

Making Social Knowledge One-Step Outside Modern Science: Some Cases of Social Knowledge-Making Strategies from Peripheries

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Introduction

The hegemonic dominance of modern science and its worldview on a global scale needs no elaborating. Even in strong civilizational societies like India, which have long existed without anything even remotely akin to modern science for long stretch of time, the dominance of science and scientific worldview has been decisive ever since they came under colonial rules. This dominance is not so much the outcome of people voluntarily absorbing modern science and ‘scientific temper’ (as it is known here), but of the ideological alliance of science, state and global capitalism. Yet, the all-pervading reach of science into the everyday vocabulary, idioms and even the remote recesses of popular consciousness in civilizational societies is phenomenal. Thus, it is no wonder that in these societies formal social science knowledge production too assumed the value-system of modern science unquestioningly, as the post-colonial Indian state took upon itself the holy task of infusing scientific temper, not just into the intellectuals, who were always and already assumed to have gone the science way, but also into the general populace. In a backdrop like this, formal, institutional social science practitioners had no freedom to evolve validation methods and strategies for social science knowledge-making by stepping outside the value-systems of modern science. What is more, they have also been mandated by the post-colonial state to distrust popular conscience as unscientific and therefore spread scientific temper to it. Consequently, social sciences, in these contexts, had, perforce, set out to

declare their dissociation from non-formal and non-institutional popular wisdom. If ever they related to them, it was only learning *about* them and never for learning *from* them.

But the triumph of science over the popular consciousness and its ways of making sense of the world has never been total, as they have somehow preserved their independence from, critical engagement with and resistance to hegemonic science in the crevices of everyday life, as well as in those public domains (still weakly monitored by science-promoting state), such as films, vernacular magazines and publications. In recent years these practices have acquired so much virulence and salience as to emerge as an organized movement and to pose a remarkable challenge to formal institutional social knowledge-making practices, around what is called Little Magazines and vernacular publications. There is a lot to learn from these groups, for all those who are concerned about producing and disseminating social knowledge outside modernity and modern science.

What is of crucial significance, here in the context of present conference, are their imaginations, value-orientations and knowledge validation forms outside modern science. Yet, their engagement with scientific worldview is not free from ambiguity. They have evolved their social knowledge-making strategies by structuring their responses to science in three different ways: (1) Spiritualizing science; (2) subverting science and (3) working outside science. This paper will be elaborating on these, particularly the third response, focusing on the following aspects that qualify themselves as evolved-outside-science; (a) what approach they adopt to reach truth and reality, (b) the way strategize their learning about social reality, and (c) their attitude toward the nature of social research.

Little Magazines of Tamil Nadu

Little magazine in Tamil Nadu has a history dating back to 1912, when *Adi Dravidan* (*Indigenous Dravidian*) magazine was started in that year. Since then more than 1600 such magazines have been published at different points in time in the last sixty years. These Little Magazines had taken different forms during their existence as handwritten magazines as printed books and recently as webzines or as blogs.

Most of these magazines have a short life span in that they are not published regularly for a long period. Since they are started with meagre fund and solely depend on the subscription money. Without any revenue from advertisement they stutter to continue. Even the ones that have a

wider subscription base fail to arrive on stands on the designated time. It is because more often than not these publications are managed by individuals who have other pursuits in life for their earning. For them publication of Little Magazines is more a passion than a profession. Thus they need to squeeze out time from their regular work life and spend that on publishing these magazines. This accounts for their fits and starts manner of arrival. Their longevity too is limited because of their non-institutionalized nature. Very often these founders of these Little Magazines do not find right successors when they die or have to move temporarily or permanently to faraway places for jobs or other pursuits. Most of these magazines do not have an office or secretariat to assist their publications nor do they find willing retail booksellers. They evolve from the desks of their respective editors and straightaway go to the subscribers through post. Pandian in his survey on Social Sciences in South India has this to say about the plight of Little Magazines: “Despite such intellectual vibrancy which animates these social science journals in local languages, they are, as a rule, the result of the efforts of a handful of enthusiasts without any institutional or financial support. Given this, they survive for a few years and disappear. Even when they are alive and kicking, the regularity of publication becomes difficult.” (Pandian 2002: 3617)

