
UNIT 10: STRATAGEMS AND SPOILS: A SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF POLITICS -F.G. BAILEY*

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will know:

- political system as a game;
- the significance of a political structure;
- understand various roles and characteristics of the leader; and
- situating the political sphere within the larger society

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Originally written in 1969, this book is an important addition to the field of social anthropology as it traces the ways in which political institutions can be understood, and can be understood by looking at certain rules and regulations, very much like the games that one plays and the rules that are associated with these games. The work is rooted in the positivist ideology that rests on two central assumptions, namely that the world has a discoverable order and that the knowledge pertaining to that order has been made of segments that have already undergone experimentation and whose validity has been determined. The idea is that social behaviour can be observed, the regularities within it observed and rational connections between the two can be drawn. (p. 228)

The book is an attempt to look at the strategies and the devices that politicians resort to when they are faced with different situations. While looking at

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these strategies that are employed and the spoils or the rewards that are applicable to these, Bailey makes ample use of examples from the Kond tribe and the Bisapara community in Orissa, India, of the Pathans from the north-west frontier province of Pakistan as well as quotes examples from Asquith-Lloyd George's political adventures during the First World War. In addition he also gives examples from France during the Fourth and Fifth Republics under De Gaulle and the member of British Parliament Harold Nicholson. He makes use of all these to very beautifully weave and show how politicians, big and small, across the continents tend to follow similar rules of conduct.

In the following pages, we will look at how Bailey understands the process and the rules that he considers as being vital and being followed by everyone in order for the process to run smoothly. He points out how despite the various contextual as well as cultural differences, there were many structural regularities to the political behaviour, and it is the acquisition of these common and general principles that can provide the tools to carry out research among various other cultures as well. Once we are able to figure out the basic structures, then these structures can be used and applied in the study and understating of the other cultures.

10.2 UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL SYSTEM AS A GAME

Bailey begins his understanding of a political system by equating it to a game and hold that just as there are rules in a game and the competitors agree on what those rules are, in a similar manner, politics also has these mutually agreed upon rules. However, after a point of time, politics resembles less of a game and more of a fight, in which the final objective is not to just win a game, but rather to destroy that game in such a way that new set of rules may be established. He talks about two kinds of rules that exist; the normative rules or rules that are out there in the public, rules that do not describe a particular type of action but on the contrary, those which set a broad set of limit to the social action. In other words, there is ample choice with the individual about what course of action they might take. The other kind of rules mentioned are the pragmatic rules or rules that relate to the private wisdom. It is these rules that are the ones that Bailey wants to focus on. He maintains that these rules which each culture has its set of, but yet there is there is something common in all these pragmatic cultural rules which must be located.

In order to find these commonalities, we need to first understand that political structures cannot be studied in a vacuum but rather need to be understood in terms of their cultural and natural environment. A political structure is able to survive only if it either modifies itself to suit the environment or else modifies the environment to suit itself. In the absence of either of these two cases, a political structure is sure to perish. In trying to understand this interaction, not all parts of the environment have to be taken into consideration, only a few. Additionally, as the environment affects the political system, the system also has its rules (of both varieties) in place so as to shield it from the excessive demands of the environment.

The work adeptly deals with the notion of how the political changes itself as well the environment through a process called maintenance, which is also understood as equilibrium. This relation can be understood through an example given by Bailey of taking an independent variable-the size of the population and a dependent variable-rule of membership of a particular political unit within the Konds, a tribe in hills of western Orissa. The former is environmental while the latter political. Given that production and land remains constant, there are two ways in which the environmental variable can go, one too many people such that the land is not able to support the population and two, very few people, such that it is not possible to properly cultivate the land and protect it from outside attack. This land is owned by clans and membership to these clans is decided by birth. Now the first independent variable, the population can most definitely affect the membership of the clan. However, the second variable can affect the first one too. In case of excessive population, the Konds stated restricting the people who could get membership into the clan and stated practicing female infanticide. And when the reverse happens, they can relax the rules of membership, so that even those not born into the clan can be a part of it. The structure then is gradually altered instead of being radically changed.

10.3 DEFINING A POLITICAL STRUCTURE

As mentioned earlier, political structure is looked at akin to a game being played where there are two (or more) teams, there is a prize that has been decided for which all players are competing for and finally there are rules in place which decide how the game should be played. A political structure, for Bailey then, can be understood as a combination of rules which make up the structure. The rules broadly deal with five concepts

1. Defining what the prize, the end result is as well actions that makes one worthy of the prize: the prize is culturally defined and is comparable to something like power or honour in an everyday setting. Additionally it must be something that is scarce and not easily achievable and is valuable. This value creates as well as regularises the competition that takes place. These values are also symbolically and culturally defined and they need to be repeated for them to be kept alive.
2. Defining who is qualified to participate in the bid to win the prize: A political structure recognises at least three groups from within which the people are eligible to for a political structure. The first is the *political community* which marks the broadest boundary of the political structure. Beyond this structure, the rules no longer apply and it helps distinguish the insiders from the rest. The second is the *political elite*, which is a part of the political community and it is from this pool that people can be chosen that can compete with one another for certain powers and privileges. And finally, there are the *political team* which is how people in a political structure should organise themselves. It is usually how supporters are mobilized, and a team that is based on achievement status is an association.

3. Defining what the composition of the competing teams will be: the composition of the members can be ascertained from the political community. As mentioned, it is the widest boundary of the structure. Within it lays the group and elites and even deeper still are the spate political teams that are made up which fight for the prize. And finally, at the centre of all this is the leader. Depending on whether the team is morally obliged to the leader and so are part of the group or whether they are there on a contractual basis, the groups can be divided into two; the former a moral team and the latter a contract team.
4. Defining how the competition will take place and also making clear what accounts as fair practices and what as unfair practices in the 'game': the rules about the competition not only constrain the behaviour of those who are taking part, but also promotes a sense of order and ensures that lines of communication is very clear between all the contenders. These messages that are passed across are known as *confrontations*. These messages may lead to a public display of their strength, a display of the resources available with each team, which is termed as an *encounter*.
5. Defining what procedure is to be followed in case the rules are broken: In the political structure there are mechanisms which ensure that in case there are opposing views between the contestants then this can be taken care of through the role of mediators. The role of who would be a mediator is not fixed and can change from one situation to another. Those who are allies in one situation can very well be on opposing teams in another situation.

10.4 POSITION OF THE LEADER

There are two major kinds of understanding when it comes to politics and the role that leaders play. One cultural understanding believes that all men are equal and by virtue of that, they should have equal amounts of political power. On the other hands are cultures which proclaim the opposite that is that not all men are born equal and that only a few chosen ones have the right to rule. And then there a third kind of understanding that sways between the two. To be able to become a leader is not just a matter of being born in the right group but is also a skill that can be acquired. It is a struggle to gain more resources that the opponent and to judiciously use these resources. An example of those who become leaders on the basis of their ascribed status is that of Pakhtouns who are a landowning caste. They alone have the right to sit in the council, and can compete to become *khan*, the leader. While men of other cases are allowed to take part in the process of politics, they cannot however rise to the position of leaders a must remain as dependents and followers of the Pakhtouns.

The link between a leader and his followers is made as well as strengthened or weakened, as the case may be, depending on the availability of resources. The relationship between them is transactional, whether it is based on a contract or out of a belief system. Even in the latter case, there is need of resources to be used. The *khan* provides you with the protection in case

some outside element bothers you. In fact, the leader must protect you, because not doing so lowers his credibility and his reputation as a leader. In return, whenever the leader requires your services, you are expected to be present without a question. In a way you exchange your services for his protection. In fact, this credibility that the leader has to protect is universal, present in both a moral group as well as in a hired group.

In fact the distinction between the moral and the transactional group might also be purely on paper. In real life, these two groups tend to exist simultaneously, often, a team consisting of a core, which is close to the leader on moral grounds, and a following which is close to the leader on transactional grounds. And it is in the best interest of the leader to include as many people as possible into his core group. Bailey shows through examples of the Bisipara people as to how leaders there experienced political allegiance coupled with kinship and ritual structures, so that people who outwardly seem to belong to two different leaders, actually were from the same decent group and their allegiance changed depending on the size of the circle, the occasion and the circumstances.

10.4.1 Various roles of the Leader

The role of the leader is another aspect that needs mention. In order for the smooth functioning of the political team it is important that someone take decisions within the group, and that other members follow this decision. This then becomes the main responsibility of the leader. A leader primarily has to take two types of decisions, one which helps main the group and the other which concerns the tasks that the team has to perform vis-à-vis the outside world. The members may compete with each other to increase their own share of the spoils or profit, or in the case of moral teams, where they compete for precedence, it is the leader then who has to mediate and resolve these issues. The leader has to take up the role of the referee, and it is in the interest of the leader to get these disputes resolved at the earliest, as the more time is spent in the dispute, the more resources are wasted, which could have been used for other purposes. While it does make sense to sometimes sit still and not do anything and let the matter resolve on its own, many other times such an action can lead to long term damage. In case the leader feels that the matter is too trivial to mediate, then the method of arbitration can be employed. In this case, the leader will take a decision that becomes binding on a group. Not only is this useful in maintaining the order but also helps in establish the fact that the leader has a good social standing.

While taking these decisions, the leader needs to make sure that they balance the three kinds of actions that occur in the group, first a decision that most agree on, i.e. consensual decisions; second decisions where there isn't any time for a discussion and is necessarily enforced upon the group; and finally, a decision that is so consensual that it is not taken by anyone in particular and is agreed on by all. The reason for the balance is that while the consensual decisions are well thought about, the enforced decisions may bring out resentment in the group. However, in the absence of a leader to take these on the spur of the moment decisions, the group will collapse. So while they are essential for the group's existence, but yet, they should not be taken too often.

10.4.2 Characteristics of a strong leader

A major difference that exists between a strong leader and a weak leader is that the strong leader commands while the weak leader asks for consent. A strong and good leader also understands that in a contract group, the followers have to be always treated as individuals and not as a group. Their requirements are different and therefore not everyone needs to be kept happy at the same time. The leader can have several ways of dividing up the earned dividends, in other words, the spoils. These could be in the form of material goods; they could also be in the form of titles that can be handed over to the follower. Both material resources as well as power positions are important in the game. Good leadership, nevertheless, is not only about the material goods but is also dependent on the skills. These include the understanding about the pragmatic rules and their applicability, the appropriate use of these rules to make the best use of the resources, which are sourced from other people and through these resources, make a successful following. Additionally, a leader is the strongest when there are no intermediary leaders within the team, who while necessary to manage a very large team, also run the risk of becoming the leaders themselves. One way to avoid this is to use the 'divide and rule' strategy in order to keep an ambitious intermediate leader in check. Additionally, the leader can also introduce the notion of specialization, whereby each smaller team under an intermediate leader is fulfilling only one function, while all report to the top leader. Such a division will reduce the possibility of any one person overtaking and becoming a rival. Moreover, in a moral team, the leader should further have control over the symbols which brings the team together.

10.5 DISORDER AND CHANGE IN POLITICS

It will be wrong to assume that all the understanding of politics is derived only through the normative rules that are present in the society. The understanding from only the point of view of those who are in authority is a flawed one, if we only look at how there are some who create trouble and how they are checks and balances to punish and keep them in place. There exists yet another parallel process that happens where the player(s) tries to change the system, they are not only able to escape these rules but also prove to be successful in executing the said change.

Moves of competition between different teams can be looked at in terms of challenges or confrontations and decisive actions or encounters and these can be arranged in a regular sequence of thing. The example of *Doladoli* is taken to understand the confrontation. Used by the people of Bisipara, the word Dolo means faction and the tension that takes place between two dolo is doladoli. There are two dolos each made up of a leader from a Warrior caste and his followers. These two leaders also come from the same descent line and so share a common kinship. The two leaders are constantly trying to increase their followers and defend their team from outside attack. In the process, there are often confrontations at the panchayat, the village council that take place in which there are verbal attacks on the mohoto or honour of the leaders. Both the parties engage in a lot of accusations that are exaggerated. They accuse each other and ask for compensation. However, since without

a consensus, a decision cannot be reached in the village council, matters are seldom resolved and people would leave feeling agitated and resort to backbiting and gossiping. Eventually, matters would settle down till there was another such a public confrontation, again followed by no decision and a period of gossiping. Here this is also seen as repetitive games where there are rules are followed and certain boundaries maintained. The process can also be understood as a means of communication between the two teams.

In order to understand subversion and encounters as a means of control, an example of Pakhtounds is used. Here the main aim to control the land and through the land to have monopoly over honour. The move that is used by the Pakhtounds to maintain their honour while demining their opponents is to murder them. There are a few seeps which precede either the murder or else acceptance of the other leader's defeat. As a first step, one amasses more followers and then brings this to the knowledge of your opponent. If the opponent thinks you are mistaken in your show of power and it does not match his, he may issue a counter challenge. Then after a series of appraisals and post that either a withdrawal of one party or else an encounter where strength of both is put to the test, where they continue to engage in this back and forth process till either one publicly admits to have reached the limit of their resources.

10.5.1 Intended and Unintended Consequences

Moving further, one needs to question, why is it that political structures break down? The actions of the actors involved have a lot of consequences, many which they themselves might not be aware of or might not have anticipated. The environment might impose some new obstacles which forces one to change the course of action. Paradoxically, while it is required that rules are followed when taking part in the competition, yet most of the time, the scarce prize is claimed by those who are able to act and react to the ways that are unseen by the opponents and to the newly emerging rules. Thus it is in the very nature of political competition that its self destruction is created.

10.6 LOCATING THE POLITICAL SPHERE WITHIN THE LARGER SOCIETY

While it is important to look at the political structure, it is equally important to understand the larger social structure it exists in. The religion, economic and kinship structure of a society will influence the political structure to a large extent. The larger broader structure, may either try and coerce the smaller structure to agree with its norms or else let the smaller structure function at its pace as long it does not disagree with the larger structure. The role of middlemen here also gains importance as they are the ones who build a bridge between these two structures. In many cases they are the only contact that is available and all contact is through them. In this way they can be seen as almost occupying the position of the leader, where the smaller section is wholly dependent on whatever information the middle man brings. This position of a middle man however, can also under a change if the subjects realise that they can handle the situation on their own.

Thus, the main intension of the book is to discover some generalised principles in a political structure, such that it goes beyond the culture that it is found in and that these tools could be used to help understand research in other cultures as well.

Check Your Progress

1. Why did Bailey described political system as a game?
2. What is the difference between a strong and a weak leader?

10.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we tried to outline the ways in which political institutions can be understood with looking at certain rules and regulations which are similarly like games. By equating political system to a game in which the final objective is not to just win a game, but rather to destroy that game in such a way that new lay down of rules may be established. Bailey maintains that these rules which each culture has its set of, but yet there is there is something common in all these pragmatic cultural rules which must be located. We have also elaborated combination of rules with various concepts. Here we also try to address that political structures cannot be studied in a vacuum but rather need to be understood in terms of their cultural and natural environment. Roles and characteristics of leader played crucial for the smooth functioning of the political team. This then becomes the main responsibility of the leader. Finally, we tried to examine how the role of religion, economic and kinship structure of a society influenced the political structure to a large extent.

10.8 REFERENCES

Bailey, F.G. (2001), *Stratagems and Spoils. A Social Anthropology of Politics* Routledge.

10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Bailey describes political system as a game. According to him– just as there are rules in a game and the competitors agree on what those rules are, in a similar manner, political system also has these mutually agreed upon rules. However, after a point of time politics resembles less of a game and more of a fight, in which the final objective is not to just win a game, but rather to destroy that game in such a way that a new set of rules may be established.
2. A major difference that exists between a strong and a weak leader is that a strong leader commands while the weak leader asks for consent. A strong leader also understands that is a contract group. The followers have to be always treated as individuals and not as a group.

UNIT 11: STREET CORNER SOCIETY*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Main themes of the book
 - 11.2.1 Corner boys vs College boys: Social Relations and Leadership Patterns
 - 11.2.2 Racketeering, Politics and Social Structure
- 11.3 Methodological Contribution of Street Corner Society
- 11.4 Critique
- 11.5 Let us Sum Up
- 11.6 References
- 11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the main themes of the book Street Corner Society (SCS)
- describe who are the ‘corner boys’ and their activities
- discuss the social relations and leadership patterns which exist in Cornerville.
- discuss briefly the advantages and challenges in carrying out participant observation
- discuss the main criticisms of the book
- describe the main contributions of SCS

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Street Corner society (SCS) was originally published as Street Corner Society by **William Foote Whyte**: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum by University of Chicago Press in 1943. It has been called a classic study of field work and participant observation. It has been republished several times over the years. It is a description of behaviours of some individuals organized into different groups in an Italian slum area of an American city. His data is drawn from a three- and half-year (1936-1940) study of the district which he called as ‘Cornerville’. Spending time in the area helped him to understand closely how the social structure of the street corner gangs changed over time.

