

Developing a Research Design based on the distinction of History from the Social Sciences

Rafia Riaz¹, Amanullah Khan²

Article History

Received:

October 16, 2023

Revised:

November 6, 2023

Accepted:

December 20, 2023

Published:

January 11, 2024

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Abstract

The issues of methodology are mainly associated with the concept of authenticity and verification of knowledge which is a key element of epistemology. Since antiquity, various solutions have been proposed and methods were evolved in order to ensure accuracy and truthfulness of the knowledge gained. As far as history was concerned, its methods were evolved in its own epistemological framework in ancient and medieval times. However, after the development of philosophy of science in the west, the discipline of history had to face severe methodological crisis. Some major philosophers of history after an evolutionary process rejected the methods of sciences; however, the discipline is still somehow related with the social sciences. The present research argues that history is even different, ancient and unique from the social sciences. Thus the methods of research in history are entirely different and building a research design in history is a completely different task. The present research has evaluated the evolution of development of methods in the social sciences as well as in history in order to draw a distinction of social sciences from history. The study further proposed a historical research design which is based on the traditional methods of research in history; and which also ensures maximum authenticity by using tools of reliability. The study will help the historians to highlight the actual methodological nature of their discipline and to justify the claims of their researches as authentic and different from the rest of the social sciences at the same time.

Key Words: history, social science, method of research, historical research design, sources, historian

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of History, International Islamic University Islamabad, rafia.riaz@iiu.edu.pk

² Assistant Professor, Department of History, Quaid-I-Azam University Islamabad, amkhan@qau.edu.pk



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/)

Introduction

The narrative of bringing all knowledge under the umbrella of science has severely damaged the status of many branches of knowledge over the passage of a few centuries. Excluding all forms of art and creative activity from the valid and scientific forms of knowledge was one of the major drawbacks of the era of enlightenment and scientific revolution in Europe. History was one of such disciplines which was out casted and ridiculed by the great philosophers like Rene Descartes and it lost its ancient position as a branch of knowledge. Debates generated from then onwards on the methodology and status of history as a branch of knowledge. Many philosophers including Vico tried to defend the status of the discipline however the most significant work emphasizing on the unique method of history and its status as an independent branch of knowledge which must be seen as different from science was that of R. G. Collingwood. This work was a successful attempt to recast whatever has been wronged with history in its imposed war with the sciences. However it still had to pass from another hard stage of its evolution and that apparently was a shelter from the attacks of the proponents of scientific method. This was its affiliation with the social sciences. Thus the discipline of history had to place itself either in social sciences or otherwise in arts and humanities.

The present research argues that while aligning history with social sciences, the discipline had to struggle hard to work within the paradigm of social sciences. The reason was the actual nature and scope of history. History is a very different, ancient and unique discipline. Social sciences had established some rigorous techniques and methods for research over the passage of time; however the methods of research in history are entirely different from social sciences. Building a research design in history is largely different from other social sciences. The present research has also proposed a historical research design which is based on the traditional methods of research in history. Moreover it also argues that the traditional methods of research in history contain all the necessary tools of verification of knowledge that any other science can claim. Similarly the issues of objectivity of knowledge are not only relevant for history alone, infact all branches of knowledge including social sciences and even some of the natural sciences cannot claim complete objectivity.

Various aspects of the debate on history as a discipline has been covered by a variety of sources since the discussion on the nature and methodology of various disciplines began in the west and

some of the important works were produced by historians (Collingwood, 1946; Carr, 1964; Elton, 1968; Bloch, 1984; Tosh, 1984; Gilderhus, 1987; Evans, 1999). There were also many serious efforts at explaining the complicated process of historical research. One of a very remarkable work is produced in French by CH. V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos translated in English by G. G. Berry with the title of Introduction to the Study of History (Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, 1898). The work has covered almost all different aspects of the methods of historical research starting from the search for documents to the discussion on auxiliary sciences and external and internal criticism. The work has also discussed in detail the grouping of facts and how historical facts are finally constructed. Similarly there are many recent sources which have discussed research methods in history. Martha C. Howell and Walter Prevenier gave a very good description of historical sources in their work From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods (Howell and Prevenier, 2001). They have categorized the sources, explained where they could be found and discussed how different other sciences can give technical help to use the historical sources. But from here the discussion went on the conceptual themes such as causation and objectivity. Similarly the work of Simon Gunn and Lucy Faire with the title of Research Methods in History is an attempt to determine some specific methods of research in history particularly in order to avoid criticism from other social scientists and to justify the claim of history as a discipline and a branch of knowledge (Gunn and Faire, 2012). The authors have targeted a few areas of research in history along with focusing the use of latest technology and methods for historical research. Although the authors wanted to “identify, clarify and debate” about the methods of historical research yet the whole discussion tilts more towards conceptual and theoretical complications of the methods instead of clearly delineating them (Gunn and Faire, 2012, p. 5). If to explore more precise studies on research in history, W.H. McDowell’s Historical Research: A Guide was considered as one of the best practical guide on historical research (McDowell, 2002). Similarly, in terms of providing a more clear and precise method of history, the effort of Michael J. Salevouris and Conal Furay was commendable. In their work The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide, theory and practice has been combined with practice done by exercises focusing on developing the skills of historians to understand and intellectually comprehend the difficult process of research in history while keeping in view the variety of sources, views and interpretations (Salevouris and Furay, 2015). In the same manner there are some very good works on the methodology of oral history (Vansina, 1973; Charlton et al., 2007; Barbara et al., 2009). Similarly

a few of the works have also discussed the relationship of History and social sciences generally trying to bring some kind of collaboration between the two sciences (Landes and Tilly, 1971a).

