Editorial

Research, Development and Social Transformation

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Human beings are known for their inquisitiveness. There is an innate never-ending curiosity in human beings to comprehend what lies beyond the horizons: seeking answers to the questions- why? how? where? and what? These questions when channelled systematically using methods, techniques and tools to find out the probable answers are what culminates as research. Thus, research harbours on finding out the facts. It basically implies the methodical and systematic study of a problem. The aim of research is to generate information, verify the existing knowledge and arrive at new perspectives that would add to the existing gamut of knowledge. The underlying purpose of research is to bring about development that can lead to social transformation for the betterment of humankind. For research to successfully execute its main objectives it has to follow a process of planning, leading to a systematic study to seek probable answers to the questions. Researchers in order to conduct meaningful research thus, 'subscribe to the idea that one does not know the fact unless one has conducted a systematic study' (Srivastava, 2004:2).

PARAMETERS FOR A GOOD RESEARCH

What is good research? How do we define good research? Research that yields beneficial data in the field; leading to a well-written report; that in the long run supports community development can be stated as good research. For a research to achieve its goal it has to follow certain criteria. Borrowing from Fox (1958:285) herein the criteria for good research are outlined below:

1. The purpose of the research, or the problem involved, should be clearly defined and sharply delineated in terms as unambiguous as possible.

2. The research procedures used should be described in sufficient detail to permit another researcher to repeat the research.

3. The procedural design of the research should be carefully planned to yield results that are as objective as possible.

4. The researcher should report, with complete frankness, flaws in the procedural design and estimate their effect on the findings.

5. Analysis of the data should be sufficiently adequate to reveal its significance, and the methods of anaylsis used should be appropriate.

6. Conclusions should be confined to those justified by the data of the research and limited to those for which the data provides an adequate basis. (Fox 1958:285)

To reach the above parameters there are certain conditions that a researcher needs to reflect upon before embarking on a research investigation. The major question lies with the selection of the research topic. What has inspired the researcher to select a given topic and how the researcher visualises the results? Many a time, researchers are swayed by contemporary fashions, fads, and foibles (Sjoberg & Nett, 1992). The availability of grants and funding to a certain extent plays a role in the selection of a research topic. Research to fulfill its aim needs not only the available resources but also motivation and zeal to work for a cause. Thus, some of the questions that need to be pondered upon at this point of time are:

1. Does the research topic really interest the researcher?

2. Is the problem amenable to scientific investigation?

3. Does the researcher have adequate resources (funding and time) to investigate the research?

4. Will there be ethical consequences related to the selection of topic and the use of methods, tools and techniques?

5. Does the topic have any theoretical interest? (these five questions were originally asked by Bernard (1994: 103) cited in Srivastava, 2004)

CONDITIONS FOR DEVELOPING A VIABLE RESEARCH

A systematic study relies on framing a research design that involves identifying a topic for research, formulating hypotheses, selecting a method or methods that best suit the topic of research, opting for appropriate investigating techniques and tools, and last but not the least taking into consideration the ethical issues.

Research of any kind arises out of a problem. The problem defines the type of investigation a research ought to carry out. The research process begins with the selection of the research question; followed by the selection of an appropriate methodology (Sarantakos, 1998:119). The research question needs to go through a proper literature review as Chapman (1979) had stated research means 'searching again'. Researchers thus, should be cautious so as not to reinvent the wheel again by working on the same problem from scratch. The goal ought to focus on a search from where the earlier research has left off- find the lacunae and bridge the gap.

The hypotheses however well-known need to be tested. The probable answers even if well known need to be verified against field data. Let's say one gets the feeling that the milk in use is contaminated. A layman would at the most talk about it with other fellow beings that are using the same milk and try to find a solution or change the brand of milk. On the other hand, a researcher to prove the hypothesis that the milk is contaminated would collect samples from different milk vendors selling milk, submit the same for a laboratory test and also conduct a survey in the locality to collect responses from the people using the milk. The researcher would try to understand the related health issues that the consumers of the milk were facing. Thereafter based on the findings would submit a report and if need be, change the brand of the milk in use (this example is from a personal communication with Roy: 2017).

This could be based on primary data collection- quantitative and qualitative or from secondary sources. In earlier studies the focus was on quantitative data, however, the relevance of qualitative data has been accepted today. The question of quantitative versus qualitative has frizzled away over the years and it is now a norm to collect both types of data to strengthen research. It is the choice of the research problem that allows the researcher to choose from an array of methods. Primary data verges on collection of information either via fieldwork, survey method or documentary research. Fieldwork relies on an intensive study of the problem backed by a long extended stay in the field area while gathering first-hand data

using participant observation, interviews, collecting life histories and case studies, presently one of the most commonly used methods in social science research. The survey method is widely used to collect quantitative data example census or house-hold surveys. The documentary research depends on finding facts based on already existing data like archival material, newspapers, manuscripts, personal records etc.