His work has challenged the assumption that slums are inherently disorganized. Through his work, he sought to bring out the degree of organization in a slum. His writings imply that social researchers do not understand the nature of organization in slums and hence refer to them as disorganized. Spending extensive time in the field helped him to understand

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the manner in which relationships were structured in Cornerville. According to Whyte (1943:37) the character of slum social organization cannot be understood until more sociologists shift their emphasis from social disorganization in order to investigate the process of social reorganization. SCS can be seen as an attempt in this direction. SCS is a study about social interaction, networking, and everyday life among young Italian-American men in Boston's North End (Cornerville) during the latter part of the Great Depression. It describes the complex social worlds of highway gangs and corner boys to prove that an underprivileged community does not have the need for social disorder. Part I of SCS describes the formation of local street gangs, the corner boys, and contrasts them with the college boys in terms of social organization and mobility. Part II outlines the social structure of politics and racketeering.

11.2 MAIN THEMES OF THE BOOK

The overall structure of the book is based on the major categorizations within the population studied: the 'little guys of Cornerville', the 'corner boys' and the 'college boys', as opposed to the 'big shots', the racketeers and politicians, going from 'lower and smaller to higher and larger types of organization. The text of the book shows a characteristic development starting with a wide scope of life in Cornerville, then narrowing the focus to one group of corner boys and then on one person, whom he referred to as Doc. After this the scope of the book widens again to include larger and more encompassing issues of the community and ends with description of Cornerville's social structure. Whether the scope is wide or narrow, the analytic object remains the same as can be seen from Whyte's statement-

"The corner gang, the racket and police organizations, the political organization, and now the social structure have all been described and analysed in terms of a hierarchy of personal relations based upon a system of reciprocal obligations. These are the fundamental elements out of which all Cornerville institutions are constructed."

Whyte (1955): 273

The next few sections describe the main themes brought out in the book.

11.2.1 Corner boys vs College boys: Social Relations and Leadership Patterns

Whyte started his study of Cornerville without a clear background in both sociology and anthropology. His book underscores the disparities amid second generation Italian American for the college boys and corner boys (Whyte, 2012). He presents a lot of 'real life' material rather than an analytic framework. He follows an inductive process and gives his observations on the lives of the 'corner boys.' He designated different groups and communities within the region he studied.

In the first part of the book, there are comprehensive accounts for the establishment and systematization of local gangs. Street Corner men hardly saw each other outside their chosen corner, although various corner gangs reserved the same night every week. This formed their time for some special activity. These special activities unceremoniously bound the men together

(Whyte, 2012). The gangs in the Street Corner Society were completely united since most of the gangs' activities can be traced back to their early childhood (Whyte, 2012). Most of the gang members had been friends since childhood and this book explores lives of those living close together considering that they are the first chances are for social contacts. Home usually plays a very small role in the activities of the corner boys: people were usually known by their nicknames and not their family names.

In his work, Whyte described the peer group interaction of the 'boys' in the community by differentiating between them as the 'corner boys' and 'college boys.' His work brings out a compassionate understanding of groups and their qualities to social action. Whyte differentiated between the corner boys and college boys. He argued that the lives of the corner boys revolved around particular street corners and the neighbouring shops. Their home life was reduced to a minimum; many had no regular employment or were engaged in illegal activities; the focal point of action was the street corner which usually gave its name to the group. On the other hand, the college boys were more focused on good education and moving up on the social ladder (Whyte, 2012). The corner boys who were larger in number usually have less than high school education. While describing the relationships between people, Whyte explained the relationship and leadership patterns as well. The relationships between the corner boys were deemed to be stronger than 'college boys. He explained that the informal corner leaders in their effort to gain social recognition finally supported many of the group activities, whereas bonds of thrifty "college boys", who already are able to conform to some aspects of middle-class values that they wished to achieve were rather weak; ready to break whenever in collision with personal betterment. For "corner boy," the most important criteria in relationship to others is loyalty and way one acts in personal relations, whereas socially aggressive "college boy" judges a man according to his capacity to advance.

By observing the group interactions, Whyte was able to learn about the street gang's informal leadership patterns. He gave examples related to how two or three groups merged into a larger unit when the leader arrived. When the leader said what he thought the gang should do, the others followed. Others in the group could make suggestions of what they should do, but these usually dried up if the leader disagreed. This is best explained through the example of 'Nortons' a group that Whyte observed. He describes how he recognized the leader of the group-

"I determined that Doc was the leader through the following types of observations. Before he arrived at his place, I would see small groups of 2 or 3 conversing. When Doc arrived, the groups would dissolve and a larger group would form around him, another member spoke to the group but then noticed that Doc was listening, he would stop and then try again to get Doc's attention. Often, but not always, Doc was the one to suggest a change in group. When another member made a proposal for action no activity change followed. Only if Doc made or approved the proposal did I observe a change in group activity (Whyte, 1993)."

If there were more than one potential gang leader, usually the lieutenants, this was shown by the members splitting up and following their respective leaders. Leaders who do not discharge their obligations are in danger of losing their position. Whyte maintained that the internal ranking in the group determines all types of social interactions. An example was that the group's leader basically never borrowed money from persons lower in the group hierarchy, but turned primarily to leaders in other gangs, and secondarily to the lieutenants. This was a recurrent pattern that Whyte could find among the five street gangs he observed.

These networks and relationships that Whyte described were deemed to be very strong as they could not be disrupted by influences from other organizations in the community. For example, the Settlement Community House had minimal influence on the corner boys. According to Whyte, this was because it was run solely by middle-class non-Italians who did not speak Italian language and had "no systemic knowledge of social background" (Whyte 1943) of those they wish to help.

11.2.2 Racketeering, Politics and Social Structure

In *Street Corner Society*, Whyte describes the social building and deeds of Cornerville in addition to the corner boys. In Part 2 of the book on 'Racketeers and Politicians', he brings out the relationships between corner boys, racketeers and politicians. He describes how each of them is useful to another and how different relationships develop. The second part, on Racketeers and Politicians, describes the workings of minor gears and levers on the political machine- "numbers" rackets, "beano"(celebration) parties, etc.-as well as the connections and interconnections that reach high in state and nation. Whyte sees his study on the social structure of the racketeers and their impacts on Cornerville as a continuation of the story of the 'corner boys'. In his book, he confirms that in the 1930s, the racketeers were almost the only men seen on the streets. They were also among the beneficiaries who had money and political influence. Whyte's purpose was to expose in detail the street gangs' social, criminal, and political organization. These constituted alternative career paths for the Racketeers and Politicians.

For Cornerville's politicians there are five prongs to their speeches: race, class, the candidate's personal appeal, his qualifications for office, and a statement of his political strength. These impact their relationship between different gangs and who will offer political support to them. The Racketeers often serve as the mediators between the corner boys and politicians. The effects of the racketeers on Cornerville can be distributed into three classes, on daily life of the corner boys, the representatives and social structures. Racketeers exert influence on both corner boys and politicians and thereby the entire social structure of Cornerville.

Reciprocal obligations do not play its role only at a street level. Following lives of Tony Cataldo and George Ravello, Whyte makes the case of interconnected worlds of racketeering and politics

describing social positions of their leaders as generally "the same." Environment, interests and territorial influence over identical groups create among them "a mutual degree of intimacy" (Whyte, 1943). Whenever politician wants to win ward elections and get into higher politics, he

needs to create a pact with one of twelve “Eastern City” racket syndicates and exploits well-organized structure of subordination reaching from “50 percent man,” larger agents and local agents back to level of street corner groups. In exchange, racketeer gains influential ally who helps to protect his gambling business— places where people go to “play numbers.”

Going back to the street level, Whyte recognizes cultural underpinnings which help to lubricate the whole structure. In contrast to middle-class Americans, police officers have more in common with regular inhabitants of the slum who, based upon catholic tradition which does not connect law with morality, “distinguish respectable and non-respectable illegal activity” (Whyte 1943). Next, racketeers are known as free spenders and patrons of local enterprises. They are thus important middle-man. They literally invest big portions of their profit into the local economy creating new employment opportunities. It reorients mutual responsibilities of previous migrant generations which were recognizable mainly along family ties and Italian cities of origin. Organized crime as an agent of socialization, therefore, contributes to the overall social cohesion of the district.

Check Your Progress I

- i) What are the main areas covered by the book Street Corner Society? Give a brief answer

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- ii) How did Whyte identify informal leadership patterns amongst the gangs in Cornerville?

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- iii) How do Racketeers impact the social structure of Cornerville? Give your answer in five lines.

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11.3 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF STREET CORNER SOCIETY

Whyte carried out his research study using the method of observation. In the first edition of the book, he does not write much about the methodology he followed. In the second edition of the book published in 1955, he added an Appendix A on methodology. This begins with his personal background

and how that influenced the selection of the research study, plan of the study, his initial efforts in establishing relationships and the challenges he faced in attempting that. He also describes meeting his key informant 'Doc' and how that helped him to gain entry into the field. This appendix which describes the personal journey of the researcher strengthened the book and increased the influence it had on sociology and on anyone wanting to practice participant observation.

Participant observation is a method which has many tensions and contrasts. In an unfamiliar setting, it offers a certain flexibility to the researcher. It is a method which requires time – a year or more. It is a challenging method to practice and therefore the descriptions given in SCS help us in establishing the usefulness of employing this method to explore new situations and areas. Adler, Adler, & Johnson (1992, p. 3) argue that “SCS represents a foundational demonstration of participant observation methodology. With its detailed, insightful, and reflexive accounts, the methodological appendix, first published in the second edition, is still regarded as one of the premier statements of the genre. SCS stands as an enduring work in the small groups literature, offering a rich analysis of the social structure and dynamics of “Cornerville” groups and their influence on individual members.”

For researchers Whyte's work is extremely important as it offers many insights about 'doing ethnography' and participant observation. The appendix brings out the process of ethnography in a detailed manner. The process of entering the field, the problems he faced while doing so, the challenges of collecting data and living with it before being able to produce some coherent text around it. He talked about being immersed in a mass of confusing data and attempting to organize that data. He describes the anxiety and challenges faced by the researcher in various stages – from initial contact to the middle stages of research and also when the research is ending. He has written about the mistakes he has made in the field 'trying to fit'. These insights are extremely beneficial for the beginning researchers who may be able to understand the need to maintain researcher boundaries while doing participant observation.

The appendix which presents his reactions in various situations help in understanding how patterns emerged in this research and also the process by which his position changed from being a non-participant observer to a participant observer. Whyte was substantially older than the members of the juvenile gang whose behaviour he wanted to study. His solution to this problem came through doing overt Participant Observation. Whyte gained the co-operation of gang's leader (“Doc”), who served as his “sponsor” with rest of gang members. Being a participant observer helped him to observe, describe and analyse groups as they evolved and changed over time.

In the initial stages, he writes about of not knowing what to ask and when to ask it. One of his questions had actually led to complete silence in the group and people becoming distant. This is the time Doc advised him to “Stop asking questions. Hang around and you'll learn the answers in the long run”. For researchers working in community settings, this is an important point. Following this advice, Whyte was able to collect more information than he would have been able to even after asking questions.

Ethnographic Cases

Selection of ‘what to research’ was another area of concern. Initially, Whyte wanted to conduct a holistic study of Cornerville (North end of Boston) with a special focus on slums. But he realized soon that this was an impossible task and there was a need for some structure. He highlighted the importance of selection of material as everything cannot be covered - cannot be comprehensive. He revised his original plan and confined his study to the street gangs’ social, criminal, and political organization in the city district. He argued-

“Though my study of the social structure of street corner gangs was based primarily upon direct observation, researchers cannot observe everything, and if we tried, we would end up with miscellaneous data, which would yield no intelligible pattern. We seek to observe behavior that is significant to our research purposes. Selection therefore depends upon some implicit or explicit theory-a process that is in large part subjective (Whyte, 1993: 293).”

“I abandoned the goal of a comprehensive study to focus on areas in which I had substantial systematic data: corner gangs and their relations to the rackets and political organizations (Whyte, 1993: 294).”

In ethnographic work or observational work, the above insight is imperative to remember as we are confronted by huge amounts of data which all appears relevant. Presenting everything would yield confusing results and hence selected material has to be presented.

Other challenges related to participant observation – those of becoming over involved in the lives of gang members and identifying with them, establishing boundaries while trying to maintain relationships, problems of researcher changing the behaviour of the group are brought out and discussed in the latest editions of the book. Whyte’s frank discussion of his methodology—participant observation—has served as an essential casebook in field research for generations of students and scholars.

Check Your Progress II

- i) Discuss briefly the main contribution of Street Corner Society to field work methodology.

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11.4 CRITIQUE

The study continues to serve as a valuable source of knowledge in concrete field studies of group processes, street gangs, organized crime, and political corruption (Homans, 1993 [1951]; Short & Strodbeck, 1974 [1965]; Sherman, 1978). Whyte’s unique ability to describe concrete everyday details in intersubjective relations created a new model for investigations based on participant observations in a modern urban environment

(Andersson, 2014). He writes in an easy flowing narrative style which has attracted many readers to the book.

The major emphasis of the first edition had been on the theory of informal group structures and leadership patterns, the organization of ethnic ghetto life, and the limited means that the people of Cornerville (now acknowledged to be Boston's North End) had to link them with the larger society around them, and thus to opportunities for upward social mobility. Whyte's most important conclusion is that the seemingly chaotic slum was informally organized. Whyte also undertook an examination of the association between Cornerville and the greater society. His key inference was that Cornerville was a community that was pre-arranged, something that contradicted the general belief that slums were informally muddled sections. He also explored this in his study that revealed the types of gang connotations and their link with gambling, party-politics and racketeering governments. Just like the structures of party politics and racketeering, the gangs also have a hierarchal organization that originated from the understanding and friendship of the associates over a long period of time (Whyte. 2012).

His work highlighted the importance of congestion, housing circumstances, joblessness and scarcity. According to him, the North End's problem was not "lack of organization but failure of its own social organization to mesh with the structure of the society around it." Even society outside the district did not offer an effective help. Whyte's consistent criticism is levelled at the policy of Settlement House which is described as "alien institution upholding to middle-class standards," it is fruitful to ask what today's practice is? As shown by researchers such as Jane Jacobs (1993), Philippe Bourgois (2003) or Loïc Wacquant (2008), debates on policy of community institutions and recurring perception of disorganization of poor neighborhoods are still relevant. This then adds to the contemporary relevancy of Whyte's pioneering work (1943) suggesting more cautious action of those in power while providing "more opportunities to participate and take responsibility for one's life" to those in vulnerability.

Apart from the praise received by the book, questions have been raised about the methodology used in the research. As a single case study of the area Cornerville, SCS has been criticised like other classic case studies for being executed without concern for research focus, development of constructs, and largely lacking methodological rigour. However, Eisenhardt (1991) explains that single case studies are not really based on a single setting. According to her although Whyte based his work on a single setting, Boston's North End (Cornerville), the study itself rests on insights and comparisons made across multiple gangs. Whyte (1941: 648) explains this in his book-

"I made an intensive and detailed study of 5 gangs on the basis of personal observation, intimate acquaintance, and participation in their activities for an extended period of time."

Many of his insights are based on observation of multiple gangs; some of the observations are confirmed across groups and thus lead to generalizations. Whereas for some observations, he brings out the differences between the various groups. Drawing on an extensive ethnographic material and the

Ethnographic Cases

fact that he conducted participant observation for a longer period of time than “anyone before him had done in an urban context” (Anderson 2014), it undoubtedly increases power of his arguments.

Another area of criticism has been that he has chosen methods that reflect a rather positivistic view of science (Anderson, 2014). He has also been criticised for giving minimal attention to factors of tension, negotiation, crisis or change. Some critics have argued that Whyte was too focused on “looking for patterns” to correct theoretical assumptions of Chicago school (related to inherent social disorganization in slums) which caused to overlook other ethnographic data. His work has focused a lot on ‘structures’ while ignoring the agency of individuals in bringing about changes in their lives.

Many of the criticisms of the book have been addressed by Whyte in the newer additions of his book. The methodological appendix helped in clarifying many issues related to methodology and presented useful insights for carrying out participant observation. Street Corner Society remains a classic in sociological theory as it one of the first books which also attempts to connect the micro and macro systems. This is best explained in the author’s own words – Whyte (1955, p. 358) explains on the basis of similar structural-functional ideas how the different institutions or organizations and leaders in the North End are functionally and hierarchically connected in a larger social system:

“Although I could not cover all Cornerville, I was building up the structure and functioning of the community through intensive examination of some of its parts—in action. I was relating the parts together through observing events between groups and between group leaders and the members of the larger institutional structures (of politics and the rackets). I was seeking to build a sociology based upon observed interpersonal events. That, to me, is the chief methodological and theoretical meaning of Street Corner Society.”

Check Your Progress III

- i) What were the main criticisms of Street Corner Society?
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- ii) What is one of the most important research findings in Street Corner Society?
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11.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit describes the main themes of the book *Street Corner Society*, written by William Foote Whyte (first published in 1943). The book is a study about social interaction, networking and everyday life among young Italian-American men in Boston's North End (called Cornerville by Whyte). The unit briefly discusses the lives of the street gangs called the 'corner boys' as well as their interactions with the racketeers and politicians. It presents the social relations and leadership patterns which exist in the Cornerville. An important contribution of the book is the detailing around carrying out participant observation in a community which is briefly described here. The main criticisms and important contributions of the book are also presented in the unit.

