

Problem of Objectivity in Research

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I. Introduction

Research is a scientific inquiry which aims at the discovery of truth on the basis of original evidence or facts. Fundamental to pursuing truth is to start with a question, rely on intellectually sound techniques and methods to answer it and report the answer it, whatever it may be. The question and even the kinds of evidence brought to bear may be shaped by values. After all, there is no such thing as value free social science. But in truthful research, the answers are what they are, regardless of the researcher's point of view. Every research is based on the assumption that the discovery of truth is the ultimate goal. A scientist aims to reach not only the truth, but the objective truth. Objective truth is the truth that is not dependant on the perspective or attitudes of any individual. Regarding the nature of truth it has been stated that truth is absolute and not relative. Truth is narrow since it rejects its opposite. It is universal, unchanging and knowledge.

Observing true picture of a phenomenon without being affected by observers own opinion is termed as 'Objectivity'. In other words, objectivity means knowing reality. Objectivity is fundamental to all sciences of research and is crucial for verification. The criterion of objectivity is that all researchers should arrive at the same conclusion about the phenomenon on which they are pursuing research. For example, coal is black. The proposition that coal is black because it appears black to all. If say that coal is the most useful mineral, this may not purely objective because all people may not agree to this statement. Competitive and collective enterprise would serve the objectivity. In the present paper an attempt is made to distinguish between objectivity and subjectivity in research and to know the factors which affect the researchers to obtain objectivity in a research.

II. Objectivity and Subjectivity in Research

The sole aim of the research is the objectivity. According to Green, "Objectivity is the willingness and ability to examine evidence dispassionately". Carr states, "Objectivity of truth means that the phenomenon would be a reality independent of beliefs, hopes or fears of any individual, all of which we find out not by intuition and speculation but by actual observation". Objectivity thus, means that the conclusions arrived at as the result of inquiry and investigations are independent.

Study of any phenomena may be either subjective or objective. A study is called as 'Subjective' when it is influenced by the scientist's individual values, feelings and beliefs. For example,

1. Western families are highly individualistic and disorganized.
2. Jews are cruel and selfish.

On the contrary, any study is considered as 'Objective' when it is based upon the objective observation of the factual events and not upon personal judgment. For example,

1. Muslims are more conservative than Hindus in adoption of family planning.
2. Birth rate in developing nations is higher than the birth rate in developed nations

Any scientific study has also to be free from the remarks like good or bad. Objectivity is an essential criterion to consider any study as scientific or non-

scientific. Therefore, the scientific methods provide a rigorous, impersonal mode of procedure dictated by the demands of logic. The criterion of objectivity is easily maintained in natural or physical sciences, whereas it is very difficult to maintain objectivity in social sciences because here our units of study are human beings themselves with whom we live and share our feelings and opinions. Besides this, people often have the tendency to consider their culture as superior; as a result often sociological and anthropological studies have suffered from 'Ethnocentrism'. By ethnocentrism is meant judging other's culture according to one's own culture and values.

III. Lack of Objectivity in Research

By objectivity we mean observation free from bias, from the observer's point of view. When we say "blood is red", it is an objective statement, but when we say "blood is the most useful element in the human body", then the statement may not be a purely objective one because of the fact that the human body cannot survive only with blood. For an effective functioning of the human body other useful components are needed along with blood, meaning blood can be a useful component, but most probably one cannot assign the word "most" before useful. In many research programs, various types of instruments and measures are being used. Good research designs use only those instruments and measures which are precise in nature. Generally, it is felt that objectivity can be achieved easily, but in actual situations, it is very difficult to attain the objectivity from a host of competitive available sources.

The objectivity observer must strive at self-elimination in his judgments and provide an argument which is as true for each individual mind as his own. He has to overcome his subjective judgment. But all persons living in a society are bound to have a set of values, through which they study their surroundings. These values constitute his "intellectual property". The subjective bias in research is a result of adverse influences of personal motives, customs and social situations. The sources of bias are selfishness, over-ambition, friendship, relationship, caste and community, class, religion, location, nationalism, language, political affinity, profession, opportunism, sexual bias, business, careerism, group bias, temperament bias, power bias, personal bias, pessimism, optimism, fanaticism, militancy. Guarding against such bias becomes a matter of perpetual vigilance for a true researcher. The problem of objectivity is more an issue of 'scientific bias'. The bias not based on narrow mental constraints but bias towards placing scientific truth about the personal privilege and interest. Personal courage, constant learning, clarity in value premises and commitment to the values help the researcher to keep away from the bias.

