
UNIT 2 ETHNOGRAPHY

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.2 Theoretical Foundations or Criteria of Ethnographic Research
 - 2.3 Ethnography and its Aims, Objectives and Concepts
 - 2.4 Ethnography and its Methodology
 - 2.5 Ethnographic Process
 - 2.6 Ethnography and its Ethics
 - 2.7 Uses of Ethnography
 - 2.8 Summary
- Reference
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



Once you have gone through this unit, you should be able to:

- define each sub-unit of the subject matter thoroughly;
- understand the importance of each sub-unit in view of fieldwork study involved in recording the life styles of ethnic groups;
- perceive the fieldwork tradition in undertaking ethnographic studies;
- learn ethnography as an important qualitative research method in human cultural study at both micro-level and macro-level; and
- recognise the fundamentals of traditional fieldwork through ethnographic studies which form part and parcel of anthropology.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Literally speaking, ethnography is the science of 'ethnos', that is, nations, people or cultures. It is a qualitative research method often used in social sciences, particularly in anthropology and sociology. It is, somewhat, a technique employed for procuring empirical data on human societies/cultures through methods like participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, etc. However, in the biological sciences, this type of study is called a "field study" or "case report", both of which are used as common synonymous for 'ethnography' which is the scientific study of human social phenomena and communities and hence considered a branch of socio-cultural anthropology. It practically involves fieldwork in which an ethnographer lives among the population being studied. He tries to maintain objectivity, and works with the informants, who are particularly knowledgeable, for a considerable period of time of a year or more. After completing fieldwork, the ethnographer writes about his or her experiences by integrating multiple disciplines such as biology to analyse available food supplies or geology to study the terrain and physical environment.

Though ethnography is visualised by many as a field of study on “other” people such as obscure native tribes of Andaman Islands in the Arabian Sea, ethnographers can also work in the most familiar environments such as semi-nomadic life styles of Kurivikaran in Tamil Nadu. Ethnography is about studying the entirety of the human experience, from hunting and food-gathering tribes in India to pub-goers in the metropolitan cities.

People who want to pursue ethnography as a career have to study cultural anthropology. If possible, they should make use of fieldwork opportunities in school to see whether they can enjoy doing fieldwork. A good ethnographer is expected to be highly sociable and accommodative, rapidly picks up new languages and instantly assesses a wide range of situations. Most importantly, ethnography is about observation and cataloging, and written communication skills are a strong asset for any one who wants to excel in this academic arena.

In general, ethnography and ethnology are considered to be the areas of interests of anthropologists who are generalists and interested in relationships between people and the physical, socio-political, personal, cultural and historical aspects of their life. Though ethnographic studies are thought to be the prerogative of anthropologists, ethnographic research, particularly critical ethnography, has become rather popular with modern developments in the social sciences, and especially with the advent of feminism and women’s studies.

2.2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OR CRITERIA OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The structure and principles of ethnographic research are derived from anthropology. They determine the perspective and direct theory and models of research. The following are the characteristics of ethnographic research.

Culture

Ethnographers make a detailed study of culture which is a system shared by groups of people who practice and experience certain patterns of behaviour, values, norms and standards. They study culture as an entity in itself; they study how folk life is established, changed or destroyed and the ways in which culture is transmitted from one generation to another generation.

Further, the researcher tries to get first-hand information more from the respondent, who knows much about the research issue. This is important in the understanding of complex issues, ideal structures and deviations. His learning goes beyond the specific research topic and includes patterns of communication (including language), habits and cultural imperatives of the environment under investigation. All this requires, in many cases, long-term participant observation on the part of the ethnographer. While participating in the life of the community as a member of the group, the ethnographer acts as an instrument by involving the total personality in the research.

It is the everyday way of life, the everyday behaviour of people, etc. which is studied in ethnographic research. The researcher does not create and investigate experimental situations. The collection of data is done by the use of various methods available in anthropological research but the main ones remain observation and formal or informal conversations. Traditionally the emphasis is on studying a single community consisting of a small population. According

to the need, a researcher can also conduct investigation on a single person with the use of life history method. The data collected is finally given meaning by analysing and interpreting it on the basis of the functions and denotations of human deeds. This is done without much use of quantitative and statistical analysis.

