Chapter Two

Methodology of Being: Hermeneutics in the Field

If I limit myself to knowledge that I consider true beyond doubt, I minimize the risk of error but I maximize, at the same time, the risk of missing out on what may be the subllest, most important and most rewarding things in life.

E F Schumacher (1990: 11)

Reality can be found only in understanding ‘what is’; and to understand ‘what is’, there must be freedom, freedom from the fear of ‘what is’.


The world we have created today as a result of the thinking thus far, has problems which can not be solved by thinking the way we thought when we created them.

Albert Einstein42

Introduction

The category of Being43 of the researcher and the Field44 inhabited by the respondents interact and shape up a research project. This is the abiding principle behind this research and the crux of this chapter. The field is a village, Fulhara, in the southern part (sharing borders with two districts of Darbhanga and Samastipur) of the Northeast of Bihar commonly known as Mithila. The details on demographic composition, spatial arrangements, practices and belief in everyday life, are all saved for the next (third) chapter. It would however suffice to say that the village is numerically dominated by the lower caste Dhamuk, while Brahmans are not redundant in significance due to their traditional status in the caste order of society. It is yet another village with the peculiarity of sound and sight displaying folk conducts. Women are largely housewives, some of them employed in various schemes such as Angan Baadi, teaching in school, or simply an aide in agricultural occupation along with their male counterparts. All the inhabitants of the filed are here potential informants, and mainly women who are known for their singing consist of the chief pool of the informants.

To begin with, interviewing them seemed to be the best way of gathering data. In the course, it became freewheeling conversation as more efficient mode of data-collection. The songs were recorded during the contextual renditions as well as on the

42 Quoted by Roy Bhaskar (2002).
43 I have put Being in italics for two reasons: one that it is not the being of the researcher in isolation, which can slip into intellectual atomization in the course of research and especially in the act of understanding and interpreting; secondly, the idea of Being emerges when the experience in the field is merged with the reading of the hermeneutic philosophy along with meditation upon the insights from the Upanishad, the Geeta, and the transcendental realism of Roy Bhaskar (2002).
44 I am using the notion of Field with Bourdieu (1975) in my mind, alluding to the basic configuration of the field, that it exerts relational power on the visitor. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) discuss the dual nature of the field, consisting of: a). configuration of forces and, b). site of struggle to maintain or transform those forces. It serves the purpose of underlining the field as a site of contestation, be it among the agencies embedded in the structure of the field (which is Bourdieu’s interest), or between the researcher’s worldview and that of the field.
insistence of the researcher on various occasions during conversations. As we proceed, this chapter presents the nitty-gritty of interaction between the researcher and the villagers, crumbling of the romanticism attached to field work in the familiar place, love and hate with the field, reading of the hermeneutic philosophy in the face of methodological crisis, and reevaluation of the hermeneutic insights in the filed leading to what I have termed methodology of Being.

Some Questions
A Field-view of hermeneutics and thereby amendments in methodological orientation is, in diverse ways, distinct from the Book-view of the same. Most importantly, it facilitates an exercise in critical appreciation of the technical training in close encounter with the field and thereof elements. It is painful insofar as it impels for a heuristically important unlearning of the technical training and pleasant as it (can) endows a research with optimum reflexivity. This chapter intends to evaluate the Book-view of methodology from the perspective of the Field. While it constantly pricks the pride of a theoretically oriented researcher by taking into account the challenge of the field, it also enables to adjust to the emotional underpinnings of the Field. Any researcher, more often than not, is guided by the Book-view at least insofar as methodology is concerned. The notion of doubt-free methodology is volatile if a researcher intends to be just to the filed, and if it is bypassed by shielding a research with a straitjacket of methodology, the results are likely to be fraught with the intellectual prejudices of the researcher. This is actually a statement on a familiar hermeneutic problem. Some of the corresponding, and probing, questions are thus: what constitutes the meaning in the field, the researcher’s academic-intellectual worldview or that of the listed as well as unlisted inhabitants of the field? Who imputes meaning, the social actor of the field or the researching actor? In case the researcher is versed in the method and philosophy of hermeneutics, and thus seeks for a ‘fusion of horizon’, what are the methods and techniques used toward it? How does

45 By Field-view I mean the interpretative skills of a researcher inclusive of the categories and concepts, perspectives and stances, intellectual and emotional strengths that emanate from a social relationship with the people, their institutions, beliefs and practices and surrounding of the universe of study. The terms such as Field is used only to make it easier for academic readers who can make sense of an argument if and only if terminologies from research parlance are used. Otherwise, the filed never remains a technically conceived universe for a researcher who is open to establish a hermeneutic relation with the whole of universe, as any layperson in the field. Thus the most honest expression, for such a field by such a researcher, would be ‘my village where I live’.
such a hermeneutically guided research arrive at the structured knowledge and doubt free meaning of what social actors express or do? Most importantly, how does such a researcher deal with the emotional content of the expressions of social actors in order to arrive at the intellectually intelligible content of the same? Is it like selectively fishing for fish suitable for the theme of research from the muddied water of emotion in which knowledge breathes like small and big fishes?

This chapter attempts to address, if not answer, such questions by bringing about an interface between Book-view and Filed-view, between the hermeneutics of the Field that a researcher stumbles upon and the hermeneutic discourse inscribed in the works of hermeneutists. It is a practical appraisal of the textual knowledge in the field where we encounter not our professors but laypersons. An interpretative understanding that this chapter arrives at discloses two-fold knowledge: every field paves way for an emotional reading of hermeneutics; and thus every field, in totality, is a foundation for anti-foundational sociology. An important rider, the emotional reading is by no means a counterpart of the rational/reason-based one. The emotional reading, instead, facilitates to perceive the decimating dichotomies of reason and emotion, intellect and sentiment and so on. Destined thereby to the discovery of a holistic paradigm of hermeneutics, the chapter proposes a resolve that is premised upon the unison of Book-view and Field-view.

**Context of Questions**

The village, as the field, Fulhara, in the southern part of Mithila, at the border of two districts Darbhanga and Samstipur. Some other villages which I chanced upon visiting to get a self-clarification on some of the fundamental confusions, also figure in the course of argumentation. It is in this part of the chapter that I intend to reveal that a research need

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46 Foundation, here, stands for the semantic meaning of the word i.e. structure that supports further building. On the other hand, foundation used in the compound of 'anti-foundation' refers to the philosophical tenets of the Enlightenment and the concomitant methodology of social sciences, Positivism of empirical social sciences.

47 The map is downloaded from [http://cc.lasphost.com/mithila/map_mithila.asp](http://cc.lasphost.com/mithila/map_mithila.asp)
not be a pretentious outsider feigning ignorance at the drop of a hat, neither is it plausible to be an outsider trying hard to be an insider. To understand and interpret the folk content, loaded with emotional elements more often than not, it is imperative to belong to the whole of hermeneutic folk life, whereby understanding is not an exclusive enterprise and interpretation is not a mere intellectual endeavor. Once found a location for the self of the researcher in the socio-emotional matrix of folk life, it is not always a need to treat the conversant folk as respondent/informant category, and ask a variety of structured questions seeking for clearly indubitable answers. The amount of disdain of the stranger and the strange that defines the interactive relation between the researcher and the field, with the latter being animated by the people and their practices, jeopardizes the possibility of understanding. This disdain is always there, in the initial stage of research, no matter the researcher is originally a native of the region or not. Only familiarity does not erase the potential bias toward the unknown, and therefore two implications: the unknown appears as either an anachronistic entity or a glorified exotica. It seldom leads to the right understanding.

48 For example, I am a native of the region, with my paternal village called Beri, where I have been going with my parents on special occasions such to attend a wedding or just for a break from the hometown which is the district called Darbhanga or from some other town of Bihar where my father was posted for his services. Whenever I went to even my own village I experienced the strangeness objectively, despite my familiarity with the village. I have been also intolerant toward the rural way of life and interpreted them with utmost criticality. So much so that I always thought an antithesis to Gandhian notion of village is every village of Bihar. Despite my liking for the fascinating locale and natural ambience I found villages a blot in the crown of India.
of the given. Thus indispensable is the process whereby a researcher in the field becomes a part of the Being, the whole. The following is the narrative on the becoming of the researcher after the meanings of folk life in a particular village.

The village, Fulhara, is maternally linked (avuncular connection) to me, for my mother’s natal home is located here. Incidentally, I never visited this village with my mother. The only familiarity with this village was through oral sketches of it, which emerged from mother’s memory. After my mother passed away, her stories as well as songs became source of intellectual engagement for me, and I took to explore this village. It of course began with the maternal mystique attached to the village, which diversified as the quest went on. The images of many faces of my own mother, readily singing the songs of unknown past, met with reality check. Nevertheless there stayed intact the fundamental principle that orature determines rural way of life. To be specific, it is orality of every day life that characterizes Maithil Being.

When I entered the village for the first time, riding an old Hero Honda Motorbike, on the equal stretch of tarmac road and almost-no-road, also traversing bamboo grooves and sideways of the fields, I thought I had stepped into a real mystical world. The only link alive in the village was my deceased mother’s widowed sister-in-law whose son-in-law belongs to the same village. Fortunately, he had promised me help in my research. Never had I been to Fulahara before and hence was not able to locate my facilitator’s house. As though on a wild goose chase I traversed the whole village, taking merely an hour, and got back to the where I had started. Putting aside my urbane certitude, that I can find the place by myself, I stopped over the village tea-shop for some help. Hastily I moved within the earshot of some villagers in and out of the bamboo-roofed tea-shop of fairly narrow space and overheard them already talking about me— the stranger in the village. Now that the questionable stranger was available in front of them, intrigue was writ large in their faces. However, I was given the luxury of asking my question first, and I enquired about Puna Misar’s house in Maithili. They were stunned at the revelation that the stranger can speak Maithili and his fatigue-clad urbanity is not a linguistic distinction; that he knows, or at least tries to show that he knows, how to address an individual in the village. Rather than answering the question, one of them took the baton, and counter-questioned— who are

49 The surname Misra is pronounced Misar in Maithili. Puna Misar is the father of my facilitator Putur Misar. Though the latter is known in village for his own identity, I continued with the practice of asking for the household by the name of the eldest.
This annoyed me; I expected them to answer my question first and he like other men in loosely tucked dhoti (a wrap around) and ganji (vest) intended to know the place I had come from. To each I delivered curt replies expecting them stop and answer my question. But then, they continued and asked- who is my father, how am I related to Puna Misar, what is the purpose of visiting the village, and so on. With a greed to find an answer to my simple question I maintained my poise and answered each question as gently as possible, hiding my exasperation. Each question laid me bare in front of the villager and I became a subject of their scrutiny. When it became intolerable to disclose myself any further I kick started my bike in an indignant gesticulation and this yielded the answer to the mere question I had asked- keep going on this road; turn to east on the northern tin-muhani (trifurcation), and near puranka inar (old-abandoned well) find the house in the south. My mind, accustomed to the instructions with ‘turn left and right’, went tizzy at the ‘turn south and north’ type of instruction. I moved ahead, in confusion, until I saw a man standing in the verandah of the house with a lota (a brass-pot) in his hand and his sacred thread wrapped around his right ear. Apparently, he was on the way to the field (or the bamboo grooves where people go for this purpose) to do what I am habitual to do in the enclosed toilets with running taps. I thought he would not take much time in telling me the way top Puna Misar. To my surprise, he withheld his nature’s call and gave me the same trial once again by asking all the questions I had answered at the tea-shop. Once satisfied he gave me the direction, which was of my little avail, for it was again in terms of south-east-west rather than what I am habitual of (left-right-center). On my humble insistence however he translated the whole of direction based instruction into side based instruction, replacing a south into left and a north into right. I rushed to Puna Misar’s as soon as I grabbed a sense of ways, and I was there standing my dust-clad bike in the shade of Dalaan (the outer chamber of the house meant to accommodate male guests, which is also used by elderly people of the household who have to maintain distance from the women of the family).