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11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

- i) SCS is a study about social interaction, networking, and everyday life among young Italian-American men in Boston's North End (Cornerville) during the latter part of the Great Depression. It describes the complex social worlds of highway gangs and corner boys to prove that an underprivileged community does not have the need for social disorder.
- ii) According to Whyte, conversations of the group usually centered around the leader. If there were 2-3 ongoing conversations; they would dissolve and merge into one on arrival of the informal leader. The leaders were the ones who made most of the suggestions related to any changes or activities in the group. In addition to that, changes or activities were carried out only if they were approved by the leader.
- iii) Relationships in Cornerville are based on reciprocal obligations. To win elections, politicians need to create pacts with different racket syndicates who extend their reach to the street corner groups. The racketeers then serve as mediators between corner boys and politicians.

Their influence on both these groups ensure that they exert influence on the entire social structure of Cornerville.

Check your progress II

- i) SCS gives detailed accounts of the nature of gangs and their interactions with the larger political environment. The author collected data through the process of participant observation and in his appendix to the book, he highlights the challenges faced during the process of data collection. He explains the process of entering the field, identifying key informants, manner of collecting information as well as selecting the topics that the research should focus on. The explanation related to how he began the research to challenges faced during various phases and the manner in which the research was concluded is extremely important for the new researchers. This book gives many insights into the process of participant observation.

Check your progress III

- i) Street Corner Society was criticized for lack of methodological rigor as it was based on a single case. His methods seem to reflect a positivistic view of science and therefore gave less attention to individual factors related to tension, negotiation, crisis and change. SCS appear to focus more on 'structures' and in doing so often ignored the agency of the individuals involved.
- ii) Whyte's most important conclusion in Street Corner Society is that the seemingly chaotic slum was informally organized. His key inference was that Cornerville was a community that was pre-arranged, something that contradicted the general belief that slums were informally muddled sections.

UNIT 12 : DEBATES ON DOING ETHNOGRAPHY*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 The Ethnographic Tradition
- 12.3 Principles of Methodology in Ethnography
 - 12.3.1 Naturalism
 - 12.3.2 Understanding
 - 12.3.3 Induction
 - 12.3.4 Ethics
- 12.4 New Approaches in Ethnography
 - 12.4.1 Reception Ethnography
 - 12.4.2 Feminist Ethnography
 - 12.4.3 Post-modern Ethnography
- 12.5 Twin Perspectives in Ethnography
 - 12.5.1 Emic Perspective
 - 12.5.2 Etic Perspective
- 12.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.7 References
- 12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- about the ethnographic tradition in social sciences;
- about various methodological principles of ethnography;
- about the new approaches in ethnography;
- about the various stages of feminist ethnography; and
- about two important analytical aspects of ethnography.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, an attempt will be made to understand the meaning of the term ethnography as well as ethnography as a method. We will also discuss how ethnography came into being through tracing its origin and how ethnography grew over a period of time. Subsequently, an attempt will be made to discuss the issues in doing ethnography. This unit will offer an insight into ways ethnography has been understood by both anthropologists as well as sociologists. It will simultaneously focus on various principles in ethnography and the emergence of new approaches in doing ethnography.

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Towards the end, this unit will offer an understanding of the two important analytical perspectives that enables a researcher to distinguish between two forms of data collected during the fieldwork.

12.2 THE ETHNOGRAPHIC TRADITION

One quite often comes across of the remarkable ethnographic contributions made by early social anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe Brown. Both these anthropologists belong to the British School of thought. In fact, if we intend to know the history of anthropology, we can refer directly to the works of Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish anthropologist, who conducted a study on Trobriand Islands in West Pacific during 1920's. Malinowski's approach was later adopted by A.R Radcliffe Brown in his anthropological study of the Andaman Islanders. There are different terms used by two allied disciplines anthropology and sociology, former belonging to British School of thought and later belonging to Chicago School. British School of anthropologists called it 'ethnography' while as Chicago School of Sociologists call it 'participant observation'.

The term ethnography is derived from two Greek words: 'ethno' which means a tribe, or a community, or a race or even a nation and 'graphos' which means to write down. Thus, the term ethnography means to write down about a tribe, a community, a race, a nation and so on. Now the question that comes to mind given its etymological meaning is that what is it that is to be written about a tribe, a community, a race or a nation. Since the time of its emergence, those concerned with it have engaged themselves in analysing culture of various tribes or communities (*See: Clifford and Marcus, 1986*). As Hammersley and Atkinson have rightly said, "ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (2007:3). Now considering this definition to simplify the understanding of the term ethnography, we can say that ethnography is an approach which ensures observation and exploration of certain social phenomena. This approach does not allow the researcher to isolate from participating in the daily lives of people under study. Interaction between researcher and participants occurs through conversations and interviews to shared ritual and emotional experiences (Murchison, 2010). So we can say that in ethnography, the researcher is immersed into the daily practices of people under study such as rituals, beliefs, and other activities also.

In the contemporary times, researchers from other disciplines also use ethnography as an approach in their research, for example, in education, psychology, media, and other natural science disciplines also. This indicates that the scope of ethnography has widened, and it has widened in studies in which an ethnographer attempts to increase his knowledge of social and cultural dynamics (Murchison, 2010). Two perspectives have emerged in ethnography not so far in the past and these perspectives are related to the objectives of research and the representation of culture. The first perspective is *turn-in ethnography*, in which researcher is restricted to make

assumptions but at the same time it allows the researcher to not immerse into the world of subjects under study. The second perspective is *turn-towards ethnography*, in which gives an opportunity to the ethnographer to represent immerse himself into the world of subjects as an outsider. These two perspectives result in the idea of ethics in ethnography, which we will discuss in the later sections of this unit. Now there are certain conditions for doing ethnographic research. Murchison (2010) has pointed out a few important ones which can be employed in ethnography in the present times also because these conditions are universal in ethnography. They are:

- Considering ethnography of Trobriand Islanders, Malinowski (1922), in this work generally acknowledged that ethnography required a lengthy stay in the field — usually a year or longer. This is true for almost all ethnographic studies.
- Secondly, an ethnographer is required to learn and communicate with the subjects in their own language (the language of subjects). This is one of the important conditions of doing ethnography.
- Thirdly, since the primary source of the creation of culture is the kinship itself, therefore an ethnographer while doing ethnography with the subjects has to completely focus on kinship system.
- There is a general agreement among the ethnographers about the idea of completely being a part of the group under study. This enables the ethnographer to obtain an insider's point of view about the group being studied.

Other than these conditions for doing ethnography, there are certain methodological principles in ethnography which will be discussed in the following section.

12.3 PRINCIPLES OF METHODOLOGY IN ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnographers have identified three features of ethnography which are significant methodologically and have different theoretical background than the other. These three methodological features include *naturalism*, *understanding*, and *induction*. Let us discuss them each.

12.3.1 Naturalism

Naturalism is the first methodological feature of ethnography in which the aim of doing ethnographic research is to portray the objective nature of human action which takes place naturally (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Having such a methodology ensures that this can be accomplished through first-hand contact with the subjects (or actors). It cannot be accomplished through the use of experiments or through interviews conducted in natural settings. It is for this reason that ethnographers conduct their research in natural settings, which is unknown to the researcher. Natural settings indicate places inhabited by those people who are being studied. Ethnographers simultaneously attempt to explain social processes and social events in terms of their natural environment in which they take place. Naturalism minimises ethnographers' influence over the activities of people under study.

12.3.2 Understanding

Now while we have discussed above that ethnography involves explaining the activities of human beings in their natural settings, this explanation is possible only when an ethnographer has an understanding of the environment or culture in which the human perform these activities. So understanding as a methodological principle of ethnography is in a way an offset of naturalism (Rosen, 1991). A common example of this sort is the fact that you cannot explain an activity which is unfamiliar to you, without having a prior knowledge and understanding of this activity. But this is not applicable to only events or actions which are alien to the ethnographer, because some ethnographers claim that having a proper and clear understanding of an event or activity is important even if an ethnographer has a prior knowledge about them. However, what happens in the later case, that is when an ethnographer has a prior knowledge of the setting in which action takes places, is that there are high chances of misunderstanding them which can be a major flaw in ethnography. In order to avoid such flaws in ethnography, ethnographers need not presuppose that he has an understanding of people's perceptions about certain action, because there are possibilities and in fact people can have differing views about the world in which they live. This is indeed a case in modern complex societies, in which there is a diversity of people, and each having its own perception and understanding of the world. So the point here is that it becomes a pre-requisite for an ethnographer to immerse into the culture of people under study through methods like participant observation, so as to have an understanding of their culture which will enable him to give explanations about it.

12.3.3 Induction

Ethnographers always encourage and support inductive based research as well as research which is based on new discovery. They place much emphasis on how respondents (or subjects) attach meaning to their actions and to their lives broadly. They rely much on how people interpret their living patterns. When ethnographers, who have certain predefined concepts, theories and propositions, attempt to study a community, they generally do not succeed in discovering the distinctive nature of what is being studied. It is for this reason only that ethnographers generally begin their study, not with preconceived concepts and theories but because of their interest to understand a particular community, a particular section of population, any type of activity or problem. Many a times, ethnographers refine their problems and modify it as they advance in the research study. In the same manner, they come up with the theoretical ideas throughout the research process. These theoretical ideas which are developed during the course of research study are considered as important and constructive outcome of the research study.

12.3.4 Ethics

Ethics in any research are the guiding principles that regulate ethnographer's relationship with the subjects, for example, norms, customs, values, etc. These ethical issues are an act of command about the way ethnographers should act with the people under study in order not to cause any kind of harm to them (LeCompte and Schensul, 2015). Doing ethnography means

that ethnographers get to know about the people living in groups, as well as understanding their culture. Ethnographers do so by establishing a relationship with the people under study and gaining the trust of people. This is considered as one of the vital strengths of ethnography. But many consider it a challenge in the sense that establishing relationship with unknown people and gaining their trust are not easy processes. And once relationships are established and trust of people is gained, ethnographers are bound to follow certain ethical considerations such as protecting the people under study. Ethnographers, in the first instance, are supposed to keep their subjects well informed about maintaining confidentiality through protecting their identities and using specific suitable pseudonyms against their actual names. People under study are to be informed about the objectives of doing ethnography. Other than gaining their trust, receiving their consent to participate in the research process, taking care of their privacy and not causing any kind of harm to them, are some of the preconditions in ethnographic research, which are important considerations for an ethnographer before immersing himself into the world of people under study.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What do you understand by the term ethnography?
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- 2) What is *turn-in ethnography*?
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- 3) What is naturalism in ethnography?
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- 4) Why do ethnographers establish relationships with the people under study?
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- 5) Define ethics? Point out three ethical issues in ethnographic research?
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12.4 NEW APPROACHES IN ETHNOGRAPHY

New approaches in ethnography started emerging since 1970's. Until that time, the traditional ethnographic approaches were highly practices and there was hardly any modification of the approaches used by the ethnographers until this time. But from 1970's new approaches came into being such as post-modernist ethnography, reception ethnography, feminist ethnography and so on. These new approaches significantly varied from those of traditional ethnographic approaches. Traditional ethnographic approaches did not cease to exist because of the coming of new approaches.

They simultaneously continued to exist. This resulted in the diversification of ethnographic landscape. This new turn in the approaches of ethnography broadened its horizons to the extent that the term ethnography has diverse meanings, which are sometimes contradictory as well as contrasting. In fact, ethnography is now understood as similar to qualitative studies. Earlier when Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe Brown used ethnography in their respective studies, the term would refer to participant observation, a process in which researchers would immerse themselves into the world of participants so as to observe how social actions take place. They would observe them directly at the scene. So it would entail the firsthand account of social actions from the participants' point of view. Ethnography took yet another term from 1980s onwards. During this period, ethnography was characterised as being highly diverse in terms of its methods of data collection such as informal everyday interviews. It also included an analysis of different kinds of documents such as visual documents, textual documents and so on.

Let us now understand these newly emerged approaches of ethnography as mentioned earlier such as reception ethnography, feminist ethnography, and post-modern ethnography.

12.4.1 Reception ethnography

Reception ethnography is also called as critical ethnography or audience ethnography. This approach is mostly common among media scholars. By the end of 1970's, qualitative media scholars shifted their focus towards the consumption of media contents by the audiences. This was considered to be a major shift in media research or what is now understood as an ethnographic turn. However towards the end of 1980's, scholars who were associated with reception ethnography started focussing on their methodologies so as to critically investigate the authenticity of the outcome of their research. They started examining the power relations between the ethnographer and the participants and how this sort of relationship changes and influences the behaviour and responses of participants. Such types of issues in the later periods became the focal points of investigation for feminist and post-modern ethnographers.

12.4.2 Feminist ethnography

Feminist ethnography is qualitative methodology which investigates the lived experiences of people in their natural surroundings. Although some scholars (such as Ghosh, 2016) claim that feminist ethnography took its birth in late 1980s, however others trace its origin long before 1980s (Davis and Craven, 2020). This approach is used in anthropology as a data collection method; but it is also used in many other disciplines such as cultural studies, gender studies, education, sociology, ethnic studies, psychology, and so on. In terms of defining the term feminist ethnography, there is no general agreement among the scholars and thus there is no consistent definition to it (Schrock, 2013). While some feminist ethnographers consider gender as a focus of enquiry, there are simultaneously others who consider it as a theory which guides the feminist research process. In spite of such disagreements among scholars in defining feminist ethnography, there is an agreement among them on the goals of feminist ethnography. Generally, feminist

ethnography is understood as an intersection of various feminist theories and ethnographic traditions, which attempts to investigate lived experiences and role associated with females in a society.

Three conceptual stages can be mentioned here if one intends to trace the history of feminist ethnography. The first stage corresponds to the period from 1850 to 1920. The chief feature of this stage was the inclusion of the voices of women in ethnographic research. Such ethnographic studies were conducted majorly by males with male respondents. This brought about a major shift in ethnographic research in terms of women doing ethnography on the issues of women. In other words, new perspectives emerged where women would conduct ethnographic research on women to generalise the issues and concerns of their female informants unlike men who could conduct feminist ethnographic research from the viewpoint of male informants only.

The second stage corresponds to the period from 1920 to 1980 and characterised by the developments in feminist theory. New shades of understanding distinction between males and females took place and there were discourses among feminists over the distinctions between biological sex and cultural construction of gender which forced feminist ethnographers like Margaret Mead and Betty Friedan towards rethinking about the power relations surrounded around this type of distinction. While acknowledging that gender was a social construction, they therefore claimed that all women share similar lived experiences and their problems are also identical, thus universalizing woman.

The third stage of feminist ethnography started from 1980s onwards. This contemporary stage is characterised by the widening of feminist ethnographic approaches in terms of a shift from woman being the centre of attention to diverse analytical concerns. Feminist ethnographers of this period such as Kamala Visweswaran, Judith Stacey and Radhika Parameswaran did not accept the concept of 'universalising woman'. They instead stressed much on the differences among women along class, race, religion, identity politics, and so on. They explore the operation of power relations in the way gender identities are constructed. The production and re-production of gender based identities along with the issues of representation have emerged as the crucial concerns for feminist ethnographers in contemporary times.

12.4.3 Post-modern ethnography

The post-modern stage is an expression that started by the end of 1970s in the works of French philosophers like Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida, however it is more closely associated with anthropologists such as Stephen Tyler, George Marcus and Michael Fischer. Postmodern ethnography erupted out of the methodological considerations within the cultural theory of post-modernism by way of changing over its assumptions into ethnographic tradition. It is a blend of various approaches such as interpretative ethnography, critical ethnography, auto-ethnography, and so on. The focal consideration in postmodern ethnography involves probing the authorial status of ethnographer's writing in order to see how it fails to capture the reality which it intends to express and analyse. Post-modern ethnography has given rise to many doubts concerning the significance of a single method in understanding social world. Post-modern ethnographers

claim that subjectivity (ethnographer's interpretations) is converted into objectivity (data) through the practice of ethnographic writing. In this way, an ethnographer composes and constructs pretended cultures which are based on narratives. What originates out of pretended cultures is an expression which is commonly called as 'paper culture', which means that the representation of culture are constructed artificially through writing and these representations of culture are far from the how respondents live in it.

12.5 TWIN PERSPECTIVES IN ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnographers as a rule conduct fieldwork for longer periods of time so as to collect data through the method of ethnography involving documenting the everyday living of people or community. They produce a deep description of the people under study, which is called as 'thick description'. They collect different types of data through two perspectives, that is, ethnographers' own perspectives and the informants' perspective. These two perspectives are different from each other and they are called as emic perspective (informants' perspective) and etic perspective (ethnographers' perspective). Let us understand these two perspectives in detail.

12.5.1 Emic Perspective

Emic perspective, also called as the insider's perspective about reality, is at the heart of ethnography. This perspective is instrumental to ethnography as it helps understand and explain situations and lives of people as they occur in their natural environment. It includes the perceptions of people under study. These perceptions of people may although differ from the objective reality however they aid an ethnographer in understanding why people do what they do. It does not include prior assumptions about the functioning of social system; rather it relies on a phenomenological approach in order to understand how social system works. Emic perspective recognizes and accepts diverse realities about people and their social world. This sort of recognition and acceptance of more than one reality is vital to understand why people act in the way they act and why people think in a certain specific way. The differences in the perceptions about realities offer an in-depth insight into their religious, socio-economic and political positions. In order to explore emic perspective, ethnographers immerse themselves into the community of people under study. They communicate with people in their natural settings. They observe people and their actions and behaviours, the way they do and perform their roles and most importantly ethnographers participate in the daily activities of people under study. This perspective is crucial for ethnographers in terms of acquiring a deep understanding of the culture of people which is different from the perceptions of an ethnographer.

