

# WHAT IS RESEARCH?

By  
Dr. JIJO JAYARAJ

# What is Research: Definition

- *Research is defined as a careful consideration of study regarding a particular concern or a problem using scientific methods.*
- According to the American sociologist Earl Robert Babbie, “Research is a systematic inquiry to describe, explain, predict and control the observed phenomenon.

# What is Research

- Every thing written by a historian or a scholar does not fall in the category of research.
- Research may be defined as an activity which aims at bringing to light something new. It adds to the existing knowledge through a systematic study or investigation of a particular subject.
- A prominent scholar B. Sheikh Ali has written, “Research is the activity undertaken to bring out something new, to extend the horizon of knowledge and to contribute some original idea. It is an attempt to make a diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject, in order to discover facts or revise the known facts or put the facts into theories”.

- Research involves **inductive** and **deductive methods**.”
- Inductive research methods are **used to analyze the observed phenomenon** whereas, deductive methods are used to verify the observed phenomenon.
- Inductive approaches are associated with qualitative research and **deductive methods** are more commonly associated with **quantitative research**.

# HISTORICAL RESEARCH.

- ‘History is digging into past in order to re-enact past history’. Historical research is gaining round rapidly among the historians, scholars and archaeologists.
- They are devoting their time and energy to enrich our knowledge about the past history with the help of their researches.
- As history is both a science and an art, the method to be used in writing history would be different from those of all other disciplines.
- As complete objectivity is impossible to achieve, the aim should be to reconstruct the past as nearly as it really happened.

- Historical research can constitute either all or any of the three important activities given below:
  - 1. Collection of New data
  - 2. Fresh interpretation of the data already known and
  - 3. Subordination of the data to a principle

# OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

- The purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of scientific procedures.
- The main aim of research is to find out the truth which is hidden and which has not been discovered as yet.
- Though each research study has its own specific purpose, we may think of research objectives as falling into a number of following broad groupings:

# OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH

1. To gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to achieve new insights into it (studies with this object in view are termed as *exploratory* or *formulative* research studies);
2. To portray accurately the characteristics of a particular individual, situation or a group (studies with this object in view are known as *descriptive* research studies);
3. To determine the frequency with which something occurs or with which it is associated with something else (studies with this object in view are known as *diagnostic* research studies);
4. To test a hypothesis of a causal relationship between variables (such studies are known as *hypothesis-testing* research studies).



# BASICS OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

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- Researching in history has numerous tasks and challenges because it will be a reconstruction of the past events and knowledge of what was done in the previous time in surrounding us.
- There is in existence an enormous body of literature on the nature of history, and the work of the historian.
- However this current effort is to provide useful and refreshing insights for our understanding of the major obstacles confronting the historian in his task, and the possible solutions through the methodology of researching the history will discuss.

- The term history has become a ubiquitous word conceptualized differently by various scholars.
- For instance, the Traditional conception of history epitomized by historians like Herodotus (Father of history), his great successor Thucydides, Livy and Tacitus, the greatest of the Roman historians, viewed history as any written narrative of events.
- This definition is however inadequate and unacceptable in view of contemporary realities.
- First, the definition did not recognize the division of the development of history over time.
- Second, it did not recognize the division of the discipline into such fields as political, social, economic, military, intellectual, constitutional and educational history.
- Third, the conception of history as mere narration of events is now archaic because history has metamorphosed from mere description of events into critical and analytical interpretation of events.

# Arthur Marwick

- Arthur Marwick on his own part, provided a tripartite definition of history.
- First, he defined history as "the entire human past as it actually happened", second, as "man's attempt to describe and interpret the past" and third, as "a systematic study of the past".
- However, it must be noted that in contemporary times, history as a field of knowledge encompasses not only past events but also their consequences.

# Walsh

- In addition, not all events of the past capture the interest of the historian, rather important historical events with consequences are usually preferred.
- It is in this light that Walsh defines history as "a reconstruction of the past which is both intelligent and intelligible" (Walsh 1967).
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# Geoffrey Barraclough

- In a similar way, Geoffrey Barraclough defines history as "the attempt to discover on the basis' of fragmentary evidence the significant things about the past", noting that "the history we read, though based on facts, is strictly speaking not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgments".