These local social science magazines were largely limited to a small and exclusive reader base numbering some 100 at the lowest to 3000 at the highest. These magazines are normally started by individuals who are established writers themselves or by those who have a disagreement with existing literary or intellectual trends or tendencies. Some individuals start it also to initiate new forms of writing or to make a new view point. Very often those who are initiators and founders of one magazine may soon fall out with each other on ideological or intellectual grounds and start their own individual magazines. When they are not mere literary magazines, they are avenues for intellectual expressions by which those who would not find space within the entrenched institutional settings for producing knowledge would vent their views. In whichever forms they appear they can be called as ‘magazines of dissent’ or ‘magazines of rebellion’ by alluding to Max Gluckman’s concept of rituals of rebellion. In recent years inspired by postmodern tendencies these magazines call themselves as ‘counterculture magazines’ (Sivagurunathan 2010).

Hence pick up any one of these magazines and you can sense palpable intensity of their dissent and anger. Their dissent takes on a variety of expressions: expression in forms, styles and issues. For example since they

are not (not all of them) registered with any government regulatory agencies they are uncensored and free from any control they use even tabooed or ‘bad language’ not admissible in a sanitized registered magazines—this is however not incidental but deliberate as they pit themselves against the entrenched high culture. In terms of forms and size they show enormous amount of dissent and innovation by designing them in unconventional forms with one such magazine *Chutty* (Naughty) appearing in the size of a telephone diary. We shall have occasion to elaborate on the issues or content dimension later. I would rather turn my attention on their ideological orientation in the next section.

In the Tamil context most, if not all of these magazines are secular and modern in their outlook. However in recent years this space has been invaded by fundamentalist and communal forces. Even though their engagement with modernity is ridden with tensions and contradictions, their modern orientation cannot be questioned as the magazine itself is born of the desire to communicate and debate in the public sphere. The secular among them in a truly Western sense in that they aspire to rise above primordial loyalties and their stridently critical engagement with traditions. Very often this transcendence form primordial identities take on the form of the contributors assuming pseudonyms that do not reveal much about their caste religious or ethnic identities.

Even in terms of their ideological underpinning they demonstrate diversity. Simultaneously one can see three categories: (1) **art for art sake** pure literary magazines inspired by romanticism and humanism of the West, (2) **art for people** magazines which are Marxist in orientation that thrived in the cold war era but continue to be influential even today, and (3) **postmodern** magazines triggered by the spirit of counter culture and cultural turn. These three categories are crosscut by recent emergence of Dalit magazines (Dalits are the most oppressed caste in caste-ridden Indian society) which themselves are inspired by black movement of Afro-Americans. Another trend that crosscuts the three categories is that which is inspired by Dravidian movement (an ethnic movement built around imagined notion of Dravidian race). All these three categories continue to be influential in contemporary times even though historically there may be one trend swaying over the other.

For example in the beginning art for art sake type dominated the immediate postindependent phase of India. Once the honeymoon between newly independent Indian state and its people was over after the declaration of emergency in 1975, politicization of art began arguing for art

for people's awakening. They took on strong Marxist character. This Marxist orientation continued to dominate until 1990. The phase after that is dominated by postmodern turn with Marxist orientation coming under strong attack. The linguistic, cultural and relativistic turn evident in the latest crop of Little Magazines has given voice to 'little' narratives as against the 'grand' narratives such as Marxism or humanism. Thus, as of today despite the dominance of postmodern turn other trends too demonstrate vibrancy.

Art for art sake

This category of magazines is intensely literary in character. They mainly publish poems and short stories. Fictional works dominate their content with very little room for analytical writings. Very infrequently they publish literary criticisms. Their discontent is normally with prevailing forms of art work and their high culture or classical or canonical nature. They have been highly influential in introducing "new poetry" *Pudhu Kavidhai* which is known as verse writing in other parts of the world.

Art for people sake

Magazines belonging to this category take inspiration from Marxism of Soviet Russia as well as China. Undergirded by Marxism, Leninism and Maoism they make a strong case for rejecting both high culture and art for art sake tendencies. Majority of the content between the cover of these magazines are essays critically evaluating and dismissing high culture and their forms. It is very common to see translated articles/essays of original writings of renowned Marxists such as Lenin, Mao, Gramsci and others. It is not uncommon to find short stories and film reviews in the pages of these magazines. Strongly polemical in their spirit, these magazines are highly critical of state, parliamentary form of government, elections and government policies.

