

1. Social Research: An Introduction

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1.1 Introduction:

John W. Best has rightly said “The secret of our cultural development has been research, pushing back the areas of ignorance by discovering new truths, which in turn, lead to better ways of doing things and better products. Through research we have been able to investigate the gradual developments from the ancient time till the present phase. Inventions and discoveries which have come up have only been possible through intensive researches by the various researchers from time to time. Still, it is continuing. New inventions, new discoveries, new theories all have come up in physical, biological, social and economic spheres.

The businessmen, agriculturists, sociologists, economists, academicians in every sphere are carrying out research in their respective fields. Social Research is a method used by social scientists and researchers to gain knowledge about people living in various societies so that their understanding may guide them to serve the people better by giving right services and providing appropriate products to match the requirements of persons. People from different countries, having different societal norms perceive every aspect of their society differently, hence the same topic or issue may be dealt differently by different people of different regions. Which can be done using Social Research. Any topic can trigger social research – new feature, new market trend or an upgrade in old technology or change in fashions, education system Etc.

1.2 Definitions of Research:

- a. **C.C. Crawford:** “Research is simply a systematic and refined technique of thinking, employing specialized tools, instruments & procedures in order to obtain a more adequate solution of a problem than would be possible under ordinary means.”

Research usually starts with a problem to be studied, a gap in the topic of study which should be filled logically. Next review of past theories, facts, studies in that area have to be made to think in terms of how to remove the gap, solve the problem. For this purpose, variables to be studied have to be generated, next independent and dependent variables are pinpointed on the basis of review of past literature, next relationship between the variables is studied, data has to be collected to test the relationship between the variables. Next the data has to be analysed using the quantitative or qualitative analysis, and on the basis of analysis interpretation is given which reveals the new finding which is evolved from the findings.

- b. **Webster Dictionary:** “A careful inquiry or examination in seeking facts or principles, diligent investigation in order to ascertain something.”

- c. **Francis Bacon:** “Research is a power of suspending judgement with patience of meditating with pleasures of asserting with caution, of correcting with readiness of arranging thought with scrupulous plan.

1.3 Historical Context of Research:

In modern times, a number of sociologists have made extensive historical studies of various social institutions. This type of research is based on going through past records in chronological method of a specific institution, for example study of family as an institution has studied families in ancient period, when joint family system prevailed. Especially in India oldest male member was the master of the house, all reported to him? All earning members gave their earnings to the head of the family and took money from him for all expenditures. This continued for a long time, especially in rural background, but gradually people started educating the children, next industries started emerging, these two conditions revolutionized the family system and brought significant changes in the family system Joint family system a staunch sense gradually became extended family, next now what is prevalent is nuclear family. Another significant example is the study of gradual evolution of marriage system as studied by Western Mark. Many social scientists have used historical approach in studying in their social studies, political & cultural development (Karl Marx, Max Weber, C. Wright Mills, Raymond Aproned al.

1.4 Background for Historical Study:

Darwin’s biological studies started the study of impact of social environment in the development of human beings from pure biological creatures moving on four limbs to Socio-physiologically developed creature moving about on two feet and using hands for other activities much above the ground. Historical research evolved from the philosophy of Hegel and Darwin. The historical method usually initiated from the origin of the topic in concern till the gradual development up tol the modern period.

Theory of evolution was introduced by Darwin in the biological arena. As new and new discoveries and inventions came up human beings grew socially, physically and economically. This led to the study of historical graph of human development. All these studies are based on subjective observations. There is no objective assessment of this development. Documents, relics & historical materials that are kept in archives & museums and stored inscriptions, coins & articles obtained from excavations have been the records through which social scientists have unearthed the gradual historical development of the various societal issues. Historical study unveils old values and traditions which become the base for the present state of values and traditions. The historical records are always helpful in reviewing old picture which existed and has led to the appearance of variables which have generated new avenues for research. Max Weber, the founder of bureaucratic approach made partial utilization of historical approach. This approach has scope in review but cannot be used for scientific investigation. After review researchers are depending on other methods like building assumptions after review of historical records and testing these assumptions to prove their points of view in more significant manner. Till today researchers start first with using historical approach to assess evolution of the topic for study. But beyond review researchers depend on other methods. Today modern researchers are not in favour of wholesale application of historical method & the study of institutions in the background of entire human history. They are however, not opposed to the study of particular institutions in their evolutionary aspect.

Max Weber has studied capitalism, modern government & religions in the light of economic determinism i.e., he has tried to see the role of economic factors on these. For these studies of popular institutions, it is essential to study them in connection with other institutions. The historical context of research has proved useful in the study of particular human institutions. But there are limitations of historical method.

1.5 Drawback of Historical Studies:

The credibility of the sources for collecting records should be high and should be studied from various angles to prove that whatever was studied would be true. Until it is proved similarly from various angles it cannot be considered factual and theoretical base may be absent. Hard work is expected from persons attempting historical research for proving their points. Such methods may not work for scientific researches as they have to be studied quantitatively to get significant findings. Usually, archaeological survey departments are set up in various countries to search out ancient inscriptions, books, etc.

Society is a complex system. It has to depend on other research techniques to get better understanding of various social phenomenon. The most popular and standardized method of research is as follows:

Choose a topic for study based on your interest area, Next review old records on that topic or nearby topics to get enlightened about what gaps exist on the topic to be studied. After gaps are assessed one thinks in terms of how they can be filled up, i.e the variables which should be studied for filling the gaps, and which are the cause of problems. The variables may be studied as independent and dependent variables and think of methods to study them to find solutions to problems and filling the gaps in the researched topic. Hypotheses have to be set up which researcher plans to test using the independent and dependent variables. Next Samples for data collections are defined. Next step involves generating tools for data collection (Questionnaire, Inventories, case study methods or projective techniques). Next data is collected from the sample. Appropriate analysis is done and interpretations are given to reach the logical conclusion.

1.6 Perspectives in Social Research:

1.6.1 Weber's Methodology:

Max Weber tried to study social topics through applicable systematic scientific method. Scientific research method was applied to social topics to prove the significance of these topics in a significant quantitative manner as far as it was possible. Weber's laws of the scientific study of sociology are based on two fundamental characteristics namely meaningful social action and logical interpretation of social action. He has kept his methodology situation specific. Societies in different parts of the world are different hence one should study each different area population from the local perspective. One should not apply internationally standardized methods to judge any society in different continents. The measurement tool should be specific to the society it taps. He accepted that human being are different from each other and even one person may vary from time to time. Their value system, their behavior patterns may vary from time to time. Hence absolute prediction was not possible in studying social aspects, but a significance level may be used to say with surety that differences observed

or relationship observed are probably possible. He has tried to study the rationality in social actions which is only possible by assessing cause of social actions and if the cause affect relationship is harmful than research may be undertaken to overcome the negative effects. This is how evolution has been possible and so many changes have been possible in the social systems like removal of sati system, child marriage, slave system, etc. These social evils could only be possible through rational understanding which was created in the thinking of common man.

Rational Interpretation:

Sociology interprets situations or phenomenon as it is most important in the society. This interpretation may be of the following two types: 1) Layman types of interpretation which explain benefit of following one tradition and loss of not following the tradition which is emotionally churned to make people accept the novel change.; and 2) The Metaphysical explanation where following a tradition is linked religiously with right or wrong doing and its impact on their future life and life beyond death. If people understand the logic behind holding or not holding a view and feel satisfied with the logical explanation than they accept new changes and propagate them to common men in simple terms to make them accept the right or wrong of any value, attitude or behaviour.

1.6.2 Comte's Methodology:

Method of Inquiry: B. Comte's came up with natural science methods. They include Observation, Experimentation and Comparison.

- a. Observation:** It is the way of collecting data, usually the researcher has to participate in the setting where observation has to be made. As per B. Comte's methodology observation is based on the theory which has to be tested. Theory will specify what points have to be observed for relating to the facts given in the theory. Without theory the observation will not have a base for scientific testing. Observation must align with facts stated in the theory to give findings which are predicted.
- b. Experimentation:** It is a tentative procedure or operation for the purpose of discovering cause effect relationship, this helps in testing a principle, supposition, etc. It is a scientific procedure of studying the relationship between independent and dependent variables using controls to use categories of treatments of independent variables and studying the different effects of different treatments on dependent variables.
- c. Comparison:** In 1954 psychologist studied that individuals determine their own worth based on how they appear in comparison to others. According to some researches 10% of our thought involves comparing oneself with others of the same level. By comparing with others we can assess similarities and differences (Robert Frost). Through comparative analysis one can check differences which are prevailing in various states, societies, families, siblings, etc. and give account of equalization, differentiation existing among various data. By comparing the different co-existing states of human society particularly by comparing primitive societies with the gradually developing societies the phases of development of the human race can be known.

As per B Comte These three elements may help in making all phenomena tested scientifically but accepts that there are some aspects which cannot be studied absolutely.

This applies to social phenomena. There are some aspects which cannot be penetrated scientifically as in physical sciences. They are mysterious and cannot be tested objectively. For example, the ultimate source of gravitation, constitution of matter, origins of life, first prompting of love. We cannot verify these social aspects and look for causes of such aspects. Reality as it is should be accepted as that is God's creation and there must be a purpose for it. If uniformities are observed in any social issues they may be observed and understanding should be used for giving realistic verdicts about them. Comte's positivism should study phenomena as they are and trying to go into specifics about them and becoming more knowledgeable about realistic picture.

1.7 Taylor's Scientific Approach:

At the turn of the 20th C, Fredrick Winslow Taylor who was named as father of scientific management applied scientific approach to study management from the labourer's point of view and his motto was creating maximum out of minimum. He carried out research in industries in USA. Taylor believed that the principle "best management is a true science" is applicable to all kinds of human activities. Taylor attempted to bring the precision of science to the analysis & management of measurement of work. He came up with principles of management which were scientifically tested and could be used on employees to make their work more efficient and effective. All the principles of scientific management were such that they could be applied internationally. Taylor was famous because he used experimental methods under controlled conditions.

He came up with the piece rate system and time and motion study which are used by many industries all over the world. He proposed a new system consisting of four parts:

- a. Observation using stop watch to assess how many steps each product manufacturing involved and how much time each step took. On the basis of this study he generated a system of getting the product manufactured in minimum time using least steps. This led to getting the product made in the shortest time in lesser time. This generated economical method of manufacturing. This method is taught to employees doing that work so they learnt to do in the standard manner. This made the workers expert in that way of working and thus their speed of work escalated. This method is still practiced in various industries.
- b. a differential rate" system of piece work was initiated to motivated energetic and hardworking employees to improve their working skill. It meant that if an employee produced at the average rate of working he would get the standard piece rate payment but if he produced more than the target set he would be paid at a higher rate.
- c. This motivated employees to give their best.
- d. Wages were given to employees based on their performance and not on the basis of the positions they held.
- e. Management don't use the thumb method but the scientific method to train the employees on doing their work. Next they were also trained to work long term using the scientific methods. They did not have to change ways of working daily.

Whatever scientific change was applied was for long periods. As American way of working was changing to overcome day to day problems of labour management conflict which was because of quantity of product to be manufactured the demand for unified system of manufacturing was the demand in industries this enabled to find out the need to recruit right man for the right job.

1.8 Scope of Social Research:

Systematic study of social research was perceived as not applicable to social sciences, but when scientific study and analysis came up as new knowledge all became sceptical about its appropriateness in application to social issues. This is like a new born baby whose growth and development are governed by unknown factors hence ambiguity is attached to it. But it may prove to have positive impact moving towards maturity and having a solid base for proving new findings. If negative impact occurs that also gives alarm signal about something not right. That is also learning. Management may check and apply corrections. Hence scientific study of social issues have been done. To some extent success was achieved. But now there is a movement towards qualitative analysis of social topics. One may wait and watch. The basic scope of social research is to understand sooner or later but correctly the nature of social events & processes & though this is done without any motive of particular reforms the conclusions cannot be ruled out. To summate scientific study of social phenomena by various researchers may help in developing generalization. Next knowledge building is only possible by further investigations in a systematic way. In brief, following are the scope of social research.

1.8.1 Theory Building:

Generalizations drawn have a certain effect on the established corpus of knowledge. A general picture presented by many researchers may convert the common views held into factual knowledge. This when observed again and again by many researchers may develop theoretical proposition as an outcome of research which enhance knowledge base for further interpretations about social phenomena. If findings do not fit the picture created by past learning than scientists may be guided to study using different approaches to get modifications,

1.8.2 Character Building:

If the generalization fits the established workings of social phenomena than they may be propagated for stronger hold, as seen in cases of values like honesty, sincerity, respect, etc. They have been observed to enhance a person's personality, hence should be taught to persons from the cradle days.

1.9 Ethical Approach to Social Research:

As per Belmont report ethics which should be considered in social Research are.

- a. **Respect for Persons:** While caring research on people individuals should be treated respectfully and may be allowed to express their views openly. They should not be degraded. Then only the genuine study is possible. Only when people agree to talk, they should be interviewed.
- b. **Protection:** If independence for narrating their views are allowed than they should also be protected from any harm to them if they say something which is not socially desirable. They should also benefit from research which are applied as reforms.
- c. **Impartiality:** Whatever benefit occurs from research should be distributed fairly to all, for example if few learned men from a tribe raise their voice against some injustice being done to the tribe, then the outcomes of the research should be shared by all tribal members, not only by few ones who were in the front row.