The aim of the present research is to shed light on the methodology of the discipline of history as distinct not only from the natural sciences but from the other social sciences as well. While acknowledging the complicated nature of the discipline of history in which it is important to read on how to search and use documents, understanding the issues of objectivity and exploring the debate of the philosophers on the methods of history, it is at the same time important to create clear research designs as they are available to the students of other social sciences. The present study has proposed a clearly designed method for historical research in order to argue that historians also work with a complete design and plan and the quality of their works should be judged according to the parameters of their own discipline. Moreover the intention is to provide a brief design to make it understandable for the students of history as well as for those social scientists who want to understand the unique nature of history.

The study will begin with the development of social sciences, after that it will explore the evolution of the discipline of history in different times and spaces. The debate will further be taken up to the methodology of history to the reason why history is different from other social sciences. Finally the study will offer a brief historical research design.

Development of Methods in Social Sciences

It was Auguste Comte who formally established the idea of social sciences, however the term was first used in 1824 by William Thompson (Thompson, 1824). The philosophy of positivism introduced by Comte brought a paradigm shift in the human sciences and added a new dimension to the discussion on the nature and methodologies of various disciplines.

Positivism was a complicated system which not only has introduced laws in social sciences but also tried to bridge the gap between scientific and humanistic knowledge. Thus the first principle “in the positive system is the subordination of the intellect to the heart” (Comte, 1865, p. 23). Comte wanted to bring a synthesis of reason and passion, the two distinct philosophies of his period. The supremacy of reason was the philosophic basis of not only the deductive method of Descartes and experimental method of Francis Bacon but of the whole age of enlightenment and scientific revolution. Comte while accepting the significance of reason stressed upon the existence and

functions of passion in directing human life; in fact he believed that intellect is the servant of heart³ and its services should be used to understand the universe. Thus in the view of Comte, the role of heart is central and it should use the intellect to understand the order of the universe, however the heart being the central command must regulate and discipline the intellect so that it may not “bend towards speculative digressions” (Comte,1865, p. 37-8). Comte further clarified the idea in the words that the intellect should be left free to get full benefits of its services but on the same time we must control “its natural tendency to unlimited digressions” (Comte,1865, p. 38-9). Comte further argued that there are laws or order by which humanity is regulated and human life is subjected to this order. The abstract laws should be made objective through study and research and with the help of these laws we can get a complete understanding of even those societies of which we do not know anything (Comte, 1865, p. 42-3).

Thus in the initial phases of the development of social sciences, it was meant to end the “antagonism which, since the close of the Middle Ages, has arisen between Reason and Feeling” and which in the view of Comte “was an anomalous” (Comte, 1865, p. 39). Moreover in the system of positivism the study of laws must be used for the betterment of humanity. Thus in the view of Comte “the universe should be studied not for its own sake but for the sake of Man rather humanity” (Comte, 1865, p. 37-8). Now the question arises how the study of laws can bring betterment in the society which Comte answers with his usual flow of thought that when the Intellect comprehends this order, the heart is able to control our contradictory tendencies. Self love is controlled and benevolent affection is strengthened. (Comte, 1865, p. 23-4) This is the main function of intellect in the system of positivism and that is how the purpose of humanity will be served.

Comte has largely set the philosophical basis of the system of positivism or laws of social sciences but it was Emily Durkeim who for the first time explicitly explained the methods of social sciences in his book *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (Durkheim, 1895/1982). Emile Durkheim also established a department of sociology at the University of Bordeaux in 1895. Later on the

³ Comte has used the word servant and says its servant of intellect and not slave. This reflects the proper position of intellect and heart in the philosophy of Comte. This idea seems identical from what Imam Ghazali (d. 1111) has talked about Qalb (heart). According to Imam Ghazali, Qalb is the supreme authority and intellect is its advisor, the one from whom he can take advice. (Ghazali, 1999, p. 40-46).

discipline developed gradually and in 1905 American Sociological Association was founded whose main function was to promote social sciences. At that time, the theoretical subjects were more popular within the social sciences. In the meeting of American Sociological Association in 1910 F. Stuart Chapin shared a survey according to which he concluded that majority institutions in America which are teaching sociology place more emphasis on anthropology, ethnology and psychology and practical subjects are less represented (Rhoades, 2005, p.12). It was around 1950 after the world wars, when there emerged a rising need of keeping and recording data for political and economic purposes that encouraged the development and growth of quantitative methods of research (Backhouse, 2015, p.3-4).⁴ Later, around 1980, sociology particularly and social sciences in general again have realized the significance of qualitative researches and have drifted more towards qualitative research (Bailey , 2014, p.170-1). Although the first methods in qualitative research were introduced by Paul Felix Lazarsfeld in 1925 in the form of psycho analysis, (Bailey , 2014, p.177-8) various different frameworks and methodologies evolved over a period of time which have been accepted and utilized by the social scientists.

Evolution of the Discipline of History

The evolution of the discipline of history is not unanimous in all times and societies. Different ancient and medieval cultures have seen the evolution of the discipline in a considerably different manner. For instance the ancient Greek culture was familiar with the discipline by the name of “Historia”. The word history is also originated from this Greek word “Historia” which means “to inquire something.” Thus the Greek culture looks at history as something which needs to be inquired or investigated. The approach of the Greeks towards the historical knowledge thus was very critical.