As Puna Misar appears, with yellow dhoti clumsily wrapped around his waist and totally naked pot-bellied torso except yellowish sacred thread slung across his chest, and chewing areca nuts in his mouth, my pretence to be a mere researcher stood aside. I was instantly reminded of the distant relation I have with him by on account of being related to him through my mother. He was my mother’s brother in the sense that they both belonged to the same village. Secondly, he was the Putur Misar’s father, who
was married to my mother's brother's widowed wife's (maternal aunt, called Maami in vernacular) daughter. Though my urbane mind denied any significance of such distant relations, I gingerly bowed to touch his feet as I knew the significance of this custom. It may be also because the younger ones touch my feet on the spur of moment out of their habit. Having asked for my well-being and that of my family, and exchanging sweet memories of my mother and my father, he called for Radha. Radha is the grand daughter of my Maami, and daughter of Putur and his wife Baby. Radha, a ten year old girl in well-worn frock appeared with a lota of water for me, touched my feet in respect and called me Mama (maternal uncle), which reminded me that I am maternal cousin of Radha's mother Baby (her mother's sister-in-law's son/ she is my mother's brother's daughter's daughter). Every child who came to touch my feet called me Mama and thus I was suddenly catapulted in the matrix of relationship which I generally intended to avoid as though it was a precondition to be a dispassionate and ruthlessly cold researcher. The idea of 'touching feet' is otherwise an anathema for me which I had always done only for very close relatives or my parents. But then it seemed imperative at this occasion to establish that I am a nicely behaved man and I deserve all help form them in my research. My submission to the this seemingly indispensable part of the folkways was by and large a calculated move to garner maximal favor from the folk and hence I did it willy-nilly. In a while Radha came back to take me inside the home from the Dalan to make me meet her mother Baby (my cousin sister) and Maami (maternal aunt whose name is Gulab Devi). It appeared that this facility was available only for the visiting guest who have any relationship with the women of the household and not to everybody. A round of 'feet-touching' ensued and placed me in the household as a guest who deserves attention. But then the researcher in me, subjecting everything to critical enquiry, hardly found any coherent meaning in such things, and
thus only faked around for ‘ulterior research motif, so to say.

I disclosed my intention of the visit to my Maami and subsequently to her son-in-law Putur who I perceived as a potential facilitator in my research that required me to collect women’s songs. I also revealed that I am equipped with a camera to record the live performances. It spread like a wildfire that a guest has come over from the town who has a video camera and intends to record performances. Putur and his family took pride in spreading it while they all thought it would help me find women and men willing to sing for me. They were right indeed; however, with mixed consequences because it amounted to the folk perception of me ranging from a man from a media house, to a man who is a scientist trying to understand the intriguing songs of village. Also rumored, that the camera-clad man from town will select the best singer who may be invited to the town for a wholly imagined mega-performance. Thus, toward the afternoon bevy of women began to stream in the aangan, the interior of the house where visiting women sit. Each was, in garish saari, colourful Bindi and prim and proper make up, vying with other to appear the best. They had indeed come to perform ‘for the camera’ as they sang especially those songs which they thought would earn them instant recognition. Those were the songs of popular choices, in Maithili, and often found endearing by the listeners in the village. Singing in group as well as individually, they maintained that the effect of their throats is sweet enough. Not that all of those songs were chart busters, created by the compact disc industry,
but some of those songs they sang were from the CDs available in the market. Radha
and other kids explicated the hidden intent of singing women more clearly as the
former sang songs in Maithili in the tune of \textit{filmi} songs and songs in Hindi in the
timbre of Maithili. As a generalizing principle, it seemed mostly young singers like to
sing popular songs they have heard in microphones or CD players. They are in fact
oblivious of the songs their older generation knew of and sang on all kinds of
occasions. It was, by and large, a sight of a visiting guest being entertained and
impressed by the host women to prove that they are no less than their urban
counterpart as far as singing in concerned.

As evening dawned, I took a break from the recording that unleashed a shock to me in
more than one ways, such as- ‘song culture is not fossilized’, ‘folk songs which
defined oral culture is subject to dramatic changes’, ‘songs, I had heard from my
mother and which drew me to this research are almost forgotten’, ‘technical aids such
as camera and others may be detrimental to research’, ‘it is well-neigh impossible to
be a guest and a researcher at once’, and so on. In sum, when a researcher is a
fashionable guest what it yields is only fashionable stuff. Secondly, when the guest is
also a researcher, it adds to the same fashionable stature. Thirdly, when the guest is
just a researcher it summons folk-doubt as the former is a downright outsider trying to
pry into the informal domain of the village.

To shrug off the intrigue I had stumbled upon, I took a walk of the village and at
every step I discovered meaninglessness vis-à-vis things unfit for my research. These
were practices of every day life, people’s general talk, rural factions and politics,
strands of religious believes etc. I was, further, filled with disgust when I had to go to
the field with a \textit{lota} filled with water (in the absence of a proper safety toilet), and I
just wondered how people can do it with a single fill of \textit{lota}\textsuperscript{50}. Waiting for the evening
tea, at Dalan, I discovered that a man is about to visit me. called Chandruji, he was
sort of a butt of ridicule for villagers as well as a free-floating entertainer due to his
singing abilities. Seemingly, he appeared to be a social misfit who is accommodated
in social structure only at the coast of general social prestige, for he was single at the
age of fifty, lived on other’s offerings and did not earn his living by himself, and
pleased the menfolk of the village by singing on their \textit{farmaish} (requested songs). My

\textsuperscript{50} I drew an instant conclusion that most of the villagers who go to the field to defecate are never clean
as one \textit{lota} can hardly suffice the need, and thus they are all sources of some or other epidemic. It is,
however rarely established as a fact and this has never been found out as a source of any epidemic.
facilitator thought it pertinent to record Chnadruji for my research, and I humbly obeyed with great deal of reservations though. From old Hindi film songs to Maithili chartbusters consisted his performance on which everybody generously clapped, while they also secretively laughed at him. Coincidentally one elderly villager present, turned his salvo toward me, and began to enquire about my economic status: do I earn enough, do I own immovable and movable properties, do I belong to the category of elite Maithil Brahmans, and so on. It just did not fit the economic common sense of the villagers that a man of my age is collecting songs in a village to write a thesis to acquire a Ph.D degree. For them it was a sheer wastage of time and resources, and that I was just ruining my life. My facilitator somehow defended me and I was short of being dubbed as another Mantruji for the present audience.

Adding to the whole of experience was the incompatibility between my notion of time and that of the village. My body-clock was still very urbane causing me great difficulty in adjusting to the rural time, which was characterized by ‘early to bed and early to rise’ principle’. While for me rural clock was intellectually unproductive, for them it was highly productive and pivot around which mobility maintained some kind of rhythm.

The recording spanned a week causing me a dissatisfaction that I was not even about to find what my research required. Also that, the notion of village has undergone sea changes. Fulhara, to my surprised, was no less networked and materially progressing than district towns. The former has the tower of Airtel cellular phone service provider and almost everybody has access to cell phone. There is no good roadways connecting villages but then every household has a motorbike. There is no safety toilet in every household but there is at least one TV set with one Delhi-made video cassette player. Electricity is abysmal, but there is a small battery in every household, which gets recharged in the nearby low-key Dudhpura bazar on generator power.

On my expressive disappointment, my facilitator Putur, took me to several individual households. Everywhere I was a prized guest at the receiving end of their respect and offerings. Everything I exhibited was in perfect conformity with the social expectations from a guest. My appearance suggested I was formal and the timing was

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51 Putur rescued me from the embarrassment by spinning attractive lies, that I was a professor at JNU which is a prestigious university in Delhi, and was in the process of writing a grand book on Maithili songs and village culture, that I earn more than anybody in the village, that I owned a big house not only in the district-town but also in Delhi, and also that I am unmarried at my age due to some family-reasons rather than ineligibility.
perfect for a visiting guest when the folk had outdid the fatigue of the day. I did take note of women who sang for me as my facilitator had already intimated them about my research interest. My gingerly taken notes on such occasions are replete with question marks on the songs which were largely for show-case and hardly of my research interest. Notwithstanding in the same series of songs I stumbled upon a woman by the name of Manorama Devi who added, perhaps unwittingly, a pinch of emotion to her rendition. While singing she broke into a melancholic pause with her tone trembling as though she intended to weep. The song was of the category known as Nachari, normally sung in devotion to Siva, wherein the protagonist complains the god that the latter has never turned his kind glance and thus this-worldly life is so woeful. At the end of the song I impatiently asked for the meaning of the song and she balked in reaction - Meaning! what meaning do you want? She perhaps deciphered some baleful intention in my pursuit of meaning, and snapped to my curiosity. Notwithstanding, my humble insistence yielded some meaning from her, though only literal, and left me left me irredeemably curious about the melancholic pause that had triggered my tendency to tread between the lines. Thus, she sang on all kinds of songs, as emotionally flatly as she could manage to, as though she performed to amuse the visiting guest only. I could experience her cautious performance that sanitized the emotional intent of the otherwise emotionally truthful woman. She sang well for my camera and notebook rather than for me who was in quest of meaning of those songs, meanings attached by the likes of Manorama Devi. This remained my pivotal concern throughout my first stint in the field: how to extract the meaning attached to the songs by the emotionally truthful singers. My pursuit of the meaning met with resistance, ridicule and refusal. Women made fun of my insistence on meaning as they smelt something fishy about my intentions. They thought I was not only prying into their personal domain, I was also disabled minded who can not understand things by myself. Besides, at the teashop people jeered at me calling me a foolish, who looks for meaning in the meaningless stuff, such as women’s songs. The village is only a source of ignorance, without any knowledge-

