

HS0.302 Research Methods in Human Sciences

Assignment 1: Reading Texts

Please read either one of these two books:

1. George Orwell: *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Part One)
2. Aman Sethi: *A Free Man*

Answer the following questions in about 2,000 words cumulatively (+/- 15%)

1. How is the book you read a primary source, and how is it secondary literature?
2. Identify the different research methods you can find used by the author.
3. If this was an academic research project, what would you give its title, and what would be a 200-word abstract?
4. What do you think are the other sources you would have made use of for this topic if you were doing an academic research project?

Draw on the ideas from class. Also, keep these three books as constant reference guides.

1. Anol Bhattacharjee (2012), *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, Practices*, Textbook Collection 3. http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/oa_textbooks/3
2. Shawn Graham et al. (2015), *Exploring Big Historical Data: The Historian's Macroscopic*, Imperial College Press, <http://www.themacroscopic.org/2.0/>
3. Paul S. Gray, et al. (2007), *The Research Imagination*, Cambridge University Press.

You may also refer to the following writings for further insights

1. Carlo Ginzberg (2002), *Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*, Verso. (Chapter 1: Making it Strange – Prehistory of a Literary Device; Chapter II: Myth – Distance and Deceit; Chapter III: Representation – The World, The Idea, The Thing)
2. Jean-Claude Carrière, Umberto Eco (2012), *This is not the end of the book*; Vintage Books
3. David L. Ransel (2010), "The Ability to Recognize a Good Source", *Perspectives on History*. <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2010/the-ability-to-recognize-a-good-source>
4. Jan Vansina (1985): *Oral Tradition as History*.

Ans 1:

A Free Man by Aman Sethi has evidence of being a primary source and secondary literature simultaneously. In the text, two men from different ends of the same city's spectrum meet different expectations and definitions of their freedom. The author, Aman Sethi, chooses to participate in the life of people he covers for his research project and deliver an understanding of how his subject impacted him, making the book a primary source of information. And as described by Paul S Gray, a primary source of information is an eyewitness's written or oral source. Moreover, while defining any source as a primary or a secondary source, the distance between the source of information and the receiver also plays an essential role, dictated by other factors such as interaction, time, location etc.

The author's primary source of information and the research subject is Mohammad Ashraf, a migrant from Bihar who works as a daily-wage worker in Delhi's Bara Tooti Chowk. Following a case study approach, Sethi wants Ashraf to narrate the timeline of his life per the structure of a research project. However, Ashraf reveals various incidents and experiences when it strikes him, creating tension between him and Sethi. Furthermore, he pointed out, "For you, all this is research: a boy tries to sell his kidney, you write it down in your notebook. A man goes crazy somewhere between Delhi and Bombay, and you store it in your recorder. But for other people, this is life", and he continues to narrate his life incidents that depict various phases of his life and showcase an intense competition for resources and socio-economic changes that characterize the challenges of a daily wage worker. And in this text, Aman Sethi records the life history of Ashraf with different tools such as a microphone or diary notes written by him during their encounters to convert the oral information into a written form of information. And one of the significant challenges for the author in his research is the lack of existing recorded information on the life of daily wage workers, which is due to limited research by various stakeholders in this domain with a lack of knowledge among the working class to present themselves in a structured way. Therefore, the author needs credible secondary sources to validate his research on several instances and incidents narrated by Ashraf.

A secondary source of information lacks a direct interaction with the subject and often depends upon any other source to describe, interpret, analyze or synthesize the primary sources. And as the book contains various incidents from various phases in Ashraf's life. And as Ashraf himself narrates, without a research project structure, Aman Sethi has to rely on secondary sources such as Ashraf's friends to obtain information and context for several places and times. In the third part, "Lawaris", he mentions how Ashraf's friend's death from TB prompted him to leave for Delhi. While dedicating a part to a character with no role in three different parts only to understand its impact on the subject, Aman Sethi described the TB hospital and researched its history and working system using secondary sources.

Moreover, Aman Sethi often commented and critiqued various preexisting settings and beliefs in the Sadar Bazaar while attempting to understand their lives. He described the jokes at Bara Toori as "dark and largely unintelligible to outsiders", and he joked about illiteracy by saying, "Who installed the taps in Sadar Bazaar? Maybe Mughals."