The time and space in which a particular historian is living influence the historiography that he produced. The Greek historian Herodotus was born in 480BC at Halicarnassus, a city state of East Greece (Scanlon, 2015, p.26; Roberts, 2011, p.6). As Herodotus lived in East Greece, the influence of medicine and natural sciences flourished in that area had great influence on his writings. The critical approach of the Greeks towards history had also its roots in the development and growth

⁴ See a detailed discussion of the rise of quantitative methods (Porter, 1986); See another of his work emphasizing on the need and practical importance of quantitative methods (Porter, 1995).

of the discipline of philosophy and natural sciences in the Greek culture which had strong impact on the development of other disciplines in that society. The influence of his time and space can be easily identified in the writings of Herodotus. Similarly many well known sophists (the early philosophers) belonged to the East Greece or to colonies controlled by East Greeks. Thus they also had an influence on the writings of Herodotus (Thomas, 2000, p.16). Mythology was very popular in Greek culture, however as mid-fifth century was a time of the progress of natural sciences; Herodotus initiated his task of writing history as a scientific study. In the words of Jennifer T. Roberts, “It was the extraordinary achievement of the great Greek historians of the 5th century to take a page from the natural scientists and undertake research – historia” (Roberts, 2011, p.1). Thus Herodotus had distinguished the facts from the myth and was the first person to develop historical methods of asking questions and basing their answers on evidence. (Collingwood, 1946, p.24-25)⁵ The history produced by Herodotus was based on this critical thinking. He tried to explore the nature of war between Greeks and Persians by asking questions about several aspects of that war and finding the answers from different accounts of eyewitnesses. He collected and arranged facts and created a narrative by relying on his own analysis (Roberts, 2011, p.1; Lateiner, 1989, 55-75).

Similarly if the origin and development of history in Chinese culture has to be explored, it has taken a slightly different course. Most of the earliest works in Chinese history, that are also included in the famous official record of Chinese history named as Twenty Four Histories either starts with Shu or Shi. Shu means the book and the word Shi has been translated as history however it can also be translated as calendar. For Instance the oldest Chinese book of history was named as Shujing (Book of Documents) (Pettersson et al., 2011, p.61). Around 1st century AD, Sima Qian wrote Shiji (Records of the Grand Historian) (<https://totallyhistory.com/the-records-of-the-grand-historian/>) (accessed on 9/16/2023). The famous Spring and Autumn Annals by Confucius also focused on maintaining records of events thus the works of history in China initially started with the concept of recording something and went up to the concept of date or chronology. In 771 BC,

⁵ Collingwood has discussed in detail the Greco-Roman historiography in which he has explored the period of mythical and then theological history leading ultimately to the scientific history of Herodotus and Thucydides which was a major shift from the earlier period (Collingwood, 1946, p. 14-45).

in Zhou Dynasty all titles of official historians included the word Record, for instance Da Shi was the title of an official historian which means the keeper of the Records of Great Events. Similarly Xiao Shi was keeper of the Records of Small Events. Thus the works of history in China were largely associated with maintaining records of events (Zhang, 2015, p. 354).

To take another example of the development of the discipline of history in different time and space, the unit of Muslim civilization can be analyzed. The Muslims also developed their epistemology regarding history in a gradual process. From the amalgamation of maghāzī, genealogy,⁶ hadith and poetry developed a consciousness about history which provided an inspiration for the development of historical studies in the later Muslim society. Within a period of 200 years, variety of genres within historical studies had developed including sīrah, futūh literature, ṭabaqāt, world history/universal history and tāriḫ.⁷ The word tāriḫ was derived from khabar/akhbār which

⁶ Maghāzī is a branch of knowledge that originated from pre-Islamic Ayyām-ul-Arab (battles of the Arabs). . This ayyām was recorded in the form of poetry as well as oral narratives. According to Duri, Iraqi school of historical thought was particularly influenced by Ayyām-ul-‘Arab. This school prevailed in Iraq and important representatives of this perspective are Abū Mikhnāf (d. 744), A‘wāna bin al-Ḥakam (d.764), Sayf bin al-‘Umar (d.796), Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim (d. 827) and al-Madā‘inī (d. 839). (A. A., 1983, 41-50); Genealogy is a science in which names, tribes and pedigrees of people were recorded. It was widely practiced in pre-Islamic times. Genealogy was not only used in the works of history, but it also emerged as a separate branch of history in the early Islamic period. Some of the famous works on genealogy in early Muslim historiography include Al-Sam‘ānī’s work Al-Ansāb, Ibn Ḥajr al-‘Asqalānī, Al-Iṣāba fi Tamīz-ul-Sahāba, Balādhuṛī, Ansāb-ul-Ashrāf, and Ibn Ḥazm, , Jumhara Ansāb-ul-Arab.

⁷ The science of hadith writing created a tendency to formulate an organized biography of the Holy Prophet Muhammad PBUH which was later called as sīrah writing. The first survived writing of sīrah is that of Ibn-i-Ishāq however sīrah has been compiled and written much earlier. Shibli Naumani has mentioned almost 8 sīrah writers before Ibn-i-Ishāq. (Naumani, 1995, 28-30); Futūh was an extended form of maghāzī literature. Futūh-ul-Shām of Waqīdī, Futūh-ul-Buldān by Baladhuri, Kitāb-ul-Futūh of Kūfī and Tāriḫ-i-Futūh-ul-Shām of Azdī constitutes some of the famous maghāzī literature. Ṭabaqāt means layers and Ibn-i-Sa‘d (784-845) was the founder of ṭabaqāt genre in historical studies. Ibn-i-Sa‘d has developed a completely new style by merging the elements of hadith, genealogy and biography. He actually wrote biographies of hadith narrators and in each biography, he has given the detailed genealogy of the hadith narrator. He has organized these genealogies chronologically and has used the concept of time and space very effectively. The work of al-Mas‘ūdī and later on Ibn-i-Khaldūn is considered to be the works of world history. The work of al-Ṭabarī is the most evident example of the works on Ta’riḫ.

literally means news and *tārīkh* literally means date. There was a separate localized condition for the development of these genres however the pioneers in all these genres made experiments in methodology and adopted a much different approach of writing history from one another and thus were able to develop new branches of history. However in all these genres, two significant aspects of history were taken care of. One that these branches remained associated with the concept of time, space and chronology. Thus the Muslim's notion of history was more associated with the concept of chronology and narrating the events. (For more details of Muslim Historiography see, Franz, 1968; A. A., 1983; Khalidi, 1994; Robinson, 2003). Furthermore the issues of authenticity and verification of sources in order to ensure the validity of knowledge has also remained significant in all of these genres.⁸

The discipline of history, it is important to notice, in all these ancient and medieval cultures, was not bound with the concept of past alone, although it had a vivid concept of time and space. Moreover there was a different mechanism in every society to ensure the reliability of knowledge.