When a phenomenon is observed in its true form without being affected by observer's own views it may be termed as "objective observation". The main criterion of objectivity is that all persons should arrive at the same conclusion about the phenomena. Objectivity is fundamental to all sciences as the very purpose of science is to arrive at the naked truth. For the study of truth becomes infinitely variable, unique and non-measurable rather than one of repetitive, simplifiable and observable behaviour. The researcher is expected to remain ethically neutral. Ethical neutrality implies that the researcher does not take sides on issues of moral or ethical significance. As such, he should have no ethical, philosophical, religious, political, liberal or moral preference. The researcher should remain neutral and not take positions dictated by moral issues or values. The legal researcher must suppress his values and conduct value-free social research.

The legal research cannot be value free as it is concerned with the study of man and his behaviour in relation with the law. It may not be possible to find out the prediction of human behaviour governed by a complexity of factors. The whole debate on objectivity may have some relevance in gathering the facts but not in their interpretation. Most of the research techniques and methodological sophistication is directed towards this factor. Facts by themselves do not convey much unless they are interpreted. Those who lack a clear conceptual framework end up in confusion. Therefore the legal research depends on objective collection of facts and their conscious interpretation.

The problem of impartiality or biaslessness is in part, a problem of objectivity. The problem of objectivity is one of knowing reality. In addition to questions related to being, objectivity involves two other considerations;

- (i) the correct method of dealing with any questions, and
- (ii) of how we know anything

The legal researcher should be necessarily objective since he himself is a human being, living in societies and has certain interests. They are participants in social movements and accept certain values and ways of life. The problem of lack of objectivity i.e., of emotional attachment arises from the fact that the legal researcher has a large stake in the outcome of his studies. For a legal researcher to detach himself from his prejudice and biases is often an extremely difficult task. The reason for this is that he is influenced by (1) personal motives (2) customs and (3) social situations of which the researcher himself is a party. The legal researcher should not let his beliefs be influenced by the above factors. One's motives do sometimes affect beliefs adversely, at times leading him to adopt beliefs without considering evidence at all. When our motives pre-dispose us in the way to believe something that is conforming without good evidence, we are rarely aware that this is so. There are many habits or thoughts which are not easy to detect are generally accepted. A person's social situation i.e., his place in the social structure gives a rise to certain interests, leading in turn to prejudice and bias. There are cases, where an effect adverse to objectivity arises in the form of an intellectual error consisting in placing undue weightage or evidence which is near at hand. This evidence in turn varies with the person's social situation.

The argument of general failure of objectivity in legal studies may be dismissed with the following arguments;

1. The failure to objectivity in social inquiries is attributed to the fact that the researcher is a social being and is also actively participating in socio-legal affairs. In answering this objection, we may say that the biologist is himself an organism and a physicist also a body of given mass, interacting with other organisms and bodies. If objectivity is not achieved in legal studies with the above objection, similar is the case with other sciences also.

2. The failure of objectivity in legal studies is attributed to the effect of 'vested interest' on researcher's beliefs. It is attributed that he does not wish to disturb the *status quo* and often defy changes to enjoy his position in terms of wealth, power and prestige etc. But ordinarily this would not disturb their views about the factual working of the system and its effect on other members who are a part of it.

3. The failure of the researcher's lacking in detachment from his social environment generally point to the special potency of interests and emotions which are centered on their interrelationship with other people. In this regard, one should not forget that potent interests and emotions do not inevitably give rise to bias. They do so

where satisfaction is gained by our escaping from difficulties rather than by overcoming.

4. The future of the researcher's lacking of objectives is attributed to the social prejudice and custom based beliefs. Considering carefully, it may be said that social prejudice do sometimes pay and deliver social good. The custom based beliefs generally contribute to social stability. It is this that makes them less susceptible to challenge.

Achieving objectivity of an instrument or study principally requires standardization of the ways in which data are collected, analysed and interpreted. This will exclude the subjective or individual influences of the researcher or the concrete situation in which data were collected.

IV. Conclusion

In the light of the above reasons it can be said that attaining or maintaining objectivity in social science research including legal studies though not impossible, but is difficult. At any stage in research personal motives, social situations, irrational faith etc. would always influence the researchers. So we must find the best means of avoiding these obstacles. The true remedy seems to be one of making oneself conscious of the influences and be alert and careful in his research process. The social science researchers should constantly engage in improving the techniques or methods of data collection. Besides improving the methods, it is also essential to apply appropriate tools and techniques to eliminate bias, prejudice in research. In real sense, what is needed is perfecting of tools which will register, record and classify finer qualitative distinctions.