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52 It was later, when I became a little less rabid researcher, and I had located myself in the emotional matrix of the folk, I realized that these women, and also men, of the village are ‘emotionally truthful’ on normal occasions. By ‘emotionally truthful’ I mean to refer to the communicative ability of the folk that expresses emotional intent without any qualms. Thereby, the singing of folksongs is actually a vent of the emotional underpinnings of everything said and done. In the last section fo the chapter where I discuss the ‘Becoming of Being’ of the researcher I actually intend to show as to how emotional truthfulness of the folk could be accessed.
value whatsoever, and a researcher after meaning is clearly on a wrong path- they opined. But then, paradoxically, coded meanings seemed to be strewn all around awaiting an interpreter. It unfolded, in bits and pieces, in the villager's acute social habit of narration. For example, my facilitator Putur would habitually say - "hey su na!" (listen to me). Almost everybody, men and women alike, had a similar urge - they have so many tales to tell. Anybody who listens to them belongs to them. While I am in pursuit of meaning I am not a good listener, for everything they speak does not make sense to me. What makes sense to me, or what is meaningful to me, is determined by my own academic worldview, which is tightly defined and defended by the methodology of the research. Operating within the framework of my research I would remain an outsider, no matter how efficiently I fake and feign to be an intimate insider, who can be only a respectable guest.

At this juncture of my visit to Fulhara I took a break and went back to the district town where I mulled over the intricacies afresh. I thought of visiting some other villages before my disappointment became conclusive. Another contact Dheerendra Jha (nicknamed Dheero), a distant relative (my mother's cousin's son), took me to his village called Dekuli Dham. Right by the side of the main road, that connected it to the district town Darbhanga, it was one of the most advanced villages I have ever seen, especially in north Bihar. It was impossible to spot a single Kuchcha ghar (uncemented house), without toilet, without well-built roadways even inside the village. Notwithstanding the apparent advancement, it was no different from Fulahara as far as basic folkways are concerned: I had to answer the same set of questions as to who I was. Thankfully, this time I was with Dheero who answered any such query on my behalf quite efficiently and saved me from the embarrassment of laying myself bare for social scrutiny. He also ushered me to the innards of the households where I could manage to steal glances of the daily chores of the women. Mostly, these women were related to Dheero and being brotherly to him I was also considered 'somewhat' insider. It was only 'somewhat' so, because my space was beyond questioning until I opened my mouth in curiosity. An act of asking for an explanation for anything I noticed unfolding in the domestic space translated me into a 'slighted stranger' or in euphemism 'a curious guest' who knows nothing about the village life and thus to be limited in access to the inside of the house. In Dheero's presence women sang songs while they continued with their chores. After spending some days in Dekuli and recording almost similar kind of songs, laced with religious overtones, I became a
little sceptical about the much-talked variety of Maithili folksongs. It was also a déjá vu in the sense the pursuit of clearer meaning was extremely impeded by the folk reluctance to divulge. Noting my doubt, Dheero took me another village, called Bhindi, about five kilometers off the railway station of Ramhadrapur along the route of Samastipur and Darbhanga. It was yet another village along the bumpy brick-pathways, away from the railways and roadways. Of all the singers I heard in Bhindi one merits special mention for the specificity of performance, that is Surdas. Around sixty, he easily finds audience for his famously catching renditions, while he is also jeered at and chased away by the boys. As a regular consumer of marijuana, an addict so to say, he gives into singing for anybody who provides him with a shot or two. Considering me his prized guest he also breaks the folk rule on the times of singing categories of song, which encapsulated in the folk proverb: saanjh parati bhor mei sanjha, ei sab chhi mair khai ke dhandha (songs of evening singing in the morning, and songs of morning in the evening; would incur wrath for such doings). After taking a long shot of marijuana that evening, Surdas broke the rule and sang some of his favorite Parati (category of songs to be sung in the morning). Most of them were Nachari. Surdas was however no different from the women of Bhindi, or for that mater that of Fulhara and Dekuli, in carefully selecting songs for to entertain and appease ‘the guest’. On the occasion of a mundane samskar (tonsorial rite) the same bevy of women were less guided by the presence of the visiting guest. They sang songs meant for the occasion irrespective of the likes and dislikes of audience. Besides, the male audience is never directly active. They may be seated outside in the dalan or on the verandah along aangan (open space in the middle of the house), while the men of the household may frequently pop up for some work inside the house. They however do not pose to be an audience who is there to sit and listen to women singing in the meanwhile like this researcher greedily does. In the flow of the songs I noticed them taking pause here and giggle there, and also to make sure that folkways associated with rite are discharged properly. It was in this of hurly burly this researcher gives into an irresistible urge to find meanings of the songs they were singing. As and when any woman came out from the site of ritual performance and singing, I scurried my way to her and asked if she could offer me an explanation on the song being sung. Each woman I encountered for the meaning got me a disapproving gesture, a mellow ridicule, and only a wishy-washy explanation.
certainly irritated them as a curious guest and they in turn debilitated my faith in intellectual pursuit.

The intricacies of my experiences in the villages warranted another break from it and thorough stocktaking for which went back to the district town Darbhanga. Propping up as a methodological argument was the thought that ‘researcher as a curious guest’ in the eyes of the folk receives only songs of certain kinds other than ridicule and disapproval. These were songs of popular choice, some from the genre of folklore and many from the CD albums available in market. Secondly, the songs of everyday life are sung by individual man as well as woman as they carry out their daily works. Thirdly, as a researcher I have to be one of them if intend to understand the meanings without asking too much. It indeed required a ‘becoming of the being’ of a researcher, whereby I could truly be one of them.

Only two options heralded my mind when I was on the way to Fulhara this time: either junk the whole research on folksongs or I throw myself in the tidal ocean of meanings. I chose neither and decided to give a chance to the field to decide the course of this research. After a while, I decided to go back to Fulhara with renewed aspirations to rediscover the village and its song culture.

**Proximity with Bachha of Changel**

It is yet another village of India, situated in the Maithili-speaking region of North-East of Bihar. Fulhara is very much like Changel as far as its connection with the cities is concerned. As a researcher my instant experience is not much different from that of *Bachha* (an affectionate address for a man who is still considered in purity of childhood), a student of St. Stephen's College in Delhi who went on to understand his village Changel and found that the village is same but he has changed in terms of perspectives. Thus, he has mixed feelings toward his village, of nostalgia as well as intellectual remoteness. With this recognition of the intellectual and emotional proximity with the protagonist-cum-researcher of Changel, I elucidate my own encounter with the Field. It was during one of the conversational sessions with one of

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53 See Arvind N Das’ *Changel: The Biography of a Village* (1996), wherein the researcher is also a protagonist or social actor himself located in the field. The location of researcher-cum-protagonist-social actor in the familiar field casts complexity of experiences and offers broadly two methodological options: either to become a romantic researcher nostalgically describing everything of the field or a completely rationally guided researcher ruthlessly in search of befitting information in order to impute meanings and draw conclusive judgments. Das apparently allows the confusion to become a methodology par excellence.
the respondents called by the name of Rosra wali that a question arose for the first time. Her stories about herself were imbued with songs, as if life were composition of a musical maestro. Following every rendition, I would request her to take a pause and explain the meaning of the song for me. And she would shoot back - Meaning! what meaning? This, as a poser, endangers my pursuit of meaning vis-à-vis understanding folk songs and thereof folk worldview.

It compels me to browse through the given literature to find a ‘way out’ of the prima facie dead end and ‘way in’ to the clouds of meaning.

**Intrigue for a Weberian**

A research concerned with interpretative understanding, in Sociological framework, is bound to begin with Max Weber’s methodological suggestions. Striking a way through the deterministic philosophy of positivism and methodological certainty of functionalism, with necessary insights from Dilthey in the neo-Kantian era of social science, Weber suggests that meaning of social action, subjectively imputed by actors in society, is of two kinds: one is ‘actual existing meaning’ and the other is ‘theoretically conceived pure type of subjective meaning’. Point to note is that meaning is but subjective. Its interpretation entails an understanding in two ways. One is rational understanding based on logic and mathematics, while the other is ‘emotionally empathetic or artistically appreciative quality’. As Weber argues, “Action is rationally evident chiefly when we attain a completely clear grasp of the action elements in their intended context of meaning. Empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when, through sympathetic participation, we can adequately grasp the emotional context in which the action took place” (Weber 1978: 5). This is a point to note: Weber does not distinguish between understanding and interpretation of meaning. Secondly, he often uses word ‘irrational’ as opposite to rational in

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44 I am using the word respondent only to catch up with the vocabulary of social science research. Else, these terms are easier to write than to carry in mind when one is conversing with them. Terms like respondent, informant or subject are only cognitive impediments to the purpose of research because we can converse only if we have social relationship and the latter apparently cancels out the effect of the afore-said terms. Thus, a respondent becomes a virtual Moumi (wife of maternal uncle) or Mausi (mother’s sister). Hence it is sort of hypocrisy to refer to them by these terms when we do not intend to consider them in that sense while in the field.

