

Applying Philosophical Considerations of Case Study and Critical Theory in Studying the Particular Cases, Perceptions and Behaviours of People

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The use of philosophical considerations in the study of the behaviours of people is crucial for the authenticity and reliability of scientific undertaking. The main purpose of this paper is to concentrate on the discourse of applying case study and critical theory as philosophical considerations in studying the particular cases, perceptions, and behaviours of people. To this end, this paper is divided into different sections. It begins with the introduction, ontology, epistemology, logic, and arguments of both case study and critical theory. Moreover, the focus is given to explain and illustrate how these philosophical considerations can be applied in studying the particular cases, perceptions, and behaviours of people. So, the main body of the paper tries to link a case study as a research philosophy to explore the case of the plight of homeless people. Similarly, the philosophical consideration of critical theory is also applied to analyze the

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perception and behaviour of landlords towards farm labourers. Finally, the recapitulation section of the paper presents the overall argument of the whole paper.

[**Keywords:** Philosophical consideration, Case study, Critical theory, Homeless people, Landlord and farm labourers]

1. Introduction

It is believed that every research study is guided by the researcher's assurance about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). So, every research begins with a philosophical paradigm which is a "basic set of beliefs that guides actions" (Guba, 1990 : 12, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 : 22) of the researcher. When we talk about the philosophical considerations, we are concerned with the basic questions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Smith (2003 : 1) defines ontology as "a branch of philosophy is the science of what is, of the kinds and structures of objects, properties, events, processes, and relations in every area of reality". Neuman (2014 : 94) states that, "ontology concerns the issue of what exists or the fundamental nature of reality...its place in the world". Similarly, Richards (2003 : 33) further states that "ontology literally the science or study of being is concerned with the nature of reality and their position". Philosophically, researchers make claims about what is knowledge is the concern of ontology (Creswell, 2003).

Epistemology is the issue of how we can learn about or know the world which is rooted in our ontological assumptions. Richards (2003 : 33) defined it as "the science or study of knowledge, refers to the views we have about the nature of knowledge and relationship between the knower and known". Similarly, for Creswell (2003 : 6), "how we know it" is epistemology. It is concerned with ways of knowing and learning about the social world. Moreover, it focuses on the questions of how to know reality and what is the foundation of our knowledge (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003 : 13).

2. Philosophical Considerations Related to Case Study

The case study particularly focuses on "the study of an instance in action" (Cohen et al., 2007 : 253). In a case study, the focus is given to explicate the case or instance rather than to represent the world. It means that the case study itself is a comprehensive in-depth study of a single entity. It may be the study of an event, a child, an individual,

a class, a community, a village, a city, and so on. Similarly, a case study always focuses on the contexts of the case rather than causality between the variables. These contexts are geographical, institutional, temporal, and others, which creates boundaries around the case (Cohen et al., 2007).

Moreover, a case study can be treated as a method of investigation which provides easily understandable information of the “real people in real situations” (Cohen et al., 2007 : 253) without using any abstract theoretical principles. Similarly, in some situations, the inevitability of a case study in ways that the numerical treatment seems to be worthless. For example, suppose that there are two individuals living in a village. The one has 10 chickens and the other does not have any chickens. If we calculate the average, as a form of numerical analysis, then the result will be that both of them have five chickens each. Statistically speaking, this shows that they have an equal share of feelings and opportunities regarding the things that are associated with the chickens because they possess the same number of chickens. In reality, this is not true for both of them, because one lost his five chickens and the other gets five chickens whereas the latter does not have chickens. This numerical analysis distorts the reality of both persons. Therefore, the quantitative data through surveys always do not fit in all situations like in this case. In such a situation, a case study is appropriate because it focuses on each of these persons separately.

