



BLOCK 4
CONTEMPORARY THEORIES

Uignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 11
Symbolic and Interpretive Approach

UNIT 12
Feminism

UNIT 13
New Ethnography and Contemporary Changes



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 11 SYMBOLIC AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACH*

Contents

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 What is a Symbol?
- 11.2 Evolution of Symbolic Behaviour in Homo Sapiens
- 11.3 Classification of Symbols and Symbolic Behaviour
- 11.4 Some Classical Anthropological Works on Symbolic and Interpretive Approach
- 11.5 Summary
- 11.6 References
- 11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress.

Objectives

In this unit you will learn about:

- how is culture a symbolic behaviour;
- Evolution of symbolic behaviour in Homo Sapiens;
- Classification of symbols and symbolic behaviour; and
- Some classical anthropological works on symbolism.

11.0 INTRODUCTION

That I am writing this unit that will be read by students are acts based on our ability for symbolic behaviour that sets humans apart from all other animal species. Only the human brain has the capacity for analogic behaviour or ability to think beyond immediate and obvious correlations. Humans alone have the ability to classify a diversity of objects and actions into abstracted, analogic categories and to communicate using a complex and interrelated system of symbols we call language. Just imagine how difficult or impossible communication would be if there was no language, and also the almost unconscious process of classification that language entails. Whenever we are talking to each other, we continue to use, not reference to specific objects and actions, but to classes of objects and actions; for example, 'the boy is running'; uses two broad categories, that of boy, an object, and running, that is an action. If you just reflect (another peculiarly Homo Sapiens ability), you will realise that almost all words we use refer to classes and not to specifics, of any kind. In this unit we shall discuss the evolution of symbolic behaviour in human culture and how this work has been looked at by the anthropologists through their works on symbolic behaviour and interpretation.

11.1 WHAT IS A SYMBOL?

The most basic requirement of a symbol is that it should have a material existence, that is, must be grasped by the senses. It is also suspended in a web of meanings

***Contributor:** Professor Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. New Delhi.

that constitutes a culture. A symbol is not a stand-alone entity, it connects to other symbols and may also have different meanings in different contexts. It signifies and stands for relationships that have meaning in their social and cultural context. Symbols can be used metaphorically as well. It is not possible to understand the significance of any symbol if one is not well versant with the cultural milieu in which it is produced. Let us take for example, a '*raakhi*', that can be a simple thread, or an elaborate ornament, but what is symbolised is a relationship contextualised within a broader culture, namely the bond between brother and sister in South Asia. It may even cut across religions, but is definitely regional. Also, symbolism has deeper reverberations, it has mythology and folk lore that surrounds it. It also has emotional and historical significance and is well publicised in popular media and literature. But most importantly, it is meaningful to all who live or have familiarity with the culture.

Culture is not just an interconnected network of symbols, but of the meanings that lie behind them. The brother and sister relationship that the *raakhi* symbolises is embedded in a culture where kinship ties are very important. Society is patriarchal so that sisters do not inherit the family resources. Since brothers inherit, they are under moral obligation to support the sister. Here we are talking about a social significance as well as the primacy of certain types of relationships in particular regions. Again, these relationships and social significations may also be tied to ecological and economic dimensions, to historical conditions and sometimes extraordinary circumstances. For example, the Nuer, a pastoral community, studied by E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), had a culture that revolved totally around their cattle. Their daily routines and their sacred cosmology were rooted in their relationship to their environment, that was mediated by their dependence on their cattle as a mode of livelihood. For the Nuer then, the cattle provided the base for most of their symbols and metaphors and one could understand the Nuer culture through their cattle symbolisms alone. A major catastrophe like the Second World War, created its own corpus of symbols and meanings. For most of the western world, the Swastika, for example signifies evil, suffering and racism; unlike its sacred meaning for the Hindus.

Symbols are in a very basic and simple way, representations, but not necessarily actually representing what they stand for. The relationship between what is represented (the signified) and what represents (the signifier); is highly arbitrary and complex. Semiotics, as the study of symbols is attributed to the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce (1931-35), defined as the study of 'Signs'. A sign is anything that conveys a meaning. The generalised category of 'sign' can be further subdivided into:

- a) 'Index': The signified has an associational relationship to signifier; for example, certain numbers are often projected as an index of growth, in other words, these numbers have an association with a process called growth, in whatever way it is defined. When we take body temperature, the movement of the mercury in the thermometer has an association with, or is an index of body temperature that in turn is an index of health. Therefore, symbols are not isolated but related to larger associational relationships with other systems and symbols.
- b) 'Icons', that have a physical resemblance to what they stand for, like the image of a deity, or something that resembles the deity, or thing that is represented. Icon can also be used for a person or thing with a symbolic association to something that it resembles or represents, like we can say Sachin Tendulkar is an icon of cricket.

- c) ‘Symbol’, where the meaning is totally arbitrary, like in a language, the association of certain sounds with certain objects is totally arbitrary.

However, for the linguist, Ferdinand Saussure, ‘signs’ is arbitrary and symbols have an association with the object they represent. In anthropology, symbols are used in the way they have been described by Clifford Geertz and others, as systems of meanings, culturally ascribed. Firth, who tried to apply Peirce’s definitions in anthropology, found that it was difficult to abide by Peirce’s classification as in actual application, meanings differed, as cultural meanings are contextual, shifting as contexts change. The same symbol or attribute may be interpreted differently by different actors and by same actor, differently in a different context. For example, to a devotee, an image may not be an icon, but a real person and he or she may relate to it as such. Meanings that symbols have are not inherent in them or in any quality that they may have. These are attribute to them by the relationships that people have to them and to each other. These meanings are experienced emotionally in a situation of social interaction, like the feelings of sibling love that is evoked when a piece of thread is tied by a sister on her brother’s hand. There is nothing in the thread or in the persons of the brother and sister that evokes such a sentiment, yet it is evoked by the cultural interpretation and the myth and ceremony that surrounds the social interaction.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is a symbol?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) What is a sign?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 3) Give the subdivisions of signs.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

11.2 EVOLUTION OF SYMBOLIC BEHAVIOUR IN HOMO SAPIENS

The earliest evidence of human culture is their tool making behaviour that began from the middle Palaeolithic onwards and is evidenced in the form of stones, flaked to form tools. As Foster (1994: 383) has pointed out, the making of tools involves a pre-conceptualisation, a plan, a design, that is only possible through a well- formed cognitive ability. According to Wynn (1979: 383) the Acheulian period tool makers exhibited the capacity for whole-part relations, spatio-temporal substitution, symmetry and other such capacities that indicate that their mental organisational ability was no less than that of modern humans. In other words, they achieved what any modern human would have, given the same resources and technological know-how. There is evidence from the Acheulian times of markings on stone that are deliberate representations like drawings indicating alreadyemerged creative or art making ability, that is the most salient expression of analogic thinking. Art is a way of representing ideas that exist in the mind of the artist to the others in her or his group. What is chosen to be depicted and the manner in which it is depicted depends upon the culture from which the relevance of the symbols is drawn. For example, the graphic drawings found inside caves in the pre-historic times often used only some part of an animal to depict the entire animal, which means that the others in that culture were able to recognize the animal from that part and also that particular aspect of the animal was considered to be important at the level of the collective. Like if a reindeer was depicted by its horns, then it must be a symbol that was recognized at the group level, and hence culturally derived. Palaeolithic art is mostly representative of animal symbols, mostly in motion. It also indicates that humans were more interested in the action or process rather than in the objects in a static manner.

As theorised by Mary Douglas (1982), much of cultural symbolism, is derived from the human body or from nature itself. The earliest representations, even in the sacred texts, derive from the body. The Hindu Varna system for example, is rooted in body symbolism, with the different varna, seen as originating from different parts of the body of the cosmic being, Purusa. Douglas uses the term Natural Symbols, to designate this paradigm. However, she makes it clear that even when arising from the body, the systems of symbols vary over societies and are coded by the community that has a common social experience, derived from a shared history. They appear natural only because the social origins are obscured in the past. However, from this assumption of deeper community origins of symbols it also follows that similar communities, with perhaps similar histories, may give rise to similar natural symbols, as nature, including the human body remains a common factor for all societies. As societies change, their values change and some symbols can be rejected, as the authority that backed up the meaning of that particular symbol, is no longer seen as legitimate. Therefore, Douglas considers symbols as capable of change in their meanings or becoming redundant altogether, if the social context in which they had meaning, no longer exist. For example, with the advent of modernity, the symbolism of the varna system is no longer acceptable, in fact few young people are even aware of it.

A positivist and highly generalised theory of symbols is given by Lévi-Strauss (1963) who associated the roots of symbols to the universal structure of the human mind. Lévi-Strauss devoted much of his scholarship to show how the binary

oppositional character of the human mind is expressed in different system of symbols, differently organised in various cultures, but which can all be reduced to an essential dualistic character of the mind's cognitive abilities. Put more simply the human mind cognises things in terms of their opposite, like for example light can only be understood in terms of its opposition, dark. A symbolic system like Totemism, to Lévi-Strauss, offers a system of coding, in terms of a dialectical process of understanding to understand relationships and basic structural principles of society like marriage and kinship.

Check Your Progress2

4) What is the earliest evidence of human culture?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5) Who used the term Natural Symbol?

.....
.....
.....
.....

6) Who associated the roots of symbols to the universal structure of the human kind?

.....
.....
.....
.....

11.3 CLASSIFICATION OF SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLIC BEHAVIOUR

Mary Douglas (1982) comments that since all communication depends on symbols, they can be classified variously. Symbols can be single referents or multi-referents, they can have single meanings or by polysemic (having multiple meanings), they can be very diffuse to very condensed. Turner's work on the Ndembu (1968) is a classic example of condensed symbols, symbols where a single signifier condenses a multitude of referents, encompassing entire cosmologies and associated social organisations and value systems. The Ndembu of Zambia have a society of strong descent groups as well as local groups, that

are horizontally stratified by age groups and cult groups. The Ndembu have a system of colour classifications drawn from nature and inscribed on the human body. They believe there are active principles, or life forces within the human body with different colour codes, black bile, red blood and white milk. They find analogous colours in nature in the sap of the milk tree, black clay and red resins and black of charred wood. These colours are used in a complex display in rituals and body decorations to encapsulate the cosmological principles that integrate the human with the environment and the supernatural world. They also integrate the social world with the cosmos. Turner's (1968) work on ritual and colour symbolism are considered classics of symbolic studies.

