

SEMESTER – V

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

UNIT : II

TOPIC: FIELDWORK IN GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

PRESENTED BY

DR. SIPRA BISWAS

Field study: The observation and survey about the physical and cultural elements of a particular area and the analytical process of those surveyed data and information through which it can be established the reciprocal relationship between the physical and cultural environments of that area. This process involved to prepare or present a report is called field report. In other words, a field study gives a scope to share the experiences of the geographical research and even to discover a set of geographical facts hitherto inexperienced. To a geographer, therefore, field study is of utmost importance. If we have not the practical knowledge, we shall be unable to explain all the aspects of geography in a proper sense. Field study is, therefore, a medium of acquiring practical knowledge from the field.

Importance of field study in geography: The following reasons may point out that why field study is so much necessary in geographical research—

- a) Geography is a field science, thus, a geographical enquiry always needed to be supplemented through well-planned field surveys.
- b) b) These surveys enhance our understanding about patterns of spatial distributions, their associations and relationships at the local level.
- c) c) Further, the field surveys facilitate the collection of local level information that is not available through secondary sources.
- d) d) Field surveys are required so that the problem under investigation is studied in depth as per the pre-defined objectives

e) It helps in comprehending the situation and process in totality and at the place of their occurrence.

f) This also helps to know the characteristics as well as nature and the interrelationship between the elements of physical, economic and social environments of a particular area.

g) It is very essential to take a plan before the physical as well as socio-economic development of an area which may be achieved through field study.

Pre-field academic preparations: Several techniques have to be adopted by the researcher during the time of gathering information in the field.

Basically, the field techniques adopted for research study on any branch of geography can be stratified into the following heads—

A. Preliminary procedure: Before starting the research study, it is very important to take a preliminary preparation for understanding the subject matter of that research clearly. For this purpose, the researcher should follow the following steps viz.—

- i. Statement of objectives
- ii. Search for documentary materials
- iii. Selection of base map or aerial photographs
- iv. The reconnaissance
- v. The formulation of field plan
- vi. Recording of direct field observations
- vii. Field planning

Ethics of Field Work :

1. Basic topic of study: When we choose a research question, that very opening move contains ethical concerns. These ethical concerns are directed primarily towards our general audience for whom this study will be of interest. We must ask ourselves whether we believe we can accurately address our research question or whether we are setting ourselves up for half-baked conclusions that could negatively affect both the community of study and the community of scholars

2. Self-fulfilling study: Some studies seem designed to find exactly and only what they are looking for through the language they use and the definition of terms, through constraining the questions so that only a handful of answers are possible. Are we designing the work or defining our terms and questions such that we bound to find only that which we already expected? How is our research design leaving us open to surprise, to learning something unexpected, to understanding our topic from the various perspectives of the people in the community we are studying?

3. Sampling and participant selection:

When we work among a population, we should expect to find diversity & diversity in gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and personal habits and opinions. Are we attempting to gain a broad sample of voices in our work?

When we learn something, are we attempting to find people who might disagree, or would add a more complex interpretation?

4. Prediction of possible harms: The social sciences may not place people in physical danger in the same way that medical research might, but we can cause changes among those with whom we work. How will we attempt to protect the reputations of our participants? Could our work cause disruption in the community, or interfere with other ongoing plans? Could we inadvertently change the power structure in place through seeming to side with one group over another?

5. Selection of methods: Some questions can be answered through archival research, others through questionnaires, and still others only through immersion into a group. What is the least invasive method we can employ to get the answers to our questions?

6. Obligation to informants: When doing fieldwork, we are not only asking people to take time to work with us, we are also asking them to trust us. Each relationship we build with an informant is different, but all are implicitly reciprocal. Identifying exactly what are obligations are to our informants is perhaps the most crucial step we take in ensuring we act ethically.