Holism

Ethnographers and anthropologists perceive human action in the context of the whole system, as individual actions are manifestations of cultural standards and principles of the large socio-cultural system. Therefore, many feminists have employed critical ethnography to explain invisibility, oppression and exploitation of women in the context of the family and society.

In-depth Studies

Ethnographers are interested in making in-depth studies but not in “surface counting” survey data. They gather information by living for a longer period in the group they investigate and experiencing culture the way their subjects do. Their observation is naturalistic and captures social life as it unfolds in natural situations.

Chronology

Anthropologists are conventionally interested in primitive cultures, whereas sociologists and other social scientists deal with modern societies and culture. Despite this division, ethnography as a method is still employed by anthropologists, sociologists and social scientists irrespective of their chronological orientation.

Interactive-Reactive Approach

In order to study the research topic most effectively the ethnographer gathers first-hand information by employing a dynamic form of data collection and analysis that is based on flexibility, reactivity and self-correction. This enables him to adjust the approach, design and method.

Humanistic Perspective

Ethnographic research is conducted towards humanistic concerns and values that throw light on the essence of culture in which people live and experiences gained through living in their culture.

Cross-Cultural Frame of Reference

Ethnographic research makes use of previously collected information to understand other cultures and environments and to gear up the study to achieve more effective and realistic goals.

2.3 ETHNOGRAPHY AND ITS AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND CONCEPTS

The principal aim and character of ethnographic study is the methods, concepts and application of procedural rules that can be applied to the study of social life under study. As such it tends to rely on a number of particular data collection techniques, naturalistic observation, documentary analysis and in- depth interviews, etc. However, the primary aim of ethnographic research begins

with the selection of a problem or topic of interest. This suggests the most appropriate approach, i.e., survey or experimental schedule or model to guide the study, primarily containing the fieldwork, basic anthropological concepts, data collection methods/techniques, analysis and a specific writing style. Another important aspect of doing ethnographic study is the theory or model building, a guide to practice and without which it can not be conducted.

The problem or research topic which is chosen by the ethnographer to interpret and define has to be a problem which should have basic research validity and applicability. A study of parent-child conflict can also become an applied ethnographic activity. The ethnographer should also keep in mind that the problem to be studied has to be clearly expressed, examined and written about. The epistemological foundation of a chosen model has to be comprehended by the ethnographer. This model for ethnographic research should be concerned with an archetype which allows reflection and analysis. Such paradigms are ones which are able to accept perspectives which are manifold containing multiple actualities.

A research design is constructed for ethnographic study. This contains the indispensable fundamentals of enquiry and also a blue print to theorize each step of her/his work. It mainly includes the sequences to be followed in order to create knowledge and understanding of the problem at hand. Therefore it is fieldwork which can be said to be the distinctive component of an ethnographic research design. An ethnographic field study may involve six months to two years of pragmatic study.

The ethnographic study begins with a survey period to learn the basics such as the native language, kinship ties, census information, historical data and the basic structure and function of the culture under study. The main issue in fieldwork is probing questions, observation, asking insightful questions and writing down what is seen and heard. Life histories of individuals can be particularly illuminating. While doing ethnographic study one must then cross-check, compare, and triangulate this information before it becomes a foundation on which a knowledge base is built. The best reason to leave the field is the belief that enough data have been gathered to describe the culture or problem convincingly and to say something significant about it.

Conducting fieldwork and analysis of data collected go hand in hand. Thus one actually begins to write one's ethnography during fieldwork itself. It is however reanalysed and restructured as one moves forward. This is a simpler process in applied anthropological fieldwork than in conventional fieldwork. In an applied scenario the employers or clients insist on minutes of each session conducted or short reports of the findings. While collecting ethnographic data, the fieldworker should possess both the qualities of an emic and etic perspective. This helps her/him to provide both the insider's view point and at the same time s/he allows scientific deductions. A standard ethnography contains the description of the history of the community, the geography, social institutions, politics, religious organisations, economic systems, educational provisions, enculturation, etc. Ethnographies can be written in various ways and formats depending on the content. Ethnographic findings are finally conveyed through documents, recordings, films, speeches, photographs etc.