12.5.2 Etic Perspective

Etic perspective refers to an external perception of social reality. It is a social scientific perception of the behaviour of people which is made by an observer without any emic influence. These perceptions are meaningful for an ethnographer. Etic perspectives are generated when an ethnographer talks and holds discussions with the people in their own communities. Etic explanations have its basis in science as well as ethnographer's prior knowledge about the historical, economic and political studies. This

perspective does not consider views of members as noteworthy because the members of a community under study cannot observe their own behaviour from a different perspective. For instance, we may never have thought of why we oil our hair the way we do. The culture of oiling our hair is normal for us that we never question this aspect of our culture. So this perspective involves an outsider's viewpoint about a certain culture or activity and this outsider is an ethnographer who relies on his own perceptions and ideas in order to explain the culture.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Reception ethnography is also called as
.....
- 2) One of the chief features of first period of feminist ethnography was
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- 3) Postmodern ethnography is a blend of various approaches. Mention at least two such approaches.
.....
- 4) Jacques Derrida is a feminist ethnographer. (True/False)
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- 5) What is etic perspective in ethnography?
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.....

12.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we discussed about the basic concept of ethnography through discussing how ethnography came into being and its subsequent development over a period of time. We also discussed about various methodological principles such as naturalism, ethics, the idea of understanding and induction. In the course of its development, new approaches emerged in ethnographic research as discussed and these include reception ethnography, feminist ethnography and postmodern ethnography. Participant observation is the chief feature of ethnography and a method of data collection. It involving two broad perspectives which we discussed such as etic perspective and emic perspective; these perspectives refer to the perception of insiders (informants) and perception of outsiders (observers) respectively.

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12.8 ANSWERS TO “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” 1 AND 2

Answers to check your progress – 1

- i. Ethnography means writing down about the culture of a community by the ethnographer who participates in the daily lives of people under study.
- ii. A type of ethnography in which researcher is restricted to make assumptions but is allowed to not immerse into the world of subjects under study.
- iii. Naturalism means portraying objective social reality as they occur in their natural setting.
- iv. Ethnographers establish relationship with the people under study so as to obtain a clear understanding of how people live in groups as well as their culture.
- v. Ethics are the guiding principles that regulate ethnographer's relationship with the subjects. Three common examples of ethics are confidentiality, conformity to the norms of community under study and protecting the identities of people under study.

Answers to check your progress – 2

- i. Critical ethnography.
- ii. Inclusion of the voices of women in ethnographic research.
- iii. Interpretative ethnography, auto-ethnography.
- iv. False
- v. Etic perspective refers to the perceptions of an ethnographer about the culture of a community under study.

UNIT 13: SCIENTIFIC ETHNOGRAPHY*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Scientific Ethnography – Past and Present
- 13.3 Understanding Scientific Ethnography
- 13.4 Representing Scientific Ethnography
 - 13.4.1 Formulation of Research Problem
 - 13.4.2 Selecting a research Site
 - 13.4.3 Gaining Access
 - 13.4.4 Presenting Self to the Group
 - 13.4.5 Data Collection, Information Recording and Field Notes
 - 13.4.5.1 Running Description
 - 13.4.5.2 Forgotten Events
 - 13.4.5.3 Personal Thoughts
 - 13.4.5.4 Methodological Notes
 - 13.4.6 Analysing Ethnographic Data
 - 13.4.7 Writing Ethnography
- 13.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.6 References
- 13.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.0 OBJECTIVES

Through this unit, you will learn the following:

- about the ethnographic tradition in social sciences;
- about various methodological principles of ethnography;
- about the new approaches in ethnography;
- about the various stages of feminist ethnography; and
- about two important analytical aspects of ethnography.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will discuss the history of scientific ethnography as well as how the approach has changed in the present times. We will also attempt to understand scientific ethnography and at the same time, the unit will offer an insight into various issues concerning scientific ethnography. In the latter part of the unit, we will try to know what it means to do scientific ethnography. We will also discuss how scientific ethnography is conducted through unfolding its various steps right from the formulation of research problem until an ethnographer reaches to the final stage of writing.

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13.2 SCIENTIFIC ETHNOGRAPHY – PAST AND PRESENT

Generally, as discussed in previous units, ethnography is both a method and methodology which is used in anthropology and other social science disciplines to explain culture and what it means to live in groups sharing similar culture. While ethnography is mostly related to anthropology, however it has a deep usage in sociology also. British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski was the first to develop scientific approach for ethnographic fieldwork which was based on intensive participation of ethnographers in the groups under study. Malinowski insisted that social practices of these groups can best be understood through emic perspective involving informant's point of view.

During its infancy stage, researchers were devoted towards making ethnography a scientific approach. They therefore produced a manual for researchers in anthropology. This manual consisted of a series of instructions informing about the process of doing ethnography. It was considered correct and precise than the descriptions of those who travelled longer distances for fieldwork. However the preciseness of this approach was not considered accurate for a scientific experiment. Scientific approach is basically a feature of positivism which can be tested independent of the researcher. At the same time, there was a naturalist aspect involved in ethnography. This naturalist aspect is more interpretive. It cannot either be verified by tests however what distinguishes it from positivism is the fact that etic perspective is an important consideration in it. The main aim of ethnography during those times was to provide an analytical explanation of other cultures than testing any hypothesis (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994).

The error in doing ethnography based on participant observation is shocking because ethnography being a professional field of inquiry, still continues to rely on the testimony that "I was in the field" which is in actuality a manifesto of Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) who established participant observation as an important scientific method of gaining familiarity about various aspects of social life of people under study. At the same time, structural functionalists employed ethnography as an empirical exercise by considering people's beliefs as real social facts. They collected this objective data with no or little interpretation. This type of data though has a qualitative orientation and there is no use of numerical data in this type of research however they encouraged and maintained the scientific spirit in doing ethnography by giving due importance to facts rather than interpretation. Structural functionalists in fact used interview schedule as a means of data collection rather than distributing questionnaires among the respondents. There is a clear cut difference between an interview schedule and a questionnaire in the sense that in interview schedule, questions are orally asked to the respondents and the researcher upon receiving the responses to questions fills in the interview schedule on its own rather than respondents filling it.

On the other hand, questionnaires are distributed among the respondents and they are asked to fill the questionnaires and there is no intervention of researcher in the process. Another difference between the two is that

interviewing in ethnography occurs in natural settings and in the native language unlike in questionnaires where a different language can be used. This demands establishing a personal relationship between the researcher and the respondents. The information/data collected through this process is considered factual objectively however there is no way to replicate the entire process of data collection because of the change in circumstances. This indicates that structural-functionalist tradition of ethnographic research stresses much upon the validity of data rather than reliability. Reliability is an important aspect of scientific method to replicate experiments. This means that ethnographic research cannot be considered scientific.

Since ethnographic tradition demands immersion of researcher in particular social setting for a longer period of time, but it does not encompass cross-cultural research. One of the reasons for the impossibility of conducting cross-cultural research is the fact that ethnography lays much emphasis to the perceived uniqueness of each society, which is one of the unintended consequences of the process. Ethnography for structural functionalists is an inductive logic for scientific investigation. This means that an ethnographer starts research process with a particular community, social group, village or even a tribe. They do so because they are interested in doing so, and in doing so, themes suitable for their research emerge out from what they observed. They do not desire to test a hypothesis or to start with a theory.

13.3 UNDERSTANDING SCIENTIFIC ETHNOGRAPHY

There is a difference in the methods of investigation between ethnography as a science and other social and behavioural sciences. The difference lies in the fact that unlike other disciplines, ethnography presumes that ethnographers need to explore, in the first place, the activities of people under study and the way these people justify their actions with reason. This is important in ethnography prior to ethnographer's attempt to interpret their actions and relate them with his/her own understanding of them or with theories. It is for this reason also that the tools of gathering data are polished according to the objectives of research. Because ethnography involves participant observation, therefore the basic tools for an ethnographer to collect data include ethnographer's eyes and ears, which are primarily important in participant observation. Ethnographers study culture and people's actions through systematically participating and observing how people do what they do. They also use interview schedules and make notes about what they observe and hear and also record the conversations with people. More importantly, ethnographers learn the way people attach meanings to their actions.

Many scholars do not agree with the fact that ethnographer in itself constitutes one of the primary tools of gathering information. They are not comfortable with this fact. Instead, they believe in the objectivity of science and claim that the presence of ethnographer in the community and his/her relationship with people under study may yield biased results. To overcome this biasness in ethnographic results, there are codified methods for ethnography. These codified methods ensure that the data is collected by ethnographers carefully and thoroughly through methods which can be

imitated and reproduced by others also irrespective of the transformation in social circumstances such as demographic changes or differences in the features. This will help to scientifically produce reliable results which can be valid also.

Another difference in scientific ethnography with other scientific disciplines is that there is no control of ethnographers over what happens in the field unlike other social and behavioural sciences. Scientific ethnography takes place in a social setting in which ethnographer appears as a participant or a guest who studies what is happening in it. In contrast to this, other social and behavioural sciences use clinical or experimental approach in which there is a complete control of the researchers who tend to arrive at similar conclusion upon replication. Ethnographers also sometimes use the same techniques and tools, however, the changing situations are beyond the control of ethnographers and thus they are likely to draw differing results. In addition to this, while ethnographers may use same tools which they used previously in studying any social setting, however such tools may be inappropriate in studying the same social setting again because of the transformations in it with the passage of time. An example of such change in the society could be a shift in language from previously Hindi speaking to English speaking in the latter periods of time.

What is critical to producing an ethnographic account is the process involved in it or the way research is carried out. The first crucial component of scientific ethnography is its dedication to produce a report about the events as they take place in the natural world. Sites of natural world are the places in which people interact each other such as meetings, classrooms, clinic waiting rooms, shopping sites, clubs, workplaces, and so on. The idea in mentioning these natural settings is to say that ethnographers doing field work at these and other sites simply portray a picture of what is happening. However ethnographers also sometimes call upon the respondents at a particular location for the purpose of conducting research with them. While this sort of fieldwork activity is by no means natural, however, the data gathered from the respondents comprises those activities that have occurred in their natural settings.

Check your progress 1:

- i. Who was the first anthropologist to have developed scientific approach to ethnographic fieldwork?
.....
- ii. What is scientific approach?
.....
.....
.....
- iii. What is an interview schedule?
.....
.....
.....
.....

- iv In scientific ethnography, ethnographer acts as a
.....
- v. What is meant by ‘sites of natural world’? Mention few examples in support of your answer.
.....
.....
.....
.....

13.4 REPRESENTING SCIENTIFIC ETHNOGRAPHY

Every type of research whether qualitative or quantitative comprises various key elements in order to represent and carry out the entire research process. Scientific ethnography too comprises many key components which are arranged in a conventional order. Scholars (such as Creswell, 1994; Berg, 2004) have offered a rather more precise explanation of the steps involved in scientific ethnography. We will now discuss various steps of conducting scientific ethnographic research.

13.4.1 Formulation of research problem

Formulation of research problem is the first step in doing scientific ethnographic research. Research problem refers to the main focus of study which an ethnographer intends to learn about and explore. A research problem or a title which is well established attracts the researcher because the researcher has, prior to formulating a title, read and analysed the literature related to the problem. This pre-existing literature enables an ethnographer to formulate such a title that can be explored through various ethnographic tools of data collection. These problems are studied in the field as they take place. An ethnographer uses his prior knowledge of the problem to formulate a new problem for exploration.

13.4.2 Selecting a research site

The first question in the minds of ethnographers prior to starting their research is about knowing and deciding the field site. As a general ethnographic rule, ethnographic research is conducted at places where people interact with one another naturally. This makes ethnography different from experimental research where we have control over the people but in ethnography there is no control over the actions and interactions of people under study. Ethnographers do a thorough review of the research site they want to select for their study. They do this by applying objective criteria in their decisions of selecting the research site. They generally select such a research site which is free from any gate-keeping and which can be compared to other sites where research is already conducted by other ethnographers.

13.4.3 Gaining access

Gaining access implies formal entry into the group that an ethnographer intends to study and explore. But the point to think about is how an ethnographer immerses into that group. In situations where there is

maximum of gate-keeping, an ethnographer is required to seek permission. In doing ethnographic fieldwork, permission is sought through initially participating in the group as a volunteer and afterwards immersing as a researcher. The other method of gaining access is through a known person who can advocate for an ethnographer's access to the group under study. Ethnographic fieldwork is not possible without having access to people and their territory. This is one of the most difficult phases in the doing ethnographic fieldwork. Ethnographic fieldwork requires a high level of cooperation from the people under study. What is of importance is that once access is gained, an ethnographer requires to devote too much of time in order to win the trust of people and to maintain that trust throughout the process of research.

13.4.4 Presenting self to the group

Presenting self to the group means the kind of behaviour an ethnographer tends to show towards his participants and deciding how to appear before them. It also indicates the kind of role that an ethnographer plays so as to adapt to the environment of people under study and also how to establish relationships with others. Generally, an ethnographer has to be polite while interacting with participants. He/she needs to respect the time and space of participants, follow ethics. But at the same time, these aspects of ethnography adds to the challenges of doing ethnographic fieldwork in the sense that an ethnographer has to be conscious about the motives and agenda of conducting research while becoming completely a part of the group under study. Complete immersion in the group as well as complete participation in the activities of people under study is important to obtain an inside view and to avoid the difficulties while negotiating for access.

13.4.5 Data collection, information recording and field notes

Data collection process involves making field notes. Field notes are the traditional way of data collection in ethnography. During early times, field notes were mostly handwritten but in the modern technological era, field notes are drafted in a laptop. However, most of the times, an ethnographer finds it difficult to record and gather data. To overcome this, an ethnographer must have prior information about the kind of data required for research which can be written in the form of field notes or recorded through using a recording device. Also what happens most of the times is that the research cannot recall the responses of the participants. To come out of this hurdle, an ethnographer needs to immediately make notes of the observation after leaving the research site. Noting down the observations from the field immediately reduces the chances of missing any important information of the participants.

Singleton and Straits (2005) have offered certain important aspects what is to be included in field notes, which includes:

13.4.5.1 Running description

Running description means recording accurately what has been observed in a day. It does not include any kind of interpretation or analysis of what is observed because such descriptions are written while an ethnographer is in the field and notes down what is observed. Analysing information while doing field work may hinder the process of observation.

13.4.5.2 Forgotten events

Field notes must also include what has previously been missed by an ethnographer but recalls it while continuing fieldwork. These forgotten occurrences are noted because ethnographer finds them important for the kind of research that has been undertaken. This information becomes an important source for analysis and it can be include any kind of speculation about the actions and relationships of people under study. These notes about the forgotten occurrences are sometimes important because they help an ethnographer to plan for future course of observations, or about specific issues which are important for exploration.

13.4.5.3 Personal thoughts

An ethnographer is supposed to record and note down his own personal thoughts about the subjective reactions of the informants while doing fieldwork. Personal thoughts reduce the chances of missing or hiding any of the observations in the later stages of research.

13.4.5.4 Methodological notes

Writing about methodological issues during fieldwork involves writing about the techniques employed in doing ethnographic research. It may also include the difficulties that an ethnographer faces in the process of data collection or the risks associated with data collection techniques that may likely yield biased results as well as the way field notes are written and observations recorded.

13.4.6 Analysing ethnographic data

Analysis of ethnographic data starts with arranging data into units based on the themes. Otherwise this data may look like an unstructured amount of information. The process of arranging data into various units is called coding, which is arrived at by reading and re-reading the data so that they can thematically be differentiated. There are two forms of coding in ethnographic research. The first is the index coding which does not attach any meaning to the data read. The second form of coding is open coding which is done during the latter stages of data analysis and in which it becomes important to attach a meaning to the data. Ethnographers collect large amount of information for their ethnographic studies so as to describe everyday lives of people who have been studied. Given this large amount of data collected, the process of analysing data becomes very challenging for an ethnographer. Therefore, an ethnographer initially understands the data inductively without any pre-conceived ideas about what has been studied. It begins right from the moment data collection process starts, which enables an ethnographer to identify various themes guaranteeing intense analysis.

13.4.7 Writing ethnography

Writing ethnography constitutes one of the key components of entire ethnographic research process. Ethnography in contemporary times is widely recognised by how it is produced in writing as much as how ethnographic data is collected. It has certainly become a textual activity. Writing ethnography cannot be reduced to set of methodological considerations as was understood during early times. In present times, an ethnographer must borrow ideas

from literary theory and contribute to ethnographic writing through rhetoric and other related fields. By doing so, an ethnographer informs about his writing skills in producing ethnographies. There is reflexivity in the way ethnographers write their ethnographies. Reflexivity is not limited to the realities grasped during the fieldwork and in the course of data collection. It applies to the process of writing also in which ethnographers transform their personal views of social phenomena into scientific text. There are many ways of writing ethnographies in the sense that there can be different styles of writing and different theories which guides an ethnographer about how to represent the data collected. Because of differences in writing styles and different theories employed in the writing, different ethnographers can produce both complementary as well as contrasting analytical ethnography.

