Unit 25
Field Research – II

Contents

Learning Objectives

It is expected that after reading Unit 25, you would be able to

❖ Discuss the field methods described in Unit 25
❖ Subsequently select and use some of them in your mini research project.

25.1 Introduction

Unit 25 deals with some of the techniques, and methods, which qualitative researchers use in their pursuit of data collection. Undoubtedly, field research has always been conducted as a matter of personal style. Clammer (1984: 70) had once pointed out that many Indian anthropologists widely practiced the drawing up of inventories of customs in response to lists of queries of the kind given in Notes and Queries but such encyclopaedism has now almost universally disappeared and Clammer (1984: 69) mentioned four basic sources to styles in the practice of field-based research, namely,

❖ The individual and idiosyncratic characteristics of individual fieldworker
❖ Ideological and philosophical assumptions
❖ The general conception of method
❖ The nature of problem being studied

You will not find all researchers using all the methods and techniques discussed in Unit 25. Depending on the source(s) of the personal style, a particular researcher may or may not use a method or technique. It is a good idea for you to get familiar with most common methods and techniques of qualitative research. With this notion in mind, we are going to discuss such methods and techniques as genealogy, interview, case study, life history, oral history and PRA/ RRA techniques. We begin the discussion with genealogical method.

25.2 Genealogy

One specialised method to study kinship, family and marriage is by the use of genealogies, which are prepared using the techniques of observation and interview.

W. H. R. Rivers (1900) showed the importance of genealogy in social and cultural studies and delineated the procedure of drawing up genealogical data (see Box 25.1 on the early realisation of the importance of genealogical method in social research). Malinowski (1922:14-15) defined genealogy as a "synoptic chart of a number of connected relations of kinship". The investigator traces the genealogical chart of the respondent (called ego) by making enquiries from him. However he may not place all his relatives in the right birth order or his memory of them may be faulty. Thus the fieldworker completes the genealogy seeking information from other respondents. The genealogical chart, however, may not be complete because people may not remember their ancestors, their names and other details about them beyond a certain number of generations. The problem of remembering is bound to multiply in societies where descent is traced from both sides.

Box 25.1 Relevance of Genealogical Method for Social Research

In 1904 Haddon suggested that a new approach to field research should involve:

Exhaustive studies of limited groups of people, tracing all the ramifications of their genealogies in the comprehensive method adopted by Dr Rivers for the Torres Straits Islanders and for the Todas (1905: 478).

Rivers' work among the Toda (1901-1902, published 1906) had pioneered this approach and his example was followed by C. G. and B. Z. Seligman among the Vedda (1907-1908, published 1911) and A. R. [Radcliffe-] Brown in the Andamans (1906-1908, published 1922).

The above excerpt is a quotation from Urry's article on *A History of Field Methods* (1984: 47) and it shows a clear bias to intensive fieldwork in single communities.

Not only do fieldworkers prepare genealogies but also the people whose charts they prepare may also keep an account of their kin and affinal relatives. The kinship chart therefore is an analytical tool as well as an ensemble of rules according to which the actors are expected to behave (Barnes 1947). In societies where writing technology has made inroads, kinship charts that hitherto existed as part of the oral tradition are now being written down (Srivastava 2004: 32). Some societies have specialised groups of genealogists who derive their livelihood by charging their clients for keeping their kinship and marriage records.

The facts of kinship and marriage that are of relevance to the researcher may not hold the same importance for the people, thus the charts that people prepare for their purposes are different from those that fieldworkers prepare after sustained interviewing and observation. According to Fortes (1949), the kinship chart that the actors prepare

may be called pedigree whilst the one the fieldworker prepares as part of his data depending upon his research interests may be known as genealogy. Genealogical data are used for a variety of purposes apart from that of studies of kinship. Demographers[©] use genealogical statements. Migratory histories of peoples can also be studied through this method. Genealogy also facilitates the process of rapport establishment with people.

