

PROBLEMS IN SOCIOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH: A CASE OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Research is considered a key domain for addressing and solving the key social, economic, and management problems. Sociology is named as the queen of social sciences because of its diversity and heterogeneity of subject matter. Although the main focus of sociology is on society in general but no society survives until and unless it has managerial skills. The focus of sociology is humans as social animals. As a result, in theory and practice it is very difficult applying all research and theoretical analogies to all without considering the relevant managerial, societal, psychological, geographical, and sociological set-up. The reason behind this view is that the research and theories conducted in developed world happens not to be at par applicable across the board. In theory and practice the best ever research conducted or theory developed in the developed world seems to be not as useful in the developing or underdeveloped world as in developed world. Majority of standard books on sociology and social science subject, are written and published in USA but sometimes, it is very difficult to apply their theories and practice in the local context of the developing world. As a result, the researchers from developing world feel exhausted especially when they are in the process of developing theoretical models for their respective researches. In this paper attempt has been made to discuss some of the problems in application from this part of the world and their possible solutions overcoming those particular problems.

Keywords: Action research, social research, management science.

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Introduction

No one can deny the importance of research. It is conducted to solve the social problems of the society. The problems, however, can not be understandable until those are addressed according to the area and situation from where they come out. Sociological research helps to have understanding the operational human social affairs. It also provides the background and enhances common sense to tackle the issues (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2009). Theory is considered the backbone of any type of research. It provides a set stage for enhancing reliability and utility of research. Theory and practice are the two sides of the same coin. They augment and support each other. Without theory the applications of research can be flawless (Parson, 1961).

There is a close link between theory and practice. They are closely concerned and dependent upon each other. In sociology, research may appear concerned only with seeking facts, but real objective of social research consists of two parts. First part is testing the existing theories to confirm whether those are also supported by the data. The next goal is developing the new theories. For purpose of achieving the first one social scientists use the deductive approach. For the second one inductive approach is used. In the inductive approach, social scientists start with three different types of ideas of what they expect to find in the social world. Whereas; by using the inductive approach, social scientists generally start with specific observations and then use those developing general ideas about the social world (Joseph, 1996).

In the developing world as in the developed world some decades back the discussion on the practical use of social science research remained a hot issue and discussed minutely. Still in the present scientific age the debate is not over. It is the utility of research and its overall impact on the end users. No doubt due to wider use of technology world has become a global village but sociology of the

people living in the developing world is quite different than the developed world. In this part of the world people are still staunch supporters of their religion and cultural heritages. Their thinking is not as secular as of the people from developed world. The people in developing countries usually have lesser earnings and have their respective socio-cultural backgrounds. They see the world differently due to the ethnocentric lenses. They have little money to invest on the schooling of their children. Their preferences and choices are quite different. Social issues and social problems are also relatively dissimilar or at least the solutions for the same issue are different.

Another reason is that developing countries of the world have lower GDP and per capita income. The vast majority of their population lives below poverty line. In such countries meager amount of money is spent on research and innovation. For example, United States, United Kingdom and Japan had GDP per capita above US\$25,000. They spent more than 2% of GDP on research and development. On the contrary, almost all countries of the developing world can not spend that amount on research activities.

Academic pursuits of the developed and developing world are also different. Some people even in the developing world have their academic degrees they achieved are from developed countries. Even some of the researchers have outward outlook like of well advanced and secular. But in the end of the day when they comeback and apply their research techniques they feel exhausted because the teaching and research patterns and physical infrastructure happen not to be the same across the borders. The level of understanding and overall geographical and ethno-cultural barriers are quite apparent in local context. Imbalance in the selection and execution of research projects in certain areas are different.

Research Methodology

The present paper is based upon the data taken from secondary resources. All literature cited here is taken from books, periodical journals, and research reports. The subject matter of the article is concerned with the practical aspects of research. Therefore, with the help of literature attempt has been made giving personal touches for reaching a solid conclusion.

Social Science Research

The importance of basic research can not be ignored and sidelined at the cost of applied research. Basic research depends on the interest of the researcher and involves lesser monetary benefits. It has also no immediate use and is like a backbone for any type of critical thinking and applicability. Social science in its essence is basically basic research addressing and taking over the issues relatively closer of the society and its people. Its laboratory is streets and roads. People on streets and roads most of the times happen not the same at all times. They change their shape and mind as they take up their responsibilities. Sometimes they are fathers, mothers or brothers and sometimes managers, shopkeepers, or street vendors. Therefore, basic science research techniques vary from the situation to situation as per demand of the research.

