

Interdisciplinary Approach in Social Sciences: Significance for the Discipline of History

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Abstract

Social Sciences deal with the organization and behavior of people in societies and communities. Their purpose is to understand human beings, their behavior and their environment in order to offer solutions to emerging problems. Sociology focuses the social behavior of human beings. Political Science deals with the principles of state and government to discover better-organized political life for human beings. Economics covers the economic activities of the human beings. Geography studies the natural environment of human beings and its implications for humankind. Archeology explores the distant past of humankind through its remains. History is the discipline unique in its objectives covering all the aspects of human life in the past. This shows that an inter-disciplinary approach is indispensable for the study of humankind. These specialized disciplines have developed their own theories, methods and techniques that may be helpful in conducting research in history. These disciplines provide theoretical basis to historical research and history provides them historical data to enrich and verify their theories. The objective of this paper is an appraisal of the reciprocal relationship among the social sciences dealing with the important aspects of human beings specifically focusing their reciprocity with the discipline of history.

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Science is generally defined as “an accumulation of scientific knowledge” to understand the world in which man lives.” (Goode and Hatt, 1952, p. 7) Social sciences focus on human beings either as individual or as part of a group/community. These are called sciences due to “constancy and uniformity in the tendencies of human nature” leading to “the acts of men at one time as due to the same causes which have governed their acts at previous times” grouped, connected, arranged and studied, as the results of the “same generally operative tendencies.” (Bryce, 1909, p. 2-3). These sciences have developed a systematic approach. Various disciplines offer diverse point of view to observe individual or collective life of man. (Caselli, Viviana and Key, 2007, p. 33) Economics, sociology, political science and geography offer a thematic perspective whereas history and Archeology tender enormous empirical data on man living in the past and deep past. Thus, all the disciplines of social sciences are facing a dilemma of focusing on micro or macro level studies adopting either inductive or deductive approach. Graziella Caselli (2007) attributes these distinctions to “linguistic and cultural differences, mutual mistrust between experts of different disciplines and attempts by various disciplines to forge their own identity” thereby wasting resources, creating boundaries in areas of potential collaboration and common interest...” deterring “sharing of knowledge and mutual curiosity are prelude to effective collaboration between disciplines”. (Caselli, Viviana and Key, p. 36) Dilly Fung also emphasizes, “there is a growing need to prepare students for crosscutting forms of enquiry in a world where complex challenges are profoundly interconnected. He warns that bifurcating different areas of knowledge into distinctive disciplines with rigid boundaries may hamper to develop new theoretical framings, new ways of collecting and analyzing evidence and new avenues for society. (Fung, 2017, p. 69)

This paper compares the major sciences with history indicating the reciprocities to eradicate the inadequacies and enriching the disciplines converting constraints into opportunities as history certainly has been and is a background for all other social sciences.

1. Political Science

Political science as defined by Paul Janet is ‘that part of social science which treats the foundation of state and the principles of the government’. (Garner, 1906, p. 341) He asserts its intimate connection to history as history furnishes the facts which political science needs. The relationship of both sciences is reciprocal as the material of political science is “the acts of men as recorded in history”. On this basis Bryce has defined political science as the data of political history reclassified and explained as the result of certain general principles”. (Bryce, 1909, p. 3). Likewise, Prof. J. R. Seeley declared that ‘history without political science has no fruit; political science without history has no roots.” (Garner, 1906, p. 348) This indicates that history is the foundation of political science, without history, we cannot judge successfully the political aspects of human life. At another place, he describes it as ‘History is past politics and politics present history’. (Rowse, 1946, p. 18) The rise and fall of kingdoms, the life of the people, and the nature of their governments, their laws etc, form the subject matter of history serves as useful material for the political scientist to draw his conclusions thus, generalization of political science is rooted in history.

