

Ramkrishna Mukherjee

METHODOLOGY IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Dilemmas and Perspectives

Essays in Honour of
Ramkrishna Mukherjee

Edited by
Partha Nath Mukherji



Sage Publications
New Delhi/Thousand Oaks/London

REFERENCES

- Irreman, Gerald D., 'Structure and Functions of Caste Systems', in George De Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma eds, *Japan's Invisible Race*, Berkeley: University of California Press, Revised Edition, 1972.
- Souza, Victor S., 'Family Status and Female Work Participation', in Alfred de Souza ed., *Women in Contemporary India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1975, pp. 129-41.
- , 'Family Status and Female Work Participation', (revised version) in Alfred de Souza ed., *Women in Contemporary India and South Asia*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1980, pp. 125-39.
- , *Inequality and its Perpetuation: A Theory of Social Stratification*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1981.
- Sumont, Louis, *Homo Hierarchicus*, London: Paladin, 1972.
- Thuryc G. S., *Caste and Class in India*, Bombay: The Popular Book Depot, 1950.
- Luton, J.H., *Caste in India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, Fourth Edition, 1963.
- Sukherjee, Ramkrishna, 'Trends in Indian Sociology', in *Current Sociology*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1977.
- , *What will it Be? (Explorations in Inductive Sociology)*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1979.
- Oppenheimer, Valeri K., 'The Sociology of Women's Economic Role in the Family', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1977.
- Parsons, Talcott and Robert F. Bales eds, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*, Glencor, Ill: The Free Press, 1955.
- Gitlin, Kathleen V. and Lowell L. Hargens, 'Occupational Positions and Class Identifications of Married Working Women—A Test of the Asymmetry Hypothesis', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 80, No. 4, 1975.
- Rinivas, M.N., *Caste in Modern India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.
- Weber, Max, 'The Development of Caste', in Reinhard Bendix and S.M. Lipset eds, *Class, Status and Power: A Reader in Social Stratification*, Glencor, Ill: The Free Press, 1953.

Mariyamma and the Logic of Realist Explanation in Sociology

Göran Djurfeldt

Realism as a theory of science,¹ in the view of the author of this paper, provides elegant solutions to several puzzles and dilemmas, not only in philosophy, but also to some of the most fundamental theoretical and methodological problems in social science. This paper introduces scientific realism, and presents one way of applying it to social science.² It does so by drawing on an example fetched from an Indian village study undertaken by the author and Staffan Lindberg in 1975. In this way it takes the same starting point as Professor Ramkrishna Mukherjee, i.e. in a village study.

The subject is too vast for a short paper, and this forces us to make some simplifications and short-cuts. Let us therefore start with our case, and bring out some of the salient points by exemplification.

Our case is an interview with a poor farmer named Krishna. The conversation deals with his view of illness, and especially his seemingly contradictory belief that some diseases are caused by germs, and others by the goddess Mariyamma. For an ethnocentric observer, his beliefs are contradictory, but as the interview leads one to understand, Krishna's ways of thinking about illness are perfectly consistent and, given his perceptions, also rational. Since the research was carried out in 1969-70 when smallpox was not yet eradicated, it was perfectly natural to ask the following questions about this disease. Krishna's replies follow.

D. Why does a person get cholera and smallpox?

In the case of cholera, I know it is because of uncleanness of the ality and of the body. Then germs are spreading. Allopathic doctors e the same explanation for smallpox. But we village people believe t it is sent by God. I also believe so.

D. But why is not cholera sent by God?

No, it is caused by germs. You see the reason we think that cholera pread by germs is that 20 years ago, when there were no hospitals e, then cholera came often and each time it took 10 or 15 lives. ne people realised that this disease spread from house to house. Then hospital came here and people became educated like myself. but smallpox is still with us. Even now it is here in the village. Two ldrren are affected right now. It must be that those people have omit- to pray to Mariyamma. If you revere God (i.e., Mariyamma) then i can cure the disease.

D. But why does Mariyamma send smallpox?

Because people do not revere her. They speak ill of Her. I myself y to Her often. At least in my heart I pray . . . There is a Mariyamma ple where we pray. We celebrate a festival to Mariyamma for four s in the month of August . . .

D. Are there other diseases caused by God?

There is no other disease.

D. But some people believe that God also sends other diseases?

There is no other disease than smallpox that is sent by God. All r diseases are infections.

