SOC 202: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY 11

COURSE OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Definition of Concepts in Sociological Research

Chapter 2: Methods and Research Techniques in Sociology

- Social Survey
- Observation
- Experimentation

Chapter 3: The relationship between Methodological and Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology

- Major Analytical Divisions in Sociology

Chapter 4: Sociological Theories

- Functionalism
- Conflict theory
- Symbolic Interaction
- Social Exchange
- Action theory

Chapter 5: Social Problems and Welfare

Chapter 6: Uses of Sociology and Careers for Sociologists

4

RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSIS

Field

A systematic and scientific research is essential for sociology to claim itself as a scientific discipline. However, whatsoever be the theoretical perspective or methodological orientation of the researcher, ultimately, he has to carry out his research in the field. So, let's try to understand what 'field' implies in a sociological enquiry and what are the problems or challenges associated with the fieldwork.

In the context of sociological research, the term 'field' refers to the members of a social group which is the prime object of study for a social scientist. In its early phase, Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown laid the foundations of intensive fieldwork among anthropologists in Britain. However, in the Indian context, it was M.N. Srinivas who strongly advocated for the 'field-view' of Indian society in place of the 'book-view'. The book-view of Indian society was largely championed by Indologists like B.K. Sarkar, G.S. Ghurye, Radhakamal Mukerjee and Irawati Karve. Indologists have claimed that the Indian society could be understood only through the concepts, theories and frameworks of Indian civilisation. They believed that an examination of the classical texts, manuscripts, archaeological artefacts, etc. should be the starting point for the study of the present (Beteille, 2009).

Srinivas was critical of the 'book-view' of Indian society. He argued that the book-view gave a distorted picture of society by dwelling on the ideals of the past from which the present reality departed considerably. The book-view of Indian society presented an idealised picture of its institutions – marriage, family, kinship, caste and religion – dwelling more on what they were supposed to be than on how they actually worked. For example, the book-view had represented caste in terms of the invariant and immutable scheme of the four *varnas*. Field studies

DOI: 10.4324/9781003291053-5

shifted attention away from the fourfold scheme of the *varnas* to the operative units of the system, namely the innumerable *jatis*. They also drew attention to the ambiguities of caste ranking and the very distinctive process of caste mobility. Thus, the field-view revealed the gap everywhere between the ideal and the actual. By bringing to attention ambiguities, contradictions and conflicts, it paved the way for a better understanding of the dynamics of social change. Thus, the idea of an unchanging and immutable society began to give way, and the field-view changed not only the perception of India's present, but to some extent also the perception of its past (Beteille, 2009).

However, like every other method, fieldwork too is marked by its own set of challenges and problems in conducting genuine sociological research. First and foremost, the researcher faces the problem of the choice of the 'field' to carry out his fieldwork as no typical field exists in reality. As stated earlier, unlike natural sciences, sociology cannot study any particular social phenomena in a laboratory by the experimental method due to certain moral and ethical reasons. As a result, social research takes place in the open, where, unlike a scientific experiment, it is extremely difficult to control the extraneous variables. Hence, it becomes increasingly challenging for the social scientist to establish a cause–effect relationship between the variables stated under the hypothesis. After having identified the field for his research, the researcher faces the challenge of entry into the field. This implies that unless the researcher is able to establish a good rapport with the natives, he would find it hard to carry out his research. Thus, in order to seek the cooperation of the native population for his data collection, the researcher must gain their acceptability. In this, the social background of the researcher also plays an important role.

Further, since the researcher can carry out only a limited study of any given social phenomenon, the problem of holism looms large. Since holistic study appears to be impractical in the study of complex societies, the researcher should keep in mind that the segment he is studying is a part of the larger and complex whole and should look for interrelationships. A researcher may also face problems in the formulation of hypothesis and might have to reformulate or modify his hypothesis because hypotheses cannot be formulated in vacuum, without the knowledge of the field. Further, the issues of objectivity and ethical neutrality also need to be addressed. The researcher should be aware of his biases and prejudices and try to make certain that they do not influence his collection and interpretation of data. Though some of these challenges are endemic to any social science enquiry, yet they can be dealt with a cautious and informed approach on the part of the researcher. Since the fieldwork basically involves dealing with people, the researcher must be empathetic and flexible in his approach and employ the services of well-trained field workers.

In the ultimate analysis, it may be argued that in any field research, the sociologist is an integral part of the research process. The data so collected have no existence independent of the researcher. His data are 'constructions, not reflections of facts or relationships alone. In the process of knowing, external facts

are sensorily perceived and transformed into conceptual knowledge'. Thus, the sociologist as a researcher is an active factor in the creation of knowledge and is not just a mere passive recipient. The importance of his perception makes a sociologist as integral part of the research process as the data he observes (Srinivas et al., 2002).

Reflexivity and the Changing Notion of Field and Fieldwork Practices

You now know that reflexivity offers an alternate perspective to study social reality. Reflexivity in social anthropological research implies that the ideas about 'field' and 'practices' of fieldwork are constantly examined and reformed in the light of new developments, thus continuously altering their character. Reflexivity challenges the conventional notions of anthropological research with regard to field and practices of fieldwork. Early social anthropological research was largely concerned with the study of small-scale societies in their natural state or surroundings. Hence, the term 'field' came to denote a distinct social group which was to be studied in its unique sociocultural and geographical setting. Early anthropological research was largely based on the dichotomy of subject and object. In other words, it was based on the separation of the social scientist (subject) from those 'others' whom he observes (object). It was based on the assumption that over-involvement of the social scientist with his object of study (social group) may contaminate the research findings. The idea about 'otherness' remained remarkably central to the fieldwork practices of Malinowski, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, etc.

Amory shows how these ideas about 'otherness' and taking for granted of a white subject have shaped the field of African studies in the United States. She shows that African American scholars were discouraged from working in Africa, on the grounds that they were 'too close' and would not manage to be 'objective', while white scholars were judged to have the appropriate distance from the black 'other'. This helps to explain why the contemporary field of African studies contains remarkably few black American scholars. Kath Weston too in her study of gay and lesbian communities in United States arrived at a similar conclusion. She argued that her position as a native ethnographer itself blurs the subject/object distinction on which ethnography is conventionally founded. She calls native ethnographer a 'virtual anthropologist'.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson also question the conventional notion of field and argue that in the light of new developments, there is a need for reconstruction of field and fieldwork practices. They argue that processes such as decolonisation and globalisation, accompanied by processes of diffusion and acculturation, have challenged the traditional definition of field and the very idea of a clearly demarcated space of 'otherness'. They argue that the conventional notion about the 'field' in terms of a homogenous social group with its unique culture and geographical surroundings has come to be questioned in the wake

of globalisation. Social groups are no longer tightly territorialised or spatially bounded. Further, the processes of diffusion and acculturation have significantly altered the homogenous character of social groups, and today cultural heterogeneity is more common.

Gupta and Ferguson further question the 'field/home dichotomy' in social anthropological research. They question the traditional notion of field which rested on the idea that different cultures exist in discrete and separate places. They argued that the 'location' of the field should not merely be seen in geographical sense alone. They advocated retheorising of fieldwork from spatial sites to social and political locations in terms of unequal power relations. For example, subaltern approach in sociology has significantly contributed towards a better understanding of various socio-economic and political processes in India, which were until now largely studied from an elitist perspective. Gupta and Ferguson argue that with decolonisation, there is proliferation of domestic research led by the natives. As a result, today, the very idea of 'otherness', which was central to the early anthropological fieldwork, is subjected to review. Hence, there is a need to modify the practices of fieldwork accordingly.

Further, Gupta and Ferguson also question the fundamental premise of early anthropological fieldwork practices that only professionally trained observers could be trusted to collect ethnographic data. Paul Radin in his study found that his untrained native research assistants proved to be better than the academically and professionally qualified observers in terms of gathering valuable data. This is because, as Radin argues, such professionals are socially separated from those whom they study by their very training. The training of the professional observers erects an undesirable barrier between themselves and the persons to be interrogated. It may lead to difficulty in establishing direct and immediate contact and building rapport with their sources of information. On the other hand, the native research assistants or local intellectuals are better positioned at least for certain sorts of data collection (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997).

Thus, reflexivity has significantly contributed in reconstruction of the ideas about field and fieldwork practices in social anthropology. Such a rethinking of the idea of the 'field' coupled with an explicit attentiveness to 'location' might open the way for a different kind of anthropological knowledge and a different kind of anthropological subject.

Let us now discuss some of the fundamental characteristics of quantitative as well as qualitative research methods.

Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

Methodology is an integral aspect of any scientific discipline. Every discipline requires a methodology to reach its conclusions. In other words, it must have ways of producing and analysing data so that theories can be tested, accepted or rejected. In the absence of a systematic way of producing knowledge, the findings of a subject can be dismissed as guesswork or mere common sense assumptions.

You know that sociology first developed in Europe in the nineteenth century when industrialisation resulted in massive social changes. Accompanying these social changes were intellectual changes during which science started to enjoy a higher reputation than ever before. Many of the founders of sociology believed it would be possible to create a science of society based upon the same principles and procedures as that of the natural sciences.

However, not all sociologists have agreed that it is appropriate to adopt the methodology of the natural sciences. These sociologists believed that the subject matter of the social and natural sciences is fundamentally different. While natural sciences deal with matter, social sciences deal with man and his behaviour. Since human beings are conscious beings, their action is meaningful. Hence, for these sociologists, methods of natural sciences alone would be inadequate. They instead emphasised on the interpretive methodology to understand the subjective meanings that underlie social action.

Thus, on the basis of the above discussion, two broad traditions within sociology could be identified.

1. Those who advocated the use of scientific and quantitative methods (positivists)
2. Those who supported the use of more humanistic and qualitative methods (anti-positivists)

However, in recent years, the new-generation sociologists have started questioning such rigid divisions between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Most sociologists instead advocate a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods in sociological research.

Quantitative Research Methods

Quantitative research in sociology is largely associated with the 'positivist tradition'. Early sociologists belonging to the positivist tradition, such as Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, etc., believed that the methods and procedures of natural sciences could be adopted in sociology as well. Quantitative research is associated with a number of techniques of data collection such as survey, questionnaire, structured interview and secondary sources of data, etc. Some of the features of quantitative research in sociology are discussed next.

1. **Social Facts**: Early sociologists like Comte and Durkheim, who were positivists, placed particular emphasis on behaviour that can be directly observed. It argues that those aspects of behaviour which are not directly observable, such as meanings, feelings and purposes, are not particularly important and can be misleading. Durkheim went to the extent of stating that social facts should be treated as 'things'. This means that the belief systems, customs and institutions of society – the facts of the social world –

should be considered as things in the same way as the objects and events of the natural world.

2. **Statistical Data**: The second aspect of quantitative approach as advocated by positivists is the use of statistical data. Positivists believed that the behaviour of man, just like the behaviour of matter, can be objectively measured and, thus, it was possible to classify the social world in an objective way. For example, Durkheim collected data on social facts such as the suicide rate and the membership of different religions.
3. **Correlation**: The third aspect of positivist methodology entails looking for correlations between different social facts. A correlation is a tendency for two or more things to be found together, and it may refer to the strength of the relationship between them. For example, in his study of suicide, Durkheim found an apparent correlation between a particular religion, Protestantism, and a high suicide rate.
4. **Causation**: The fourth aspect of positivist methodology involves a search for causal connections. Positivists believed that on the basis of the data collected through quantitative methods, patterns could be identified and a cause-and-effect relation between two or more variables or social phenomena could be established. For example, Durkheim in his study of suicide had explained that low solidarity among the Protestants was the causal factor for high suicide rate among them.
5. **Generalisation and Replicability**: The quantitative researcher is invariably concerned to establish that his result of a particular investigation can be generalised to the larger population. Positivists like Comte and Durkheim believed that just as natural sciences could arrive at universal laws with regard to matter, laws of human behaviour can also be discovered in social sciences. They believed that laws of human behaviour can be discovered by the collection of objective facts about the social world, by the careful analysis of these facts and by repeated checking of the findings in a series of contexts (replication).

Positivism is based upon an understanding of science that sees science as using a mainly inductive methodology. An inductive methodology starts by collecting the data. The data are then analysed, and out of this analysis theories are developed. Once the theory has been developed, it can then be tested against other sets of data to see if it is confirmed or not. If it is repeatedly confirmed (replicated), then positivists like Comte, Durkheim, etc. assume that they have discovered a law of human behaviour (Haralambos and Holborn, 2014).

Qualitative Research Methods

As mentioned earlier, qualitative research methods in sociology are largely advocated by sociologists belonging to social action approach who emphasise on the interpretive understanding of human social behaviour. These sociologists prefer

sacrificing a certain precision of measurement and objectivity in order to get closer to their subjects, to examine the social world through the perspective of the people they are investigating. They sometimes refer to quantitative researchers as those who 'measure everything and understand nothing'. Qualitative research fundamentally refers to that approach to the study of the social world which seeks to describe and analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied. As discussed earlier, quantitative data are data in a numerical form, for example, official statistics on crime, suicide and divorce rates. By comparison, qualitative data are usually presented in words, e.g. an ethnographic account of a group of people living in poverty, providing a full and in-depth account of their way of life, or a transcript of an interview in which people describe and explain their attitude towards and experience of religion. Compared to quantitative data, qualitative data are usually seen as richer, more vital, as having greater depth and as more likely to present a true picture of a way of life, of people's experiences, attitudes and beliefs. Participant observation, unstructured interview, focus group discussion, life history or case study method are some of the major methods or techniques of data collection in qualitative research. The main intellectual undercurrents which tend to be viewed as providing qualitative research with their distinct methodology are Weberianism, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, etc. Some of the features of qualitative research in sociology are discussed next.

1. **Empathetic Description of Social Reality**: Since social action theorists believe that social action is meaningful, they focus on the interpretation of the meanings that social actors have probably given to their act. The most fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is its express commitment to viewing events, actions, norms, values, etc. from the perspective of the people who are being studied. This is explicitly stated by Weber in his *Verstehen* methodology.
2. **Contextualism**: Social action theorists believe that social action does not exist in isolation, rather it is expressed in a given socio-economic, political and historical context. Hence, qualitative research exhibits a preference for contextualism in its commitment to understanding events, behaviour, etc. in their respective context. It is almost inseparable from another theme in qualitative research, namely 'holism', which entails an undertaking to examine social entities – schools, tribes, firms, slums, delinquent groups, communities or whatever – as wholes to be explicated and understood in their entirety.
3. **Emphasis on Processual Dimension**: Qualitative research views social life in processual and dynamic terms, rather than static terms. The emphasis on process can be seen as a response to the qualitative researcher's concern to reflect the reality of everyday life which, they tend to argue, takes the form of streams of interconnecting events. The general image that qualitative research conveys about the social order is one of interconnection

and change. For example, symbolic interactionists explain social order as a 'negotiated order'.

4. **Flexibility**: Qualitative researchers tend to favour a research strategy which is relatively open and unstructured. Such strategy allows them access to unexpectedly important topics which may not have been visible to them had they foreclosed the domain of study by a structured, and hence, potentially rigid strategy.

However, some sociologists, in recent years, have questioned the need for such a rigid division between quantitative and qualitative methodology and have advocated combining the two approaches. Alan Bryman has suggested a number of ways in which a plurality of methods – a practice known as *triangulation* – can be useful.

1. Quantitative and qualitative data can be used to check on the accuracy of the conclusions reached on the basis of each.
2. Qualitative research can be used to produce hypotheses which can then be checked using quantitative methods.
3. The two approaches can be used together so that a more complete picture of the social group being studied is produced.
4. Qualitative research may be used to illuminate why certain variables are statistically correlated. For example, Durkheim concluded in his study on suicide that the rate of suicide varies from religion to religion because of their varying degree of solidarity.

Bryman believes that both quantitative and qualitative research have their own advantages. Neither can produce totally valid and completely reliable data, but both can provide useful insights into social life. He argues that each has its own place and they can be most usefully combined. Generally, quantitative data tend to produce rather static pictures, but they can allow researchers to examine and discover overall patterns and structures in society as a whole. Qualitative data are less useful for discovering overall patterns and structures, but they allow a richer and deeper understanding of the process of change in social life (ibid.).

Many of the debates about the merits of particular research methods focus on questions of 'reliability' and 'validity'. In the natural sciences, data are seen to be 'reliable' if other researchers using the same methods of investigation on the same material produce the same results. By replicating an experiment, it is possible to check for errors in observation and measurement. Once reliable data have been obtained, generalisations can then be made about the behaviour observed. No sociologist would claim that the social sciences can attain the standards of reliability employed in the natural sciences. Many would argue, however, that sociological data can attain a certain standard of reliability. Generally speaking, quantitative methods are seen to provide greater reliability. They usually produce standardised data in a statistical form: the research can be repeated and the

results checked. Qualitative methods are often criticised for failing to meet the same standards of reliability. Such methods may be seen as unreliable because the procedures used to collect data can be unsystematic, the results are rarely quantified and there is no way of replicating a qualitative study and checking the reliability of its findings.

Further, data are considered 'valid' if they provide a true picture of what is being studied. A valid statement gives a true measurement or description of what it claims to measure or describe. It is an accurate reflection of social reality. Data can be reliable without being valid. Studies can be replicated and they produce the same results, but those results may not be a valid measure of what the researcher intends to measure. For instance, statistics on church attendance may be reliable but they do not necessarily give a true picture of religious commitment.

Supporters of qualitative methods often argue that quantitative methods lack validity. Statistical research methods may be easy to replicate, but they may not provide a true picture of social reality. They are seen to lack the depth to describe accurately the meanings and motives that form the basis of social action. They use categories imposed on the social world by sociologists, categories that may have little meaning or relevance to other members of society. To many interpretive sociologists, only qualitative methods can overcome these problems and provide a valid picture of social reality.

Researchers are sometimes attracted to quantitative methods because of their practicality. Quantitative methods are generally less time-consuming and require less personal commitment. It is usually possible to study larger and more representative samples which can provide an overall picture of society. Qualitative research often has to be confined to the study of small numbers because of practical limitations. It is more suited to providing an in-depth insight into a smaller sample of people. Hence, most sociologists today tend to combine both quantitative and qualitative methods in their social research to enhance its reliability as well validity.

Concepts and Hypothesis

In our discussion on 'Scientific Method and Sociological Research' in Chapter 3, we have learned that a social scientist starts his research by defining precisely what it is that he wants to know. This he does by formulating a clear and verifiable hypothesis. Let us now discuss hypothesis and its relevance in sociological enquiry in detail.

According to Theodorson and Theodorson, a hypothesis is a tentative statement asserting a relationship between certain facts. Bailey has also said that a hypothesis is a proposition stated in a testable form which predicts a particular relationship between two or more variables. Since statements in hypothesis have to be put to empirical investigation, the definition of hypothesis excludes all such statements which are merely opinions or value judgements, for example, '*All politicians are corrupt*'. In other words, a hypothesis carries clear implications for

testing the stated relationship, that is, it contains variables that are measurable and also specifies how they are related. A statement that lacks variables or that does not explain how the variables are related to each other is no hypothesis in scientific sense. Variables are measurable phenomena whose values can change. In social sciences, variables may be understood as the social characteristics that can be converted into measurable forms and analysed. This point will become clearer in our subsequent discussion on operationalisation of concepts (Ahuja, 2008).

In social sciences, the social scientists tend to study and explore the various aspects of social reality and interrelationship among them. Since social reality is infinite, social scientists make sense of this infinite social reality through logical abstractions. These logical abstractions or mental constructs are nothing but the 'concepts'. Hence, when a social scientist is carrying out research to test his hypothesis, he is actually exploring the relationship between the two concepts. Thus, in general, variables in social sciences are nothing but the concepts which are the part of the research. However, in particular, variables are described as the specific characteristics or attributes of the more general concepts. You will soon learn that in order to carry out research, the variables or the concepts used in the hypothesis should be clearly defined and operationalised. This point will be discussed in detail with examples in our subsequent discussion on operationalisation of concepts. Further, the terms 'independent variable', 'dependent variable' and 'extraneous variable' used commonly in research have already been discussed in our earlier discussion on the 'scientific method'.

A few examples of hypothesis are cited below:

- suicide rates vary inversely with social integration
- urbanisation leads to proliferation of nuclear families
- literacy rate is directly related to average marital age
- children from broken homes more likely tend to be delinquents

Hypothesis formulation is of fundamental importance in any research. A hypothesis looks forward. It provides direction to research. Without it, research is unfocused and may be reduced to a random empirical wandering. Results of such unguided research would be of little use. The hypothesis is the necessary link between theory and the investigation that leads to the discovery of additions to knowledge. Goode and Hatt argue that theory and hypothesis are very closely interrelated. Hypotheses are the deduced propositions from the existing theory. These hypotheses, when tested, by means of empirical investigations, are either proved or disproved. Hence, in turn, hypothesis testing leads to either revalidation or reformulation of the theory (Goode and Hatt, 2006).

Let us now discuss a few essential characteristics of a good hypothesis. The most fundamental of them all is that a hypothesis must be conceptually clear. This means that the variables or the concepts used in the hypothesis should be clearly defined and operationalised. Operationalisation of concepts refers to

the process of defining the concepts in terms of those attributes which could be empirically observed during research. In other words, operationalisation refers to the process of converting concepts in their empirical measurements. For example, the concept of anomie, in general terms, is defined as a 'state of normlessness' in society. Now, anomie could be observed in social, economic and political systems of a given society. For instance, the concept of anomie in social sphere may be operationalised by identifying the quantifiable attributes such as incidence of suicide, crime, honour killings, etc. on which empirical data can be collected. Similarly, in political sphere, the concept of anomie may be operationalised when it is explained in terms of the attributes like stability of the government, corruption in the government, people's perception about the government, etc. In the economic sphere, the concept of anomie may be operationalised when it is defined in terms of attributes like economic inequality, poverty, unemployment, etc.

Second, the variables or the concepts used in hypothesis should be commonly accepted and communicable. In simpler words, it implies that there should be uniformity in the definition and meaning of the concepts used in hypothesis. Once the concepts have been clearly defined and operationalised by means of their empirical referents, a hypothesis must also specify the relationship between the variables. A hypothesis that does not explain how the concepts are related to each other is no hypothesis in scientific sense. For example, suicide rates vary inversely with social integration.

Another important characteristic of a good hypothesis is that it should be related to the available techniques of data collection and interpretation. In other words, a hypothesis must be so formulated keeping in mind the availability as well as applicability of the techniques of data collection in the respective field (socio-geographical area identified to carry out the research). Further, a good hypothesis must be related to a body of theory. As stated earlier, one of the key features of any scientific discipline is its cumulative nature. Likewise, sociological theories are built upon one another, extending and refining the older ones and producing the new ones. This would be possible only if the hypotheses are related to a body of theory (Ahuja, 2008).

Dear Learner, so far we have discussed the meaning of hypothesis, its relevance in sociological enquiry and some characteristics of a good hypothesis. We have discussed that a hypothesis is a tentative statement asserting a relationship between two or more concepts or variables. What do you understand by concept? What is the relevance of concepts in sociology? What are the problems associated in defining the concepts in sociology? Let us now try to understand and answer these questions.

Concepts are the logical abstractions or mental constructs created from sense impressions, percepts or experiences. Concept formation is an essential step in the process of sociological reasoning. Concepts are the tools with which we think, criticise, argue, explain and analyse. We build up our knowledge of the

social world not simply by looking at it but through developing and refining concepts which will help us make sense of it. Concepts, in that sense, are the building blocks of human knowledge. Concepts help in comprehending the reality that a science is engaged in studying. Concepts act as mediums of short-cut communication among those associated with the enquiry (social scientists).

Concepts and hypotheses are the core of social research. For any social research to be fruitful, it is important that the concepts or variables mentioned in the hypothesis are operationalised. As discussed earlier, operationalisation of concepts refers to the process of defining concepts in terms of those attributes which could be empirically observed during research. In other words, operationalisation refers to the process of converting concepts in their empirical measurements. For example, the concept of alienation is generally explained in terms of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement. Now, in a given workplace, powerlessness could be empirically measured in terms of the indicators such as participation in the administration, degree of control over the decision-making process, grievance redressal mechanism, etc.

Let us now discuss the various problems in defining concepts in sociology. Social reality is dynamic in character, and so are the concepts in sociology. Sociology being a relatively young discipline relies more and more on empirical research for verification and validation of the existing theories and concepts. Hence, new findings lead to modification of the established concepts and theories. In other words, it leads to re-conceptualisation or re-specification of a concept. For example, earlier the personality differences between men and women were explained in biological terms. However, later-day research by anthropologists like Margaret Mead, who in her work *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Tribes* studied three tribes, namely Arapesh, Mundugumor and Tchambuli (in the western Pacific), concluded that personality patterns were culturally determined rather than biologically. In brief, her comparative study revealed a full range of contrasting gender roles. Among the Arapesh, both men and women were peaceful in temperament and neither men nor women engaged in fight. Among the Mundugumor, the opposite was true: both men and women were of violent temperament. Among the Tchambuli, gender role reversal was found. While the men 'primped' and spent their time decorating themselves, the women worked and were the practical ones. Similarly, you can also discuss here how the concepts of class, caste (*jati*), etc. have undergone changes with new findings put forward by later day researches.

Second, sociology as a discipline is rapidly attaining maturity with the contributions of several established and highly reputed schools like the British school, the American school, the French school and the German school. But the contributions from diverse schools of thought give rise to the problem of ensuring uniformity in the definition and meaning of the concepts. Concepts develop from a shared experience. Since each school of sociological thought puts forward its own set of concepts and defines the concept in the context of its unique

social setting, it gives rise to the problem of communication. For example, the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which were coined by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, have no English equivalent. The terms *Community* and *Association*, which are English translations of these words, do not convey the particular sociological meaning of these two German words.

Third, due to the very subject matter of sociology, the terms used to denote scientific concepts may also have meanings in other frames of reference. For instance, the term 'bureaucracy', which implies a particular type of social structure, may either be seen as a rationally designed authority structure or as an administrative institution characterised by red-tapism, corruption and official disregard for the public interest.

Another problem associated with defining the concepts in social sciences is that the same term may refer to different phenomena. For example, the term 'function' in one sense may be used to denote the contributions which a given practice or belief makes towards the continued existence of society. However, the term function may also be used to denote the causal relationship between two variables; for example, in determining to what extent one variable (proliferation of nuclear families) is the function of another variable (industrialisation).

Further, in social sciences, different terms or concepts may be used to refer to the same or similar phenomena. For example, the terms like formal–informal, organic–mechanistic, primary–secondary, community–association, etc. overlap to a great degree in their meaning. Another problem with regard to concepts in social sciences is that a given concept may have no immediate empirical referent. For example, the concepts like social system, social structure, etc. have no immediate empirical referents or quantifiable attributes. At best they can be studied by observing the patterns of relations among the members of a given society (Goode and Hatt, 2006).

Thus, a social scientist must define the concepts as precisely as possible and operationalise the concepts in order to conduct a meaningful and result-oriented research.

Techniques of Data Collection

We have earlier discussed some of the fundamental characteristics of quantitative (positivist) and qualitative (anti-positivist) research methodologies. However, in practice, the distinctions between positivist and anti-positivist research methodologies are not as clear-cut as the previous sections have shown. They have been placed at opposite ends of the spectrum for purposes of emphasis and illustration. A large body of sociological research falls somewhere between the two extremes. In the same way, the methods of data collection discussed in the following sections cannot be neatly categorised as aspects of positivist or anti-positivist methodologies. However, certain methods are regarded as more appropriate by supporters of one or other of these perspectives.

Let us now discuss some of the important techniques employed by the social scientists for collecting data from the field. The need for adequate and reliable data is ever increasing for taking policy decisions in different fields of human activity. There are two ways in which the required information may be obtained:

1. complete enumeration survey (also known as the census method)
2. sample method

Under the complete enumeration survey method or census method, data are collected for each and every unit (person, household, field, shop, factory, etc., as the case may be) belonging to the population or universe, which is the complete set of items that are of interest in any particular situation. Since every unit is covered, this method ensures greater accuracy. However, it is a highly time- and money-consuming exercise, and that is why it is used very rarely and selectively for some specific purposes only, such as census. This is more true of underdeveloped countries where resources constitute a big constraint. Also, if the population is infinite, the method cannot be adopted. 'Population' here refers to 'all those people with the characteristics which the researcher wants to study within the context of a particular research problem'. A population could be all students in a school, all patients in a hospital, all prisoners in a prison, etc. Hence, in modern times, very little use is made of complete enumeration survey. How to collect the data then? It is through the adoption of sampling technique that a large mass of data pertaining to different aspects of human activity are collected these days (Gupta, 1990).

Sampling

As mentioned earlier, when the population is relatively large or widely dispersed, researchers survey only a sample. Sampling is simply the process of learning about the population on the basis of a sample drawn from it. In the sampling technique, instead of every unit of the universe, only a part of the universe is studied and the conclusions are drawn on that basis for the entire universe. A sample is not studied for its own sake. The basic objective of the sample study is to draw inference about the entire population which it claims to represent. In other words, sampling is only a tool which helps to know the characteristics of the universe or population by examining only a small part of it.

Features of a Good Sample

Since conclusions are drawn on the basis of the study of a small part of the entire universe or population, it is necessary that a sample possesses certain essential characteristics. First, a sample should be representative enough. In other words, a sample should be so selected that it truly represents the universe, otherwise the results obtained may be misleading. Second, the size of sample should be

adequate in relation to the universe it tends to represent, otherwise it may not represent all the characteristics of the universe. Third, all items of the sample should be selected independent of one another, and all items of the universe should have equal chance of getting selected in the sample. Last but not the least, there should be homogeneity between the units of the sample and that of the universe.

Types of Sampling

There are basically two types of sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling (also known as random sampling) is one in which every unit of the population has an equal probability of being selected for the sample. It offers a high degree of representativeness. This implies that the selection of sample items is independent of the person making the study – that is, the sampling operation is controlled so objectively that the items will be chosen strictly at random. Hence, it provides estimates which are essentially unbiased. However, this method is expensive, time-consuming and relatively complicated since it requires a large sample size and the units selected are usually widely scattered. Also, it requires a very high level of skill and experience for its use. Non-probability (or non-random) sampling makes no claim for representativeness, as every unit does not get the chance of being selected. It is the researcher who decides which sample units should be chosen.

Probability sampling today remains the primary method for selecting large, representative samples for social science and business researches. Some of the important sampling designs or methods under this category are simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, systematic (or interval) sampling, cluster sampling and multi-stage sampling.

Simple Random Sampling

Random sampling refers to the sampling technique in which each and every item of the population is given an equal chance of being included in the sample. The selection is, thus, free from personal bias because the investigator does not exercise his discretion or preference in the choice of items. Since selection of items in the sample depends entirely on chance, this method is also known as the method of chance selection. Some people believe that randomness of selection can be achieved by unsystematic and haphazard procedures. But this is quite wrong. However, the point to be emphasised is that unless precaution is taken to avoid bias and a conscious effort is made to ensure the operation of chance factors, the resulting sample shall not be a random sample. Random sampling is sometimes referred to as 'representative sampling'. If the sample is chosen at random and if the size of the sample is sufficiently large, it will represent all groups in the universe. A random sample is also known as a 'probability sample' because every item of the universe has an equal opportunity of being selected

in the sample. To ensure randomness of selection, one may adopt any of the following methods.

1. *Lottery Method*: This is a very popular method of taking a random sample. Under this method, all items of the universe are numbered on separate slips of paper of identical size and shape. These slips are then folded and mixed up in a container or drum. A blindfold selection is then made of the number of slips required to constitute the desired sample size. The selection of items, thus, depends entirely on chance.
2. *Table of Random Numbers*: The lottery method discussed above becomes quite cumbersome to use as the size of population increases. An alternative method of random selection is that of using the table of random numbers. Three such tables are available: (i) Tippett's table of random numbers, (ii) Fisher and Yate's numbers and (iii) Kendall and Babington Smith's numbers.

The merits of random sampling lie in the fact that since the selection of items in the sample depends entirely on chance, there is no possibility of personal bias affecting the results. Further, as the size of the sample increases, it becomes increasingly representative of the population. However, the use of random sampling necessitates a completely catalogued universe from which to draw the sample. But it is often difficult for the investigator to have up-to-date lists of all the items of the population to be sampled. This restricts the use of random sampling method (Gupta, 1990).

Stratified Random Sampling

In this sampling method, the population is divided into various strata or classes, and a sample is drawn from each stratum at random. For example, if we are interested in studying the consumption pattern of the people of Delhi, the city of Delhi may be divided into various parts or zones, and from each part a sample may be taken at random. However, the selection of cases from each stratum must be done with great care and in accordance with a carefully designed plan as otherwise random selection from the various strata may not be accomplished.

Stratified sampling may be either proportional or disproportional. In proportional stratified sampling, the cases are drawn from each stratum in the same proportion as they occur in the universe. For example, if we divide the city of Delhi into four zones A, B, C and D with 40, 30, 20 and 10 per cent of the total population, respectively, and if the sample size is 1,000, then we should draw 400, 300, 200 and 100 cases, respectively, from zones A, B, C and D, i.e. sample is proportional to the size in the universe. In disproportional stratified sampling, an equal number of cases is taken from each stratum, regardless of how the stratum is represented in the universe. Thus, in the above example, an equal number of items from each zone may be drawn, that is, 250. This approach is obviously inferior to the proportional stratified sampling.

The most important merit of the stratified random sampling is that it is more representative. Since the population is first divided into various strata and then a sample is drawn from each stratum, there is little possibility of any essential group of the population being completely excluded. A more representative sample is thus secured. Stratified sampling is frequently regarded as the most efficient system of sampling. However, utmost care must be exercised in dividing the population into various strata. Each stratum must contain, as far as possible, homogenous items as otherwise the results may not be reliable. However, this is a very difficult task and may involve considerable time and expense.

Systematic or Interval Sampling

This method is popularly used in those cases where a complete list of the population from which a sample is to be drawn is available. It involves obtaining a sample of items by drawing every *n*th item from a predetermined list of items. In other words, it involves randomly selecting the first respondent and then every *n*th person after that; '*n*' is the sampling interval. For example, if a complete list of 1,000 students of a college is available and if we want to draw a sample of 200, then this means we must take every fifth item (i.e. $n = 5$). The first item between one and five shall be selected at random. Suppose it comes out to be three. Now we shall go on adding five and obtain numbers of the desired sample. Thus, the second item would be the 8th student, and the third would be the 13th student and so on.

Systematic sampling differs from simple random sampling in that in the latter the selections are independent of each other; in the former, the selection of sample units is dependent on the selection of a previous one. The systematic sampling is more convenient to adopt than the random sampling or the stratified sampling method. The time and work involved in sampling by this method are relatively smaller. It is a rapid method and eliminates several steps otherwise taken in probability sampling. However, critics of this method argue that it ignores all persons between two *n*th numbers with the result that the possibility of overrepresentation and underrepresentation of several groups is greater.

Cluster Sampling

This sampling implies dividing the population into clusters and drawing random samples either from all clusters or from selected clusters. This method is used when (a) cluster criteria are significant for the study, and (b) economic considerations are significant. In cluster sampling, initial clusters are called primary sampling units; clusters within the primary clusters are called secondary sampling units; and clusters within the secondary clusters are called multi-stage clusters. When clusters are geographic units, it is called area sampling. For example, dividing one city into various wards, each ward into areas, each area into

neighbourhoods and each neighbourhood into lanes. We can take an example of a hospital. The issue is to ascertain the problems faced by doctors, patients and visitors in different units and to introduce some reformative programmes. Administratively, it will not be viable to call all doctors from all units, nor a large number of patients admitted in different units like cardiology, neurology, orthopaedic, gynaecology and so on. Treating each unit as a cluster, randomly selected doctors and patients – say 2 doctors and 3 patients, or about 50 people all together – from all units may be invited for discussion. On the basis of such discussion, suggestions by the stakeholders may be submitted to higher authorities for necessary action.

The advantage of cluster sampling is that it is much easier to apply this sampling design when large populations are studied or when a large geographical area is studied. Further, the cost involved in this method is much less than in other methods of sampling. The disadvantages of this sampling method are that each cluster may not be of equal size, and hence the comparison so done would not be on an equal basis. The chances of sampling error are greater as there could be homogeneity in one cluster but heterogeneity in other.

Multi-stage Sampling

As the name implies this method refers to a sampling procedure which is carried out in several stages, but only the last sample of subjects is studied. Suppose it is decided to take a sample of 5,000 households from the state of Uttar Pradesh. At the first stage, the state may be divided into a number of districts and a few districts are selected at random. At the second stage, each district may be subdivided into a number of villages, and a sample of villages may be taken at random. At the third stage, a number of households may be selected from each of the villages selected at the second stage. In this way, at each stage the sample size becomes smaller and smaller. The merit of multi-stage sampling is that it introduces flexibility in the sampling method, which is lacking in the other methods. It enables existing divisions and subdivisions of the population to be used as units at various stages. It permits the fieldwork to be concentrated despite covering a large area. Another important advantage in this sampling design is that it is more representative. Further, in all cases, complete listing of population is not necessary. This saves cost. However, a multi-stage sample is in general less accurate than a sample containing the same number of final stage units which have been selected by some suitable single stages process.

Let us now discuss about the non-probability sampling. In many research situations, particularly those where there is no list of persons to be studied (e.g. widows, alcoholics, migrant workers), probability sampling is difficult and inappropriate to use. In such a research, non-probability sampling is the most appropriate one. Non-probability sampling procedures do not employ the rules of probability theory, do not claim representativeness and are usually used for qualitative exploratory analysis. Some of the important sampling designs under this

category are convenience sampling, purposive or judgement sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling and volunteer sampling.

Convenience Sampling

This sampling is also known as 'accidental' or 'haphazard' sampling. In this sampling, the researcher studies all those persons who are most conveniently available or who accidentally come in his contact during a certain period of time in the research. For example, the researcher engaged in the study of university students might visit the university canteen, library, some departments, playgrounds and *verandahs* and interview certain number of students. Another example is of election study. During election times, media personnel often present man-on-the-street interviews that are presumed to reflect public opinion. In such a sampling, representativeness is not significant. The most obvious advantage of convenience sample is that it is quick and economical. But it may be a very biased sample. The possible sources of bias could be: (i) the respondents may have a vested interest to serve in cooperating with the interviewer, and (ii) the respondents may be those who are vocal and/or want to brag. Convenience samples are best utilised for exploratory research when additional research will subsequently be conducted with a probability sample.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is also known as judgement sampling. In this sampling, the choice of sample items depends exclusively on the discretion of the investigator. In other words, the investigator exercises his judgement in the choice and includes those items in the sample which he thinks are most typical of the universe with regard to the characteristics under investigation. For example, if a sample of 10 students is to be selected from a class of 60 for analysing the spending habits of students, the investigator would select 10 students who, in his opinion, are representative of the class. This method, though simple, is not scientific because there is a big possibility of the results being affected by the personal prejudice or bias of the investigator. Thus, judgement sampling involves the risk that the investigator may establish foregone conclusions by including those items in the sample which conform to his preconceived notions. For example, if an investigator holds the view that the wages of workers in a certain establishment are very low, and if he adopts the judgement sampling method, he may include only those workers in the sample whose wages are low and thereby establish his point of view, which may be far from the truth. Since an element of subjectiveness is possible, this method cannot be recommended for general use. However, because of simplicity and easy adaptability, this method is quite often used by businessmen in the solution of everyday problems. Indeed, if applied with skill and care, the judgement method can be of great help to businessmen. At least, it helps deriving somewhat better solutions to the problems than could be obtained without it.

Quota Sampling

Quota sampling is a type of judgement sampling. In a quota sample, quotas are set up according to given criteria, but within the quotas the selection of sample items depends on personal judgement. For example, in a radio listening survey, the interviewers may be told to interview 500 people living in a certain area and that out of every 100 persons interviewed, 60 are to be housewives, 25 farmers and 15 children. Within these quotas, the interviewer is free to select the people to be interviewed. The cost per person interviewed may be relatively small for a quota sample, but there are numerous opportunities for bias which may invalidate results. Because of the risk of personal prejudice and bias entering the process of selection, the quota sampling is rarely used in practical work.

Snowball Sampling

In this technique, the researcher begins the research with the few respondents who are known and available to him. Subsequently, these respondents give other names who meet the criteria of research, who in turn give more new names. This process is continued until 'adequate' number of persons are interviewed or until no more respondents are discovered. For instance, in studying wife battering, the researcher may first interview those cases whom he knows, who may later on give additional names and who in turn may give still new names. This method is employed when the target population is unknown or when it is difficult to approach the respondents in any other way. Reduced sample sizes and costs are a clear advantage of snowball sampling. Bias enters because a person known to someone (also in the sample) has a higher probability of being similar to the first person. If there are major differences between those who are widely known by others and those who are not, there may be serious problems with snowball sampling.

Volunteer Sampling

In this sampling, the respondent himself volunteers to give information he holds. The success of the research is dependent on the 'rich' information given by the respondents. However, there is a possibility that the informants may not truly represent the population, i.e. they may not have the aggregate characteristics of the population. Further, the personal leanings of the researcher of being prejudiced against certain types of persons, say, untouchables or religious minorities, may also affect the validity of the findings (Ahuja, 2008).

On a review of the pros and cons of the various methods of sampling, it is clear that stratified sampling and systematic sampling methods based on random principle are more reliable, and hence, these methods are more widely used than others. Let us now briefly discuss the merits of the sampling procedure in

general. The sampling technique has the following merits over the complete enumeration survey:

1. Sampling is essentially useful in cases where the universe if large and scattered.
2. It consumes less time. Since sampling is a study of a part of the population, considerable time and labour are saved when a sample survey is carried out. Time is saved not only in collecting data but also in processing it.
3. Less cost is incurred in sampling compared to other techniques of data collection in terms of the cost involved. This is a great advantage particularly in an underdeveloped economy where much of the information would be difficult to collect by the census method for lack of adequate resources.
4. Sampling yields more reliable results. This is because more effective precautions can be taken in a sample survey to ensure that the information is accurate and complete. Moreover, it is possible to avail of the services of experts and to impart thorough training to the investigators in a sample survey which further reduces the possibility of errors. Follow-up work can also be undertaken much more effectively in the sampling method.
5. Since the sampling technique saves time and money, it is possible to collect more detailed information in a sample survey. For example, if the population consists of 1,000 persons in a survey of the consumption pattern of the people, the two alternative techniques available are as follows:
   (a) We may collect the necessary data from each of the 1,000 people through a questionnaire containing, say, ten questions (census method), or
   (b) We may take a sample of 100 persons, i.e. 10 per cent of population, and prepare a questionnaire containing as many as 100 questions. The expense involved in the latter case may be almost the same as in the former, but it will enable nine times more information to be obtained (Gupta, 1990).

However, despite the various advantages of sampling, it is not altogether free from limitations. Some of the difficulties involved in sampling are stated next.

1. A sample survey must be carefully planned and executed, otherwise the results obtained may be inaccurate and misleading.
2. Sampling generally requires the services of experts for the proper planning and execution of the survey. In the absence of qualified and experienced persons, the information obtained from sample surveys cannot be relied upon.
3. If the information is required for each and every unit in the domain of study, sample method cannot be adopted.

To appreciate the need for sample surveys, it is necessary to understand clearly the role of sampling and non-sampling errors in complete enumeration and sample surveys. The errors arising due to drawing inferences about the population

on the basis of few observations (sample) is termed as sampling errors. Clearly, the sampling error in this sense is non-existent in a complete enumeration survey, since the whole population is surveyed. However, the errors mainly arising at the stages of ascertainment and processing of data which are termed non-sampling errors are common both in complete enumeration and sample surveys.

Sampling Errors

Even if utmost care has been taken in selecting a sample, the results derived from the sample may not be representative of the population from which it is drawn, because samples are seldom, if ever, perfect miniatures of the population. This gives rise to sampling errors. Sampling errors are, thus, due to the fact that samples are used and to the particular method used in selecting the items from the population. Sampling errors are of two types: biased and unbiased. Biased errors are those which arise from any kind of bias in selection, estimation, etc. Bias may arise either due to a faulty process of selection or faulty method of analysis. Unbiased errors, on the other hand, arise due to chance differences between the members of the population included in the sample and those not included. The simplest and the only certain way of avoiding bias in the selection process is for the sample to be drawn either entirely at random or at random, subject to restrictions, which, while improving the accuracy, are of such a nature that they do not introduce bias in the results.

Non-sampling Errors

When a complete enumeration of units in the universe is made, one would expect that it would give rise to data free from errors. However, in practice it is not so. For example, it is difficult to completely avoid errors of observation or ascertainment. Similarly, in the processing of data tabulation errors may be committed affecting the final results. Errors arising in this manner are termed non-sampling errors, as they are due to factors other than the inductive process of inferring about the population from a sample. Thus, the data obtained in a census by complete enumeration, although free from sampling errors, would still be subject to non-sampling errors, whereas the results of a sample survey would be subject to sampling errors as well as non-sampling errors.

Non-sampling errors can occur at every stage of planning and execution of the census or survey. Such errors can arise due to a number of causes, such as defective methods of data collection and tabulation, faulty definitions, incomplete coverage of the population or sample, etc. More specifically, non-sampling errors may arise from one or more of the following factors.

1. Data specification being inadequate and inconsistent with respect to the objectives of the census or sample survey
2. Inappropriate statistical unit

3. Inaccurate or inappropriate methods of interviews, observation or measurement with inadequate or ambiguous schedules, definitions or instructions
4. Lack of trained and experienced investigators
5. Lack of adequate inspection and supervision of primary staff
6. Errors due to non-response, i.e. incomplete coverage in respect of units
7. Errors in data processing operations such as coding, punching, verification, tabulation, etc.
8. Errors committed during presentation and printing of tabulated results

These sources are not exhaustive but are given to indicate some of the possible sources of error. In some situations, the non-sampling errors may be large and deserve greater attention than the sampling error. While, in general, sampling error decreases with increase in sample size, non-sampling error tends to increase with the sample size. In the case of complete enumeration, non-sampling error and in the case of sample surveys both sampling and non-sampling errors require to be controlled and reduced to a level at which their presence does not vitiate the use of final results (Gupta, 1990).

Survey

The most common type of empirical, or quantitative, research in sociology is the survey, which consists of systematically questioning people about their opinions, attitudes or behaviours. A social survey involves the collection of standardised information from a sample selected as being representative of a particular group or population. The group from which the sample is drawn may be the population as a whole, a particular class, ethnic, gender or age group, etc., depending upon the objective of the researcher. In a survey, standardised information is obtained by asking the same set of questions to all members of the sample. Questionnaires and structured interviews are two important and popular techniques of data collection in a social survey.

Social surveys are broadly divided into two categories: descriptive and analytical. Descriptive surveys are used to describe the world as it is. In other words, descriptive surveys are concerned with description rather than explanation. It aims to provide an accurate measurement of the distribution of certain characteristics in a given population. For example, a survey may be conducted in a city or town to measure the extent of poverty in the given population. Here the researcher and his team would be interested in collecting the data on average per capita income of the working-class stratum or the population below poverty line, etc. In other words, they aim to measure the extent of poverty in a given population rather than to explain the causes of poverty. Analytical surveys, on the other hand, are concerned with explanation. They are designed to test hypotheses about the relationships between a number of factors or variables. For example, an analytical survey may seek to discover possible relationships between social class and educational attainment, gender and occupation, etc. Analytical surveys

are not simply concerned with discovering relationships but also with explaining them (Haralambos and Heald, 2006).

Analytical surveys are usually designed to test the effects of a number of variables or factors on some other variable. For example, a researcher may suggest that social class differences in some way cause or determine variations in educational attainment. However, there may be other factors also affecting educational attainment, and they must also be considered if the influence of social class is to be accurately assessed. For example, variables such as caste, gender and ethnicity may account for some variation in educational attainment. As a result, researchers usually gather data on a range of factors which might influence the variable in question. The method used to analyse relationships between variables is known as 'multivariate' or 'variable analysis'. With the aid of various statistical techniques, the analyst attempts to measure the effects of a number of variables upon other variables. This method was pioneered in sociology by Emile Durkheim in his study of suicide.

Official statistics revealed significant variations in suicide rate between European societies. Durkheim's research indicated that predominantly Protestant societies had a higher rate of suicide in comparison to societies where Catholicism was the majority faith. But before a causal relationship could be claimed between religion and suicide rates, it was necessary to eliminate other possibilities. For example, could variations in suicide rates be the result of differences in national cultures? To test this possibility, Durkheim held the variable of national culture constant by examining differences in suicide rates between Catholics and Protestants within the same society. The relationship still held. Within the same society Protestants had higher suicide rates than Catholics. To ensure greater objectivity in his research, Durkheim then went a step further and examined the possibility that regional differences rather than religion might account for variations in suicide rates. He found, for example, that Bavaria had the lowest suicide rate of all the states in Germany and it also had the highest proportion of Catholics. Yet, might the suicide rate be due to the peculiarities of Bavaria as a region rather than its predominantly Catholic population? To test this possibility Durkheim compared the suicide rates and the religious composition of the various provinces within Bavaria. He found that the higher the proportion of Protestants in each province, the higher the suicide rate. Again, the relationship between religion and rates of suicide was confirmed. By eliminating variables such as national culture and region, Durkheim was able to strengthen the relationship between religion and suicide rates and provide increasing support for his claim that the relationship is a causal one (ibid.).

Let us briefly discuss some of the major steps normally involved in survey research. First, before a survey is begun, the issues to be explored must be clearly defined. At the same time, the target population to be interviewed is selected. The target population might be identified on the basis of the characteristics that the researcher is interested in examining. It could either be a particular gender or age group, or any specific socio-economic section of the society, etc. This first step is crucial, for if the population is not correctly specified, the results of the

survey may be meaningless. For example, if the aim of the research is to predict the results of an election, it is very important that the population chosen consist only of those persons who will actually vote in that election.

Second, if the population is large, time and cost will almost always make it impractical to interview the entire population. So, the second step in surveying is to pick an appropriate sample of the population to interview. A sample is a limited number of selected cases drawn from a large group. Careful procedures have been established for selecting samples. The better the sampling procedure, the more closely the sample will resemble the entire population and the more accurate will be the generalisations or predictions. In other words, if generalisations are to be made from the findings of a social survey, it is essential that the sample is representative. This is often accomplished by means of a 'random sample'. We have already discussed the various types of sampling techniques and their merits and limitations. Once the researcher is satisfied that he has obtained a representative sample, he can begin the survey proper and feel some justification in generalising from its findings.

Once the sample is selected, the third step in survey research is to interview or administer the questionnaire to the selected people and to collect the data. At this point a major consideration is the precision of the questions. Do the questions really pinpoint the issues concerned? Are they phrased in such a way that they will be interpreted correctly and similarly by each person interviewed, i.e. the respondents. In addition to being precise and unambiguous in meaning, a survey question must also be neutrally stated.

For most accurate results, the entire sample must be interviewed, particularly if the sample is small. If some people refuse to answer or are unavailable for interviewing, the sample is no longer representative and, consequently, the accuracy of the data may be reduced. Non-response is frequently a serious problem when questionnaires are sent by mail, for refusals to respond to mailed questionnaires tend to be high. Replies often come only from those who have some interest in the particular issue, thus introducing a bias into the survey findings. To assure maximum response, most major attitude surveys and public opinion polls are conducted through personal interviews. These interviews range from the highly structured to be highly unstructured.

A structured interview consists of a set of questions and answers which are always stated in the same way and in the same sequence. The answers are, thus, easily compiled and generalised. Most public opinion polls use structured interviews. For other research purposes, where more extensive information about individual attitudes or behaviour is desired, the unstructured interview has many advantages. An unstructured interview may consist of open-ended questions (How do you feel about the inter-caste marriages or caste-based reservations?) or even just a list of topics to be discussed. It is possible for the interviewer to introduce bias into the survey. He may, for example, use expressions or make comments that encourage the respondent to answer in a certain way. In an unstructured interview he may influence the answers by the way he phrases the

questions. It is important that interviewers be suited to their task and that they be well trained in the techniques of interviewing. The final step in survey research is the tabulation, analysis and interpretation of the data. In all but the smallest surveys, this step normally involves the use of computers.

There are several possible sources of error in survey results. Sampling error is the degree to which the selected sample misrepresents the population as a whole. Other major sources of error arise from problems in observation and measurement, processing the data and analysing the findings. A basic problem with all surveys is that what people say may not always agree with how they act. People sometimes conceal their attitude purposely. An individual prejudiced against lower castes in India, for example, may act in a discriminatory fashion towards them, but because he knows that this prejudice is socially disapproved of, he will not admit it to an interviewer. Research that is well designed and carried out can help to overcome these difficulties, but the sociologist must be constantly aware that attitudes expressed in interviews are not always perfect expressions of underlying values, and that actions do not always reflect stated attitudes. The success of any survey is, however, ultimately dependent on the quality of its data. At the end of the day a social survey stands or falls on the validity of its data.

Case Study

Case study method is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. Frederic Le Play is reputed to have introduced the *case study* method into social science. He used it as a handmaiden to statistics in his studies of family budgets. Herbert Spencer was one of the first sociologists to use case materials in his ethnographic studies.

Case study is an intensive study of a case which may be an individual, an institution, a system, a community, an organisation, an event or even the entire culture. Robert K. Yin has defined case study as 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used'. It is, thus, a kind of research design which usually involves the qualitative method of selecting the sources of the data. It presents the holistic account that offers insights into the case under study. It is worth noting that while a case study can be either quantitative or qualitative, or even both, most case studies lie within the realm of qualitative methodology. It is the preferred strategy when 'how, who, why and what' questions are being asked, or when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context (Ahuja, 2008).

Case studies have been used in varied social investigations, particularly, in sociological studies, and are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data. It is, therefore, an approach to explore and analyse the life of social unit, be it a person, a family, an institution, a culture group or even an entire community. Its aim is to determine

the factors that account for the complex behaviour patterns of the unit and the relationships of the unit to its surroundings. Case data may be gathered, exhaustively, on the entire life cycle or on a definite section of the cycle of a unit but always with a view to ascertain the natural history of social unit and its relationship to the social factors and forces involved in its environment. In other words, through case studies researchers attempt to see the variety of factors within a social unit as an integrated whole. When attention is focused on the development of the case, it is called 'case history'. For example, how a particular boy became a juvenile delinquent because of lack of parental control, impact of peers, lack of attention by teachers and money earned through cheap means, and then became an adolescent thief and a sex criminal and ultimately a professional pickpocket is tracing criminality through case history method.

Data, for case studies, can be collected by primary as well as secondary sources. Two main sources of primary data collection are interviews and observations. Interviews may be structured or unstructured. Most commonly, it is the unstructured interview which is used by the investigators. The observation method used could be either participant or non-participant, while the secondary data can be collected through a variety of sources like reports, records, newspapers, magazines, books, files, diaries, etc.

Sjoberg has identified some essential characteristics of case study method, which are as follows:

1. The case study 'strives towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action'. Cultural systems of action refer to sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation.
2. Case study research is not sampling research. However, selection of the items or sources must be done so as to maximise what can be learned, in the limited period of time available for the study.
3. Because they are intensive in nature, case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined.
4. 'Case studies are multi-perspectival analyses'. This means that the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the actors but also of the relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them.

According to Black and Champion, some of the advantages of case study design are:

1. Case study makes holistic and in-depth study of the phenomenon possible.
2. It offers flexibility with respect to using methods for collecting data, e.g. questionnaire, interview, observation.
3. It could be used for studying any specific dimension of the topic in detail.
4. It can be conducted in practically any kind of social setting.
5. Case studies are relatively inexpensive.

However, practically, the case study method is very time-consuming and demanding of the researcher. The possibility of becoming involved emotionally is much greater than in survey research, thus making detached and objective observation difficult and sometimes impossible. Another problem in the use of case study method is that since only one example of a social situation or group is being studied, the results may not be representative of all groups or situations in the category. In other words, the particular mental hospital ward, slum or suburb may not be typical of all mental hospital wards, slums or suburbs. Critics of the case study method believe that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings. Some dismiss case study research as useful only as an exploratory tool. Yet, researchers continue to use the case study research method with success in carefully planned and crafted studies of real-life situations, issues and problems. In comparison to survey, the case study method is more intensive, while survey research is more extensive in nature. In other words, surveys are usually conducted on a fairly large scale in contrast to case studies that tend to be more intensive but on a smaller scale. Case study is done in terms of limited space and broader time, whereas survey is done in terms of limited time with broader space. Case study is inward looking, while survey method is outward looking.

Interviews

Interviews are one of the most widely used methods of gathering data in sociology. They consist of the researcher asking the interviewee or respondent a series of questions. Bingham and Moore have described interview as 'a conversation with a purpose' (Ahuja, 2008). According to Goode and Hatt (2006), 'Interviewing is fundamentally a process of social interaction'. Interviews can be classified as 'structured' or 'unstructured' though many fall somewhere between these two extremes.

In a structured interview, there is a set of predetermined questions which the interviewer is required to put before the interviewee (respondent) to collect the required information. In this type of interview, the wording of the questions and the order in which they are asked remains the same in every case. The result is a fairly formal question and answer session. However, unstructured interviews are more like an informal conversation. In an unstructured interview, there are no specifications in the wording of the questions or the order of the questions. The interviewer usually has particular topics in mind to cover but few, if any, preset questions. There are no specifications in the wording of the questions or the order of the questions. He has the freedom to phrase questions as he likes, ask the respondent to develop his answers and probe responses which might be unclear and ambiguous. This freedom is often extended to the respondent, who may be allowed to direct the interview into areas which interest him (Haralambos and Heald, 2006).

Data from structured interviews are generally regarded as more reliable. Since the order and wording of questions are the same for all respondents, it is more

likely that they will be responding to the same stimuli. Thus, different answers to the same set of questions will indicate real differences between the respondents. Different answers will not, therefore, simply reflect differences in the way questions are phrased. Thus, the more structured or standardised an interview, the more easily its results can be tested by researchers investigating other groups. The structured interview reduces the interviewer's bias to the minimum. This form of interview is largely employed in quantitative research. By comparison, data from unstructured interviews are seen as less reliable. Questions are phrased in a variety of ways, and the relationship between the interviewer and the respondent is likely to be more intimate. It is unclear to what degree the answers are influenced by these factors. Differences between respondents may simply reflect differences in the nature of the interviews. It is therefore more difficult to replicate an unstructured interview but the greater flexibility of unstructured interviews may strengthen the validity of the data. They provide more opportunity to discover what the respondent 'really means'. Ambiguities in questions and answers can be clarified and the interviewers can probe for shades of meaning (ibid.).

Structured interviews are largely employed in quantitative research. Such interviews are regarded as appropriate for obtaining answers to questions of 'fact' such as the age, sex and income of the respondent. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, are seen as more appropriate for eliciting attitudes, opinions and interests. Interview data are often taken as indications of respondents' attitudes and behaviour in everyday life, although what a person says in an interview may have little to do with his normal routines. Even if the respondent does his best to provide honest answers, he may be unaware of the taken-for-granted assumptions which he employs in everyday life.

Various studies have suggested, though, that interviews pose serious problems of reliability and validity. This is partly due to the fact that interviews are interaction situations. Thus, the results of an interview will depend in part on the way the participants define the situation, their perceptions of each other and so on. Most studies have been concerned about the effects of interviewers on the respondents. The significance of what has come to be known as 'interviewer bias' can be seen from the research conducted by Katz. The classic study of socio-economic status of interviewers was conducted by Katz in 1942 in a lower-class area in Pittsburgh. Katz compared the results obtained by a group of interviewers who were blue-collar industrial workers with the results obtained by middle-class interviewers. Katz found that low-income industrial workers consistently gave more radical answers on labour issues to the blue-collar lower-class interviewers than to the middle-class interviewers. Katz concluded that lack of rapport between lower-class respondents and middle-class interviewers led to bias in response (Bailey, 1994). In a similar study, J. Allan Williams Jr. concluded that the greater the status differences between interviewer and respondent, the less likely the respondent will be to express his true feelings. In a series of interviews organised in 1960s, Williams found drastic difference in the responses of the respondents when interviewed by black and white interviewers at different

points of time. Williams found that on issues such as civil rights demonstrations and school desegregation, black respondents often tended to give the answers they felt that white interviewers wanted to hear. These findings suggest that when status differences are wide, as is often the case with middle-class sociologists interviewing members of the lower working class, interview data should be regarded with caution (Haralambos and Heald, 2006).

Interviewers, like everybody else, have values, attitudes and expectations. However, no matter how much the interviewer tries to disguise his views, they may well be communicated to the respondent. This is particularly likely in the more informal situation of the unstructured interview. As a result, the interviewer may 'lead' the respondent whose answer will then reflect something of the interviewer's attitudes and expectations. This can be seen from a study conducted by Stuart A. Rice in 1914: 2,000 destitute men were asked, among other things, to explain their situation. There was a strong tendency for those interviewed by a supporter of prohibition to blame their demise on alcohol, but those interviewed by a committed socialist were much more likely to explain their plight in terms of the industrial situation. To counter this problem, interviewers are often advised to be 'non-directive', to refrain from offering opinions, to avoid expressions of approval and disapproval. It is suggested they establish 'rapport' with their respondents, that is, a warm, friendly relationship which implies sympathy and understanding, while at the same time guarding against communicating their own attitudes and expectations (ibid.).

However, despite these limitations, interviews do have certain advantages. They are less costly and time-consuming and can cover much larger samples. Further, the response rate of the interview method is high, particularly when compared to mailed questionnaires. Most importantly, the validity of the information can be checked. Since the respondent's confidence can be sought through personal rapport, in-depth probing is possible. The interviewer can explain difficult terms and clear up any confusion and misunderstandings. He gets the opportunity to observe the non-verbal behaviour of the respondent, which thus enables him to record the responses in the right perspective.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire consists of a list of preset questions to which respondents are asked to supply answers. Questionnaire poses a structured and standardised set of questions, either to one person or to a small population, or most commonly to respondents in a sample survey. Structure here refers to questions appearing in a consistent, predetermined sequence and form. Researchers who use questionnaires regard them as a comparatively cheap, fast and efficient method for obtaining large amounts of quantifiable data on relatively large numbers of people.

Questionnaires may be administered in a number of ways. Questionnaires may either be distributed by mail or by hand, through arrangements such as the 'drop-off', where a fieldworker leaves the questionnaire for respondents to complete by

themselves, with the provision either for mailing the complete form back to the research office or for a return call by the fieldworker to collect the questionnaire. A questionnaire administered in a face-to-face interview, or over the telephone (growing in popularity among researchers), is generally termed a 'schedule'. Often, they are given to individuals by interviewers, in which case they take the form of structured interviews. This method was used by Goldthorpe and Lockwood in the affluent worker study and by Young and Willmott in their survey of family life in London conducted in 1970. This method has the advantage of having a trained interviewer on hand to make sure that the questionnaire is completed according to instructions and to clarify any ambiguous questions. However, questionnaires administered by interviewers involve the problem of 'interviewer bias'. Further, this method is expensive in comparison to other alternatives available such as postal questionnaire. As its name suggests, a postal questionnaire is mailed to respondents with a stamped addressed envelope for return to the researcher. It is a cheaper method of data collection, especially if the respondents are dispersed over a large geographical area. However, the response rate of postal questionnaires is low. In deciding upon one of these methods, the researcher balances the cost, probable response rate and the nature of the questions to be posed.

It is important to note that the set of structured questions in which answers are recorded by the interviewer himself is called *interview schedule*, or simply the *schedule*. It is distinguished from the questionnaire in the sense that in the questionnaire the answers are filled in by the respondent himself. Though the questionnaire is used when the respondents are educated, schedule can be used for both the illiterate and the educated respondents. The questionnaire is especially useful when the respondents are scattered in a large geographical area but the schedule is used when the respondents are located in a small area so that they can be personally contacted. The wording of the questions in the questionnaire has to be simple, since the interviewer is not present to explain the meaning and importance of the question to the respondent. In the schedule, the investigator gets the opportunity to explain whatever the respondent needs to know.

Questionnaires could broadly be classified into three types: *standardised questionnaire*, *open-ended questionnaire* and *close-ended questionnaire*. Standardised questionnaires are those in which there are definite, concrete and pre-ordained questions with additional questions limited to those necessary to clarify inadequate answers or to elicit more detailed responses. The questions are presented with exactly the same wording and in the same order to all the respondents. The reason for standardised questions is to ensure that all the respondents are replying to the same set of questions. Here the respondents or the researcher mark certain categories of reply to the questions asked, for instance, 'yes/no/don't know' or 'very likely/likely/unlikely/very unlikely'. Standardised questionnaires have the advantage that responses are easy to compare and tabulate, since only a small number of categories are involved. On the other hand, because the standardised questions do not allow for subtleties of opinion or verbal expressions, the information they yield is likely to be restricted in scope.

Open-ended questions allow the respondent to compose his own answers rather than choosing between a number of given answers. For example, 'What's your view on the reservation policy in India?' Open-ended questionnaires are designed to permit a free response from the subject rather than one limited to certain alternatives. This may provide more valid data since he can say what he means in his own words. However, this kind of response may be difficult to classify and quantify. Answers must be carefully interpreted before the researcher is able to arrive at certain conclusion.

Close-ended or fixed-choice questions, on the other hand, require the respondent to make a choice between a number of given answers. For example, 'Do you agree with the reservation policy in India?' The answer choices given are, 'yes', 'no', and 'partly'. From the point of view of the interpretation of questionnaires, the closed question is preferable. The results are unambiguous and comparable. With an open question, the heterogeneous answers must first be ordered into classes (codified) before they can be interpreted. Constructing classes in this way is sometimes very laborious and a challenging task. From the point of view of the reliability of interview data also, the closed question is preferable. This is because that the response to an open-ended question is subjected to the perception and linguistic ability of the respondent and under certain circumstances this can produce serious distortions.

Although the content of questionnaires is governed by the purpose of the study, many problems of communication may still arise on all surveys regardless of the content. Much careful attention and experimentation are needed to produce effectively worded questions. The language should be concise and directed towards producing uniformity of understanding among the respondents. Great care is therefore needed in designing a questionnaire. Sometimes the main survey is preceded by a 'pilot study', which involves giving the questionnaire to a group similar to the population to be surveyed. This helps to clear up any ambiguity in the wording of questions and to ensure their relevance to future respondents. Ideally, the questions should mean the same thing to all respondents. As earlier discussed, this is extremely difficult to ensure, particularly if respondents are drawn from different social classes and ethnic groups. In addition, the researcher must be aware of the meaning respondents give to the question. He cannot simply assume that they will share his interpretation (Haralambos and Heald, 2006).

More importantly, questions must not only elicit stable or reliable answers but they must also provide the kind of information, which the researcher wants. More often, the problem of truth is a much more complex one. A good questionnaire will contain some 'check questions' on crucial issues, variously placed within the document, designed to parallel or confirm each other. Sometimes, these will explore other facets of the same behaviour. Usually, the cross-check question is a kind of *specification*. That is, a general question is checked by specific reference.

Questionnaires provide data which can be easily quantified. They are largely designed for this purpose. Those who adopt a positivist approach insist that this kind of measurement is essential if sociology is to progress. They argue that only

when the social world is expressed in numerical terms can precise relationships be established between its parts. Only when data are quantified by means of reliable measuring instruments can the results of different studies be directly compared. Without quantification, sociology will remain on the level of impressionistic guesswork and unsupported insight. It will, therefore, be impossible to replicate studies, establish causal relationships and support generalisations. The questionnaire is one of the main tools of measurement in positivist sociology (ibid.).

Operationalisation of concepts is an important aspect in the construction of a questionnaire. This means concepts are defined in terms of their empirical referents and, thus, put into a form which can be measured. Sociologists classify the social world in terms of a variety of concepts. For example, social class, power, family, religion, alienation and anomie are concepts used to identify and categorise social relationships, beliefs, attitudes and experiences which are seen to have certain characteristics in common. In order to transpose these rather vague concepts into measuring instruments, a number of steps are taken. First, an operational definition is established. This involves breaking the concept down into various 'components' or 'dimensions' in order to specify exactly what is to be measured. Thus, when Robert Blauner attempted to operationalise the concept of alienation, he divided it into four components: powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement. Once the concept has been operationally defined in terms of a number of components, the next step involves the selection of 'indicators' for each component. Thus, an indicator of Blauner's component of powerlessness might be an absence of opportunities for workers to make decisions about the organisation of work tasks. Finally, indicators of each dimension are put into the form of a series of questions, which will provide quantifiable data for measuring each dimension (ibid.).

However, whether such procedures succeed in producing valid measurements of human behaviour is open to question. Scholars belonging to phenomenological tradition often reject the entire procedure of operational definitions, selecting indicators, constructing questionnaires and quantifying the results. They argue that rather than providing a valid picture of the social world, such operations merely serve to distort it. From the phenomenological perspective, the social world is constructed by its members. Hence, phenomenologists argue that the job of the sociologist should be to investigate how members construct or perceive their world. According to phenomenologists, positivist research procedures merely impose sociological constructs, categories and logic on that world. Thus, when Blauner seeks to measure alienation, he is employing a concept which may have no reality in the social world. Phenomenologists argue that instead of imposing sociological categories and measuring instruments on the social world, sociologists should discover whether workers even categorise jobs in terms of satisfaction or not, and if so, investigate the procedures they employ to arrive at such categorisation.

There is little doubt that questionnaires are rather inexpensive and for that reason quite attractive. This is not merely a question of saving money but also of

saving administrative time and talent, e.g. by using the mail system instead of a costly *ad hoc* staff of interviewers. One special advantage lies in the simultaneity of access. If it is important to reach all respondents at the same time, this is probably easier by means of questionnaires than interviews.

Observation

Observation is a method that employs vision as its main means of data collection. It implies the use of eyes rather than of ears and the voice. It is accurate watching and noting of phenomena as they occur with regard to the cause-and-effect or mutual relations. It is watching other persons' behaviour as it actually happens without controlling it. For example, observing the life of street children or a religious ceremony in any community.

Lindzey Gardner has defined observation as 'selection, provocation, recording and encoding of that set of behaviours and settings concerning organisms *in situ* (naturalistic settings) which are consistent with empirical aims'. In this definition, *selection* means that there is a focus in observation and also editing before, during and after the observations are made. *Provocation* means that though observers do not destroy natural settings, they can make subtle changes in natural settings, which increase clarity. *Recording* means that observed incidents/events are recorded for subsequent analysis. *Encoding* involves simplification of records (Ahuja, 2008).

According to Black and Champion, the major purpose of observation is to capture human conduct as it actually happens. In other methods, we get a static comprehension of people's activity. In actual situation, they sometimes modify their views, sometimes contradict themselves and sometimes are so swayed by the situation that they react differently altogether. They further argue that observation can be used as a tool of collecting information in situations where methods other than observation cannot prove to be useful, e.g. voter's behaviour during election time or worker's behaviour during strike.

Participant observation is one of the most important qualitative methodologies in which the researcher participates in the daily life of the population under study, observing things that happen, listening to conversations, informally questioning people. This may be done covertly, as when a sociologist becomes a prison inmate in order to study the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes. It may also be done openly, by joining a group in the formal role of the observer.

In other words, participant observation is a method in which the investigator becomes a part of the situation he is studying. He involves himself in the setting and group life of the research subjects. He shares the activities of the community, observing what is going on around him, supplementing this by conversations and interviews. One of the pioneering uses of participant observation by sociologists in a modern setting is recorded in William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*.

Street Corner Society is a study of an Italian American street-corner gang in a low-income district of south Boston. Whyte spent three and a half years living in

the area as a participant observer. Whyte studied lower-class 'slum' street-corner groups by joining and talking informally with the members. He gained access to the first group through a social worker, became friendly with the group's leader, was introduced to other groups and finally was accepted as 'one of them' although he did not have to 'play their game all the way'. By 'hanging out' on the street corner for a period of time, Whyte gained much valuable information about the group's goals and structure and the motivations of its members.

Supporters of participant observations have argued that, compared to other research techniques, it is least likely to lead to the sociologist imposing his reality on the social world he seeks to understand. It, therefore, provides the best means of obtaining a valid picture of social reality. With a structured interview – a predetermined set of questions which the interviewee is requested to answer – or a questionnaire – a set of printed questions to which the respondent is asked to provide written answer – the sociologist has already decided what is important. With preset questions, he imposes his framework and priorities on those he wishes to study. By assuming the questions are relevant to his respondents, he has already made many assumptions about their social world. Although the participant observer begins his work with some preconceived ideas, for example, he will usually have studied the existing literature on the topic he is to investigate; he at least has the opportunity to directly observe the social world (Haralambos and Heald, 2006).

However, the success of participant observation depends initially upon the acceptance of the observer by the group he wishes to study. Once accepted, the participant observer must gain the trust of those he observes to be successful. Further, there are also the challenges of objectivity and value-neutrality. Since the observer participates in the events, sometimes he becomes so involved that he loses objectivity in observation. He may start interpreting events subjectively. Further, his presence may sensitise the subjects that they do not act in a natural way. In other words, his presence will to some degree influence the actions of those he observes. In this way he may modify or change the social world he wishes to investigate.

Positivists who argue that research methods in sociology should be drawn from the natural sciences are, however, highly critical of participant observation. They argue that the data obtained from participant observation lack 'reliability' since there is no way of replicating a study and checking the consistency of its results. Since the success of participant observation relies heavily on the rapport between the researcher and his respondents, his interpretive skills and personality, the exact replication of studies using this method are difficult, if not impossible. Hence, it is not possible to generalise from such studies. However, the value of participant observation studies seems to lie in providing useful insights which can then be tested on larger samples using more rigorous and systematic methods.

The above criticisms derive mainly from those who adopt a strongly positivist approach. Others would argue that what the findings of participant observation

lack in reliability, they often more than make up for in validity. By coming face to face with social reality, the participant observer at least has the opportunity to make valid observations. Many would argue that the systematic questionnaire surveys favoured by many positivists have little or no chance of tapping the real social world (ibid.).

In non-participant observation, the observer remains detached and does not participate or intervene in the activities of those who are being observed. He merely observes their behaviour. Sometimes, this places the persons being observed in an awkward position and their conduct becomes unnatural. But some say that though initially the observer's behaviour may affect the behaviour of the observed, after a little while, less and less attention is paid to his presence. This type of observation is more useful as a tool of data collection because the observer can choose the situations to be observed and can record the data freely. This is because the observer is not required to participate actively in the social processes at work in the social field he is observing. Since he is not himself immediately affected by the demands of the situation, he can concentrate his whole attention more easily on systematic observation of the situation and what is happening in it.

Content Analysis

Bernard Berelson defined content analysis as 'a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications'. Content analysis is a research tool focused on the actual content and internal features of media. It is used to determine the presence of certain words, concepts, themes, phrases, characters or sentences within texts or sets of texts and to quantify this presence in an objective manner.

Content analysis or textual analysis is a methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of the communication. Earl Babbie defines it as 'the study of recorded human communications, such as books, websites, paintings, and laws'. Harold Lasswell formulated the core questions of content analysis: 'Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?' Ole Holsti offers a broad definition of content analysis as 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages'.

In other words, content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, and then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience and even the culture and time of which these are a part.

Texts can be defined broadly as books, book chapters, essays, interviews, discussions, newspaper headlines and articles, historical documents, speeches, conversations, advertising, theatre, informal conversation or really any occurrence of communicative language. To conduct a content analysis on any such

text, the text is coded, or broken down, into manageable categories on a variety of levels – word, word sense, phrase, sentence or theme – and then examined using one of content analysis' basic methods: conceptual analysis or relational analysis. Conceptual analysis can be thought of as establishing the existence and frequency of concepts in a text. Relational analysis builds on conceptual analysis by examining the relationships among concepts in a text.

Content analysis is a product of the electronic age. Though content analysis was regularly performed in the 1940s, it became a more credible and frequently used research method since the mid-1950s, as researchers started to focus on concepts rather than simply words, and on semantic relationships rather than just presence. While both traditions still continue today, content analysis now is also utilised to explore mental models, and their linguistic, affective, cognitive, social, cultural and historical significance. Due to the fact that it can be applied to examine any piece of writing or occurrence of recorded communication, content analysis is used in large number of fields, ranging from marketing and media studies to literature and rhetoric, ethnography and cultural studies, gender and age issues, sociology and political science, psychology and cognitive science, as well as other fields of enquiry.

For example, in a research project on gender issues, the content of the text books (particularly the stories) was analysed and it was found how gender relations prevailing in our society manifested themselves, as well as got reinforced by the gender roles described in the various stories. The girl child often was depicted as an obedient child, helping the mother in the household chores. On the other hand, the boy was often portrayed as school going, naughty and aiming high in life. Similarly, the content analysis of the local newspapers in rural hinterland could throw light on the prevailing caste relations and the nature of the caste conflict.

Bernard Berelson has identified the various uses of content analysis. Some of them are listed below:

1. It reveals international differences in communication content.
2. It can detect the existence of propaganda.
3. It can identify the intentions, focus or communication trends of an individual, group or institution.
4. It helps in describing attitudinal and behavioural responses to communications.
5. It can determine psychological or emotional state of persons or groups.

Content analysis offers several advantages to researchers who consider using it. Some of them are as follows:

1. It is an unobtrusive means of analysing interactions. One of the significant advantages of content analysis is that it is an *unobtrusive* method, i.e. it has no effect on the subject being studied. In other methods (like interview, observation, experiment, etc.), the researcher is directly involved with

persons. Content analysis eliminates the source of 'response bias' that threatens research whenever the respondents are directly questioned or observed.
2. It looks directly at communication via texts or transcripts, and hence gets at the central aspect of social interaction.
3. It can allow for both quantitative and qualitative operations.
4. It can provide valuable historical/cultural insights over time through analysis of texts.
5. It makes possible a variety of cross-cultural studies that would likely be unfeasible using other methods.
6. It provides insight into complex models of human thought and language use.

Content analysis suffers from several disadvantages, both theoretical and procedural. Some of them are as follows:

1. Since content analysis is a heavily planned method, it lacks the spontaneity often required in the field research.
2. It can be extremely time-consuming.
3. Content analysis is subject to increased error, particularly when relational analysis is used to attain a higher level of interpretation.
4. It is often devoid of theoretical base, or attempts too liberally to draw meaningful inferences about the relationships and impacts implied in a study.
5. It often disregards the context that produced the text, as well as the state of things after the text is produced.
6. Some required documents may not be available to the researcher, which may affect the conclusions.
7. It is susceptible to coder's bias (Ahuja, 2008).

One of the leading debates among the users of content analysis is whether analysis should be quantitative or qualitative. Berelson, for example, suggests that content analysis is 'objective, systematic, and quantitative'. Similarly, Silverman dismisses content analysis from his discussion of qualitative data analysis 'because it is a quantitative method'. Selltiz et al., however, state that concerns over quantification in content analysis tend to emphasise 'the procedures of analysis', rather than the 'character of the data available'. Selltiz et al. suggest also that heavy quantitative content analysis results in a somewhat arbitrary limitation in the field by excluding all accounts of communication that are not in the form of numbers as well as those that may lose meaning if reduced to a numeric form (definitions, symbols, detailed explanations, photographs and so forth). Other proponents of the content analysis, notably Smith, suggest that some blend of both quantitative and qualitative analysis should be used. Smith explains that he has taken this position 'because qualitative analysis deals with the forms and antecedent-consequent patterns of form, while quantitative analysis deals with duration and frequency of form'. Abrahamson suggests that 'content analysis can be fruitfully employed to examine virtually any type of communication'. As a

consequence, content analysis may focus on either quantitative or qualitative aspects of communication messages.

Another controversy concerning the use of content analysis is whether the analysis should be limited to *manifest content* (those elements that are physically present and countable) or extended to more *latent content*. In the latter case, the analysis is extended to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data. For example, an entire speech may be assessed for how radical it was, or a novel could be considered in terms of how violent the entire text was. In other words, manifest content is comparable to the *surface structure* present in the message, and latent content is the *deep structural* meaning conveyed by the message. Holsti has tried to resolve this debate:

> It is true that only the manifest attributes of text may be coded, but this limitation is already implied by the requirement of objectivity. Inferences about latent meanings of messages are therefore permitted but … they require corroboration by independent evidence.

One reasonable interpretation of this passage, and a similar statement made by Berelson, suggests that although there are some dangers in directly inferring from latent symbolism, it is nonetheless possible to use it. To accomplish this sort of 'deciphering' of latent symbolic meaning, researchers must first incorporate independent corroborative techniques (for example, agreement between independent coders concerning latent content or some non-content analytic source). Finally, and especially when latent symbolism may be discussed, researchers should offer detailed excerpts from relevant statements (messages) that serve to document the researchers' interpretations.

Focus Group

Focus group is a qualitative research method of data collection in social sciences. Over the past decade, focus groups and group interviews have emerged as popular techniques for gathering qualitative data, both among sociologists and across a wide range of academic and applied research areas.

David L. Morgan has defined focus groups as 'a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher'. This definition has three essential components. First, it clearly states that focus groups are a research method devoted to data collection. Second, it locates the interaction in a group discussion as the source of the data. Third, it acknowledges the researcher's active role in creating the group discussion for data collection purposes.

Thus, on the basis of this definition, focus groups should be distinguished from groups whose primary purpose is something other than research, for example, therapy, education, decision-making, etc. Further, it is useful to distinguish focus groups from procedures that utilise multiple participants but do not allow interactive discussions, such as nominal groups and Delphi groups. Finally, focus groups should be distinguished from methods that collect data from naturally occurring group

discussions where no one acts as an interviewer. However, there is a difference of opinion among scholars on the issue whether focus groups should be distinguished from other types of group interviews. On the one hand are the scholars who use an inclusive approach and treat most forms of group interviews as variants of focus groups. On the other hand, there are scholars who use an exclusive approach and treat focus group as a distinct technique which should not be confused with other types of group interviews. In this regard, Frey and Fontana argue that group interviews can be distinguished from focus groups on the basis of three features:

- first, group interviews are conducted in informal settings
- second, group interviews use non-directive interviewing
- third, group interviews use unstructured question formats

Similarly, Stewart and Shamdasani associate focus groups with more or less directive interviewing styles and structured question formats. However, applied demographers such as John Knodel, who have held focus group interviews throughout the world, concluded that focus groups can be adapted to a wide variety of settings and culture practices. Hence, in actual practice, it would be quite difficult to apply the above-mentioned classification as the methodology of focus groups or group interviews is largely dependent on the purpose of a particular project as well as the sociocultural context.

Today, focus groups, like other qualitative methods, are being used across a wide variety of research areas including education, public health, marketing research, etc. In recent years, two specific areas where the applied use of focus groups has had a major and continuing link to sociology are family planning and HIV/AIDS. Studies conducted in these areas suggest that the use of focus groups facilitated better understanding of knowledge, attitudes and practices with regard to contraception in the Third World countries. Further, an important aspect of focus group method is that it facilitates participatory research. Various studies have suggested that use of focus group method in HIV/AIDS research has not only facilitated a better understanding of the problems being faced by at-risk groups, but it also serves to 'give a voice' to such marginalised groups (Morgan, 1996).

Uses of Focus Groups in Combination with Other Methods

Focus groups can be used either independently or in combination with other methods such as individual interviews, surveys, etc.

Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

Both focus groups and individual interviews are qualitative techniques of data collection. But while focus groups and group interviews provide greater breath to the research, individual interviews, on the other hand, provide greater depth. Various researchers have often used in-depth individual interviews as a follow-up to focus group studies in order to ascertain the degree of consistency or discrepancy in the responses of the participants.

Focus Groups and Surveys

Morgan has described four ways of combining quantitative and qualitative methods using survey and focus groups as example. The four ways of combining the methods are based on 'which method received the primary attention and whether the secondary method served as a preliminary or follow-up study'.

First combination: *Survey as the primary method and focus group for preliminary study*

The first combination contains studies in which surveys are the primary method and focus groups serve in a preliminary capacity. Survey researchers typically use this design to develop the context of their questionnaires. Because surveys are inherently limited by the questions they ask, it is increasingly common to use focus groups to provide data on how the respondents themselves talk about the topics of the survey.

For example, in order to carry out a survey on the factors that influence the voting behaviour of people in rural areas, a preliminary focus group study may be undertaken to list various important factors and issues that people take into account when voting such as caste, religion, socio-economic status of the contestants, etc. The data thus collected from this preliminary focus group study may be used to design the questionnaire for the survey study.

Second combination: *Focus groups as the primary method and survey for preliminary study*

In the second combination, focus groups are the primary method, while surveys provide preliminary inputs. Studies following this research design make use of the data obtained from survey in selecting samples for focus groups to carry out a detailed analysis.

For example, a preliminary survey study may be carried out to know about the opinion of students regarding implementation of semester system. After determining the general opinion of the students either for or against the semester system, a more intense and detailed focus group study may be carried out to find out the reasons that students give for their respective opinion.

Third combination: *Survey as the primary method and focus group as a follow-up*

The third combination uses survey as the primary method and focus group as a follow-up study. This type of research design is increasingly being used for interpreting the survey results and in determining the degree to which the results of both methods are in conformity or at variance with each other. For example, if a survey study finds out that people in rural areas give high priority to caste factor during voting, it may be cross-checked by a follow-up focus group study.

Fourth combination: *Focus group as the primary method and survey as a follow-up*

The fourth combination uses focus group as the primary method and survey as a follow-up. For example, if a focus group study suggests caste as the most important factor determining the voting behaviour of people in rural India, it can be cross-checked by a follow-up survey.

In comparison, survey offers more breadth to research both in terms of coverage of area and coverage of issues. Focus group offers more depth to research by means of in-depth and detailed investigation over a topic.

Strength and Weakness of Focus Groups

Morgan and Krueger argue that compared to other methods, the real strength of focus groups is not simply in exploring what people have to say, but in providing insights into the sources of complex behaviours and motivations. They view this advantage of focus groups as a direct outcome of the interaction in focus groups. What makes the discussion in focus groups more than the sum of separate individual interviews is the fact that the participants both query each other and introduce themselves to each other. Morgan and Krueger argue that such interaction offers valuable data on the extent of consensus and diversity among the participants. This ability to observe the extent and nature of interviewees' agreement and disagreement is a unique strength of focus groups.

The weaknesses of focus groups, like their strengths, are linked to the process of producing focused interactions, raising issues about both the role of the moderator in generating the data and the impact of the group itself on the data. Agar and MacDonald, and Saferstein from their respective studies have concluded that the behaviour of the moderator has consequences for the nature of group interviews.

Sussman et al. in their study administered questionnaires before and after focus group discussion to find out if the focus group discussion changed the participants' attitudes. They found that the attitudes became more extreme after the group discussion. In other words, after the focus group discussion, there was a polarisation effect on the attitudes of the participants. Thus, it could be concluded that 'group effect' also influences the response of participants in a focus group.

Further, critics argue that only a limited range of topics can be researched effectively in groups. It is argued that some sensitive issues may be unacceptable for discussion among some categories of research participants. However, this assumption is being questioned in the light of widespread use of group interviews to study various sensitive issues like sexual behaviour, etc. (Morgan, 1996).

Comparative Method

Comparative method refers to the study of different types of groups and societies in order to determine analytically the factors that lead to similarities and differences in specified patterns of behaviour.

Comparative method is an integral component of the positivist tradition in sociology. The founding fathers of sociology like Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim laid great emphasis on the use of 'comparative method' in any sociological enquiry. In the nineteenth century, when sociology as a discipline was still in its infancy stage, the principal attraction of the comparative method lay in the belief that it could be used for discovering scientific laws about human society and culture. The strong advocates of the comparative method believed in the possibility of a natural science of society that would establish regularities of coexistence and succession among the forms of social life by means of systematic comparisons. Unlike natural sciences, sociology cannot make proper use of experimental method in the study of any particular social phenomena in a laboratory due to certain moral and ethical reasons. But a sociologist can surely experiment in the laboratory of the world by employing the comparative method.

Not only was the early use of the comparative method tied to the idea of a natural science of society, it was, more specifically, tied to the theory of evolution. A large part of nineteenth-century anthropology was concerned with the origins of phenomena and the reconstruction of the stages through which they had evolved from simplest to their most complex forms. The classification and comparison of the forms of social life became an indispensable part of this process of reconstruction (Beteille, 2009).

The central place assigned to comparison was signalled by Durkheim when he wrote: 'Comparative sociology is not a special branch of sociology; it is sociology itself'. Durkheim regarded the comparative method as the counterpart in the social sciences of the experimental method pursued in natural sciences. He recognised that social fact could only be observed, not artificially produced, under experimental conditions. Therefore, Durkheim favoured a comparative-historical approach because sociologists could not carry out experiments and had to rely on the method of indirect experiment, that is, the comparison of similar cases in a systematic way. In this regard, it is important to note that Durkheim, following J.S. Mill's *System of Logic*, refers appreciatively to the 'method of concomitant variations' as the procedure of the comparative method. He calls it 'instrument par excellence of sociological research'. Please note that concomitant variation simply refers to the method of establishing statistical correlation between two variables. For example, Durkheim in his study of suicide found that Germany, a Protestant-dominated country, reported a high suicide rate, whereas Spain, a Catholic-dominated country, reported a low suicide rate. Hence, he arrived at the conclusion that the rate of suicide is correlated with the religious faith in a society.

However, in this regard, S.F. Nadel in his work *The Foundations of Social Anthropology* argues that the notion of concomitant variations does not mean the same thing in J.S. Mill's *System of Logic* and in Durkheim's sociological treatise. Nadel argues that while for Mill concomitant variations imply quantitative correlation, Durkheim makes and advocates the use of comparative method with concomitant variations to arrive at qualitative correlations. For instance, after having arrived at a statistical correlation between the suicide rate and a

particular religion, he further explores what makes people of a particular religious faith more or less prone to suicide. The answer he arrived at was solidarity. The lower degree of solidarity or social integration among the Protestants made them prone to greater suicidal tendencies, while higher solidarity among the Catholics, affirmed by the age-old institution of Church, resulted in relatively fewer suicides. Hence, Durkheim concluded that 'the rate of suicide is inversely proportional to the degree of solidarity'.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955), in Britain, was another strong advocate of the comparative method. Radcliffe-Brown borrowed a great deal from Durkheim, including the idea that societies were governed by laws that could be discovered by the application of the proper method. That method was the comparative method based on observation, description and comparison of societies as they actually existed. He often used the term 'comparative sociology' as a synonym for social anthropology. He argued that in comparative sociology or social anthropology, the purpose of comparison is to explore the varieties of forms of social life as a basis for the theoretical study of human social phenomena. In his essay 'The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology', Radcliffe-Brown further extended the argument of Durkheim to explain why a particular totem is chosen by a society or group as its totem. In a comparative analysis of various tribes of Australia and north-west America, he found various instances whereby a tribe was divided into two exogamous moieties and each moiety represented by particular natural specie as its totem. For example, in case of Australian aborigines in New South Wales, the two moieties were represented by eaglehawk and crow. On the basis of his comparative study, he concluded that the selection of a particular set of natural species as the totem by the two exogamous moieties of a tribe is also associated with their inter-group social relations. He found it common that natural species were placed in pairs of opposites, with certain degree of resemblances as well as differences. He interpreted the resemblances and differences of animal species in terms of social relationships of friendship and antagonism in human society.

Thus, on the basis of his comparative study he arrived at a higher order generalisation that relationships of mutual alliance and antagonism are universal to human society. However, the manner in which these relationships of alliance and opposition get reflected may vary from society to society. For example, in his comparative study of the institution of marriage, he found that the expression of relationships of alliance and opposition may take the form of joking and avoidance relationship. In joking relationship, members of opposite divisions are permitted or expected to indulge in teasing each other, in verbal abuse or in exchange of insults. Joking relationships serve to protect the delicate relationships between persons who are bound together in one set of ties and yet separated by other ties. For example, the members of different lineages are socially separated from each other, but, if they marry each other, they are also allied. Joking, thus, is one way of defusing the tensions of certain delicate relationships. Another response is avoidance or extreme respect. It prevents conflicts that might arise

through divergence of interest. In many societies, a man is required to avoid any close social contact with the mother of his wife and others (Radcliffe-Brown, 1958).

However, André Béteille in his essay 'Some Observations on the Comparative Method' argues that the great wave of enthusiasm for the comparative method belongs to the past, and today there are probably more sceptics than enthusiasts. Among the sceptics, Franz Boas, Goldenweiser and Evans-Pritchard are some of the important names. For example, Franz Boas objected to the sweeping generalisations made through the use of comparative method, and recommended studies on a more limited geographical scale. He clearly stated his preference for 'historical method' over and above the comparative method. Similarly, Evans-Pritchard recommended intensive comparative investigation in a limited area rather than going for universal generalisations. Similarly, scholars belonging to the phenomenological tradition argue that the application of this method is not as simple as it may appear because social units have different meanings in different societies. For instance, the institution of marriage among Hindus is regarded as an indissoluble and sacred bond between husband and wife. Muslim marriage, on the other hand, is not a religious sacrament but a secular bond. It is a social or civil contract, which can be terminated (Beteille, 2009).

However, despite these criticisms and limitations of comparative method, its significance in sociology cannot be undermined. For example, Durkheim and Weber in their respective works have clearly highlighted the importance of comparative method as a scientific for sociological enquiry for a comprehensive understanding of social reality.

Historical Method

As discussed earlier, enquiries in social sciences could be classified in two categories: the nomothetic and the ideographic. According to this classification, the ideographic sciences are those which study unique and unrepeatable events, while the nomothetic sciences attempt to make generalisations. We can, thus, call sociology as a nomothetic science and history as an ideographic science. Historians try to increase our accurate knowledge of unique phenomena of the past, whereas sociologists try to seek information about certain uniformities in social behaviour under specific conditions. This, in principle, is the difference between the two modes of enquiry. However, the data of history are also widely used now by sociologists. On the other hand, historians have also started using data generated by sociologists for their own writings.

Historical method is one of the important methods to analyse the process of social change that occurred in the past. It involves the study of origins, development and transformation of social institutions over a period of time. The historical method in sociology has taken two principal forms. The first is that of early sociologists, initially influenced by the philosophy of history and later by biological theory of evolution. It concentrates upon the origin, development and

transformation of social institutions, societies and civilisations. It is concerned with the whole span of human history with all the major institutions of society, as in the works of Comte, Spencer, Hobhouse, etc. It was also employed by Karl Marx in conjunction with dialectical materialism in understanding the human societies. Marx talked of dialectical materialism to explain change as a historical phenomenon. According to Marx, the history of all the hitherto societies is the history of class struggle. He classified the evolution of human society in terms of the following stages, viz. primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society, capitalist society and communism.

Yet another form of historical method is characteristic of the works of Max Weber. This is exemplified, especially, in his studies of the origins of capitalism, the development of modern bureaucracy and the economic influence of the world religions. The main methodological features of these studies are that particular historical changes of social structures and types of society are investigated and are compared in certain respects with changes in other societies. In this manner, both causal explanations and historical interpretations find a place in the social explanation. A very convincing illustration of this approach of Weber is to be found in his treatment of the growth of capitalism in Europe, as he brings out in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

P.V. Young, in her book *Scientific Social Surveys and Research*, describes sources of historical data highlighting both the adequacy and the limitations of historical data. The social scientists generally confine themselves to three major sources of historical information: (i) documents and various historical sources to which historians themselves have access, (ii) materials of cultural history and of analytical history and (iii) personal sources of authentic observers and witnesses. When, how and under what circumstances these sources are to be used depends upon the discretion of the researcher's interest, the scope of the study and the availability of the sources. Historical data have some limitations, which arise mainly because historians cannot describe all the happenings in time and space available at the time of writing history. Personal biases and private interpretations, often, enter unconsciously, even when honest attempts are made to select and interpret pertinent facts.

LET'S THINK

Dear Learner, I am sure that by now you must have understood the technicalities and complexities of sociological research. You must have also understood the challenges that are associated with sociological research, especially with regard to maintaining reliability and validity, in other words, objectivity in research. Can you now think of a social problem that you may wish to investigate? Develop a hypothesis and prepare your research design. What techniques of data collection would you choose for the purpose of your research and why?

For Practice

Q1. Analyse the changing notion of the 'field' in sociological research with suitable examples.

Q2. Comparative sociology is not a special branch of sociology; it is sociology itself. Discuss.

Q3. Participant observation is the most effective tool for collecting facts. Comment.

Q4. Compare and contrast the quantitative research methodology with qualitative research methodology. Which of the two in your opinion is best suited for sociological research?

Q5. Formulate a hypothesis, research design and list the research techniques you would use to understand the influences on marriage choices among young people.

Model Answers

Q. Compare and contrast the quantitative research methodology with qualitative research methodology. Which of the two in your opinion is best suited for sociological research?

A. Methodology is an integral aspect of any scientific discipline. In sociology, two major methodological traditions could be identified, viz. quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative research in sociology is largely associated with the 'positivist tradition'. Early sociologists belonging to the positivist tradition, such as Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, etc., believed that social reality can be studied with the same methods and procedures as that of natural sciences. This assertion of positivist was largely based on the following assumptions. First, they viewed social reality as an objective reality and believed that the behaviour of man, like the behaviour of matter, can be objectively measured. Second, they placed particular emphasis on behaviour that can be directly observed, and ignored those aspects of behaviour which are not directly observable, such as subjective meanings, feelings and motives unique to an individual actor. Some of the key features of quantitative research in sociology are: (i) it focuses on the study of social facts and treats social facts as 'things', (ii) it relies on statistical data to establish correlation and cause-and-effect relationship between two or more variables and (iii) it assumes the cause-and-effect relationship so arrived can be universally generalised subject to empirical verification and replication. The study of suicide by Durkheim could be cited as one of the best demonstrations of the application of this methodology. Quantitative research is associated with a number of techniques of data collection such as survey, questionnaire, structured interview and secondary sources of data, etc. Quantitative

methodology facilitates extensive research and, thus, adds more breadth to research. Though it offers high reliability, it scores low in validity.

On the other hand, some scholars argued that in order to have a complete understanding of man's social behaviour, it is not only important but also necessary to take into account the unique meanings, motives and values that underlie such behaviour. These scholars, such as Max Weber, G.H. Mead, etc., are largely associated with the anti-positivist tradition and emphasise on the interpretative understanding of social action. They advocate the use of qualitative research methods such as participant observation, unstructured interview, focus group, case study method, etc. to understand human social behaviour. Some of the key features of qualitative research in sociology are as follows:

(i) it focuses on empathetic description of reality,
(ii) it exhibits a preference for contextualism and
(iii) views social life as dynamic and emphasises on its processual dimension.

Malinowski, W.F. Whyte, Srinivas, André Béteille, etc. used qualitative research methods, participant observation to be more specific, in their respective studies. Qualitative methodology facilitates intensive research and, thus, adds more depth to research. Though it offers high validity, it scores low in reliability.

However, most sociologists in contemporary times suggest a combination of both research methodologies in their social research to enhance its reliability as well validity. For example, Alan Bryman has suggested a number of ways in which a plurality of methods – a practice known as *triangulation* – can be useful.

Q. Formulate a hypothesis, research design and list the research techniques you would use to understand the influences on marriage choices among young people.

A. Sociology is a scientific study of society and all phenomena and processes that unfold within it. Sociological theories are arrived at on the basis of empirical research. Sociological research, thus, is not a random search for facts. It is a guided research that begins with defining precisely the objective of the research. A clearly defined and verifiable hypothesis is, thus, the first step in sociological research which guides and directs sociological research.

A hypothesis is a tentative statement asserting a relationship between two or more variables, though there could be several factors that may influence the marriage choices of young people, such as caste, religion, region, education, career orientation, etc. However, in the light of the research problem stated above, one of the possible hypotheses could be: 'Increase in literacy rate is directly proportional to the average marital age' or 'Increase in education tends to increase the incidence of inter-caste marriages in India'.

The next step is to develop a research design. A research design is a plan for the collection, analysis and evaluation of data. It involves:

Step 1: Identification of a suitable field. It could be a group of undergraduate students in a university or young people visiting a mall.

Step 2: Choice of a sampling method (for a representative sample).

Step 3: Selection of appropriate techniques of data collection as per field requirements. For example, if the sample size is large and dispersed, then considering the time and cost factor, a survey through questionnaire would be more suitable. However, if the sample is small, then data can be collected with the help of an interview schedule or structured interview. Some of the sample questions could be: 'What is your name?', 'What is your caste/religion?', 'What are your educational qualifications?', 'For marriage, which of the following factors is most important for you?' (caste, religion, education, income, etc.), 'At what age would you prefer to get married?' (15–20 years, 20–25 years, 25–30 years, etc.).

Step 4: Cross-checking of data. Let's say if the primary technique of data collection was a quantitative method, e.g. questionnaire, then these findings can be cross-checked with the help of a qualitative method, e.g. an interview. This process of cross-checking the reliability and validity of data by adopting a plurality of methods is called triangulation by Alan Bryman.

Step 5: Data analysis in the next step in order to identify certain patterns, if any, and establish a cause-and-effect relationship between variables as proposed in the hypothesis.

Step 6: Report writing. The findings of the research are finally submitted as a report for further verification.

Sociological findings thus arrived at could facilitate the understanding of the complex social reality and contribute significantly in the formulation of social policy and bringing about necessary social reforms.

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SOC 202: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY II

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Restricted Circulation

SOC 202: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY 11

COURSE OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Definition of Concepts in Sociological Research

Chapter 2: Methods and Research Techniques in Sociology
Social Survey
Observation
Experimentation

Chapter 3: The relationship between Methodological and Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology
Major Analytical Divisions in Sociology

Chapter 4: Sociological Theories
Functionalism
Conflict theory
Symbolic Interaction
Social Exchange
Action theory

Chapter 5: Social Problems and Welfare

Chapter 6: Uses of Sociology and Careers for Sociologists

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTS IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

1. **Variable**: A dimension along which an object, individual or group may be categorized, such as income, height or weight. It is a characteristic which can be measured and which may vary along a continuum. The concept is used in empirical social research to denote the representation of a social factor such as, social class, employment status, years of education, which can be observed to affect other measures, such as income level (which may be influenced by all those mentioned). There are three main types of variables, they are : (i) Independent variable (ii) Dependent variable and (iii) Intervening variable.
2. **Case Study**: The study of a single instance of a phenomenon either for its own sake (e.g. a particular person or strike). It is a research design that takes as its subject a single case or a few selected examples of a social entity- such as communities, social groups, employers, events, life-histories, families, work teams roles or relationships- and employs a variety of methods to study them.
3. **Respondent**: A respondent is a research subject, that is, a person from whom the researcher wants elicit some information. A respondent is a person who answers a questionnaire or a request for information of some kind.
4. **Questionnaire**: A form containing questions to be administered to a number of people mainly in order to obtain information and record opinions. Sociologists in general use questionnaires to;
    (a) Examine the general characteristics of a population (e.g. age, sex, occupation, income, etc.)
    (b) Examine attitudes;

(c) Establish the relationship between two variables (e.g. religion and family size or education and political participation);

(d) Test theories.

5. **Interview**: A method of collecting social data at the individual level. This face-to-face method ensures a higher response rate than postal questionnaires, but can introduce interviewer bias by the effect different interviewers have on the quality, validity and reliability of the data so collected.
6. **Survey**: A method of sociological research involving the administration of questionnaires to a population being studied.
7. **Sampling**: Taking a proportion of individuals or cases from a larger population, studied as representative of that population as a whole. It is a method for collecting information and drawing inferences about a larger population or universe, from the analysis of only thereof, the sample.
8. **Quantification**: The transformation of observations into numerical data to assist analysis and comparison.
9. **Research Design**: The explicit procedures that are used in collecting empirical data. It is a strategic plan for a research project or research programme, setting out the broad outline and key features of the work to be undertaken, including the methods of data collection and analysis to be employed, and showing how the research strategy addresses the specific aims and objectives of the study, and whether the research issues are theoretical or policy oriented.

10. **Reliability**: The dependability of data collected, or of the test or measurement used to collect it. A reliable measure is one which gives the same results if the same individuals are measured on more than one occasion.
11. **Validity**: The extent to which a measure, indicator or method of data collection possesses the quality of being sound or true as far as can be judged.
12. **Correlation**: The association between two variables such that when one changes in magnitude the other one does also, i.e. there is a concomitant variation. Correlation may be positive or negative. Positive correlation describes the situation in which, if one variable increases, so also does the other. Negative correlation describes the situation in which the variables vary inversely, one increasing when the other decreases.
13. **Objectivity**: Accounts of the external world held to represent the world as it exists independently of our conceptions. It is knowledge claimed to meet criteria of validity and reliability, and held to be free from bias.
14. **Subjectivity**: The perspective of the person (subject); lack of objectivity. It is often used pejoratively within positivist sociology to derogate biased observation or methodology.
15. **Empiricism**: In Sociology, the term empiricism is often used, loosely, to describe an orientation to research which emphasizes the collection of facts and observations, at the expense of conceptual reflection and theoretical enquiry. In Sociology, empiricism has been widely adopted as a philosophical approach by those who advocate methodological naturalism: the development of Sociology as a scientific discipline.
16. **Tabulation:** This is the arrangement of information in lists and columns.

16. **Percentages**: A percentage is a fraction expressed as a particular number of hundredths.
17. **Research**: This is an attempt to know new things, facts, information, etc. in a scientific manner. It is a systematized effort or initiative to acquire new knowledge.
18. **Social Research**: This is a systematic method of exploring, analyzing and conceptualizing social life in order to "extend, correct, or verify knowledge, whether that knowledge aids in the construction of a theory or in the practice of an art".
19. **Hypothesis**: An idea, or a guess, about a given state of affairs, put forward as a basis of empirical testing.
20. **Triangulation**: The use of multiple research methods as a way of producing more reliable empirical data than is available from any single method used in isolation.
21. **Science**: The application of systematic methods of research, and careful logical analysis, to the study of objects, events or people; and the body of knowledge produced by such means.
22. **Fieldwork**: Research that is carried out in the field, as opposed to the laboratory, library etc. Fieldwork is the investigation of real-life situations through observation and informal or unstructured interviewing.
23. **Focus Group**: A research method in which selected groups participate in focused discussion on a research issue.
24. **Qualitative Research Techniques**: Any research in which sociologists rely on their skills as emphatic interviewer or observer to collect unique data about the problem they are investigating.

25. **Quantitative Research Techniques**: Any research method that results in the data being expressed in numerical form. Here reliance is placed on the research instrument through which measurement is made, i.e. the structured questionnaire, the structured observation, or the experiment.
26. **Analysis**: A stage in the scientific method in which the data collected are systematically assessed in order to determine what has been discovered.
27. **Data**: Information about the empirical world.
28. **Historical Research**: A type of research design in which information about the past is gathered systematically.
29. **Scientific Method**: The procedures employed in the collection of data. These procedures are designed to test theories or, at the very least, to collect data in ways that are objective and replicable by other researchers.
30. **Research Ethics**: The application of moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects', in particular active acceptance of subjects' right to privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent.
31. **Response Rate**: The percentage of an eligible random sample that agrees to participate in an interview survey.
32. **Replication**: Repetition of the same basic study or experiment to check its accuracy or to estimate the experimental error.
33. **Sample**: This is a part of a population observed for the purpose of making scientific statement about the population.

34. **Coding**: a research procedure in which the data collected are prepared for counting and tabulation by classification and codification.
35. **Content Analysis**: a research technique used to describe and analyze objectively systematically and quantitatively the content of written, Spoken or pictorial communications such as novels, editorial, movies, comic books and public speeches.
36. **Data**: Information collected from observation or measurement from which an attempt is made to develop generalizations or conclusions.
37. **Objectivity**: the goal of scientific investigation, sociological or otherwise, is often said to be objective knowledge, free of bias or prejudice.
38. **Quantification**: the process of transforming natural and social dynamics into number systems.
39. **Qualitative data**: Data that are not in numerical form. Qualitative data are data in the form of descriptive accounts of observations, interviews, or written material.
40. **Quantitative Data**: data in numerical form. Quantitative data are obtained through enumeration and measurement. Data may be collected directly in quantitative form or data originally in qualitative form may be quantified.

CHAPTER TWO
METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF DOING RESEARCH IN SOCIOLOGY

What is a method?

According to Wilmot (1985) a method is simply an organized way of achieving set objectives, and must be adapted to fit those objectives.

What is methodology?

According to Jary & Jary (2000), methodology is the philosophical evaluation of investigative techniques within a discipline; a concern with the conceptual, theoretical and research aspects of knowledge. It is the techniques and strategies employed within a discipline to manipulate data and acquire knowledge.

What then are Research methods?

Research methods are the techniques used to study questions of interest to the sociologist; for example, experiments, social surveys, observation, and analyses of document and historical data. (Ritzer et al 1979). It is the investigative techniques employed within an academic discipline.

Sometimes sociologists work in laboratories, where they conduct closely controlled experiments using human subjects. They also conduct experiments in more natural settings. They conduct social surveys. They make observations of naturally occurring human behaviour. They analyze collected data (e.g. from censuses and official statistics) and documents such as speeches, newspapers, autobiographies, and they sometimes observe and analyze the histories of ongoing events of total societies.

Sociological knowledge has experienced a tremendous growth in recent years. Much of this welcomed situation is due to the extensive development of research methods and techniques in sociology, as well as in the allied social and behavioral sciences upon which it draws. As a

matter of fact, Sociology is a discipline that usually draws eclectically from several perspectives and relies on impulses from other allied disciplines.

It is therefore necessary to have some understanding of the nature of these research methods, the various techniques and procedures, in order to evaluate the knowledge or the findings which they help produce. How we know has significant for what we know.

THE LOGIC AND METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Sociology is one of the few fields of human inquiry that can be pursued intellectually in a number of different ways. There is in fact a very wide range of markedly different approaches to sociological investigation, for each of which certain techniques as appropriate, while others are not. This variety of approaches can be reduced to two polar extremes, each reposing upon different fundamental philosophical assumption about the way we acquire knowledge about human social conduct.

The first approach is known as **'Positivism' or the 'Scientific method'** popularly associated with Auguste Comte. The scientific orientation is the dominant one in sociological analysis and research today. This approach, regards the procedures used in social sciences as fundamentally of the same kind as those used by natural scientists. It assumes that social phenomena constitute a reality which exists in its own right, quite independently of how the observer acquires information about it. The scientific method in Sociology is concerned with an objective discovery of laws or general principles, of human social behaviour. Those who adopt this stance feel justified, therefore, in using the procedures of the natural sciences to collect data relating to social phenomena and to analyze these data. Their analyses are therefore phrased in terms of **'variables'** and use statistical procedures to establish relationships among the variables and express their findings in terms of causal explanations.

The basic outline of this philosophy is that **'reality'** is constituted of phenomena which are causally linked to one another. What is 'real' can only be demonstrated to be real by reference to empirical evidence of its existence. While other kinds of explanation obviously exist, they are not admissible for the positivistic scientist unless they are based on empirical observable – evidence. Even though it is generally believed that God made the world, that is not an acceptable positivistic scientific explanation since there is no empirical evidence to verify it.

The establishment of scientific knowledge thus involves the empirical explanation of how phenomena cause other phenomena – and can be expressed in form 'if A happens', then B happen',

Science involves the uncovering of such **cause-and-effect** relationships between Science involves the uncovering of such cause-and –effect relationship between phenomena in reality that always hold true. Such universal statements are called scientific laws. The positivistic methodology consists of three separate stages:

(i) a stage at which discovery is made

(ii) a stage at which validation is made

(iii) a stage at which explanation is made

The second approach is known as the **'humanistic method' or 'interpretive'** method. This method relies primarily on subjective analysis, including such processes as intuition, speculation, impression, insight and common sense as the principal elements. Sociologists who work within this framework therefore lay particular emphasis on the observer's direct understanding, often intuitive, of the phenomena as falling into particular patterns, as wholes, while the observer must interpret to bring out their wider and deeper significance. According to Max Weber, Sociology should develop the method of "interpretative understanding" for

studying human behaviour. This term is called VERSTEHEN. The humanistic orientation seeks chiefly to describe, usually in highly subjective terms, behavioral phenomena.

While subjective analysis may be typical and distinctive perspective of the humanists, just the opposite is true of the scientist. The scientist employs objective analysis in his work which, performed in a highly systematic fashion, seeks to establish facts, and demands empirical proof as the basis of his knowledge. However, subjective analysis is not irrelevant in science. Quite to the contrary intuition and common sense play a fundamental role in the formulation of hunches and hypotheses which are the starting points of research. Moreover, subjective analysis, in one form or another, is often incorporated into the scientific method. More basically, however, and at the risk of oversimplification, it may be said that each of these two major modes of investigation involves essentially a different epistemology – that is, a set of principles by which we come to know or to understand the phenomena in question.

Collection of Data/ Sources of Data.

The scientific method involves a series of activities concerned with accumulating evidence-the individual bits of information that are necessary to put the hypotheses to an empirical test in a manner consistent with the research design. These elements of empirical observation constitute the facts of scientific research.

Data collection may take many forms, depending upon the nature of the research design/problem and its theoretical objectives. A variety of techniques and tools are available to the sociologist for this purpose. Among the principal types of data collection used by sociologists are:

1. Social Surveys or Survey Research
2. Observation- Participant and Non-Participant

3. Experimentation-Field and Laboratory
4. Hypothetico-deductive method
5. Field and Laboratory Research
6. Content Analysis
7. Computer Simulation
8. Interviewing
9. Historical Documents: Case studies, Life Histories and Contemporary records and
10. Ethnography.

All of these, in one way or the other, are concerned with socio-metrics, or the empirical measurement of relevant phenomena.

We will now deal with some of these methods of data collection in turn.

1. Social Survey:

The social survey is a systematic collection of facts about people living in a specific geographic, cultural, or administrative area. Social survey involves the observation or survey of a sample of social particulars from which generalizations about the entire universe of particulars can be made. Social survey is clearly based on induction and the rules of inductive logic apply to the method of selecting the sample, collecting evidence, and making generalizations.

The basic procedure in surveys is that people are asked a number of questions focused on that aspect of behaviour the sociologist is interested in. A number of people, carefully selected so that they are representative of the population being studied, are asked to answer exactly the same questions, so that the replies of different categories of respondent may be examined for differences. Since one of the virtues of the survey lies in the number of

respondents that can be included, it follows that both the method of getting the questionnaires completed, and consequently the formulation of the questions to be asked, must be very carefully worked out.

Survey research and opinion polling are concerned fundamentally with measuring the behaviour of people in terms of the systematic analysis of such things as attitudes, values, opinions, beliefs and customary practices.

Survey research is either of the cross-sectional or longitudinal variety. The principal tools used in survey research are the interview and the questionnaire.

2. Observation

It is the most primitive, as well as the most sophisticated, of research techniques. Observation fundamentally involves the use of one's senses to record information: Seeing, feeling, tasting, touching, and smelling are the basic vehicles of observation. Rao (2006) defined observation as a systematic, direct, definite and deliberate examination of the spontaneous occurrences at the time of occurrence. Observation may be classified into two major categories.

Simple observation: This is a causal and informal type of observation that involves no standardization of observational techniques, and no control over the pertinent variables in the research situation.

Systematic Observation – This is a formal and more precise type of observation that places controls on both the observer and the observed phenomenon, usually involving various types of instruments and highly refined procedures.

There are also two types of simple and systematic observation – these are participant and Non-participant observation. Participant observation involves a situation in which the

observer plays an active role in the behaviour that one is attempting to study. The expectation is that a greater depth of experience can be obtained from such personal experience in the natural setting.

Non-participant observation involves the contrary situation in which the observer takes a totally passive and non-involved part in the behaviour that he observes.

3. Experimentation:

All sciences use experiments. The experimental method provides a reliable way of studying the relationship between two variables under carefully controlled conditions (Rao 2006). The experiment is a form of observation which essentially involves the manipulation of social phenomena or social situations in order to measure their effect in selected respects. This type of data collection permits control over one or more elements under investigation. It is obviously, not suitable for some types of sociological research e.g. the analysis of riots, violence or panic behaviour. There are three principal elements or variables in experimental analysis. A variable is any phenomenon or condition whose properties or values may vary rather than being immutably fixed. Age, sex and religion are common examples of socials variables. The three types of variable are:

1. **Dependent Variable:** – This is determined by or dependent upon other variables. In a cause-and-effect relationship, the effect is the dependent variable. The dependent variable in sociology is usually a form of human action, such as an attitude or behaviour. In short, it is the response, output, or outcome variable. Dependent variables are those characteristics predicted when statements of hypotheses are made, which can change as the researcher manipulates the independent variables.l

2. **Independent Variable:** This represents the causal factor in a cause-and effect relationship. In some experimental situations, however, the independent "variables" is considered the given, constant, or invariant factor for the analytical problem at hand.

3. **Intervening Variable**: This is a test factor or experimental element that is introduced into the experiment in order to determine its ability to produce a dependent variable as a consequence of its interaction with the independent factor.

Intervening variable is a variable which affects the relationship between an independent variable and is not directly seen or controlled.

We have two types of experiment. These are:

(1) Field research; and (2) Laboratory research

Field research is conducted in the true context of the behaviour under study while laboratory research consists of observation and or experimentation that are conducted in the somewhat artificial confines of a laboratory.

4. The Hypothetico-deductive method

In this method theories are taken from the existing 'schools' or perspectives such as Marxism, functionalism, conflict or consensus theory. From these theories relevant hypotheses are derived which are tested against evidence collected in the field or from the library. The test will either verify or refute the hypothesis.

5. Interviewing

Social surveys may depend either on questionnaires which are self-administered, or on schedules which are completed by trained interviewers or by the research-worker personally.

Interviewing, then, is not a method of data-collection distinct from social surveying, but rather a technique which may from the brief formal contact as when the interviewer is working for a firm of public opinion consultants and simply asks a few highly specific questions on a limited range of topics- to a long and rather rambling interview in which the research-worker allows the respondent to develop points and take up others as the chooses. The brief formal interview, in which the wording of the questions and the order in which they are asked is fixed, is called structured' interview, while the freer discursive interview is called an 'unstructured interview.

In the interview approach, heavy reliance is placed on the subject's verbal report for information about the stimuli or experiences to which he is exposed and for knowledge of his behaviour, usually the investigator has not observed the events discussed. The starting point is the subject's self-report followed by interpretation in the light of other knowledge about him; inferences may be drawn about aspects of his report.

6. Ethnography

This is basically a descriptive method, involving very little analysis or knowledge of arcane techniques, it is relatively easy starting point. What is required is the observation and recording of the history, geography, social organization, economy, political system, culture and religion of the people under focus or study. Since the investigator is very likely to be a member of the society, he is already familiar with the way of life of the people. The advantages of this method are first of all its simplicity as it requires no complex interview schedules or questionnaires or computers. It helps the student to develop his powers of observation by looking at familiar situation in new, more informed, more objective light. The investigator is able to isolate essential, universal aspects of his or her own culture.

The disadvantage of this perspective is that the investigator may idealize his or her own culture; leading to a kind of ethnocentrism. He or she may suppress unflattering information about his or her society as he or she may not want to present his or her own society in bad light.

Existing Material

The amount of material potentially available for secondary analysis is enormous, since it includes all the information about social relationships and social actions from any source whatsoever, whether it has been assembled for sociological purpose or otherwise. For convenience we can classify these are: (i) Statistical records (ii) Historical sources (iii) Contemporary records and personals documents.

Statistical sources – Government statistical particularly censuses – or statistics produced by large organizations provide one important kind of data which sociologists can use in their analyses, and which in fact they commonly do use. An outstanding example of the imaginative use of official statistics, in the positivist tradition, is the study of suicide made by the famous French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) in the last decade of nineteenth century.

Historical documents or Documentation.

Documentation is another source of data that the sociologists frequently utilize. These materials comprise such "precoded" or previously collected information as personals and public records that often provide the only source, or the only available source, for certain kinds of data.

Records and accounts of a qualitative i.e. non-statistical kind-for example, relating to beliefs, values, social relationships or social behaviour – may also provide data for

sociologists, especially those working within an interpretive framework. Such records and accounts maybe contemporary or may refer to earlier periods.

Contemporary records are seldom used as the sole source of information in sociological research; they are usually one source of a particular kind of information.

Contemporary and historical records are sometimes analyzed through systematic procedures known as 'content analysis'. This involves constructing categories for classifying information about certain themes in advance. The records are then perused and the incidence and use of the categories and theme noted.

Personal documents, or biograms as they are technically called, describe events in which one personally participants and include such things as diaries, autobiographies, and letter. Here the use of 'theme or content analysis' is particularly appropriate.

Public documents include written reports, newspapers, books, magazines, pamphlets, journals and officials statistics, such as census data. Particularly useful here are various kinds of data that more recently have come to be known as social indicators. These mechanisms involve such information as figures and rates for such things are population, housing, marriage, divorce, death, illness, income, expenditures, work, unemployment, social security, welfare, social mobility, use of leisure time, and social participation of various kinds.

Personality Inventories: Much of information that comprises sociological data is derived from the measurement of personality variables. The study of attitudes, values, beliefs, opinions, motivation and, and self-concepts, as well as subjective states such as alienation and anomie, essentially involve assessments of personality dynamics and psychological phenomena.

Other methods of data collection, too technical for elaboration here, include scalo-grams, socio-metric devices, indicators and indices. As a matter of fact, there is a rather large, and constantly expanding, body of research tools and technique that are utilized for data collection in the field of sociology. Each one has its strength, weaknesses, and limitations that determine its appropriateness for particular kinds of research problems.

Types of Data

1. Primary and (2) Secondary data

Primary data refers to the first hand information collected or gathered by an investigator directly from the field work, survey research or observation or opinion poll. Secondary data refers to the information gathered or collected from secondary sources such as statistical records, documents or what is known as "Existing Material"

Analysis of Data

Once the data have been collected, the next process, or set of processes, is to perform an analysis of them. Facts, however valid and reliable, do not speak for themselves. Accumulated data need to be interpreted in order to have an explanatory meaning. Specifically, there is the need to discern the independent-dependent, cause-and-effect, relationship within the observed phenomena.

All data analysis fundamentally consists of data reduction which includes a complex set of processes by which the many individual data are reduced to a more manageable form. Basically, in sociological research, we are measuring qualitative phenomena which need to be quantified in one way or another in order to be amenable to scientific treatment. There are, however, two basis modes of data reduction and data analysis: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis.

Quantitative analysis – This consists of techniques for the reduction of the data through such methods as categorization and classification. These processes are known more technically as coding. Quantitative analysis also involves the manipulation of data through statistical analysis and tabular presentation.

Qualitative analysis – This consists of the logical ordering of the data which includes such processes as conceptual specification and theoretical interpretation. Basic methods of qualitative analysis include the techniques of cross-tabulation and correlation that seek to relate meaningfully one set of data to another.

Qualitative methodologies refer to research procedures which produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. The subject of the study, be it an organization or an individual, is not reduced to an isolated variable or to an hypothesis, but is viewed instead as part of a whole.

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis yields empirical generalizations which are simply descriptive, but factual, statements concerning the phenomena under analysis. Examples of empirical generalizations are:

1. Rural families are larger than urban ones
2. Children from broken homes are usually delinquent
3. Most academicians usually have small families.

The Organization of Research

The following are steps in the organization of a typical final year undergraduate research essay:

1. Statement of the problem
2. Review of literature

3. Formulation and operationalization of concepts
4. Collection of data
5. Analysis of data
6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Motivation for Sociological Research

1. Personal experiences- issues arising from the personal experiences of the individual which needs to be checked against reality.
2. Public issues and social problems that demands solutions and answers e.g. crime rates
3. Theoretical problems- theoretical issues that needs to resolved or addressed
4. Issues arising from the literature and existing body of knowledge- sometimes the need to fill gaps and omissions in the literature or even replication.
5. Curiosity- the desire to discover or learn something new
6. Desire to make significant contributions to knowledge
7. Revelation
8. Intuitions
9. Comparative analysis
10. Historical analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGY

What is Methodology?

According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975) the term methodology in a broad sense refers to the process principles and procedures by which we approach problems and seek answers. In the social sciences the term applies to how one conducts research. As in everything we do, our assumptions, interests, and goals greatly influence which methodological procedures we choose. When stripped to their essentials, most debates over methods are debates over assumptions and goals, over theory and perspective.

For Rao (2006), a methodology is a system of rules, principles and procedures that guides scientific investigation. The sociologist is interested in what happens in social world and why it happens. Research methodology provides guidelines for collecting evidence about what takes place and for explaining why it takes place.

Two major theoretical perspectives have dominated Sociological studies. One, positivism seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena with little regard for the subjective states of individuals. According to Durkheim, the Sociologist should consider "social facts" or social phenomena, as "things" that exercise an external coercive influence on human behaviour.

The second theoretical perspective which stems from the interpretive tradition is 'phenomenology'. According to Max Weber, the phenomenologist is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the actor's own frame of reference. As Douglas (1970)

writes – "The 'forces' that move human beings, as human beings rather than simply as human bodies…are "meaningful stuff". They are internal ideas, feelings, and motives.

The phenomenologist examines how the world is experienced. For him or her important reality is what people claim it to be.

Since the positivists and the phenomenologist's approach different problems and seek different answers, their researches will typical demand different methodologies. The positivist searches for "facts" and "causes" through methods such as experimentation, observation, social surveys, inventories, and demographic analysis, which produce quantitative data and which allow the investigator to statically prove relationship between operationally defined variables.

The phenomenologist, on the other hand, seeks understanding through such qualitative methods as participant observation, open-ended interviewing and personal documents. These methods yield descriptive data which enable the phenomenologist to see the world as subjects see it.

We are however not denying the fact that positivists can use qualitative methods to address their own interests. What we are saying categorically is that each of the theoretical perspectives is based on certain kinds of methodological procedure suitable or appropriate for it. In this way, methodological perspectives are strongly related to theoretical perspectives. For example, observation or experimentation appears to be the more appropriate methods for positivism while personal interviews, participant observation, survey questionnaires are the most appropriate for researches in the interpretive camp.

In short, qualitative methods – such as participant observation and personal documents, including unstructured interviewing are the more appropriate methods by which

one gain the interpretative understanding of human behaviour. The argument is that when we reduce people to statistical aggregate, we lose sight of the subjective nature of human behaviour. Qualitative methods allow us to know people personally and to see them as they are developing their own definitions of the world. We experience what they experience in their daily struggles with their society. We learn about groups and experiences about which we may know nothing.

This approach directs itself at setting and the individuals within those settings holistically, that is, the subject of the study, be it an organization or an individual, is not reduced to an isolated variable or to an hypothesis, but is viewed instead as part of a whole.

Finally, qualitative methods enable us to concepts whose essence is lost in other research approaches. Such concepts as beauty, pain, faith, suffering, frustration, hope and love can be studied as they are defined and experienced by real people in their everyday lives.

Positivistic methodologies – which are usually quantitative analysis of data, include such methods as observation, experimentation, survey research, official statistics and records. It is the direct opposite of the interpretive school…

Some of the major theoretical perspectives commonly associated with the interpretive school are Phenomenology, Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodolgy while Functionalism, Conflict theory, Marxism and Social Exchange theory falls into the positivistic tradition.

There is no single sociological theory, nor one that clearly dominates the field. Many sociologists in fact are able to accept and follow different theories simultaneously. The

theory they use depend upon what they are studying (individuals, groups, or societies) and upon the questions they wish to answer at the time.

MAJOR ANALYTICAL DIVISIONS:

Sociology, like some other disciplines in the social sciences, is frequently divided for analytical and theoretical purpose into micro-and macro dimensions. While this distinction is helpful in terms of the extent to which sociological explanations may be generalized or extended to include, or to exclude, certain categories of social behaviour. Each of these dimensions, or levels of analysis, is distinguished further by the different theoretical approaches and methods of investigation that they employ.

Micro-sociology – This is concerned with the analysis f the elementary forms and processes of social behaviour. Activity here concentrates on social interaction-that behaviour which takes place, relatively informally, on the interpersonal level in face-to-face contexts and those of small groups. Microscopic sociology is therefore a focus on smaller social units, particularly on individuals and their experiences within groups, organizations, cultures and societies. The emphasis here is similar to that of the psychologists who focus particularly on individuals.

Macro-sociology- This is also known as systematic sociology. It studies society as a whole, and is thus concerned with broad-scale or grand-scale analysis. The point of focus at this level is on relatively formal structured and processes of social dynamics that are more typical of complex organization, such as bureaucracies, institutions, communities, culture, social movements, and social change.

Micro-sociology and Macro-sociology overlap somewhat in scope and concern, just as their respective phenomena interpenetrate the reality of social behaviour. Just as macro-

sociology is the context for the other, so, too, the social interactional concerns of micro-sociology have no ultimate meaning except in terms of total context of social dynamics.

Sociological Theories at the Microscopic Level

Certain theories of sociology are especially related to the microscopic level of sociological analysis. These particular theories are not inevitably bound to the microscopic level, but there is a strong tendency for sociologists concerned with the behaviour, action, and interaction of individuals to use them. Some of the social theories must often associated with the microscopic level are:

1. Exchange Theory
2. Symbolic interaction theory
3. Phenomenology-Ethnomethodolgy theory and
4. Action theory

Methods of Research at Microscopic Level:

In the same way as particular sociological theories are linked to individual behaviour, individual actions, and interactions, certain research methods seen particularly suited to this level of sociological analysis. The two methods that have most often been applied at this level of sociological analysis are (1) the experiment and (2) participant observation. However other methods such as the interview-questionnaire, for example are used to study both individuals and interactions among individuals.

Methods of Research at the Macroscopic Level. These are:-

(1) Historical-Comparative Method and

(2) The Interview and the Questionnaire

Definition of the Methods.

1. Field Experiments – Research in which elements and conditions of a social setting are controlled by the researcher .It differs from the laboratory in that the setting is more natural.
2. Laboratory Experiments – Research in a setting in which the researcher attempts to closely control all elements and conditions. Ideally, in a laboratory setting the effects of the experimental factors can be isolated from other possible causal factors.
3. Participant Observation – A research technique in which an observer joins in and becomes immersed in the group he or she is studying. There is usually an attempt to analyze the viewpoints and through processes of the actors as well as the social world the actors create.
4. Verstehen method: A way of gaining insight into human action by understanding the socio-cultural setting in which is occurs. The researcher is concerned with how the social setting is understood or interpreted by the actors.
5. Historical-Comparative Method. A method of sociological research in which events of a particular time and place are studied and compared with similar events in another time and place. The object of the comparison of different events is to show the most basic social features of different societies, or societies at different times.
6. Interview method. A data collection method in which a researcher questions a respondent directly. This sociological research method is used to study both macroscopic and microscopic units of society.

7. Questionnaire method –A self-administered sociological research method that solicits written responses to printed questions.
8. Quantitative Sociology – Studies that apply mathematical and statistical techniques to empirical observation of society.
9. Research methods – The techniques used to study questions of interest to analysis of documents and historical data.

Types of Questions

Describing, explaining, predicting, and prescribing require four kinds of questions.

A **descriptive question** asks for factual information. How many people attended the Independence Day celebrations?

An **explanatory question** asks why something happens. It starts from the answers to descriptive questions. Why did the Islamic fundamentalists reject all overtures from the west?

A **predictive question** asks about what will happen. Will the conflict in the Niger Delta continue to escalate in the new civilian dispensation?

A **prescriptive question** determines what ought to happen or be done. What should the federal government do to curtail violence in the Niger Delta?

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

What is a theory?

A theory in Sociology is a set of ideas or concepts that are useful in understanding and explaining a broad range of social phenomena.

Theory may be defined as a set of logically interrelated concepts empirical reference that purports to explain phenomena.

A theory is a system of related ideas that unable one to explain and predict phenomena. Theory assumes the principles of causation and explanation seeks to establish the relation of cause and effect with a stated degree of certainty.

Sociology, as with all other fields of the social and behavioural sciences, can be undertaken with a number of different theoretical perspectives or conceptual orientations that serve to explain the phenomena of is concern Orientation are neither right nor wrong. They are merely ways of looking at phenomena or of proceeding to their analysis.

Each theoretical orientation begins with a different set of assumptions, each has a different focus of analysis, and each asks essentially different questions. The ultimate value of any orientation as a sociological tool however is in terms of its utility – how well it contributes to, and facilitates, the sociological task of explaining human social behaviour. Each perspective therefore has its own advantages and its own limitations. Majority of sociologists today do not stick completely to any one perspective. They prefer to combine the perspective of one or more orientations and to proceed with an eclectic approach that utilizes whichever orientation appears to be the most productive in a given theoretical situation.

The principal theoretical approaches that are prevalent in sociology today may be conveniently categorized in terms of those that are strictly sociologist in character and those which are strictly sociological perspective while the latter emphasize a primarily micro-sociological orientation. The following are brief descriptions of the principal theoretical orientations that are utilized in the field of Sociology today.

MACRO-SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

1. Functionalism and Structural Functionalism

This is the dominant or most prevalent theoretical orientation in Sociology today. Its basic assumption is that order, regularity, and balance are the principal forces of social activity, and, hence, that they should constitute the basic foci of sociological investigation. The theory postulates a parallel or correspondence in the essential nature of society and a biological organism. The structured-functional orientation conceives of society as a system, or complex organization, composed of many inter-related parts or structures assumed to be composed of many component parts, or structures, all working in an interdependent manner and thereby contributing to the total function of the social system.

The structural-functional perspective utilizes, either simply or in combination, evolutionary or organismic models of society.

Stability, equilibrium and harmonious function are inherent in the social system, and its orderly, highly efficient function is maintained by a set of shared values and beliefs or a basic consensus, among its constituents

2. Conflict Theory

This perspective, completely antithetical to structural-functionalism, focuses on the elements of change and revolution. It has its main roots in the contributions of Karl Marx and

Engels (1848) who explored the positive contributions of conflict as a unifying force in social behaviour and one with potential, for contribution to the survival of societies.

The conflict orientation assumes that the fundamental dynamics and conditions of human life are consensus and competition rather than consensus and integration. Conflict is a continuing and inevitable dimension of social life; and all societies are in a constant state of change. Conflict theorists maintain that societies continuously experience an inevitable competition for scarce resources, especially power, wealth, and prestige. Poverty and racial discrimination would be offered as two prevalent manifestations of these dynamics. While conflict necessarily involves tension and hostility, it need not result in violence.

Harmonious equilibrium, according to conflict theorists, is an illusion. Social order is essentially a product of coercion and restraint, not consensus, or shared values. The society involved in an endless competitive struggle.

The society is involved in an endless competitive struggle for social advantages between various social segments of society e.g. socio-economic classes, racial and ethnic categories and even the sexes, and not a continuous or steady effort at maintaining harmony of equilibrium. Society, then, is perceived to be inherently unstable, and in a perpetual state of change.

3. Marxism

Marxism is more or less the same thing as the conflict theory. The Marxian analysis is a form of conflict theory closely based on Marx's critique of the capitalist system and upon Marx's premise of the likelihood of class conflict.

5. **Modernization theory**.

This is an evolutionary view that says that traditional societies change their basic structure through economic development and industrialization in order to survive. This change occurs through such processes as structural differentiation and proceeds through various stages that produce a more complex and mobile society ready to deal with industrial technology, more or less on the Western model.

MICRO-SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Symbolic Interaction. This is a uniquely sociological or psycho-social perspective that has become an increasingly popular orientation among sociologists today.

It is a theory of human action and interaction that gives great emphasis to the use of symbols and language and to the way people use symbols to help define themselves, others, and their social situations. It focuses on individuals as social actors rather than on the system in which social actions occurs. It seek, thereby, to explain more about the actual processes of human social behaviour (and their meaning for participants) rather than about the structure and function of society or the social system in which they take place. The emphasis in this perspective, however, is on the specific interaction that occurs between people, and more particularly on the meanings that social behaviour has for the individual actors. Central to this position is the application of what Cooley (1992) called "sympathetic introspection" or the emphatic understanding of one's behaviour. Any valid comprehension of human behaviour often requires an understanding of how actors perceive reality-that is how they form a 'definition of the situation'. For as Thomas (1928) contented, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequence". Hence, for the symbolic interactionist behaviour can be understood only when it is studied in its whole context-not

only the situation as it exists in its objective forms, but also in its subjective dimensions at it seems to exist to the actor himself or herself.

Ethnomethodololgy

This is another variety of symbolic interaction that has been developed in recent years. That name does not mean anything mysterious, meaning only 'the study of the methods which people in society use to make sense of what is going on around them.' Ethno' refers to the stock of common sense knowledge available to a member of society; 'methodology' refers to the methods or strategies which actors use indifferent settings to make their meanings understandable, or accountable to others.

This perspective, incorporating fundamental elements of Phenomenology which maintains that all reality is subjective reality, places, a much greater emphasis on the subjective dimensions of human behaviour. It seeks to understand the unspecified, the implicit and unconsciously used, guidelines or 'ethnomethods' by which people construct social reality, and thereby achieve definitions of situations and the then in the process of social interaction in order to create and to sustain an orderly social life. Many of its advocates allege that Ethnomethodolgy, while accepting many of the core elements and having much in common with the symbolic interaction approach, is nonetheless sufficiently different as to be considered an independent theoretical orientation.

Phenomenology –

Phenomenology is the science of phenomena or what appears. Phenomenologists also have an interest in understanding what things mean to the actor, but they particularly are concerned with the way in which people come to define social reality and then develop mental constructions, people proceed to arrange their actions and interactions into

meaningful patterns. Phenomenologists are intensely involved with what goes on in the mind of the person and with the meanings shared among persons.

Phenomenology in diametrically opposed to Functionalism. Its stresses human freedom, intentionality and choice as opposed to the deterministic, almost compulsive quality of Functionalism. Phenomenology also concentrates on individual existence as opposed to Functionalism which concentrates on society and social forces at the expense of the individual human being. While Functionalism concentrates on the whole in relation to the neglect of the part, Phenomenology concentrates on the part to the neglect of the whole.

Action Theory

This is a sociological theory oriented to the study of moral complex forms of social interaction. Unlike the theoretical perspective discussed earlier on, Action theory is not oriented toward the individuals so much as toward the effect of the meaning context in which people or their actions exist. Action theorists seek to determine how individuals experience, perceive, understand, and interpret the 'meaning context'

Weber urged sociologists to use the research method of 'verstehen' (understanding) in order to uncover what he termed the 'meaning context'. Through the use of the verstehen method, action sociologists seek to put themselves in the place of the people in a particular historical context, in an effort to understand the social forces that impelled them to act as they did. Thus, Action theory is oriented to the study of historical as well as contemporary, social settings. The objective is to understand the social pressure and conditions that lead actors to behave as they do.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory focuses on the elementary forms of social behaviour, including the goals and motives of participants in social interaction. Building on the psychological principles of stimulus and response, exchange theorists have argued that people are likely to perform behaviour that have been rewarding to them in the past. Conversely, they argue that people are not likely to perform behaviour that have been painful or costly to them in the past. Thus, people are depicted as rational creatures involved in human interchange, their behaviour is seen as determined by previous experience in a give-and-take process of rewards and costs of personal interchange.

One of the key concepts of Social Exchange theory is 'reciprocity' which refers to the 'give-and-take' phenomenon that is alleged to be the basic dimension of social behaviour. For instance, when you give someone a gift or do a favour for someone, you usually expect that person to reciprocate the courtesy. An example is that of people sponsoring political candidates in elections in the expectation that he can obtain political favour at a later date. Some boys give money to girls in exchange for love. Similarly, one may conform to the wishes of another in terms of certain behaviour norms, such as manners or dress styles, in return for the person's friendships. If someone repeatedly receives something from you, and gives nothing in return, you will probably eventually stop giving. In other words, you will avoid interacting with that person. Social behaviour in the perspective of exchange is essentially a "trade off" of one kind of behaviour for another. Such reciprocity is assumed to be indispensable for sustained social interaction, which in turn is the fundamental ingredient or process of any form of social organization.

The two chief protagonists of this prospective are Levi Strauss who wrote on the "collectivistic" tradition in French Sociology and George Homans who wrote on the "individualistic" tradition in British and American Sociology.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND WELFARE

Social problems are not the same things as sociological problems. The theoretical problems and scientific questions of sociology are not to be confused with social problems. Sociology is a scientific mode of analyzing social relationship, and a problem, for Sociology, is any pattern of relationships that calls for explanation; the challenging problems are those where the relevant factors and causes are not obvious.

A 'social problem' is some piece of social behaviour that causes public friction and /or private misery and calls for collective action to solve it.

A social problem is a set of conditions that the majority or a substantial minority, disapprove as morally wrong. This includes such things as crime, population, mental illness, and so forth – all of which are social conditions thought to be undesirable or problematic by the people in a particular society. Such concerns belong to the domain of social engineering which is concerned with the improvement and reconstruction of society.

A social problem is more than a set of conditions. Poverty was prevalent enough in the Middle Ages, but poverty was not then a social problem because it was regarded as God's will. Before any problem can be regarded as a 'social problem', the larger percentage of the society must agree that the issues at state are morally wrong or unacceptable. A problem becomes a 'social problem' when it comprises a set of conditions which have aroused widespread disapprobation. Social problems is seen as something identified as harmful to society and needing something doing about it

Sociological problems on the other hand, are represented by issues that are concerned with the explanation of the nature and function of human social phenomena apart

from any a priori judgement on the worth or desirability of the behaviour in question. Sociological problems therefore involve the explanation of the nature and dynamics of social behaviour and not the development of strategy and techniques for the control or change of social phenomena.

The problem of Sociology is essentially those that are fundamentally related to breaking the behaviour code or explaining what Nisbet (1970) has called the "social bond". Just as biologists have concerned themselves with breaking the genetic code in order to unlock the mystery of biological life, and just as chemists and physicists occupy themselves with explaining the bond or unification of chemical and physical elements, so, too, do sociologists, along with other social and behavioural scientists, seek fundamentally to unravel the mysteries of the nature, structure function dynamics, and change of human social behaviour and society. Social problems are merely one type of sociological problem.

Social problems, which are usually the problem of all the social sciences, involve questions of social policy which seek a determination of the way that society should function, and which kinds of social behaviour are preferable or desirable on the one hand, and correspondingly which kinds of behaviour are considered undesirable on the other.

The explanation of why divorce happens, why it happens to some people with certain social characteristics and not others, or its rise and fall, constitutes problems of explanation for the sociologists. Divorce thus throws up sociological problems. It is, at the same time, a 'social problem'. Again, Finer (1962) argued that whilst the series of recent military take-over in African countries is a social phenomenon requiring explanation, equally interesting is the sociological problem of explaining why it is that the military, who have decisive control over the means violence, do not take over in every society.

Since Sociology emerged largely in the context of movements of reform or modernization, we tend to retain 19th century conceptions of social science as the study of 'social problems'. According to Worsely (1977) the kinds of issues regarded as social problems in the 19th century conceptions include: delinquency and crime, unemployment, disease, malnutrition, poverty drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, bad housing, sexual deviance, divorce etc. The major things that these quite diverse items have in common is that they are all things which the 19th century saw as bad things, and about which people used sociological inquiry in order to provide them with ammunition in an essentially political and moral debate. This debate centered on the issues of whether these things occurred because the individuals involved were personally inadequate, or whether social arrangements and not simply individuals shortcomings led them into such straits.

WELFARE

Welfare is defined as the state of happiness, comfort, and freedom from want. It is a state of well being.

In a pure sociological sense, welfare is a 'community-action' approach to solving social problems.

For a long time, social problems are still thought of in a way that it could be solved or tackled with an individualistic approach. Thus that social services or welfare schemes are largely focused upon a 'case-work' approach to solving the individual client's personal problems. But nowadays, sociologists have usually adopted 'community-action' approaches to social problems. This approach takes a closer look at the political economy of the entire society and began to break away from the individualistic 'case-work' approach. Researchers

have come to realize that individual problems are not merely the product of inadequate interpersonal socials relationships socials within the family or within the organization, but as outcomes of decisions and arrangements at national level and as part of national politics. For 'welfare' problems cannot be fully analyzed without relating them to the wider structure of society which produces such problems for the individual.

Deviations from normal; respectable behaviour create social problems not just for the individuals who suffer, but also for their neighbours, their kin, the state etc, who have to bear the consequence of their suffering. Such tragedies, that is, are rarely purely private, either in causation or in their consequences. Nor are the individual's problems, usually peculiar to him alone.

According to Mills, the sociological imagination consists in the ability to appreciate that the 'troubles' that affect the individual are the outcome of much wiser arrangements within which his life is lived out, and that these arrangements affect the local family and work milieu within which most his life is acted out. Most people never get beyond seeing their personal troubles as simply personal. Even some social scientists tell people that their problems are mainly caused by personal inadequacy, by inability to adjust, that they are the outward manifestation of innate anti-social drives, etc. however, Mills contends that the development of a sociological imagination enables the individual to see that his 'personal troubles of milieu' are connected with 'public issues of social structure' that his personal history (biography) is shaped by what is happening to his society (history); that to 'understand what is happening in themselves; men have to see themselves as 'minute points of the intersection of biography and history within society'. (Mills 1959).

From the above presentation and stand, one can see very clearly that social problems create welfare problems. Individual's problems are not personal problems as they have implications for society at large, therefore the society must try to alleviate these individual problems through concerted efforts or community action hence the need for welfare service or programmes.

CHAPTER SIX

USES OF SOCIOLOGY

What is Sociology all about? What good is Sociology?

Question of this raises a whole range of issues concerning the application of sociological knowledge and its role in policy and reform.

As stated earlier, a concern with social problems and social reform was an integral part of Sociology from its foundations. Many of the early sociologists were anxious about the social changes occurring around them and wanted to establish sociology as a comprehensive scientific discipline, charged with discovering sociological laws of behaviour and constructing social policy based on these laws. In other words, a scientific sociology was to be used for the re-organization of society.

What are the uses Sociology? What has Sociology to offer?

The first value to be considered in an intellectual discipline is its scientific value. We have already discussed the scientific value of sociology in studying social activity, social organization, social development, in a precise, systematic way. This scientific attitude replaces ethnocentrism and cultural relativism. The study learns that the customs, traditions, religions and cultures of others are not bad, simply because they are different. This realization is extremely important where multi-ethnic and multinational states are seeking to create unity out of diversity Wilmot (1985). Nigeria fits properly into this situation. Mitchell (1967) argued that Sociology enables us to appreciate the variety in forms of social life (cultural diversity and heterogeneity).

Again sociological knowledge and skills have now come to be widely utilized as a source of objective information, as a sometimes helpful guide to action, and as an important approach to the understanding of human conduct.

Fundamental to the scientific study of society has always been the hope and belief that it could contribute to the understanding and solution of social problems and to a better and more reasonable world.

According to Chinoy (1967):

Sociology, both as tested theory and as a body of reliable facts, possesses a double value: it can add to man's understanding of himself and his society, and it can contribute to the solution of the problems he faces in achieving and maintaining the kind of society in which he hopes to live.

The increasing complexity of modern society creates problems for which there are no ready-made answers. In this situation sociology obviously constitutes a useful, even essential, source of reliable knowledge for both the individual and society.

Pedagogical Advantages

Sociology apart from anything else is an educative discipline. It is a discipline that can satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of the curious people. People need to be educated about the societies they live in rather than relying on common sensual knowledge and speculations which are often unreliable, invalid, uncritical, inconsistent and sometimes subjective. One can undertake sociological excursions for the purpose of learning alone or as a pure academic exercise (intellectual undertaking).

Sociologists, however, can, do and should take a key role in specifying the implications and consequences of alternative types of social policy. Such a contribution is but one aspect of the practical value of sociology. Sociological studies can assist policy makers in urban or rural resettlement, caused by slum clearance, dam construction and other development projects. Throughout the history of Sociology, there has been an ebb and flow of involvement by sociologists in solving social problems. Sociological knowledge may be sought and used for any political ends, from the conservative right to the radical left.

Another area of sociology that reflects a more activist orientation is applied Sociology. Many Sociologists today identify themselves as applied Sociologists. They are involved in the everyday affairs and activities of organizations, businesses, and governments. Applied sociologists use sociological knowledge to advise on policies and practices of governments, businesses and organization that employ them. They also evaluate the impact of policies and actions, both before and after they have been implemented.

Mitchell (1967) argued that Sociology has a bearing on administration. It also has something to contribute to aid the social worker and the teacher. What is the nature of this contribution? There are some obvious answers. We might say that Sociology can present the social worker with some facts about society and may do so with some degree of precision. It may estimate, and indeed point to the incidence of poverty among various sections of the population. Or it may, by an examination of the relationships in various sections of the population, estimates the differential needs of the aged. To the teacher it can give information about our society, the factors conditioning the personalities of children from different social milieu, rural and urban, middle and working class, and so forth. It may even

provide the information which he deems necessary to impart to children so that they may be better informed about their own society and others.

Sociological knowledge, therefore, has application to every facet of human existence.

CAREERS FOR SOCIOLOGISTS

What is Sociologist do? What are the prospects of the discipline?

Students who take strong interest in the discipline naturally wonder what the job prospects are. Sociology is a discipline that is relevant to every facet of life and as such Sociologists have unlimited career opportunities in a wide every organization and in all areas of Human Endeavour.

Sociologists can work as teachers, be it in the Secondary and in tertiary institutions. As a matter of fact, Sociology is offered at the ordinary and advanced levels in Britain, the US and other advanced countries while degree courses and postgraduate programme are offered in most of the present day universities.

Sociologists can also take up careers as Probation or Parole Officers. Many young graduates in the discipline are particularly attracted to this field of youth probation because they fell that through their sociological understanding and personal guidance the young offender may be steered towards an adulthood of productivity.

Personnel work is an appropriate field of employment for a graduate in Sociology. Personnel activities involve the screening of applicants for jobs in industry, help in the preparation of job descriptions and coordinate or mediate inter-departmental matters.

Sociology is also useful in Public Relations, Advertising, Mass Communications and Journalism. There are job opportunities for Sociologists in these mentioned fields.

Since Sociologists study widely varied fields such as Sociology of law, Medical Sociology, Industrial Sociology, Criminology, Urban Sociology, Population, Sociology of Education etc. it is obvious that there are so many other areas in which Sociology will provide a valuable start and in which job opportunities are available to people in the discipline.

Sociology can be helpful and a very important tool for people entering into Law or Politics. Sociologists are also needed in the civil service and ministries. They can be gainfully employed as Administrators in both public and private establishments. These includes-Welfare or Social Work, Health, Education and Public Complaints Commissions.

Sociologists can also be gainfully employed as Consultants and researchers (NISER) in many organizations and government agencies. Some can work as Marriage Counsellors. Others can be employed as government advisers. Sociologists are usually appointed to important Commissions to advise their nations at all levels be it federal or state on cases like Crime, Justice, Violence, Moral decadence, population problems and other social ills in the society. Sociologists are in the position of giving out suitable advice on many of the societal problems.

Sociology is a discipline that can be systemically applied in a number of different ways and at different level in different spheres of life. So the question of what the chances of a Sociologist are does not pose a problem anymore. The career opportunities of a Sociologist are unlimited.

According to E.W. Steward and J.A Glynn "You can do almost anything that, at a pre-professional level is concerned with the direction of and effective organization of people". Sociology can be applied effectively in all occupations.

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REVIEW QUESTIONS

What are the main arguments in favour of Positivism in sociological research?

What do you understand by the term "VERSTEHEN"?

What are the main components of 'interpretive' method is sociological inquiry?

Discuss and explains five methods of collecting data in sociological research

Distinguish between Quantitative and Qualitative analysis

Enumerate the basic steps in the organization of a typical research essay

What do you understand by the term phenomenology?

Write short notes on two of the following:

(i) Exchange theory

(ii) Action theory

(iii) Symbolic interaction theory

(iv) Conflict theory

(a) What is social problem?

(b) In what ways are social problems different from sociological problems

What are the uses of sociology?

Write short notes on two of the following:

(i) Social survey

(ii) Observation

(iii) Interviewing

(iv) Hypothetico-deductive method

To what extent is Sociology a scientific discipline?

CLASS NOTES

Census Sample

06/05/24 Specific Data Collection Methods

Data collection may take many forms, depending on the nature of the design/problem

- Social survey/Survey Research
- Observation
- Experimentation - field and laboratory
- Hypothetical deductive method
- Field and laboratory research
- Content analysis
- Computer simulation
- Interviewing
- Historical studies
- Ethnography

1. Social surveys

A systematic collection of facts about people living in a geographic, cultural, or administrative area.

E.g Taking a survey in an online space - Telegram on how students' network connectivity affect the ~~class~~ studen

* Inductive approach - Social surveys are based on the rules of inductive logic. * Sample collection, evidence, generalization.
↳ careful selection, formulation.

It can be done around beliefs, practices, values, opinions, etc.

Survey research is either Cross-Sectional or longitudinal variety

cross-sectional: within a short period of time; collection of evidence; generalisation

longitudinal variety: high no. of respondents; proportional sampling within clustered sampling; mass interview questions

2. Observation

One of the earliest/primitive method.

Using senses to observe information | ~~Ear~~, See, Feel, Taste, Smell |

Observation is a systematic, direct examination at the point of occurence

* Simple Observation
* Systematic Observation
→ Participant / Non-participant Observation

For research reasons, observation uses

04/05/24

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS IN SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Sociologists employ different methods in research. They are interested in different ways in which the Society works. Sociology employ empir. reasoning investigation and critical reasoning.

Their unique insight is the Sociological Imagination.

[Contributions of Sociological Research across fields] Importance of Sociological Research

facilitation of communication among stakeholders

It aids identification of social systems

Limitations to Research

Key Concepts in Sociological Research experiment, survey, observation subjectivity objectivity

Variable Questionaire Subjectivity Tabulation Fieldwork Qualitative research

Sampling Correlation Empiricism Hypothesis Science Quantitative research

Key Sociological Concepts: Survey sampling correlation etc.

- Alienation
- Bureaucracy (Max Weber)
- Capitalism
- Social Stratification

Quantitative data

Qualitative data

Methods of Sociological Research / Techniques

Methods are Systematic approaches, techniques used to analyze a particular phenomenon

Methods help to organize, collect, structure information in a systematic manner.

* Qualitative Method | Understanding/interpreting social phenomenon through in-depth exploration → to gain insight into complex phenomena

e.g Interviews, Focus group, participant Observation, Content analysis, etc.

* Quantitative Method | Measurement & analysis of numerical data to identify patterns/trends

e.g Experiment, Surveys, Observation, etc.

04/05/24

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Key Concepts in Sociological Research (experiment, survey, observation, subjectivity, objectivity)
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Sampling Correlation Empiricism Hypothesis Science Quantitative research
Key Sociological Concepts: (survey, sampling, correlation) etc.

- Alienation
- Bureaucracy (Max Weber)
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Quantitative data
Qualitative data

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e.g Experiment, Surveys, Observation, etc

Methodology → Epistemology (How do you know that you know?) - observation of indicators
→ Ontology (the nature of what you know)

essence

* Mixed method research / combines various method of the quali- and quanti- ~~validity of data collection~~ used to investigate, analyze a particular phenomenon.

Methodology refers to the systematic framework / approach used by researchers to conduct research, analyze data, regarding a specific research topic. and draw conclusions

It provides a structured & organised way of conducting research.

The Logic of Sociological Enquiry - The logic of Explanation

1) Positivism [The Scientific Method] => Auguste Comte

Sociologists are expected to use scientific approach in their subject matter which is the human society in an objective manner.

* cause and effect * relationship

Stages of Positivism
- Discovery - Validity - Explanation

2) Humanism [The Interpretive Method] => Max Weber (Verstehen)

It relies primarily on subjectivity e.g common sense, interpretative understanding, human reason

Data collection occurs in the primary level and secondary level i.e either in the qualitative or quantitative method.

=> observation

=> social survey

Variable

3. Experimentation

Involving two or more variables under carefully controlled conditions.

It is sometimes not suitable for some types of sociological research.

Elements

Variable - any phenomenon/~~fact~~ condition whose properties vary. e.g Age, Sex, grade point

* Dependent → outcome variable
* Independent → causal factor
* Intervening Variable

A student ~~effort~~ grade depends on how much effort he/she puts in their academics.

→ Independent (human action)

→ Prayer, Fasting (a student may introduce the God-factor.)

A variable introduced into experiment in order to determine its ability to produce ....
It is not directly seen

Types of Experiment : * Field Research * Laboratory Research

4. Hypothetical - Deductive logic Method

Method theories are taken from existing 'schools' or perspectives

5. Interviewing

Either on questionnaires or a face-to-face [Interviewer & Interviewee]

~~It is not a~~ It is always not a method of data collection

6. Ethnography

- A descriptive method
- nano ethnography
- existing materials

Sources of Data

- Primary Sources
- Secondary Sources

Analysis of Data

- Quantitative Analysis [Coding] – hypothesis,
- Qualitative Analysis ↓ Data reduction

Motivation for Sociological Research

- Personal experiences
- Public issues
- Theoretical problems