Burgess has illustrated the significance of history on three levels. First under the category of time, in the order of antecedent and consequent; second, under the category of cause and effect, history would be mere statistics or chronology; third, it possesses the element of self-progression. (Burgess, 1897, p. 402-403) He elaborates that political science consists of logical conclusions from facts with philosophical speculation precursor of history. Political facts and conclusions interacting with political reasons forms political ideals establish principles of political science eventually evolving into laws and institutions. He concludes, “there are parts of history which are not political science and there is an element of political science which is not strictly history, yet the two so overlap and interpenetrate each other that they cannot be distinctly separated.” Political science must be studied historically, and history must be studied politically to comprehend both. (Burgess, p. 407-408)

Political science is teleological determining *what ought to be*, while history is concerned with *what has been*. Thus, though with distinct problems both have a common subject of state, and therefore their spheres touch at many points and overlap with others. Both disciplines are

mutually contributory and supplementary rather than antagonistic. (Rowse, 1946, p. 349-50) Professor Seeley explains 'Politics are vulgar, when not liberalized by history, and history fades into mere literature when it loses sight of its relation to politics'. (Rowse, 1946, p. 351) Bryce (1909) has emphasized that instead of abstractions, the generalizations in political science must be rooted in historical facts.

History also benefits from political science that furnishes the principles and laws of development and destruction to evaluate and certify historical events. Political scientists' approach is deductive, and they study at macro-level and generalize. On the other hand, historians' approach is inductive, and they study at micro-level then generalize through comparisons thus, theory evolves with the processing of data. Garner also emphasizes "to fully comprehend political science in its fundamental relation, one must study it historically and to interpret history in its true significance one must study it politically". (Rowse, 1946, p. 351)

Klein referred to the origins and evolution of the modern welfare state, in which historians, political scientists and sociologists are all engaged in historical studies. (Klein, 2016, p.297) the debate in political science about the viability of democratic systems, the nature of authoritarian regimes, and the question of transitions between the two have generated much discussion in political science and sociology fields. A sociologist Charles Tilly has suggested in his study of state formation "there is no way to create comprehensive, plausible, and verifiable explanations without taking history seriously into account". (Klein, 2016, p.297)

2. Economics

Economics exclusively deals with the economic aspect of human life. It deals with production, consumption, exchange and distribution of wealth. Herbert Spencer declares that 'the bottom of a society is its economic relations'. (Jordanova, 2006, p. 66) Economist's approach is deductive arriving at general propositions to derive specific statements. They study problems at macro-level rarely studying at micro-level. In sharp contrast, historians' approach is inductive, and they study at micro-level studying specific situations, then through comparisons proceeding to generalizations. History is narrative and qualitative whereas Economics is quantitative.

Marx defined History “economics in action, contest among the individuals, groups, classes and states for food, fuel, material and economic powers. Political forms, religious institutions, cultural creations are all rooted in economic realities.” (Tosh, 1984, p. 136-49) In sharp contrast to his predecessors, Marx has presented the materialistic interpretation of history. This means that economic conditions determine human life and society. History does not progress through the rise of new ideas or by great men or by spreading of new beliefs, customs and religions but as the result of the economic condition of the production leading to a new social class. (Tosh, 1984, p. 136-49)

Klein (2016) asserts that all fields in social sciences have become more historically oriented; the biggest change has come in economics. Today leading historians call for a deeper understanding of historical process as a fundamental aspect of economic research” (Klein, 2016, p.294) as Thomas Piketty (2014) argued “economics without history is not a science”. (Piketty, 2014,) Klein also referred to economists’ work on African slavery in Latin America enriching the historical study on this subject yet regretting historians’ neglecting this research in their studies when all other sciences are deeply enriched by research in economics. (Klein, 2016, p.295) He appreciated the works of North (1990), Sokoloff and Engerman (2012) and Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2001) who identified the factors that created the institutions which determined the economic and social developments of a given society. Besides, why some societies evolved institutions that promoted wide-scale economic growth and others retained institutions that rewarded only a few at the expense of the many. (Klein, 2016, p.295) Klein also cited the historical research of economists and historians on the common area of interest raising significant question “why backward Europe and not Asia ended up dominating the rest of the world after 1500” then proposing “plethora of hypotheses as to whether it was warfare by small states of Europe, the European family model, an early commitment to property rights, the availability of new American lands for an exhausted Europe, or a host of other institutions that led to European domination”. (Klein, 2016, p. 296)

Inequality is another theme which generates interest among economists, historians and other social scientists but historians are uniquely able to produce basic historical studies

regarding the questions of trends in inequality using wills and testaments, voting records based on property qualifications, tax lists, and militia sources. Avoiding statistical analysis, historians can benefit from the questions, models and themes of other social scientists to guide their own research and nourish the ongoing debates among the political scientists.