D. What are the most common diseases that people suffer from here?

Headache, fever, and stomachache. We poor people don't have any- g to eat. No milk and no other nutritious food. We simply eat this and millet. That is why we easily get sick (Djurfeldt & Lindberg s: 116).³

rishna's views may seem inconsistent and irrational; but they are and it is easy to demonstrate their logic. He accepts the germ theory simultaneously believes that Mariyamma is responsible for small- As brought out in the quoted work, this can be explained by four rs:

The folk definition of 'smallpox' ('*Mariyatta*' in Tamil) which Krishna takes for granted includes mumps, chickenpox and measles in addition to what allopathic doctors define as 'smallpox'.

2. The first two diseases are benign infections, even for an under- and malnourished population like that in Thaiyur. Thus, Thaiyur patients have a fairly high degree of immunity against '*Mariyatta*'.
3. While the smallpox vaccination scheme was effective in prevent- ing smallpox, its efficiency against '*Mariyatta*' was marginal (since the vaccine did not prevent mumps, chickenpox and measles).
4. '*Mariyatta*' patients are treated by a religious therapy which also includes dietetic and hygienic prescriptions, which in themselves may have a certain therapeutic effect. Given the aetiology of '*Mari- yatta*', most patients do recover after the treatment. Thus, the therapy is effective.
5. Add to this that the patients are isolated, and we get a remark- ably efficient medical regime!

Scrutinising the logic of this explanation, we see that it contains two elements, one which is a variety of a Weberian '*Verstehen*' or herme- neutic. Let us deal with the hermeneutic first. Krishna makes a great effort to explain his thinking to the researchers, and we need only add the linguistic analysis of the Tamil term '*Mariyatta*' to achieve '*Verstehen*' of his way of thinking.

But the five-stage explanation also contains elements, more specific- ally items (2) to (5), which go beyond the logic of a hermeneutic ex- planation. They do so by making references to a bio-medical reality and by provisionally accepting a bio-scientific analysis of this reality, i.e., by equating '*Mariyatta*' with four bio-medically classified diseases (smallpox, mumps, measles, and chickenpox), and by spelling out the implications of this (in items 3, 4 and 5). This part of the explanation, I would claim, presupposes a realist theory of science. Such a theory assumes the existence of a structured reality beyond our perceptions, an assumption alien to an orthodox hermeneutic method. A realist explanation is built up by making (provisional) assumptions about the character of the 'objective' reality. That is, in our case we assume a bio- medical reality beyond Krishna's perceptions, and we provisionally accept some bio-scientific theories about this reality. This allows us to conclude that Krishna's medical world-view is consistent and, *given his perceptions*, perfectly rational.

On a more general level, we can conclude that, contrary to what is often alleged, there is no contradiction between a hermeneutic and a realist explanation. On the contrary, they are complementary. Let us,

in the following, call this combination of 'Verstehen' with a realist strategy of explanation an *extended hermeneutic method*.

Now Krishna's case is not representative. Patients in Thaiyur do not in general subscribe to the dualist medical world-view which he holds. The segmentation of the medical system is also more elaborate than Krishna's case could lead one to believe. Besides religious therapy, like the Mariyamma cult, there are several traditions of medicine coexisting with the allopathic. To explain this coexistence, or *segmentation* as we call it, we need a more generalised model of behaviour. Although there is no reason to claim that all medical behaviour is rational, it was shown in the original study that under the assumption that all or most patients act rationally when seeking treatment, we can explain how individual behaviour in the aggregate contributes to the reproduction of a segmented medical system.

To bring out the logic of this general model, we will bring another realist concept into the discussion, viz., the realist theory of causality. By means of this theory we will be able to glimpse how a realist theory of science can be further integrated with an extended hermeneutic strategy of explanation. The realist account of causality centres on the notion of *causal mechanism* or *causal power*.⁴ Adapting Sayet's formalisation,⁵ we can define the cause of an event e_i as follows:

If an object (x) by virtue of its structure (S_x) contains a mechanism (m_x) which, given certain conditions (c_i), leads to certain events (e_i), then m_x is the cause of e_i .