Reflection and Action 25.1

Read Unit of ESO 12 of IGNOU's B. A. Sociology programme to learn how to make genealogical diagrams. Then, prepare a genealogical chart of your own family with a generation depth of at least three generations before you and a horizontal spread of all relationships arising out of marriages. In preparing the chart, note the name, sex, occupation and dwelling place of the person whose details you are noting down. Next, find out as accurately as possible when and where the person was born and where the person has lived. Note the names of each of the person's spouses, whether or not the marriage is still alive, and record in each case where the marriage began and where and when it ended if it is not still extant. Note down the spouse's date and place of birth and where the spouse lives now, or date and place of spouse's death. Information on births, marriages and deaths is likely to be more precise. Distinguish between social filiation at birth from filiation acquired by adoption or fosterage. The very process of making this chart is going to provide you a learning experience. After completing the chart you may study it in order to find out about the pattern of territorial spread of your family, its occupational pattern and types of marital unions, average age at marriage, the pattern of male and female longevity and so on. It would be interesting for you to compare your chart and findings on its basis with similar documents prepared by fellow learners of MSO 002 at your Study Centre.

25.3 Interview, its Types and Process

Interview is usually defined as a conversation with the purpose of gathering information. There is, however, a difference between "everyday conversation" and "interview", the latter being an unequal situation in which usually the researcher decides and controls the talk either directly or indirectly (Srivastava 2004: 29). Interview is based on the assumption that the respondent's verbal descriptions are a reliable indicator of behaviour, meanings, attitudes and feelings and that the stimuli (the questions) are a reliable indicator of the subject of the study. It is a two-way process in which both the interviewer and the respondent have a mutual view of each other, engage in an interactive situation, communicate ideas and an incipient relationship emerges between the two. Interview is an effective method of collecting information for certain types of assumptions, particularly when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events. In such situations, interviewing provides a useful means of access. Unlike observation, it is less time consuming and one can collect data pertaining to intangible things. Interview is also a flexible tool that can be used to gather additional information on the spot that has not been

predetermined. One can catch lies and contradictions easily by watching gestures and cues. Taking interviews is preceded by preparing a list of questions on the topics relating to the research problem. This list is known as interview guide. It is used as a ready reference by the interviewer to cover as many issues as possible in a limited period of time.

It is fine to have a ready reckoner with you for an interview but this may in some ways restrict the flow of information. For this reason many researchers like to use different types of interview schedules. We may discuss types of interview on the basis of a number of criteria (see Box 25.2 on criteria of types of interview).

Box 25.2 Criteria of Types of Interview

The first criterion is the degree of pre-determination in the questions asked (this includes formal questionnaires through a standard agenda and checklists to questions cropping up in the middle of interview.)

A second criterion is the degree of directiveness (this includes the direction of questions from neutral to the most specific questions on particular subjects.)

The third criterion is linked to the second. It is the degree of openness or closedness of questions asked (for example, "How are you?" versus "Are you not going to school today?")

The fourth criterion is the length of interview (that is a brief encounter versus in-depth inquiry)

A fifth criterion is of prior arrangement (fixing an interview by appointment)

A sixth criterion is the interview setting (group versus two persons, subject's residence, ethnographer's house, neutral location, and so on)

The above excerpt is based on Kemp and Ellen (1984: 231).

After looking at different criteria, let us now discuss types of interview.

Types of interview
Interviews are generally classified into three types, namely,

❖   Structured interview
❖   Unstructured interview
❖   Semi-structured interview

We will now deal in some detail with each type of interview.

Structured interview
This type of interview uses a formally structured schedule of interview questions. The rationale is to offer each subject approximately the same stimulus so that responses to the questions ideally are comparable. They are designed to elicit information using a set of predetermined questions that are expected to elicit the subject's thoughts, opinions, and attitudes about certain issues depending on the study.

Unstructured interview
There is no formal question schedule in this type of interview. Interviewers begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what the

necessary questions are. They also assume that not all subjects will necessarily find equal meaning in like-worded questions. The interviewers must develop, adapt and generate questions and follow up probes appropriate to the given situation and the central purpose of the investigation. Unstructured interviews allow researchers to gain additional information about various phenomena they observe by asking questions.