Both history and economics have intimate relationships. History exhibits that the economic forces influenced many past occurrences directly or indirectly. The economic prosperity of India had been attracting foreign invaders, and these invasions influenced the course of history. The Industrial Revolution of 1787 furnished history with a new dimension, the economic interpretation of history. The French Revolution in 1789 occurred due to the determination of the middle class to seize economic rights. The Russian Revolution in 1917 and Chinese Revolution in 1948 were the outcome of economic grievances of the people. Economic exploitation of Muslims was a major factor in the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Thus, history enriches economics through providing facts of economic activities in the past and economics reciprocates with providing principles and theories to analyse this data.

3. Sociology

Sociology studies “social aggregates and groups in their institutional organizations, of institutions and their organizations and of causes and consequences of changes in institutions and social organizations” (Kuper and Kuper, 1989, p.799) of contemporary societies whereas history deals with past societies. Sociology has extended its frontiers to past societies in the form of a new discipline of historical sociology. Historians are concerned with specific societies prevailed at a particular time. Historians rarely attempt vast comparisons of societies different in time and scale, therefore, avoid generalization. Besides, both sciences have different methodology. Sociology generates its data through observation and fieldwork whereas history relies on whatever is available in the form of documentary and non-documentary sources. Sociologists ‘prefer definition over description, and abstract and quantitative categorization over qualitative and narrative analysis. (Lukas, 1987, p. 85) Weber signifies a division between history and sociology by indicating that sociology formulates type concepts and explores uniformities in events. In contrast, history aims at the causal analysis and causal attribution of individual actions,

structures and personalities. (Roth and Weber, 1976, p. 307) History provides data to the sociologist about ancient societies and old institutions. The sociologist studies past events of men of action to examine the human behavior in the past societies. Ivan Karamazov declares, "When we are born into societies, we are born in history". (Carr, 2001, p. 75) Sociology has extended the scope of history in the form of "current historical interest in magic, witchcraft, popular culture, family, urban, rural and oral history". (Jones, 1976, p. 76)

E. H. Carr also asserts, "Our view of history reflects our view of society". He warns about sociology of becoming "ultra-theoretical" dealing with abstract and meaningless generalizations about society and "ultra-empirical" splitting into a series of distinct technical problems of social readjustment. (Carr, 2001, p. 59-60) Sociology is concerned with historical societies unique and molded by specific historical antecedents and conditions. If a sociologist avoids generalization and interpretation by confining to "technical" problems of enumeration and analysis", sociology merely becomes "the unconscious apologist of a static society". He proposes that sociology like history must be dynamic and focus on the relation between the unique and the general and social change and development. Therefore, he admits, "the more sociological history becomes, and the more historical sociology becomes the better for both. Let the frontier between them kept wide open for two-way traffic". (Carr, 2001, p. 59-60)

4. Geography

Geography deals with the physical environment of human beings and its impact on human life. It is difficult to draw frontiers between history and geography because "the geography of the present-day is but a thin layer that even at this moment is becoming history". (Darby, 1953, p. 6) Besides, "the characteristics of different landscapes are the result of not only...soil and climate, but also of the utilization of these successive generations of inhabitants". (Roth and Weber, 1976, p. 307) Broek points out that the historian should view the integration of phenomena at a certain period in their due spatial relationships. The geographer can understand the structure of a certain region delving into the past. Both sciences deal with social life in its actual complexity. Both are synthesizing sciences. Historians and geographers are skeptic of universal laws of social behavior. Causality has limited validity for them. Both try to

demonstrate the existence of relationships between different categories of facts. (Broek, 1941, p. 321)