Postmodern Magazines

Strongly cultural-political rather than just political, magazines of this kind have large number of pages devoted to translation of poststructuralist writings from Western countries or essays inspired by such methodologies. They also publish large amount of poems and short stories that are avant-

garde in spirit. They are also highly responsive to socio-cultural-political issues affecting the immediate Tamil society. Very sporadically they comment on global issues such as American invasion of Iraq etc.

Little Magazine as Movement

In spite of their fragmented and discontinuous nature their long history and spread has enabled Little Magazines to evolve and breed a culture of its own. They have gradually acquired a movement like character generating their own figureheads, icons, cadres and followers. It has also created its own subculture of recruiting, apprenticing and socializing neophytes. It has formulated its own rules for defining insiders/outsideers and as to who are eligible to become members. There are entrenched processes of collaborating and interacting. Finally there are established ethos for reward and punishment. All these contribute to their strong movement like character. However, it must be cautioned that it is not a unified and consensual movement. It is acutely divided and often gossipy. Quite often, one magazine or the other becomes a school of thought or a subculture-centre, recruiting and training its votaries and litany of followers. At any point time one other group is deeply engaged in slinging mud at the other. Despite all these, their contribution to social science knowledge and tradition is immense but remains unacknowledged and even undocumented. Their bitchy nature apart, their dynamism, energy and swiftness to learn and adopt new intellectual currents, their extraordinary sensitivity to local cultural traditions, and their ever present readiness to respond to issues affecting the immediate social milieu have a lot to comment on and teach institutional social science practices.

When writing about these nonformal academics Pandian observes that Tamil Nadu, just as all other southern states “are marked by the presence of a vast sector of ‘non-formal’ academics who are not formally linked to academic institutions, but maintain a keen interest in scholarly writings and participate in debates of an academic nature. Most often this sector is a product of different social movements wherein social scientists too as public intellectuals participate. This intersection between the formal and ‘non-formal’ academics has given rise to a plethora of journals in local languages which deal with an array of social science themes. The papers published in them exhibit a high degree of theoretical sophistication while engaging with local problems” (Pandian 2002: 3617).

He cites two examples of such magazines. It is worth quoting him

extensively.

Aaraichi which is published from the provincial town of Thirunelveli was a product of the mainstream left movement, though its constituency both in terms of contributors and readers is ideologically inclusive. Founded in 1969 by Nellai Arivu Kuzhu (Nellai Research Group) under the leadership of late Na Vanamamalai, a Left intellectual, over 50 issues of Aaraichi has been published so far. The papers in the journal reflect a wide range of interests: sociology, history, anthropology, folkloristics and literary criticism. Nirappirigai is another social science journal which is a product of the Dalit literary movement. Nirappirigai carries, among other things, high quality literary criticism, local history with a subaltern perspective, and translations from English social science journals. The journal's engagement with contemporary debates in social sciences would be evident from the fact that it organised a two-day conference on subaltern studies in 1996, and the set of papers discussed in the conference were subsequently published in a volume in Tamil. (Pandian 2002: 3617)

Little Magazine as Antithesis

In their very nature and spirit Little Magazines in Tamil Nadu have always pitted themselves against any form of institutionalized culture and practices. Their essential anti-establishment character has entailed a strong skeptical and critical stance towards institutional academics, particularly that of social science practices and practioners. Often accusing them of being hand maidens of the state apparatus on the one hand and as mouthpieces of Western superpowers on the other hand Little Magazines had always reserved contempt for institutional academics. Here is an example: "Universities have not produced any notable social critics. Instead they have converted knowledge and criticisms into 5 mark or 10 marks questions, thereby fragmenting the knowledge" (Ramakrishnan 2005). Although there are significant number of college and university in the rank and file of the Little Magazine fold and many such members from institutional cloister as T. Paramasivam, A.K Perumal, A. Marx, V. Arasu, Tamilavan, Nagarjunan, M.T Muthukumarasamy and S-Shanmugam do contribute articles to Little Magazines, they have to work very hard in the reverse to earn their place in the Little Magazines. Often working in the

reverse means undergoing a reverse socialization and unlearning the culture of established academics. Only those who exhibit intense internal critical dissent and disown as well as distance themselves from rewarding entrenched practices followed in formal academic institutions are allowed entry into the portals of Little Magazine movement.