45 This is an institution to call a woman by the name of the place where her natal home was/is. It is in a way a social name of a married woman. The woman in question came from Rosra, a small town, after marriage. On insistence, she confides in me her name by which she was addressed at her natal home. Her name is Manorama Devi, also mentioned on voter identity card. Henceforth I shall refer to her by her social and actual name.
understanding the emotional part of meaning. However, rational understanding yields causal explanation along means-end line. Against the dominant positivistic-empiricist trends of his time, Weber encourages to establish explanatory-emphatic type of understanding. Notwithstanding, on the account of unclear motive and intention of actor, Weber argues, “every interpretation attempts to attain clarity, but no matter how clear an interpretation as such appears to be from the point of view of meaning, it can not on this account claim to be causally valid interpretation. On this level it must remain only peculiarly plausible hypothesis” (Ibid.: 9). As obvious as it is, the Weberian pendulum vis-à-vis interpretation and understanding of meaning disparagingly oscillates between rational-causal and empathic-explanatory types. In sum, all the Weberian promises are at last slave of foundation of social science, that rejects the validity of emotional understanding of meaning and seeks for causal explanations to make knowledge doubt-free, verifiable and objective. Let alone the terse exclamation of Manorama Devi on the reseracher’s quest of meaning, a Weberian enterprise would fall flat in the face of the melodramatic twists in the stories such inhabitants of the field unfurl. Would a Weber be able to comprehend a sociologically significant meaning of a thickly and apparently individual act of crying and sobbing in the middle of a conversation? Over all, Weber does not render me, however a researcher, into a subject matter of my research. It does not address the discrepancy that arises between me and my field, in spite of an iota of nostalgia I nurse. I remain a methodologically protected self and hence unable to arrive at an understanding of the meaning that Manorama Devi understands for herself. And, therefore, I turn my attention to hermeneutic tradition where the interpreter and interpreted are put on the anvil under the same hammer.

**Hermeneutics: Philosophy and Method**

A long drawn hermeneutic tradition of interpretation becomes the next choice for the puzzled researcher in this case. To map the historicity of hermeneutics we can cite

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56 Giddens (1976) clubs Weber and Dilthey together and argues that they both fail to defend against a charge that *Verstehen* generates only hypothesis and not verified knowledge. While the positivist social science benefited from this allegation, the qualitatively oriented social science and particularly interpretative sociology suffered. It is not until Heidegger and Gadamer that the subjective meaning of the actor could find an acceptance in the realm of objective enquiry.
broadly three strands (Bleicher 1980, Muller-Vollmer 1985). First is the hermeneutic~
theory, with predominant purpose of devising methodology restricted to philology, 
theology and jurisprudence, in response to the epistemological urges of the 
Enlightenment. Second is the Hermeneutic philosophy (Giestwissenshaftcn57), with 
predominant purpose of developing philosophy, of course with a tincture of idealism, 
with formerly implicit and latterly explicit methodological implications. It arose 
commonly as a philosophical critique of positivism of social science and the dominant 
methodological connotations of the Enlightenment. It had overt orientation toward 
history in particular and social sciences in general. Though generally traced to Dilthey 
and before him to Schleiermacher, Giddens (1976) dates its advent back to Herder and 
Friedrich Wolf. Third is the Critical Hermeneutics, with clear bent to balance 
philosophy and methodology. It continued with the critique of only limiting 
methodological notes of the Enlightenment, but in the rest, it was wedded to the latter 
inssofar as acceding to the supremacy of reason and rationality is concerned. It also 
raised the validity of tradition-based knowledge and rather propagated an agenda of 
emancipation. Though Paul Ricoeur does not belong to the critical school, he is often 
mentioned only after Habermas.

The earliest usage of hermeneutics58 rendered it as a technology with three features of 
efficiency: it assisted in discussions about the language of the text (philological), 
facilitated exegeses of the Biblical literature, guided in jurisdiction. Thus, it is no 
wonder that the early hermeneutics overlaps more with technicality than with ideas. 
Moreover, what we have before the advent of hermeneutic philosophy of twentieth 
century, in eighteenth and nineteenth century, is actually either an ally of the 
foundations offered by the Enlightenment or a romantic reaction to the same. 
Chladenius59, in eighteenth century, set the tone by stating, “the completeness of the 
account can be ascertained only by referring to the author’s intention” (Mueller- 
Vollmer 1985: 4). It means that meaning lies in the author’s intentions. The catch 
however lies in the suggestion that the author’s intention can be deciphered because 
of ‘the presence of rules and reasons in the author’s utterances’. Chladenius also

57 Giddens point out that Dilthey resorted to this term with an intention to represent J S Mill’s term 
Moral Sciences. It only in approximation means hermeneutic philosophy.
58 Etymologically, Hermeneutics is related to the Hermes (the messenger god of the Greek). They had 
to be conversant in the idioms of gods and mortals in order to understand and interpret.
59 I am referring to Chladenius with an intention to touch upon, albeit very briefly, the posterity of the 
hermeneutical problem in question. Neither does it have a purpose of hinting that hermeneutics begins 
with Chladenius.
points out multiplicity of perspectives in interpretation and understanding which, nonetheless, does not lead to relativism because the object of interpretation is same for all perspectives.

It is certainly sketchy and confined to philological concerns, besides being apparently primitive in the suggestions. But, it is important in the sense that it raises the points that become abiding feature of hermeneutic propositions in later centuries.

The nineteenth century hermeneutics revolve around the premises drawn by Schleiermacher, hailed as founder of modern hermeneutics, who introduced a romantic linguistic paradigm. He introduced the key paradigms of interpretation: grammatical and technical. While one was to serve philological needs the other was to explore the author’s intention with psychological tools. The grammatical interpretation, according to Schleiermacher, is objective but also negative as it indicates the limits of understanding. It is only with the technical (psychological) interpretation that we can reach the subjectivity of the one who speaks. The romantic tendency of siding with the utterly subjective, in reaction to the scientific emphasis on objective knowledge, is evident in Schleiermacher (Bleicher 1980, Ricoeur 1981, Muller-Vollmer 1985). Along with the work of Humboldt and Droysen, this version of Hermeneutics became of use-value for philology and history in great deal. Droysen also anticipated something that later became popular as Hermeneutic circle. According to it, “the part is understood within the whole from which it originates, and the whole is understood from the part in which it finds expression” (Ibid.: 19).

It is Dilthey who brings about a watershed by stepping forward from romanticism and hitherto popular framework of philology, jurisprudence, literary critics and history to make hermeneutics available for social sciences. Also, in Dilthey’s work hermeneutics begins to assume philosophical significance and category of understanding acquires centrality. Understanding aims at ‘life expressions’, which emerges from ‘life experiences’, as though one expresses what one is in the fashion of proportional relation between essence and appearance. As Dilthey puts,

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60 This particular stance characterizes the whole of twentieth century hermeneutic philosophy, in the works of Dilthey, Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer and Apel. It is also important to note as to how it redresses the adverse impact of the Durkheimian stance that reads: the whole is not sum total of part. A hermeneutic relief is, thus, overtly felt at this juncture for a researcher who is trained in a positivistic methodology of social science.
"By 'life expressions' I mean not only expressions which intend something or seek to signify something, but also those which make a mental content intelligible for us without having that purpose" (Ibid.: 152).

This, broader ambit of 'life expression', offers more avenues for understanding which starts with 'elementary form of understanding'. The latter is the outcome of the both subject/object of understanding and seeker of understanding. Dilthey argues, "A sentence is intelligible because a language, the meaning of words and inflections, as well as syntactical arrangements, is common to a community" (Ibid.: 156).

As an outsider in a community a researcher can arrive at an understanding by recalling own experiences. We recognize and intend to understand because we have felt it ourselves, may be in bits and pieces and in different social set up. Furthermore, Dilthey suggests that 'higher form of understanding' entails re-creating/re-living/re-experiencing by the seeker of understanding. "Thus every line of a poem is re-transformed into life through the inner content of lived experience from which the poem arose. Potentialities of the soul are evoked by the comprehension- by means of elementary understanding- of physically presented words" (Ibid: 159).

Two points about the propositions of Dilthey need to be highlighted. Firstly, understanding requires not only the expressions of others but also a simultaneous understanding of one's own self. A researcher himself/herself becomes a part of subject matter of study/understanding. To understand is as much an inward process. Secondly, life-expression is in unequivocal sync with life-experience. It means what I articulate is actually what I am, at least in my consideration. Despite these potentially promising postulates, Dilthey runs the risk of obscurity due to the lack of connection between my knowledge and my Being. In other words, Dilthey's conclusions are only partially ontological and more occupied with the epistemological implications. Secondly, it is too microscopic a reliance on an individual life experience for the evolution of understanding. It also has psychological dimension to it reducing an individual. In case I am a researcher who has sadist tendencies, how would I make sense Manorama Devi who bursts into tears every now and then, when she narrates the moments of separation from her parents. Thirdly, Dilthey does not provide us with enough clarity on the idea of elementary and higher form of understanding. They seem to be so very same.
It is no wonder that Heidegger brings Dilthey face to face with Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology 61 to fulfill the most felt need: ontologizing understanding. Dwelling upon the ontologico-existential character of understanding Heidegger highlights preunderstanding or primordial mode of understanding that underlies Dasein. Dasein is Being-there and Being-in in the world. It means what is out there is also in here. Understanding occurs in an intriguing way to my being as the Being-there always discloses itself to Being-in. To quote, “Understanding is the existential Being of Dasein’s own potentialities-for-Being; and it so in such a way that this Being disclose in itself what its Being is capable of” (Ibid.: 217).

To simplify, I can understand what I am because I understand what my world is. Both disclose to each other, in terms of potentialities and possibilities. It takes place in such a way because we are situated on a time line with past, present and future as coordinates. Potentialities and possibilities are significant indicators of a perpetual occurrence of understanding, as we are mostly oriented toward future. The further evolution of understanding is continuous on the level of our/my existence, of course with a constantly present background of preunderstanding/primordial mode of understanding. It’s the latter that makes my existence and my world’s existence possible. Heidegger makes it simpler as he argues, “in understanding the world, Being-in is always understood along with it, while understanding of existence is as such always an understanding of the world...on the other hand Dasein’s opaqueness is not rooted primarily and solely in ‘egocentric’ self-deception; it is rooted as much in lack of acquaintance with world” (Ibid.: 218-219).

But an understanding, curiously, does not guarantee meaning. Says Heidegger, “Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility of something maintains itself. That which can be articulated in a disclosure by which we understand, we call meaning” (Ibid.: 224).

Meaning is an existentiale of Dasein that emerges from interpretation. We can hear, converse and thereby interpret the meaning from our understanding. We can do so because we all have in common Being-there and Being-in, disclosed and disclosing Dasein, and the basic minimum preunderstanding. Interpretation, carried out in the

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61 I am not discussing either Husserl’s philosophical discourse on phenomenology or the simpler version of the more or less same in Sociology by Alfred Schutz, though I am aware the former is included in Hermeneutics tradition and the latter has place of pride in interpretative sociology.
form of assertion, is ‘derivative mode’ as it is based on ‘fore-having/fore-sight/fore-conception’. The latter are actually existential foundations of interpretation arising from Dasein. Heidegger defines ‘assertion’ as ‘a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates’. Thus, as an offshoot of understanding, interpretation - through explication and assertion - is only fulfillment of understanding. Similarly, discourse, that hinges on understanding and interpretation, is ontologico-existential in nature. In a discourse it is Dasein-with that works and bring diverse listening and talking of existential character in the ontologically structured world. Hearing and keeping silent are possibilities which belongs to discursive speech.

