Data Collection with Special Reference to Historical Research – A Study

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Abstract— After deciding the topic of research and setting up of research plan, the most important step is to collect the required information which is suitable for the construction of the thesis. It is very much necessary to look for data relevant for the research topic chosen. Writing history is a narrative process which is done chronologically. So, In case of historical research the data required will be mostly in the form of paper which is already recorded either by government, an institution or by an individual.

Keywords— Data sources; Historical research; Thesis writing; Written records.

1. Introduction

Enquiry of past events with the help of written or unwritten oral records is known as historical research. Historical events are collective, chronologically narrated and interpreted by the historians. Writing history is a strenuous process because it should be done perfectly. Mistakes done by the historian will seriously affect the credibility of the event happened and will give a false picture to the one who reads it later. So, the solution for all these problems would be to do the data collection with high level of alertness. The research design based on the problem taken for research is the main criterion which decides the sources of data needed for the later stages of research work. Therefore it is essential for the research to collect relevant data. In this research paper it is intended to discuss about the crucial sources of data needed for the research related to history.

2. Hypothesis

This research paper titled "Data Collection with special reference to Historical Research – A Study traces the definition of historical research, importance of data collection in historical research, nature of sources, types of sources and the sources that are considered as the basics to write the history of India.

3. Source of the Study

The methodology adopted in this research paper is descriptive and narrative. Regarding the sources the work relies primarily on secondary data. Printed books such as Research Methodology in Social Sciences by Sadhu Singh, Methodology and Techniques in social Research by T.S. Wilkinson, Practical Approach to Research Methodology by S.P. Verma, Dimensions of social Research by P.B.Rathod, Research Methodology by Manoj Sharma were used for writing this research paper.

4. Limitations of the Study

The study is only about the research in the subject of history. Regarding Data Collection needed for historical research has been discussed in this paper. The area taken for giving examples is history of India.

5. Nature of Sources - Historical Research

Sources of data are considered as the raw materials of the historian. There would be an evidence left behind knowingly or unknowingly related to the events happened in the past. It is the duty of the historian to find the related sources to write the perfect history of the past events. Those evidences survive the test of time to remind people about the past happenings of the world. Some sources are left behind by men unintentionally. But some of them are intentionally done to preserve the posterity of their own identity. Such evidences are collected by the historians and will give a clear picture about the rulers as they thought how they should be remembered.

The relics and traces left behind for the future enquiry is known as sources. Historical events are written based on the historical sources. The sources are examined for the purpose of writing history. Sources can be classified into historical and non-historical sources. Historical sources are which can be traced with timeline. On the other hand, non-historical sources are found even before the historic period or prehistoric period which does not have a definite time frame.

The nature of sources can be material, immaterial and written sources. The objects used by the prehistoric and historic people can be considered as material sources. The material remains may be the structural remains, that is, temples built of stone in south India, monasteries built with bricks in eastern India, and Painted Grey Ware indicates the iron age of northern India. These material remains can

be found in mounds built up in course of time. Mounds are those formed due to the land covering by the remains of the successive habitations in a particular place. Mounds can be excavated horizontally or vertically to find the history of that place. Vertical excavation will reveal the time frame, sequence of time period, and the successive habitations of that exact site. Horizontal excavation will uncover the entire culture of the site in a specific phase of history.

The social life of the people can be traced with the help of immaterial sources. It includes the languages, faiths, customs, religious practices, ethical values, traditions followed by a group of people and stories about them. The seals, coins and the potteries used in the Harappan culture are considered as immaterial sources. Print sources of history are considered as written sources which can be replicated in print. These written sources can be trusted upon as master source for writing history. The chronicles of Kings and annals are considered as written sources of history.

6. Types of Sources used in Historical Research

There are two types of sources that can be classified under sources used to write history. They are primary and secondary sources of history. Primary sources are those which exhibit the occurrence of an historical event. Secondary sources are those which written by a person with the help of primary sources. I can be considered as a finished product produced from a raw material. It is considered better to study the secondary source first before attempting to collect primary source to understand the topic or a problem chosen for the research work.

Primary sources can further be classified into archaeological, numismatical, epigraphical, literary sources, ancient monuments, ruins, seals, sculpture, paintings, confidential records of an institution, government orders, fortnightly reports, census, gazetteers, etc. Most of the primary sources used in historical research are published by the government itself. Those resources can be accessed from the National or State archives functioning under the respective governments.

Archaeological sources are considered as pure form of historical sources. There is no way it can get polluted. No one can interpret those evidences found from the archaeological site. It serves as a direct source of information regarding the particular place or particular time period. Archaeological sources are considered important for writing prehistory and history of historic period. Most of the civilisations of the world are exposed only because of the excavations done in the archaeological sites of the respective civilisations. In India, Mohenjo-daro and Harappan sites were excavated to find out the existence of Indus Valley civilisation.