Apart from the hard-earned space given to the academics, very often the magazine themselves are started by non-academics and (as discussed above) more as a passion than as a livelihood option. These magazine founders are largely drawn from middle and lower middle class backgrounds and often have careers not connected to teaching and knowledge making - either as bank employee or as staff in postal-telegraph department, or as clerks of government/private sectors or as small business owners. It is not uncommon to find some of the founders of Little Magazines owning bookshops prior to starting the magazines. Many of them take recourse starting Little Magazines as a reaction to two things: first, because they are discontent with existing practices of knowledge-production and their ideological orientation; second, because they are finding it difficult to influence wider public opinion through established and institutionalized modes of knowledge dissemination. These institutionalized avenues are dominated by institutional academicians who have uncritically reproduced the academic culture and methods of knowledge-production and dissemination of the West. The fact these avenues are open only to those who fit into the eligibility criteria set by these institutional social science practitioners, with such criteria as possession of M. Phil. or PhD, formal position as academicians or qualifications of some exams or publications in refereed national or international journals are so resentful to these non-academic intellectuals. In protest to this rigid and purely colonial legacy, they have sought out their own media of knowledge dissemination and opinion-making (Arasu 1999: 39-44).

This interesting class background combined with the resentment against eligibility criterion, has engendered a unique character and intense energy and dynamism to this Little Magazines. Their own openness to accept and publish the writings of anyone with the courage and perspective, besides fulfilling certain ideological and value-commitment requirements, has given the Little Magazines great deal of diversity and synergy as many minds and hearts come together.

In the context of this Little Magazine movement in Tamil Nadu, it is very important to define its location in the larger debate on the academic dependency. While there has been a range of responses to the academic

dependency accusations by evolving nationalist social sciences (e.g., Indian Sociology or Korean Sociology), indigenous sociology (e.g., Dalit Sociology, Tribal Sociology etc) or alternative sociologies (Black Sociology, Subaltern Sociology), the social science practices of the Little Magazines are best characterized as parallel ‘sociologies’. It is by choice I describe as sociologies with a small ‘s’. These sociologies of Little Magazines, are not necessarily consistent, there is not unity of methodology and theory. Their commonness lies in their non-reactionary style. They have not evolved in response to the hegemony of power center social sciences. They are independent and sui generis, in that they are more inward looking as they communicate with their intended audience drawn from outside the academic establishments of Tamil Nadu. Their writings are meant for internal circulation and not to the perceived or imagined hegemonies. Indeed there is no attempt to translate their writings to hegemonic languages such as English.

They demonstrate their parallelness in term so their adoption of new attitudes to truth and truth-seeking; organizing and disseminating knowledge and knowledge communities; choice of research topics, and forms of constructing their writing; evolving validating strategies. While these were formulated in highly proactive sense without necessarily pitching them against dominant power-center social sciences, they hold enormous significance as those falling outside modern, Western science.

There is no scope for delineating all the parallels, we shall elaborate on few that are methodologically significant. In the following section we shall elaborate on the parallel sociologies related to attitudes and strategies of approaching social realities and truth.

Listening to truths

Listening is an act of humility. It can be humbling too. However listening in the everyday life circumstances of the poor is a weak act, a practice condemned to be followed by the poor, marginalized and the oppressed. Normally it is women in relation to men, Dalits (the most oppressed caste in India) in relation to the non-Dalits and children in relation to adults who were forced to cultivate listening as a skill. In a scaled up version, even the larger social science research agendas only reiterated listening as a weak act or act of the weak by compelling the respondents in the research exercises to fit into the designs evolved in circumstances alien to the ‘respondents’¹

The commitment of Little Magazine writers to situate the act of listening at the heart of social science research exercises arises from the compelling necessity to transform the otherwise weak act of listening into a radical act. It is precisely because of this commitment they suggest that social researchers hold listening as a cardinal value in most of the social research exercises. By taking up the weak act of listening they want to humble themselves as well as to translate that into a radical act. In their understanding:

1. Listening is a radical act, primarily for it calls for repositioning of social actors. It presupposes altering and restructuring social relations and interaction patterns, first in the domain of research and later, by extension, in the domain of wider society.
2. Listening is a radical act in research exercise for it is done not so much for confirmations of the researchers' opinion, but for refutation. This has to be read in the background of how social research projects have been largely used by many researchers to confirm their frameworks rather than radically challenge them. In the context of poverty research, Kannan argues, "the boring uniformity of conclusions arrived at by many social research programmes about the perceptions of poverty across the globe, despite the expansive multidimensionality, only buttresses our argument that, if they had been conducted with listening as a value they would have led to the breakdown of many paradigms on poverty rather than presenting them as manageable data. If numerous studies on poor have merely confirmed that "here is one more poor person who is starving", that would be tantamount to an ornithologist declaring that she has found 'another crow that is black'" (Kannan 2011).

Only when the paradigm is held in doubt will we be engaged in refutations research. And only when we look for falsifying cases that would challenge our time-honoured paradigms, will we start

¹ The choice of the word itself smacks of the arrogance of behavioural psychology which coined the word in fact. The 'respondents' have as much freedom only to respond to the stimuli from the scientist researcher, as the rats and other hapless animals had in the researches conducted in highly controlled environments. Instead of responding, if the researched being acts on its own, it would make no sense to the researcher or it would invite punishment, in the true behavioural psychological sense.

listening to even the minutest of the noises. There commences a creative humane falsifying research. It is humane because the moment the existing paradigms are kept in doubt, the certainty and arrogance arising out of holding on to them steadfastly, disappear.

3. Listening is a radical act in another count too. When 'listening to' we witness the evolution of stories narrated with the desire for coherence, arguably for the first time in the lives of many we choose to study. Yet it is not a charitable admission of the story to take shape. It is a very natural outcome of listening, even when there is no conscious intention meant for it. This is very crucial because the act of listening subsumes or ought to be subsumed by different conception of humans as storying persons. Indeed it is a different ontological reality we posit to human being in line with many narrative analysts. It is to these aspects we turn our attention now.

I Tell Stories, Therefore I Am

The telling example of how parallel the discourse of these 'sociologies' comes from the way they conceive human beings as storying animals. This change in the very ontology of humans offers a lesson for other sociologies too. In the Western social sciences perspective humans are seen essentially as thinking and rational beings capable of processing and hierarchizing information which they will proffer for the social science research as data. In scientifically inclined social sciences, both the researcher and researched are seen as psychologically normal being possessing memory, learning and mental analytical capabilities. But these Little Magazines people are presenting and institutionalizing human as essentially storying animals, who operate more at the levels of hearts rather than mind. This we will elaborate below, but for now how the Little Magazine movements aspire to privilege listening to these storying animals will detain us here.

It is the contestation of the Little Magazines that human beings live storable lives. It is in the act of storying they find their essence. We can say "Humans are essentially storying animals." In many of their research endeavours too they argue that, more often than not, the evolution of these stories is a joint exercise between the researcher and the person listened to. The fact that a storable life can be grasped by the people has a radical potential to transform people into humans. The arguments of Veena Das (1990), in her excellent essay on Bhopal Gas victims, that the absence of

narration in the lives of the humans signifies the breakdown or disorganization of their personal selves are very relevant here. When trauma strikes, narratability is the casualty. And the return of the story to the persons is the moment of triumph of the person over the objective history, because by recuperating a story of ourselves we personalize the historical time and space as ours own. Listening can create those triumphant moments for others whose stories were never organized before. Yet, listening should not be construed as a charitable act by which the restoration of humanness in the poor through their recovery of storability is a gift from the researcher to the poor. In contrast, listening has to herald an authentic meeting between authentic people as R. D. Laing (1990) would propose.