3. Philosophical Considerations Related to Critical Theory

The basic ontology of critical theory is known as “historical realism” which believes that “a reality is assumed to be apprehendable as historically reified structures which are taken now as real” (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994 : 110). It further claims that the reified economic, social, and political structures or ideologies have been always a medium to oppress the people. In this situation, the emancipation of people is only possible when we unmask the structurally imposed reification and hidden ideologies embedded in people’s beliefs and values (Gorton, 2010). It further claims that the structure of capitalism always works as a source of domination and false consciousness which serves to keep the working class in a deluded and exploited condition (Gorton, 2010). Similarly, the epistemological position of critical theory is known as “transactional

and subjectivist” which beliefs in a value-mediated relationship between the researcher and research (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994). It believes that the ideology of value neutrality was a kind of propaganda of naturalism to keep the society in a status quo by justifying crystallized structures that mask the domination and oppress the people. Moreover, objective truth is only possible if it represents the accurate and actual world (Gorton, 2010). Therefore, the researcher must adopt the value-mediated position intentionally and always to be in favor of liberation and emancipation.

4. Applying Case Study in the Plight of Homeless People

In the context of the “plight of homeless people”, the use of case study is appropriate because it is manifested as a phenomenon of a bounded system of its own story. It is because the homeless people have their own miseries, pains, sorrows, and dire conditions which are unique and not amenable for comparison with the people of other locations and situations. Their subjective experiences are limited and located around the milieu where they live. For example, we do not generalize the findings derived by the study of “Gaijatra” of a particular place as a festival to the study of another festival “Rodi” and in some sense even to the “Gaijtra” of other places because they have their own uniqueness. Although it doesn’t mean that the case study cannot make theoretical statements or generalizations being supported by the evidence presented, but its nature of generalization is different from that of statistical analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). For example, the case study of a particular commercial bank might be useful as a case study to grasp the major features of the other commercial banks of the same categories. Therefore, these unique characters of the phenomenon demand the inevitability of cast study.

The material plights that almost all homeless people of particular places may be similar to the homeless people in other places. These plights might have that they do not have sufficient food to eat, dresses to wear, clean water to drink, and they are living under temporary tents for years. These are the material things we could observe from outside, but we could not observe what they see, think, and feel about themselves and their present condition. It is because, their plights are location-specific, geographically bounded, socially ingrained, ecologically conditioned, and economically deprived. We do not understand the plights of the homeless by separating and ignoring these contexts in which they were created,

sustained, and prevailed. So, this creates the inevitability of a case study because it always depicts the close-up reality and thick description of the lived experiences of people and portrays the phenomenon in real-life contexts (Cohen et al., 2007).

There are several other reasons to choose the case study for the investigation of the plights of homeless people. On the one hand, it is a distinct phenomenon situated by creating its own contextual boundaries. It explores the things that are distinctively related to that case on the other hand. Similarly, the case study focuses on particular aspects of the phenomenon rather than ordinariness amenable to generalization. Moreover, it is suitable to know the unanticipated and unique consequences that have been faced by homeless people. Furthermore, it also explores how and why this phenomenon embarks in this particular context. In this condition, we need a method that could explore the concrete, contextual and in-depth information about a phenomenon like the plight of homeless people, in real-life settings, a case study is more appropriate for this end.

Though a case study focuses on a bounded instance in real-life contexts by presenting vivid and rich descriptions, it has several limitations, too. The major limitation is related to its lack of control over the treatments and extraneous variables systematically (Cohen et al., 2007). This makes the findings of the case study difficult to generalize even the related other cases of the same categories. In the case study, it is almost impossible to control the environment or natural setting as is found in other experimental studies. Moreover, though an instance has its bounded boundaries, various external micro and macro factors may have a direct and indirect impact on the case. For example, the plight of the homeless may have a connection with national policy as an external connection. Similarly, it is very difficult to check the reliability and validity of the data recorded from the case study.

5. Applying Critical Theory in the Perception and Behaviour of Landlord towards Farm Labourers

The philosophical consideration adopted by “critical theory” is more appropriate to investigate such a perception and behaviour of the farm labourers towards their landlord. It is because, these perceptions and behaviours should be treated as an outcome of crystallized social structures and “a hidden ideology of value

neutrality” (Gorton, 2010 : 14). Though critical theory and post-modernism have shared some similar arguments regarding rejecting the value-neutrality of naturalism, adopting interpretive inquiry as a part of social investigation, and hermeneutical evaluative activity of interpretation (Gorton, 2010), they differ in several respects.