In the developing world including Pakistan the research which has lesser economic personal benefits is considered of no use. Engineering, medical, business and information technology subjects are considered as hot cakes than social science disciplines. Unfortunately, in developing world social status is attached with the fields and degrees. Engineer and doctor is the symbol of status even though they are not as much profitable as some disciplines in social science. Even at government levels the grants are granted on the basis of the immediate results of the projects and its wider immediate utility. As a result since last decade huge money was

spent on the graduates opting for physical science subjects. Even this trend is found quite vivid in Pakistan where all emphasis is on practical research. As a result, social science could not get the much importance for developing theories of their own. The researchers in Pakistan run behind the theories which are created and tested in Western countries. But the projects are started and executed in this part of world. As a result, the theories used in the projects do not necessarily support the main results of the projects. That is the main barrier expanding the fruits of research to wider community.

In spite of all odds, however, the trend going to change somewhat in many developing countries including Pakistan. But, applicability of theory and practice of research is a challenging issue. Therefore, the minimum acceptable criteria and utility of social science research is being reshaped making it in milieu with the local context. Some of the barriers are discussed as under.

Research in Local Context

There is a need to understand the problem in local context. Every theory or practice is full of limitations until and unless it is twisted as per demands of that particular locality or community. No doubt, technology has solved the problems but technology does not guarantee the acceptability across the board. Understanding and sensitivity of local problems and other related factors need to be well taken care of. Situation specific understanding and geographical depicted data are the most crucial issues.

It will be a great mistake if solutions of the local problems are searched and imported from elsewhere without considering their applicability in local context. For example, the Durkheim's theories of suicide are not necessarily applicable for taking the ground research on suicide in Pakistan. Suicide in Pakistan is the result of some different factors than the suicide in Western countries when Durkheim propounded the suicidal theories. Likewise, most of the

economic theories researchers here try hard applying forcefully because they are developed in Western world but they do not care the side effects when those are forcefully applied.

Different socio-cultural environment and time period limitations are the driving and pressing forces making the research inappropriate in local Pakistani context. Huge literature is available on social development in the developed world. Theories are at hand and verified by the results in that part of the world. On the contrary, when those theories are applied in local projects they are less likely to be as vital as those are in the West. The reason is that social development is conceived and practiced differently in developed and developing countries. Even poverty line is different in different countries. Most of researchers go for various social and economic classes as defined in books. They go for defining lower, middle, and upper classes as Marx saw during in his particular time period. Gender research is conducted in everywhere in Pakistan. But it is a fact that the indicators and theories set and tested in the West can not be applied in true letter and spirit in Pakistan because culture does not support those results. Likewise, the theories on family are not applicable in local Pakistani context because set-up of family is different than the West. Keeping all these facts in mind this is not easy to guess that as per criteria set in Western countries all other countries are in dark ages. But the situation and all other settings have to be analyzed before jumping to any conclusion.

Cultural Clash in Sociological and Social Research

The research conducted in social science especially in sociology no doubt has remained vital but diversity in interpretation creates cultural clashes. The reason is that sociology is the study of human beings as social animals. As human nature is shaped and developed as culturally rooted and inherited, therefore, subjectivity is a natural phenomenon. The most of theories and results are not far from cultural influences. That promotes and infiltrates cultural clashes

among the various civilizations and between rich and poor. The cultures are classified into larger groups called “cultural domains”, popularly known as civilizations. These are according to Samuel Huntington (1992), about eight cultural domains in the world.

Economic modernization and social changes due to the technological inventions are playing havoc with local traditions. Media war has pushed the weaker cultures to the wall. Theories and books written in the Western world depict the culture of the developed world. As a result, the Western influence is found everywhere with the difference of level of intensity. Cultures in the developing world have different ‘folkways and mores’. People from the developing world are ready to shun away with ‘folkways’ but no one seems ready to ignore ‘mores’ because those are deeply rooted in the blood of people. That is the same case with Pakistan. Pakistani society is very rich in cultural traits. It has long history of civilization dating back some 5000 years. Therefore, the theories and researches which are against the cultural traits are not easy to digest. If reinforced forcefully the cultural clash may create more conflict and violence in the world. This may not happen if people learn to understand each others cultures, especially the ways people live in a different culture see their own interests. There is a strong resistance to such an understanding (Thio, 1996).