Ruth Benedict's work *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1934), set the trend to look for the symbols that would be representative of the core values and themes of any culture. Benedict had identified the chrysanthemum and the sword as the two key elements for the understanding of Japanese national character. Inspired by her work, David Schneider (1968), in his analysis of American Kinship also identifies the two "core" and opposed symbols of kinship in America as nature and law; both of which he finds is expressed in the marriage or conjugal bond. For Americans, the conjugal bond, which is a legal bond between two unrelated individuals is realized in the sexual relationship that begets children, a natural phenomenon that creates the primary blood relations of parents and children and of siblings. All other relations are derivatives of these and express the same logic of differentiation of blood and law. What Schneider calls 'core' symbols are referred to as 'dominant symbols' by Victor Turner and Key Symbols by Sherry Ortner.

In her article in the *American Anthropologist* (1972: 1338-1346), Ortner defines what she calls Key Symbols as certain objects, themes or stories among other possibilities that expresses the most core values and goals of a culture. She has even given a methodology by which to identify the key symbols of a culture and for which she gives five indicators; namely, they are mentioned as culturally important by the people bearing that culture, they arouse emotions, both positive or negative, but are rarely dismissed with indifference, they keep reappearing in many different contexts, are referred to and represented in many ways, there are narratives and cultural elaborations around them and they are also subject to taboos and restrictions. All key symbols are in the public domain for they are collectively shared. Anthropological literature indicates that key symbols can be anything from animals, practices, folktales and narratives, religious and secular symbols like the national flag and dominant religious icons like the Christian cross, the Buddhist chakra and the Hindu 'Om'.

Ortner further classifies the Key Symbols into a continuum from Summarising to Elaborate, while actually focussing on the two ends. Summarising encapsulate multiple ideas and emotions that represents to the members of that society, some theme or themes, most pertinent and relevant to them, which form the core of their existence and therefore are capable of provoking intense emotions and actions. For those who consider the nation as a core aspect of their lives, the national flag is a key symbol that evokes all the themes that the nation means for them, like unity, identity, sacrifice and patriotism. Most religious key symbols evoke the entire cosmological principles of that religion, like the Om for the Hindus, the prayer wheel or Chakra for the Buddhists and so on. Summarising symbols perform a synthesis of ideas and emotions and a single object or action can therefore trigger a multitude of emotions, even actions.

The Elaborating symbols are those that deconstruct the complex and dense themes to make them more comprehensible and communicable, and easier to follow. They are marked by their recurrent appearance in various aspects of daily life and do not command the high emotion and focus of the summarizing symbols. They are necessary for successful social interactions and for the manoeuvring of daily life.

These elaborating symbols can further be divided into Root Metaphors and Key Scenarios. While the former is oriented towards thought, that is provides the cognitive orientations, the latter provides the cues for action, like a screen play or script. While the first help people understand the world around them in terms of comprehension and analysis the latter tells them what to do and under what circumstances. From the root metaphors one can identify the unifying principle underlying a variety of experiences and also see the reflection of these experiences in the metaphor itself. For example, cattle provide the root metaphor for the Dinka, who use them to classify and understand other aspects of their world, like colour classification, time schedules and seasons, aesthetics and visual experiences and so on. The latter are roadmaps for action. An apt example of a key scenario in India is the enactment of the Ramlila, where all the actions appropriate for various categories of kin and also other status holders in society are elaborated as ideal son, ideal husband, ideal wife, ideal brother and so on. These are also frequently alluded to in daily conversation and narratives; like for example if someone oversteps any restrictions it is referred to as overstepping the 'Lakshman Rekha' and devotion is idealised as equivalent to that of Hanuman, and brotherly duty as that of Lakshman. Thus, most Hindus find a guideline for future action in this script that is a key scenario par excellence.

Check Your Progress3

7) Whose work is a classic example of condensed symbols?

.....
.....
.....
.....

8) Name the two key elements in Ruth Benedict's work used to define the Japanese National character?

.....
.....
.....
.....

9) Who used the term core symbol?

.....
.....
.....
.....

10) Victor Turner referred to Schneider’s ‘core symbols’ as ——?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

11) Whose work deals with ‘key symbols’? Identify some key symbols.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

11.4 SOME CLASSICAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORKS ON SYMBOLIC AND INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Mary Douglas (1982) has devoted herself to analysing whether symbols are just expressive, in a neutral sort of way or whether they actually act upon the social situation to produce effects that may vary from society to society. Ritualism, is defined as an empty symbol, that has no meaning but is enacted only as a routine, as a habit by people in society, who otherwise have no inner connect with what they are doing. For example, many people perform a daily ritual of worship, more as a routine and as a deference to received traditions. They adhere to given rules and regulations of performance of the rituals and are more attentive to these details than to their emotional responses or even to the idea of divinity or some entity for which the ritual is being performed. In other words, the ritual, that has no ostensible function, is in itself taken as efficacious, if performed correctly and is therefore a powerful symbol in itself.

On the other hand, there are groups and communities who perform rituals with no such rigidity, not bothering about rules but about the emotional and devotional content. For example, she quotes from the ethnography of David Aberle (1966) that the traditional Navajo, were highly ritualistic, they believed that they must follow all the rules and regulations of performance of rituals, they believed in supernatural sanctions for the breach of taboos and rules of performance of rituals. The pre-colonised Navaho were closely knit community with close cooperation and unity between matrilineal kinsmen, who had strong mutual support systems with strong sanctions against any kind of disruption. People feared the breaking of rules, not because they thought in terms of morality and values, but because they were scared of the consequences of such a breach, that would primarily lead to and which ultimately was a breach in social order. In this way her analysis follows that of Durkheim, who had first pointed to the social functions of rituals. However, under colonisation, the Navaho, moved away from their origin systems of social control, when the Americans took over the legal and political roles,

earlier performed by their close-knit clan organizations. They lost most of their livelihood of sheep herding and the cooperation of kin groups for tending and grazing sheep was also gone. They were attacked by disease and loneliness in the reservations and suffered socially, culturally and emotionally. Most of the Navajo then switched to the Peyote cult, that involved a direct communion with the divinity or supernatural, through smoking of an intoxicant plant. Here there were no strict adherence to codes and to formal ritualism, but a loosely structured, spontaneous and personalised form of communication, that was beyond rules and based on emotions and faith. The ritualist symbolic system here was now weak and did not exert any control. Douglas extends the discussion to include other groups like the Bantu and the pygmies, who live in close association with each other but have very different lifeways and social organization. Studied by Turnbull (1961) in the Ituri forest, the pygmies are a classic study of a hunting food gathering band. From a comparison of the two, the agricultural Bantu with permanent village settlements have strong ritualistic behaviour, are bound by many rules and follow strict procedures for performance of their rituals, whereas the pygmies, who have loosely structured bands and wander around for hunting and food gathering with a strong emphasis on individuality in their culture, have no rituals to speak of. They relate to their environment with inner faith and beliefs that are more personalized than group oriented. Douglas then concludes, "that the most important determinant of ritualism is the experience of closed social groups. The man who has that experience associates boundaries with power and danger" (1982:14), the opposite happens with groups with weak boundaries who then place less emphasis on ritualism and are likely to be more individualistic. Also, as she points out in the case of the Bog Irish and the English churchmen in London, the marginalized and disadvantaged are more likely to depend on their own ritualism for comfort and support while the better placed have more universalistic and individualistic values.

Since symbolism is at the base of all human behaviour, there cannot be any ethnographic possibility without referring to some symbols or symbolic actions. One cannot for example describe any ritual or any life cycle ceremony or religious structure, without describing its symbolic meaning, what they mean to the members of that culture. Edmund Leach's article 'Magical Hair' (1958) has received much attention, as he tried to combine psychoanalytical and anthropological theories about the body. As we have seen earlier, body symbolism is a core of symbolic theory. The body symbolism also provides a common ground to explain similarities of symbolic expression across cultures. Leach had written his article following upon the publication by Berg (1951) linking shaving and hair cutting of the males to symbolic castration and the libidinous association of hair with sexuality as a recurrent theme across cultures. In his article Leach comes to the conclusion that in ritual terms long hair signifies uncontrolled sexuality, short, tightly bound hair signifies restricted sexuality and shaven hair, celibacy. In many religions but not in all, monks shave their hair, men generally keep their hair short and even if kept long, it is bound.

In later analysis Leach (1976) has described the ritual symbolisms of time; how certain annual rituals keep time and allow for the cosmological reckonings of the cycles of the universe. He theorised that time is not measured as a continuity, as a linear phenomenon that is irreversible, but in terms of intervals marked by symbolic inversions, reversals from ordinary life. Take for example water running from a tap, instead of viewing it as a continuous stream, one can also visualise it

as one drop following another, so that there is a possibility of discontinuity between one drop and the next. Annual rituals often have masquerades, role reversals, and the flouting of social norms as an integral part of the performances and rituals. Such 'reversals' are actually marking of the intervals, so that one phase of time becomes separated from another to indicate that one phase is over and another is going to begin. Often it is the same phase and not another, that is time can be cyclical and reversible also.