An historian, H. B. George claimed that “history is not intelligible without geography”. (George, 1901, p. 1) Michelet confirms it “without geographical bases, the people, the makers of history, seem to be walking on air.... The soil too must not be looked on only as the scene of action. Its influence appears in a hundred ways, such as food, climate etc.... As the country, so are the men”. (Darby, 1953 p. 2) On the other hand, a geographer, Alan R. H. Baker declared that ‘geography is not intelligible without history’. (Baker, 2003, p. xi.) Two geographers E.C. Semple and A.P. Brigham practically confirmed it. Semple in her *American History and its Geographic Conditions* interprets different phases of history of the United States in the context of its geography whereas Brigham organized his book on geographical basis. (Darby, 1953, p. 6)

G. R. Green asserts that “history strikes its roots in Geography” and “without a clear and vivid realization of the physical structure of a country, the incidents of life which men have lived in it can have no interest or meaning”. (Darby, 1953, p. 6) James Bryce claimed, “Geography determines history”. (Darby, 1953, p. 6) Richard Hartshorne indicates, “geography includes animate as well as inanimate things”. In fact, “geography is the matrix of history”. There can be no history without geography and there can be no geography without history. Historians can never know history without the help of map. There are geographical factors in history and there are historical factors in geography. Kant proclaims, “the description according to time is history, that according to space is geography... History is narrative, geography is descriptive”. (Rather, n.d. p.29) Historical geography is a new approach to reconstruct geography of past times in which data is historical, but method is geographical. Macaulay clearly stated in his *History of England* “if we would study with profit the history of our ancestors... we must know that the country of which we read was a very different country from that in which we live”. (Darby, 1953, p. 4) Trevelyan prefaced his work *England under Queen Ann (1930–33)* with a survey of “Queen Anne’s Island”. (Darby, 1953, p. 4) J. H. Clapham provided two accounts of ‘the face of the country’ in 1820 and in 1886 in his trilogy *An Economic History of Modern Britain (1926–38)* (Darby, 1953, p. 4). These are the classic examples of historical geography

by historians. Historians are utilizing geographical tools like land surveys to reconstruct past times.

There is a geographical understanding of the world politics generally known as geopolitics. (Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A very short Introduction*, 9). Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen first used this term in 1899 in the context of twentieth century developments. (Dodds, *Geopolitics*, 22). It is a pragmatic approach to international politics to analyze the role of territory and resources in shaping the states. This 'science' of geopolitics put forward 'laws' about international politics based on the 'facts' of global physical geography (the disposition of the continents and oceans, the division of states and empires into sea- and land-powers). Reacting against what he perceived to be an overly legalistic approach to states and their conflicts with one another, the introduction of scientific geopolitics in the academic and government-orientated worlds of the 1890s and 1900s was opportune. Geopolitics as a concept attracted interest because of its novelty to investigate the often-unremarked geographical dimensions of states and their position within world politics. (Dodds, *Geopolitics*, 24-25). Scholars and students need to investigate this important area in academic research.

5. Anthropology

Anthropology studies human beings with biological and socio-cultural aspects. Sociology focuses on the complex, modern and urban-industrial societies whereas anthropology focuses on more primitive, tribal and pre-literate societies. Anthropology is the study of man, whereas history is the study of man's past, to study history is to study Anthropology. It provides data to the historians. It is through Anthropology that the historian learns about the races, their social features, and their customs, traditions, cultures, languages and different religions of human beings. Anthropology also enables a historian to know why certain societies remained backward. It leads historian to certain conclusions. A sociologist asserts, "by and by anthropology will have the choice between becoming history or nothing" (Schorkowitz, 2012, p. 39) that "in the future there will be a turning humanistic discipline, especially history and particularly towards social history or the history of institutions of cultures and ideas". (Schorkowitz, 2012, p. 39) Schorkowitz (2012) confirmed, "comparative methods have been indispensable tool of social and

historical sciences." Historical thinking in anthropology has enhanced efficiency as well as sound capacity of revising hasty conclusions from present observations. (Schorkowitz, p. 39)

Two simultaneous movements emerged in the United States towards the last quarter of 20th century. One culminated in the founding of Social Science History Association. The other movement inspired historians to look towards cultural anthropology mainly led by Clifford Geertz to find a theoretical basis in social sciences for rejecting a scientific paradigm. Both movements inspired historians to turn to social sciences for theory and method but reflected very different views regarding the nature of the historical enterprise. (Kertzer, 2009, p.1.)