Check your progress 2:

- i. What do you understand by research problem?
.....
- ii. What makes ethnographic research different from experimental research?
.....
.....
- iii. What is meant by field notes?
.....
.....
- iv. Point out at least two aspects of field notes?
1)
2)
- v. What is index coding?
.....
.....
.....

13.5 LET US SUM UP

Scientific ethnography, as is understood through this unit, is a feature of positivism and it was Bronislaw Malinowski who first conducted scientific ethnography in 1922 in Trobriand Islands in west pacific. Later on there was debates and discussions over the ethnography as a scientific method. Through this unit, we have learn what were issues concerning the scientific nature of ethnography by going deep into its past and present of scientific ethnography. In an attempt to know and understand various steps involved in conducting scientific ethnography, we discussed how an ethnographer formulates the research problem, the kind of field site that ethnographers chose to conduct

their fieldwork, how they gain access and what it means to having access to a particular group or field site, how an ethnographer presents self to the group in which he participates and collects data from as well as other steps until an ethnographer finally writes ethnography which is the last stage. This unit is believed to help students gain an understanding of scientific ethnography as a method and will guide them in carrying out scientific ethnographic research.

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13.7 ANSWERS TO “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1 & 2”

Answers to ‘check in progress – 1’

- i. Bronislaw Malinowski
- ii. Scientific approach is a feature of positivism which can be tested independent of the researcher.
- iii. An interview schedule comprises a set of questions orally asked to the respondents and the researcher upon receiving the responses fills in the interview schedule on its own rather than respondents filling it.
- iv. Participant observer
- v. Sites of natural world are the sites or places where people meet and interact with each other. Some common examples of sites of natural world include classrooms, play field, shopping complexes, sports club, workplaces, and so on.

Answers to “Check your Progress-2”

- i. Research problem refers to the main focus of study which an ethnographer intends to learn about and explore.
- ii. The difference between ethnographic research and experimental research is that ethnographic research is conducted at places where people interact with one another naturally without any control of the researcher while as experimental research is conducted in a laboratory in a controlled situation.

**Ethnographic Practices
and Styles**

- iii. Field notes are the traditional way of data collection in ethnography. They are the notes which an ethnographer notes down during the course of fieldwork in order not to lose any information which may be important for research.
- iv. 1). Running description which means recording accurately what has been observed in a day. 2). Forgotten occurrences are the events that an ethnographer though has missed at one point in time during fieldwork but recollects it in the later stages of fieldwork.
- v. Index coding is a form of coding in which no meaning is attached to the data that has been read by an ethnographer.



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UNIT 14: FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF ETHNOGRAPHY*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Early Influences
- 14.3 The Emergence of Feminist Anthropology
- 14.4 Feminist Methodology
 - 14.4.1 Feminism and Positivism
 - 14.4.2 Feminists and Fieldwork
 - 14.4.3 Contemporary Issues and Concerns
 - 14.4.4 Development and Social Change
 - 14.4.4.1 Motherhood and the Body
 - 14.4.4.2 Knowledge and Representation
 - 14.4.4.3 Contemporary Issues
- 14.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.6 References
- 14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- understand the impact of feminist thought on ethnographic research;
- identify the key authors and texts that contributed to feminist ethnography;
- discuss the strengths and limitations of the feminist approach; and
- identify major areas of inquiry in which feminist scholars are currently engaged.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement and feminist thought have made an extraordinary impact in the social sciences and humanities over the past half a century. Feminism which has its focus the subordination of women by men, has a history of over two centuries; Mary Wollestonecraft's pioneering work 'Vindication of the Rights of Women' is viewed as a foundational text of "First wave" or 'Suffragette feminism' in Europe in which women for the first time organized themselves politically demanding the right to vote. Feminism has been broadly categorized into 'liberal', marxist' and 'socialist' feminism. While it is not within the scope of this unit to map the trajectories of these various viewpoints, it may be noted that the underlying core of all these approaches is to bring to the centre stage women's experiences

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in all walks of life; from the secluded, secret 'private' sphere to the more visible 'public' one. While liberal feminism advocates for reforms in the system and the promotion of practices and policies that will promote gender equality, Marxist and Socialist or Radical approaches view the system itself as fundamentally flawed and unequal and therefore advocate radical structural changes and an overhauling of social institutions so that they do not discriminate against women. The so called 'Second Wave' of feminism, which began in the 1960s and 1970s in the U.S.A. and Europe, saw an intense upsurge in feminist mobilising, activism and writing, including in the social sciences. Large numbers of women entered universities and very soon began to realize that in many areas of social thought history was either assumed to be 'male', with women confined to domestic spaces, or gender issues were simply regarded as unimportant or irrelevant. This 'androcentric' bias was also experienced by students of anthropology which is itself described as 'the science of Man'! Despite the long-standing interest of anthropologists and sociologists in kinship and family, the focus was the male and issues related to descent, property, political organisation based on kinship. For instance, Claude Levi-Strauss's 'alliance theory' views women merely as the conduits or messages exchanged by different groups of men. Women ethnographers like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict published very popular ethnographic texts, however their work was viewed very condescendingly and critically by dominant men of the British school of social anthropology who thought it was unscientific, impressionistic and frivolous. It was observed by feminist scholars that much of the information and ethnographic accounts on the lives and experiences of women were often, in reality reports of male informants transmitted through male ethnographers. In the 1960s and 1970s therefore, feminists set out to correct the 'male' bias in societies they studied. They argued that the field had been dominated by male researchers and was full of male stereotypes and androcentric frameworks for the analysis of cultures.

In the following sections, we map the emergence and growth of feminist theorizing and methodology from the early beginnings to the contemporary period. We shall examine some of the crucial methodological and substantive debates that feminism engendered and will elaborate some of the areas of inquiry and research in which feminist anthropologists are currently engaged. It will become clear to you that gender, is today regarded as a central, fundamental category. Without a gender perspective, attempts to understand and analyse society and culture will be incomplete, inadequate and uni-dimensional. Gender is recognized as being central to the analysis of structures of power, the organization of social and cultural institutions and mode of ideological control across cultures. Feminist ethnographers have played an important role in bringing this issue to the forefront.

14.2 EARLY INFLUENCES

Ellen Lewin (2006) mentions the work of some brave and pioneering women, many of whom remained unknown and unrecognized. Prominent amongst them is Elsie Clews Parson (1875-1941) a political radical and outspoken feminist, who made use of her personal wealth to offer financial support to younger scholars in an era before public funding for field research had been

institutionalized. Ruth Benedict was one of the beneficiaries of Parsons' generosity. Parsons completed her doctorate in Sociology from Columbia University in 1899, but moved to anthropology under the influence of scholars like Kroeber, Lowie, Sapir, Boas and others when she was in her 40s. She travelled with male colleagues to the American southwest, thus breaking social barriers against men and women working together. Her best known work is 'Pueblo Indian Religion' (1939) a descriptive and comparative work whose constant theme is culture change.

Zora Neale Thurston was another early pioneer mentioned by Lewin (ibid.). She was an African-American woman who studied at Columbia University under Franz Boas. She experimented with several narrative forms and moved freely between academic and creative writing. Daisy Bates, a little-known fieldworker who for several decades lived near the Australian aborigines, is said to have provided A.R Radcliffe-Brown with much of the data that he later claimed as his own.

Within British Social Anthropology, Phyllis Kaberry, a student of Malinowski, was recognized as a pioneer of ethnographic research on women in specific social and political contexts. In 1939, she wrote "Aboriginal women: Sacred and Profane" which examined the rich but separate ritual experiences of Aboriginal Women. "Woman of the Grassfields" (1952) is a significant study on woman's work and economic life in the British Cameroons. This work is a precursor to the vast body of interdisciplinary literature on women and development that followed from the 1970's onwards which examined the nature of women's work across cultures and the impact of male-centric developmental plans and policies on their lives. Another leading figure in British Social Anthropology was Audrey Richards (1899 - 1984). Her work, spanning over 50 years, covered areas like Kinship, nutrition, fertility, labour and migration. An Africanist, she conducted fieldwork in the 1930s and 1950s in Uganda and Zambia. Her well known study "Land, Labour and Diet" (1939) examines the manner in which the Bemba community manage scarce resources and the acute problems faced by Bemba women in doing contingency planning during periods of food shortage. Her most famous work 'Chisungu' (1956) examines female initiation rites among the Bemba of Zambia; and the various secret rituals and practices that signal their passage into adulthood and responsibility.

An interesting source of influential writings identified by Lewin (2006) is the work of the 'unsung heroines' – the wives of anthropologists. Some of these women facilitated the work of their husbands; others created their own genre. Lewin (ibid) cites, among others, Elizabeth Fernea's 1965 work "Guests of the Sheik" which was the result of her being with her anthropologist husband in the field in Southern Iraq, helping him gather information about the women. Similarly, Margery Wolf's classic ethnography "The House of Lim" (1968) was written because she had accompanied her husband to Northern Taiwan to conduct fieldwork. Some other highly influential use of life histories included Mary F. Swith's "Baba of Karo" (1954) and Marjorie Shostak's "Nisa: the life and words of Kung German !

This section has highlighted the significant contributions of women ethnographers in bringing women's issues to scrutiny. However, barring some notable exceptions, the disciplines of sociology and anthropology

were dominated by men. Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) and Margaret Mead (1901-78) were two such figures who attracted wide-spread interest from academic and lay readers alike. Some of their works were indeed "best sellers". Their work drew upon comparisons between the United States and the non-Western world; they made their American readers aware of the vast differences that exist across cultures in "appropriate" male and female behavior, child rearing practices and attitudes towards sexuality.

Benedict's fieldwork with Native Americans and other groups lead her to develop the "configurational approach" to culture wherein culture is viewed as "personality writ large", facilitating and constraining different personality types in different societies. Gender is a crucial dimension of personality and culture and the enactment of gender roles is also culturally conditioned. Mead also examined the influence of culture on human social development. Her landmark work "Coming of Age in Samoa" (1928) and later. "Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies" (1935) demonstrate how culture is the primary factor in determining masculine and feminine characteristics and behavior. "Coming of Age in Samoa" created a sensation in the USA as it dwelt upon the very different manner in which young men and women in Samoa experienced adolescence and adulthood as a consequence of their "permissive" and relaxed attitudes towards sexuality and intimacy. The works of Benedict and Mead focused upon so-called "soft" areas like child rearing practices and gender socialization and tended to be highly impressionistic in nature. This did not go down well with the British Social Anthropologists who were immersed in the study of "hard" areas like Kinship and political organization. However, the visibility, popularity and high academic stature attained by Benedict and Mead made it possible for women anthropologists to make their presence felt in the years to come. The next section will discuss the emergence of "feminist anthropology" as a distinctive development and highlight some of the key texts and authors that made valuable contributions.

14.3 THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINIST ANTHROPOLOGY

Feminist anthropology emerged in the Western Universities in the 1970s. Sally Slocum's (1970) paper, "Woman the Gatherer: The Male Bias in Anthropology" presented at the annual meet of the American Anthropological Association critiqued the popular conception of "man the Hunter" and posed a challenge to the male dominated academic thinking regarding the roles of men and women and the evolutionary history of the species.

1970 also saw the publication of Peggy Golde's edited volume "Women in the Field" This path-breaking collection of essays by women fieldworkers, opened up the question of how being a woman affected the experiences of anthropologists conducting their research in diverse settings and periods.

Two of the most significant volumes published during the 1970s which virtually defined the field of feminist anthropology were "Women, Culture and Society" (1974) edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Lousie Lamphere and "Toward an Anthropology of Women" (1975) edited by Rayna Reiter (later known as Rayna Rapp).

Rosaldo and Lamphere's volume was based upon the premise that relations between men and women were asymmetrical across cultures and societies. They write: "Everywhere we find that women are excluded from certain economic or political activities, that their roles wives and mothers are associated with fewer powers and prerogatives than are the roles of men. It seems fair to say then, that all contemporary societies are to some extent male-dominated and although the degree and expression of female subordination vary greatly, sexual asymmetry is a universal fact of human social life". (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974:1)

Women tend to be subordinated because of their confinement to the domestic or private domain. Men, on the other hand dominate in the public domain and thus have greater access and control over economic, political and social resources.

Sherry Ortner's highly influential piece "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" looked at symbolic constructions of women as the key to understanding their secondary status. Because women are connected with 'natural' functions like pregnancy, lactation and child rearing they are seen on a lower plane than men who control the 'cultural' realm; Culture is always viewed as superior to Nature.

Rayna Reiter's volume was also inspired by the emerging feminist movement. One of the important papers in the volume is Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex". Rubin elaborates upon the "sex/gender system" in which the biological category, 'female' is transformed into the socio-cultural category 'woman' While 'sex' is a biological or physiological given 'gender' emerges when bodily characteristics are given cultural meanings and significance. It is thus socially constructed and constituted.

By placing women at the centre of analysis feminist anthropologists were able to arrive at very different results from those of traditional male-centred studies. Annette Wiener's famous re-study of the Trobriand Islands for example, in which she revisited the site of Malinowski's classic work and actually incorporated women's voices in her ethnography, showed us a different picture of the Trobrianders than the one painted by him.

To sum up, the period of the 1970s and 1980s saw debates over domestic/public and nature/culture dichotomies, recognising universal sexual asymmetry and "women" as a universal category. The political goal of uniting women across nations and cultures was the hallmark of the feminist movement. Women, it was believed should strive together to fight the common experience of discrimination. However, scholars also argued that these conceptions were "western" ones; rooted in European and American history and culture, in other words, they were shaped and structured by specific socio-cultural contexts. Could these concepts be used uncritically in other cultural contexts without distorting the understanding of gender relations in other cultures? Would these concepts misrepresent different experiences and realities?

It is this "essentialising" and "totalizing" tendency in feminism that was critiqued and questioned by several social scientists. They argued that the category of "woman" that was discussed by feminists, actually referred to

White, Western/middle class women and failed to account for the diversities of race, ethnicity, caste, class etc. Non-western social scientists have strongly criticized the ethnographic bias of western feminist scholars in their studies and interpretations of other cultures. Some have also raised the issue of unequal structures of power which continue to dictate the research activities; those who are studied are mostly from other cultures and those who study and write are mostly Western women (Abu-Lugodh 1990). Even in the case of 'native' researchers studying their own culture, the western-centric concepts and theories of academic social science creates a hierarchy of knowledge between the scholar/researcher and the subjects of study.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s scholars of gender broadened their concerns from women's experiences per se to the ways in which gender and other analytical categories (race, caste, class, ethnicity etc.) meet and interact under varying material and cultural conditions. For example, in the Indian context, we can see quite clearly how difficult it is to separate gender, caste and class; the intersecting of these categories shapes women's experiences and degree of marginalization. Thus we can speak of Dalit women as being "thrice marginalized" on account of their position in caste, class and gender hierarchies

An extremely important contribution of feminism in general and feminist ethnography in particular has been in the domain of methodology and the manner in which we do field work. The following section will elaborate upon this.

14.4 FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

14.4.1 Feminism and Positivism

One of the major challenges posed by feminists to mainstream science and social science (also designated as 'male stream' by some writers) has been its critique of positivism. Early social sciences (including sociology and anthropology) were modelled on the 'positivist' tenets or principles of value-free objectivity. Positivity science aims at the collection of "facts" and "truth". Research must be replicable and have validity and reliability. This view of science implies a certain hierarchical distance between the researcher (the scientist) and the subjects of research (the lay persons). The researcher is expected to keep a certain objective, analytical distance from the "subjects" so that he/she can objectively see, judge and interpret the life and meanings of the subjects. In the case of ethnographic research, in which researchers "go out into the field", learn the local language and live in the community for an extended period, they are cautioned not to 'go native' or identify themselves so completely with their subjects that they forget the 'aims and objectives' of their research.

This positivist paradigm is in sharp contrast to the way in which feminist research has been described: "contextual, inclusive, experiential, involved, socially relevant,complete but not necessarily replicable, inclusive of emotions and events as experienced". (Nielsen, 1990:6)

According to Diane Wolf (1996) feminist critiques of positivism have been located in three major areas: i) philosophical critiques of positivism and its pretense of value free science;

- ii) moral critiques of objectifications and exploitation of subjects;
- iii) practical critiques of the way positivism opposes the interest of the researcher and the researched.

Feminists (and others) argue that the requirement of 'objectivity' and 'value-neutrality' is not only impossible, but also undesirable. The hierarchical relationships between researcher and subject reflect male forms of interpersonal dynamics – men are expected to be 'rational', unemotional and business like in their work- indeed, Pat Caplan (1988, c.f. Wolf 1996) suggests that 'objectivity' is simply a form of 'male subjectivity'.

