Sociology

CHAPTER -2

c. Fact value and objectivity
Syllabus

2. Sociology as Science:

Science, scientific method and critique
Major theoretical strands of research methodology.
Positivism and its critique.
Fact value and objectivity
Non-positivist methodologies
Fact Value and Objectivity
Fact Value and Objectivity

Objectivity means freedom from personal biases

Fact – Empirically verifiable
Value – Desirable
Value Neutrality

Indifference to the matter in hand

No opinions or values about the matter

Which might be unrealistic or unnecessary if we are objective

That is, whatever be the conclusion, nothing is prescribed as such
Objectivity

It allows Sociologist to have positions or opinions if it is based on scientific methods, evidence based reasoning, logic, etc.

The focus is on means, that is, the methods

Values or Personal bias come from Race, caste, language, religion, culture etc.

Source of value is, thus, through Socialisation

These values influence human thoughts and actions

Premise of Positivism – Fact and value are in dichotomous relationship
Jurgen Habermas

Since humans study humans, thus, complete separation of facts and values not possible

Vilfredo Pareto

Sociology should study ‘what is’ rather than ‘what ought to be’
Problem of objectivity appears at different stages

1) Choice of subject matter

2) Formulation of the problem

3) Accumulation of data

4) Data analysis

5) Hypothesis building

6) Testing of theory
1) Choice of topic not considered a problem of subjectivity

**Max Weber**

Distinguish between *value freedom and value relevance*. Value relevance can be made while doing investigation. Value relevance has to be ensured.

**Merton**

The very choice of topic is influenced by personal preferences and ideological biases of researcher.

Also, *topic of suicide* has received disproportionate amount of attention in Sociology after Durkheim’s study.
2) Formulation of problem depends on prevailing choice of investigators debates and this issue is considered objective
3) Accumulation of data faces the problem of objectivity

Andre Beteille
Brahmins did not let him visit the Untouchables’ locality, hence subjectivity can also creep in because of field limitations

Interview method influenced by subjectivity of interviewer and interviewee

William Whyte
Study of Italian criminals concluded – “I started as a Non-participant observer but ended as participant non-observer”
4) Interpretation of facts also coloured by viewpoints of investigator

Robert Redfield  
(functionalist)  
and  
Oscar Lewis  
(Marxist)

studied the same village in **Mexico** around the same time but their interpretations differed vastly
5) Theories also suffer from biases

**Durkheim** gave functional theory of religion whereas  
**Marx** gave conflict theory of religion
6) Testing is subjected to researcher’s Bias

As the tendency would be to produce the same results

Durkheim’s Study of Suicide is accused of this
Degree of objectivity desired in Sociology

Objectivity has been found to be neither possible nor desirable. It is an elusive goal.

**Alvin Gouldner** – Fact and Value cannot be separated in empirical research.

**Gunnar Myrdal** - Total objectivity is an illusion.

It amounts to falsifying history and loss of basic purpose of the discipline which is of reformist agenda.
Degree of objectivity desired in Sociology

Social problems cannot be and should not be studied objectively. They become meaningful only within a specific cultural context. Suggesting solutions with reference to the society is essential.

Gunnar Myrdal – “Chaos cannot organise itself into Cosmos we need viewpoints”

Book - The Asian Drama
How objectivity can be insured

1) Comte
Suggested using positivist methods and studying macro aspects.

2) Durkheim
Preferred inductive methodology and Statistical Techniques
   Weber
Also suggested scientific methods (Verstehen, Ideal Types) to ensure objectivity

3) Weber
   Training the investigator

4) Stating one’s own bias

5) Organising criticism through Peer Review
How objectivity can be insured

6) By refraining from advocating preference of any viewpoint

7) Using testing techniques to ensure reliability and validity

8) Stating field limitations

9) Triangulation – Using various methods to cross check the outcome


11) Herbert Marcuse – Objectivity in Sociology is a limitation of the discipline

12) Max Horkheimer – Contemporary Sociology demands plural theories

13) Theodor Adorno – Positivism is negative dialectics