Semi-structured interview

This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions or only predetermined topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order but the interviewers are allowed the freedom to digress to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardised questions.

To determine which type of interview format to use you must consider the kind of questions you want to ask and the sort of answers you expect to receive. The nature of the question (direct or indirect, open or close ended, long or short) will depend on the nature of the study.

Interview process

It is also relevant to understand about the interview process. Interviews frequently begin with "open ended" questions (such as demographic questions, general questions) that may be essential for developing rapport between interviewers and subjects. Questions concerning the central focus of the study may be placed together or scattered throughout the schedule. Extra questions, i.e. those questions equivalent to certain essential ones but worded slightly differently, are asked in order to check the reliability of responses. Probing questions provide a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects. Probes frequently ask subjects to elaborate on what they have already answered in response to a given question.

The investigator must convince the subjects about the importance of the survey. One must convince subjects what they have to say is important. A list of questions may help the flow of interview and come in handy when conversations grind to a halt. One should cultivate appropriate conversation styles, sitting positions and eye movements. During the interview if conversation touches the low ebb, it should be rekindled by indicating that you know something; you offer opinion or provide a calculatedly wrong assertion so that the respondent is motivated to air his views and opinions. In case of a stagnating conversation, you should push with an appropriate probe. Probing is an art which has to be cultivated. One should not interrupt the respondent accidentally, but if it must be done it should be done gracefully. Questions should be clarified by the use of non-verbal stimuli such as artefacts, show cards, pictures or even photographs. A certain focus is required to control the situation in all stages of the interview. See Box 25.3 for some tips that can help during the interview:

Box 25.3 Helpful Tips For Conducting an Interview
- ❖ Begin an interview with small talk to establish a rapport.
- ❖ Be dressed appropriately and present a natural front.
- ❖ Interview in a comfortable place.
- ❖ Be aware, appreciative, respectful and cordial to the respondent.
- ❖ Do not be satisfied with monosyllabic answers.
- ❖ Never forget the purpose of your interview.

In many interview situations, one-to-one interviewing is often not possible especially in villages, in teashops or slums where interactions are held in public view. Often the researcher finds the individual interviewing turning into a group interview where others surround the two, interject and supplement answers. Group interviews are advantageous especially if one is seeking public information, for instance on water crisis or sanitation in a slum, etc.

25.4 Feminist and Postmodernist Perspectives on Interviewing

We are here adding two different perspectives on interviewing for your use as and when you may find either or both useful for your mini research project.

The feminist perspective on interviewing

Feminist methodology rejects the assumption that maintaining a strict separation between the researcher and the researched produces a more valid, objective account. One way in which feminists avoid treating their subjects as mere objects of knowledge is to allow the respondent to talk back to the investigator. It aims at building more from the sharing between the researcher and his respondents. In order to do this the researchers need to interview in ways that allow the exploration of incompletely articulated aspects of women's experiences. Ann Oakley's (1981) feminist paradigm for interviewing seeks to minimise objectification of the subject as data by viewing the interview as an interactional exchange. In her framework, answering the questions of interviewees personalises and humanises the researcher and places the interaction on a more equal footing. The meaning of the interview to both the interviewer and the interviewee and the quality of interaction between the two participants are all salient issues when a feminist interviews women. Oakley also points out that interactive interviewing is an approach that documents women's own accounts of their experiences and allows the sociologist to garner knowledge not simply for the sake of knowledge but for the women who are providing information.

Traditionally, qualitative researchers have conducted interviews that are "open-ended" and "intensive", seeking to avoid structuring the interaction in terms of the researcher's perspective. But eliciting useful accounts is much more than encouraging women to talk. Most members of a society

learn to interpret their experiences in terms of the dominant language and meaning and women have trouble talking about their experiences. What researchers can do is to take responsibility for recognising how the concepts we have learned as sociologists may distort women's accounts. We can return to activities conducted in specific settings as the source for our studies, and ground our interviewing in accounts of everyday activity - in accounts of how particular women actually spend their time at home, for example, rather than a previously defined concept of "housework". Since words available do not fit, women learn to "translate" when they talk about their experiences. As they do so, parts of their lives "disappear" because they are not included in the language of the account. In order to "recover" these parts of women's lives, researchers must develop methods for listening around and beyond words.