Debates on the Nature of the Subject: History and Science

The debates regarding the nature and subject matter of history have started in the west particularly after Renaissance. Although, Ibn Khaldūn in 14th century AD has raised a debate about the critical analysis of the sources of history (Ibn Khudūn, 2000/1377, p.15-68; Al-Azmeh, 1982; Mehdi, 1964) and the same has been practiced in Muslim society since its inception; the reason of which was the rigorous method of hadith scholars to critically evaluate the chain of transmitters. The same was loosely followed by the Muslim historians; however the issue was not known to have been discussed in Muslim society before Ibn-i-Khaldūn.

In West, the debates regarding the nature of history started in a period which was later materialized in scientific revolution. It was an age when philosophy of science evolved and flourished. In such an environment, the claim of history as a valid branch of knowledge was not easily recognized. It was Rene Descartes (1596-1650) a French mathematician and philosopher of science who challenged the reliability of the methods of research in different sciences and concluded that

⁸ Isnad or providing the chain of transmitters for any tradition was a system of verification of information that the Muslim historians use and it was considered as one of the most important part of early Muslim historical writings.

Mathematics was the most reliable science. He however excluded history from the category of valid knowledge as according to him, there was no reliable method to study history because “even if the most faithful of accounts of the past neither alter nor exaggerate the importance of things in order to make them more attractive to the reader, they nearly always leave out the humblest and least illustrious historical circumstances, with the result that what remains does not appear as it really was” (Descartes, 2006/1637, p.8-9). In fact he denied the need to study history by claiming that “when we immerse ourselves too deeply in the practices of bygone ages, we usually remain woefully ignorant of the practices of our own time”. (Descartes, 2006/1637, p.8)

Vico was one of the philosophers who refuted the ideas of Descartes and proposed his own philosophical system of knowledge in his famous work *Scienza Nuova* (The New Science). He was a critic of enlightenment and tried to reinforce the significance of reality in poetic and artistic forms. In the opinion of Collingwood, Vico believed that history is “capable of yielding knowledge just as certain as the knowledge Descartes has ascribed to the results of mathematical and physical research” (Collingwood, 1946, p.65). Vico has strongly negated the knowledge based only on senses and mental faculties and in his new sciences has given much emphasis to the immortality of human soul and that passions should be moderated and made into human virtues (Vico, 2016/1725, elements Axiom 130; Berlin, 1980; Berlin, 2000).

This debate was then continued and although the remarkable intellectual entry of Comte with championing the case of sociology as the highest science provided a great safe to the defensive historians, but it also threatened to bring the subject matter of history under the umbrella of science. Thus, the issue of the nature of history still remained unresolved.

Those who followed Comte’s Positivism, tried to apply that on history too and argued in favor of finding common patterns and making broader generalizations. There was an age when English historians like Lord Acton (1834-1902) were convinced to produce an ultimate history. Lord Acton, in his passion to regain the lost status of history declared it to be a science, just like other natural sciences. According to him, the historians like scientists gather facts, arrange them and find conclusions. According to Lord Acton, historians can produce neutral, unbiased and scientific histories. In his view, “If men were truly sincere, and delivered judgment by no canons but those of evident morality, then Julian would be described in the same terms by Christian and pagan,

Luther by Catholic and Protestant, Washington by Whig and Tory, Napoleon by patriotic Frenchman and patriotic German” (Acton, 1906, p.18).

Lord Acton was infact the inspiration behind creating the Cambridge History Series in which he has planned to conclude the history of the world, once and for all. One of the series of Cambridge history records the famous words of Lord Acton claiming that the “ultimate history we cannot have in this generation; but we can dispose of conventional history, and show the point we have reached on the road from one to the other, now that all information is within reach, and every problem has become capable of solution” (Mowat, 1968, p.1).

This position taken on behalf of history was greatly perplexing the traditional historians, who knew the limitations, actual circumstances and the original nature of history. Reducing history to a science would drastically reduce the ultimate aim and significance of the subject. Much to the relief of traditional historians, a contemporary of Lord Acton, an English historian, Collingwood (1889-1943) took a drastically different position while exploring the nature of history. In his book, *The Idea of History*, he argued that the purpose of history is to study the motives of the historical actors to comprehend the nature of historical events. This definitely cannot be done by any scientific method of research; instead the historian must try to read the minds of the historical actors through looking at the available sources. Thus history along with collecting and arranging facts relies largely upon the imaginative skills and judging ability of the historians. Collingwood has called the simple collection and narration of facts as ‘cut and paste history’, which can be called scientific but has no significance (Collingwood, 1946, p. 257-261). According to him, “Historical knowledge, then, has for its proper object thought: not things thought about, but the act of thinking itself” (Collingwood, 1946, p.305). Thus Collingwood is considered as the founder of idealist school of thought in history in contrast to the positivists.

In 1961, the thesis of Collingwood was further strengthened by still another English historian, E. H. Carr (1892-1982). Carr raises the issue of the role of historian in choosing, selecting and then arranging the facts. The social, cultural and intellectual background of the historian would frame his choice and selection of facts and then would further become evident in arranging and finally explaining the phenomenon. Thus Carr believes that no scientific history is possible, instead history is relative (Carr, 1964).

In the later part of the twentieth century, the historians like Fernand Braudel, G. R. Elton, Mark T. Gilderhus, Benedetto Croce, John Tosh, and Richard J. Evans continued the debate. On the methodology of history, a further school of postmodernists also developed, but it could not get widespread acceptance by the community of historians. In the twentieth century, along with the introduction of many other debates within the discipline of history, the issues of methodology are still alive and the debate is going on with historians either taking positivist or idealist/relativist positions.