In his philosophical postulates on understanding, meaning, interpretation through assertion and explication, and discourse, Heidegger also diminishes the distance between empirical and non-empirical. As he argues,

“Seeing does not mean just perceiving with the bodily eyes, but neither does it mean pure non-sensory awareness of something present-at-hand in its presence-at-hand” (Ibid.: 219).

Two significant hermeneutic strands, based on the philosophical basics of Heidegger are: Bultmann’s methodology of ‘demythologizing’ and Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizon’. Accepting that any understanding, in science or history, of natural phenomenon or historical events, presupposes preunderstanding and personality of the observer, Bultmann takes a quasi-theological turn. The abiding question as to how to understand the apparently religious texts, particularly mythology, in the wake of science guides this strand. The methodological significance of ‘demythologising’ comes to fore as Bultmann argues,

“I take the term ‘demythologising’ to mean a hermeneutic procedure which inquires after the real content of the mythological assertions or texts” (Ibid.: 248). This however does not mean a secular demythicizing or eliminating the mythology under the influence of science. Instead, it means extricating its true and symbolic meaning that could make sense to humans even in the wake of science and technology. Thereby mythology ceases to be an explanation of the physical phenomenon, associated with primitive and hence a counterpart of science. Instead, it becomes an expression of what it feels like living in the world across time and space (Segal: 2006). Understanding religious texts/mythology in this way is ever relevant for
humans because they have a tendency to perceive ‘one’ reality in at least two aspects corresponding to their two potentialities. Bultmann calls them authentic and inauthentic existence. “In inauthentic existence, man understands himself in the available world. In authentic existence, he understands himself in the unavailable future” (Muller-Vollmer 1985: 251). These two aspects of the one reality appear, or man attempts understanding in dialectical manner. Associated with human’s existence, the understanding discloses that humans are not masters of their lives. Human life has a ground in transcendent power which lies beyond that which humans can calculate and control. How to make sense of this power when we are in some way or other buyer of scientific knowledge is a question that makes Bultmann argue, “Since God is not an objectively ascertainable phenomena in the world, it is only possible to speak of His activity in such a way that one is speaking simultaneously of our existence, which is affected by God’s activities” (Ibid.: 253). There is however no other testimony of such a knowledge, like the one a scientific or historio-philosophical theory would have, than existentially self-understanding of man. The process of such an understanding is paradoxical in the sense it entails inwardly occurrences and the otherworldly God, eventuating into a relationship between the two. Hence, ‘the Jesus Christ-event becomes present everytime-present as that event which ever touches me in my existence’.

On the other hand, the category of understanding that Heidegger renders ontologico-existential is further improvised by Gadamer. Beginning with a critique of the Enlightenment and the thereof methodological preoccupations, Gadamer points out the methodological prejudice of science against the prejudice of socio-cultural thoughts. The foundation of science and its prejudice lay in the Enlightenment philosophy that credits only de-historicised, de-ontologised epistemological endeavor of understanding. Thereby tradition, religion and every thing that belongs to social thought appeared an inferior counterpart of Reason. The German Enlightenment, under the influence of romantic hermeneutics, attempted nullification of the superiority complex of science and Reason. The romantic reaction to the prejudice of Enlightenment resulted into resurrection of the past, the Christianity, and tradition.

62 Resorting to Heidegger, Bultmann means by existentiell, deriving from existential, the structure of the constitution of Dasein which also lays ground for personal choice.

63 Bultmann’s thesis, in a way, illustrates a Manorama Devi’s constant reference to diverse Gods as though they were no supernatural entities and some humans next door. Besides, in her songs humans acquire the status of gods and vice-versa. This is, despite the fact that, nobody has ever seen a being called God and nobody ever thinks of accomplishing it in future.
The romantic historical hermeneutics only emulated the Enlightenment thrust toward the prejudice of science. Hence, methodologically it was the same with a slight difference that it exalted tradition as opposed to reason. For example, Schleiermacher's view that narrowness of vision and hastiness cause misunderstanding is only slightly different from Descartes emphasis on the same. As an epistemological outcome, the romantic hermeneutics perpetuated the abstract contrast between myth and reason. Gadamer acknowledges the retrospective tendency of romantic hermeneutics that paved way for historical hermeneutics and Dilthey's useful notion of 'self-reflection'. Nevertheless, historicity and inwardness of understanding ought not land a researcher into an endless relativism and subjectivity. Gadamer suggests,

"The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of an individual is only a flickering in the closed circuit of historical life" (Ibid.: 261).

Furthermore, Gadamer perceives no such unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason. After all, tradition tends to be preservative and it requires an aid of reason to do so. "At any rate, preservation is as much a freely-chosen action as revolution and renewal" (Ibid.: 265).

Thus, in Gadamer's understanding, an understanding of tradition does not become a counterpart of reason. The object of study/understanding and the person seeking for it are in a historical continuum. This is what Gadamer calls 'effective history', and the success of hermeneutical enterprise depends on the development of one's 'effective historical consciousness'. By virtue of this, an individual can understand his/her horizon rather than only situation. "A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough, and hence overvalues what is nearest to him" (Ibid.: 269). No matter we agree or not, we make sense of other's horizon as we do ours. It is because no horizon is fixed and final. Curiously, "the horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us" (Ibid.: 271). It is not mere empathy because we are in a reciprocal relationship that leads us to understanding vis-à-vis 'fusion of horizon'. A tradition is, in fact, a site of perpetual fusion of horizons. As Gadamer argues,

"In fact, the horizon of the present is being continually formed, in that we have continuity to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing is the encounter with the past and the understanding of the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present can not be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present than there are historical horizons. Understanding,
rather, is always the fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves" (Ibid.: 272).

It is pertinent to mention here that the contributions of philosophy of hermeneutics have been pivotal in critical appraisal of the sociology of knowledge. Executing an ambitious objective of casting Gadamer’s philosophy as a significant part of the sociology of knowledge, Susan Hekman agrees with Rorty that only Heidegger and Gadamer are overtly anti-foundational as they shift the focus from the Enlightenment concern with epistemology to ontology. To quote, “what the anti-foundational philosophers suggest is not a search for truth conceived apart from history and culture, but, rather an examination of the relationship between human thought and human existence... an endeavor that falls under the rubric of the sociology of knowledge... divorced from the Enlightenment assumption of the distinction between objective and subjective knowledge” (1986: 9).

The early history of the sociology of knowledge, evidenced in the works of Bacon, Vico, Montesquieu, Destutt de Tracy, and Marx endorse superiority of pure knowledge that is distinct from the impure knowledge of people vis-à-vis idols of mind/ ideology/false consciousness. The concern with common sense that found prominence after Scheller’s trend setting work struck a chord with phenomenology of Schutz, especially with the work of Berger and Luckmann. Sociological phenomenology however runs a paradox, as Hekman points out, “He (Schutz) can not have it both ways - social (intersubjective) meaning constitution and individual intentionality” (Ibid.: 30).

The paradigm of individual subject and subject-object dichotomy on which phenomenology hinges, curtails its possibility to be just to the social source of knowledge.

Moreover the three main variants of the sociology of knowledge that ensued methodological debates are:

1. the German Philosophical school, that presages the concerns of those who are characterized as anti-foundational

2. the French Durkheimian school, in support of the scientific Archimedean point where from everything else can be judged

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64 This small part of the chapter is only to serve the purpose of acknowledging diverse ways of incorporating hermeneutic philosophy in Social Sciences. Hence, it does not venture into the vast terrain of either Sociology of Knowledge or Phenomenology. Also, it highlights the distinctions that hermeneutic philosophy has in relation to other theoretical streams.
3. the Chicago school, that promoted individualist and psychological attitude
Apart from these three variants, phenomenology, analytical philosophy (language analysis) of Wittgenstein, Hekman also mentions the realists. What Mannheim failed to do, namely subjecting science and mathematics to the investigation in sociology of knowledge, realists like Barry Barnes, David Bloor and Roy Bhaskar did in their works respectively. It is in Bhaskar’s proposition that a methodological claim is made through a distinction between epistemological and ontological relativism.\(^{65}\)

Hekman sides with the German school and particularly with Gadamer to perceive a possibility of social science that is not mired into the methodological mimicry of natural science. In the scheme of Gadamer, hermeneutics acquire the characteristics of ‘natural human capacity’ in the universal process of understanding. It is here that an ‘I-Thou’ relationship owing to effective historical consciousness facilitates ‘fusion of horizon’. And, it is accredited to Gadamer that inevitableness of prejudice in interpretative social science is convincing.

At this point, I reiterate, with a different reference, the question I began this chapter with. Akira Kurosawa’s masterpiece *Rashomon* presents a story of a story acquiring diverse versions in tandem with the disposition of the storyteller. Each version consists of a grain of truth and each hinges on a stance that is blend of reason and emotion. It becomes indeed, impossible for a viewer to trust one stance in the light of polysemy and plurivocity, and it in turn impels to consider them all, put together, true.

An intellectual restlessness yearns for conclusive clarity and confirmed validity of the story, to which Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* remains indifferent. In other words, what is the validity of understanding *vis-à-vis* fusion of horizon?

This very question is central to the critical hermeneutics of Apel and Habermas. Albeit Hekman or any other devout of hermeneutic philosophy would brush them aside, they tend to ask a valid question on the validity of understanding.

Expressing an unrelenting doubt about the validity of tradition Habermas says,

“...we have good reason to suspect that the background consensus of established traditions and language games can be a consciousness forged of compulsion, a result of pseudocommunication, not only in the pathologically isolated case of disturbed familial systems, but in the entire social systems as well” (1985: 317).

\(^{65}\) Bhaskar argues that epistemological relativism does not entail ontological relativism. It means, though knowledge is socio-historical the being is not. This takes us to understand Bhaskar’s transcendental realism. I shall return to Bhaskar in the latter part of this chapter to discuss his propositions in detail.
Habermas elaborates on the power that a native speaker commands owing to the creativity of natural language (vernacular of the native). This is power over the practical consciousness of men. It can be used for the purpose of obfuscation and agitation as well as for Enlightenment. This inherent power equation yields a ‘systematically distorted communication’ with symptomatic unintelligibility. Habermas calls it ‘pathological disturbances of speech’, taking cues from Freud and Lorenzer. Thus he advocates,

“a theory of colloquial communication, consequently, must first open the way to pathologically buried meaning” (Ibid.: 301).