The postmodernist perspective on interviewing

Postmodernist interview involves the sharing of personal and social experiences of both respondents and researchers, who tell their story in the context of a developing relationship. In this process, the distinction between the "researcher" and the "subject" gets blurred. We also view researchers' disclosures as more than tactics to encourage respondents to open up. The feelings, insights, and stories that researchers bring to the interactive encounter are as important as are those of respondents. Thus, our work focuses on the interview process, the stories and feelings that both respondents and researchers share in the interview and the understanding that emerges during interaction.

Interactive interviewing requires considerable time, multiple interview sessions, and attention to communication and emotions. It also may involve participating in shared activities outside the formal interview situation. Our approach is flexible and continually guided by the ongoing interaction within the interview context.

Participants engaged in this kind of research must be open to vulnerability and emotional investment while working through the intricacies of sensitive issues. Interactive interviewing reflects the way relationships develop in real life; as conversations where one person's disclosures and self-probing invite another's disclosures and self-probing; where an increasingly intimate and trusting context makes it possible to reveal more of ourselves and to probe deeper into another's feelings and thoughts; where listening to and asking questions about another's plight led to a greater understanding of one's own; and where the examination and comparison of experiences offer new insights into both lives. This inter-subjective process provides a contextual basis for a level of understanding and interpretation that is not present in traditional hierarchical interview situations - where interviewers reveal little about themselves, aloofly ask questions in one or two brief sessions, and have little or no relationship with respondents.

Feminists have called for researchers to acknowledge their interests and

sympathies. They have also questioned the separation of the researcher and the respondent and viewed research as properly ascribing to the goals of empowerment, consciousness-raising and improvement of life circumstances. Moving away from a traditional research model, interpretivists encourage self-disclosures on the part of the researcher. Researcher involvement both helps respondents feel more comfortable sharing information and closes the hierarchical gap between researchers and respondents that traditional research encourages. Interviewees become narrators who improvise stories in response to researcher's questions, probes and stories.

Reflection and Action 25.2

Make a team of three fellow learners of MSO 002 at your Study Centre and each member of the team needs to select one of the three types of interview methods for interviewing a teacher of her/ his choice on the subject of reforms in the examination system at open and distance learning institutions. Each team member is to prepare a short note of about five hundred words on the basis of her/ his findings. Each member is to then explain in an oral presentation before other learners of MSO 002 at one of the counselling sessions of this course the differences in findings due to the difference in the way interview was conducted in each case.

25.5 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis seeks to analyse narratives (events, viewpoints) of subjects. Das (1999) has discussed contemporary methods used in narrative analysis (see Box 25.4 on different techniques of collecting verbal data).

Box 25.4 Three Techniques to Collect Verbal Data used in Narrative Analysis

In her article on narrative analysis, Das (1999: 48-50) has mentioned three techniques to collect data.

1) Narrative technique: It facilitates an exploration of variations in the life histories of people in similar social settings. Here the narrative is 'linear and oriented' and the focus is on a single event or a sequence of events that occurred in a person's life.

2) Amplificatory technique: In this technique the person narrating the life history gets the opportunity to present the story of her or his life around the events which are most important in the eyes of that person.

3) Elicitory[@] interview: this technique is used for testing a hypothesis and with this purpose the researcher focuses on eliciting information.

Narratives collected through interaction with subjects are not always enough and have to be supplemented by additional data. In analysing narratives one should be able to read between the lines and also investigate the various situations that made a subject respond to a certain question in a certain way. It is subject positioning that constitutes the type of response one elicits from them. For example, a war widow

might vent her anger at the government for not caring for her needs because she is economically unable to support herself while another from an established background might dismiss such aids as unnecessary. When subjects refuse to respond it does not mean that they do not have an opinion. At the same time one should also take into account the fact that opinions might be formed at the spot when the subject had never thought about any before. In such cases the response would be influenced by the nature of the ongoing situation. Data collected should not only amount to the words that are spoken, but also should be the summing up of observations, attitudes, various records and respondents' viewpoints. The production of truth is questionable (Visweswaran 1996) as there are specific kinds of truth produced by a specific kind of epistemology. Even silences also have their own narratives and one should be aware of the response made to fulfil certain subject functions.

