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Process, Advantages, Disadvantages of Observation Method

LESSON 7 OF 32



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SOCIOLOGY-OPTIONALS -MAINS

PAPER 1.

FUNDAMENTALS OF SOCIOLOGY

UNIT 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSIS

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Vanamala Ramesh



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BOOKS REFERRED FOR THIS MODULE

1. Sociology: Anthony Giddens
2. Sociology by Haralambos and Holborn
3. MSO-002 (IGNOU, MA)
4. Internet, and Encyclopaedia.



MODULE 3

PROCESS, ADVANTAGES, DISADVANTAGES OF OBSERVATION .



Vanamala Ramesh

PROCESS OF OBSERVATION

- One of the striking aspects of observational field research is the absence of standardised operating procedures, because all cultures have their own distinct characteristics.
- Observation requires sensitive human interaction it cannot be reduced to a simple set of techniques.
- Yet a few scholars have tried to point out the path the observer has to in the field work.
- Sarantankos has provided with a six step procedure that needs to be followed in Observation.

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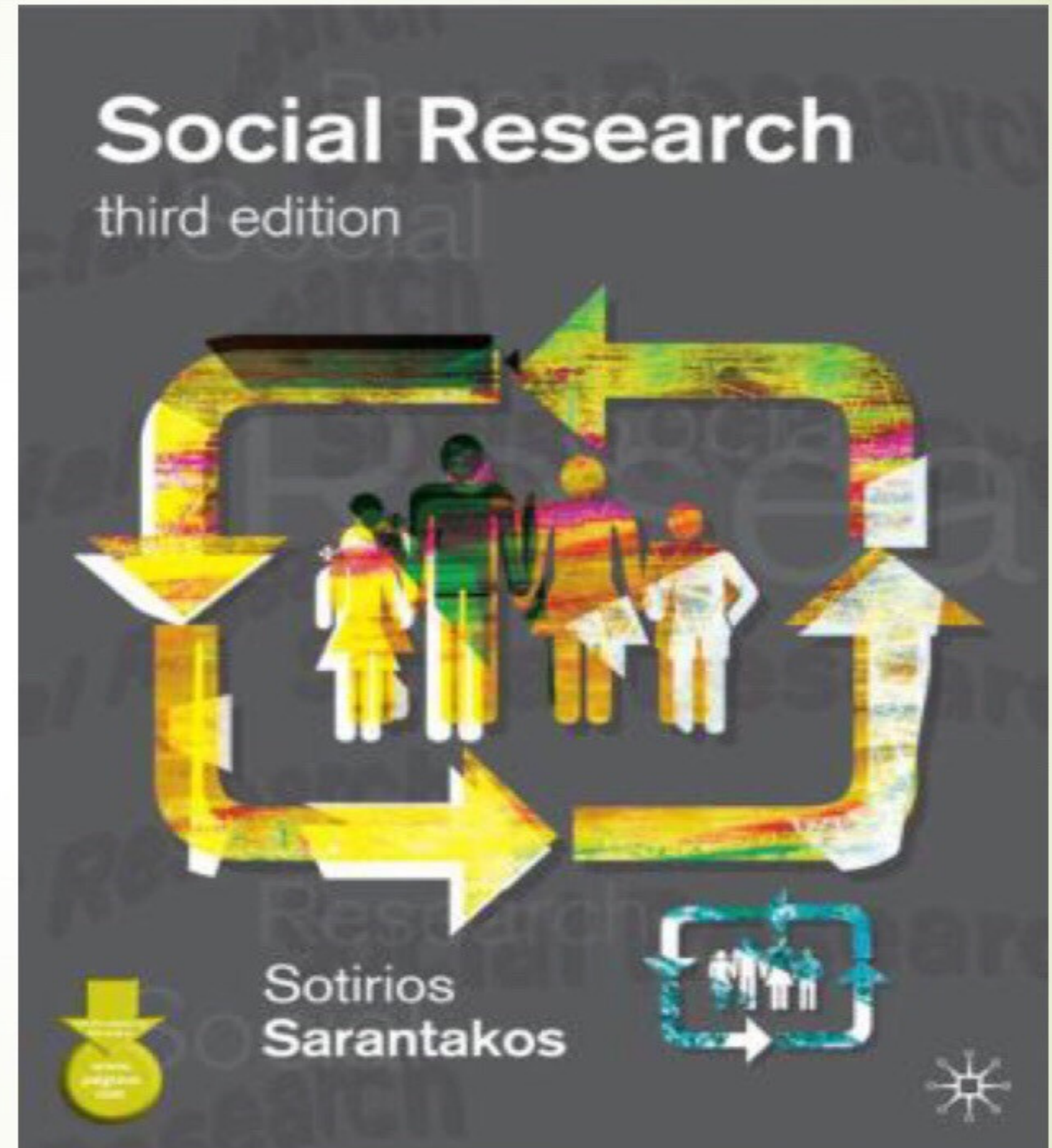
SARANTAKOS SIX STEPS FOR OBSERVATION

1. *Selection of the topic:* This refers to determining the issue that needs to be studied through observations, like marital conflict, Dalit atrocities, caste Panchayat, child workers in cracker factories.
2. *Formulation of the topic:* This involves fixing up categories to be observed and pointing out situations in which cases are to be observed.
3. *Research Design:* This determines identification of subjects that are to be observed, preparing observations schedule, if any and arranging entry in situations to be observed.

4. Collection of data: This involves familiarization with the setting, observation and recording.

5. Analysis of data: In this stage, the researcher analyses the data, prepares tables, and interprets the facts.

6. Report writing: This involves writing of the report for submission to the sponsoring agency or for publication.



FACTORS AFFECTING CHOICE OF OBSERVATION

1. *Relating to the problem:* Certain types of situations are not easy to be observed like the lifestyles of a drug mafia group, hawala dealers, professional criminals etc etc. Theoretical orientations like ethnomethodology, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism can be used.
2. *Relating to skill and characteristics of the investigator:* All social scientists do not feel comfortable in observing a situation for a long time, they feel more at ease in asking questions for an hour or so. Only a few scholars adjust themselves in an observable situation, thus persons with certain characteristics and skills can be good observers.

3. *Relating to the characteristics of the observed:* In getting information from the investigated people, their characteristics play an important role. The status of the interviewee vs the interviewer is a major factor in determining whether observation will be feasible as a method of data collection.

- Many people who are to be observed give importance to their privacy because of their occupational position, economic status, sub cultural values and social norms that they do not permit the observer to observe them in all situations.
- It is easy to watch economically disadvantaged groups than observe professionals like doctors and lawyers as they have to maintain sanctity and confidentiality of their relations with their clients.

BASIC PROBLEM IN OBSERVATION

Festinger and Katz have specified six basic problems.

1. Under what conditions are observations to be made? How is the observation situation structured?
2. What behaviour is to be selected and recorded in order to obtain the information required.
3. How stable are the conditions in which observations can be made so that same results may be obtained under what appears to be same conditions, are the measures reliable?
4. What is the validity of the process which has been observed ?

5. What evidence is there that some process which functional unity is being observed?

6. Has an attempt been made to summarize what is observed in quantitative terms? Can a score be assigned?

Lyn Lofland said that a few activities should be avoided by the researcher while using Observation technique.

- The observation purpose should not be kept secret from the subjects under observation. Information should be collected from maximum people.
- Researcher should be strategic in relations.

ADVANTAGES OF OBSERVATION

1. *Superior in data collection on non verbal behaviour:* It gives an in depth study to the phenomena that is observed.
2. *Intimate and informal relationship:* The relationship sometimes become primary than secondary.
3. *Natural environment:* Natural environment will not cause bias.
4. *Longitudinal analysis:* The researcher is able to conduct his study over a much longer period than in a survey.

ADVANTAGES ACCORDING TO SARANTAKOS

- It is less complicated and less time consuming. It offers data when respondents are unable or unwilling to cooperate to share information.
- It approaches reality in its natural structure and studies events as they evolve.
- It allows collection of wide range of information and it is relatively inexpensive.
- Observers can assess the emotional reactions of subjects, the observer is able to record the context which gives meaning to respondents expression.

DISADVANTAGES OF OBSERVATION METHOD

1. *Lack of control:* It is very difficult to control variables in natural setting.
2. *Difficulties in quantification;* The data collected through observation cannot be quantified, the recorded data will show how people interacted. In communal riots looting, burning of vehicles can be observed but cannot be quantified.
3. *Small sample size:* Observational studies use a smaller sample than survey studies, two or more observers can study a bigger sample but since observations are made for a longer period employing many observers can become a costly affair.

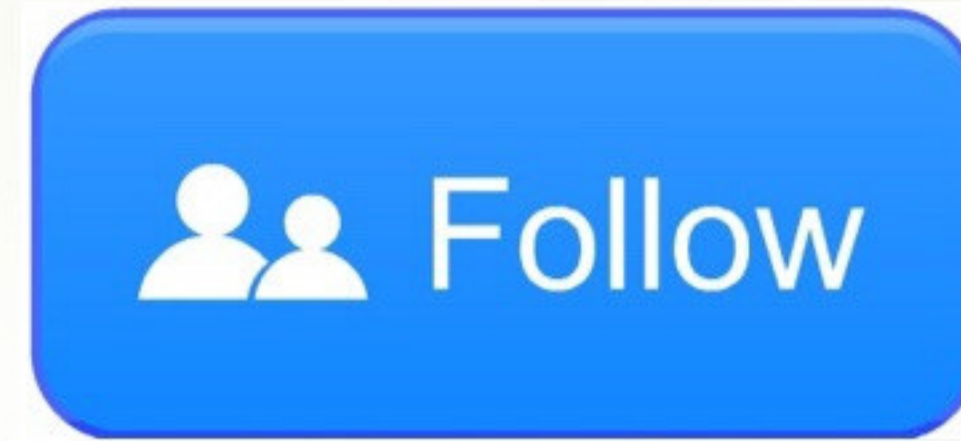
4. *Gaining Entry:* Many a times the observer has difficulty in receiving approval for the study. It is not always easy to observe the functioning of an organization or institution without obtaining permission from the administrator. In such cases he may not record observations then and there, he may do it later do the jotting down of notes, here there is a risk of missing out the information.

5. *Lack of anonymity/ studying sensitive issues:* In observational study it is difficult to maintain the respondents anonymity. In survey it is easy for the to hide facts but in observation it is difficult to conceal them.

6. *Limited study:* Observation method studies only limited issues, the internal attitudes and opinions cannot be studied.

Williamson have listed a few limitations of Observation method:

- This method is not applicable to the investigation of large social settings.
- There a few safeguards against the biases of the researcher, it is a related problem of selectivity and data collection.
- The mere presence of the researcher may change the social setting and system, since there is no set procedure followed it becomes difficult to replicate the study.
- It could be concluded that observation becomes an effective tool of scientific study when it is planned and recorded systematically.



NEXT LESSON: Case Study.

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