

# Methods Used under Various Epistemological Approaches

- Scientific Approach in studying Sociology uses both Qualitative and Quantitative Methods
- **Positivism** - Looking at **Primary and Secondary Data through numbers**
  - Surveys (after Sampling):
  - Statistical Data Analysis
- **Phenomenology** – Because meaning is to be discovered, it requires empathy and intimate familiarity. Collecting primary data through
  - In-depth Interviews - structured and unstructured interviews ; often accompanied by detailed note taking, recording (With consent) ; translation and transcription
  - Focussed-groups Discussions (FGDs)
  - Participant Observation/ Fieldwork/Ethnography
    - Long-term data collection, involves immersion in the field (not visits) ; often involves learning local language, mannerisms etc. , focus on not just what people say but what people do!
  - Life Histories/ Narrative Approach/ Case Studies

- **Critical**
  - Content/ Discourse Analysis
- Increasingly Methodologies becoming digital –
  - online surveys - google forms / survey monkey etc.
  - internet ethnography - Nicole Constable's Study of Pen-pals and transnational marriages
  - data mining (x, facebook, reddit , instagram)
  - CCTV, high-resolution satellite imagery data

## Question of 'Objectivity'/'Subjectivity' in Social Sciences

- Science endorses the goal of '**value neutrality**' or **objectivity**
- Emotional states, background, personality, upbringing should not interfere in research
- Personal Values may not affect natural science experiments. They can impact social Science research.
- Sociologists recognise this – Divided on it . Durkheim- Treat social facts as 'THINGS'.
- Max Weber – Values will always affect what topics you choose to study.
  - Topics- Value relevant
  - But outcome should be- Value-free
- How to overcome it?
  - Detachment (report what is, not what ought to be)
  - Replication (of research by others)
  - Being open about your own position

## **Limitations of Scientific Sociology**

- Human behavior is too complex to predict (unlike say planets, chemicals, plants)
  - Subject matter is thinking objects
  - Under what conditions people act in certain ways is important
- Humans respond to surroundings so researchers may affect responses of people. People react to being observed.
- Social patterns change, what is true at a time/place may not hold true in another – Diversity and Social Change - Key to study sociology
- Sociologists live in their 'test tube' – greater challenge in controlling values that may distort their work.