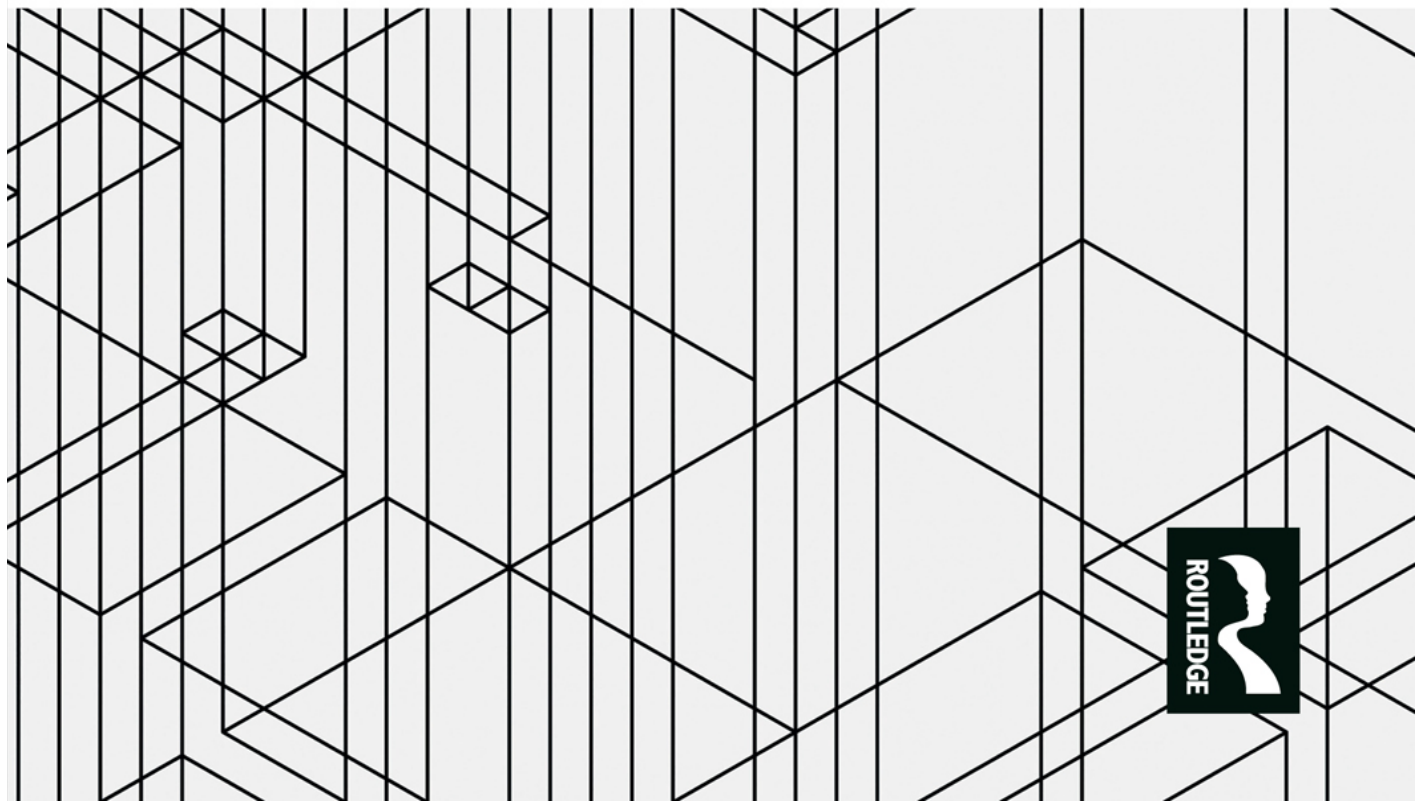


# **THEORY, POLICY, PRACTICE**

## **DEVELOPMENT AND DISCONTENTS IN INDIA**

Edited by

Suman Nath and Debraj Bhattacharya



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# Theory, Policy, Practice

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This book explores the meanings and perceptions of development and the dialectics of theory, policy and practice. It looks at how theory translates into policy, and the disconnections in its design and implementation in the Indian context.

The book focuses on the influence of capitalist globalisation, democratisation, decentralisation and neoliberal economic reforms on the development discourse in India and how these have challenged the traditional role of the 'state', the meaning of citizenship, and public participation. Through an analysis of case studies from various parts of the country, it bridges the gap between policy prescriptions and practices and unpacks the institutional, political and policy-led compulsions and incompatibilities which most often remain unreported. It also discusses the intersections between policymaking and the politics of class, caste and gender, and emphasises the role bureaucracy plays in institutional governance.

