

**Classical Sociological Theory**  
**Professor. R Santhosh**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Lecture No. 59**  
**Theoretical orientations and methodologies**

Welcome back to the class and in today's class, and you must be knowing that today is the penultimate class, we will have the concluding class tomorrow, which means that I will be giving you very broad overview as well as some concluding remarks. So, before that I thought it would be useful to have at least one session dedicated to understand the relationship between theoretical perspective and methodology.

This class is specifically within the framework of sociology but what the content of the class or the message of the class or the prime point that I am going to emphasize is applicable to every discipline, applicable to every subjects. The kind of a connect between theory, methodology and method is something that is I am going to talk about in this class and there is something extremely important for every discipline, not only that of sociology.

In the previous three classes we looked at three important theoretical traditions functionalism, conflict theory and interactionism, and we also had some very brief mentions about the later theoretical developments from the post structural, postmodern theoretical traditions. So, at present we will not be able to talk about the current 3 or 4 important traditions, because there are numerous theoretical traditions.

What is important is to understand a very direct connect between a particular theoretical orientation and its corresponding methodology, because methodology does not stand in isolation and every theoretical orientation has a methodological orientation in itself. There must be a congruence between the kind of methodology that you use and the kind of theoretical orientation or theoretical perspective that you adopt while you conduct research.

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- Sociology as the study of society and the question of how to study the society?
- More importantly, what is to be studied?
- The relationship between Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology and Research methods
- Interesting transformation of sociological methodology over the decades



So, let us begin with this fundamental question; sociology as the study of society and the question of how to study the society? And more importantly what is to be studied? And now once you study sociology, once you begin to carry out research, you may not have time to look at these fundamental questions. You might think that okay you have a well-defined problem at hand and there is an issue, you have a field, you have a say you need to collect data from 100 people or 200 people, or you have to do interview from some 50 people that constitute a data.

Before reaching into these conclusions, it is extremely important that you really ask or at least you be very, be familiar with much deeper philosophically informed debates about these questions. How to study the society? And more what is to be studied? And what is a society? What is that you want to study? And how do you make an assumption that what you want to study is directly connected with the data that you are going to collect. You have a particular research question in your mind and you think that there are certain social phenomena that reflect these research questions.

But you have to be extremely careful when you jump into such kind of conclusion thinking that there is a direct empirical phenomenon that really reflects a kind of research questions that you have in mind, because these questions; what is to be studied? And how do you capture the reality, what constitutes social reality, this question is a deeply philosophical question.

A question that has been discussed and debated and there have been numerous discussions and debates about this simple question; what constitutes social reality? And how do we capture that? Is it already there? Is it independent of our senses? Or is it that we create an image of an ordered social reality out there? So how do we, do we believe our senses? Do we have any other way of understanding this particular reality without the help of the senses? There are series, those who are familiar with philosophy would realize that these are some of the very, very fundamental questions.

Here I am just introducing you to some of the philosophical debates because this is not the time to go deeper into these questions, but those are going for higher studies in sociology, those who want to have a deeper understanding about society must be familiar with at least with these broad concerns, so that they have better idea about the complexity of this whole enterprise called as social research.

Why I am repeating is that because many a times we hardly give a think of, we hardly give a thought about why we are approaching or why we are adopting a particular method? We think that it is, it automatically comes and many times we do not pay adequate attention to establish a congruence between a theoretical perspective that we adopt, a theoretical framework that we adopt and its corresponding methodology.

Because there has to be some kind of a consonance, there has to some kind of a congruence between the methodology that you adopt, the method that you adopt and the kind of theoretical questions that you ask or the kind of framework where you place your study in. And if they are completely, there is absolutely no, it is full of mismatch, then that raise serious issues. So, this relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology and research methods.

So, I want to invite your attention to these two three terms, we must have come across epistemology and methodology in the previous classes but this ontology, epistemology, methodology and research methods; there is a kind of a connection between each of these terms, each of these processes or each of these aspects. And it is extremely important that we need to understand that. And if you look into the trajectory of sociology as a discipline, how did sociology emerged, we know that we have, you are familiar back to that story by now.

Sociology emerged as social physics, sociology wanted to ape modern sciences like physics, it wanted to do study in a scientific manner. But later you know that kind of positivist orientation was challenged later. And as we say in interactionism, the phenomenological approach came to the fore, they do not believe, they do not want to be called as scientists. They argued that sociology or society cannot be studied through scientific method or there is no need to study it scientifically. Because scientific method will not reveal lot of stuff.