Or formalised:

$$((S_x \supset m_x) \cap c_i) \rightarrow e_i$$

The realist theory of causality is formulated in opposition to an empiricist, or what is conventionally called a Humean account of causality, which seeks for constant conjunctions of events.⁶ This theory underlying many statistical methods misrepresents reality.⁷ The realist theory should instead be seen as a further development of J.S. Mill's notion of causality, a scheme in which the same cause may result in different outcomes and where, thus, the notion of constant conjunction and correlation is not a sufficient indicator of causal relations. The important addition in the realist theory is the notion of causal mechanism.⁸

In this realist perspective, we can say that human action possesses causal power, or that it is a causal mechanism. Adapting the definition to Krishna's case, we can say that what causes Krishna to sacrifice to

Mariyamma is, on the one hand, his aim to seek efficient treatment, and on the other hand, his perception of the goddess as the cause of 'smallpox' (*Mariyattā*). The causal mechanism in this case is what, modifying Weber's terminology, I would call his *substantive rationality*, (which in my definition includes both his *project* or aim, and his perception or *definition of the situation*).⁹ Given 'infections' (c_1), his substantive rationality (m_x) leads Krishna to seek allopathic treatment (e_1), and given '*Mariyattā*' (c_2),¹⁰ it leads to his sacrificing to the goddess (e_2). The causal mechanism (m_x) in human action is thus its *substantive rationality*, i.e., its orientation to certain goals or projects, and the attendant choice of means based on the perception of the situation and the efficiency and legitimacy of the means for attaining the goal. This causal mechanism is present in all behaviour involving a choice between means to attain a certain goal, and it is part of our structure as human beings (S_x).¹¹ Other forms of human behaviour, e.g., routinised or habitual behaviour has also got causal power but it is not dealt with here (cf. Searle 1995: Ch. 6).

Obviously, substantive rationality is a very different mechanism than, say the mechanism of gravitation, although both the explanation of the falling of a stone, and the choice of medical treatment can be subsumed under the same conception of causality.¹² The difference between causal mechanisms in physical reality, like gravity, and substantive rationality is, of course, that the former are enduring, while human beings keep changing their projects and definitions of situations, in principle, in unpredictable ways. This leads to a whole discussion of the difference between the natural and the social sciences according to a realist theory of science, which, for want of space, we must avoid getting into.

Let us instead continue the analysis of our case by means of the realist notion of causality. On the assumption that patients seek what they perceive as the most efficient treatment, we can explain their consultation of practitioners of different traditions of medicine in Thaiyur.¹³ But this is only one step in a methodology combining an extended hermeneutic with the realist conception of causality. The next step is to show how the action-structure duality can be handled by means of an extension of this method, and how it allows us to avoid falling into the usual traps of methodological individualism on the one hand, and into a 'subject-less' structuralism on the other.

To take this next step we need to assert that, just like human action possesses causal power, *so do social structures*. In other words, social

structures are causal mechanisms. In order to show how to use this notion in sociological analysis, we provisionally and somewhat unconventionally define a *social system* as made up of two levels or sub-systems. Both levels are defined in terms of the realist theory of causality. Thus, a social system is here defined as made up of:

- Level 1: *action-sets*, i.e. systems wherein events (e_i) are actions (by individuals or collectivities), and where mechanisms are the subjective rationalities of human beings.
- Level 2: *social structures*, wherein events (e_i) are reproduction or non-reproduction (or change) of pre-existing patterns and triggered by mechanisms contained in these structures.

Reproduction or non-reproduction of the structure is defined as the relevant events at the structural level. This is a fundamental proposition since it amounts to saying that the goal of a structural explanation is to understand the reproduction of the structure. Therefore, we focus the analysis of the structure of the medical system in Thaiyur on the reproduction of its segmentation into several traditions of medicine.

Adapting the terms defined above to our example, we see that we have hitherto analysed two action-sets:

- 1a. Krishna's sets of action where he either seeks allopathic treatment or sacrifices to Mariyamma.

Using Krishna as a model we developed a more general model:

- 1b. Thaiyur patients' sets of action in seeking treatment from a variety of medical traditions.