Feminist scholars engaged in qualitative fieldwork traditions like ethnography have encouraged relationships between the researcher and researched that are based on friendship, trust, intimacy and closeness rather than a cultivated "distance". This is expected to make it possible for a deeper, richer more nuanced picture of respondents' lives to emerge. Some feminist researchers have experimented with different forms of writing in order to depict women's experiences in a richer, more meaningful way. Some use the device of 'auto-ethnography' and place themselves within the narrative detailing their own experiences and emotions rather than writing 'outside' the account. The term "inter subjectivity" has been used to describe a two-way relationship between researcher and 'subjects' wherein the researcher compares her work with her own experiences as a woman and scientist and shares it with her subjects who then add their opinion. This not only challenges the splitting of researcher and researched and of subject and object but also encourages the researcher to put herself into the research and writing as part of the experience (Duelli Klein, 1983: cited in Wolf, 1996).

14.4.2 Feminists and Fieldwork

Feminists have reflected extensively upon the dynamics of fieldwork. We have earlier made reference to Peggy Golde's (1970) anthology of fieldwork experiences of women scholars. Other important and frequently cited collections dealing with fieldwork experiences and dilemmas include Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai's edited volume 'Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History', (1992) Joyce Nielson's edited volume 'Feminist Research Methods: Exemplary Readings in Social Science' (1990) Kamala Visweswaran's 'Fictions of Feminist Ethnography' (1974) and Diane Wolf's edited volume 'Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork' (1996) In the Indian context, the classic 1979 volume 'The Fieldworker and the Field' edited by M N Srinivas et al has chapters dealing with the issue of gender, positionality and fieldwork.

There are several accounts of the difficulties faced by women researchers in alien settings where the freedom of dress, movement and expression is severely curtailed. How feminist researchers have to negotiate and sometimes submit to patriarchal pressures makes for very interesting reading. For instance, while conducting research amongst the Bedouin in Saudi Arabia Lila Abu-Lugodh (1986) had to live like a Bedouin daughter and conform more strictly to their gender norms than the other young women of the community. This process of 'immersion' enables the researcher to gain a perspective on the culture from 'within', and sometimes position her differently from a more distant 'participant observer'. Feminist ethnographers have reflected upon

their 'positionality' and attempted to share and compare their experiences with their respondents. They use ethnography as a means to uncover the intimate, day-to-day lived experiences of women across races, ethnicities, caste and class.

At the same time, there have been several critiques both from outside and within the feminist movement which have made them constantly question and reflect upon their ideas and practices. The inherent power relationship that characterizes the fieldwork experience is one such issue. Friendship, intimacy, sharing between researcher and researched can also be exploitative. Kum Kum Bhavnani (1988, cited in Wolf 1996) argues that these power relations are hidden because the researcher's power is often transparent and unspoken. Yet, she makes decisions right from conceptualization to writing about the 'subjects' and eventually withdraws from the field back into her 'own' world of prestige and privilege. Judith Stacey's (1991) classic piece 'Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?' makes the point that the closeness and intimacy feminist researchers seek may actually be more harmful than 'objectivity'. The tragedies and crises in the lives of subjects often end up being 'data' for the researcher leading to a sense of betrayal for the subject and guilt for the researcher. For example, a researcher may learn many intimate family secrets by cultivating friendships with respondents. If she uses the information for her own research purposes, she may harm the subjects. Feminists have contributed to the literature on research ethics, human rights, informed consent and privacy issues through critical examinations of their own practices. Daphne Patai (1991) asks the important question: Is it possible to write about the oppressed without becoming one of the oppressors?" (cited in Wolf 1996:21). The question is still open to debate. In the next section, we will briefly review some of the areas that have attracted the attention and engagement of feminist scholars. We draw upon Ellen Lewin's (2006) review of feminist anthropology for this purpose.

14.4.3 Contemporary Issues and Concerns

'Gender' is considered an important, significant area of research and specialization and all important academic journals and publications- both national and international- publish papers and articles with gender as their major analytic focus. Large numbers of books are published and it has become a very difficult task to keep updated with all the latest publications and researches in the area some of the important areas of research and engagement have been briefly summarized below.

14.4.4 Development and Social Change:

Feminist sociologists and anthropologists are studying the ways in which gender influences economic development, migration, nationalisms, and the roles and priorities of contemporary nation states in influencing the lives of women and men. Some of the themes are: the transnational circulation of people and information and the resultant impact on gender patterns; multinational commerce and the gendered movement of workers into global marketplaces; changing political and economic realities and their impact upon social and cultural institutions; the gendered assumptions underlying international developmental projects and their outcomes for both men and women.

14.4.4.1 Motherhood and the Body

How the body particularly the female body is acted upon by cultural, medical, economic and other forces – has become a central theme. Health and illness, pain, spirit possession, sexually transmitted diseases particularly AIDS and violence against the female body have been studied.

Reproductive technologies, diagnostic techniques like amniocentesis and ultrasound for the purpose of sex selection, Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) including surrogacy, ‘renting a womb’, adoption (both national and international) have wide implications for gender relations. In the context of developing countries like India where technologies are readily available but cultural values are still deeply patriarchal, such ethnographies can contribute greatly to our understanding of these complex cultural processes.

Box : 14.2 Leela Dube: An Indian Pioneer

Leela Dube is one of the pioneering women anthropologists in India who has produced extremely detailed and insightful work on gender, family and kinship in India. She was also one of the core members of the Committee on the Status of Women that produced the landmark report “Towards Equality” (1974) that squarely brought out the glaring discriminations and inequalities faced by Indian women quarter of a century after the country’s independence. She was born in 1923 in an upper middle-class Maharashtrian family which valued and promoted education for girls yet still believed that marriage was their ultimate destination. She broke with tradition and had chose her spouse outside her community when she married the noted anthropologist Shyama Charan Dube. S.C. Dube inducted his wife into the discipline of anthropology and continued to be a source of guidance throughout their life together. Leela Dube’s anthropological work began with her doctoral study of the Gond Community in Central India, with a particular focus on Gond women. This was the beginning of a life long engagement with issues of gender, caste, kinship. Her detailed ethnographic work brought alive the world of interpersonal and familiar relationships and the ‘lived realities’ of women’s experiences. She also wrote reflexively about her positionality as a scholar, wife of a distinguished anthropologist and a ‘dutiful’ housewife, daughter-in-law and mother and how it impacted her anthropological work. She actively engaged with the emerging literature feminist anthropology bringing these perspectives to bear in her own detailed examinations of structure, culture and agency.

The experience of motherhood cross-culturally has always been a focus of interest. This has been taken further by scholars like Rayna Rapp, Faye Ginsburg and Nancy Scheper-Hughes. The physical, mental and emotional ‘reproductive labour’ that women engage in to bear and raise their children has been explored in detail. An important contribution is the acknowledgement of how inequality between races, classes, ethnicities and castes shapes the experience of motherhood.

14.4.4.2 Knowledge and Representation:

In the earlier section on feminist methodology, we examined some of the critical questions raised on issues of research, positionality and power relations. Feminists have raised the issue of ‘insider’ research, contending

that insightful and valuable research can and should be done by those who belong to the community/group that they wish to study. This is known as 'positionality'.

14.4.4.3 Contemporary Issues

Different dimensions of gender experience have been explored. The study of men and masculinities has become an important area of inquiry. How is male dominance constructed and enacted? How is masculine identity acquired? These inquiries challenge entrenched assumptions about gender stratification. 'Lesbian and gay' or 'queer' anthropology directly drew inspiration from feminist anthropology. Studies of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender phenomena depend upon understandings about sex, gender, embodiment and identify which are at the core of the feminist inquiry.

Check Your Progress:

- 1) On the basis of fieldwork by Benedict's with Native Americans and other groups lead her to develop the.....
- 2) The termhas been used to describe a two-way relationship between researcher and 'subjects'.

14.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit has attempted to bring out the impact of feminist theory and practice on ethnography. Feminists pointed the androcentric bias and male-centred ethos. While a number of outstanding women ethnographers including Benedict, Mead, Richards and Kaberry did make their mark, it was not until the Second Wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s that large numbers of enthusiastic feminist scholars made inroads into anthropology and sociology and changed them forever. Feminist methodology which rejected positivism and celebrated friendship, sharing of experience and breaking down the hierarchy of research relationships brought a new perspective in ethnographic research. These interventions in matters of theory and methodology made the field stronger and more rigorous. 'Gender' has become a critical focus of social science inquiry and ethnographic research, and feminist critiques of the ways of doing ethnography have played an important role in bringing about change.

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14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Configurational approach
2. Inter - subjectivity

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UNIT 15: INTERPRETIVE ETHNOGRAPHY*

Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Evolution of Interpretive Ethnography
 - 15.2.1 Traditional Period
 - 15.2.2 The Modernist Phase
 - 15.2.3 Blurred Genres
 - 15.2.4 Period of Intense Reflection
- 15.3 Interpretive Ethnography: Meaning and Methods
- 15.4 Critique of Interpretive Ethnography
- 15.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.6 References
- 15.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

15.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- explain what is interpretive research;
- describe the evolution of interpretive ethnography;
- describe the meaning of interpretive ethnography;
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of interpretive ethnography; and
- explain the importance of Interpretive ethnography.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The roots of interpretive ethnography lie in interpretive research. Interpretive research paradigm is based on the assumption that social reality is not singular or objective, but is rather shaped by human experiences and social contexts (ontology), and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants (epistemology). An interpretive methodology holds that there is no direct, unmediated access to reality (a basic claim in interpretive epistemology), and this, in turn, means that humans' interactions with their external worlds are always already mediated by the historical, cultural contexts in which they find themselves. This view point understands humans as not just responsive to stimuli but also involved in the making and remaking of the meanings of those stimuli.

For interpretative researchers' social reality is embedded with the social settings and therefore they 'interpret' reality through a "sense-making" rather than a hypothesis testing process. This is in contrast to the positivist or

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functionalist paradigm that assumes that the reality is relatively independent of the context, can be abstracted from their contexts, and studied using objective techniques such as standardized measures. Interpretative analysis is holistic and contextual, rather than being reductionist and isolationist. It focuses on language, signs, and meanings from the perspective of the participants involved in the social phenomenon, in contrast to statistical techniques that are employed heavily in positivist research. Rigor in interpretative research is viewed in terms of systematic and transparent approaches for data collection and analysis rather than statistical benchmarks for construct validity or significance testing.

In interpretive methods, the researcher starts with data and tries to derive a theory about the phenomenon of interest from the observed data. Interpretive research has its roots in anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics, and semiotics, and has been available since the early 19th century, long before positivist techniques were developed. The failure of many positivist techniques to generate interesting insights or new knowledge have resulted in a resurgence of interest in interpretive research since the 1970's, albeit with exacting methods and stringent criteria to ensure the reliability and validity of interpretive inferences.

Central to the interpretive framework is the notion of *Verstehen* or understanding (first discussed by Max Weber). This framework focuses on understanding and 'meaning-making' rather than explanation. Within qualitative research, interpretive paradigms, practices, and methods have become central and have been constantly shaping and reshaping specific research methods. This unit deals with one kind of interpretive research – 'interpretive ethnography'. Interpretive ethnography is one way of 'doing ethnography'.

Ethnography involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). The manner in which questions are asked, data collected and analysed has changed over time. These changes have led to the development of newer forms of ethnography which includes 'interpretive ethnography.' The next section traces the evolution of interpretive ethnography.

15.2 EVOLUTION OF INTERPRETIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

15.2.1 Traditional Period

According to Clair (1997), ethnography grew out of the discourse of colonialism. It was about writing 'cultures and the beginning stage it consisted of writing about 'other cultures. It consisted of documenting traditions and socio-political practices among people of ancient world during third century B.C. In the second stage of colonisation, ethnography was seen as a means of 'saving' cultures that were being virtually annihilated. As a result of World Wars alternative forms of ethnography emerged along with classical and traditional ethnography. These included descriptions

of the precarious and unique situations and atypical ethnographies of the colonized. For example, Malinowski's work in New Guinea after being arrested in Australia in 1900's.

15.2.2 The modernist phase

This phase existed from the world wars to the 1970s and is still present in the work of many people. In this period, many texts attempted to formalize qualitative methods (see, for example, Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The modernist ethnographer and sociological participant observer attempted rigorous, qualitative studies of important social processes, including deviance, and social control in the classroom and society. Another development was the study of urban poor; urban ethnography included contributions from Robert Park, W.E.B Dubois, W. F Whyte (1955) and so on. Instead of studying cultures 'far away' they started studying the 'cultures' which existed nearby. Contemporary ethnographers started highlighting interpersonal relationships and personal struggles and therefore reflexivity became more ingrained in ethnographic works.

Beginning in the 1960s, anthropologists began to place much more focus on the symbols used in a culture. They aimed to interpret the meaning of these symbols from *within* that society rather than just looking at them from their own society's point of view. This often caused them to question whether any "grand theory" can be applied to all cultures universally. This was also the time when a rise in structuralist anthropology impacted ethnographic practice. In this phase, ethnographic analysis was concerned with the systems of events and the experience or system of meaning in which experience is embedded (Dourish, 2014). It focused ethnographic attention on the decoding of patterns of meaning and the symbolic nature of culture and paves the way for further examinations of cultural life (and ethnography itself) as an interpretive process (ibid).

Apart from descriptions of other cultures – the other cultural aspects of domination and exploitation started coming up in writings as ethnographers faced such situations themselves. Concepts of power, politics, hegemony were written about leading to development of critical ethnography (Clair, 1997). Feminist ethnographers like Simone de Beauvoir (1961), Eleanor Burke Leacock (1954) combined feminist, critical and postcolonial theories to explore cultural issues. Betty Friedan offered a unique ethnographic form and political commentary that set of debates related to feminism and patriarchy. Voice of white women feminist ethnographers started being challenged by African-American women.

15.2.3 Blurred Genres

By the beginning of the third stage (1970-1986), "Blurred Genres," qualitative researchers had a full complement of paradigms, methods, and strategies to employ in their research. Theories ranged from symbolic interactionism to constructivism, naturalistic inquiry, positivism and post positivism, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, critical (Marxist), semiotics, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, structuralism, feminism, and various ethnic paradigms. Geertz's two books, *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973) and *Local Knowledge* (1983), shaped the beginning and end of this moment. In

these two works, he argued that the old functional, positivist, behavioral, and totalizing approaches to the human disciplines was giving way to a more pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended perspective. Geertz suggested that all anthropological writings were interpretations of interpretations. The observer had no privileged voice in the interpretations that were written. The central task of theory was to make sense out of a local situation.

These writings highlighted the linguistic and political aspects of culture. 'Colonized' began speaking for themselves (Clair, 1997). The authenticity of descriptions of 'culture' emerging out of the theoretical paradigm of structural functionalism were questioned. Issues related the absence of ethnographer from their tale, presentation of partial or complete picture were raised; leading to the newer forms of ethnography which came to be known as 'Interpretive anthropology' (Harper, 1989). From being a unified theory, ethnography moved to a posture of tentative and eclectic theorizing. This tradition whose beginnings were attributed to Clifford Geertz further developed in books such as Clifford and Marcus' *Writing Culture* (1986), John Van Maanen's *Tales of the Field* (1988), and Marcus and Fischer's *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1988).

The 1970s saw a progressive turn towards hermeneutics and textuality which reflected the broader currents of change. The hermeneutic turn places interpretation at its core, in at least two ways – first, it focuses on the work of the ethnographer as essentially interpretive, and second, it draws attention to the interpretive practices that participants themselves are engaged in as they go about everyday life. That is, if culture is a text to be read and interpreted, then that is simply what people are doing themselves. The goal of an ethnographic description, then, is not merely to set down on the page what happens in front of the eyes, but to do so in a way that allows for multiple, repeated, indefinite processes of interpretation; the goal is to open up, not to close down, the play of meaning (Dourish, 2014).

This was also the time that research and writing was becoming more reflexive. New models of truth and method were sought (Rosaldo, 1989). The erosion of classic norms in anthropology (objectivism, complicity with colonialism, social life structured by fixed rituals and customs, and ethnographies as monuments to a culture) was complete (Rosaldo, 1989, pp. 44-45). Critical, feminist, and epistemologies of color now compete for attention in this arena (see Clough, 1994)

15.2.4 Period of intense reflection

According to Denzin (1997) the blurring of genres gave rise to a crisis of representation which led to a period wherein the researchers were involved in intense reflection. This gave rise to "messy texts" (Marcus, 1994, p. 567), experiments in auto ethnography (Okely & Callaway, 1992), ethnographic poetics (Marcus & Fischer, 1986, p. 74), anthropological and sociological poetry. Interpretive ethnographic writing in the twenty-first century was seen to move to a more critically informed discourse about the moral human universe (Clough, 1992, 1994).

15.3 INTERPRETIVE ETHNOGRAPHY: MEANING AND METHODS

Ethnographic research is, like much other human action, an attempt to solve a problem of communication (Dewey, 1922, 1927): The ethnographer must learn how to communicate with the researched well enough to maintain an acceptable presence in the field before any scholarly claims-making can happen. So, we constantly are trying out interpretations of everyday action. Through mundane reality tests, over time, we produce more valid interpretations in that we accomplish ordinary interaction with the researched more successfully, make better guesses and fewer big mistakes, and realize in retrospect that we have made fewer mistakes (Sanders, 1999).