Sociology, if you look into the trajectory, the historical trajectory of discipline it has had, so many dittos, so many different directions, its debates about methodology and epistemology, it developed into so many different directions and it is extremely important that a student of the discipline becomes aware of this transformations.

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- Ontology: is the study of existence. ... Ontology is also the study of how we determine if things exist or not, as well as the classification of existence. It attempts to take things that are abstract and establish that they are, in fact, real.



- Ontology is the philosophical study of being. More broadly, it studies concepts that directly relate to being, in particular becoming, existence, reality, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations.

- Deep philosophical debates on the question of being.

- Real? Mental construct? Experienced only through our senses and so on.



Now what is ontology? Ontology is usually when I used in philosophy, ontology is the study of existence, and it is the question of being what is there. It is the question of the whole issue concerned about the thing out there. Ontology is also the study of how we determine if things exist or not. It is the question about reality as well as the classification of existence. It attempts to take things that are abstract and establish that they are, in fact, real.

How do we understand the whole question of, for example when you say that there is reality or there is violence for example; how do we categorize violence? What constitutes violence? What constitute an act of violence? It is not a simple question. What constitute an act of violence?

Does violence always need to be a particular act that kills somebody, harm somebody or the person is incapacitated? What constitutes violence?

And this is an ontological question, because if you at the some of the interesting discussions and debates on violence, scholars talk about different types of violence, scholars talk about symbolic violence for example, scholars talk about social violence for example, they talk about cultural violence for example. So, what constitutes violence? You want to study a research; you want to conduct a research on violence or certain group of people. So, how do you study violence?

Usually you maybe, you know that a particular community has been targeted, and then you need to go and see how many people are stabbed, how many people are murdered, how many people are wounded and that constitutes the violence for you. But for philosophy, for philosophers, for social scientists, in order to understand what constitutes violence, how do we make sense of that, is a question that related to ontology.

Therefore ontology is the philosophical study of being, more broadly it studies concepts that are directly related to being, in particular becoming, existence, reality, as well as the basic categories of being and their relations. The questions of reality, how do we capture that, how do we understand this question of reality. And they are, there are very, very deeper philosophical debates on the question of being.

Is it a real? Is there a reality, objective reality out there? Irrespective of in spite of our experience and irrespective of our thinking and other things. So, there are questions whether is there a reality out there in spite of our existence, in spite of our senses is there a reality out there, can we think of a reality in our absence? Is it possible? Or is it a kind of a mental construct that we create certain some kind of an order for a completely disorder kind of a phenomenon out there.

And a very fact that we can or we are able to experience a reality only our senses, what is the implication of that and how do we communicate with each other, the kind of reality that we construct through our senses. And this is, these are some of the extremely important and complicated philosophical questions. Because we know that whether, is it the social world or the physical world? It is so chaotic, it is completely without any order, it is completely confusing, it is completely arbitrary.

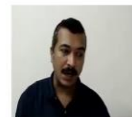
But are we making some order out of that arbitrariness? Or are we imputing certain kind of order for that chaotic society, that kind of a chaotic situation? So, these questions, there is no consensus among philosophers among that, but these are some of the initial thinking about the study of any object for that matter, whether it is physical object or social object or whatever be that.

So, here as well, be sociology especially philosophy of social sciences, it begins with this kind of a question; what is a kind of a reality that you want to study? What is that you want to study? The questions of being, its categories, labels that we attribute to that, how do we look into that.

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- **Epistemology:** the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge
- It studies the nature of knowledge, epistemic justification, the rationality of belief, and various related issues.
- It is about the construction of concepts, the nature of conditions and the validity of the senses. How do we distinguish truth from falsehood?
- What constitutes social reality? What is data for sociological inquiry? How do we segregate data and collect it?



Second important concept is epistemology. Epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge. So, if ontology is the question about the reality, if it is the question of what is it, what is its existence? Now epistemology is the whole question about the human knowledge, what kind of human knowledge we use to make sense of that. So, it studies the nature of knowledge, epistemic justifications, the rationality of belief, and various related issues.

So, it tries to understand how we construct certain kind of knowledge forms. How do we say priorities our certain kind of understanding as the authentic knowledge over others? And how do we say that this form of particular knowledge is greater than or better than the other kind of knowledge? How do we make sense of that? How do we make, how do we interpret the kind of

reality in a particular way? How do we say that scientific rationality is better than say a kind of a knowledge that you derive from magic or knowledge that you derive from religion? Or knowledge that you derive from black magic? How do you say that?