Relationship between History and Social Sciences

History has been treated as a separate discipline in many parts of the world as for instance American Sociological Association has not added history in its list of subjects. Similarly several works dealing with the history of social sciences have also not included history in their list (Backhouse and Fontaine, 2010; Backhouse and Fontaine, 2014). The opinion is not however general, there are a few works on social sciences which have included history in their domain, for instance The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences has included a fairly large number of entries on history (Sills, 1968). Likewise Donald K. Sharp has included history while explaining the development of different social sciences (Sharp, 2009). Similarly Eller has talked about the different kinds of history writing starting from the development of Ancient to modern history including the view of different philosophers on the process of history while talking about social science and historical perspectives (Eller, 2016). Thus the status of history has always remained fluctuating within the domains of social sciences, arts or humanities. If we only talk about the Pakistani academic circle, history departments have been working under the academic leadership of the faculty of social sciences as well as Humanities and arts.

However there is a continuous lack of understanding and acceptance for history as a separate discipline. There are a few works dealing with the relationship of history and social sciences emphasizing that “historical narrative can be incorporated into a scientific frame” (Jacob & Adebayo, 2014, p.35). Around 1970, National Academy of Sciences and the Social Science Research Council conducted a survey of the behavioral and social sciences. David S. Landes and Charles Tilly concluded that “the promotion of social scientific history is in the interest of all historians” (Landes and Tilly, 1971b, p.1). They showed a deep disapproval for those historians who kept a different position by calling them as those who greet the recommendations of social

scientific history “with doubt, scorn, anxiety, or hostility” (Landes and Tilly, 1971b, p.1). Further commenting on the traditional methods of research in history they argued that “If the product of research is personal, it is not necessarily cumulative or additive. Some research is worth doing because of the subject and the person doing it, but much work is a waste of time, the writer’s and the readers’” (Landes and Tilly, 1971b, p.2-3). The work has judged the status of the discipline of history from its own parameters without deeply knowing and understanding the methods of research in history and has concluded that the historians should learn the methods of social sciences in order to bring improvement in their research. Although interdisciplinary approach is much appreciated even by the historians as we can see a nexus of historians with sociologists when “Annales historian Marc Bloch helped sociologist Maurice Halbwachs think through his conception of collective memory” (Steinmetz, 2016) however it cannot be created artificially.

Why Historical Research Design is Different and Unique: The Significance of Sources vs Method

“The pressure to make explicit methodological assumptions” to historians from other sciences has been taken as a positive challenge by Simon Gunn and Lucie Faire who argued that methods are important as methods are “linked to epistemology, the grounds of knowledge” (Gunn and Faire, 2012, p.4). Further emphasizing on finding clear methods for history, he stated that “we need to identify, clarify and debate what we mean as historians when we say we are “doing research” (Gunn and Faire, 2012, p.5). However if one picks up and read the book, he will find the complicated debates of problems of the sources, discussion on the significance and possible means of doing archival research. This remained an issue with most of the books written on the methods of historical research. The reason is again the nature and the complicated process involved in historical research. There is a method but it is difficult to explain and more difficult to internalize without practice. Thus first, we need to understand why this method is different and how it is difficult before trying to clearly explain it.

The methods of research in history are different from other social sciences as the issue of reliability and authenticity, which was the basis of the development and evolution of Modern Research Methods in social sciences, is entirely different in history. A sociologist can do his research by simply observing the society, meeting people, taking their views on his proposed research

question, yet he does not do this. The reason is that he doubts it to be a universal phenomenon, thus in order to make his research authentic, he selects a particular research design and the relevant methods. Afterwards he collects his data from his respondents who become the primary source of the social scientists. The social scientists do not however rely on one or two respondents, instead he takes a fairly large sample and he tries to spread that sample fairly enough to include representation from all possible groups. Thus he may use any of the accepted formats of sampling. The use of design and then methods will help the sociologist to specify the next steps of his research. The selection of design and methods will be thus the most important and primary task of his research. (For research methods in social sciences see David and Sutton, 2011a; David and Sutton, 2011b; Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

The historian on the other hand begins his research on completely different grounds. After selecting his research problem, he also selects his research design, however the most significant part of this design is to find out and identify the sources. By the sources, the historians mean the eye-witness account or if it is not available, it can be any contemporary record that provides some information about the question historian has asked. If no written record is available, the historian can rely on oral or material records. The historian's sources can be in the form of materials, manuscripts, archival data, any personal files or records, actually anything that would help him in answering the question asked. Thus the most significant part of a historian's research is not choosing a method but is finding his sources.

Historical Research Design

In the light of the above discussion, it has become clear that historical studies have evolved in a different epistemological framework and can be operated through a completely different and largely complicated mechanism as compared to the other social sciences. However it is very pertinent to lay down the design of the historical research in order to clearly explain the various steps of this research.

Finding and Locating the Sources

It is very significant for the historian to know the availability and location of and access to his sources. The sources unlike respondents cannot be considered as population and none of the

sampling formulas can guide the historian to leave one or to choose another. The historian has to consult this entire unorganized, messy and impassive dump of sources in order to get answers for his research question. Thus, the most significant part of historical research design is to locate the sources before finding his methods of data collection and analysis (See a chapter on locating and indexing the sources in McDowell, 2002, p.93-108). The documentary sources may be found in libraries, archives, documentation centres, relevant ministries and offices while the material sources can be located in the relevant museums, excavation sites or any other historical sites.

Sources of Research in History:

The sources of history are varied, huge and can be different according to the time and space studied. For instance the historian who has opted for research in ancient history will have to rely on completely different sources and tools to complete his research. His main source will be consisted of material records, consisting of remains of the buildings, coins, pottery, sculpture or figurine, skeletons and bones, wall paintings or any tablets etc (see a detailed discussion on material culture as sources of history in Gunn and Faire, 2012, 48-65). The methods of research in ancient history will be different as the nature of the sources is different.