25.6 Interpretation

Interpretation requires more care than asking questions. The respondent's answer is to be situated relationally. Meanings reside in the cultural context. Certain answers may be offered as a matter of mere courtesy and may not have anything to do with accuracy (see Jones 1964), some answers may be given due to impatience, others still due to political, moral and other social constraints. As Kemp and Ellen (1984: 234-235) have said, "one way of approaching the problems of interpretation is systematically envisage all possible questions or interpretations of questions that might have elicited the actual answers you get".

Interpretation also involves the understanding of the power dynamics that structured the interaction between the interviewer and the subject. One should be aware of the various kinds of circumstances and situations that elicit a certain type of response. Silence and subject refusal have their own interpretations and should be read as meaningful data, for it is not only spoken words that have meanings but also gestures, attitudes, cues and silence or denial.

25.7 Case Study and its Types

Case study method involves systematically gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event, or group to permit the researcher to effectively understand how it operates or functions. Case study is not actually a data gathering technique, but a methodological approach that incorporates a number of data gathering measures. The approach of case studies ranges significantly from general field studies to the interview of a single individual or group. Case studies may focus on an individual, a group, or an entire community and may utilise a number of data technologies such as life histories, documents, oral histories, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

Case studies can be rather pointed in their focus, or can approach a broad view of life and society. For example, an investigator may confine his examination to a single aspect of an individual's life such as studying a medical student's actions and behaviours in medical school.

One must determine the area of social life to be studied according to the nature of the problem. When examining an individual case study, a similar type of assessment must be undertaken. A single lengthy interview may be sufficient or several interviews may be required to be supplemented with field notes during observation, copies of journal or diary entries from the subject, or other forms of documentation. Several reasons may make it necessary for a broader and more sweeping investigation on all aspects of an individual's social life as they are interconnected and one cannot be adequately understood without a consideration of the others.

Types of case study

According to Yin (1994) and Winston (1990) there are three types of case studies.

1) **Exploratory**: In exploratory case studies, fieldwork (and data collection) may be undertaken before defining a research question. This type of study may be seen as a prelude to a large social scientific study.

2) **Explanatory**: This type of study seeks to explain certain phenomena and is useful when conducting studies particularly in the complex studies of organisations or communities.

3) **Descriptive**: This type of study requires the investigator to present a descriptive theory, which establishes the overall framework for the investigator to follow throughout the study. Before beginning research the investigator must determine exactly what the unit of analysis in the study will be.

What distinguishes case studies from more general ethnographic reportage is the detail and particularity of the account. Each case study is a description of specific configuration events in which a particular set of actors have been involved in some defined situation at a particular point of time. In setting out a case study the analyst must decide in advance at what point to enter the ongoing flow of events and at what point to withdraw from it. It should emphasise on the theoretical connection between the events rather than on the events themselves. Any technique can be used for the collection of data and it is preferable to operate with "social fields" (Gluckman 1961) since data beyond what is strictly germane to this purpose are redundant.

While on his notion of social fields, let us also mention Gluckman's (1961) concept of extended-case method, which van Velsen (1964: xxv) calls "situational analysis". The extended-case method refers to the researcher's collection of detailed material of a particular sort. It also entails the specific use to which such field material is put while the

ethnographer analyses the same. Mostly, sociologists and anthropologists have used extended-case method or situational analysis to discuss conflict as a normal aspect of social change. See Box 25.5 for van Velsen's (1967: 148-149) views on the use of the extended-case method/ situational analysis.