The volume includes articles from professionals ranging from academics, practitioners and activists. It will be of interest to scholars and researchers of public policy, development studies, South Asian politics, and economics as well as policy makers and practitioners in government and civil society.

**Suman Nath** received his PhD jointly under faculties from the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta and the University of Calcutta in Anthropology. He teaches anthropology as Assistant Professor at Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam Government College, Kolkata, India. Since 2007, he has been researching on issues of politics of resource allocation, which includes a stint as Research Associate at Public Policy and Management Group, Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, India. His books include a monograph, titled *People-Party-Policy Interplay in India* (2020) and a co-authored volume on *Sexuality, Identity and Health* (2014). He has published in international journals on issues of politics, corruption and governance. He was awarded to participate in different research programmes organised by the UNDP, Planning Commission and SaciWATERS. Apart from his academic publications, Suman runs a couple of internationally recognised

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## Development and Discontents in India

Edited by Suman Nath and  
Debraj Bhattacharya

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Revisiting Qualitative Methods in Social Science Research

REVISITING  
QUALITATIVE  
METHODS IN  
SOCIAL SCIENCE  
RESEARCH

EDITED BY  
BONITA ALEAZ  
PARTHA PRATIM BASU

  
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FIELD RESEARCH FOR THE 'PRESENT'  
AS COLLABORATION AMONG  
FRAGMENTS AND DIFFERENCES

A JOURNEY WITHIN, ACROSS,  
IN-BETWEEN AND BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES

*Arnab Das, Suman Nath and Suman Hazra*

### The Critical Point of Departure

What this chapter is supposed to introduce as one of the opening points of field research has been clearly stated by Turner (2009: 5) quite similar to all scholars of 'the social sciences and the humanities' acknowledging,

an intellectual crisis [...] One aspect of this crisis has been a revolution in the philosophy of the social sciences and epistemology whereby the certainties of positivism, empiricism, and objectivism have waned before the insistence that there are no theory-neutral observations of reality, that all theory is context-dependent, and that the pretension of scientific neutrality is just that—a pretension.

It is to mark the point of departure for qualitative research. In other words, since nearly the later half of twentieth century, the earlier hegemony of 'numbers', passive reception of culture, 'measurement', 'causal explanation', 'scientism' and 'prediction' was curbed by the effective alternatives of 'meaning', 'interpretation', 'understanding', 'active construction', 'critical action', 'embodiment', 'discourse', 'emancipation' and 'transformation'. To say the minimum, the effect of this paradigm (or worldview) war, negotiation and proliferating

paradigms—resulted principally by the conflict of paradigms, the incommensurability of paradigms (Kuhn 2001), the inter-paradigm dialogue (Guba 1990), the integration of paradigms (Gioia and Pitre 1990) and the hybridisation of paradigms (Schultz and Hatch 1996)—inundating social science research, curiously enough, could not dismantle the spatial hegemony of the West over the rest. In India, social science could not come out of the complex hegemony of natural scientific paradigms, at least in the grassroots of research practices in the universities and most of the research institutes. This article on 'field research' with emphasis on qualitative research does not primarily aim at rejoining too many (voluminous as well) scholarly articles and volumes—on diversity of qualitative researches, whether in field context or otherwise—readily available to buy or read or download via the internet. Rather, our reflexive urge would highlight the chosen areas of significant understanding of field research.

### Field Research as Accumulative Repertoire with(out) Boundaries

In field research, the 'collection' of data *in situ*, even of past (such as archaeological, historical, etc.), would allow the researcher to engage with an array of methods to make information contextual to the purpose/question/hypothesis/objective of the research to culminate in the (sometimes differentiated into 'primary' and 'secondary' following the logos of 'presence' over 'absence' of the sources of data) data. For ethnographers, the term 'field research' is less used than 'fieldwork'. The term fieldwork has been a continuously modifiable practice of (reflexive) embodiment of 'being there' with the people or the persons in 'natural setting' the way (why and how)—that the ethnographers analyse—the people are, could be and actively change to be, eventual to or irrespective of the interactions with the field researcher(s). The process, practice and representation of fieldwork are supposed to be systematic, rational and ethical in order to render quality and accountability to research. Thus, commonly, *field research* is contrasted with 'experimental' research in laboratories or solely theoretical research or research relying solely on already existing/'secondary' data.