

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The Philosophy of social sciences is not to be confused with social philosophy which is concerned with the nature of society, its telos, its normative contents, the desirable social systems or societies, what constitutes a good society etc. rather than the method of knowing social phenomena. In short while social philosophy deals more with the ontological and normative dimensions of society, Philosophy of social sciences studies the method, scope and logos of social scientific knowledge.

There is a debate in the Philosophy of social sciences as to whether social sciences should be treated as a 'process' or a 'product'. According to Rudner¹, all sciences (including social sciences) as a 'process' refer to the activities or working of scientists e.g., experimenting, observing, reasoning etc., whereas science as a 'product' is a corpus of statements, concepts and theories intended to describe and explain the phenomena under investigation. Thus products are linguistic activities or phenomena. Rudner's concept of social science is based on the concept of science as a product, and therefore, his Philosophy of social science is primarily concerned with the linguistic as well as the theoretical aspects of the social scientific enterprises.

But from the phenomenological standpoint, the process of knowing, describing and explaining social actions and events becomes more important. However this standpoint may also be concerned with the assessment of the particular methodological prescriptions reached after studying such actions and events. But even in that case it sets such prescriptions in relation with the actual phenomena. No value can be ascribed to such prescriptions a priori. What follows is that the phenomenological method basically 'suspends' or 'brackets out' all pre-suppositions or preconceptions about such actions or events, in general the social phenomena, with the purpose to understand them afresh. Any evaluation of any given theory or methodology cannot be dissociated from this understanding.

The phenomenological approach does not restrict the observer to a narrow set of perspectives and evolves a way of looking at the data of social sciences. This approach is essentially different from that of positivism or naturalism, because these 'isms' treat social phenomena as a kind of natural phenomena only. Emile Durkheim, the well-known positivist upheld this approach to the extent of claiming to do 'social physics', and treated social facts as things. As both in naturalism and positivism the role of consciousness is simply ignored. They cannot account for the relation that holds between social actors, social phenomena and the social scientist as a knower.

But how does phenomenology help in this matter? Phenomenology does not compartmentalize the knowing subject and the

object of knowledge in order to concentrate on one or the other. The basic insight is that there is no pure subjective subject and objective object. There are no objects that have appearances independent of subjects who experience them and no subjective experiences independent of objects, events or activities experienced. Phenomenology recognizes that all consciousness is consciousness of something. 'Intentionality' is the term to refer to this relation. The main aim of Husserlian phenomenology was to explore the structure of intentionality and to describe the givenness of the modes of experience in a pure or presuppositionless manner. This was supposed to lead ultimately to the level of essence-intuition (Wessenschau) by means of what Husserl called the imaginative variation.

Relevance of phenomenology for social sciences lies in the fact that it enlightens in the analysis of the life-world and the relation of the observer-scientist with the life-world. George Psathas rightly observes, "Since the life-world is given to people in the natural attitudes as an intersubjective world, one of the tasks of the social scientist is to describe the experience of intersubjectivity"².

The traditional non-phenomenological approaches to social sciences always oscillated between thought-oriented and reality-oriented approaches such as positivism, behaviourism, realism, idealism, functionalism etc. There have been also attempts to synthesize thought and reality into certain concepts like collective consciousness (Durkheim), self as the generalised

other (Mead) etc. But the problem becomes acute when there are phenomena which belong to a completely different conceptual scheme, and the social scientist is liable to investigate into them. Also, social scientific inquiries become difficult when the phenomena under investigation are covered by so many alien determinants or distorted by prejudices, pre-occupations, and confusions arising out of them. For the social scientist the point, however, is to see himself in the phenomenon and get rid of such determinants. In this regard phenomenological sociology proposes to serve as an alternative methodological foundation for understanding social phenomena.

Early sociological theories aspired simply to study human social behaviour in interactional constellations of organizational settings, but phenomenological sociology is an interpretative approach to social life in emphasizing the need to understand social action from the point of view of the social actor. Thus the only presupposition for a phenomenology of social science would be the existence of a non-solipsistic interhuman reality with certain concrete experiential contents. Thus the framework of the phenomenology of social sciences is closer to Merleau-Ponty and some other existential phenomenologists than to Husserl, or Schutz.

Phenomenological sociology is an attempt to identify (i) the meanings people find in their world of things, persons, events; (ii) the perspective from which people see themselves and other people; (iii) the motives that underlie their behaviour.

So it is suggested that this approach reflects the best motive and the right purpose for any social and behavioural science. It is grounded on the intersubjective consciousness of everyday life. Phenomenologists are required to 'suspend' or 'bracket' the belief that objects of inquiry are independent of the intersubjective consciousness and the mode of inquiry based on it. They reduce the things in natural world to objects of immediate consciousness and try to construct the world in and through the intentional acts of consciousness. Thus for phenomenological sociology, the foundational nexus of meaning in man's world is that of immediate consciousness. The domain of phenomenological inquiry therefore is limited to the analysis and interpretation of recognizable structures of consciousness in immanent processes.