Box 25.5 J.van Velsen on The Extended-case Method and Situational Analysis

... ... I have outlined methods of analysis and fieldwork from the comparison of haphazardly collected customs, through the more modest but sociologically more fruitful structural method with its emphasis on social morphology, to a method that aims at analysing the interrelation of structural ('universal') regularities, on the one hand, and the actual ('unique') behaviour of individuals, on the other.

Although I am of the opinion that the fieldworker's theoretical approach is of primary importance with regard to the type of material he seeks, and although I think that fieldwork methods can be prescribed only in general terms, I have made some suggestions regarding the collection of the type of material that is most likely to satisfy the demands of some of the present theories. These demands are of a synchronic analysis of general structural principles that is closely interwoven with a diachronic analysis of the operation of these principles by specific actors in specified situations.

Case study method is not a new style of data gathering and analytic technique. The fields of medicine and psychology, for example, by their very nature require physicians and psychologists to examine patients case by case. Case studies are commonly used in business and law curricula to help students bridge the gap between foundational studies and practice. The use of diaries and biographies, a popular method used by some feminist and other social scientists, approximate the case study method. *The Professional Thief* by Edward Sutherland (1937), *The Jack Roller* by Clifford R. Shaw (1930) and *Being Different: The Autobiography of Jane Fry* by Bogdan (1974) are some examples of classic case studies.

Reflection and Action 25.3

While explaining the application of case method in the field of law, Epstein (1967: 229) 'treated law as a complex social phenomenon concerned with a series of problems with which all human groups would appear to be confronted, and for which solutions must be devised' and showed 'how the case method, employed both as a field technique and as a tool of analysis, and applied in different ways, may serve to illuminate these problems. The discussion has concentrated on law as a body of rules, as a set of procedures of inquiry and adjudication, and as an instrument of social control.' Epstein makes a further point about law that it 'may also be regarded as embodying a system of values; moreover, as a social institution it is itself subject to evaluation. We are concerned here with the basic assumptions or postulates that underlie the social life of a community, and the ways in which the task and purpose of law may be perceived.'

In the light of what Epstein has said above, provide a case in the field of law, culled from any source of sociological inquiry (or any case described in a newspaper report) and explain how that particular case exhibits the features of case method as explained by Epstein.

25.8 Life Histories

·The life history approach to social research and theory subsumes several methodological techniques and types of data. These include case studies, interviews and use of documents, including letters, diaries, archival records, oral histories and various kinds of narratives. It was used extensively in the 1920s and 1930s and was identified with the Chicago School. But later, an increased use of quantitative techniques coupled with survey data collection led to a relative decrease in the life history approach. In the 1970s however, there began a resurgence of interest in life history research not only in the USA but also in Europe. The main assumptions of this approach are that the actions of the individual and groups are simultaneously emergent and structured and that the individual and group perspectives must be used for analysis. Thus, any materials that served those perspectives can and should be regarded as essential to the empirical study of social life.

The first such study was Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. In this five-volume 2200-page book they presented almost 800 pages of life history data in support of their conclusions and generalisations. Those data included newspaper articles, letters to family members, records from courts and social work agencies, and a 300-page biography of one person as a representative case. This approach was used in research on race relations, delinquency, mass media, migration, occupation and other issues centred primarily in the veers of ethnic and urban studies. Current uses of life history research display considerable variation as well as more precise conceptual distinctions. Terms such as "life story", "bibliography", "discourse", "history", "oral history", "personal experience narratives", "collective narratives", and "sagas" are now distinguished from one another and frameworks for linking types of verbal accounts to types of generalisations have been developed.

It is now common to regard life histories as a legitimate form of data. Through the propositions contained in narrative theory, some researchers have developed what is called the narrative interview. This approach focuses on establishing event sequences across the life course on the basis of interview data. Bertam (1981) has long been an advocate of the life-history approach. The collaborative research on social movements (1990) used life-history data from the members of student's movements in the USA, England, Ireland, Italy, West Germany, and France. He shows the application of this method in large-scale comparative research projects.