Interpretive Approach

To understand interpretive approach, the student has to first refer to the work of Max Weber, to whom sociology was a comprehensive science of social action, but as Aaron (2020: 169) explains, the emphasis is on comprehension, by which Weber meant the meaning given to the action by the actor. Here he deviated significantly from the positivist approach, where any action was understood by the meaning given to it by the observer, or the anthropologist, like Turner's explanations of ritual symbolism. To Weber, one needs to understand the action in terms of the actor's frame of reference and also when we understand something as rational, it is again rational as per the knowledge of the performer. The interpretive approach therefore looks at and comprehends the world from the actor's point of view. He defined rational action both in terms of a goal, and in terms of a value, and there is always an interdependence of these aspects. For example, if we consider science to be rational, then the goal of science, is that of finding the truth, but this is rational only in relation to the value that the scientific person puts on truth; if it were not so, the goal would have been different. Therefore, the rationality of any action is dependent upon the value that is held by the actor. To give another example, the value of a religious person lies in the realm of the sacred, and therefore his or her action needs to be understood in relation to that value. If the value is in the realm of devotion, then the goal will be likewise and hence the action will be rational only in that context and not in that of science. Geertz took off from Weber's famous adage, that men are suspended in webs of significance of their own meanings, and developed the interpretive approach in anthropology.

The interpretive approach formed a bridge between the earlier positivist approach and the later post-modern approach, by bringing subjectivity into the analysis. It raised question regarding explanation, by questioning the possibility of a purely objective and externally situated analysis purely looked at from the point of view of the analyst. Geertz brought in a paradigmatic change in methodology by introducing the concept of thick ethnography. By this Geertz meant that the ethnographer cannot be an impartial observer, but must try to get into the mood and motivations of the people she is observing. His thick description of the Balinese Cock Fight is often given as an example of thick ethnography, where he tries to analyse, not the function of the cock fight, but the emotional and mental involvement of the participants, their rationale for action as looked at from their own perspective and the nuances of emotional play that occurs during the entire event. Geertz, following Weber, brought about a change in anthropological methodology, where the observed was equally involved within the framework of explanation. Culture was to be comprehended and not to be analysed. It was not important to know the instrumental or functional aspects of any action but its meaning and the role it played in the life of the actors.

According to Clifford Geertz (1973), while culture is a system of symbols, the different subsystems within a culture are marked by their own system of symbols, and the power of these symbols are linked to their motivational capacity. According to Geertz the most powerful symbols are those that lie in the realm of the sacred, as the sacred is the most esoteric of all cultural realms. To Geertz, to understand a culture, one needs to interpret the symbols, for which one needs a very deep understanding of the culture, possible only through what he calls as ‘thick ethnography’. The meaning of any behaviour is not manifested at the surface but is obtainable by both the subjective interpretation of the actor and the external contextualization within the broader meaning system of the culture that has to be ascertained through in- depth qualitative fieldwork. Without reference to the way the actors understand and interpret their actions, it is not possible to get a realistic understanding of any culture. Since meanings are internal to the culture, they can be accessed only through intensive interactions with the members of that culture. Symbols are not just systems of meanings, but they are also associated with deep seated emotions and may stimulate moods and motivations, especially those that are associated with the sacred realm. Thus, symbols can stimulate both a state of mind, what Geertz refers to as a mood, and motivation for actions. The powerful symbols are situated in the realm of the sacred as the sacred stimulates our inner most emotions and pushes us to cross boundaries. However, religion is not the only source of sacred symbols that can be rooted in other forms of non-rational behaviour like nationalism and ideology. For example, for the Communists, the Red Book is comparable to the Bible.

Check Your Progress 4

12) Discuss Mary Douglas work on symbolism.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

13) Explain Clifford Geertz’s ‘thick ethnography’.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

11.5 SUMMARY

Symbolism is a vast area covering a large part of anthropological research and theorization. Symbolism runs through all the various anthropological theories, each of them having analysed symbols within their own framework of theory and academic interest. Though more closely associated with the interpretative field, symbols have been analysed within the positivist framework as in the works

of Lévi-Strauss, Leach and Victor Turner and more interpretatively in the works of Geertz, Christine Hugh-Jones, Pierre Bourdieu, and others who have taken into account the intuitions and narratives of the informants into their analysis. While Lévi-Strauss and Leach have attempted a universal, generalised structuralist analysis, Turner, along with other functionalists like E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Radcliffe-Brown have done symbolic analysis in the particularistic framework of unique cultures. The interpretative framework that takes into account the subjective interpretations of the actors and is done with an intense qualitative depth looks for meanings within the cognitive map of the culture itself.

For more theoretical discussions on symbolism the student can look up the works of Gluckmann (1962), Sperber (1974) and Wagner (1986), who have done pioneering work in the area of symbolism. Gluckmann had analysed the symbolic dimension of rituals. Symbolism remains a hall mark of anthropological analysis and has been used by theorists of all genre.

11.6 REFERENCES

Aberle, David. 1966. *The Peyote Religion among the Nahavo*. London: Aldine.

Benedict, Ruth. 1934. *Patterns of Culture*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Berg, Charles. 1951. *The Unconscious Significance of Hair*. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.

Douglas, Mary. 1982 [1970]. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*. New York: Pantheon Press

Firth, Raymond. 1973. *Symbols: Public and Private*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Foster, Mary Le Cron. 1994. "Symbolism: The Foundation of Culture" In Tim Ingold (ed.) *Companion Encyclopaedia of Anthropology*. London: Routledge. pp 366-395.

Geertz, Clifford. 1966. 'Religion as a Cultural System' in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*. A.S.A Monographs 3. London: Tavistock.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Hallpike, C.R. 1969. 'Social Hair' *Man*. n.s.4:256-64.

Leach, Edmund. 1958. 'Magical Hair' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 88(2):147-64.

1976. *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1949. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Boston: Beacon Press.

1963. *Structural Anthropology*. New York and London: Basic Books.

Ortner, Sherry. 1972. 'On Key Symbols' *American Anthropologists*. Vol 75: 1338-1346.

Sahlins, Marshall. 1981. *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of Sandwich Islands Kingdom*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Schneider, David. M. 1968. *American Kinship*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Sperber, Dan. 1974. *Rethinking Symbolism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turnbull, Colin. M. 1961. *The Forest People*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

1968. *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*. International Africa Institute. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

1962. "Three Symbols of passage in Ndembu Ritual" In Max Gluckman (ed.) *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*.

Wagner, Richard. 1986. *Symbols that stand for themselves*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wynn, T. 1979. 'The Intelligence of later Acheulian hominids'. *Man* (n.s).14(3): 371-91.

11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 11.1
- 2) Refer to section 11.1
- 3) Refer to section 11.1
- 4) Refer to section 11.5
- 5) Mary Douglas
- 6) Lévi-Strauss
- 7) Victor Turner in his work on the Ndembu (1968)
- 8) Chrysanthemum and the sword as the two elements.
- 9) David Schneider
- 10) Dominant symbol
- 11) Sherry Ortner. For the second part of the question refer to section 11.3.
- 12) Refer to section 11.4
- 13) Refer to section 11.4

UNIT 12 FEMINISM*

Contents

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 What is Feminism?
- 12.2 Early Evolution of Feminist Theory
- 12.3 Contemporary Critical Feminism
- 12.4 Challenging Heteronormativity
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 References
- 12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

Learning Objectives

After reading the unit, learners would be able to:

- discuss the concept of Feminism;
- give a brief sketch of the evolution of feminist theories; and
- critically analyse the Post-Structural Feminist Approach and Contemporary Critical Feminism.

12.0 INTRODUCTION

In most of the literate world, the production of knowledge was almost entirely in the hands of upper-class males, till almost the middle of the twentieth century. The renowned English writer Virginia Woolf, even at the height of her fame was denied entry into the library of Oxford University, just because she was a woman; as women were not allowed into the precincts of any educational institution of repute, as if their very steps would pollute these sanctified centres of knowledge. Women lost all their privileges after the Renaissance and industrial revolution in the West, as they became equated with nature, to be controlled and manipulated by men, who controlled knowledge, especially the rational, scientific knowledge for dominating nature (Ortner 1974). Even as the European societies extended their political domination to their colonies, they extended their patriarchal ideology to all parts of the world that they conquered (Etienne and Leacock 1980). In India, at least from the medieval period women had been denied education and even till today many suffer from illiteracy or inadequate access to knowledge. The close interrelation between knowledge and power indicates that women, again almost globally but kept out of the domain of power, not only in the public domain but even over their own bodies.

The first paradigm of feminist theory was therefore that of universal male domination (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974).

12.1 WHAT IS FEMINISM?

In its true meaning feminism is not just directed towards the inequality between men and women, but is a critical perspective directed towards all forms of

***Contributor:** Professor Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. New Delhi.

discrimination and inequality. Since all forms of domination and subordination involves power play and hierarchies, feminism is greatly involved with questions of power and representation and has the possibility of developing into a critical political movement. To understand what is feminism one needs to also differentiate it from gender theory and women's studies, two academic orientations often confused with feminism. Margaret Mead (1935) was the first anthropologist to challenge the theory of universal male domination by her ethnographic work done in the New Guineas. In three separate communities studied by her, in the same contiguous region, she demonstrated how men and women were very differently constructed and expected to follow roles quite different from that in the western world. In one society, both men and women were subdued and peaceful, in another, they were both equally aggressive and women had no nurturing characters, and in a third, they played roles diametrically opposite to that of western men and women. Her work had a great impact upon American society, especially on the women, who found themselves suddenly freed from the shackles of biological determinism. This was also the beginnings of gender theory that views gender as a social construct independent of biological sex and masculinity and femininity as culturally inscribed. Gender theory and feminist theory run parallel to each other.