# Edward Hallett Carr

- For Edward Carr, history is "a continuous process of interaction between the present and the past", affirming that, interpretation is the lifeblood of history.
- The point in all these is that there is yet to be unanimity regarding the exact meaning of history.
- However, it is possible and desirable to identify certain features which may be described as defining characteristics of history.
- This is important because history, is the product of historical research, and therefore the nature of history and of historical research are symbiotic.

- One of the basic characteristics of history is in its humanistic nature.
- History concerns human actions in the past.
- It involves other actions that emanate from human society which can be perceived by ordinary human senses and powers.



- Hence, actions or events attributed to the gods or spirits are not to be regarded as history.
- Since history relies on evidences and the evidences from believers in spirits, gods and goddesses are mythical, speculative, extraordinary, unscientific and illogical; they are considered outside the action of man.

- History is fragmentary by nature. It focuses on aspects or parts of an event, but not the whole event.
- No matter the efforts of an historian, it is possible for him to capture everything about his choice of study.

- Availability of evidence, its reliability and consistency available time, and the objectives of the study shape his selection and utilization of sources and evidence.
- As Akinjogbin notes, history is an organized critical study of such past activities of human beings as had produced significant effects on subsequent course of events.
- History terminates in the present.
- As Hegel posits, history cannot talk of the future because nothing has happened in the future in question.
- Thus, the future to the historian is not an object of knowledge but of hopes, aspirations and fears, elements which are not history. History is dynamic, in a sense.

- History is always in a state of flux because it deals with a state of continuous change.
- Human society which is the primary focus of history involves the cyclical manifestations of existence.
- Evidence is the pillar of historical research. This is because without evidence there will be no historical interpretation.
- The submission of the historian is not a product of speculation or imagination. History is not fabricated and thus cannot be manufactured.
- Instead, evidence is the rubric upon which history stands .

- **Finally**, history is an outcome of diligent analysis of available data.
- It is these features of history that have made it look science.
- These aspects of history imply that what is presented as history is a product of honest inquiry and not that of the historian's sensibilities or imagination.

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# Challenges to Historical Research

# Problem of sources

- The major challenges to historical research revolve around the problems of sources, knowledge, explanation, objectivity, choice of subject, and the peculiar problems of contemporary history.
- Sources the problem of sources is a serious challenge to the historian in the task of reconstructing the past.
- The quality of a historical study is determined largely by the manner in which sources are collected and used Sources are basic in historical research and they are many and varied.
- The manner in which sources are recovered, examined, and preserved are important parts of historical research.



# Problem of sources

- The importance of recovery, examination and preservation lies in the fact that they provide a basis for the assessment and interpretation of sources in order to achieve the objective of historical research.
- While sources must be reliable and valid, it is important to strive at understanding the origins of the sources because no matter how meticulous the process of recovery, interpretation and presentation might be the reconstruction of the past goes beyond mere summing up of reliable information available in the sources.

- A major problem facing the historian in his work is that he has no direct access to the past, since events happen and disappear.
- What is then left of the past are traces or fragments of information which may be in the form of primary, secondary or tertiary sources.

- The situation is even more daunting for the historian engaged in the reconstruction of the history of pre-literate peoples
- The absence of written sources upon which conventional history rests presents its own problems.

# Oral sources

- The deficiencies of the written, contemporary sources have made historians of traditional societies to seek data from alternative sources, particularly oral tradition mainly in the form of myth, legend, song, and popular history.
- However, the use of oral sources in historical reconstruction is replete with difficulties of which the problem of chronology is outstanding.
- As an illustration, in traditional history of Africa, accurate chronology was hardly taken seriously as emphasis was on specific events. Even when there are specific references to years, generations and periods, they may relate to 'structural' and not chronological time.

# Distortion

- Again, frailty of human memory makes it difficult to chronicle events in specific detail for more than four generations.
- Distortion is yet another limitation of oral tradition.
- Distortion in oral tradition occurs either due to alteration of traditions or adaptation to provide the basis for the elevation of a particular society above another.
- The historian encounters this problem when two societies give an account of the same events, thus the given evidence might conflict, or even contradict at many points.

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