Dolby-Stahl (1989), a folklorist[©], has developed a variation of the life history approach she calls "literary folklorist" which focuses on personal narrative data. She uses the reader response theory to develop an interpretive method for studying the interdependence of personal narratives (stories) and collective narratives (ethnic group folklore). The

assumption of this approach is that personal and collective narratives are inherently connected and thus a personal story has a collective dimension. "Interpretive Biography" is designed to study the turning points or problematic situations people find themselves in during transition periods. The basic question he asks concerns how people live and give meaning to their lives and capture those meanings in written narrative and oral forms.

In the Indian context, Dalit sociology is making use of the life histories of selected Untouchables. The scheduled castes have constructed through writings of untouchables — be it poem, short story, biography or autobiography - lives that have the essential element of social and economic liberation. The life history of Muli, a Dalit, written by Freeman (1978) provides an insight into the nature of caste oppression in Indian society. According to the author many incident in his life show striking similarities with events in other cultures and his case stands as an indictment of stratified systems like caste and others.

25.9 Oral History

Most contemporary social scientists make use of written and oral sources for documentation and substantiation in social research. Diaries, letters, written documents, personal papers, autobiographies and biographies, archival material and today even films, advertisements, news, fiction, creative art forms like dance, music and paintings etc., are used as texts. The latter forms of texts are constructed by fieldworkers based on often first hand information collected in field research by interviews, asking people to write down about themselves or collecting life histories. Anthropologists have long adopted this method of elicitation especially in societies where no written records existed.

Oral histories are less focused on whole life and more focused on a topic or a part of a life. Besides contributing significantly to historical data previously collected, this method can be used to give voice to minority groups, to pay attention to the minds of great individuals or to permit inclusion of usually silenced groups in a population like *Dalits*, women, tribals, the disabled etc. And it has even been used as a form of therapy (O'Reilly, 2005).

Historians today are making use of oral histories to supplement historical understandings. Feminists especially insisted on using oral histories of women to recast histories. Subaltern school historians have used this method in reconstructing histories of peasant movements and protests.

25.10 PRA and RRA Techniques

Organisations, which adhere to participatory paradigm (very often NGOs), have developed a number of techniques for effective interaction with

communities. Two of them are Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). PRA and RRA were developed in response to disappointments and criticism of the assumptions upon which earlier developmental work was based.

RRA and PRA are two closely related families of approaches. They emphasise a re-orientation in the relationship between the outsider and subjects of developmental activities and research. Thus, a reciprocal learning process in the relationship has replaced the one-way "transfer of know how" idea.

The term PRA describes a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act. PRA flows from and owes much to the activist. Participatory research, agro-ecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, field research on farming systems and rapid rural appraisal in RRA information is more elicited and extracted by outsiders; in PRA it is more shared and owned by local people. The one most important principle is "use your own best judgment at all times" which implies improvisation.

The distinction between RRA and PRA has been described by Robert Chambers (1992). RRA leads to learning by outsiders in a cost effective way. PRA, on the other hand, enables rural people to unravel and analyse their own situation in ways they do not normally do, and in optimal cases to plan and act on their own premises.

Both RRA and PRA have been referred to as data economising or data optimising approaches. The experience gained with RRA during the first years of application in 1980s showed that it was susceptible to the criticism that it had levelled at "quick and dirty" development work and "development tourism".

Participatory assessment and activities are methods for creating a dialogue and for collecting information. They are characterised by ingenuity and flexibility, and the methods to be applied depend on the specific context. PRA techniques have proved to be of much use in diagnosing specific problems and highlighting possible solutions. Here is a catalogue of selected PRA methods, techniques and tools.

1) Review of secondary resources
2) Direct observation
3) Key indicators
4) Semi-structured interview
5) Ranking and scoring
6) Construction and analysis of maps, models and diagrams
7) Diagramming
8) Case studies and stories
9) Drama, games and role-plays
10) Possible future and scenario workshops
11) Triangulation

12) Continuous analysis and reporting

13) Participatory planning, budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and self-surveys

14) Do-it-yourself

A PRA technique essentially complements more formal methods. More often than not these techniques are preliminary exercises. They generally serve the purpose of dialogue with the people, information generation, analysis in some cases and mobilisation of people around certain issues like land rights, water, public distribution system, etc. Since the NGOs involve multidisciplinary teams, the PRA exercises take a multidisciplinary perspective.