Cultural Barriers in Acceptance of Theory and Research

There are certain cultural barriers in accepting or rejecting the research results. The cultural interpretation is the most important and key phase of presenting research results. It is widely believed that culture twists or reshapes ones thinking or looking at the things. Sociologically speaking, something that is allowed and accepted in one country or culture is banned and prohibited in the other country or culture. Suppose radical theories of women liberty are much advocated liberalizing or what helping women to get equal status at par with men. Modernization and freedom is the slogan in the name

of women sanctity or honour. It is easy to use as slogan but very dangerous when it is applied in local cultures with the notion that people need to be modernized. In Pakistan or many other developing countries of the world where cultural codes are strongly rooted in the society such type of slogans are mere politicizing the issue than the actual solution. In many cases general strata of society dislike or disown such practices which in that particular scene are interpreted as vulgarizing the women in the name of giving them rights. Some of the researchers at some stage of research find it hard to define the terms puberty, honour, sexuality, and vulgarity. Sexual codes as they are different in different countries complicate the situation. Honour killing is practiced almost in all parts of the world. Its acceptability and condemnation is quite different.

Social Change: Problems in Theory and Practice

The world has witnessed a rapid change in development sector in the recent years. As a result, the traditional societies got a direct impact of change. In its essence, the social change is the process of transferring the cultural values and social institutions to the next generation. It is inevitable but the rate of change varies between societies (Piotr, 1994). No one can stop the social changes because the society always remains in the state of transformation. It never remains stagnant. Social change is both intentional and often unplanned. It is generally believed that social changes are always imported and harboured with the utmost efforts of the societies. But at the same time, due to their complex nature, they do not take place as planned. Social change has always considered controversial (Etzioni, 1973). Every society accepts the social change according to the prevalent cultural and moral ethics. As a result, change is taken positively for the societies but at the same time the same change is also unacceptable and even negative for the others. The examples can easily be found everywhere all over the world. Due to ethnocentrism societies weight and evaluate the cultural traits as per

their own point of views (Harper, 1998). Social change has important and unimportant consequences. It is widely noted that the importance of social change varies from one society to the other. People adopt and use the fruits of social change as per their own requirements and temperament. If the changes appear according to the desired goals they are welcomed and easily incorporated. Otherwise, those are considered as useless and unimportant.

Social change is closely intertwined with the cultural change. Both of them support each other. Cultural change has to pass through three processes. They include: invention, discovery, and diffusion. Societies have to strive for the inventions. Inventions help the societies to make the life vibrant. They are directly related with the emergence of new social changes. Inventions form an important part of man's intellectual equipment and hope for the future. Discoveries are something to know about the various things which are unknown to human beings. Through discoveries the mankind has found the solutions of various mysteries. Diffusion is the spread of social, scientific, and mundane knowledge across the boundaries. They play a key role in bringing the social changes in the society (Chauhan & Chauhan, 1999).

Social change as a concept imbibes itself many connotations and meanings. It has been defined in various time periods with a distinct approach. Some of the definitions are as under:

The term "change" literally means to render different, alter, modify, transmute, and to quit one and take another. It also means to turn or convert into it. Therefore, to change a society is meant to turn it or convert it from one mode to another like moving from agricultural to industrial or from tradition to modernity. The term "social" means, "living or disposed to live, in companionship of others" or "pertaining or relating or being connected with society as a natural or ordinary condition of human life. Social change is defined as the "inter-organism behavior relations among human beings. Such

behavior involves the interaction between two people. This interaction is largely patterned and governed by norms that are part of the symbolic universe otherwise designated as culture" (Ronald, 1976: 2).

Ogburn (1964) is considered as the pioneer of 'Cultural Lag'. He has compared the social change with physical and biological laws. According to Ogburn social changes occur when there is attempt to create or use something new. He was the supporter of Gabriel Tarde; but Ogburn then began to wander in the tracks of Marx. He is of the opinion that inventions always take place in material science. The technology has altered the society that is self-evident. At the same time with every new technological invention there happens some disturbance in the prevalent social order of the society. The stress and strain is quite notable among the different aspects of social order and technological inventions. The disequilibrium between new technology and old social organization is called as 'Cultural Lag'. According to Volti (2004) the core of Ogburn's theory is the idea that change first occurs in the material technology.