Gender theory focuses on differential roles of men and women, the various ideological and cosmological influences on the formation of culturally appropriate gender models. Gender is appropriately a universal theme that forms the underlying script of all social relations such as the economy, the politics and the legal. It assumes difference but not necessarily a hierarchy or inequality. Feminism is on the other hand a political ideology and a methodology that is set to uncover the various ways patriarchy operates in society and the power relations involved; a feminist is also a possible activist. A gender theorist is only an analyst. A third pedagogical category is women's studies, that is a specific application of gender theory focussing only on women, their work, their lives, their problems and issues. The need for a discipline like women's studies was deemed necessary to make up for the lack of specific knowledge about women, as most studies, scientific or of the social sciences had focused on men. The realisation that women can inhabit a world separate from that of men, has led to this impetus for separate women's studies that focus on women, their roles and activities and other aspects of their lives. No doubt women's studies have emerged from the feminist perspective and follow a feminist methodology, that of prioritising the subjective point of view rather than to take a positivist stand. Unlike both gender studies and feminist studies, women's studies focus on only one half of humanity. Gender is not on the other hand a stand-alone category but is only understandable relationally. Moreover, gender can be a study of masculinity also. But whether focusing on men or on women, gender is always relational, for example Collier and Yanagisako's pioneering work on gender and kinship.

Here one must emphasise the methodological aspect of feminism, that is often, though not always, applied to gender studies and women's studies as well. Feminism arose as part of a post-structural anti-establishment movement, within and outside of academics. The Post World War II world was both critical of and disillusioned with institutions and conventions of morality and ethics that were deemed male centric, specifically white male centric, which eulogized aggression, dominance, racism, divisiveness and essentialism. The feminist critique was side by side with the anti-colonial and post-modern critique of modernist positivism

and science without humanism. Many sectors of humanity wished to move from their status as ‘objects’ to being subjects, to have agency both over their own lives and in the production of knowledge. The white, male centric global structures of dominance were being challenged, by those referred to as ‘natives’ of the former colonies and all other sections of marginalised humanities, that also included women.

The most salient criticism of positivism was its objectivism, its separation from the emotional and subjective content of analysis. The havoc brought about by a science devoid of ethics and morality put a question mark on scientific epistemology. In the social sciences such as anthropology, there was a recognition of the role of the knowledge producer in the creation and nature of knowledge itself. Feminism specifically situated itself against such knowledge that was not only produced by males but was also directed towards reproducing male dominance. For example, there is a large corpus of feminist literature that reveals how medical science reinforced patriarchy by using the most objective and rigorous methods to prove pre-conceived notions about women’s physical and mental inferiority (Gould 1980, Arnold 1993).

In anthropology, restudy by women scholars of the work of eminent male scholars showed up the unconscious subjective bias to which even the best of scholars was subjected. Annette Weiner’s (1976) visit to the Trobriand Islands revealed how Malinowski had overlooked the contribution of women to the economy of these islands. This was not a deliberate oversight but one that was a result of an unconscious subjectivity. So, the feminist and post-structural methodology in general accepted that no knowledge production is independent of the subjectivity of its producer. Especially, where the subject matter of study are other humans (anthropology, psychology etc) or living beings (primate behaviour, zoology etc) there is bound to be an interactional situation between the subjectivity of the scholar and the subjectivity of the person doing that study. Feminism accepts that the intersubjective methodology is the only way of producing knowledge and also that it is imperative to have knowledge production from multiple locations. This decentralisation of knowledge, privileging the voices that had earlier being muted is central to a feminist methodology. Feminists make extensive use of the narrative method and also privilege marginal voices (Behar and Gordon 1995). In this way feminism situates itself against a dominant ‘other, with the ‘other’ assuming different forms in different spatial, temporal and historical situations.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Define feminism.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) State how gender theory and women studies differ from feminism.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

12.2 EARLY EVOLUTION OF FEMINIST THEORY

The earliest feminist theories were bifurcated into the Radical Feminists and the Marxist Feminists. The former believed in the dictum of universal male domination, and traced the roots of male domination to biology and heterosexuality. There was a strong influence of Freudian psychoanalysis around the time feminism was taking shape in the west (Mitchell 1984[1966]). The feminists criticised psychoanalysis as not just a theory but also a technology of domination, emerging from the clinic. But Freud did not accept a biologically reductionist theory that ‘biology’ determined sexual identity, for in his schema there is a pre-oedipal phase of early childhood when boys and girls are identical and they are both attached to the mother. It is in the later childhood (beyond three years) that femininity appears in the form of ‘penis envy and castration desires’; making the woman an incomplete being, defined in terms of a ‘lack’. In other words, infants are not born gendered, but acquire these characters as they grow up interacting with parents of both sexes. Here the feminists put a query as to what would be the gender identity of children brought up by parents or surrogates who are undifferentiated by sex. Will there be no oedipal complex in that situation? One may recall Malinowski’s (1929) criticism based on his study of a matrilineal society, where the authority figure is the mother’s brother replacing the father in Freud’s Oedipal theory.

However, Jacques Lacan, the French psychoanalyst, reinterpreted Freud to say that the oedipal theory was not based upon biology, but the interpretation of biology in language, replacing the term penis with phallus, a more abstract term to designate sexuality. According to Lacan, kinship terms translate the norms of sexuality and instil them in the growing child culturally. For example, in a society with prescriptive marriage rules, terms appropriate for blood relations, like sister is used for the women who are tabooed for marriage. The Oedipal complex then expresses itself in the taboos which are internalised to form appropriately sexed individuals who can reproduce society. The presence or absence of the phallus creates social men and women, and since the latter are defined in terms of a ‘lack’; women remain dominated by men. To Lacan the phallus is more than a sexual organ, it is a symbol of masculine status, that is also circulated through women, by marriage. Women are exchanged between men, to reproduce the phallus in another lineage. The phallus therefore symbolises several social rights of men, including the rights over women. From Lacan’s theory one understands masculinity not as just sexuality, but as an expression of all kinds of male social privileges.

An anthropological theory, parallel to that of Lacan, was given by the French Structuralist, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1969), who, from the perspective of the

feminists, reduced women to objects of exchange between men. Lévi-Strauss had defined women as the gift par excellence and the most basic object that must be exchanged if society is to reproduce itself. He identified the universal incest taboo as not derived from nature but from the social need to form relationships, as the most basic relations are those of exchange. Marriage and kinship are the primary building blocks of society made possible by the incest taboo and exchange of women. There is much ethnographic evidence to show that men have been, in most historical societies, the subjects with the agency to give and women have been semi-objects to be given away. Among Hindus and Christians, it is the father who 'gives away' the bride, symbolising the woman as a possession of her father before she is transferred to another man by him. Yet as Rubin (2006) points out, in hunting food gathering societies, no one gives a woman away. She has full agency to make her own choice. It remains more of a matter of exploration of kinship systems as to who has rights and over whom. Even if it is shown that in most cases women have less rights than that of men; it cannot be reduced to a universal, as suggested by Lévi-Strauss. The hunting food gathering societies are also human societies formed without the exchange of women, which denies his theory that exchange of women is the basis of all societies.

Again, this theory rests upon the universalisation of heterosexuality by making the basic unit of social reproduction comprising of at least one man and one woman, based upon the universal sexual division of labour to ensure that marriage takes place between a man and a woman. The gendered division of labour is therefore a social mechanism to suppress the similarity between the sexes and to create social men and women (Rubin 2006: 95). If women are to be exchanged, it automatically implies that her sexuality needs to be controlled. Both psychoanalytic theory and theory of exchange as given by Lévi-Strauss put women as disadvantaged with respect to men, thereby supporting the universal subordination of women. Psychoanalytic theory also projects the development of the feminine persona as based on 'pain and humiliation' (Rubin 2006: 99). The famed feminist Simone de Beauvoir (1953) labelled women as the 'second sex' in society as she believed that whatever is required for the progress of the species-being is done by men while women do the mechanical/natural work of reproduction.

The Marxist feminists, following the work of Marx and Engels (1972), pinned the marginalization of women to the rise of capitalism and private property. It is because men want their property should go to their sons, they place restrictions on their women to ensure the purity of the offspring, and restrict inheritance in the male line. This theory found favour with many anthropologists such as Eleanor Leacock, who also linked the greater equality found in precapitalist societies with the lack of sense of property and ownership among them, giving examples from various indigenous societies especially the hunting and food gathering ones (Leacock and Devore 1982). With specific historical instances Etienne and Leacock (1980) also showed how colonisation and missionary activities promoted patriarchy. Within the western intellectual framework, matriliney was seen as inferior to patriliney and any society where women played an important role had to be at a lower stage of civilisation. The colonising European countries, saw imposition of patriarchy also as a civilising mission for them.

From a feminist Marxist perspective, all gendered activities are embedded in larger economic and political systems. For example, in marriage exchange there

are two economic possibilities, either a woman can only be exchanged against another woman, or there are material equivalents of women, like cows, pigs and money or in other words bride wealth. There are possible political implications of transfer of women, like among the royal families in the feudal period. Marriage also involves a class or status hierarchy. In many stratified societies, marriage is an integral signifier of status. Indian society is a prime example. Marxist feminists ventured out in the larger political economic milieu to analyse the possible position of women and there have been many successful analyses (Gunewardane and Kingsolver 2008).

As Brodtkin's (1989) discursive analysis on Marxist feminism describes, the most crucial problematic faced by feminist Marxists was the reconciliation of the notions of class, race and gender. In Marxist theory, the worker is an individual selling labour in the capitalist market, and this identity is generalised to obscure any other identity, that of gender or race. While first wave feminists thought that women would gain power only if they functioned as men; the second wave feminists, from the sixties onwards, paid more attention to women's work in the domestic sphere. This movement was born out of the grassroots movements of women of colour and those opposing colonial rule around the world. When feminists gave the now famous slogan, 'The personal is political'; it soon expanded to incorporate much more than just women to men relationships; such as lesbianism, reproductive rights and domestic violence. In countries like South Asia, the 'personal' is often a matter of bare survival, where female foetuses are often eliminated at birth and girl children struggle to survive against all odds. As more women from different locations joined in to produce knowledge for and about women, patriarchy, earlier understood only in the context of western capitalism, began to be expanded to include many more situations and forms of women's oppression.