The practitioners themselves have recognised three major dangers, weaknesses and challenges of using PRA.

- ❖ Rate of spread
- ❖ Practitioner aptitude, and
- ❖ Backsliding.

The speed of spread must not exceed the capacity for individual institutions to conduct social and organisational experiments to discover what is most appropriate for them. The practitioner's personal attitudes are difficult to control.

The problem of not reaching all interest groups persists, especially among women, the landless, ethnic minorities, the poorest, etc. Higher-level planning targets disrupt bottom-up demands and desires.

PRA does not produce the final answers. It is a process that contributes to a better understanding of the situation.

Reflection and Action 25.4

Read carefully the following excerpt from Schönhuth (2002:152-153) and discuss the merits and demerits of PRA/ RRA approach to field research. Explore the possibility of carrying out a one-day experience of applying the method to gain a quick understanding of access to school education by girl children of your neighbourhood. If not on this topic, you may select some other topic to carry out a one-day PRA exercise in order to get a feel of this method.

The Excerpt
Here is the excerpt from Michael Schönhuth's article on Negotiating with Knowledge at Development Interfaces: Anthropology and the Quest for Participation.

From my experience, if used in a culturally suitable way, visualising tools can be extraordinarily useful for the outsider as a means of gaining a quick picture of the local situation and people. Far from being objective, these pictures provide an excellent basis and act as a catalyst for elucidating discussions on local features, local knowledge and local views of reality within homogeneous groups, and between different groups. On a methodological level, anthropology could profit from making more use of visual cues to focus group discussions and to elicit cultural maps of reality. Research results, which are normally analysed at home by the anthropologist after fieldwork, could be discussed and corrected in the field with the local people.

25.11 Conclusion

Unit 25 discussed some of the common methods which sociologists/ anthropologists use during their field researches. You may need to use one or the other of these methods in your mini research project assignment of MSO 002. Our suggestion is that you need to include in the discussion of methodology of your project report the method(s) you have used and also provide the reasons why you have opted to use the same. Do select from Further Reading and read more about the methods you decide to use.

Further Reading

Barnes, J. A. 1961. *Physical and Social Kinship. Philosophy of Science* 28: 296-299 (about genealogical method)

Das, Veena 1999. *Contemporary Methods in Narrative Analysis.* IN R. L. Kapur (ed.) Qualitative Methods in Mental Health Research. National Institute of Advanced Study: Bangalore (for narrative analysis method)

Du Boulay Juliet and Rory Williams 1984. Collecting Life Histories. IN R. F. Ellen (ed.) Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct. Academic Press: London, pp. 247-257 (for life histories method)

Jain, Shobhita 1999. *1. Participatory Approaches; 2. Types of Participation; 3. Constraints and Problems of Participation; 4 The Rhetoric of Participation; 5. Leveling the Playing Fields: Recognizing Local Know-How;* IN Participatory Forest Management, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi (for PRA/ RRA techniques)

Jain, Shobhita and Neeti Bhargava 2001. *1. Participation: Philosophy, Nature and Approach; 2. Operationalisation of Participatory Processes; 3. Data Collection Techniques for Mobilising Participation; 4. Techniques of Data Analysis and Modes of Analysis,* Units in MRR 02 of Participatory Management of Displacement, Resettlement and Rehabilitation, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi (for PRA/ RRA techniques)

Kvale, Steiner 1996. *Inter Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing.* Sage: London (for interview method, especially pp. 1-10)

Mukherjee, N. 1993. *Participatory Rural Appraisal—Methodology and Applications.* Concept: New Delhi (for PRA AND RRA techniques)

Van Velsen 1967. *The Extended-case Method and Situational Analysis.* IN A. L. Epstein (ed.) The Craft of Social Anthropology. Social Science Paperbacks: London (for case studies method)