It requires reason and rationality which Habermas considers free from any prejudice and liberating humans from the repressive consciousness. It is explicit acquiescence in the Enlightenment that Habermas exhibits, however not unstinted as he, in agreement with Gadamer, denounces the ‘monological self-certainty’ of any scientific enterprise. Nonetheless he argues,

“The Enlightenment knew what hermeneutics forgets: that the conversation which according to Gadamer, we ‘are’ is also a nexus of force and precisely for that reason (it) is not a conversation...the claim to universality of hermeneutical approach can be upheld only if one starts from the recognition that the context of tradtion, as a locus of possible truth and real accord, is at the same time the locus of real falsehood and the persistent use of force” (ibid.: 314).

According to Habermas, the hermeneutic philosophy of Gadamer is unable to sustain the claim to universality because it does not reckon with the difference between authority and reason. It is reluctant to accept that prejudice exposed is no longer an effective prejudice and hence it leaves no room for reason and rationality. Accepting the benefit of hermeneutics, albeit on conditions, he says,

“Philosophical hermeneutics, then - and my remarks are intended only to recall this to mind- develops the insight into the structure of natural languages which are to be derived from a reflective use of communicative competence: reflexivity and objectivity are as fundamental to language as creativity and the integral relationship between language and life-praxis” (Ibid.: 297).

Habermas, furthermore, devises ‘depth hermeneutics’ which encourages the usage of psychological tools, and whereby interpretation is emancipatory in implication. It presupposes an ideal speech situation, in the fashion of clinical psychology. The
extension of Habermas' perspective finds expression in his theory of communicative action.

In a similar vein, Apel outlines the emancipatory agenda of the critical hermeneutics. It is aimed at 'second nature', that is the material world, considered as unpredictable, uncontrollable and atrocious as nature. While the latter is the target of natural science, critical sociology must deal with the former with the aid of reason and rationality. In this scheme, men are not so much self-determining, and to understand them it is imperative to understand the menacing 'second nature', though causal and statistical explanations.

There is, indeed, no doubt about the problems that critical hermeneutics in general and Habermas in particular raised. Tradition as a site of contestation, language game as modus operandi of communicative violence and validity of the meaning in such a plurivocal situation are points of concern. But then, there is a strong problem with the self-assumed role of emancipator that the critical hermeneutics/depth hermeneutics profess. It is specially unbearable when it tends to become a premise upon which every interpretation is to be mounted. In implication, everything a native has to offer articulates but a sigh of neurotics or sounds of fetters of the subdued in the language game. As researchers, we all confront this initial-spontaneous consideration of our natives respondents being a 'sack of potatoes' or helpless creatures seeking refuge in false consciousness, and so on. This naïveté of the researcher finds place of prestige in the theoretical framework of Habermas. Would it not be right to suggest that Habermas does exactly what he blames tradition and native language games for? A critical answer is, Habermas attempts at 'forging' a 'consciousness' through 'pseudocommunication' by perpetuating 'falsity' not only about "pathologically isolated case of disturbed familial systems, but (about) entire social systems as well". To put it simply, Habermas' propositions are entrenched in the notion of 'what should be' and hence not effective enough to capture 'what is'; secondly, his conception of 'what should be' too is only ill-conceived because we know the meaning of the term 'weapon of the week'.

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66 In a passing reference I intend to mention that, the colonies of British Empire were considered peopled by intellectually and politically weak consciousness. While, of late, the theorists began to perceive the potential strength embedded in the apparent weakness, especially folklorists noted the power of the conventionally subdued in the context of oral tradition. See the first chapter for particular references.
If I juxtapose Habermas with a Manorama Devi of village Fulhara, the crisis of the critical hermeneutics and over all Enlightenment thinking bursts asunder. The prejudice against prejudice, which Gadamer detected in the epistemological foundation of the Enlightenment, is articulated not only in Habermas but also in Paul Ricoeur. The latter attempts at thrashing the methodological grains dispersed in hermeneutic philosophy. However, in order to respond to the poser of the critical hermeneutics, Ricoeur reeks of epistemological bias. For him the aim of hermeneutics is discourse that is, and can be, inscribed and rendered into a text. Writing is more meaningful than speech, as Ricoeur says in agreement with Plato, “writing was given to men to ‘come to rescue’ of the weakness of discourse, a weakness which was that of event” (1981: 199). Notwithstanding the recognition that writing only replaces ‘real wisdom’ with ‘the semblance of knowing’, Ricoeur argues that inscription is discourse’s destination. A discourse in speech act has mainly four properties. One, it has ‘instance of discourse’, that makes it temporally located in present. Second, it is ‘self-referential’ as it tells ‘who’ is speaking. Thirdly, it has an ‘ostensive reference’ as in it creates a world/universe. Fourth, that all messages are exchanged in a discourse. Once inscribed and converted into a text, a discourse is no longer temporal, is detached from the author/speaker, offers a suspension of the author’s/speaker’s limited finite horizon, and enables an able reader to read and understand it. Furthermore, using the categories from the work of Austin and Searle, a speech act entails three aspects/forces: locutionary (the act of saying), illocutionary (which we do in saying) and perlocutionary (which we do by saying). The illocutionary (gestures, body language etc.) and the perlocutionary (that has a bearing upon emotion and affective dispositions) are not apt for inscription in entirety, and they constitute ‘propositional meaning’. Having admitted this Ricoeur, in two subsequent sentences cum paragraphs, creates a gulf of contradiction. As he says, “Thus the propositional act, the illocutionary force, and the perlocutionary action are apt in a decreasing order, for the intentional extereorisation which makes inscription in writing possible”67 (Ibid.: 200).

67 I italicize the part in this quote to bring to attention the hierarchy of content in a speech act that Ricoeur’s scheme yields. A prejudiced inclination towards the text, relegating any significance of speech whatsoever, is likely to fall prey to such hierarchy and thereby jeopardize the phenomenon of understanding. It becomes clearer as we proceed with Ricoeur’s hermeneutics that he terms ‘depth semantics’.
As obvious as it is, Ricoeur in the first place recommends the prima facie non-intelligible (not necessarily unintelligible) elements of speech act, mere propositional part, to be put in decreasing effect. In the next sentence he offers a pretentious sensibility toward what is already denied a say.

"Therefore it is necessary to understand by the meaning of speech act, or by the noema of the saying, not only the sentence in the narrow sense of the propositional act, but also the illocutionary force and even the perlocutionary action in the measure that these three aspects of speech act are codified, gathered, into paradigms, and where, consequently, they can be identified as having the same meaning" (Ibid.: 200).

Obviously, the incorporation of the non-intelligible (or quasi-intelligible, that warrants a de facto fusion of horizon in order to disclose itself) in this scheme is only to fulfill the requirement of intellectually inspired inscription, and rendering a discourse into text. It is all because, Ricoeur believes, and tries to convince us, that a text is really free from the finite horizon lived by its author and ostensive references. A prejudicial inclination toward the written makes him say,

"the spirituality of discourse manifests itself through writing, which frees us from the visibility and limitation of situation...only writing in freeing itself, not only from its author, but also from the narrowness of the dialogical situation, reveals the destination of discourse as projecting a world” (Ibid.: 202).

Not afar from comprehension, that in this scheme ‘text’ is a mere utopian conceptualization given its illusive freedom from author and dialogic situation. Secondly, text is here yet another namesake of the epistemological foundation of the Enlightenment. Moreover, Ricoeur proposes to perceive social action in the similar vein. In other words, reduce a social action into a text. As with text meaning lies in the ‘said’, meaning of action lies in the ‘done’. Broadening Peter Winch’s notion of ‘rule-governed behaviour’, Ricoeur suggest that an action is social and meaningful if registered, documented, and archived. Thus such action, quite like text, escapes the actor and are available for interpretation in social sciences. This proposition is however never reflective of an inherent vicious circle: an action is meaningful because it is registered, and an action is registered because it is meaningful.

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68 It actually means that the kind of disdain positivist social scientists or Enlightenment philosophes had towards the emotional actors, Ricoeur has toward something that is not fit for his scheme characterized by textual absolutism.
The methodology for the interpretation of such text and (textualised) action is expressed in dialectical relation between *erkaren* (explanation) and *verstehen* (understanding/comprehension). It goes against Dilthey who posed them in dichotomies. The ‘hermeneutic arc’ of Ricoeur, that revolves around the dialectic relation, entails ‘hermeneutic circle’ of ‘guessing’ and ‘validating’. The circle is in other words about the move between subjective and objective. Given the polysemy of words and plurivocity of text, Ricoeur invokes ‘logic of probability’ rather than that of empirical verification. Thereby responding to Popper’s insistence on ‘falsification’, he says,

“An interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another” (Ibid.: 213).

This methodological modus operandi, Ricoeur calls, is ‘depth semantics’ that is essentially semilogical in characteristics and modeled upon structuralist notion of text. A rider he adds,

“Neither in literary criticism, nor in the social sciences, is there such a last word. Or, if there is any, we call that violence” (Ibid.: 215).

Nonetheless, the violence is already done in the premises of Ricoeur’s methodology. The disdain of what can not be converted into indubitable (textualised discourse), an overzealous conceptualization of the text and writing off actors'/speakers'/authors’ significance are antithetical to the horizon of possibilities that the philosophy of hermeneutics so courageously architected. In Habermas and Ricoeur both, there is greater freedom for the seeker of understanding only at the coast of actors/speakers/authors. Most importantly, in their schema a researcher is free from intellectual need (also spontaneous need) to enter into a conversation with the other, and hence all chances of widening gap between object and subject. They both inculcate a mistrust and disdain of the inhabitants of the field.

At this point, it is useful to refer to, the celebrated synthesizing of all strands apt in interpretative sociology, Giddens’ ‘New Rules’. With an explicit skepticism toward all the available lines of methodological thinking, Giddens proposes ‘New Rules’ that may be justified to both the notions of agency and structure. It begins with a terse comment on the positivistic social science and the functionalist adherence to formulaic investigations. Giddens says,

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69 Giddens never indulges in the dichotomies such as objective and subjective, and uses interpretative sociology along with hermeneutics to endorse his ‘new rules’.
“However, a sort of yearning for the arrival of social-scientific Newton remains common enough, even if today there are perhaps many more who are skeptical of such a possibility than still cherish such a hope. But those still waiting for a Newton are not only waiting for a train that won’t arrive, they are in the wrong station altogether” (1976: 13).