While the first phase of feminism was directed towards more public issues, the second phase focussed on the domestic and family. According to Margaret Benston (1969) women played a key role in capitalist economy as the reproducers of labour at a much-reduced cost than if the system had to pay for that reproduction. This was made possible by the women's unpaid domestic work. The hours spent by a housewife in cooking, cleaning, caring for her husband and children, is unrecognised as productive labour within the capitalist system, yet it is this work, that helps reproduce the worker, and makes him available for productive work in the public sphere. In addition, women form part of what is known as the reserve army of labour that supports the formal organisation of the capitalist economy. This reserve army also includes the productive activities being carried on from home and the informal sector of the economy, at much cheaper rates than in the formal sector. The capitalist sector derives considerable benefits from this shadow economy while keeping it deliberately out of sight.

In the post- world war era, another dimension was gaining ground. Earlier, the worker was viewed politically only as a worker, irrespective of other social markings, like race, gender, ethnicity etc. But in the post-World War II era, the differences of gender and race in particular were becoming evident. As soon as women gained a voice, it became clear that they did not experience the capitalist system in the same way as men did. For example, even today, women carry the burden of caring and nurturing their families, even if they are working in the public domain. The problems faced by the working woman, at home and at work,

and even while commuting to work are not the same as men. Further on, as women and men from erstwhile muted sections of society, like the African-Americans, the indigenous and the non-western earlier colonized, entered the fray as producers of knowledge, it became evident that race and ethnicity played key roles in how a worker experienced the capitalist system. In other words, the homogenised version of class in Marxist theory stood to be corrected. For example, in an American company, while a white woman is more likely to be at a front desk secretarial position, an African -American woman is more likely to be back stage; both are more likely in supportive than in managerial positions.

Even class consciousness appeared in different ways in different people and they negotiated power in different ways. Group identity and cooperation in the community plays an important role, for example, for African American women were studied by Patricia Hill Collins (1989) and Elsa Barkley Brown (1989). According to them, African American women and even men, seek identity in their community and family for a positive construction, as they are constantly being evaluated negatively by the whites, in larger American society. Most African-American women reacted to the feminist issues of white middle class women, centred on their goals of liberation from men and the constraining heterosexual family life. African-American women on the other hand wanted to be freed from sexual exploitation and wished for normal family life with their partners, who were more often than not in jail. Thus, all forms of feminism, radical or Marxist, found a variety of expressions as feminism spread across the globe.

Check Your Progress 2

3) Who discussed woman as a ‘gift par excellence’?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4) Which anthropologist labelled women as the ‘second sex’?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5) What was the slogan of the feminist’s ideology?

.....
.....
.....
.....

6) Discuss Marxist feminism.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

12.3 CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL FEMINISM

Feminism emerged as an oppositional category with respect to both intellectual and social constructs. Women were trying to rectify the age-old wrongs practiced on them, both academically and culturally, related to the denial of full humanity to them as a category. Like Gayle Rubin (2006) has pointed out, it was not that there has never been any traffic in men, but they happen under specific conditions, to specific persons, but women have been trafficked (exchanged) as objects just because they are women. Similarly, psychoanalysis had doomed women to pain and humiliation as an essential aspect of becoming a woman. But the modern women do not believe in it. The new generation of feminists, have learnt to celebrate the fact that they are women, and rejected much of the earlier theories defining women.

The major issue for the contemporary feminists is that of identity denying the essentialism of earlier feminists. Most of what was taken as feminist literature is a derivative of the works and thoughts of western middle-class women. When such an essentialised ‘self’ (the feminine self) is pitted against the ‘other’ (the masculine other); there occurs a grave injustice and injury; to all those who do not fit, ethnically, historically and spatially, into that category of self and whose environment does not consist of the ‘other’ as understood in the middle-class European context. In the West, the first to disagree, were the Euro-American women of colour, the African-Americans for example. They came out strongly to assert that their needs and their problems were very different from that of middle-class white women.

When the first wave of feminism began in India, during the colonial period, it also began from the upper class and caste of women, later to be rejected by the lower castes and classes. Today in India we have a well-developed Dalit feminism. As pointed out by Abu-Lughod, who also opines that when woman becomes women, and gender has no specific referent, “feminism itself dissolves as a theory that can reflect the voice of a naturalised or essentialised speaker” (2006:155). From this we have to move on to the methodological perspective that all notions of self are subjectively constructed and when pitted against an essentialised ‘other’; it performs an act of symbolic violence, that of silencing the others, whose voices then become muted.

With these considerations feminism in the recent times has moved towards methodological ‘positionality’ as an essential tool of analysis. There is no monolithic category of woman opposed to a similarly constructed category of man. Instead, we have multiple feminine identities, situated in specific time and space contexts, fighting their battles against specific foes, that appear in the form

of local norms, indigenous versions of patriarchy and also the immediate technologies of domination (Rege 2006, Visveswaran 1994, Grewal and Caplan 2002, Channa 2013).

Feminists also find themselves in an uneasy relationship with the concept of culture. Culture forms an essential component of identity-based politics of the current times. Many nations contain subnational identities that are those of marginal people and groups who are asserting their political social identity, supported by their claims to cultural ethnicity. Yet as women have asserted, culture is often a tool for the oppression of women, oppressions that appear in many forms. For example, the women of the Naga communities of North-East of India, vociferously complain against the central government's policy to let the indigenous people practice their own customary civil laws. They complain the Naga customary laws are highly patriarchal especially as they deny inheritance to women altogether. Naga women prefer the Indian Civil code, as they would then get all the benefits of that law, of inheritance and legal personhood of many kinds. In this way women's interests are directly opposed to the identity politics of the men.

Since traditions are mostly constraining for women, modernity was initially seen as a potential liberating force for women, but that is not the way things happened. Patriarchy reinvented itself in many forms especially in the form of capitalism. As Rosaldo (1980) points out, women's subordination in the capitalist system has often been naturalised, even to their genes, as a lack of aggression and will to succeed, so that their subordination in the capitalist system and patriarchy becomes inevitable. Although the second wave of feminists were more concerned to counter this kind of biological reductionism, the third wave, especially triggered by the global environmental crises thought ahead.

In the twenty-first century, women have begun to celebrate femininity, rather than thinking about it as an impediment. Feminism is also equated with action and not just ideology. Harrison (2015:167) defines feminism as a theoretical perspective that is 'ultimately related to advocacy for women's rights, conceptualised as integral to an expanded notion of human rights.' A broader definition of gender is as a relation of power, opposed to patriarchy, in turn associated with all forms of sexism. The entry of non-western feminists in the discourse, like Kamala Visveswaran (1997) and Chandra Mohanty (2003), expanded gender relations to an expanded universe of nationalism, Islamism, Hindutva ideology, Pan-Africanism and all other kinds of ideological mechanisms that along with numerous forms of divisiveness and marginalities, reinforce and reproduce sexism and patriarchy in many forms in the modern globalised world.

The onslaught of globalisation and neo-liberalism has destroyed habitats, led to deforestation and species elimination and caused environmental degradation to result in global warming and climate change. As feminists have demonstrated through numerous data-based studies, women often bear the brunt of climate change and environmental degradation and consequently, it is women, assigned to nurturance and care who have reacted to masculine domination of the globe (Maathai 2003). Harrison (1997) has argued that the neoliberal forces causing environmental destruction and deepening of structural inequalities are also fundamentally gendered and project a form of masculinity that is directed to super-exploitation of women's productive and reproductive abilities to feed the capitalist systems of profit. The characters of aggression and macho masculinity

that is so much eulogised in western cultures is directly related to all forms of domination and exploitation, of women, of nature and of the marginalised, especially of subsistence- based economies and indigenous people and their environments (Shiva 1993).

For its survival, the world needs to the values of nurturance and qualities of preservation and conservation, peace and harmony that have been denigrated as feminine and of less value in the capitalist system. Ecofeminist Karen Warren (1997) is of the opinion that the closeness of women to nature as expressed in women’s responsibilities for care and nurture, their reliance on food, water and fodder opposes the masculine bias foreconomic developmentthat fails to take these basic subsistence requirements into account. Health and economic welfare of women are constantly being threatened by the loss of bio-diversity and climate change and therefore it is women who are in the forefront to challenge capitalism and the market forces. Thus, contemporary feminism does not deny that women are analogous to nature, but rather highlight it as a way to show women as a positive force to protect nature and saving it from capitalist forces destroying it.

In this way the new generation of feminists are loudly proclaiming that it is feminine virtues and qualities that will save the world. Rather than being just victims, women can also navigate themselves successfully in the face of challenges (Gunawardena and Kingsolver 2008, Channa and Porter 2015). Backed by data and strong ethnographies, this new generation of feminists are projecting femininity as a virtue, at the same time interrogating the theoretical notions of what femininity and masculinity stand for and represent.

Check Your Progress 3

7) What is the major issue for the contemporary feminists?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8) Discuss contemporary feminism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

12.4 CHALLENGING HETERONORMATIVITY

A radical challenge emerged out of the feminist movement at the end of the twentieth century. A number of feminists coming out in critique of the heterosexual model, that although criticised by earlier feminists, had always been taken for granted. All the feminists had worked their analysis and their criticism

taking the male-female duality as given. When feminists talked about ‘subjectivities’ they were speaking from a subjective position assumed to be female, no matter how defined or conceptualised. A number of mostly homosexual feminists critiqued this assumption, putting forth that there were many more subject positions possible than that of male and female. Even from normative women, there was a criticism of the essentialist and exclusionary nature of the category or term woman; many women across the world did not agree with any kind of given definition of what being a woman means. There has been considerable debate and academic discourse on this issue, but basically it all comes down to identity politics, the fact that the multiple sexual identities cannot be forced into just a binary classification and as Judith Butler (1990) has argued, even if we accept the now well- recognised definition of gender as being socially constructed, then how do we also assume that this construction will mime the biological binary of male and female? A construction can happen in many different ways and generate multiple identities going beyond just two. At present contemporary feminism is going beyond the essentialism of binary sexuality and encompassing a multitude of identities such as lesbian, transsexual, gay, queer and others as categories that continue to supper oppression and suppression and many of the parameters of oppression that we have outlined are also applicable to them. But there are dynamics that are unique to some identities and the scope of this unit does not cover all the ensuing debates and discourses. But the student can refer to Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) for an introduction to this discourse.