The need for fieldwork in collecting qualitative data stems from the fact that what people say they do, what people think they do and what people actually do can only be revealed through lived experiences. Say, for example, everyone is aware of how many times one needs to brush teeth. If the question "How many times do you brush your teeth in a day? is asked, the standard answer would be twice a day (what people think they ought to do), however, does everyone conform to this? Do we always brush our teeth twice a day? This answer when tested in the field might yield responses like "sometimes, I feel too lazy to brush", "winters I skip as I don't want to touch cold water", "when I am too tired, I just sleep off, don't bother about brushing teeth", "at times I forget" so on and so forth. The reality of a situation can only be revealed through intense fieldwork that harbours good rapport-building in the field and continuous validation (example cited from a Facebook Live (social media site) session "Anthropology Today" conducted by Prof Srivasatva (2020) for Discipline of Anthropology, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University). Answers in the field cannot be taken at face value, as everyday in the field is a new day, and people react as per situations and context. In a field situation, we see variations in terms of "what people think they need to do", "what people say they need to do", "what people do" and "what people think they ought to do".

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Malinowski, (1922) had stated that the best way to capture the daily lives of the people under study is by observing "the imponderabilia of actual life, and the type of behaviour of the people by collecting minute, detailed observations, in the form of some sort of ethnographic diary" (page 24). For long participant observation has been the tried and tested method used in fieldwork- a bottoms-up approach. In the recent past, this method has also come under the radar, as it leaves out the voices of the people. The approach though stated as emic (as the researcher lives with the people) does not reflect on what the people want, but rather relies on what the researcher observes in the field. In a way, it is the narratives presented by the research about a community and not the direct voice of the people. Thus, it is critical to the issue of ethics. Most times, there is a thin line between what the researcher observes and reports as to what he/she interprets to be the truth. In recent studies many of the autoethnographies and writings by the 'native' researchers have criticised the "ethnographers' lens as creating otherness" while describing a community and their activities.

Encountering sustainable development, one realises that community involvement in the development process is what leads to social transformation. Thus, development studies have relied on the *facilitatory approach*. Action Anthropology which relied on taking the accounts and needs of the people owes its origin to the Fox Project (1948-59). During this study, Sol Tax involved the community to voice their opinions and to state their needs. The emphasis was on what the community wanted. Sol Tax was of the view that everyone has the 'right to make mistakes' and thus, even if the solutions did not turn out favourably yet the community had a way of coping with failures as it was their decision. In present times aiming at social transformation the researcher has included methods like Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP), Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Action Research and Evaluation and SONDEO technique to the tool kit. These are participatory research techniques where the community has a major role to play, they are the

main stakeholders and they share with the researchers what they want. The community is involved in each and every step of the project development and dissemination of the findings.

For bringing about social transformation one may look at the three types of researches that are in vogue:

a. Academic Research
b. Research by Government Bodies and
c. Research by Civil Societies

Academic research sets the stage for further work at the policy level that could lead to social change and transformation. Much of the anthropological research has been taken as baseline projects upon which further research has been carried out for the betterment of society. Anthropologists, Sociologists, Economists and many more work with government agencies for policy-making like the framing of Tribal Policy, Forest Policy etc. Likewise, central to Amartya Sen's work has been 'social choice'. Through his social theory for example, he has been able to drive home the fact that many times women are the flag bearers of patriarchy and how they imbibe the notion of carrying forward the lineage through a male heir leading to female feticide.

In terms of research by governmental bodies, one of the finest examples is of NITI Aayog which works in the field. They are involved in collecting first-hand data using systematic research tools and these data are used for bringing about policies and plans for the betterment of society. Herein, are examples of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and many more. One of the recent examples comes from the COVID-19 period when the Covaxin (BVV152) vaccine was developed by a group of scientists working under the aegis of ICMR.

Researches by Civil societies mostly comprised of non-governmental organisations have also come a long way in bringing about social transformation through their research activities. SEWA one of the oldest known NGOs in Delhi has worked towards empowering women by organising micro-credits and employment. Child Relief and You (CRY) is one of the organisations that work for the rights and well-being of underprivileged children. Through its research activities and workshops the organisation has been able to support many of these children in their education and provide career-building opportunities. In terms of bringing about change by civil societies and movements Aruna Roy's efforts are worth mentioning when discussing development towards social transformation. Her initiative in Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan which fought for the fair and right of equal wages for everyone finally culminated in the Right to Information Act in 2005 in India.

How long does a research take to translate into a development that leads to social transformation? A recent interaction with a research scholar from University of Pittsburgh, School of Medicine is something worth pondering upon when she said, "My work might yield results say in another 20-30 years and bring about a change in the treatment of eye". This statement leaves us with the hope that all research work has the potential to bring about development and may lead to social transformation provided we have the patience to wait for the gestation period. Research of any kind may lead to development and social transformation though it may take its own course of time.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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