The broader concept of ethnography is that it is the anthropological study about a particular culture. The most popular ideational definition of culture being its

cognitive nature which comprises of the ideas, beliefs and knowledge that characterise a particular group of people. Moreover, a cognitive ethnographer would ask members of the social group studied about how they define their reality and their subcategories of existence and how they define their symbols, etc. As such both material and ideational definitions are useful at different times in exploring fully how groups of people think and behave in their natural environment. The ethnographer should stay longer in a community, build rapport and probe deep into individual lives for learning about the sacred subtle elements of the culture. In this way ethnographers can learn about the intricacies of a subgroup or community in order to describe it in all its richness and complexity. As such, a cultural interpretation rests on a foundation of carefully collected ethnographic data and hence s/he can assume a holistic outlook in research to gain a comprehensive and complete picture of a social group which might include the group's history, religion, politics, economy and environment. On the other hand, by contextualising data observations can be placed into a larger perspective. In view of an emic perspective the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities about a group can make the ethnographer understand why people think and act in different ways as they do. The other anthropological concepts of ethnographic study include the etic perspective, the group's external, non-judgmental orientation that prevents the ethnographer from making inappropriate and unnecessary value judgment about what s/he observes, the intercultural and intra-cultural diversity, the traditional concepts of studying the structure of a group for knowing it's social organisation and the study of symbols and rituals of a social group to crystallise the critical cultural knowledge.

2.4 ETHNOGRAPHY AND ITS METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic study tends to rely on a number of particular data collection techniques such as naturalistic observation, documentary analysis and in-depth interviews. When these methods are used it marks the ethnographer's application of study of people in a naturally occurring setting or 'field', in which the researcher participates directly where there is an intent exploration of meanings of these setting, their behavior and activities from the inside.

The prime method in ethnography being fieldwork (a variety of methods and techniques to ensure the integrity of the data) through selection and sampling of a place or people or program to study even though the ideal site for investigation of the research problem is not always accessible. The next step is to decide how to sample members of target population. It depends on the selection of approaches, first being the sources of information and its probability of little add to the study and who and what to study, which help to understand life in a given community. Resource constraints and deadlines may also limit the length of time for data gathering in the field-exploring, cross-checking and recording information. Apart from this, the first and foremost thing of ethnographic method of research being the ethnographer's entry through an introduction by a member of the same community which have a chilling effect on ethnographic research. The facilitator may be a chief, director, teacher, tramp, or gang leader who has some credibility with the group. A worthy reference and introduction to the people, reinforces the fieldworker's ability to investigate and collect data which is of good quality. Therefore if an internal and powerful person of the community introduces the fieldworker to the people, it helps in

warding off other unnecessary means of contact and lets the fieldworker maintain her/his independence. In order to enable fieldwork in a sequential manner the fieldworker has to partake of the following methods (participant observation and interviewing) and techniques (questionnaire, projecting, outcropping, proxemics, kinesics and folktales). They are briefly discussed below:

Participant Observation

This contains participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a professional distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data. It is the ethnographer's immersion in a culture to learn the language and seeing the pattern of behavior over time. A long-term residence helps the researcher to interlace the basic beliefs, fears, hopes and expectations of the people under study. This method sets the stage for more refined techniques such as projective techniques, questionnaires, etc. It can also help clarify the results of more refined instruments by providing a baseline of meaning and a way to reenter the field to explore the context for those (often unexpected) results (of validity and vitality). This requires close, long-term contact with people which include classroom observation, nonstop informal interviews, occasional substitute teaching, interaction with community members and using other research techniques such as long-distance phone calls, dinners, etc. In any case, the acquisition of ethnographic knowledge and understanding is a cyclical process. By penetrating the depth and skimming the surface an ethnographer can portray the cultural landscape in detail.

Interviewing

This is one of the most important data gathering techniques which explains and puts into a larger context what the ethnographer sees and experiences. He requires verbal interaction and language is the commodity of discourse. General interview types include structured, semi-structured, informal and retrospective interviews. Formally structured and semi-structured interviews are verbal approximations of a questionnaire with explicit research goals. These interviews are most useful at the middle and end stages of a study for the collection of data about a specific question or hypothesis whereas informal interviews are most common in ethnographic work which seem to be casual conversations but useful in establishing and maintaining a healthy rapport and offer the most natural situations or formats for data collection and analysis. The interviews also contain survey or grand tour questions, specific questions, open-ended or closed-ended questions, protocols and strategies, informant questions, etc.

Questionnaires

These are close to the approximations of structured interviews and they are perhaps the most formal and rigid form of exchange in the interviewing spectrum-the logical extension of an increasingly structured interview. However, these are qualitatively different from interviews because of the distance between the researcher and the respondent. Questionnaires do not have interactive nature.