Based on the assumption that patients seek what they perceive as the most efficient treatment, we can explain much of the medical behaviour in Thaiyur (i.e., the more comprehensive action-set).¹⁴ We used Krishna as an example (1a), and the more general model (1b) to explain the structural event:

2. The reproduction of the segmented medical structure in Thaiyur.

In effect, we coupled the general model of the comprehensive action-set (1b) with the reproduction of the social structure (2) in the following way (Table 1):

Table 8.1
Matrix of Interrelation between Action-Set and Social Structure

Action-set (A_i)	Conditions (c_a)	Events (e_a)
Patients' rationality to seek treatment on the basis of perceived efficiency	1. Existence of segmented structure (allopathic and indigenous traditions) 2. Perceived differences in efficiency in treating different types of diseases	1. Consultations of allopathic practitioners 2. Consultations of practitioners of indigenous traditions of medicine
Social structure (S)	Conditions (c_s)	Events (e_s)
Medical system segmented into:	Patients consulting:	Reproduction of segmented structure
1. Allopathic system	1. Allopathic practitioners	
2. Indigenous traditions of medicine	2. Practitioners of indigenous traditions of medicine	

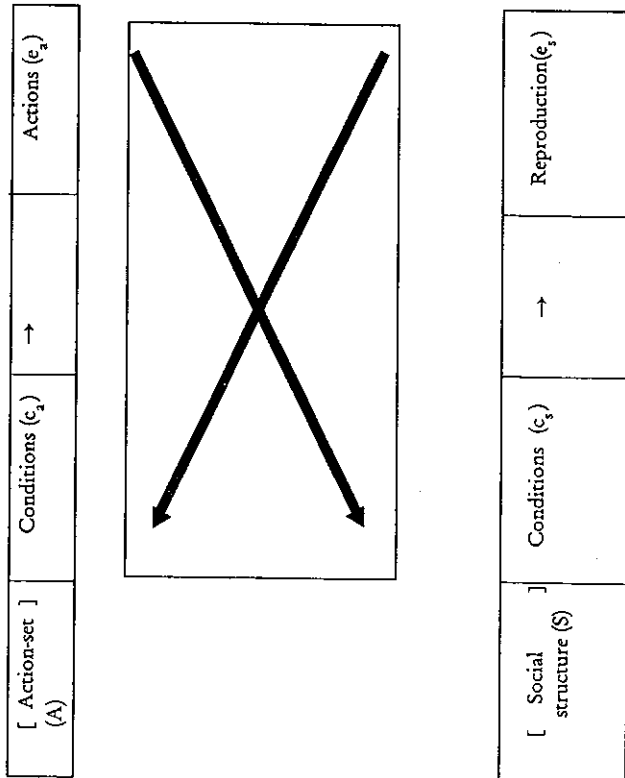
The interesting feature of the action-structure model exemplified in the above matrix is that *events at one level function as conditions for events at the other*. This is what we can call *mutual conditioning* (see Graph 8.1).

Thus, in the terms of our example, Krishna's action-set in seeking both allopathic and indigenous (religious) treatment functions as a condition for the reproduction of the segmented structure, and conversely, the reproduction of this structure functions as a condition for Krishna's action-set in seeking different types of treatment for different types of disease.

Thus, as brought out graphically in Table 8.1, action and structure presuppose each other. As illustrated by the arrow going from the level of action to the level of structure in Figure 8.1, actions (e_i) are conditions (c_s) for reproduction of structures (e_s). Conversely, and as illustrated in the graph by the arrow from the structural level to the level of action, reproduced structures (e_s) are conditions (c_a) for sets of action (e_a). Both methodological individualism and structuralism are short-cuts, since actions presuppose structures, and structures presuppose sets of actions. A complete sociological explanation must involve both levels. The realist conception of causality helps us to see how structure and action are interconnected in an unending dialectic.¹⁵

Let us take one more example to show that the realist account of causality, and the model of action-structure interconnection may be

Figure 8.1
Mutual Conditioning between Action-Set and Social Structure



used to make sense of social reality, and resolve a classical puzzle. Let us take the example of 'joking relationships', a paradigmatic example in Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism.

According to Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) analysis, 'joking relationships' have the function of minimising the conflict latent in the relation between, for example, a man and his mother-in-law. There is the risk of too great intimacy or, more probably perhaps, of an open conflict, which would constitute a deviation from the joking relationship instituted between them. Such a conflict could harm the matrimonial alliance, and thereby risk damaging the alliance between kin groups which the marriage may signify. The function of the joking relationship is therefore, according to this type of functionalist analysis to maintain *social order* or *equilibrium* in society. As is well known from the debate on functionalism,¹⁶ the problematic terms here are *order* and *equilibrium*. The functionalist analysis has difficulties in explaining how equilibrium gets established, and instead tends to assume its existence. Similarly,

the problem of a changing order is allegedly intractable within a functionalist discourse.