Thus the crux of phenomenological method in social sciences lies in an interhuman life. It is therefore necessary to discover the basic experiential perspective it deals with. This experiential perspective can be elaborated best with the reference to the philosophy of dialogue and hermeneutics. These are the horizons where subject-object ~~dichotomy~~ is dropped and thereby the unity of the experiential whole is taken into consideration.

The present study points out the inadequacy of non-phenomenological treatment of the problem of social scientific knowledge, but it also goes beyond the Husserlian and Schutzian phenomenological approaches and attempts to anchor a phenomenological method based on dialogue and interpretation. Let us now

consider some features of hermeneutics and the philosophy of dialogue.

Hermeneutics is loosely defined as the theory of interpretation of meaning of human expressions to be recognized as such by a subject and translated into his/her own system of meaning without any distortion. Joseph Bleicher³ has brought out three clearly separable strands to schematize different features of the problem of hermeneutics, (i) hermeneutical theory, (ii) hermeneutical philosophy, and (iii) critical hermeneutics. While hermeneutical theory focuses mainly out the epistemological and methodological issues related to human and social sciences, hermeneutical philosophy is concerned with an ontology of Dasein, the prereflective laben in which the social scientist and his/her object of study are linked by a context of tradition. The hermeneutical philosophy goes further in Hans George Gadamer's work to give the problem of hermeneutics a language-philosophical turn. Since it is basically a problem of communication attempting an agreement with somebody else about our shared world, the communication here takes the form of a dialogue which in Gadamer's context means a 'fusion of two horizons' following a mediation of language. The critical hermeneutics propounded particularly by Jurgen Habermas challenges the idealist ingredients in both the hermeneutical theory and hermeneutical philosophy and emphasizes the extra-linguistic factors which also help to constitute the context of thought and action. His critical social theory proposes not only to describe social reality but also to

criticize and change it. Thus it is claimed to be a theory with a 'practical intent', "in the sense of being oriented to an emancipatory political practice but not to technological-administrative context"⁴.

The concept of 'dialogue' which I propose to incorporate into the methodology of social sciences is however different from Gadamer's notion of dialogue. The concept of dialogue which we will find as more relevant in the context of this work is imbibed from Martin Buber. Buber's standpoint proposes dialogue as preceding language whereas in Gadamer's thesis language precedes dialogue. Hermeneutical theory and hermeneutical philosophy are combined in my approach as it is already obvious in the above explication of the notion of dialogue. So far as the critical dimension of the problem of hermeneutics is concerned, criticism would follow a dialogical understanding and description of social reality. Hence the Buberian concept of dialogue would best be understood as an addendum to what Bleicher calls 'hermeneutical Philosophy and also as a prerequisite to criticism.

The philosophy of dialogue consists of two aspects viz. ontological and methodological. The ontology of dialogue lies in the being of the relationship between an addresser and an addressee i.e., I and Thou. According to Martin Buber who is the chief exponent of the philosophy of dialogue, it is the 'relation's own being' which is important in dialogue. 'Dialogue', therefore, does not simply mean a verbal communication or exchange of words

i.e., conversation. It is relationship as such. Neither the Thou nor the I can be separated from the hyphenated perspective which is I-Thou. This relationality is opposed to I-It relation which is precisely the relation between a subject and an object. In I-It perspective, relationality is secondary. The relation in 'I-It' is determined by the primacy of the subject over the object. The methodological importance of this notion of dialogue is beyond doubt. Dialogue, if consciously practised, brings us straight to the nexus of human relationship between the studier and the studied, in social scientific investigation for the present purpose.

While the phenomenological component of this method would help the social scientist to 'suspend' all his/her own socio-cultural and economic superiority, his/her being 'knower' who is superior to 'the known', it would also build up a unique rapport between the knower and the known so that a knowledge in terms of dialogical agreement may generate. The third dimension of a dialogical method is that it paves the way for an interpretative understanding without making the interpretation one-sided. In this process of interpretation the role of language is intrinsically connected with this sense of dialogue as being in relation. Moreover dialogical relationship is the concept in which also we may notice the intrinsic incorporatedness of intersubjectivity. In other words to explain dialogue we are not required to explain beforehand what intersubjectivity is.

History of philosophy demonstrates two opposite directions regarding the analysis of intersubjectivity. Over-philosophizing on it yields solipsism while for some, meditation on it is too naive to have any philosophical point. But in a dialogical perspective a reasonable emphasis has been laid. And it seems to me that this is the required quantum which may work as the basis for any social scientific enterprise.

Now let me give a brief but guiding note on the contents of the chapters. In the first chapter the early social and sociological theories have been discussed in nutshell, which includes the development of positivism as well as the micro-interactionist trend of the century. Phenomenological sociology and the phenomenology of social cognition of various thinkers engaged the pages of the second and third chapters. This is followed by some critical observations on them, to be found in the fourth chapter. In the subsequent chapter the theme would be the hermeneutic perspectives of Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas etc., regarding the methodology of the social sciences. We step to the last chapter with some insights obtained from phenomenology and hermeneutics and add some other dimension - that of the dialogical philosophy of Martin Buber. The dissertation closes with the conclusion in the end.