6. Archeology

Archeology focuses deep past. It collects the remains of man, his handwork, his possessions through scientific excavation and classify and interpret subsequently. Both history and Archeology study human past. History depends on documents, but Archeology is concerned with physical remains of men. Archeology cannot do without history and history cannot do without Archeology. (Woodbury and Longrace, 1976, p. 1078) Thus, both sciences have intimate relationship and are interdependent. Archeological methodology is formulated on scientific principles. Archaeological investigation usually involves several distinct phases with variety of methods starting from preliminary fieldwork leading to excavation, collecting the data to study, classify and interpret (Goetz, 1987, p. 525) to publish it for the information of other archaeologists and historians.

Archeologists work like detectives using things as clues to the lives of people, who made and used them. For instance, stone clay and other metals with written inscriptions provide a lot of information about ancient art and civilization and the living style of people at a particular period. Then the coins of a particular age communicate about the boundaries of the empire, economic condition of the people and their business. Archeological findings provide information about how the ancient people lived, behaved and worked. What were their religious beliefs? What kind of government did they have and how were they destroyed and removed from the earth? Archeologists investigate to find answers to all these questions, by making meaningful

interpretations of their data. Consequently, archeology becomes fundamental to a scientific understanding of man.

In past, history was written based on written records called documents. With time, this concept transformed particularly with the establishment of Archeology as a scientific discipline in the twentieth century. We have no other reliable means to extend our knowledge of deep past. A prominent South Asian historian Romila Thapar asserts that “the significant new evidence on early periods of history is likely to come from archeological data than from literary sources. This makes the close collaboration between the historian and the archeologist imperative”. This is reciprocal. The historian must familiarize himself with archeological data and methodology and the archeologist must be aware of the kind of evidence the historian is seeking. The method of data-collection may differ, but the interpretation of data is similar in both disciplines, and the common models would benefit both disciplines. (Thapar, 1984, p.173)

Archeology increases the range and amount of data and helps to fill in the gaps in the history of civilizations. Historians can test a great variety of hypotheses about cultural growth and change with the help of archeological data. Archeology has provided essential checks on the theories of cultural evolution and substitutes facts for speculation in matters such as the beginning of writing, urbanization and other crucial steps towards civilization. J. B. Bury considers archeology a “branch of historical research [with] a distinct name and distinct place” because the “investigation of the historical records with which it deals requires a special training of faculties of observation not called into play in the study of documents”. (Stern, 1961, p. 222) Thus “the special historian whom we call an archeologist needs a general training in history and a grasp of historical perspective as much as any other historical specialist”. (Stern, 1961, p. 222)

Historians know only one percent of man’s existence in the past. Archeologists are determined to explore the remaining 99%. They have discovered Indus, Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations. Archeology has offset the limits of History, which only concerns written matter through providing concrete evidence on man’s past. Archeology and History have operated quite independently, in most of their specific investigations. Both sciences can

collaborate through combining data from their separate approaches to neutralize each other's constraints.

Archeology provides material to other disciplines that also help in the writing of accurate history. Epigraphy studies the written records of man in the form of inscription on stone, clay, parchment, birch-bark paper, metal, wood, etc. Epigraphist reconstructs, translates and dates the inscription. (*Britannica: Macropedia*, Vol. 6, p. 915) The historian determines and interprets the events recorded by the inscription as document. Through Epigraphy, the historian collects information about arts, culture, religion, language, customs and ways of life of the people of ancient civilizations. The inscriptions on stone are more important because with the passage of time, they remained the same as they were written. For example, inscriptions of Buddha on mountains in Swat Valley provide information about the Buddhist religion in this region. The Edicts of Asoka scattered over parts of India, Pakistan and Nepal offer substantial evidence of Buddhism being 'the oldest surviving Indian written documents of any historical significance'. (Basham, 1997, p. 53) The Rosetta Stone helped in the understanding of ancient Egyptian writing called hieroglyphs. The Thebes Tablets provide information on Greek culture. Likewise, Small Copper Tablets found in the Indus Civilization provide information regarding social, cultural and economic conditions of second millennium B.C.