I will now show that the analysis of the joking relationships, seen as social structures, and their attendant action-sets can be analysed in the format proposed in this essay. More specifically, the problem should be seen as one of the interrelation between two social systems, as defined above. I will not use the original ethnography but analyse a fictive case of two kin groups exchanging women between each other, and with an institution of joking relationship between a man and his mother-in-law.

How could we translate the problem of joking relationships into a problem of the interrelation between two social systems? On the one hand, we have a social structure instituting the relation between mother-in-law and son-in-law, i.e., the joking relationship as such. On the other hand we have the corresponding action-set, i.e., the actions or interactions between mothers-in-law and sons-in-law, more or less conforming to the joking 'model'. The essence of the functionalist explanation is that this social system has some type of relevance for other social systems, for example, the alliance between kin groups, signified by the matrimonial alliance. Thus, it is part of our example that son-in-law and mother-in-law are from different kin groups exchanging women between them, along the lines of a classical theory like Lévi-Strauss (1969). Obviously, nothing prevents more than two social systems from being drawn into the matrix of mutual conditioning, but here we chose to regard the problem as the simplest possible one, i.e., as a relation between two systems.

Seen in the perspective of the alliance between kin groups, a conflict between mother-in-law and son-in-law could threaten greater values than the relation between the man and his wife. And from this perspective, it is essential that the mother-in-law and the son-in-law do not start quarrelling or befriending each other too much. But does this explain their tendency to joke between themselves? Obviously, it could only do so under the assumption that both of them are aware of the danger, and consciously choose to minimise it by joking with each other. But this is not the point. The joking relationship is an institution, or a social structure, not an action-set. In other words, the motivations of the involved individuals is not the essential thing, but the structural framework within which they act. '*People do not marry to reproduce the marriage system,*' says Bhaskar.¹⁷ Similarly, and to paraphrase him, mothers-in-law and sons-in-law do not joke to reproduce

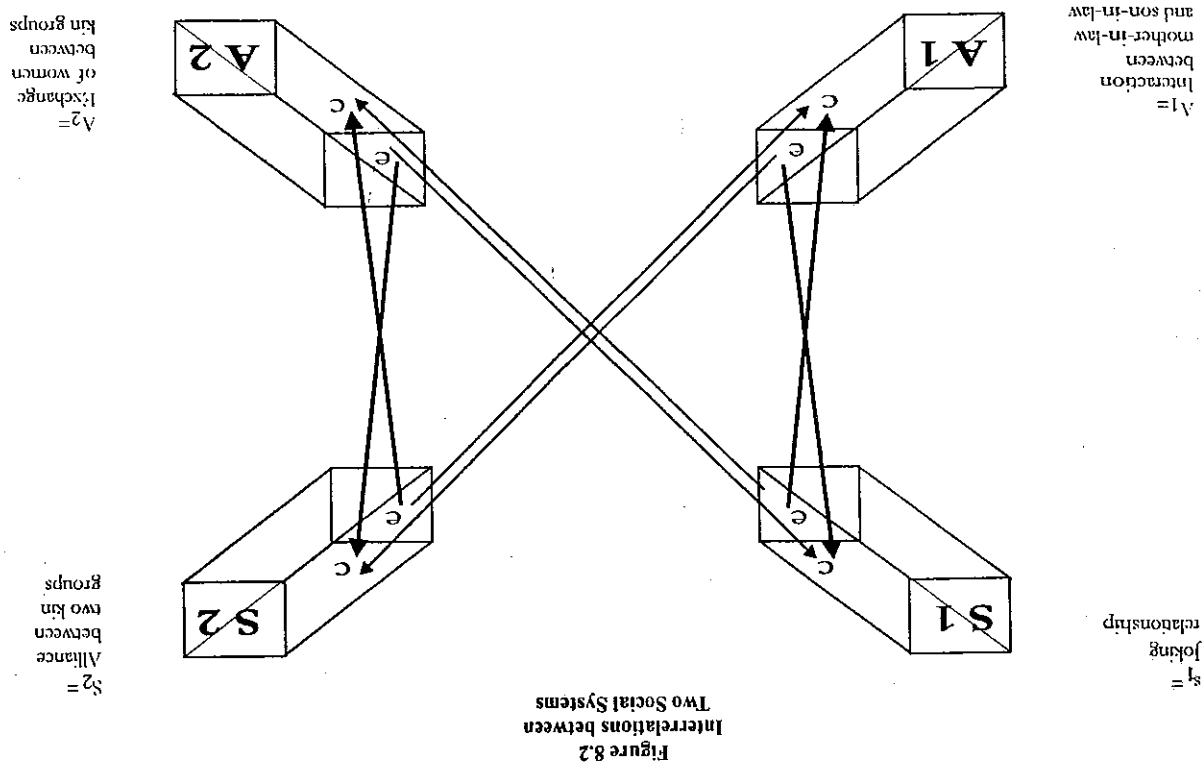
the kin group alliance. Here lies the solution of the problem, and the dissolution of the functionalist problem. What is important is not the motives for joking. What is crucial is *the* joking. Irrespective of their motives, as long as both of them are joking, they reproduce the joking relationship, and thereby they also reproduce one of the conditions for the reproduction of the alliance between the kin groups, and the continued exchange of women between the groups.