After getting an initial knowledge about the sources, the next stage is identification of sources according to the research design. All of the sources of ancient history will not be relevant for a historian of ancient history. Instead, he will select the sources according to his research question. The historian might be instructed by someone more acquainted with the sources to use a particular set of sources. However this process of identification of sources cannot be generalized, mechanized or methodized as the sources can be used to answer multiple questions and the variety of sources can mould, increase or vary the understanding of the historian about the question asked. For instance if a historian is doing research on the nature and significance of wall paintings in ancient Egypt, his main source will be the wall paintings, however he may get some information from the tablets, epigraphs or even the pottery as he may find the similarities between the patterns of art in pottery and wall paintings. Thus, the more sources a historian will able to locate and select the more dynamic his research will be.

Along with identifying and locating his sources, the historian on ancient history must take help from someone else or teach himself the techniques of excavations, the knowledge of numismatics,

paleography, epigraphy, chronology, philology, and diplomatic and certain chemical processes through which he could identify the material used in various sources in order to date them correctly and to further analyze them. These sciences are called in history as 'Auxiliary sciences' (See detail of these sciences and how they can be used in Howell and Prevenier, 2001, p. 43-59).

The nature of research in medieval history is quite different from ancient history as for medieval period, a historian gets a lot of written record, and thus he relies largely on that written record. These written records are called 'manuscripts' and there can be various categories and sub-categories of these manuscripts. It is thus not necessary for these manuscripts to be the works of history. They can be based on any written record including history, genealogy, poetry, chronological registers, records maintained by palaces, churches or monasteries, hagiographical literature, court histories, religious scriptures etc.

In medieval ages however the sources would be further classified and distinguished on the basis of different time and space. For instance, for doing research in early Muslim history, the sources will be slightly different from that of doing research in Medieval India. The possible sources for early Muslim history can be works of genealogy, poetry, maghāzī, geography, hadith literature, Ṭabaqāt Literature, biographies and works of Tārīkh. Most of these sources will be in Arabic. These sources can also be supported by local accounts of the areas which the Muslims conquered. Thus, for instance any written record produced in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran or Khurasan can be helpful. Again the further process of identification and selection of sources depends on the question asked. Likewise the sources for doing research in Medieval India will be very different in nature than that of early Muslim history. Most of these sources will be in Persian and Turkish, however a few of them will also be in Arabic. These sources might include court histories, hagiographical literature, theological texts, fatāwā literature, naṣīhah literature, biographies or autobiographies, memoirs etc. Some of these important documents are later on compiled in the form of books for instance the letters written by Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindhi are compiled as muktūbāt-i-Imam Rabbāni (Sirhindī, 1889). The further identification and selection of sources will be based on the area determined and definitely on the question asked.

Modern period roughly starting from nineteenth century and going up to the twentieth century is the time which is very near and the sources of history for this time period have been extensively preserved in abundance. This makes it possible for the historians to explore a variety of historical

issues however also makes it at the same time extremely complicated procedure to select the relevant sources from this bulk of records. The nature of the sources of modern history is not only different from ancient or medieval history but is also very vast. One major part of these sources consists of the official records which begun to be specially preserved by the governments. If we take the example of the British government in India, the records of different offices like police, postal office, divisional and district offices were preserved. Similarly the proceedings and judgments of the courts, records of the foreign office, government treaties and pacts, proceedings of different local representative bodies, provincial and national parliaments were also recorded minutely and saved. These and similar records have been maintained by the national and provincial archives of Pakistan and India and some of it has been transferred to Britain as well. There are certainly some instructions that need to be followed to get access to the archival material and to collect the relevant sources and finally the required facts from it (see a detailed discussion on the methods of archival research in Gunn and Faire, 2012, p.13-29). Apart from these official records, there can be a huge variety of private sources available for the researcher. These may include personal diaries, letters, and memoirs of important personalities. This may also include family record, autobiographies, and travelogues. In case of contemporary history, the official record will not be available thus newspapers and private records will be used. The documentary sources can be supplemented with interviews from the relevant persons⁹ (Robert C., 2007, p. 154-160; Vansina, 1973; Charlton et al., 2007; Barbara et al., 2009) surveys or any other quantitative studies as well.

Methods of Research for Collecting Data

Now comes, the most common question that if there is any particular method to deal with these sources or are there any special rules through which these sources will be used? The answer is that there is a proper mechanism and a complicated procedure to use the sources, (almost all important works on the methodology of History have devoted large sections either on the use or the importance of sources. For instance see Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, 1898, p. 17-41; Tosh, 1984,

⁹Interviews are considered as a technique of oral history. Some of the historical researches may completely base their studies on oral history or are largely based on it.

p. 71-121; McDowell, 2002 p. 54-76; see a detailed discussion on typology of sources and how they can be used in Howell and Prevenier, 2001, p.17-59; Robert C. 2007, p. 56-78) however there is no hard and fast rule. The reason is that the sources are different in nature from the respondents as they do not speak themselves, instead they remain constant. The sources of history have no opinions of their own. They just reflect the culture and customs of their own time. However there must be somebody who could speak on their behalf. This somebody is the historian who looks at the material record, takes help from the auxiliary sciences, connects one fact with the other, thinks about that particular age of history, keeps on connecting the data with one and another and finally becomes able to understand a particular epoch or phenomenon from the whole process of history. Thus the procedure of collecting data is indeed hard and needs an intelligent mind to select, sift and contextualize the relevant data from a plethora of material.