So, epistemology is about, it is also about the construction of concepts, the nature of conditions and the validity of the senses. How do we distinguish truth from falsehood? What are the kind of technology, what are the kind of techniques that we use in order to distinguish between falsehood and truth? How do we say that, when we say that something is truth? What does it mean? What does it mean for a theologian? What does it mean for a scientist when he say, when he or she says that it is a truth, what does it mean for a scientist? What does it mean for a theologian?

What does it mean for a priest? Or when you, somebody says that it is a beautiful scenery, it is a beautiful truth, what does it mean? So, what constitute social reality? What is a data for social inquiry? How do we segregate data and collect it? Because these questions; these epistemological arguments or epistemological positions will tell you what constitutes that reality and how do we collect data for that? And on what standpoint do we stand? What theoretical framework do we stand and then assert that okay this is the data for me.

This is how I understand, this is how I understand the social reality, and this is what constitutes, this is what the if I am coming from such and such epistemological foundation, such and such epistemological basis and this epistemology offers me this explanation to understand reality as so. So, there are, there could be competing epistemological basis, but you understand, for example, from a feminist epistemology you will take a completely different position about a household situation, a very happy home for that matter, an ordinary family.

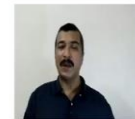
If you take a feminist epistemology you would try to problematize that particular happy home into a very problematic arrangement of sexual, of gender roles. So, how do you conceive of certain things, how do we use the human knowledge in order to make sense of a social reality in a particular manner. So, that is something the epistemology talks about.

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**Research Methodology:** Is the theoretically informed systematic way of conceiving and implementing research protocol and procedures. It must start with the question of the 'reality' and 'knowledge' to capture it.

**Research Methods:** The specific tools and techniques used to collect specific forms of data as defined by the methodology, informed by deeper understanding of epistemology and ontology.

Social science research is intricately connected with the questions of ontology and epistemology



Third one is research methodology. It is the theoretically informed, it is a theoretically systematic way of conceiving and implementing research protocol and procedures. When you write a research proposal, you usually have to have a section on research methodology. So, what does it mean? Research methodology is not something that you talk about the method, there is difference between research methods and research methodology.

Research methodology is a science of doing research, it is complete conceptual scheme. It is a kind of complete conceptual scheme that explains why you do, why you adopt a particular research method. What is your theoretical understanding about the data? How do you conceive of social reality in a particular manner? What are its theoretical and philosophical justifications?

If you are adopting interview, if you are, for example you need to understand violence, you want to understand domestic violence and you are using a feminist framework and you are, you want to conduct an interview, you want to conduct a an interview, you want to conduct a unstructured interview. So, in an unstructured interview, you do not go to the person with a set of questions, you make it as kind of open ended questions, you encourage the person to speak and you only try to guide the conversation into certain thing.

So, you need to really explain, why that you adopt an unstructured interview to understand the situation of a domestic violence, especially from a perspective of a woman, a victim of domestic violence. And so you will explain that I would listen to that person, I would encourage, I would



let her recount the experience. So, this experience that person recounts, it could be the slap on the face of that woman must have experienced, but how she felt about it, was it only a kind of physical pain that really hurt her or how did it really provided, how did it really, how did she feel it, what, how did she, how does she explain or experienced the kind of pain and shame emerging out of such a situation.

And this is what you understand as violence and this particular unstructured interview, this kind of a narration or explanation of this victim would constitute your data and for that you require a particular method. So, it goes to, so there is a very specific connection between research method, methodology, epistemology and ontology. So, is then it is the theoretically informed, systematic way of conceiving and implementing research protocols and procedures.

Every, once you do higher forms of research into for your doctoral studies or other things, you know that there are very specific protocols starting with your identification of your field, identification of sample, your response, your data collection techniques, your data analysis tools and other kind of interpretation that you adopt. So, all these things are important. And it must start with a question of reality and knowledge to capture this.

Fourth one is the research method, which I think more of, more or less all of you are familiar with. And when you talk about research methods, we talk about specific tools and techniques used to collect specific forms of data as defined by methodology, informed by deeper understanding of epistemology and ontology. And you know, so every social science research is intricately connected with the question of ontology and epistemology.

But in reality, in our everyday practice we hardly think about it, we think that, we assume that these are much simpler terms and simpler procedures, so we straightaway we go into the field and collect data and then come back and say that this is a scientific research procedure. But if you dig deeper into that, if you think deeper into that these questions are much more complicated.