If we want to lay bare the logical structure of this argument, we can do it by means of another graph. Extending Figure 8.1 to a graph portraying two social systems and their interrelations, we get Figure 8.2.

Here we have two social structures, i.e. the joking relationship (S_1) and the alliance between two kin groups (S_2). Each structure has its action-set, i.e., the interaction between mother-in-law and son-in-law (A_1), and the exchange of women between kin groups (A_2). In addition to the crossed arrows within each system which we recognise from Figure 8.1 (black arrows), we now get two new pairs of crossed arrows constituting the inter-system relations (grey arrows). Two of the inter-system arrows symbolise:

1. The arrow ($e_{s_1-c_2}$) from the structural level in system (1) to the action level in system (2) symbolises the reproduction of the joking relationship (e_{s_1}), and thereby the constitution of one necessary, but hardly sufficient, condition for continuing to exchange women between the kin groups (c_{s_2}).
2. The other arrow ($e_{s_2-c_1}$) corresponds to the former one, but relates system (2) to system (1). In other words, the alliance between the kin groups is reproduced (e_{s_2}), which again may be a necessary but hardly sufficient condition for mother-in-law and son-in-law to continue joking (c_{s_1}).¹⁸

We see the strength in this mode of analysis. The functionalist paradoxes dissolve, and the system is open as regards its output which may be both reproduction and change of the structure. We do not preclude the possibility that mother-in-law and son-in-law cease joking and get serious, in some sense or other. And if they do, it is an open question what happens when, as a consequence, one of the conditions for a continued alliance between the kin groups ceases to exist. It is by no means certain that the alliance gets disrupted. By means of diplomatic missions between the parties, the alliance may be saved, perhaps at the cost of sanctions towards the transgressing mother-in-law and/or son-in-law.



In contrast to what functionalism has been accused of, our realist-inspired approach shows no tendency of favouring status quo, or of having difficulties of analysing change or non-reproduction and neither does our approach lead to historical speculation. To analyse a structure or an institution, we need not dig into its history, i.e., we need not bother about how the joking relationship arose in the first instance. Like all other institutions, it has its own history, in this case with all probability impossible to reconstruct. But the analysis can be made without knowing that history.

With this exercise we have come to the end of this brief interpretation of realist methodology. Using a case-study of medicine in a Tamil village, we first demonstrated the necessity of extending the hermeneutic method by incorporating assumptions about the underlying bio-medical reality when analysing medical behaviour. A conventional hermeneutic explanation recognises only one reality, viz., 'reality' as perceived or defined by the agents studied. As argued above, on the other hand, an extended hermeneutic explanation draws on provisional assumptions about the 'reality' beyond the perceptions of the agents.

Furthermore, a realist model of causality was introduced, and it was shown that it can be used to overcome the pitfalls of methodological individualism and structuralism. Lastly, the same theory was used to penetrate a classical problem in functionalist analysis, and it was shown how by this method one can dissolve the functionalist problematic. Without claiming to have worked out the final answer to the old questions about the logic of explanation in sociology, I hope that the above would have demonstrated the promises of a realist method.

Finally, I want to point to one important corollary of the scheme worked out here. Recognising that social structures are reproduced through the causal power of human agency, and similarly recognising that this causal power, unlike, for example, gravitation, is in principle unpredictable, has important methodological implications. Explanation in sociology of necessity becomes historicist, and *general theory*, in the sense of *supra-historical* sociological theory becomes an impossibility. The only general instruments we as sociologists possess are our analytical models (like the realist model of causality, for example). These receive their power of explanation only when applied to concrete historical cases. In the view of this author, that is why empirical studies and field-work continue to be the essence of the science of sociology.

NOTES

1. For example, Bhaskar (1989) and Harré (1990).
2. Several other authors have given divergent versions of a sociological realism. See for example Keat and Urry (1975), Pawson (1989), Sayer (1984), Searle (1995) and the works cited in the preceding note.
3. The excerpt from the interview is slightly modified and shortened compared to the earlier published version.
4. Bhaskar (1989), Harré & Madden (1975).
5. Sayer (1984).
6. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (1995: 127-28).
7. Cf. Pawson (1989: part I).
8. See the works quoted in note 4 above.
9. Weber's term 'Werrationalität' is more narrow (1968, Ch. 1). The only reason to tamper with the classical definitions is the want of a better term. The phenomenological 'rationalité' would be an alternative, but in these, the heydays of public choice theory, it would risk getting mixed up with 'rationality' (Weber's 'Zweckrationalität').
10. If we prefer, we can break down (c_2) into four different conditions (c_2 to c_5): measles, mumps, etc.
11. As pointed out above, there is no reason to assume that all behaviour is substantively rational, but under this assumption we can explain the reproduction of the segmented structure of the medical system in Thailand.
12. Cf. Sayer's discussion (1984: 94 ff.).
13. Djurfeldt & Lindberg (1975: Ch. 8).
14. Although other types of behaviour must also be reckoned with, if we want a complete account of all choices of treatment, Cf. Djurfeldt and Lindberg (1975: 171 ff).
15. Cf. Bhaskar (1989: Ch. 5).
16. For an elegant summary and analysis see Elster (1982).
17. Bhaskar (1989: 75).
18. I leave it to the reader to work out the interpretation of the other two arrows.

REFERENCES

- Bhaskar, Roy, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*, London: Verso, 1989.
- Djurfeldt, Göran och Staffan Lindberg, *Pills against Poverty: The Introduction of Western Medicine in a Tamil Village*, London: Curzon Press, 1975.
- Elster, Jon, 'Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory: The Case for Methodological Individualism' *Theory and Society*, 11, 4, 1982.
- Harré, Rom, 'Exploring the Human Umwelt', in Roy Bhaskar ed. *Harré and his Critics: Essays in Honour of Rom Harré with his Commentary on them*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990.
- Harré, Rom and E.H. Madden, *Causal Powers*, London: Routledge, 1975.
- Honderich, Ted ed., *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

- Keat, R. and J. Urry, *Social Theory as Science*, London: Routledge, 1975.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1969.
- Pawson, Roy, *A Measure for Measures: A Manifesto for Empirical Sociology*, London: Routledge, 1989.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, London: Cohen & West, 1952.
- Sayer, Andrew, *Method in Social Science*, London: Hutchinson, 1984.
- Searle, John R., *The Construction of Social Reality*, London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1995.
- Weber, Max, *Economy and Society, An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* ('*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*'), New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

The Problematic of Constructing Social Reality: Some Methodological Issues

M. Bharathi

Academic research into developmental projects initiated by governments has an interesting epistemological and ontological history. What generally started as benefit studies, over time incorporated various costs which came into cognisance and passed through cost-benefit studies at a later stage. If the contemporary debate is an indication, the studies came to contrast the perspective of people who agitate against the construction of development projects. Hirakud dam is one such developmental project. The work on this project commenced in the twilight period of Indian independence, i.e., in 1947. It is a well-researched project and continues to attract the attention of various scholars even today.

Hirakud dam was the major planned capital-investment project initiated by the Indian state, in the footsteps of the Tennessee Valley Project in America, in order to activate the Indian economy. Hirakud dam, a technological marvel, being the longest earthen-cum-cement dam in the world, is located on the Mahanadi river in the district of Sambalpur in Orissa. It has the potential to irrigate, control floods and of course generate electricity and help navigation. The irrigation potential has attracted a fairly large number of peasant migrants from the Krishna and Godavari regions of Andhra Pradesh, who normally stay outside the villages in 'camps'. These peasants migrated into the command areas with capital and technology and started cultivating irrigated rice.