Projective Techniques

These supplement and enhance fieldwork. They are helpful for gathering cultural and psychological information from group members. The participant's responses usually reveal individual needs, fears, inclinations and general worldview. The Rorschach ink blot tests are a classic projective technique

and many anthropologists adopt these tests to fit the local context. As such these techniques can be clues to lead to further inquiry or one of several sources of information to support an ongoing hypothesis and only the ethnographer's imagination limits the number of possible projective techniques.

Outcroppings

Outcropping is used in understanding the nuances of inner-city ethnography. Buildings, skyscrapers, burnt-out schools, worn out hospitals, malls, street art, urine traces in city streets, garbage, etc. tell us a lot about a city and the way it lives. The ethnographer takes note of such outcroppings to make an educated guess about the condition of a city, for example estimating the relative wealth or poverty of a locality. Such outcroppings are used in a larger context in ethnographic research.

Proxemics and Kinesics

Proxemics is the analysis of socially defined distance between people. For example, the seating arrangement at a meeting can reveal social meaning. Kinesics focuses on body language. Sensitivity to body language can also be instrumental in ethnographic research. For example, a clenched fist, a student's head on a desk, a scowl, a blush, a student sitting at the edge of a chair etc., provide useful information to the observant fieldworker.

Folktales

Folktales provide significant knowledge in both literate and non literate societies. Folktales are more often than not used as carriers of cultural norms and customs through generations. Such tales are created from situations, figures, surroundings which are local and relevant. Though the stories are not real the contents have incidences, subtleties, tinges which give an indication to the ethnographer of the real happenings in the profane, sacred, emotional and logical lives of people.

Ethnographic Equipments

Pen and paper, notepads, computers, laptops, voice recorders, cameras etc., are the tools of ethnography which are the extensions of human instrument, aids to memory and vision. These useful devices can facilitate the ethnographic mission by capturing the rich detail and flavour of ethnographic experience and then help to organise and analyse the data.

Activity

Explain different methods of Ethnography.

2.5 ETHNOGRAPHIC PROCESS

Ethnographic research follows certain procedural rules for studying people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of capturing their social meaning, economic activities, etc. When these procedural rules or methods are rooted at differential methodological frames of research process, its basic practice does not alter and the only difference lies between its methodological positions, status of the ethnography's representations of the field and the legitimacy of the criteria to evaluate them but not the practice of the method. The theme of ethnographic study comprises a series of actions hitherto known

as 'research process' that produce the end result of the study, and in ethnography it constitutes a naturalistic study of some aspect of social behaviour and meaning. Hence, these actions are collectively known as a process of research which can be coordinated and planned but these are kept together imaginatively, flexibly, often in a recognizable manner as to achieve the end result. In a way ethnographic study requires a research design but a careful one in a flexible manner.

The research design in ethnographic study mainly reflects the desire to achieve greater accuracy in the quantity of social and behavioural phenomena and it is an attempt to strengthen the social science objectivity. It should have a strategic plan with a broader research design that sets out for achieving good results. Hence, ethnographic research design is a plan that includes the following considerations:

- The outline and features of the topic addressed in the work, including aims and objectives of the research;
- Choice of research site or field;
- The resources available for the research including money, time, etc;
- The sampling of time and the events to be experienced in the field;
- Negotiation of access and trust in the field;
- The nature of the fieldworker's role(s) that is adopted when in the field and when interacting with informants;
- The question of gender and other: identities that have to be handled in the field;
- The form of analysis to be used, particularly whether qualitative computer packages are to be employed;
- Recording data unobtrusively; and
- Withdrawal from the field and the form(s) of dissemination that will be used to report the results.

During ethnographic study, the researcher has to follow certain data collection techniques as a central feature to fulfill her/his desire in the final presentation of the complete picture of a group's social history. To access social meanings, observe behaviour and work closely with the informants the following methods of data collection are relevant in addition to participant observation and in-depth interviewing.

Personal Documents

Schools, colleges, various government departments, banks, police, archives, credit card companies, mobile phone companies etc., maintain records about us. These personal documents contain personal information which is used as the basis of various sorts of official statistics. However, it is necessary to know whether they are primary or secondary documents. Primary documents are the original sets of data compiled by the writer like a letter, recorded conversation in a tape recorder, transcript, etc. The secondary documents contain data obtained from second hand information like newspaper report, an edited letter of some one's letters or an edited transcript of conversation. All these documents provide data for the aspiring researcher.