A historian for instance has asked a question about the economic structure of Indus valley civilization. There are definitely no economic surveys, reports or any other directly relevant data. The material record directly does not give any clue about it. Thus the historian will measure the economic structure of Indus valley from the structure of buildings, material used in it, difference between the residence of elite and common men in order to know the nature of class system, the coins and pottery used and their material, and probably a few other things as well. It solely depends on the thinking, connecting, analyzing and abstracting abilities of the historian to make the sources speak and to get most accurate answers for the question he had asked. The process is qualitative in nature and cannot be quantified. The significance of the work of history is to ask questions which are relevant for the present society and have never been answered before in the sources.

One important aspect of data collection is actually the collection of facts. The job of the historian is to pick up some scattered facts from the sources and create a new historical account. The whole process of research has well-defined stages however the process of the collection of facts cannot further be formalized. The historian collects the relevant facts from the plethora of his primary sources, however there is no fixed mechanism or method which could tell him to include one fact and to exclude the other¹⁰ (contrary to what the social scientists do in sampling)

¹⁰The whole thesis of E. H. Carr's relativism focuses on the idea that historian is free to choose his facts and that's how different historians may come up with totally different historical accounts of a same historical event (E. H. Carr, 1964).

Data Analysis: Organizing and Arranging the Facts

The next stage is to arrange the facts in an order, which can be thematic or chronological. This arranging of facts will be an attempt to get an appropriate answer of the question asked in the research. This part of research is like completing a picture with the help of several puzzle pieces. Historian's effort lies in finding all the relevant puzzle pieces or at least as much as he can. However unlike a modern puzzle game, the historian may not be able to find all the puzzle pieces. During the arrangement of facts, there may be some missing links (some of the facts have not been recorded anywhere). In such a situation, the historian may add a learned hypothetical possible description of what is most likely to happen to fill that missing gap. The description will be based on historian's knowledge of the relevant area. This whole process is qualitative however occasionally this data can also be used to make some quantitative findings (for instance see the work of Bulliet, 1979).

Another problem that usually comes across a historian, while arranging the data is the discrepancies or contradictory set of information of different sources about one event/incident. At this, the historian uses the technique of internal criticism¹¹ and makes judgments on the basis of other relevant evidence to know which of the account is accurate. Filling the gaps and doing internal criticism brings another material into creation along with the facts, which is called opinion.

Data Analysis: Methods for the Write-up

While writing the findings of a historical research, the historian must select a method of writing. All methods of writing in history include two important things. One is the fact and the other is the opinion. The opinion as already has been explained is based on historical facts and is constituted on filling the gaps and doing internal criticism. However a third category of opinion constitutes a very important part of historical writings. Most of the sources of history are descriptive in nature and do not answer the question of why. The question of why is to be answered by the historian. It is looking into the motives of the historical actors and finding causation in historical processes.

¹¹ Internal criticism is the part of historical criticism introduced by Ranke in the discipline of History. The benefit of using this rigorous method was to ensure maximum validity of knowledge. Internal criticism is a technique of interpretative criticism in which the text of different sources are critically compared, judged and evaluated to know if they are providing accurate information. For details see (Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, 1898, p. 71-190).

Historical writing styles have usually been divided into three broader types of descriptive, narrative and analytical (for more details of the writing style of history see Robert C. 2007, p.90-148).

Most of the facts answer the questions of what happened, where and when it happened or at the most how did it happen? If the historian decides to base his write up on this set of facts, he may write descriptive history which usually do not deal with the question of why. Descriptive form of writing is mainly a description of a historical incident/event with the help of facts and opinion (filling gaps or doing internal criticism). It may be thematic or chronological. In descriptive writing, the historian usually avoids using judgmental statements and do not apply his own moral standards on the subject researched.

In a narrative writing, the facts and opinion are arranged in the form of a story. This writing connects the facts in a causal link. The historian must develop a close connectivity between the facts and the opinion. The reader should not be easily able to discriminate between the two if they are blended properly. Moreover, the reader must not be distracted by the feeling of separation of facts and opinion. The historian creates this narrative on the basis of his own understanding of the historical phenomenon he is studying.

Analytical form of historical writing begins with an argument and then the collected facts and opinion is used as an evidence to prove that argument. This form of writing clearly takes a position and the historian provides a proper interpretation of historical events or processes according to his findings.

Conclusion

History definitely is not a deductive science and cannot be studied as a branch of natural science. However this does not reduce the significance of the discipline and it continued to exist as an important part of human sciences. As history deals with man and society, thus after the evolution and development of social sciences, it was commonly placed in the paradigm of social sciences. Along with that it was also generally assumed that the research methods recently evolved by the social sciences are sufficient to study history. However this was an erroneous assumption ignoring the fact that history is an ancient and unique discipline and encompasses a broader epistemological framework. Its style and methods have also evolved differently in different societies however in its entire journey from different times and spaces to modern times, the discipline of history has

devised its own mechanism to ensure accuracy and validity of knowledge. The historical research methods are entirely different in their origin, evolution and structure from the research methods in social sciences. The historical research design primarily consists of the historian's knowledge of the sources and their accessibility. Moreover the historical research design must include a proper plan of the location of the sources and the mechanism to use them. The whole research is subjective in nature and the role of historian is very important who examines the sources, connects one fact with the other, thinks about that particular age of history, keeps on connecting the data with one and another, applies internal criticism to sort out the discrepancies in data and finally becomes able to understand a particular epoch or phenomenon from the process of history. This whole procedure of research has its own steps and its own methods to follow and fruitful historical researches can only be produced by understanding and using these methods and by clearly differentiating them from the methods of social sciences.

Reference List

Acton, John. (1906). *Lectures on Modern History*. London: Macmillan & Co.

Al-Azmeh, Aziz. (1982). *Ibn Khaldun: An Essay in Reinterpretation*. London: Cass, 1982.

Backhouse, Roger E., & Fontaine, Philippe. (2010). *The History of the Social Sciences Since 1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Backhouse, Roger E., & Fontaine, Philippe. (Ed.). (2014). *A Historiography of the Modern Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bailey, Lawrence F. (2014). The Origin and Success of Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Market Research*, 56(2),167-184.