The astounding fact that listening ends up constituting the humanness in the other, is very important for it can radicalize social science research methods themselves. The extraordinary or proclaimed sensitivity to people's way of world-making notwithstanding, classical social science research methods have not seen the humans as storying persons inasmuch they saw them as speaking/answering persons. Even Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which claimed an alternative status for itself has not been free from seeking fractured information from people. PRA's total reliance on the people's self-chosen modes and ways of revealing information could not still help PRA methodologies to overcome their obsession with information in whatever forms they came – be it stories, diagrams, or answers to interviews. This has not enabled the people to construct an ordered narration of themselves, as they only saw themselves as information-providers under whatever democratic or enabling environment it happened. The unintended breakdown of stories that was recurrently produced by even the sincerest application of PRA methods, failed to restore the essential human quality, namely as storying persons. It could also be attributed to the failure of the PRA to transfer the foundational values guiding them to the people it studied.

Thus by foregrounding listening as a value, Little Magazine movement aspires to turn social research exercise into a joint human enterprise. In this, humans emerge as storying individuals. Stories themselves can be an extraordinarily significant source of details in retrospect, because stories of humans are invariably enmeshed in history.

Researching/Learning through Heart

It was mentioned above that the Little Magazine members view humans as essentially heart driven beings. This can be juxtaposed to the Western scientific hierarchized vision that traces heart-driven existence to savagery and mind-driven existence as maturity and growth. Following from this, social research too detests and fears expression of savagery both from the researcher and the researched. In the name of preserving ‘objectivity’, it has evolved many checks and balances to preclude the intrusion of savagery of the researcher and the researched. Such a suspicion driven social research conveniently forgets the fact that social research essentially has to deal with human experiences in their original forms. Such experiences are lived in tier raw and savage forms and not as highly processed and neatly organized data. When doing such research we may rely on documents and texts that have recorded human experiences, however an authentic social research is done when it deals with human experiences directly.

It is the position of Little Magazine movement advocates that once we set upon ourselves the task of studying human experiences, it is incumbent upon the social researchers to refrain from engaging in mere collection of information. Writing about what is social research, Asif writes, “When doing social research, one has to bear in mind the changed background in which there is this refreshing understanding that any social research cannot be a mere fact-gathering exercise. In the social research we set out to do, there can only be points of entry – the points at which we, as researchers make the momentous decision to responsibly relate with the people we study. There are no exit points, much as we cannot have exit points from many of the relationships we have been born with – like our relationships as children to our parents, as parents to our children etc. This is because, research is no longer conducted in the orthodox sense of researchers comfortably walled by notions of objectivity and expertise. The wall has collapsed, as it were! If social research is a relationship exercise, then researchers have to relate with the subject of the research on equal footing. In other words, our attempts to explore the experiential universe of the people we study cannot happen without the active cooperation of the people themselves. In our endeavours to reconstruct the lived-reality of the social actors, the people are primary authors, as they continue to experience the reality much before we even attempt to study them. Hence, we have to recognize co-authorship of the people we study in the research project. In

this sense they are our co-researchers, just as we are their co-researchers. We should indeed cease to use the word “subjects” to refer to ‘respondents’, in its stead we use the word co-researchers” (2003: 12).

It can be inferred from the above why the ‘subjects’ of the research have to become “co-researchers.”

First and foremost, in most of the orthodox quantitatively oriented scientific social research exercises, it is the intentions of the researchers that dominate the research agenda, rather than the ‘intentions’ of the co-researchers. Given the options, the co-researchers would have shared what makes immediate sense and what holds deep relevance to their lives, rather than merely respond to that of researcher. Pradeep in another context demands, “In our research, we have to effect a non-conflictual interplay of intentions of researchers and co-researchers. To achieve this we have to imagine the very research exercise as that which generates right and enabling human/social processes, rather than that which limits itself to asking right questions. Essentially, social research is not asking right questions but is allowing right processes to emerge.”(Pradeep 2004: 3)