Benzecry describes ethnography as an “exercise in miscommunication”. According to him achieving total control over what is communicated is impossible and understanding “what is really going on there” remains partial and is never really fulfilled. It becomes the responsibility of the researcher to communicate the kind of choices they have made to produce data; this would help in understanding how the knowledge is being produced. The postmodern view of ethnography as a jointly constructed narrative rather than an accurate objective depiction of social reality has gained support in recent years (Newmahr, 2008).

Clifford Geertz’s (1973, 1977) focus on symbols, texts and language gave birth to what is known as ‘interpretive ethnography’. He wrote about ‘thick descriptions’ and ‘webs of significance’ ushering in a new era of ethnography. Thick descriptions is an intensive, small-scale, dense descriptions of social life from observation, through which broader cultural interpretations and generalizations can be made. The term was introduced in the philosophical writings of Gilbert Ryle, and developed by Clifford Geertz in anthropology, especially in his celebrated study of the Balinese cockfight. He acknowledged that ethnographers’ thick descriptions are interpretations. Indeed, these descriptions are based in part on the interpretations of informants, which in turn are interpretations of what informants think they are doing (Martin, 1993).

Deep Play is a study of the Balinese cockfighting tradition based on a year of anthropological research undertaken by Geertz and his wife in Bali at the end of the 1950s, when they attended and interviewed those involved in the illegal but immensely popular cockfights. Geertz uses the method of thick description (a term coined by philosopher Gilbert Ryle) to inscribe the phenomena of cockfighting into a complex context, imagining it as a cultural phenomenon that reflects a “simulation of social matrix” and displays the society’s non-obvious hierarchy. Cockfights, for example, are not open to women, young people, or those who are socially underprivileged, while the major players are the community’s most respected and politically active members. The genuine cockfight is a human competition that has been delegated to animals, in which the winner receives respect and admiration from the other participants, while money (which Geertz does not specify) is awarded to the loser.

Apart from thick descriptions, interpretive ethnography is also characterized by widening methodological experimentation. The emerging methodological orientation is described metaphorically as dialogue and communication. Dialogue suggests exchange between individuals of approximately equal status, and in the context of ethnographic field work. The element of dialogue which emerges from the ethnographer contributes as much meaning as does that which emerges from the subject. Marcus and Fisher write: ‘dialogue has become the imagery for expressing the way anthropologists (and...their readers) must engage in an active communicative process with another culture. It is a two-way and two-dimensional exchange, interpretive processes being necessary both for communication internally within a cultural system and externally between systems of meaning’ (ibid.). Interpretive ethnography is partially about self-disclosure. It is “auto ethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical” (Denzin, 1999, p. 510). It is about articulating one’s views and perceptions. It is about detailing experience and offering “storied histories of sacred spaces” (Denzin, 1999, p. 510).

Interpretive ethnography is a methodology for studying the ways in which a social group constructs and lives its particular, indigenous version of reality (Smart, 1998). It aims to chart the network of shared meanings that constitute reality within a community. The interpretive ethnographer’s job is to map out the ideology of the community under study through extended social engagement with informants (ibid).

Interpretive ethnography (Denzin, 1997) has been termed as a part of postmodern ethnographies which focus on the visceral quality of understanding (Denzin 1995) and attempt to highlight their personal or the self in the research context. This reconsideration of the field became known as **symbolic anthropology**, also described as **interpretive anthropology**. It placed meaning at the centre of its enterprise and encouraged scholars to conduct ethnographies of communication (Hymes, 1964). The subject matter of ethnography grows to include the constitution of the self, the emotional life of the culture, and the interaction of the research process. A reader of a text might well ask not only what the text means but also why the text was produced in the first place, why it takes this form rather than that, what functions it has, what psychological effects a given interpretation has on readers who accept it (Martin, 1993). The interpretive anthropologist seeks new ways of both learning and telling: the recasting of biographical and autobiographical texts as ethnography, the use of literary texts as models, experimentation with ethnographic narrative, or texts which explore the presence of the writer and the process of fieldwork.

Johan Van Maanen (1988) describes interpretive ethnography as a rhetorical practice that represents the “social reality of others through the analysis of one’s own experience in the world of these others” (p.9). He described ethnography as being “hauntingly personal” (p.9). and at the same time a “portrait of diversity”. Ethnography can take different forms such as a realist form, a confessional form or an impressionistic form (Van Maanen, 1988). This is an ethnography which refuses abstractions and high theory. It is a way of being in the world that avoids jargon and huge chunks of data. It celebrates the local, the sacred, the act of constructing meaning. Viewing culture as a complex process of improvisation, it seeks to understand

how people enact and construct meaning in their daily lives. It celebrates autoethnography, the personal account, mystories, myth and folklore. This is a return to narrative as a political act (see Jackson 1998, c.f Denzin, 1997), a minimal ethnography with political teeth. It asks how power is exercised in concrete human relationships, understanding that power means empowerment, the give and take of scarce material resources.

An existential, interpretive ethnography offers a blue print for cultural criticism. This criticism is grounded in the specific worlds made visible in the ethnography. It understands that all ethnography is theory and value-laden. There can be no value-free ethnography, no objective, dispassionate, value-neutral account of a culture and its ways (see Smith/Deemer 2000). It is presumed that the ethnographic, the aesthetic and the political can never be neatly separated. Ethnography like art is always political.

The focal point in interpretive ethnography is understanding the meaning of phenomenon. Interpretive ethnographers look to interpret the meaning of cultural practices. They are more focused on understanding cultural meanings rather than social action. It brings together strengths of methodologies that analyze social and discursive structures and those that attend closely personal experience. Some of the main characteristics of interpretive ethnography are listed in the box below-

Box 15.1 Main characteristics/features of Interpretive Ethnography

- Critical interpretative ethnography grounds itself in participants understandings of their lived experiences along with their cultural and sociopolitical contexts that give shape and meaning to these experiences.
- Based on realistic, natural conversation, with a focus on memorable, recognizable characters, who are located in well-described, “unforgettable scenes” (Ford 1998, p. 1112).
- Pays detailed attention to how the participants view their world bracketing as much as possible the ethnographer’s point of view.
- Close reflection on the way participants view their own complex worlds- their rules, patterns of association and logic of implications’ (Marcus and Fischer 1988: 30).
- It presents a well-plotted, compelling, but minimalist narrative
- It articulates clearly identifiable cultural and political issues, including injustices based on the structures and meanings of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation.
- The findings usually articulate a politics of hope.
- Interpretive ethnography criticizes how things are and imagine how they could be different.

Instead of bracketing, some authors argue for building on the good explanations or interpretations of the ethnographers. This process becomes more transparent through reflexivity. In order to make explanatory claims more transparent and disputable by readers, there is a need for the researchers to show readers how they came up with their interpretations, how they made mistakes and lucky guesses along the way to capturing other

people’s meanings. That is what interpretive reflexivity discloses. Max Weber famously argued that explanations of social action must take into account what action means to the actor; interpretation and explanation are not separate universes of concern (Litcherman, 2017).

Interpretive reflexivity focuses on mistakes, gracelessness, hard-won insights, experiments in attribution, and other inter-cultural encounters whose outcomes may or may not correlate predictably with social position. Interpretive reflexivity tracks missed connections, lost opportunities to act differently by attributing meanings differently, as well as the ethnographer’s little reality tests that get it right. People communicate in language, gesture, silence, and we don’t wear positional identity-tags on our backs when we do so. Ethnographers need a more setting-specific, nuanced map of cultural differences to reflect on how communication succeeded or failed. When we start to sketch that kind of map, showing the signs we used to determine these successes or failures, we are performing interpretive reflexivity.

The intimate engagement of reflection and description that is interpretive ethnography demands a felt involvement that cannot help but motivate and transform the author and those who read it. So, to make interpretive ethnography meaningful beyond the scope of the individual experience, the insights gathered must be translated into action; it must be used to transform our educational praxis and the experience of students (Alexander, 2002). Interpretive ethnography places value on the seeing and reflecting on experience. This ocular epistemology presumes the primacy of visual perception as the dominant form of knowing. Perception, however, is never pure. It is clouded by the structure of language that refuse to be anchored in the present—the site of so-called pure essence (Denzin, 1997, p. 34). Hence, interpretive ethnography is a personal and critically reflexive process. And, “it is a situation-specific, author-specific, fallible method. It asks more questions than it pretends to answer, and its chief product is a perspectival understanding of the truth created by and constituted in a transient rhetoric” (Goodall, 1994, p. 151).

Check Your Progress I

- 1) Briefly explain the evolution of interpretive ethnography.
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- 2) Give the meaning of Interpretive ethnography. Use about five lines for your answer
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15.4 CRITIQUE OF INTERPRETIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

The nature of interpretive research gives it some unique advantages. This kind of research is useful for exploring hidden reasons behind complex, interrelated, or multifaceted social processes, such as institutional politics or violence against women, where quantitative evidence may be biased, inaccurate, or otherwise difficult to obtain. Second, they are often helpful for theory construction in areas with no or insufficient a priori theory. Thirdly, they are also appropriate for studying context-specific, unique, or idiosyncratic events or processes. Fourth, interpretive research can also help uncover interesting and relevant research questions and issues for follow-up research. That is in addition to finding answers it can also help in raising questions which need to be addressed by future research.

Interpretive ethnography also offers a certain flexibility to the researcher as it allows the researcher to change the original research question. If the researcher realizes that her original research questions are unlikely to generate new or useful insights, they can modify the questions to a certain extent. This is a valuable but often understated benefit of interpretive research, and is not available in positivist research.

Interpretive ethnography has its own set of challenges. It has been criticised by the positivists on method, truth and verification. They argue that interpretive ethnography does not use on agreed on methods of verification, including random samples, representative texts, and so-called unbiased methods of interpretation. According to positivists, this kind of research tends to be more time and resource intensive than positivist research in data collection and analytic efforts. Too little data can lead to false or premature interpretations/assumptions, while too much data may not be effectively processed by the researcher. Other criticisms include the need for well-trained researchers who are capable of seeing and interpreting complex social phenomenon from the perspectives of the embedded participants and reconciling the diverse perspectives of these participants, without injecting their personal biases or preconceptions into their inferences.

All participants or data sources may not be equally credible, unbiased, or knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest, or may have undisclosed political agendas, which may lead to misleading or false impressions. Inadequate trust between participants and researcher may hinder full and honest self-representation by participants, and such trust building takes time. It is the job of the interpretive researcher to “see through the smoke” (hidden or biased agendas) and understand the true nature of the problem. Lastly, given the heavily contextualized nature of inferences drawn from interpretive research, such inferences do not lend themselves well to replicability or generalizability (Bhattacharjee, 2021).

Some of the issues raised above were addressed by writers who described certain ways for ensuring a certain level of accuracy in the findings of interpretive ethnography. Wherry (2011) describes three techniques that assist ethnographers in developing accurate interpretations: a search for variation and conflicting evidence in the field; careful attention to the way that

detailed field observations are interpreted in ‘thick minimal matches’ with social scientific concepts; and excavating the discourses, understandings, and social forces that provide the theoretical scaffolding of the lives of the people we observe (c.f Voyer and Trondman, 2017).

An alternative set of criteria was also given by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These help in establishing a certain rigor to interpretive research.

Dependability

Interpretive research can be viewed as dependable or authentic if two researchers assessing the same phenomenon using the same set of evidence independently arrive at the same conclusions or the same researcher observing the same or a similar phenomenon at different times arrives at similar conclusions. This concept was seen to be similar to reliability. Dependability could be ensured by providing adequate details about the phenomenon of interest and the social context in which it is embedded so as to allow readers to independently authenticate their interpretive inferences.

Credibility

If the inferences of a research are believable then its findings can be considered credible. This concept is akin to that of internal validity in functionalistic research. Credibility of the research is improved by providing evidence of the researcher’s extended engagement in the field, by demonstrating data triangulation across subjects or data collection techniques, and by maintaining meticulous data management and analytic procedures, such as verbatim transcription of interviews, accurate records of contacts and interviews, and clear notes on theoretical and methodological decisions, that can allow an independent audit of data collection and analysis if needed.

Confirmability

This refers to the extent to which the findings reported in interpretive research can be independently confirmed by others (typically, participants). This is similar to the notion of objectivity in functionalistic research. Since interpretive research rejects the notion of an objective reality, confirmability is demonstrated in terms of “inter-subjectivity,” i.e., if the study’s participants agree with the inferences derived by the researcher. For instance, if a study’s participants generally agree with the inferences drawn by a researcher about a phenomenon of interest (based on a review of the research paper or report), then the findings can be viewed as confirmable.

Transferability

Transferability in interpretive research refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other settings. This idea is similar to that of external validity in functionalistic research. The researcher must provide rich, detailed descriptions of the research context (“thick description”) and thoroughly describe the structures, assumptions, and processes revealed from the data so that readers can independently assess whether and to what extent are the reported findings transferable to other settings. For example, findings of health study in an urban low-income community in one country may also be applicable to a similar community in another country. If this kind of transfer of knowledge is possible then it provides more rigour to the research.

Check Your Progress II

- ii) Explain the advantages of using Interpretive ethnography to conduct research.

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- iii) How do we ensure rigor in interpretive ethnography? Explain in about 8-10 lines.

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15.5 LET US SUM UP

Ethnography, as a gendered project, has changed because the world that ethnography confronts has changed. Ethnographers inhabit a postcolonial world—the age of multinational, electronic capitalism. This world is defined by difference and disjuncture and shifting borders and borderlines. Center and periphery intersect, making the local global (Denzin, 1997, 265).

The new writers seek a model of truth that is narrative, deeply ethical, open ended, and conflictual, performance, and audience based, and always personal, biographical, political, structural, and historical (ibid,267). The new writers create a new reader, a reader willing to confront the unrepresentable features of the postmodern world which include different kinds of violence – economic, sexual as well as political.

There are now multiple forms of reflexivity, from the methodological and in tertexual to standpoint, queer, feminist, and the postcolonial. There is a conscious effort to avoid the telling of stories that reproduce the standard version of the knowing subject of contemporary ethnography.

When researchers use reflexivity in their research, it greatly enriches ethnographic understanding. Interpretive ethnography is enabling and addresses the power issues which have existed between the researcher and the researched. This unit begins with tracing the history of Interpretive Ethnography- it explores the reasons for the development of a more

reflexive form of ethnography. The meaning and methods involved in interpretive ethnography are explained here in addition to the critique of this form of ethnography. The advantages in using this method along with the challenges in theory and practice are also discussed in this unit. Along with the challenges it also describes the methods that are used to ensure rigor in interpretive ethnography. The unit ends with highlighting the importance and need of interpretive ethnography in this dynamic world.

Check Your Progress III

Briefly explain the importance of Interpretive Ethnography in the postmodern world. Use about 6-8 lines.

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15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress I

- i) Initial ethnographic writings were focused on documenting ‘other cultures’ and revealed a colonial understanding of different cultures. After the World Wars I and II newer ethnographies focusing on important social processes like social deviance came up. Interpersonal relations and personal struggles became a part of ethnographic works. Issues of power, politics, gender started coming up leading to a blurring of genres. The work of Geertz emphasized a more plural, introspective and open-ended perspective. The blurring of genres and focus on introspective processes led to a period of intense reflection amongst the researchers. This eventually led to more critically informed interpretive ethnographic writings.
- ii) Interpretive ethnography is a methodology for studying the ways in which a social group constructs and lives its particular, indigenous version of reality (Smart,1998). It is often “autoethnographic, vulnerable, performative, and critical” (Denzin, 1999, p. 510). It is a method which is situation-specific as well as author-specific. It is largely about self-disclosure.

Check Your Progress II

- i) Interpretive ethnography is useful for exploring hidden reasons behind complex, interrelated, or multifaceted social processes, such as institutional politics or violence against women. Second, they are often helpful for theory construction in areas with no or insufficient a priori theory. Thirdly, they are also appropriate for studying context-specific, unique, or idiosyncratic events or processes. Fourth, interpretive research can also help uncover interesting and relevant research questions and issues for follow-up research. This method of research offers more flexibility to the researcher as it allows of research questions to be modified according to field realities as well.
- ii) Lincoln and Guba gave a set of criteria for establishing rigor. This included *Dependability*- which includes providing adequate details of the phenomenon of interest and social context to allow the reader to authenticate interpretive inferences, *Credibility* – providing evidence of researcher’s engagement in the field by giving examples of data

triangulation, *Confirmability*-reported findings can be independently confirmed by others, *Transferability* – extent to which findings can be generalized to other settings.

Interpretive Ethnography

Check Your Progress III

- i) Currently, we live in a rapidly changing world which is defined by difference and disjuncture as well as shifting borders. There is a need to confront a world full of different kinds of violence. This requires addressing biographical, structural, political as well as historical issues. Interpretive ethnography enables the researcher to address power issues as well as to work with multiple discourses of reality. It gives space for the emergence of multiple forms of reflexivity-standpoint, queer, feminist and post-colonial. Therefore, this carrying out this form of critical ethnographies becomes essential in the postmodern world.