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### Research Methodologies in sociology



Evolution of Research Methodologies in sociology since inception

Positivist, anti-positivist or phenomenological approaches and a host of perspectives that emerged later

Influx of ideological as well as political positions in deciding theoretical as well as methodological frameworks

Critique of positivist positions: Impossibility of finding out the 'objective truth'



Now research methodology in sociology, so whatever I explained so far, this is true in the case of natural sciences and physical sciences and social sciences, whether it is in economics or physics or psychology, it is applicable to every form of human discipline, not only about sciences, any discipline that wants to conduct research, whether even if you are doing study on philosophy. But now let us spend some time trying to understand the kind of a specific implication of these things in research methodology in sociology.

So, evolution of research methodology is in methodologies in sociology since its inception. I do not think I need to summarize it again, we have mentioned it several times, sociology emerged, as a social physics, as a science, as a positive science and then with the coming of Weber you have this anti-positivist stand emerging. And then with coming of interactionists, it takes a completely phenomenological turn, it does not believe in facts or things, it tries to understand how meaning is produced in among different people.

So, it has a very, very long trajectory starting with positivist, anti-positivist or phenomenological approaches and a host of perspectives that emerged later. We do not, I do not have the time to go through all these things, because that does not come under the purview of this course. And also more important is an influx of ideological as well as political positions in deciding theoretical as well as methodological frameworks.

It is not that okay there are only academic debates and concerns about what is the most appropriate theoretical or methodological framework. A host of ideological as well as political positions have come and they have made the realm of sociology extremely complicated. Not only sociology but almost every social science is extremely complicated. For example, with the emergence of orientalism, with the emergence of orientalism, a completely different set of political concerns and ideological concerns were brought into picture with Marxist scholarship.

Marxist scholarship has its own ideological and then political positions. Feminist scholarship has its own scholarship Dalit argument has its own point, gender studies has its own ideological as well as political positions. So, a host of other study, host of other disciplines and arguments have really made it much messier. So, now nobody vouches by the, it is the character of its objectivity of the study. I do not think any scientist, any social scientist, any scholar of contemporary time would say that, what we are putting forward is the most authentic study, the most objective study or this is the truth, nobody would say that. We know that all such claims are quite problematic.

So, there were critique of positivist positions, impossibility of finding out the objective truth. Because now we have established it beyond doubt that there is no singular truth, even to an incident that has happened just maybe yesterday or day before yesterday. It is almost impossible for you to reach what is objective truth, this is a very problematic truth, and the unadulterated complete truth is a very difficult proposition. What at best we can able to is the most reliable interpretation of that, there are arguments that there is no truth but only interpretations.

Especially in this world, we are living in the era of post truth scenario, an extremely dangerous, extremely dangerous scenario, we say that we are living in the post truth era or post truth stage. So, but even otherwise, to say that this is the objective reality becomes a very, very problematic argument. So, no social scientist, no scholar would say that, it would only try to present the most convincing argument on the basis of available evidences.

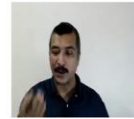
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#### Research methods

Survey, Questionnaire, interview schedule, focused group interviews, participant observation, ethnography, content analysis, discourse analysis, network analysis-both digital and physical, netnography and so on.

Why and how each of these methods is used is of paramount importance.



You have a host of research methods and I am sure that you are familiar with quite a few. When you talk about survey, you know there is something called as a census, census is another type of method where you enumerate every member of a particular research universe. For example, you are conducting a survey among school children of a particular school and if you are asking each and every child about your research question, maybe about the classroom experience, about the attitude of the teachers and if you are counting every child then the survey becomes the census. We know that does not have census that we undertake every once in 10 years.

Otherwise it is a survey, survey is you go by the idea of the probability. You take a sample and there are statistically proven method, how, what does it mean to be a presentative sample. So, you instead of asking everybody, you take a small section of people on the assumption that these people represent the larger universe. Then there is something called as a questionnaire, a printed set of questions, either you hand it over to the people to fill it or must have come across it in google form, google online surveys and other things.

Or if you are conducting a survey among people, you ask these questions and then you yourself, you fill it. And mostly it includes the kind of a quantitative questions. And then interview schedules. Interview schedules are a set of series of questions that are arranged in a particular order so that there is kind of a thematic continuity, and then you ask and then you record the

response. Then there are focused group interviews; you have a particular theme, and you ask a several of the respondents about that particular theme.