Ans 2:

In his work of reportage, Aman Sethi is trying to understand the life and hardships of daily wage workers from underdeveloped villages in rural India who migrated to metro cities such as Delhi in search of better employment opportunities. And as most of the research available has limited the daily wage workers as a mere concept or idea, Aman Sethi identifies Mohammad Ashraf as his subject for his research and attempts to do a qualitative analysis of his life while interviewing him and his friends about different phases of his

life instead of quantitative analysis and relying on numbers and statistics. While using an interpretive method, he used an inductive approach for his case study of Ashraf's life. He spent five years with Ashraf and his friends while collecting information about Ashraf's life by interviewing them and recording the oral information in his recorder and diary. Then he derives his theory about Ashraf's expectation of his freedom and presents his arguments in his book in a pessimist narrative.

Moreover, to better understand Ashraf's life for his case study, he relied on secondary sources several times and the survey method where he met essential people in Ashraf's life and interviewed them. Moreover, he lived with the daily wage workers of Sadar Bazaar, had breakfasted with them, and understood their psyche, beliefs and opinions about their situation in Bara Tooti. Moreover, the surveys conducted by Aman Sethi were longitudinal field surveys, as his meeting with them were not mere field visits where he asked a specific set of questions. Instead, he indulged in other characters' lives through conversations and impromptu interviews and documented the information later using his recorder.

Ans 3:

The recorded history and information have often failed to record the plight of labourers, daily wage workers and migrants, by limiting them to a mere concept or numbers while focusing on the hardships in their lives. This paper, "Mazdoor Ki Zindagi", attempts to understand the expectations of a daily wage worker regarding his freedom, with the help of a case study of Mohammad Ashraf's life trajectory. Rather than just analysis of data and numbers like previous research, the paper focuses on a boy from rural Bihar who chooses to escape to a metro city from his village and work on his terms, who got the freedom of movement along with the loneliness of being a stranger, what made him leave a metro city again and start his life again in a new city. While attempting to create a social biography of the subject, the research is conducted over five years for an intimate understanding of his life and various experiences to understand his thoughts better. With a pessimistic narrative, the research aims to dramatize the hardships of a daily wage worker, with a constant quest to understand the reason behind his decision while following a case study approach or an interpretative method where the source of information is the subject's interviews and conversations with other characters that impacted his life.

Ans 4:

In A Free Man, Aman Sethi opted for a qualitative analysis of various incidents in Ashraf's life to understand his expectations of his freedom and under what circumstances he became the person he is today. Although I agree that every human has a different trajectory in his life, strictly limiting the research to qualitative analysis often ended up with the research being an individual case study. Being a Computer Science and Social Sciences student, I would like to find a balance between quantitative and qualitative analysis to study the situation of migrants who works as daily wage workers in metro cities.

Rather than just depending on one case study, firstly, I would try to get more subjects from various socio-economic groups in the migrant community itself. Moreover, I would try to integrate cognitive science by trying to find if there exists any pattern among the circumstances someone moves to a metro city. And try to answer different questions, such as how likely a poor rural boy is to shift to a metro city for work and the factors affecting it. What are the average wages of migrants, are they indulged in legal or illegal activities, and do they have holidays? Are there any patterns in their expenditure? Do they consume alcohol or not? Have they received compulsory elementary education or not? And after obtaining the data, I would

like to translate the data into the form of numbers and statistics to check for socio-economic trends across various periods, regions, governments and other criteria.

The best source of information about the life of daily wage migrants is collecting information from their socio-economic groups and then the groups closest to them. Now, to get a different approach to the life of a migrant, I would start with journals or scholarly articles to get a brief idea of the situation of migrants in metro cities. These can be research articles or case studies such as A Free Man. Then, I would like to find the news across different periods around the same social group in various media such as newspapers, magazines, and digital media. To get various ideas from various individuals, I would try to find the transcripts of conferences around the lives of migrants in metro cities. And for the popular opinion of the general public around the same, I would like to see the depiction of a migrant in the entertainment industry, paintings and photographs. After obtaining the information from the data mentioned above available in private and public libraries and government archives, I would go on to find the government data and surveys around the daily wage migrants to find the different information of every worker and then analyze the numbers and statistics. This information can be of any nature, ranging from their origin to the crime rate in their area, the number of cases/complaints/FIR among the migrants etc. Ultimately, I would also like to file some RTI(s) asking various questions that could contribute to my research fruitfully.

References:

- a. Aman Sethi (2012): A Free Man
- b. Anol Bhattacharjee (2012), Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, Practices, Textbook Collection 3. http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/oa_textbooks/3
- c. Paul S. Gray, et al (2007), The Research Imagination, Cambridge University Press.
- d. Jan Vansina (1985): Oral Tradition as History.
- e. David L. Ransel (2010), "The Ability to Recognize a Good Source", Perspectives on History. <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/october-2010/the-ability-to-recognize-a-good-sourc>