UNIT 16: ETHICS AND ETHNOGRAPHY*

Structure

- 16.0 Objective
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Various ethical considerations that guide ethnographic research
 - 16.2.1 Informed Consent
 - 16.2.2 Voluntary Participation
 - 16.2.3 No harm to the participants
 - 16.2.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality
 - 16.2.5 Not Deceiving Subjects
 - 16.2.6 Analysis and Reporting
- 16.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.4 References
- 16.5 Answers to Check Your Progress

16.0 OBJECTIVE

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- explain ethics and ethnography
- identify the various ethical issues that guide ethnographic research. Few of these are:
 - informed consent
 - voluntary participation
 - no harm to participants
 - anonymity and confidentiality
 - not Deceiving the subjects

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us begin our discussion on relationship between ethics and ethnography with understanding of what ethnography and ethics mean. Ethnography is defined as: ‘the recording and analysis of a culture or society, usually based on participant –observation and resulting in a written account of people, place or institution’ (Simpson and Coleman 2017).

The ethnographic method is called participant observation. The researcher goes to the field and interacts with the group of people in their natural habitat. The journey of the anthropologist starts as a non-participant researcher of people’s culture. Over a period of time he becomes a participant observer. He participates in the daily and ceremonial life of the locals. The researcher may also use a number of other methods such as formal and informal interviews, focus group discussion and use of audio-visual recordings for collecting data.

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Ethnography is a category of qualitative research that involves engaging yourself in a particular community or organisation to observe their behaviour and interactions as closely as possible. It is a flexible research method that allows you gain an in-depth understanding of a group's culture, their conventions and social dynamics. Ethnography is an excellent mode of inquiry to have a first-hand understanding about behaviour and interactions of people within a particular context. The end result of fieldwork is a written descriptive account of people and their ways of life. The aim of a written ethnography is to provide a rich, authoritative account of the social setting in which you were embedded. The purpose of such exhaustive and rich description of people's life is to transport the reader to the field. The term 'fieldwork' comprises of two words – 'field' and 'work'. 'Field' means the social world of study or the community of human beings who are being studied. So the work that is carried out to study something in the natural environment where it occurs (such as an event or a culture) or that it inhabits (such as community of human beings) is referred to as fieldwork. Fieldwork is one of the oldest forms of human inquiry or research practice. It essentially engages with "the worlds of others" with the aim of studying them at close quarters. It is concerned with research on some aspect of human behaviour in its everyday context

All sociological research requires informed consent. Participants are never compelled into participation. Informal consent in broader sense involves ensuring that prior to agreeing to participate, research subjects are aware of the particulars of the research. They are well aware of the risks and benefits of participation, if any. They are even told by the researcher the use the collected data will be put to. Participants have the freedom to opt out of the study at any point. Thus, research ethics involves the question of moral principles that guide and govern how the researcher should go about doing their work.

The question of ethics in any social inquiry is of great importance. The term research ethics refer to the norms, values and institutional arrangement that guide the researcher in the course of his research. The subject matter of any sociological study are the people. The sociologist must strictly adhere to the code of ethics at all point of sociological inquiry. Of utmost importance in any sociological research is the safety of the participants. It is the duty of the researcher to ensure that the participants are not harmed in any way. A researcher must remain mindful of his responsibilities towards his informants.

According to the Webster's New World Dictionary ethical is defined as 'conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group'. In ethnographic study which requires the researcher to live in a particular society, it becomes imperative to understand and know what the society considers ethical and unethical. Also as a researcher it is important to be informed of the general agreements about what's correct and what's unsuitable while undertaking any scientific inquiry.

16.2 VARIOUS ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS THAT GUIDE ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Research often involves a great deal of teamwork and synchronization among many different people in different disciplines and institutions. Ethical standards uphold the values that are essential to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness. Many of the ethical norms help to guarantee that researchers can be held answerable to the public. People are more likely to fund a research project if they can trust the quality and integrity of research.

Ethical consideration

Ethical consideration is a collection of principles and values that should be followed while doing human affairs. The ethical considerations make sure that no-one act in such a way that is harmful to society or an individual. It refrains people and organizations from indulging in vicious conduct.

Here is a list of the more important ethical considerations that guide any social research

- 1.1 Informed consent
- 1.2 Voluntary Participation
- 1.3 No Harm to the Participants
- 1.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality
- 1.5 Not Deceiving Subjects

We will now be discussing each of the above listed points one by one.

16.2.1 Informed consent

Perhaps the most important instrument for securing confidentiality is the informed consent procedure. It is rooted in the idea that involvement in research should have no detrimental effects on the participants, honour the individual's fundamental rights, and respect relationships, bonds, and promises. Informed consent is a critical procedure for the fulfilment of the ethical dimension in scientific research in social sciences. Informed consent is the process of telling potential research participants about the key elements of a research study and what their participation will involve. The informed consent process is one of the central components of the ethical conduct of research with human subjects.

“Anthropological researchers should obtain in advance the informed consent of persons being studied, providing information, owning or controlling access to material being studied, or otherwise identified as having interests which might be impacted by the research. It is understood that the degree and breadth of informed consent required will depend on the nature of the project and may be affected by requirements of other codes, laws, and ethics of the country or community in which the research is pursued. Further, it is understood that the informed consent process is dynamic and continuous; the process should be initiated in the project design and continue through implementation by way of dialogue and negotiation with those studied. Researchers are responsible for identifyin

and complying with the various informed consent codes, laws and regulations affecting their projects. Informed consent, for the purposes of this code, does not necessarily imply or require a particular written or signed form. It is the quality of the consent, not the format, that is relevant.” (American Anthropological Association, 2009, Art. 4)

16.2.2 Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation refers to a human research subject’s exercise of free will in deciding whether to participate in a research activity. Putting it in simple terms, Voluntary Participation refers to the freedom and willingness on part of the informant to participate in any social inquiry. Social research in most cases involves an intrusion into the lives of the people. Participation in a social experiment costs the respondent both time and energy. The daily routine of the participant suffers and there is disruption in their regular activities.

A major tenet of social research is that no one should be forced to participate. Also the social research may require the participant to talk about their personal and private lives, give out information that may be unknown to even their friends. All sociological inquiries aim for generalization. This scientific aim of generalizability is risked if the respondents are not selected through random sampling. A researcher cannot generalise the sample survey findings to an entire population unless a substantial majority of the scientifically selected population actually participates. The norm of voluntary participation is the most significant and crucial ethical consideration. However, in field it is difficult to adhere to it. Many a times, the researcher may not disclose the nature of study being undertaken and give very little scope to respondent for refusal or opportunity to volunteer.

The Nuremberg Code

A well-known chapter in the history of research with human subjects opened on December 9, 1946, when an American military tribunal opened criminal proceedings against 23 leading German physicians and administrators for their willing participation in war crimes and crimes against humanity. Among the charges were that German physicians conducted medical experiments on thousands of concentration camp prisoners without their consent. Most of the subjects of these experiments died or were permanently crippled as a result.

As a direct result of the trial, the Nuremberg Code was established in 1948, stating that ‘The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential,’ making it clear that subjects should give consent and that the benefits of the research must outweigh the risks.

Although it did not carry the force of law, the Nuremberg Code was the first international document, which advocated voluntary participation and informed consent.[2]

16.2.3 No harm to the Participants

One of the utmost responsibility of the researcher is to ensure that the participant is not harmed in any ways. As mentioned above, the respondent may reveal private and personal details of his personal life. Very often, the

respondents are asked to reveal deviant behaviour or demeaning personal characteristics. Revealing such private information is quite likely to make them feel uncomfortable. Social research studies may require the participant to accept and discuss those aspects of their personality or personal lives that they do not talk about in everyday life. This can be a source of personal agony for the respondent. The subject may start to self-introspect and question his own morality which add to his woes.

The researcher may be well aware of the adverse impact of his research on the psyche of the people. The researcher also knows his incapacity to safeguard the informants against the unpleasant consequences of research inquires. If a particular study is likely to produce disagreeable effects for subjects, the researcher should have the firmest of scientific grounds for undertaking it.

It is not only in the stage of data collection that subject experience discomfort. The respondent can also be harmed at the stage of analysis and reporting of data. The respondents may often get to read reports or ethnographic accounts based on the studies they participated in. They may find themselves labelled or stereotyped. They may find themselves characterised as conservative, unpatriotic, less advanced or superstitious. These categorizations and labels are likely to have a negative impact on their self-image.

Much like voluntary participation, not harming people is easy said than done. However, in the recent past social researchers are getting support for abiding by this norm. Many universities and even funding agencies are clear to approve only those projects which promise some kind of commitment whereby they promise to safeguard the interests of the respondents.

16.2.4 Anonymity and Confidentiality

Taking forward the above stated point i.e. causing no harm to the respondent, it is important to protect the identity of respondents. During the interview or while responding to the questions in the questionnaire, the responses may injure and risk their reputation. To save the respondent from any kind of a discomfort or embarrassment and at the same time not compromising with the data and findings, the researcher may resort to anonymity and confidentiality. However, anonymity and confidentiality are not be treated as synonyms.

Anonymity: Anonymity is ensured when the researcher cannot identify a given response with a given respondent. So in many ways, the interview does not ensure respondent any anonymity, since the interviewer while conducting interview knows who the respondent is. Anonymity is ensured in the mailed survey where the respondents have the freedom not to disclose their identity. However, in such cases it is difficult for the researcher to keep track of who hasn't returned the questionnaire. Anonymity can be ensured by making use of pseudonyms for the respondents and place of study. Sometimes the researcher may transform their qualitative data into fictionalised account, a step towards ensuring anonymity of the subjects. Though anonymising research sites may allow for greater decontextualisation of the data, thereby making it easier to draw comparison. However, it may adversely create the risk of over-generalization

Confidentiality: In a confidential survey, the identity of the respondent is known to the researcher however he doesn't make it public. Confidentiality pertains to the understanding between the researcher and participant that guarantees sensitive or private information will be handled with the utmost care. Ultimately, confidentiality is rooted in trust. In case of anonymity, the respondent is not known to the researcher and public. In order to keep the data confidential, the researcher replaces all names, and addresses with identification numbers. A master identification file is created linking numbers to names to permit the later use, which may be used for correcting any missing or contradictory information.

Robert F. Boruch and Joe S. Cecil (1979) have discussed and engaged in the issue of confidentiality at great length and enlisted a number of techniques that can be used to safeguard the identity of the subject. The first step in this direction is the removal of identifying information as soon as it is no longer necessary. Once the researcher has ensured all quality control in data collection and is certain that he doesn't need any further information he can safely remove all identifying information from the interview booklet.

16.2.5 Not Deceiving Subjects

Research not only involves ethical consideration about the subject's identity but also pose concerns regarding researchers own identity as a researcher. Sometimes the researcher is very vocal and clear about his work and identity in the field and this facilitates the researcher to go about the exercise of doing research. Sometimes the researcher has no choice but to hide his identity and move ahead with research work discreetly. Now when the researcher hides his identity to take forward his research assignment, it raises ethical considerations. Deceiving people is unethical and within social research one needs to have a strong reason or logic to justify deception. Even then, the justification will be arguable.

Many a times, the researcher may reveal his own identity but chooses not to disclose about the aim or goal of research. Many a times the researcher may hide the exact use to what the data may be put to. The researcher fears that if he discloses the aim of his study or the purpose to which the data would be put to, people may not like to participate or the respondent may not report the correct information. Lying about research purpose is relatively common in laboratory experiments. It is quite tough to conceal the fact that you are undertaking a research. However, it is far simple and less complicated not to disclose the purpose of inquiry.

16.2.6 Analysis and Reporting

A social researcher has a number of ethical obligations to the subjects of his study. It is not only towards the respondents that the researcher has ethical obligations, but he has ethical obligations to his colleagues in the scientific community. The researcher also has some obligations towards the readers too. In most cases, the researcher skips reporting the negative findings. Researcher is more keen and inclined to report only the positive discoveries. This may totally mar the purpose of study and research. If his hypothesis is rejected or challenged in the field, the researcher must not shy from reporting it. The researcher is always trying to situate his findings as product of a carefully preplanned analytical strategy when that is not

the case. Many findings arrive unexpectedly, or are chance discoveries – even though they seem obvious in retrospect. The researcher must be honest in telling the truth about all the pitfalls and problems experienced by him in course of undertaking the research. These honest reporting of research activities may make the work easy for future researchers.

Check Your Progress I

1. The ethnographic method is also called as.....
2. refer to the freedom and willingness on part of the informant to participate in any social enquiry

Ethical principles	Definition
Honesty	It is a must to achieve honesty in all science-related communication. The scientist must honestly present information on the data, results, research methods and procedures, and publication status. It is prohibited to falsify and distort the data, to deceive colleagues, agencies aiding grants, or the public.
Objectivity	Partiality should be avoided in the formulation of the research stages plan, analyzing and interpreting data, as well as evaluating the work of colleagues, recruiting the staff, writing applications for the award of grants, giving expert testimony, and other aspects of the scientific research where objectivity is essential. It is recommended to try to avoid partiality and self-deception. The researcher must disclose any personal or financial interests that might influence the scientific research.
Morality	The researcher must comply with the promises and agreements, be honest and seek the sustainability of thoughts and actions.
Prudence	The researcher must avoid careless errors and omissions. It is important to evaluate carefully and critically both own and colleagues' work. It is proposed to collect/ systematize good, research-related activity (e.g., data collection, planning research stages and correspondence with agencies and journals), notes.
Openness	The researcher must share the data, ideas, tools, and resources, be open to criticism and new ideas.
Respect for intellectual property	The researcher must respect patents, copyright rights, and other forms of intellectual property, not to use unpublished research data, methods, or results without permission, quote where you must cite and thank properly for their help in the research. It is strictly forbidden for the researcher to plagiarize.
Confidentiality	The investigator must save confidential information, such as articles submitted for publication, records of employees, professional or military secrets and the records of patients' health stories.

Ethical principles	Definition
Responsible publication	The researcher should publicize the results of the research for the sake of science and scientific research and not for the benefit of his career. The scientist should avoid unnecessary publication or republication.
Responsible management	The researcher should help educate students, guide and advise them in order of their well-being, and allowing themselves to make decisions.
Respect for colleagues	The researcher must respect his/her colleagues and deal with them honestly.
Social responsibility	The researcher must promote social welfare and try to avoid harm or reduce it through research, public education, and advocacy activities.
Anti-discrimination	The researcher must avoid discrimination against students or colleagues of sex, race, nationality, or other factors unrelated to scientific excellence and honesty.
Competence	The researcher must maintain and improve own professional competence through lifelong learning, and take measures to promote competence in science.
Legitimacy	The researcher must have knowledge of relevant laws for his/her work as well as institutional and government policies and comply with them.
Security of people involved in scientific research	Conducting scientific research with human beings, one must strive to minimize the damage and the risks and maximize the benefit. The researcher must respect human dignity, privacy, and autonomy. The researcher must take special precautions, working with vulnerable populations, and seek a fair distribution of the research benefits and burdens.

Source: According to Shamoo and Resnik.

16.3 LET US SUM UP

Ethical considerations in social research are critical. Ethics are the norms or standards for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. They help to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Social researchers / scientists should respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people and strive to eliminate bias in their social research-based activities; they must not tolerate any forms of discrimination based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, health conditions, or marital, domestic, or parental status. Social researchers must be sensitive to cultural, individual, and role differences in serving, teaching, and studying groups of people with distinctive characteristics. In all of their social research-related activities, social scientists should acknowledged

Thus, the above discussion highlights that all ethnographic inquires need to be sensitive to the ethical principles. Research studies must ensure that no

harm is caused to the participants. All research inquires must strive towards protecting the autonomy, safety, wellbeing and dignity of all its informants. All research studies should aim for objectivity and avoid ethnocentricity.

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16.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress 1

1. Participant observation
2. Voluntary Participation.

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GLOSSARY

Ethnography: Descriptive study of a certain human society or or the process of making such a study.

Autoethnography: Autoethnography is a type of qualitative study in which an author explores anecdotal and personal experience through self-reflection and writing, and then connects this autobiographical account to broader cultural, political, and societal meanings and understandings.

Online Ethnography: Online ethnography (sometimes referred to as virtual ethnography or digital ethnography) is a type of online research that applies anthropological methodologies to the study of communities and cultures formed through computer-mediated social interaction.

Triangulation: Triangulation is a technique designed to compare and contrast different methods to provide a more comprehensive account of the phenomena under study.

Caste: An ascriptive grouping which is community based.

Great Tradition: Cultural trait or tradition, which is written and widely accepted by the elite of the society who are educated and learned.

Little Tradition: Cultural trait or tradition, which is oral and operates at the village level.

Race: Race is widely considered as a basis of categorization of human beings in various categories depending upon their physical features. However, since race is a social construct, this categorization of human being is socially based and categorized.

Authority: When power is legitimised it becomes authority.

Totem: A religion in which an animal, plant or some object is held as sacred and from which the group claims descent.

Social Structure: It is the organised pattern of the inter-related rights and obligations of persons and groups in a system of interaction as seen in terms of statuses, roles, institutions governed by social norms and values.

Culture: The system of behavior, customs, regulations etc. which is learnt by and socially acquired.

Suffrage: The legal right to vote.

Feminism: A social, economic, and political commitment directed at changing the existing power relations between women and men in society in order to fight against gender injustice and to promote equal rights and opportunities for all.

Stereotypes: It refers to a partial, prejudiced, biased, exaggerated view about a group, class of people, tribe, etc.

Power: One's capacity to impose his or her will on others.