Taking cues from the philosophers of science and interpretative sociology he locates the possibility of methodological amendments in Geistwissenschaften. But his intention is not to side with any and only to show “how it is possible, and important, to sustain a principle of relativity while rejecting relativism” (Ibid.: 18). For this he detours and traverses perspectives as wide as phenomenology, ethnomethodology, the analytic philosophy of Wittgenstein, hermeneutic philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer, even the critical hermeneutics and as well as Mead. The notion of self-consciousness and understanding are integral in Giddens’ notion of ‘reflexivity’. Hermeneutics, for Giddens, is important not as a technique but as a philosophico-methodological mooring. He argues, “hermeneutic, I wish to claim, does not find its central range of problems in the understanding of written texts as such, but in the mediation of frames of meaning” (Ibid.: 64). Fielding Gadamer, Habermas, Betti and Apel in a conflicting debate, he points out the limitations of their approaches respectively.70 Hermeneutic penetration into the frames of meaning is one of the points on Giddens’ list of New Rules. Also, through the concept of ‘Double Hermeneutics’ Giddens respond to the conventional interpretative sociology siding with layperson’s conceptualization.

**Holistic Hermeneutics**

The recognition of the long trajectory of and vast contribution by hermeneutics so far, despite inherent problematic in the propositions, humbles a researcher. Hence, any claim at devising an alternative or claim at coinage, of course in accordance with the requirements of a particular research theme and questions, is but precocious. Even without intending to offer a new concept or paradigm, a methodological reflection paves way for mending the given. It is nothing more than cobbling various strands imbued in the foregone perusal and exegeses indeed. What however distinguishes it

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70 In Giddens’ apparently sketchy perusal of hermeneutic works one gets a sense of Gadamer being read through Habermas. Secondly, Giddens seems to side with Gadamer more than with Habermas, and points out the unacceptably overemphatic reliance of the latter on psychoanalysis.
is, the question and experiences of the field with which this attempt is concerned. While the introductory section of this chapter introduced a daunting question that was with reference to Manorama Devi, hereon I present an appendage to the same question. To do so I refer to a hermeneutically significant tale from the fifth chapter of the *Brihadaranyak Upanishad* 71:

Once upon a time, three disciples of Brahma (a mythological character who appears as teacher in this tale, is otherwise god of creation) namely a god, demon and human (three characters with their respective characteristics) spent years under his tutelage. They fulfilled the prerequisite to prove their competence to learn the greatest lesson. The satisfied teacher agreed to impart them the lesson. First came the god and begged for it. The teacher uttered only one letter *D* 72. The receiving disciple, god, interpreted it as *D* for *Daman* (meaning dominate sensory desires, unless god will fall prey to the abyss of desires). Responding to god’s interpretation the teacher said - yes, you understood it correctly.

On the human’s turn, the teacher yet again uttered the same letter *D*, and the disciple considered it pointing to *Daan* (meaning, charity/philanthropic submission/ parting with one’s possession). Responding to human’s interpretation the teacher said - yes, you understood it correctly.

The demon too received the same utterance from the teacher and construed it as *Daya* (meaning, kindness/non-violent attitude/caring and compassionate outlook). And the teacher did not rebuff it either. Responding to the demon’s interpretation the teacher said- yes, you understood it correctly.

Shankar, the ancient philosopher who is renowned for his treatise on *Adwaita* (non-duality), points out two features underpinning the act of understanding and interpretation by the disciples. First of all, the three disciples analogically indicate three distinct properties/features/socio-cultural constitution of humanity. Each element thus propels an interpretation in accordance with itself, and each is hence correct as the teacher affirms in each case. Secondly, each has fulfilled a common prerequisite, in this tale each disciple observes celibacy and affective-devotional proximity with the teacher. Thereby, despite difference of disposition, each is able to relate to the utterance of the teacher. A one-point observation with regard to the afore-

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71 I claim maximum proximity with the original Sanskrit version of tale, though the reproduction systematizes and stylizes the presentation.

72 *D*, the Roman equivalent of the Sanskrit letter *D* are phonologically more or less the same, though the etymological significance and deeper connotation vary.
mentioned tale is: How does the teacher know and understand all three disciples’ validity of understanding? The answer is, of course, lay in the dialectics of ontological epistemology and epistemological ontology that we encounter in the perusal of *Geistwissenschaften*. A further endorsement emerges from the Upanishadic lessons.

Shankar argues, “intellect resides in the hridaya”. The translated equal of *Hridaya* is heart. But then in Shankar’s scheme it is not merely a biological organ. It can be rather construed as a category of skill which thrives on an amicable union between reason and emotion, intellect and affectivity, objective and subjective, and so on. Thus, so confidently the *Upanishad* argues ‘Only the heart knows the truth’. The very same point is vivid in the philosophico-hermeneutic suggestion of the *Geeta*, another ancient text that appears as part of the epic *Mahabharata*. It invokes ontologico-existential abilities of one who seeks for understanding transcendental or otherwise. M. K. Gandhi interprets it quoting Krishna from the *Geeta*, “Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will by the fact of this service assuredly reach Me...” (1959: 17-18).

A non-theological understanding of the *Geeta*, with hermeneutic interest pertaining to social science, suggests that ‘Me’ is actor/embodiment of the actor’s speech and action. Understanding ‘Me’, as the quote suggests, requires what Gadamer called ‘Me-Thou’ relation. An interpretation in this case is a matter of self-realization. Thus, like in the Upanishadic tale, understanding presupposes fulfillment of prerequisites that facilitates ‘fusion of horizon’ and Dasein’s disclosure.

The hermeneutic zenith of Upanishad is expressed by Shanakar in the process of *Neti neti* vis-à-vis understanding. Curiously, a negative connotation of *Neti* (Not this…) is meant to refer to something that is beyond empirical verification. However this does not mean reluctance to understand the variegated images of truth. The *Upanishad* offers yet another insightful adage *EKO AHAM bAHYUSYAM*, which implies one

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73 *YAD HRIDYAM HRIDAYAMITI HRIDAYASHTHA BUDHHI RUCHYATA*. The translation is mine.

74 *HRIDAYEN HI SATYAM JANATI*. The translation is mine.

75 Simply meaning ‘not this...nor that’, is the epitome of Shankar’s philosophy of *Adwaita*.

76 This particular adage is accompanied by *DWITYAT WAI BHAYAM BHAWET*, and *EKAKI NA RAMTE...* it means I fear an existence apart from me, and I dislike being only one, respectively. The resolve of this tension is *SA DWITYAM ECHHET*, meaning, hence I want some apart from me. The
years for and endeavors to become many. It simply means that I want my companions despite my fear of the same, as that paves way for my rejoice of my being. Hermeneutically, it points out my existential joy and fear arising from my ontological being, despite my transcendental tendency. So is it with the act (which is science as far as systematic analysis through questioning and writing/inscribing it in empirical terms is concerned, and art as far as going beyond the instant empirical realm is concerned) of understanding and interpreting ‘meaning’.

Hence, to draw a conclusion, in order to understand and interpret one has to realize oneself, existentially and ontologically. While the knowledge generated thereby has epistemological relativism, it is ontologically transcendent. In implication, it transcends the divide of subject and object because talking about the self is also talking about the so-called other, and vice-versa. Thereby the alleged epistemological relativism is nullified. Besides it does not become an ‘either’ subjective ‘or’ objective. For it states thing as it is, it talks in terms of probabilities for the non-empirical/non-intelligible, and thus without denying the significance of prima facie non-intelligible it also presents the verifiable. The transcendental tendency of the above mentioned hermeneutic conclusions are by no means merely theological illusion. At this point, it is imperative to take note of critical realism that perceives humans in terms of ‘Meta-Reality’, and describes transcendence as everyday feature. It is, categorically, in contrast with the conventional notion of transcendence as an esoteric philosophical conceptualization.

“Transcendence, transcendental identification in consciousness and transcendental agency are an indispensable feature of all human being, social life and indeed a necessary condition for any human act at all” (Bhaskar 2002: 10).

Beneath the duality and heteronomy of the visible world and its people, lies the non-dual. It is ground-state, prior to all kinds of duality, and the abode of what Bhaskar calls ‘transcendental self’. This self is connected with everybody else by the virtue of residing in the ‘cosmic envelope’ and the inherent tendencies of the self. Bhaskar however adds an important rider,

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wisdom is singularly expressed in *EKO AHAM BAHUSYAM*, meaning I am one yearning and becoming many.

I refer to these couplets with an intention to draw a hermeneutic lesson from them in the context of the present discourse.
"Although we are all connected at the ground state, at the cosmic envelope, we can only act in the physical world from we are and we are unique, bounded and clearly demarcated, concretely singularized beings" (Ibid.: 14).

Bhaskar’s critical realism targets modern epistemology that perpetuates egocentricity, abstract universalism and incomplete totality, reductionist materialism and formalism, unilinearity and lack of reflexivity. It also critiques the postmodern, which as a reactionary replica of modernity, encourages overzealous epistemic relativism and linguistics, ontological irrealism and judgmental irrationalism, an ignorance of totality and universality, an ignorance of possibility and emancipation, unsustainably heightened self-reflexivity, and finally a proximity to the politics of identity and difference. Against this, Bhaskar propounds philosophy of transcendence and ‘Meta-Reality’ that conceives human self through a tripartite distinction. The tripartite distinction entails, one’s embodied personality, one’s psychic being (often termed as ego), and ground state (Bhaskar terms it as non-dual transcendental self). As an embodied personality an individual is related to all those animate and inanimate objects dwelling his/her immediate and familiar surrounding. My parents, some relatives in intermittent exchanges, friends, teachers, dogs, furniture, car and so on, to whom I am affectively attached, may constitute my embodied personality. Psychic being or ego is only a demi-real in the sense it is an illusion of real kind; it is an illusion because it never exists with one concrete reference and it is never as independent as projected. It however generates ‘causally efficacious’ propositions. For example, my ego/psychic self generates a sense of uniqueness and separation from others, and this in turn motivates my likes and dislikes, my desire I may call very personal, and my actions that any body can identify as very typical of me. While these propositions are real, my ego is without a real object of identification as ‘I’ is merely a needle (shifter) to point out an ego, which shifts corresponding to its changing user. Beneath ego and embodied personality is transcendental self, a non-dual core which is relational and totalizing. Nonetheless, “You don’t lose your difference, your singularity, your uniqueness; all that is preserved. What you lose is your sense of separateness and you forget it because you are part of the whole scene of creation” (Ibid.: 97).