Many among the Little Magazine practitioners, there is a deed urge to privilege heart over mind. In much of the conventional social research projects, the researchers expect deeply-felt and authentic answers and information from the co-researchers, even while the researchers aspire to remain authentic only to their research design and its structure, rather than to the co-researchers. In other words, while the researchers want the co-researches to speak from their hearts, the researchers themselves remain cerebral as they busy remembering sequences and structured answers. In their self-proclaimed radical understanding of social research, they demand a creative and authentic union of heart-to-heart dialogues and conversations, by turning the researchers into feeling and acting persons rather than as thinking persons. It is remarkable that there is such a demand as they foreground a completely radical revision of how the social research and researcher ought to be disciplined. In the established institutional academic social science research programmes there is an enormous premium placed on training the social researchers as objective and thinking social researchers. The courseworks in these programmes already assume the researchers as ‘too much feeling persons’ and such feelings are sought to be banished. For these institutional intellectuals in Tamil Nadu, the subjective researcher is an anathema to the good social research. But for the Little Magazine intellectuals, social research, foundationally, cannot be subject-object interaction, but a subject-to-subject dialogue. This necessitates

immersion in the experiences we wish to explore in the company of co-researchers. All the research questions, if ought to emanate from the hearts of the researchers, have to be internalized in such a manner that they haunt the heart/mind of the researcher. Internalization has to happen in the form of imaginatively living and feeling the questions along with co-researchers. This cannot happen if the living universes of the researchers and co-researchers are thought to remain separated and irreconcilable. The researcher has to give up the outsider positions with reference to the universe he/she explores, but should imaginatively immerse in the universe he/she enquires into. Thus, the mechanical reproduction and reciting of questions by the researchers would mean that they will not have the right to elicit sensitive answers from the co-researchers. The questions the researchers choose to ask have to transform themselves into haunting issues that have a life of their own, as well as a form and intensity perfectly approximate to the inquisitiveness of the reflective members among the co-researchers. Put it differently, the researchers have to carry these questions in the heart and ask them in the manner in which one of the people we study would ask the other - not so much in the manner of getting answers but also collectively searching for them. It is here research turns into an illuminating humanist exercises, leadings both the researcher and co-researcher to a position of critical-self-awareness or critical subjectivity.

Word and Utterance as Action

Little Magazine authors often base their writings on the basis of not just what they read from books and articles and but more on the basis of what they have heard from others. They do not claim any element of objectivity or authenticity to these utterances and personal conversations. Their determination to use personal utterance and conversations as sources of knowledge arises from the fact that their writings are not linked with any material benefits or career advancements, but with their mere desire to communicate (since most of those who write in the Little Magazines are not formal academics nursing secret desires to become professors, but working as blue collar workers. Even for those formal academics, these publications do not further their career interest as these are not counted as valid publications in the universities. They are only driven by their urge to communicate what they feel and think. Another important factor is something very specific centrality of 'oracy' against the centrality of literacy in modern expressive traditions. In cultures that privilege oracy

over literacy, utterance is also taken as an action in its own right. In other words, saying something ‘terrible’ is equivalent to doing something terrible. For example, when leaving home one is not supposed to say “I go,” instead they should say “I go and come back.” The former is taken to be dying and never returning.

Building from this understanding, the non-institutional intellectuals of Little Magazines claim that social research cannot be conducted for the sake of mere knowledge and intellectual advancement alone. Action is so inseparable from utterances. Hence, the demand for ‘activist research’: Here the activist research must be differentiated from the institutionalized action research in the western academia. Activist research² arises from two different but connected understandings of what is action or activism. One which has been briefly commented above bases itself on utterance as action perspective. The other considers activism as the validating force of utterances of a researcher. In other words, we can summarily characterize the two as follows: utterance resulting in action, action resulting utterances. This latter is very crucial here and needs elaboration. Normally in the western context action research means research as a process that generates actions and is simultaneously built on actions in the process of research being conducted. But the action research programme itself does not diverge from the scientific and objectivity paradigm. Here action nearly assumes a clear instrumental value, in that action is not sought as an end in itself, rather as, at worst, a means to the research output as end. In the best of the circumstances, action is seen as a co-end to the research output. Action research does not claim its validation on the sole basis of actions generated by it. In the activist research, on the other hand, the researcher is not qualified to pursue his or her research if such researcher has not got his/her hands dirty in the field with action of a transformative type – not just self-transformative for the researcher, but also for the co-researchers. The ridicule and scorn reserved for a so-called pure researcher by the Little Magazine champions is intense, as they do not regard such research findings arrived at by even theoretically strong researchers as “good research,” though it may be inspiring and exciting to read. The legitimacy

² Here I recognize the prevalence of pleas for activist research in western academia. Although the one proposed here in this paper is still slightly different from that on the one hand and such instances of activist research is still a marginal tendency in the western contexts on the other hand. In this connection see the work of Fals Borda, Orlando, and Mohammad Anisur Rahman, (1991).

and validity of a good research is derived from the politically active engagement of the researcher in the subject he/she is writing her research paper on. Therefore, the researcher is exhorted to make his research valuable by paying by his life and his activism, rather than by adhering to the so called objectivity parameters or scientific standards. It is not the objective science that validates research but the subjective engagement and the transformation that happens both for the researcher and the researched.