Berlin, Isaiah. (1980). *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Berlin, Isaiah, (2000). *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*. London: Pimlico.

Bloch, Mark. (1984). *Historians Craft*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bulliet, Richard. (1979). *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Carr, E.H. (1964). *What is History?* London: Penguin.

Charlton, Thomas Lee, Myers, Lois E., & Sharpless Rebecca. (Ed.). (2007). *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*. Lanham: Rowman Altamira.

Collingwood, R.G. (1994). *The Idea of History* (revised edition) (D. Jan Van Der, Ed.). New York: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1946).

Comte, Auguste. (1865). *A General View of Positivism* (Bridges, J.H., trans.). London: Trubner and Co.

David, Matthew, & Sutton, Carole. (2011a). *Social Research: An Introduction*. London: Sage.

David, Matthew, & Sutton, Carole. (2011b). *Principles of Methodology: Research Design in Social Science*. London: Sage.

Descartes, Rene. (2006). *A Discourse on the Method* (M. Ian, trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Originally written in 1637).

Duri, A. A. (1983). *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs* (Lawrance I. Conrad, Ed. and trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Durkheim, Emily. (1982). *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (L. Steven, trans.). New York: The Free Press. (published originally 1895).

Eller, Jack David. (2016). *Social Science and Historical Perspectives: Society, Science, and Ways of Knowing*. Routledge: Taylor & Francis.

Elton, G. R. (1968). *The Practice of History*. New York: Crowell.

Evans, Richard J. (1999). *In Defense of History*. New York: W. W. Norton Co.

Ghazali, Imam Muhammad. (1999). *Kīmiyā-i-Sa'ādat* (N. Muhammad Saeed, trans.). Lahore: Progressive Books.

Gilderhus, Mark T. (1987). *History and Historians*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Gunn, Simon, & Faire, Lucy. (2012). *Research Methods for History*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Howell, Martha C., & Prevenier, Walter. (2001). *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*. London: Cornell University Press.

Ibn Khudūn, (2000). *The Muqaddima: An Introduction to History (Vol.1)* (R. Franz, trans.). Islamabad: Reproduced by National Book Foundation (Originally published by Princeton University Press) (Originally written in 1377).

Jacob, Gunniyi Olayemi, & Solomon Adebayo, Atoyebi. (2014). *History, Science and the Social Sciences: The Relationship of Humanities to Other Knowledge Domain*. *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 3(5), 34-36.

Jan Vansina, Jan. (1973). *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*. London: Transaction Publishers.

Khalidi, Tarif. (1994). *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Landes, David S., & Tilly, Charles. (Ed.). (1971a). *History as Social Science*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Landes, David S. and Tilly, Charles. (Ed.). (1971b). *History as Social Science: Excerpts from the Report of the History Panel of the Behavioral and Social Sciences Survey*. *ITEMS*, 25(1), 1-6.

Langlois CH. V., & Seignobos. (1898). *Ch. Introduction to the Study of History* (Berry, G.G. trans.). London: Duckworth & Co.

Lateiner, Donald. (1989). *The Historical Method of Herodotus*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Mahdi, Muhsin. (1964). *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marshall, Catherine, & Rossman, Gretchen B. (2011). *Designing Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage.

McDowell, W.H. (2002). *Historical Research: A Guide*. New York: Routledge.

Mowat, C. L. (Ed.). (1968). *The New Cambridge Modern History: The Shifting Balance of World Forces, 1898-1945 (Vol. XII)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Naumani, Shibli. (1995). *Seerat-un-Nabi (sixth edition)*. Lahore: National Book Foundation.

Porter, Theodore M. (1986). *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Porter, Theodore M. (1995). *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pettersson, Anders, Lindberg-Wada, Gunilla, Petersson, Margareta, & Helgesson, Stefan. (Ed.). (2011). *Literary History: Towards a Global Perspective (Vol. 2)*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Rhoades, Lawrence J. (2005). *A History of the American Sociological Association, 1905-1980*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.

Robinson, Chase F. (2003). *Islamic Historiography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rosenthal, Franz. (1968). *A History of Muslim Historiography*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Salevouris Michael J., & Furay, Conal. (2015). *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*. West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons.

Sharp, Donald K. (2009). *The Evolution of the Social Sciences*. Maryland: Lexington Books.

Sills, David L. (Ed.). (1968). *The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences (Vol. 6)*. New York: The Macmillan Company & The Free Press.

Sirhindhi, Shiekh Ahmed. (1889). *Muktubat-i-Imam Rabbani (Vol.3)*. Lucknow: Nawal Kishore

Press.

Sommer, Barbara W., Lassiter, Luke E., & Quinlan, Mary Kay. (2009). *The Oral History Manual*. Lanham: Rowman Altamira.

Steinmetz, George. (2016). *How Interdisciplinarity Works: Field Theory and the Study of Interactions between History and Sociology*. ITEMS. Retrieved from

<https://items.ssrc.org/interdisciplinarity/how-interdisciplinarity-works-field-theory-and-the-study-of-interactions-between-history-and-sociology/>

Thomas, Rosalind. (2000). *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, William. (1824). *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness applied to the Newly Proposed System of Voluntary Equality of Wealth*. London: Longman.

Tosh, John. (2015). *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History* (sixth edition). New York: Routledge. (first Published in 1984).

<https://totallyhistory.com/the-records-of-the-grand-historian/> (accessed on 9/16/2023).

Vico, Giambattista. (2016). *The New Science*, (3rd edition) (G. B. Thomas, & H. F. Max, trans.). London: Cornell University Press. (Originally Published in 1725).

Williams, Robert C. (2007). *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student Guide to the Theory and Craft of History*. New York: M. E. Sharpe.

Zhang, Qizhi. (2015). *An Introduction to Chinese History and Culture*. Xi'an: Springer.