Check Your Progress 5

9) Which are the multitude of identities that are being studied under feminism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

12.5 SUMMARY

Feminism, is a theory, a methodology and a social movement, rooted in the realization by one half of humanity that they had been suppressed and muted for a very long period of human history. Although feminism as it is understood in contemporary times, is seen as having its roots in the west, as we have seen in this unit, its present- day ramifications are global. This is not to say that the same feminism has spread everywhere, but that spatially distinct feminisms now exist. We have traced the development of feminist theory from its early beginnings in the twentieth century as well as examined some of its main branches and proliferations. The twenty-first century has seen the emergence of a critical feminism, that critical of the ideal masculine /capitalist system dominating the world. Femininity, is celebrating itself, moving out of the melancholia of psychoanalysis and positivist theories of being objectified and dehumanised. Feminism is now a major critic of the environmental devastations caused by neo-liberal policies and market domination, pointing to peace, nurturance and

12.6 REFERENCES

- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. 'Writing Against Culture' in Richard G Fox(ed.) *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, pp 137-62.
- Arnold, David. 1993. *'Women and Medicine': Colonizing the Body*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barkely-Brown, Elsa. 1989. 'African-American Women's Quilting: A Framework for Conceptualizing and Teaching African American Women's History' *Signs*. 14(4): 921-9
- Behar, Ruth and D.A. Gordon (eds.) 1995. *Women Writing Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Benston, Margaret. 1969. 'The Political Economy of Women's Liberation', *Monthly Review*. 21(4):13-27.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge
- Channa, Subhadra. M. and Marilyn Porter (eds). 2015. *Gender, Livelihood and Environment: How Women Manage Resources*. Hyderabad: Orient Black Swan.
- Channa, Subhadra Mitra. 2013. *Gender in South Asia: Social Imagination and Constructed Realities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Collins, Patricia. Hill. 1989. 'The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought'. *Signs* 14(4): 745-73.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. 1953. *The Second Sex*. New York.
- Engels, Frederick. 1972. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. edited by Eleanor Leacock. New York: International Publishers.
- Etienne, Mona. and Eleanor Leacock. (ed.). 1980. *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Praeger.
- Grewal, Inderpal. and Caren Kaplan. 2002. *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Gould, Stephan Jay. 1980. 'Women's Brains' in *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History*. New York: W.W. Norton. pp 152-59.
- Gunawardena, Nandini and Ann Kingsolver. (eds.). 2008. *The Gender of Globalization: Women Navigating Cultural and Economic Marginalities*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Harrison, Faye. V. 2015. 'Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives on Global Apartheid, Environmental Injustice, and Women's Activism for Sustainable Well-being' In Channa, Subhadra, M. and Marilyn Porter. (eds.) *Gender, Livelihood and Environment: How Women Manage Resources*. Hyderabad: Orient Black

Swan. pp 166-199.

Leacock, Eleanor. and Richard Lee. 1982. *Politics and History in Band Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

Lewin, Ellen. (ed.). 2006. *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*. Blackwell

Maathai, Wangari. 2003. *The Green Belt Movement: Sharing the Approach and the Experience*. New York: Lantern Books.

Malinowski, B. 1929. *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*,

Mead, Margaret. 1935. *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*,

Mitchell, Juliet. 1984[1966]. *Women: The Longest Revolution: On Feminism, Literature and Psychoanalysis*, New York: Pantheon Books

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 2003. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ortner, Sherry. 1974. 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?' In Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (eds.) *Women, Culture and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Rege, Sharmila. 2006. *Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonies*. New Delhi: Zubaan.

Rosaldo, Michelle. 1980. 'The Use and Abuse of Anthropology: Reflections on Feminism and Cross- Cultural Understanding', *Signs*, 5(3):89-417.

Rosaldo, Michelle and Louise Lamphere. 1974. *Women, Culture and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Rubin, Gayle. 2006. 'The Traffic in Women: Notes on the "Political Economy" of Sex'. In Lewin, Ellen (ed.). *Feminist Anthropology: A Reader*, Blackwell, pp 87-106; Org. 1975 in Rayna R Reiter (ed.) *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. pp157-21

Sacks, Karen. Brodtkin. 1989. 'Toward a Unified Theory of Class, Race and Gender'. *American Ethnologist*. 16(3): 534-50.

Shiva, Vandana. 1993. 'Colonialism and the Evolution of Masculinist Forestry'. in Sandra Harding (ed) *The 'Racial' Economy of Science*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. pp 303-14.

Visveswaran, Kamala 1994. *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Minnesota; University of Minneapolis Press

Visveswaran, Kamala. 1997. 'Histories of Feminist Ethnography' *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 26:591-621.

Warren, Karen. J. (ed.) 1997. *Ecofeminism: Women, Culture, Nature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Weiner, Annette.B. 1976. *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Feminism

12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 12.1
- 2) Refer to section 12.1.
- 3) Lévi-Strauss
- 4) Simone de Beauvoir
- 5) 'Personal is Political'
- 6) Refer to section 12.2
- 7) Refer to section 12.3
- 8) Refer to section 12.3
- 9) Refer to section 12.4



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 13 NEW ETHNOGRAPHY AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGES*

Contents

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 New versus Old Ethnography
- 13.2 Types of New Ethnography
 - 13.2.1 Reflexivity
 - 13.2.2 Autoethnography
 - 13.2.3 Team Ethnography
 - 13.2.4 Dialogical Ethnography
- 13.3 Summary
- 13.4 References
- 13.5 Answers to Check Your Progress

Learning Objectives

Once you have studied this unit you should be able to:

- understand why New Ethnography appeared;
- distinguish between different types of New Ethnography; and
- write reflexive essays on different topics.

13.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will be discussing the change that took place in traditional field methodology and the emergence of 'New Ethnography'. We will also see what is 'new' about this kind of ethnography and how it differs from the 'old'. We will also discuss different types of new ethnography, how they arose and existed, and their relevance in today's world.

But first let us recollect on what ethnography is. The term comes from the Greek words, *ethnos* meaning 'folk, people, nation' and *grapho* meaning 'I write'. Thus, 'Ethnography' literally means 'to write about culture'. Therefore, by definition, it is a systematic study of a group of people and their cultures.

Some of the classic ethnographies include *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) by Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) by Margaret Mead, *The Nuer* (1940) by E. E. Evans-Pritchard among many others. These ethnographies were based on a long stay in the field usually for more than a year, running into several years for many, trying to understand different aspects of culture. Ethnographers before going to the field and after reaching it, spent months learning the local language since they believed that the use of interpreters could dilute their understanding of the people under study, and it could be antithesis to what they were trying to achieve – which is an emic view of the studied culture. Ethnographers selected people and locales far away from their own, usually in underdeveloped countries and people who were far away from modernity and

***Contributor:** Dr. Queenbala Marak, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Meghalaya.

living in a state of ‘primitiveness’. They depended largely on participant observation and key informants in their attempt to understand culture. In doing their fieldwork and in writing about them, they tried to adopt the positivist approach – trying to be scientific and objective – while trying to distance the personal from the professional (i.e., writing ethnography).

It was soon, however, realised that in writing about cultures scientifically, the ethnographer covers up the truth and does not narrate the actual and real situations. In the 1950s, anthropologists started writing bio-confessional ethnographies (also referred to as confessional tales) that made public the actual situation of what they had gone through – their personal feelings, dilemmas, discoveries, pleasant and unpleasant encounters etc. One of the early triggers was the publication of Malinowski’s field diaries in 1967. Similar confessional tales gave rise to much discussions and newer forms of writing culture. This was the beginning of new ethnography which brought in issues and variants like reflexivity, auto ethnography, feminist ethnography, critical ethnography, political ethnography, team ethnography, dialogical ethnography, collaborative ethnography among many others. Four of these are explained in detail in the next segments.

While discussing new ethnography we cannot ignore one of the works that influenced anthropology and ethnography – *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986) edited by James Clifford and George Marcus. This book helped to highlight the different political and philosophical predicaments that many ethnographers went through while writing about people and their cultures.

13.1 NEW VERSUS OLD ETHNOGRAPHY

Moving on from the brief introduction, let us now try to compare the differences between Old (i.e., traditional) and New Ethnography.

- 1) Old ethnography was written from the viewpoint of the so called ‘western gaze’ towards the little known, simple societies located in far-off places. Quite often these were part of the colonies or belonged to territories colonised by Europeans. Today researchers also undertake ethnography in their own social environment, although there is greater trend of still studying those located elsewhere.
- 2) Positivism was the basis of old ethnography, i.e., scientific knowledge based on empirical data which was taken to be the *only* way to the ‘truth’. New ethnography is post-positivist with the understanding that there are multiple truths, multiple voices, multiple perspectives in the study of a people and all of these needs to be taken into consideration.
- 3) In traditional ethnography, data was collected from informants living in the far-flung field areas. This data was then scientifically analysed and presented in the form of a text. Today, the researcher is also the informant – since he/she plays an ‘active role’ in the narration of the ethnography.
- 4) Old ethnography was mostly text-based – with data from field areas presented in prose form with first-person quotations (of the informant) interspersed within the text, though infrequently. New ethnography takes multiple forms – as dialogues, poems, songs, narratives etc., and is in some cases collaborative in nature.

- 5) Old ethnography stressed on objectivity in its approach, data collection, and in the writing process. On the other hand, newer forms of ethnography are imbued with subjectivity, and challenge the conventional distinction between objective and subjective writing.

Reflection

Western gaze – Earlier ethnographers were written by Western scholars on little known communities living in a state of ‘primitiveness’. By extension, western gaze refers to gaps that exist in studying cultures when researchers from dominating cultures write about small scale societies and cultures.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What is ethnography?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) What is Positivism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 3) List the differences between old and new ethnography.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

13.2 TYPES OF NEW ETHNOGRAPHY

13.2.1 Reflexivity

The word ‘reflexive’ comes from the Latin *reflexus*, meaning ‘bent back’, which in turn comes from *reflectere*– ‘to reflect’. Reflexivity, thus, is the process of reflection, which takes itself as the object; in the most basic sense, it refers to reflecting on *oneself* as the *object* of provocative, unrelenting thought and contemplation (Nazaruk 2011: 73). This process has given a focus on the ethnographer’s proverbial *self*: self-examination, self-strategies, self-discovery,

self-intuition, self-critique, self-determination, and selfhood (ibid.p.74).