Bhaskar, furthermore, discusses the factors that impede the human endeavor to realise the transcendental self. Heteronomy in the form of ceaseless desire, split-unfulfilled intentions, fear of diverse kinds, indulgence in fictive ego-centricism, and debilitating
duality comes in the way of it. These are ‘negative incompleteness’ to be eliminated in order to expand the non-dual core. It means arriving at a positive ‘inner emptiness’ overcoming the constraints in the personal trajectories and acquiring spontaneity of intention and action. Thus, actors attain a sense of transcendentals self about which Bhaskar argues,

“Our transcendentally real selves then, are fields, differentiated fields, of the cosmic envelope. It is in virtue of our unity with other beings on the cosmic envelope, a unity which can be sharpened into the idea of our co-presence within them and them within us, that we can transcendentally identify with other beings on that envelope” (Ibid.: 91).

With this hermeneutically significant proposition it is important to reiterate a precaution that Bhaskar reminds us again and over again,

“You can not live in a non-dual state, but you can minimize the splits in your being and you can eliminate inconsistency with your ground-state as that you are effectively a whole autonomous being” (Ibid.: 110).

In spite of Bhaskar’s failure to recognize and elaborate on any interrelationship among ego, embodied personality and transcendental self, that could make the conceptualization of social actors including a researcher necessarily/desirably complex, the philosophy offers hermeneutic insights in great deal. Especially in the context of this research, where from Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur constitute the methodological trajectory, it comes to a virtual full circle with Bhaskar. It shapes a holistic hermeneutics to enable a researcher understand the meaning of the poser by Manorama Devi on the ruthlessly rational search of meaning. Bhaskar joins the league of hermeneutic philosophers who attempted an ontological grounding of the foundation of knowledge, and thus came to be termed as anti-foundational. They all suggested one thing in common: Be one with your ‘field’ in order to talk about them, not only epistemologically but also in terms of being. Thereby, do not only seek for their meaning, also do a constant appraisal of what you as a researcher mean. In simpler words, do not divide the pursuit of knowledge into domain of heart or mind. It indeed occurs when dichotomies dissolve.

By holistic hermeneutics I mean a philosophical discourse that puts the subject and object of a research, the researcher and the researched, the subjective and the objective in one paradigm. To understand this paradigm, a researcher has to become both the Upanishadic disciples and teacher. For the latter knows the validity of diverse
interpretations of a single utterance. Each knows the other: a virtue of transcendently real self that is imminently manifest in a conversation/dialogue through which 'fusion of horizon' occurs in every day life. When it comes to inscribing, documenting, and writing, a researcher has to resort to what Ricoeur calls the 'logic of probability' only without excluding even the most non-intelligible/quasi-intelligible. In this process, needless to say, anything that is an alleged pathological suppression according to the suggestions of Habermas, would be spontaneously obvious. There is no denial of any such possibility as humans are subject to the ab/use of power (linguistic or otherwise).

**Researcher in the Field and Methodology of Being**

Looking at a researcher through the above discursive prism it is only obvious that researcher's Being is itself a perpetual subject of research. In the interactive framework of the field, a researcher is shaped up by the external influences while carrying out a well-defined research plan. The structure of research receives constant tweaking and twisting while the researcher undergoes a process of becoming. A fairly substantiated sense of methodology, particularly the sort of hermeneutics this research warrants, appears to the view when I make myself a subject of analysis in the field. All my experiences since the day I began to visit villages in the Maithili speaking region became my data for methodological investigation.

**Becoming of Being**

On the way to Fulhara I stopped at a place called Singhia to buy sweets for children to who called me Mama (maternal uncle). This was a token entry for a guest in the domain of informal relations. As soon as I reached, I was yet again given the regards meant for a guest. But then I proactively entered the inner part of home to meet Baby and Maami. I intended to drive the message home that a guest who is also maternally related can walk in any time and make his informal presence. This became a precursor to obscure the label of guest in the village. I began to roam about the village in dhoti and short kurta (an informal dress that villagers do not distinguish me as a guest). For no reasons I began to frequent the barber's shop for shaving and hair-trimming. Most importantly, I was now willingly listening to anybody who wanted to share all kinds of stories, even apparently useless and boring ones. The utilitarian logic in a research that only a certain kind of story told in certain ways ceased to haunt me as soon as I
put aside the prepossessed research design. I still carried my camera, which I put to use only when very necessary, and ensured that it would not cause a throwback to my guest status. Now I was all ears as a listener and all eyes as a beholder. This was however not enough because I knew ‘to be is to do’, and ‘to do is to be’. Thus I took to certain errands that came my way, such as milking the cow in the cowshed alongside the angan of Maami’s house. Getting fodder ready for the cow every morning and evening, visiting the field whenever Maami went to see for the crops, accompanying Radha to the kirana (grocer’s) shop and to other household where she went to deliver a message or something, were some interesting jobs I liked doing. Most important was to accompany Radha to Kansar (the many-mouthed hearth under a small thatch roof without walls where women/girls went to get their rice or maize parched) every evening. My association with Radha located in the matrix of everyday life of the village while roaming around with her father Putur roped me in the informal socio-political and economic spheres of the village. Most important for me was my association with Radha and her mother Baby which ushered me in the informal-emotional interior of the village. Baby was a sewika (worker) in the Angan-badi branch of Fulhara. She took me along wherever she went and introduced me as her younger brother. I was gradually established as a quiet, younger brother of Baby in this circle of women. Besides, my simpleton appearance and keenness to listen to the folk drew me closer to them. I earned their confidence by providing them with necessary advice as and when need be. I began to think that I was one of them despite the differences in upbringing and my intellectual interest in the song culture of the village. Not very surprising, as I felt, it was perhaps always within me, underneath my intellectual outfit or call it pretences, which required only a bit of loosening.
While I slowed down, body and spirit, in a bid to become one with the folk mind (another term for group mind/collective consciousness), I also acquired an orientation to the body clock of the village. It amounted to an early to bed and early to rise dictum, catching the rural acoustics of dawn, birds chirping, folk tunes and devotional songs aired by the Darbhanga branch of All India Radio. Waking up early meant an exceptionally early breakfast (chura-dahi) followed by an excessively sugary tea, sticking my lips. The solar cycle was the cycle of everyday life for the literate as well illiterate in the village. It defined almost everything. Thus, I was defined by it. Besides, a range of apparently meaningless actions began to appear intelligible. Curiously, the intelligibility is prerogative of feeling. It is felt in the first place, and then only translated into intelligibly meaningful. Such as dripping a bit of tea on the earth before consuming it, responding to the sound produced by domestic lizards or to the moos of cow while carrying on domestic chores, singing while carrying out everyday drudgery, and so on. It was not as simple as Weberian Verstehen, for mere empathizing hardly amounted to the meaning they attach to various things said and done. The Dilthean ‘life-expression’ in tandem with ‘life-experience’, as found in the field, presumed the researcher to have it experienced. Truly, understanding is as much an inward process. But to understand it was imperative to interpret. And to do so, as a researcher I had to find my seamless location in the ‘ontologico-existential matrix’ of the field. My routine tea-session at the tea-shop in the village, my freewheeling
conversations with the barber who sings parati every morning, my venturing into the
croppy land of the village with kids accompanying them on various errands, my
frequent visiting to the neighbouring households as a man for whom every elderly
man is a Mama (maternal uncle) and every elderly woman a Mami (maternal aunt),
and such actions defining my being, translated me from an researcher (outsider) into a
knower (insider). The evolution was not fake as I laughed when they laughed and I
wept when they all did. Emotional unison was an evidence of my becoming one of
them- something Heidegger called Dasein, Being-there and Being-in. as soon as
attained, the state of this Being curtails the circuit of subjective speculation as well as
bland search of rational meaning. The Gadmerian ‘fusion of horizon’ foreclosed the
separation of ‘I’ of the researcher from the ‘We’ of the field. Yet the significance of
the ‘I’ is never destroyed, neither is that of the ‘We’ compromised. Thus, for example,
When Manorama Devi sings a simple devotional song, I can fathom her tacit attempt
to be self-referent and meanwhile her ‘self’ is located in the context of the collective. I
can also figure out her biography entwined with the songs she sings, and that her
biography becomes a socio-cultural history of the folk. Similarly, I get a sense of my
own biography being constituted and reconstituted at the intersections of Manorama
devi’s renditions. Every now and then I get to know that I am so very akin to not only
Manoroma, but also so many of those who I, as a rational researcher, would have
reduced into mere informants/respondents. The folk thus become a mirror reflecting
my own variegated images. Thus I realize, only holistic hermeneutics enables me as
a researcher-observer to perceive the link between the cosmic envelop within which
the folk consisting individual and groups articulate distinctions. Thus a Brahman
woman or man, a little child, a cobbler, a barber, may be singing different songs.
Notwithstanding the distinctions, they all tend to remind themselves as well as their
direct/indirect listeners that there is a cosmic whole, that they are variegated images of
heteronomy, and that they can transcend them through practices of everyday life. To
understand, interpret and put them into words, it is imperative for me to realize my
own quotidian ability of transcendence. Only then can the sobbing in the middle of
singing, reminiscing an event of life alongside a rendition of song, reluctance to sing

77 The usage is discussed in the previous section, in an elaboration, suggesting that it is derivative of the
diverse philosophical suggestions made by Hermeneutists, the Upanishad and the critical realist
position of Roy Bhaskar.
certain songs on certain occasions, and refusal to deliver crystal-clear meanings, make sense to me.

**Denouement**

In hindsight, thus, what this whole process elicited was mainly twofold. The research process thus entails phases, starting with the phase when I was a guest and I could record songs of popularity amongst the folk. These songs irritated me when they were rendered for mainly two reasons: they were aimed at the guest to win his appreciation and secondly they were emotionally sanitized. The deliberate attempt on the part of the singing women to shroud the emotional content translated the songs into unfathomable puzzles for me. These songs were however, the harbinger of changes in the song culture of the village, especially those belonging to the CD industry. The second phase is when I became a part in the emotional matrix of the village. This was when my technological aids took a backseat and when I did not need to pester the singers for clear a meaning of each song.