The perception and behaviour of farm labourers to consider their landlord as their food provider and submit to his will most of the time should be analyzed as an outcome of crystallized social structures and the hidden ideology of value neutrality. This perception and behaviour is a kind of incorrect assessment or false consciousness planted in the minds of farm labourers as if it is real. In fact, the landlord is not their food provider rather an exploiter who has the privilege of reified structures. These reified structures mislead both of them and their unrealized potentiality. The reification process detached the farm labourers from their roles in the production process. Moreover, it creates such a situation that farm labourers become separate from their own products. Similarly, they no longer recognize themselves in relation to their products by treating themselves as being alien, and the external forces have control over them.

The perception of farm labourers, as a distorted or false consciousness, is shaped by the capitalist economic, social, and political structures or ideologies. The landlord and the farm labourers both have been socialized in the same capitalist structures. It is, therefore, the farm labourers feel that it is their duty and responsibility to work for the landlord. They also feel that this is the only way to feed their family otherwise would not have been possible. Moreover, they think that this is a kind of mercy on them from the side of the landlord to provide the opportunity of work. Similarly, the pitiable conditions now they are facing are not due to the landlord but by their deed of the previous life. In this situation, the religious ideology comes into practice in favor of capitalism to mask the exploitation of farm labourers by justifying it as legitimate and rational.

This kind of false consciousness closes the door to think about the whole production process, the role of the farm labourers, and limit their role only as a receiver of the landlord’s mercy. In fact, it is due to the labor of farm labourers the objects receive the value as a commodity. The landlord sells these commodities in the market and gets the profit. Out of the others, one prerequisite for more profit-making, which is the motto of capitalism, is to provide low wages to

labourers. This situation creates a pitiable condition for labourers' life. The important point here is that the labourers' labor from which the commodities receive the value can be reified as if it is determined by the unalterable and inevitable principle of markets. This process reifies the whole production process and detaches the farm labourers from their products. Therefore, the real process of value creation goes into the invisible hands of the market. This is what the critical theory blames the orthodox economists for their argument of "fundamental and inalterable dynamics of economic systems" (Gorton, 2010 : 16).

The role of the researcher, according to critical theory should be always in favor of exploitative people to unmask the capitalist structures and hidden ideologies to liberate and empower them. The critical theory claims that value-neutrality in research is not an appropriate one because "value neutrality represents a hidden ideology" (Gorton, 2010 : 14). In this situation, too, the role of the researcher should be in favor of farm labourers to empower and liberate them from their reified perception and behaviour regarding the relationship with their landlord. Moreover, the researcher must be aware that liberation from these reified consciousnesses is only possible through enlightenment. When they became enlightened the true nature of their situation would be exposed by which ultimate emancipation is possible. Therefore, the philosophical consideration of critical theory is more appropriate for this end.

6. Conclusion

Applying different philosophical considerations for the study of people's behaviour needs to know about the ontology and epistemology of respective philosophy. It is because philosophical considerations guide the researcher about the world and how it should be understood and studied. In the context of a case study or the study of an instance in action the focus is being on the case or instance rather than to represent the world. In the context of the "plight of homeless people", the use of case study is appropriate because it is manifested as a phenomenon of a bounded system of its own story. Moreover, a case study is justified in this condition because it could explore the concrete, contextual and in-depth information about the phenomenon in real-life settings.

Similarly, the philosophical consideration adopted by critical theory is more appropriate to investigate the perception and behaviour of the farm labourers towards their landlord. It is because

only critical theory treats these perceptions and behaviours as an outcome of crystallized social structures and a hidden ideology of value neutrality. Therefore, it would be possible to unmask the capitalist structures and hidden ideologies to liberate and empower reified people.

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