Reflexivity in anthropology is an outcome of three critical episodes that took place. *First*, the acknowledgement that the discipline of anthropology was European-centric (or having the western gaze) in its approaches and researches; and hence unwittingly it was involved in extending issues of inequality as a result of European colonization. This approach was critically assessed by authors such as Dell Hymes and Talal Asad. *Second*, the emergence of the feminist movement had a strong impact on anthropology, which was accused of being androcentric so far. The feminist intervention led to an emphasis on positionality – a reflexivity that is enacted through the explicit acknowledgment and theoreticisation of the “situatedness and partiality of all claims to knowledge” (Marcus 1998: 198). *Third*, the 1967 publication of Malinowski’s field diaries (*A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*) revealed the subjectivity in Malinowski’s fieldwork even though he had covered it up in his monograph. He was now known to curse his subjects (the Trobriand people) in his diary, but he edified their human condition in his ethnographic monograph (Nazaruk 2011).

In 1986, two important volumes were published which focused on different forms of new ethnography and supported reflexivity in writing using unconventional strategies such as dialogue, pastiche, and memoir – James Clifford and George Marcus’s *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* and Michael Fisher and George Marcus’s *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.

In anthropology, reflexivity has two different meanings – *One*, which refers to the researcher’s awareness of an analytic focus on his or her relationship to the field of study; and *Two*, that attends to the ways that cultural practices involve consciousness and commentary on themselves. The first type of reflexivity is not confined to anthropology alone, but is part of a more general self-critique that took place in social sciences. The second type became an important part of the critique of the colonial roots and positivist approach of anthropology in the *Writing Cultures movement*. This has drastically changed the methodological approaches in anthropology – with emphasis on reflexive understanding of the ethnographer and his/her field study, and calls for collaboration with research participants (and no more subjects or informants).

Important reflexive ethnographies include the following:

- *Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight* by Clifford Geertz (1972)
- *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* by Paul Rabinow (1977)
- *The Headman and I* by Jean-Paul Dumont (1978)
- *Tuhami* by Vincent Crapanzano (1980)
- *Moroccan Dialogues* by Kevin Dwyer (1982)

13.2.2 Autoethnography

The word *auto* in autoethnography refers to the ‘self’ (auto); therefore, in autoethnography it refers to the turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography looking at the larger context wherein self-experiences occur (Denzin 1997: 227).

The term ‘autoethnography’ was first coined by Raymond Firth in his seminar on structuralism in 1966 (Hayano 1979). In his lecture, Firth made a reference to

Jomo Kenyatta's study of his native Kikuyu people. He narrated how when Kenyatta first presented his field material in Malinowski's seminar, he touched off a heated shouting match with another Kikuyu speaker a white African, L. S. B. Leakey. Their argument raised the question of judging the validity of anthropological data by assessing the characteristics, interests, and origin of the person who did the fieldwork.

Now let us see how autoethnography as a genre of ethnography develop. According to Hayano (1979), the three reasons for its development include the following:

- 1) Fieldwork under the wing of friendly colonial authorities was no longer feasible, and the merging of formerly tribal peoples into peasant and urban social systems made it impossible to study small, isolated tribal groups as they were now merged with the larger social systems.
- 2) Trained minority and foreign anthropologists started doing ethnography in their home territories, either by choice or social restriction.
- 3) Specializations such as urban anthropology, applied or action anthropology and other interdisciplinary studies led many students to do at least some pre-doctoral fieldwork in their own locales.

However, autoethnography, as known today, refers to much more than native ethnography, i.e., ethnography written by native scholars.

Though it has several meanings, but today it largely refers to both the *method* and the *product* of researching and writing about personal lived experiences and their relationship to culture (Ellis 2004: xix). As a methodology it acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they do not exist. Auto-ethnographers research themselves in relation to others (Boylorn and Orbe 2014). It is a research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political (Ellis 2004: page no).

So, is autoethnography completely different from traditional ethnography? Or, are there points of convergence and divergence between the two?

- 1) Like ethnographers, autoethnographers follow similar ethnographic research process by systematically collecting data, analysing and interpreting them, and producing scholarly reports.
- 2) Like ethnographers, autoethnographers attempt to achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation, but through the self.
- 3) Autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data, which traditional ethnographers desist from.

Autoethnography began in the 1980s as a protest to the existing social science methodologies. Even though experimentation with self-observation and analysis started in 1960s, very few anthropologists ventured into this except an occasional methodological note (in field notes and diaries), or in confessional tales. The publication of two volumes in 1992 captured this trend and influenced its subsequent development. These were –

- 1) *Anthropology and Autobiography* (1992) by Judith Oakley and Helen Callaway aimed to convey personal narratives about experiences in the field, and open discussion on the role of the anthropologist as a person in the construction of knowledge in the field.
- 2) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992) by Pierre Bourdieu who delineated an intellectual stance that he called 'anti-autobiography' to refer to an approach of social science research that does not privilege the individualism of the author (like in autobiography), but, rather, required an awareness of the researcher's positioning in various social fields and social spaces, as well as a broader critique of the ways in which social science constructs its objects.

Well-known books in autoethnography today include:

- *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Lives and Telling Stories* by Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis (2016)
- *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life* by Laurel Richardson (1997)
- *Interpretive Autoethnography* by Norman Denzin (2014)
- *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks your Heart* by Ruth Behar (2014)
- *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* by Deborah Reed-Danahay (1997)

When we analyse the works of these authors and more, it becomes clear that there is no single type of autoethnography. There are several variations or genres which include the following:

- 1) *Native Ethnography* – in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group.
- 2) *Ethnic Autobiography* – personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups.
- 3) *Autobiographical Ethnography* – in which anthropologists interject personal experiences into ethnographic writing.
- 4) *Evocative or Emotional Autoethnography* – which include the use of systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall; the inclusion of the researcher's vulnerable selves, emotions, body, and spirit; the production of evocative stories that create the effect of reality; the celebration of concrete experience and intimate detail; the examination of how human experience is endowed with meaning; a concern with moral, ethical, and political consequences; an encouragement of compassion and empathy; a focus on helping us know how to live and cope; the featuring of multiple voices and the repositioning of readers and 'subjects' as co-participants in dialogue; and the seeking of a fusion (Ellis 2004).
- 5) *Analytic Autoethnography* – this refers to ethnographic work in which the researcher is a full member in the research group or setting, visible as such in the researcher's published texts, and committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (Anderson 2006).

- 6) *Critical Autoethnography* – begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain.

This method of analysing culture through the self, however, is not free from criticisms. Some of the criticisms refer to the use of intensive participant observation, to the neglect of other research tools, in the undertaking of such a research; and that in field selection the choice of a field location is often determined by the researcher's identity and group membership.

Reflection

Write an essay on a social incident from the past that has impacted you greatly. Pay special attention to the context, the social actors involved, how you felt and behaved, and how you feel looking back at it.

13.2.3 Team Ethnography

Have you ever played a team sport? When we look at the game of cricket or football, we can understand the importance of all the players involved. Each player has a role to play – in the former, the captain has to guide, the fielder's field, the batsman bats, the bowler bowls, the wicket keeper attempts to keep the wicket etc. When a team wins, even though one or two players might have been outstanding; it is taken as a team effort. If the whole team plays together according to a plan, then the team wins. This is how team ethnography also works!

Ethnography is usually thought to be a solitary work, but much fieldwork and eventual ethnography is team oriented. Ken Erickson and Donald Stull say: "Teams are made up of players, and players have roles to play and jobs to do. Roles must be defined, and players must accept and carry them out, no less in the field than on the field" (1998: 61).

Team ethnography works in two ways – (a) a number of researchers work on a project – each of whom have a defined role to play, and (b) collaborative research in which the researched (i.e., subjects/ informants) are co-researchers or co-partners or research participants in the conduct and writing of an ethnography.

The traditional ethnographer was a lone researcher. Today from single researchers, there is a shift to multiple researchers – especially in the study of not one, but multiple sites. These researchers could be co-workers from the same research areas, or from different disciplines making it an inter-disciplinary work, or across countries making the study a *global ethnography*. In such a research, there is more than one researcher engaged in research and in writing about them.

The composition of a team (in team ethnography) and their roles were defined by Diane Austin (2003) as follows:

- 1) Resident ethnographers, non-resident ethnographers and teachers can comprise the team,
- 2) One lead researcher is responsible for the overall study and meeting the needs of the sponsor and community, and another is dedicated to ensuring that key aspects of knowledge methodology are followed and teachers' needs are met,

- 3) Integration of non-resident researchers as a means to sharpen the team's focus on particular issues and include topics and populations that are revealed during the study, and
- 4) Clear expectations, boundaries, and job demarcation of all researchers.

It is clear that in such a team effort, there will be several advantages and disadvantages. The advantages include: (a) Ability to collect focused data in several settings simultaneously within a short time-span, and (b) Sharing of experiences and interpretations between researchers contribute to a more holistic understanding of the research topic. On the other hand, the disadvantages include: (a) Epistemological and methodological differences of team members could lead to unending arguments, (b) Representation of diverse voices in the research process, such as caste, gender, politics etc. could lead to badly constructed ethnography, and (c) Conflicting roles as evaluators and critical researchers. Therefore, though the multiple layers of collaboration can lead to greater understanding through multiple meanings and through multiple layers of cooperation; it could also lead to greater fragmentation, uncertainty, and chaos.