7. Numismatics

Numismatics is another auxiliary science that studies coins, which are the metal pieces of currency issued by the authority. (*The World Book Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, 1996, p. 392) Coins have historical significance. Numismatics helps historians in tracing out facts to maintain or check continuity in history. For example, it elaborated the chronology of the Sultans of Bengal. Coins also tell us about the marriages, relationships and death of Emperors. The picture of Noor Jahan with Emperor Jahangir on coins clearly indicates Queen's influence and power during that period. It also provides information about the boundaries of the Empire. Coins of gold and silver reveal the prosperity of age. Besides, coins help historians to analyze the prizes of gold and silver at that time. Some coins contain the achievements of Kings during war and peace. Coins also indicate the technical skills and aesthetic sense of the people of their times to assess the progress of civilization in ancient times. (Gill, 1998, p. 233)

8. Diplomatics

Diplomatics is yet another significant discipline for history. It determines the genuineness or fabrication of documents. Lorenzo Valla's proof of the forgery of *Donation of Constantine* is the first major achievement of this discipline. (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia*, Vol. 5, p. 808)

9. Paleography

Paleography investigates ancient and medieval handwriting. (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropedia*, Vol. 13, p. 911) It aims to read and to date the document correctly. Its sub-disciplines are Philology that studies language of written historical sources and Graphology that focuses the development and evolution of language. Philological knowledge of the language, vocabulary, and grammar generally used at a given time or place helps distinguish ancient or more recent forgeries from authentic documents. Graphology tells us about the character, ideology, prestige and place of a writer in society. (Gill, 1998, p. 244)

Herbert S. Klein (2016) proclaims a paradigm shift that "social sciences are making ever deeper commitments to historical research and taking up themes that used to be treated by historians" and regrets that historians are turning towards humanities". (Klein, 2016, p. 294) Jared Diamond and other social scientists have proposed that history is the prime laboratory for social science research, since it allows for "natural experiments" that are otherwise unavailable to most of the social sciences. He particularly referred to the contrasting development of North and South Korea after World War II and the impact of slave trades on various societies of Africa, the institutional changes in European countries conquered by the French revolutionary armies, and the British colonial direct or indirect rule in India. (Klein, 2016, p. 300) Klein proposed that historians could use the questions raised by the social scientists and could also challenge their hypothesis through historical method. He concludes that social scientists have abandoned their hostility towards history and started appreciating historical insight and understanding for resolving problems. Historians should reciprocate this recognition and adopt innovative approaches to engage with other social scientists in these debates to be relevant with the major issues facing the modern world. (Klein, 2016, p. 301)

To conclude the above discussion, it is obvious through inter-disciplinary approach, social sciences benefit regarding data and theories, techniques, and methods of other disciplines surpassing the artificial boundaries to curtail the shortcomings. All social sciences deal with only one aspect of human life specifically in present scenario whereas history deals with all aspects of human life in the past. It is beneficial for historians, political scientists, economists, archeologists, anthropologists and social scientists to work in collaboration. Historians need to be acquainted with the theories and models developed in other social sciences to resolve current issues and problems. They can assist in developing the context of the study in other social sciences. Besides, they can provide data to other sciences to test their theories and models in historical data. This is beneficial and enriching for the progress of the discipline of history. The students conducting historical research must be encouraged to adopt interdisciplinary approach. Individual researchers learn methods from other disciplines and apply them to issues that arise in their own discipline. Collaborating projects between different disciplines should be encouraged to find areas of common interest and identify innovative approaches to issues within each respective discipline. One such example can be the study of cultural change through multi-disciplinary approach. Emerging disciplines must be appreciated, and scholars and students must be encouraged in multi-disciplinary research, which brings together approaches from separate areas such as historical geography and historical sociology.

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