Asif elaborates, “Social research is not only about human experiences and relationship of equality it presupposes between the research and co-researchers, but also an activist research. But in reality, by resorting to terminological feat and sleight of hand, such as ‘preservation of objectivity’, ‘rigorous quantification’ and ‘vast coverage’, much of the research endeavours characterize themselves as pure research. In the realm of human experience, no research can claim to pure information-gathering agenda without touching the lives of people it purports to study in the same breath as the one who undertakes the research. Even the most rigorously quantitative studies aiming only to collect observable data from the human persons, tend to generate expectations, promises and disappointments from the people it studies. In several other cases such studies tend to ‘spoil the field’ for the subsequent researchers, thanks to the badly established relationships with the people. These may all happen, despite the studied objectivity and detachment of the researchers” (Asif 2003: 14).

He further adds, “But in social research of the kind I propose, not only the co-researchers end up undergoing changes – changes of expectations, or self-awareness, but also the researchers, who give up the impossible objectivity for the sake of critical subjectivity. Quite apart from the mutual transformation that a qualitatively oriented social research causes in the primary actors of social research, such research need also to anticipate and eventually lead to a broader social change through expression of responsibility and solidarity between the researchers and co-researchers. It is in this sense, that I visualize the social research as an activist research.” (ibid.: 14)

We further see, the claim for the formation of a research community which is so inclusive in nature. The in-divisibility of researcher from the researched is reflective of the nondualist nature of the reality not easily celebrated in modern world view. They welcome a research community of core-researchers and co-researchers. This community is characterized by its consistency of involvement across the length of study operates on shared-conscience basis. If the researchers are primarily triggered by the

passion to positively touch the lives of the people they study, such passion must be passed on to and generated in the co-researchers too. This produces a heightened commitment and responsibility. It also creates moral accountability to each other. It goes without saying that there is no limit of the membership in this community of researchers who can agree to share the conscience of the others who are already citizens of the community.

The community of action researchers, as previously stated, should firmly believe that research is primarily a relationship exercised characterized by generation of right process, rather than by right questions. Thus, they aspire to involve in the life-worlds of the select people's lives and the community, and its moral universes as authentic individuals. Getting right answers can only happen as an outcome of attitudinal transformation and authentic immersion. Once an authentic relationship evolves through mutual transparency, then raw fact-gathering can happen more as a voluntary disclosure or even as an expression of trust.

However, in the process of entering into the moral universe of the co-researchers and their life-worlds, and listening to them, we may end up touching their lives. We make all efforts to touch their lives positively, as we wish to ensure that they touch our lives positively. Our authentic relationship and collective sensing of reality may help all of us – researchers and co-researchers - to change, modify and alter our conception of our 'selves' and our reality. We should be cautious enough to lead such transformation to affect critical self-awareness for empowerment, and conscientisation along mutual lines, and not as a one-way process.

Conclusion

Much of the above alternative practices and strategies have not yet become mainstream trends to give us cause for celebration in anticipation of alternative social sciences or their emergence as universalizing influences having the power to recast Western theories. There is so much confusion, contradictions and mutual animosities among their voices. Their plurality of voices is both a cause for optimism and concern too. There is so much freshness in their observations but the equally intense presence of mutual lionizing and assassinations that can reduce them to one-off eruptions and fleeing angsts of an angry mob.

Above all, we need to be conscious of the fact that all these attempts are occurring in a world historical condition in which the power and resources are unequally distributed. The Little Magazine intellectuals are

operating with least power and meager resources. Their aspirations and language of resistance may get muted, if the knowledge power centres master and co-opt them in far more powerful and fluent manner. But that is a question for another day (or is it not?).

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