For example, you have some five or six housewives and then you conduct a focused group interview on domestic violence. So, you record the response from all of them and their discussions and their cross information, all these becomes extremely important insights. Then participant observation; a very important participant observation and ethnography considered to be together.

A very powerful tool of anthropology and sociology, where the researcher lives in the community or with the community and try to become a part of the community, observe the dynamics very closely. A method started with anthropology but still continued to be extremely powerful, because here you are not worried about numbers, you do not do statistical analysis, rather you come up with very, very insightful, very detailed analysis about the social processes.

Let's talk about content analysis; most of the literary study students use that, historians use that, sociologists use that, you try to understand what is a content of a particular text, a song, a story, an interview or a public debate. And discourse analysis; another important method that is connected with content analysis, you try to understand your material as two distinct discourses or as a single discourse and then you try to understand how that discourse is formed. What are the underlying assumptions behind that discourse?

And then there is network analysis, both digital as well as physical; what are the kind of the character of network, what are the kind of relationship that people are involved in. And especially in this digital era, network analysis is assuming very, very important place. And then netnography and so on. Netnography is the term used to do ethnographic work in digital world, how do you, because these digital resources are very, very powerful, useful resources, your Facebook account, your Twitter account, the blogs, the videos, interviews.

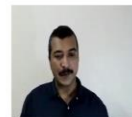
So you, sociologists or every social scientist have used very effective methods to make use of these enormous amount of news that, enormous amount of information that is available in the digital world. So, now why and how each of these methods is used is of paramount importance? So, that is a point that I am emphasizing again and again. And why should you use say interview

schedule instead of ethnography or why should you use a questionnaire instead of a network analysis?

And these, if you were to answer these questions, you need to understand that kind of a connection that I mentioned earlier from ontology to epistemology to methodology to method. Otherwise it becomes a very mechanical one, otherwise if somebody asks you why, what is your understanding of reality, why do you use these particular methods to capture this, what is your epistemological understanding that, you will not have any kind of particular answer, convincing answer for that.

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- Postcolonial studies, influence of Michael Foucault and Edward Said's Orientalism
- Connection between knowledge and power
- Debates on positionality and standpoint theory
- Feminist epistemology, Racial theories, Dalit arguments and so on



So, then along with these methods, the more recent advancements maybe after 80s, there is post-colonial studies, then there is influence of Michael Foucault and Edward Said's orientalism. These are all important ideological movements which actually provided also very interesting methodological take on that. And the kind of a connection, the kind of relationship between power and knowledge, both Foucault and Gramsci and Edward Said speak about that.

The intricate connection between knowledge and power. No knowledge is free of power. And how the power, in a positive sense creates knowledge or how knowledge is very closely connected with power. Or how certain kind of knowledge produce certain kind of subjectivities, certain kind of people. And debates, debates on positionality and standpoint theory. Again is extremely important when you talk about this question of objectivity.

The whole question of representation, who can represent whom? When you look at the story of a Dalit, who can tell the story of a Dalit in a most convincing manner? Can an upper caste person represent the Dalit experience? There are very fascinating discussions and debates about this experience. And this positionality, even in the Indian context, the debate in which philosophers Sundar Sarukkai and his political scientist Gopal Guru involved and it came out as a book, titled “The Cracked Mirror”.

This book is a very fascinating account on this all kind of questions. What does participation mean? What does experience mean? When you say that you have an experience what does it mean? So, does it mean that others who do not share your experience cannot talk about it, cannot write about it? They are all very, very fraud questions. So similarly, feminist epistemology, racial theories, Dalit arguments and so on.

Each of these arguments make this realm of methodology more and more complicated, at the same time more and more fascinating. That is why we understand that the studying a society is not that simple, studying a society is not as simple as somebody doing a research work in a laboratory. It is a much fraud, complicated domain, it is a much messier world, where a host of ideological, political factors have made it much messier, much more complicated.

So, that is why we realize that by conducting a research you are not going to tell the truth, because what the truth, in that sense it is a problematic one, but at the same time you also much know that this is not a license for pushing or peddling half bit truth or utter lies or other things. Because that is also what we are witnessing today.

But the important aspect is that students or scholars must be really well trained in the methodology, they must be able to use very rigorous methodological protocols. They must be very, they must be able to use very rigorous methodological protocols and practices. So, this rigor methodology that itself will really ensure the kind of quality and reliability of the kind of a research that they, that people do.

So, I am winding up the class today and tomorrow we will have the final class of the entire course, we will have the concluding session. But today I just thought that I will spend some time trying to make some observations about social, conducting or doing social science research. So, thank you.