Problem-oriented Research: Ethnocentric Approach

Almost since the beginning of this world, everyone is taught that one's way of living is good, moral, civilized, or natural. In the same way every one of us is being taught that other people's ways of life are not good. As a result, ethnocentrism is natural with the perception that one's own culture is superior to that of others. It exists in every society East or West. In North America people consider it psychologically very dangerous for the children in non-Western traditional developing countries to sleep with their parents until they reach puberty. On the contrary, the people who belong to traditional societies take it very harmful leaving their old parents to live alone as it is in the West. Ethnocentric feelings are so deeply rooted that it even affects physical health. If culture prohibits eating something and is eaten, then we become sick (Harris, 1985). For

instance, Pakistani culture prohibits using wine if someone drinks the chances of sickness are greater. Likewise, many Western people get allergic if they use something prohibited by their culture.

Ethnocentrism is a term which is coincided with universal syndrome of attitudes or looking at things as per his/her particular narrow approach. The attitude generally accepts one's own culture or things better than the others (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). The members or followers of that particular group or culture take their particular language, race, tribe, and family the most valuable (Sumner 2007; Hirshfeld 1996; Kurzban, Tooby & Cosmides, 2001).

The majority of the researches in social science especially sociology are conducted in Western world. Those are purported as universal happen not to be objective, and non-ethnocentric. It is human nature that every one of us interprets the things as per ethnocentric lenses. Mostly those researches are based on narrow and particular angle. Most of those are irrelevant or less relevant to the rest of the world. Even those scholars who have the experience of having study in developed countries recognize the out rift in research results. Therefore, the theories or research results of the developed world are not necessary applicable or acceptable to all.

Preferences of Problems: Need-based Approach

Social research is conducted to address personal sorrows and pains of people. In sociology it is a general perception that social issues happen not to be the same across all the regions. In advanced countries the preferences for obtaining the particular things are considered as opting for luxuries in developing countries of the world. The reason is that basic needs and their solutions are not alike. In poor countries like Pakistan where poverty and illiteracy is the main issue, if anyone is able meeting basic needs he/she will be considered rich enough. On the contrary, in the developed world poverty is defined as not having the basic things for meeting the day

to day luxuries of the life. On the contrary, in the developing countries poor is one who can not afford eating meal three times in a day. Therefore, the selection of problems and their application depends on the preference and need of that particular country or region. That indicates that theories and their application are regionalized problem to problem basis.

Globalization and Social Change

It is a well known fact that social change has occurred everywhere in the world. It has almost reshaped every aspect of the life. It has modernized the world with a distinct outlook. However, social change differs from one society to the other, and in other respects it does not. Therefore, it has raised a question that whether diverse societies are converting into one world or diverting into separate worlds (Thio, 1996). Modernization is the form of social change that involves the transformation of agricultural society into an industrialized one. Contrary to popular belief, such social change does not inevitably destroy tradition. There are many instances where modernization reinforces tradition or the other way around (Kakepoto, 2009).

Globalization has a greater role to play in changing the world into one united. The idea sounds a very good one. However, in operational terminology the things are very complex and difficult. Every society is the group of people having a particular culture, geography, psychology, and income resources. Some of regions are economically very rich. But all the parts of world are not equal. Some parts of the world are economically marginalized. Some of us live in a rich world whereas, some of us in the backward areas. Some regions follow culture strongly and blindly. Some do not care about culture. Therefore, no one can say that world is universalized by globalization under the one roof of 'global village'. If this dream may come true then the world needs to be developed with assimilation of all the things which may look one for all. That is not

possible and will remain a wishful thinking. The idea sounds better to ideal world and it no where exists. Therefore, theories can not be applied universally with same approach and vigour but those need to be applied according to the prevalent situations.

Conclusion

The utility and compability of the research in developing countries clearly vary as per prevalent socio-economic conditions and suitability of research activity. Some research undertaken in these countries can be tackling pressing needs, while other research may not be doing so. Even though most of the developing countries depend on the global pool of the research but there is a dire need for conducting research keeping in mind the needs of particular country. Some social problems without any specific solutions are needed to be researched with local approach. There is also a need that sociological research may be supported and its results are implemented to the local community level. There is also a need that research conducted in developing countries including Pakistan must be given a due positive recognition at global level. There should be some concrete efforts developing the theories which are universalized and acceptable with lesser resistance.

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