Epigraphical sources are mostly exaggerated accounts but are considered very important. Study of inscriptions or literary works carved on the walls of caves, stones, plates, seals, rocks and pillars are known as epigraphical sources. Most of the inscriptions are found in the languages such as Sanskrit or Prakrit. Script is important for the expression of information in inscriptions. Kharoshti and Brahmi scripts are used in the Indian inscriptions. Inscriptions provide us the information about the lifestyle, ethical values, and achievements of a ruler, economic condition, and territorial extent of a dynasty or kingdom. Pillar and rock inscriptions of Ashoka were considered most important to write the history of Ashokan Empire, Samudragupta's conquests were known from the famous Allahabad pillar inscription.

Study of historical information from the coins issued by the rulers of various ages is known as numismatics.It helps in the construction of rich history with definite information. Political, social, administrative, religious, cultural and economic condition of kingdoms, dynasties and are rulers were known from the study of coins. Earlier coins were punch marked and later minted. Gold, silver, copper, lead are some of the metals used for minting coins. These metals disclose the economic condition of the particular dynasty. Images marked in the coins will tell us about the appearance of the rulers. Coins were also issued to commemorate some important achievements of the rulers. Roman coins found in the site of Arikamedu throw light on the Indo-roman commercial transactions in the ancient times.

Numerous ancient monuments are found in India. Stupas, Rock-cut caves, temples, Viharas, Pillars are some of the examples for ancient monuments. Study of ancient monuments gives us a clear picture about the cultural and religious life of the people. The style of architecture and engineering are revealed. Pillars of Ashokan Empire, Ajnata and Ellora caves, Sanchi stupa are some of the examples of ancient monuments. Ruins are also considered important in writing history. The mounds found in the Indus valley site contains not only the structural remains but also non-monumental relics like utensils, tools, pottery, monolithic stone tools, terracotta figurines, weights and measures, etc. Seals are considered as very source of information for writing ancient history of India. Copper, soap-stone, clay and stone are some of the materials used for making seals. The sculptures and paintings found in the old temples informs us about the dressing style, ornaments, hair style, transport, taming of animals, etc.

Literary sources are often considered to know about the social and cultural conditions of the people and place. Literary sources are mostly exaggerated and written by the court poets due to the influence of rulers. Birch bark, palm leaves, sheep leather, wooden tablets, clay tablets were the materials used for writing. Religious literatures of Hinduism includes Vedas, Upanishads, Aryankas, Brahmanas, Epics namely Mahabarata and Ramayana, Jataka folktales of Buddha, Jaina texts, Holy Bible of Christianity, Holy Quran of Islam, Kautilya's Arthasashtra, Abhijnanashakuntalam of Kalidasa, Sangam literature of

South India, Ettuthogai, Pattupattu, Purnanuru, Patinenkil Kanakku discloses the history of India from time to time.

Confidential records are mostly related to the government comprising of military despatches, secret communications, serves as definite evidence and considered as primary source of data. Personal diaries, letters, Public reports, annual administration reports, gazetteers, annals, records of debates held in Parliament, Legislative Assembly, etc, editorials, regional newspaper reports, fortnightly reports, etc. comes under the category of primary sources. These sources are considered authentic.

The official orders or documents issued by the government every day will be recorded and preserved in the archival section for future reference. These records can be analysed to know the decisions taken by the government on particular issue or event. Government orders are maintained department-wise for well maintenance. National and state archives play a crucial role in preserving government orders and official records.

Secondary sources are supplementary records of history. They are called so because they are written based on the primary sources. Mostly historians start their research work by referring secondary sources. Secondary sources are not original sources of information. So, the historian must be cautious while obtaining information from secondary sources. There is an indirect connection between the past and the secondary sources. Secondary sources are mostly published written materials such as books both authored and edited, journals, periodicals, articles, encyclopaedias, etc. The historian must refer secondary sources which will automatically lead him to refer the right kind of primary source.

The merit of referring secondary sources is that it will give a clear picture about the topic chosen for research, the usage of sources can be understood, methodology adapted can be referred, a frame work can be read, the degree of research work done on the topic can be evaluated which help in further study of the unexplored areas, bibliographical data can be collected, the idea of interpretation can be derived. A background study can be made with the help of the secondary sources. The primary sources can be understood better. This will give a lead and motivation for further research work.

7. Conclusion

As discussed above collection of data will be done once the problem or topic of research is chosen and research design is plotted by the researcher or historian. Survey of literature should be done to know the availability of sources related to the particular research topic. Secondary sources should be consulted as a preliminary step. This will push the researcher for the further study and clarification needed thus leading to consult primary sources which is the most important and crucial stage in the research process. Collection of primary sources is very important as it will act like the DNA structure of a human being. High level of care should be taken while collecting data which is the base for the research. This will in turn reflect the credibility of the research work done by the historian.

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