The second type of team ethnography refers to collaborative ethnography. Collaboration in ethnography is neither new nor noteworthy in and of itself, although what constitutes collaboration and indeed ethnography is subject to debate (Mills and Ratcliffe 2012). To collaborate means, literally, to work together, especially in an intellectual effort. While collaboration is central to the practice of ethnography, realising a more deliberate and explicit collaborative ethnography implies resituating collaborative practice at every stage of the ethnographic process, from fieldwork to writing and back again (Lassiter 2005).

Collaborative ethnography highlights and focuses on collaboration specifically between ethnographers and research participants. People who give information are no longer called 'informants', rather they are now referred to as 'research participants'. This type of ethnography seeks to make collaboration an explicit and deliberate part of not only fieldwork but also part of the writing process itself. Community collaborators thus become a central part of the construction of ethnographic texts, which shifts their role from 'informants' (who merely inform the knowledge on which ethnographies are based), to 'consultants' (who co-interpret knowledge and its representation along with the ethnographer).

Historians of anthropology have elaborated a number of important collaborations between ethnographers and their consultants in the discipline's developmental years – collaborations that built upon and extended the collaborative requisite of fieldwork into the collaborative writing of ethnographic texts. American anthropologist Franz Boas and George Hunt collaborated on *The Social Organization and the Secret Societies of the Kwakiutl Indians* (1897). This portrait of a Native North American society was the result of Boas' fieldwork among the Kwakwaka'wakw of British Columbia and a collaboration with his indigenous research partner, George Hunt. Drawing on a Kwakwaka'wakw metaphor, Boas imagined his book as a storage box for 'laws and stories', preserving them for science in case the culture vanished under colonial impact.

However, today, collaboration is stressed upon in researches undertaken by Universities and Institutes. This has emerged due to issues of ethical concerns and the need of giving credit to cultural informants who do much more than merely provide information.

Reflection

- *Confessional tales* – These refer to the researcher’s true story or confessions of how he/ she felt in the field, how he/she reacted to situations, and how he/ she behaved. This is in opposition to the earlier style of ethnography that was a formal, edited and impersonal account of people and their cultures.
- *Emic* – Opposed to an etic stance, an emic view refers to the insider’s view, i.e., how a culture is looked at meaningfully from the perspective of a person within that culture.
- *Global ethnography* – Also referred to as multi-sited ethnography, this refers to a research that is conducted across two or more countries. These studies could relate to migration, Diaspora, global phenomena etc.
- *Key informant* – Key informants are people with specialist knowledge who are consulted by researchers on a particular topic frequently. Sometimes they are also consulted to check the reliability of data collected from other sources.
- *Memoir* – This is a historical or biographical account written from personal knowledge.
- *Participant observation* – This is a qualitative research method in which the researcher not only observes the people under study, but also actively engages in the activities of the people he/she is studying.

13.2.4 Dialogical Ethnography

What is a *dialogue*? Dialogue comes from the Greek *dialogos*. *Dia* in ‘dialogue’ refers to ‘across’ or ‘through’. It refers to a written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people. But what does dialogical ethnography refer to? Does it refer to dialogues that take place between two or more people in the field? How can dialogues be made into ethnography?

In traditional ethnography, there are records of dialogues among natives, dialogues between fieldworkers and natives, and dialogues among returned fieldworkers. Anthropology has always been about dialogues between researchers and natives, but when we come back from the field and write about them, we do not let the natives speak. We mute them, and we speak instead. When we insert brief quotations, we do it as a means to support what we have written about, or theorised; and even in doing so, we use abridged versions, or what we think they said or meant. In confessional tales, which spearheaded the reflexivity movement, the dialogue is internal – the ethnographer has the dialogue with himself or herself. In the much quoted *Tristes Tropiques* by Levi-Strauss (1955), not a single Brazilian Indian ever utters so much as one complete sentence, not even with the help of an interpreter. Conversations may be summarized or conclusions drawn, but they were not often quoted.

The need for the voice of the ‘informants’ who was providing the information and who in many instances were helping in decoding their culture, was strongly felt in anthropology. In 1957, Paul Radin called for a more directly dialogical approach citing two examples that were already published. One was a brief dialogue between J. R. Walker and Finger, a priest of the Oglala Sioux religion

published in 1917. The other was a book-length dialogue between Marcel Griaule and Ogotemelli a priest of the Dogon religion which appeared in 1948. Thus, if we are look for pioneers in the area of dialogical ethnography, we can cite the names of J. R. Walker, Finger, Marcel Griaule and Ogotemelli. This is also an example of collaborative ethnography.

Important works in this genre include:

- *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* by Vincent Crapanzano (2013)
- *Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question* by Kevin Dwyer and Faqir Muhammad (1987)
- *The Dialogic Emergence of Culture* by Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim (1995)

There is a lot of variability in these authors' approach, but in general each of them were interested in the personal encounter of the anthropologist and the 'informant' and in examining how that encounter serves as the origin of the material that would later be smoothed in to what would later be a seamless ethnography (Golub 2016).

So how does dialogical ethnography differ from traditional ethnography?

- 1) A dialogue is a speech between two people who are in some way opposed, and a written ethnography (or a monograph) is a text that stands alone.
- 2) Dialogue is agonistic, live and dramatic; while the other is pictorial, static and authoritative (Crapanzano 1990).

However, like all genres of new ethnography, this is also not free from problems. One of the biggest issues is connected to the collaboration itself with the local or native informant: (a) If collaborations are to be based through the medium of the written word, research participants may not be equipped with the levels of literacy required to represent their own experiences and reflections faithfully through text, (b) How representative any accounts of a particular community or groups of people are, will always be open to question, (c) A dialogical approach may only be practical with a relatively small number of people, (d) Selection of participants for such a dialogic ethnography is not only difficult but burdened with bias.

The second challenge in such an approach is the actual dialogical process itself: (a) How to go about the dialogue? (b) How many sittings will be required for the dialogue? (c) How and in what manner to introduce the topic of interest? (d) What to do if the participant does not talk or digresses from the topic of interest?

A third challenge concerns its appropriateness. As mentioned, working in this way is not necessarily suitable or desirable in all cases. Though clearly researchers and those involved in these projects may have different life projects, motivations, worldviews and so forth, these products or encounters show that there is also room for at least a partial overlap or a willingness to work together. Were such willingness not to be found, it would not be possible or desirable to pursue such an endeavour. What is important from these dialogues is the sense of mutual learning and respect, and how through embodying different 'projects' (of worldview, ethics, epistemology, ontology) the participants in many ways learn about how much they share in common (Butler 2013).

Check Your Progress 2

4) List the types of new ethnographies.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5) Explain reflexivity.

.....
.....
.....
.....

6) What is autoethnography?

.....
.....
.....
.....

7) What should be the composition of a 'team' in team ethnography as given by Austin.

.....
.....
.....
.....

8) What is dialogical ethnography?

.....
.....
.....
.....

9) List two works each in the genre of a. reflexive ethnography, b. auto ethnography, c. team ethnography and d. dialogical ethnography.

.....
.....
.....
.....

13.3 SUMMARY

As we have seen in the foregoing sections, New Ethnography emerged as a protest against the big-brotherly attitude of ‘Western anthropologists’ having an androcentric view. What was earlier glorified for its positivist stance, ethnography now was seen to be a monologue, untrue, and edited versions of the real story. It also became clear that in doing and writing ethnographies there were multiple voices, multiple identities and multiple actors – all of which needed to be given space. This included not only the natives being studied, but also the ethnographer himself/ herself, and his/ her own positionality and life experiences both in and off the field. All these gave rise to reflexive ethnography and autoethnography. The emergent issues of ethics and channels of trying to be ethical in the field and while writing about a people gave rise to other genres of new ethnography – that of team or collaborative ethnography and dialogical ethnography. Despite criticisms of subjectivity and biasness levelled against new ethnography, it cannot be denied that newer forms of representation has only enriched the discipline and given voice to the once voiceless.

13.4 REFERENCES

- Anderson, L. 2006. ‘Analytic autoethnography’. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4): 373-395.
- Austin, D. E. 2003. ‘Community-based collaborative team ethnography’. *Human Organization*, 62(2): 143-152.
- Boylorn, R. M and M. P. Orbe. 2014. *Critical Autoethnography: Intersecting Cultural Identities in Everyday Life*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Butler, U. M. 2013. ‘Notes on a Dialogical Anthropology’. In Sam Beck and Carl A. Maida (eds.), *Toward Engaged Anthropology*. Berghahn Books, 99-117.
- Crapanzano, V. 1990. ‘On Dialogue’. In Tullio Maranhao (ed.), *The Interpretation of Dialogue*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 269-91.
- Denzin, N. K. 1997. *Interpretive Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ellis, C. 2004. *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Erikson, K. C and D. D. Stull. 1998. *Doing Team Ethnography: Warnings and Advice*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage publications.
- Golub, A. 2016. ‘Dialogical anthropology in an age of controlled equivocation’. *Savage Minds: Notes and Queries in Anthropology*. <https://savageminds.org/2016/09/17/dialogical-anthropology-in-an-age-of-controlled-equivocation/>. DOA: 17/6/2019.
- Hayano, D. 1979. ‘Auto-ethnography: Paradigms, problems, and prospects’. *Human Organization*, 38:99-104.
- Lassiter, L. E. 2005. ‘Collaborative ethnography and public anthropology’. *Current Anthropology*, 46(1): 86-106.
- Marcus, G. E. 1998. *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Mills, D and R. Ratcliffe. 2012. 'After Method? Ethnography in the knowledge economy'. *Qualitative Research*, 12(2): 147-64.

Nazaruk, M. 2011. 'Reflexivity in anthropological discourse analysis'. *Anthropological Notebooks*, 17(1): 73-83.

13.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) See section 13.0 para 1, 2, 3
- 2) See section 13.1
- 3) See section 13.1
- 4) See section 13.0 para 4 and section 13.2
- 5) See section 13.2.1
- 6) See section 13.2.2
- 7) See section 13.2.3 para 5
- 8) See section 13.2.4
- 9) See section 13.2



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY