

## **SURVEY METHOD IN SOCIAL RESEARCH**

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### **Concept of Research:**

Research is a phenomenon which brings out the observations and the conclusions about the understanding of problems and to make human life happy. Day by day the process of research is getting new dimensions in the changing scenario. It is an intellectual effort to examine and re-examine the environment and the position of human beings in it. This concept of research is basically connected with human endeavour, evaluation, environment and growth of human history. It is an integral part of the academic pursuits in the past. Research has given to the mankind various theories, principles and tools for the better living. In the earlier stage, man has no idea of economic, social, cultural, political and anthropological aspects of existence with the progress of time man has increased his curiosity and it led him to understand the environment through different angles. This awareness of man is manifested in a process which is aptly known as Research.

### **Survey Method:**

The structure of the social sciences consists of two parts- theory and empirical evidence. These two elements are so inextricably interwoven, for successful social understanding a study of one without the other is barren. Theory is an attempt to account for a number of closely related observations or phenomena. e.g., price and demand. When price increases demand decreases and vice versa. We call it price theory. Theory is confused with speculation. It remains speculation until it is proved. Once the proof is made it becomes a fact and empirical evidence. Facts are definite. A fact is an empirically verifiable observation. They are called empirical evidence. Facts play an important role in the development of a theory. Survey method is one of the techniques used in the analysis of fact finding. They are the widely used method of social research. A fact finding analysis is necessary to solve the innumerable problems in a society. Adequate information about them may not be available in records, files and other sources. A study of them require systematic of gathering and data through personal contacts, interview techniques etc. They are called social survey.

Survey means viewing and interpreting things rigorously and comprehensively. Started with this connotation it has undergone such a revolution. Now a day's survey method is not a way of collecting data but also analysing the results statistically, systematically. The surveys have a particular method of data collection, a particular method of data analysis and a particular substance.

Surveys are useful in formulating hypothesis. The function of a survey depends on the purpose for which it is required and how much of information is already known about the problem. It is a technique of investigation and it refers to direct observation of a phenomenon and collection of information through personal interview, questionnaire etc. They provide causal and meaningful explanations. Survey method has great potential in addressing so many theoretical questions in social science.

**Objective of social survey:** C.A. Moser, "Survey Methods in social Investigation" while dealing with the sketch of surveys has slated how a survey method can be motivated by a number of objectives. The chief of them he has classified as

- (1) Supply of information on any problem.
- (2) Description of a phenomena.
- (3) Explanation of a phenomenon.

To Moser the purpose of many surveys is simply to provide someone with information. That someone may be Government, wanting to know how much people spend on food or business concern interesting to find out what type of detergents people use or a research institute studying the problem of educated jobless. Most of the surveys are utilitarian in nature and they provide information on practical problems.

Surveys are also used for a detailed description of phenomenon. No description is complete and accurate unless we come face to face with it. Socio economic surveys and anthropological surveys are of this nature. The purpose is simply to collect information and there is no need to prove or disprove any thing. Hence they may be stated without any hypothesis. But the analysis of the data may serve as a basis for hypothesis later on.

Then, there are other enquiries which aim at explanation rather than description. In such type of surveys we form a hypothesis and test it. For example, educated people are health conscious. This can be proved or disproved by collecting data regarding health and education. The information collected would be highly specific and purposive and not of a general nature as in case of description of a phenomenon.

Dictionary meaning of survey is 'over-looking.' By this method a political scientist tries to look forward to solve political problems. Different definitions have been given to define the scope of this subject. Festinger and Kat are of the opinion that "Many research problems require systematic collection of data from population through the use of personal interviews or other data gathering devices. These studies are usually called surveys, especially when they are concerned with large and widely diversified groups of people."

In short, Survey is one of the important methods of investigation if scope of investigation is confined to a particular area. In other words it helps in solving problems of a group or community confined to definite geographical limits.

### **Kinds of Survey**

For studying a political problem surveys must be conducted. A survey can be of different kinds, its scope can be both very limited as well as very comprehensive. Similarly it can be conducted by the government as well as private agencies and can also be direct as well as indirect. Briefly speaking different kinds of survey may be discussed as under

#### **1. Regular or Ad-hoc Survey**

When a body/individual/organisation conducts some survey at regular intervals say e.g., census survey by the Registrar General of India or Survey for up to dating the list of voters before election etc., the survey is called regular survey. On the other hand when the survey is conducted with a view to finding out some information required for a particular purpose and the purpose of survey is over, as soon as the object is achieved, the survey is called ad-hoc-survey, e.g. to find out the popularity of a political leader etc., obviously in the case of ad-hoc-survey the information called for is not of regular

nature and that the data collected relates to certain specific subject matter and is not of any routine nature.

## **2. Official and Non-official Survey**

A survey can be conducted by the Government for finding out certain facts for official as well as philanthropic purposes. Such a survey is called official survey. Surveys are also collected by individuals as well as by political and research organisations with or without the help of the Government. Such surveys are called non-official survey. But municipalities, corporations or other autonomous bodies also conduct surveys and these surveys are called semi-official survey. Needless to say that the surveys conducted by the Government are more sound and comprehensive than any other survey, due to availability of more resources and man-power.

## **3. Direct or Indirect Survey**

Surveys have also been classified as direct and indirect surveys. In the former case facts can be quantitatively interpreted where as in the latter case that is not possible and results are to be concluded out of the available data, by some indirect method.

## **4. Personal or Postal Survey**

A personal survey is one in which the surveyor himself is required to move about and collect information personally but on the other hand in the case of the postal survey surveyor gets information through post. The methods have their own advantages and disadvantages. Whereas in the case of personal survey the surveyor can also know about the mood, temperament and reliability of information supplied by him, he may not be in position to get detailed information for want of time. The advantage of detailed and considered opinion being provided is possible only in the postal survey.

## **5. Primary or Secondary Survey**

A primary survey is one in which surveyor himself starts work on particular subject and personally collects all data's and facts and figures. On the other hand in the case of secondary data, surveyor himself does not start the work but depends on the work which has already been done by somebody else. Obviously primary data is more important and dependable than the secondary data.

## **6. Personal or Impersonal Survey**

A personal survey may also be defined as one in which information is sought about the individual himself while on the other hand in an impersonal survey information called for does not concern the person concerned himself but is about somebody else and thus person who is being interviewed has no direct concern with the person about whom information is being collected.

## **7. First or Repetitive Survey**

When survey is carried out in a particular area or on a particular subject for the first time, that is called first or initial survey. But when that is being carried out again and again that is called repetitive survey. In an initial survey more time and labour is required than on the repetitive survey.

## **8. Open or Confidential Survey**

When the nature and result of survey are open to the public or organisation it is called open or public survey. On the other hand when the results of survey are only for the consumption of the body or organisation which is carrying out survey that can be called confidential survey.

## **9. Comprehensive or Limited Survey**

Comprehensive and limited are very relative terms but when the survey covers vast field and the questionnaire of survey asks for the information which is of wide variety and range, the survey is

called a comprehensive survey. On the other hand when the field covered is comparatively limited it is called limited survey. In India census operations, or economic surveys or study of voting behaviour of the people at the time of elections can be called comprehensive surveys.

### **Pre-Requisites of Good Survey**

A good surveyor cannot start his work off hand. He must be prepared with the nature of his enquiry and also with the type of questionnaire. He also must be clear about the fields and areas to be covered by him and also the scope and nature of his study. He should be capable enough of delimiting his areas so that the nature of his study does not become too wide. He must also be mentally prepared to do field work and ready to utilise both primary as well as secondary sources for his survey. Not only this but he should not leave the data unutilised and must be prepared to have tabulated analysis of the data which he has collected.

### **Criticism of Survey Method**

Survey method for the study of political, social, economical problems has come to stay. The system however has both the advantages as well as disadvantages. One of the most important advantages of the study is that is directly related to the political social, economical problems and thus directly discusses such problems and problems of political reconstruction and disorganisation. It points out political disintegration with the result that to a great extent it can help society from actual disintegration. The scope of the method is so comprehensive that it studies all aspects of community. In actual practice it was used by Engel for discussing problems connected with the unequal income of rich and poor families. Census Reports of India, voting behaviour of the people which are important studies are connected with the help of this method. One of the advantages of this method is that it provided opportunity of direct observation and thus helps in bringing political consciousness. The system overcomes emotional interferences and scholarly attitudes As a result of analysis social awareness among the masses becomes possible and the desire for social reformation and reconstruction gets momentum.

But the method has its own limitations as well. The greatest difficulty is that surveyor has his own preconceived and pre-determined notions and he views the problems with those notions in mind with the result that the approach to the problem is not impartial. Then another limitation is that so far this method has been used to study the problems of lower middle classes and has left middle upper middle and higher classes untouched.

### **Aims of Survey**

In every group and community there are certain problems which need proper analysis and collection of data for assessing their gravity and also for finding out their solution.

One aim of a political survey is to collect data and obtain scientific and well ordered information. Such a data can be both qualitative as well as quantitative.

Then another aim is to have correct information about political problems and political attitude of the people particularly those of the working classes, depressed and the unprivileged groups of society.

This survey also aims at finding out the causes of political backwardness and retardation. It finds out the reasons for political backwardness of group of people in a geographical area and about their indifference to political problems of the country.

Its aim is also utilitarian because it also suggests ways for the betterment and uplifting of the poor, needy and the downtrodden and to take them to main stream of political life of the country.

Remedial measures are then recommended and suggested to safeguard political interests of the unprivileged.

### **Stages in the Survey Method**

There are different stages through which this method passes before actual results are achieved. The first stage in the process is that of selecting a problem. The scope of the problem must be clear and precise. It should be definite and practical and be motivated by some motive. It should be politically useful. As far as possible it should be ensured that the solution of the problem being investigated will benefit the society as a whole or geographical area. After the problem has been selected the aims of the study should be very clearly defined and made very specific. Scope of the study should be clearly delimited and the terms which are going to be used should be clearly defined e.g., the terms like "Middle income group". The poor, the educated and so on because these are likely to be interpreted differently by different people. For the sake of uniformity it is essential that these terms should have clear definitions. Next step comes about the preparation of schedule of the problems that are to be solved and also which are likely to be faced. Then financial and personnel needs should be clearly assessed so that subsequently at no stage the work is held up either because there are no people to do the work or there are no finances to meet expenses. If the problem to be investigated is interdisciplinary, it is essential that at this stage a board or a committee etc., should be set up which is competent enough to guide the investigators.

After these preliminary and basic steps have been taken the scope of the investigation should be very clearly defined and demarcated and also kept within certain well arranged and possible limits. While defining limits, geographical areas to be covered the type of the people to be covered i.e., rich, poor, illiterate, criminals, factory workers, office workers, etc., and definition involved clearly defined.

For a good survey it is also essential that time limit should be clearly fixed. It should be very realistic and in the case of time bound studies if this limit is not adhered the very purpose of study is defeated e.g., the attitude of people towards a party candidate at the time of election. If the survey is not carried out at the time of election. If the survey is not carried out at the time of election the purpose of study will be defeated. Moreover, if time limit is not adhered and the people are approached to give their opinions on a matter of topical interest, they are not likely to give correct response. Sometimes even the character of the problem changes with the passage of time. While fixing time limit care should be taken about the availability of personnel whether they are trained or untrained travelling involved the nature of people to be covered and time of their availability and also the availability of finances.

Then another stage is to find out sources from where the information will be available. If the information is not likely to be available if it is classified or confidential or if the persons who have documents are not willing to part with them, then either the survey will have to be abandoned or some alternative means will have to be found. In this connection it may be mentioned that when it is first survey the time taken is more while in the case of repetitive survey time taken is less. Then another step to be taken is to decide whether 100 per cent or less accuracy is needed. Extent of refinement and accuracy will also depend on the time to be taken. Such an accuracy can, however hardly be obtained in a qualitative survey.

But in a political, social, economical survey it is essential that the investigators must be trained and capable of adjusting themselves to the nature of work. If they are not trained, they should be trained, we have already discussed the qualities of a good researcher and as far as possible persons

having maximum of these qualities should be picked up for the job. For the success of a political survey one important method is that the respondents should get prepared well before the investigator approaches the person concerned. This can be done by either advertising in the newspapers, distributing the hand bills, writing them post cards, indicating the objectives of the survey or even be holding public meetings. If necessary and proper aim and purpose of the survey can be given on radio and television and posters should be pasted on the walls. Even cinema slides can be used for the purpose, so that when the investigator approaches the respondent there is no difficulty and he or she is quite prepared to attend such a person. Then next step in the process is that the person conducting the survey should be clear in his approach about the techniques which are to be used in survey, i.e., whether it will be observation method, schedule or questionnaire method and so on and field staff should be trained accordingly.

After these steps have been taken the investigator is to collect data. It is essential that he should be trained to properly organise the matter which he collects from the field and then that be properly classified and analysed. If such a matter is neither properly classified nor analysed then the very purpose of conducting the survey will be defeated because results will then not be available to the society. After the data has been analysed then clear conclusions should be drawn. Such conclusions can be presented either in narrative form or in the form of graphs and charts. It is also essential that those who are to conduct survey give their recommendations so that some politically useful steps can be taken by those who are responsible for their implementation.

**Importance of Survey Methods**

As regards value and importance of survey it can be said that with the help of this method that problems are understood and efforts are made in solving them. It is also with the help of surveys that social planning can become possible and social planners are in a position to allocate funds and finances for tackling each problem. It is also with the help of this method that even general and special types of problems can be properly diagnosed and understood. Even problems having multiple aspects can be analyzed without much of additional efforts and costs and as such importance of survey method for finding out political, economical and social problems cannot be underestimated

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