Studies of Natural Language

Language is mostly studied for the content of the talk. An area of study called 'pragmatics' or 'discourse analysis' examines the structure of the talk itself. Pragmatics is relevant as a data collection technique for three reasons; language is a form of social interaction; it purposes shared knowledge and is inseparable from its social setting; language and setting are closely tied; it is sometimes possible to reconstruct from a fragment of conversation the whole social world that produced it. For example, a single word '**consanguinity**' reveals a whole universe of kinship relations and social stereotypes.

Vignettes

While collecting data, vignette serves as a technique that involves hypothetical or real circumstances being put to respondents for their comments. This technique is often used to explore sensitive topics like drug injecting, HIV risk, premarital sex, etc. The stories in the vignettes must appear plausible and real, should not depict eccentric and extraordinary events.

Triangulation

The use of multiple methods is called triangulation which is a routine injunction to an ethnographic researcher. Denzin (1970) argued that triangulation should involve not just multiple methods (data triangulation) but also multiple investigators (investigator triangulation) and multiple methodological and theoretical frameworks (theoretical and methodological triangulation). Combined operations like this are feasible in ethnography. Triangulation always improves the quality of data and accuracy of ethnographic findings.

Other Aspects of Significance

The other items that are important in an ethnographic study are the study of patterns of thought and behaviour which are a form of ethnographic reliability and hence ethnographers see pattern of thought and action that repeat in various situations and with various players as it is a form of analysis in ethnographic interpretation. The ethnographer begins with a mass of undifferentiated ideas and behaviour and then collects pieces of information. Comparing, contrasting and sorting gross categories and minutiae until a discernible thought or behaviour becomes identified. For example, the observation of a middle-class family might reveal several patterns such as work, children's care, rituals, festive occasions, food consumption, and quarrels etc., which form the pattern of everyday life.

Key or focal events that are recorded or written by the fieldworker can be useful for analysing an entire culture in every social group. It is a lens through which a culture is viewed in a classical way. Key events become a metaphor for the culture and also illustrate how participation, observation and analysis are inextricably bound together during fieldwork. Visual representations such as maps, flowcharts, organisational charts etc., are useful in ethnographic research. Matrices provide a simple, systematic graphic way to compare and contrast data. S/he can compare and cross-reference categories of information to establish a picture of a range of behaviours or thought categories and are also helpful to identify emerging patterns in the data. Another endeavour of an ethnographer is the crystallization of her/his thoughts at various stages throughout ethnographic study which may bring a conclusion, a novel insight, and an earth-shattering epiphany. Thus, analysis and interpretation has no single

form or stage in ethnography. Multiple analyses and forms of analyses are essential which takes place throughout any ethnographic assessment right from the selection of the problem to the final stages of writing. Analysis is interactive and often cyclical in ethnography.

Activity

Write a short note on the process of an ethnographic field work.

2.6 ETHNOGRAPHY AND ITS ETHICS

As the ethnographic research is conducted among the living ethnic groups certain ethics have to be known and followed by the researcher. Before taking up fieldwork the researcher has to make clear about her/his goals to the members of the community with whom the subject matter lies so that s/he can gain the informed consent of the informants. It is also important to learn whether the group would prefer to be named in the written report of the research or given a pseudonym in order to offer the results of the research if the informants would like to read it. Another important aspect of ethics is that the researcher/s must be sure that the research does not harm or exploit the characteristic feature of that group among whom the study is undertaken. As the ethnographers do not work in a vacuum and often meddle into people's innermost secrets, sacred rites, achievements and failures, they should subscribe to a code of ethics that preserve the participants' rights, facilitates communication in the field and leaves the door open for further research. In addition, they have to be careful in trampling the feelings of natives or desecrate what the culture calls sacred. In this respect the ethical sensitivity on the part of ethnographers ensures not only the rights of the people but also the integrity of the data and a productive, enduring relationship between the people and the researcher. Professionalism and a delicate step demonstrate the ethnographer's deep interest, respect, administration and appreciation for the people's way of life.

Ethics pervades every stage of ethnographic work and therefore ethnographers must make intelligent and informed decisions that satisfy the demands of science and morality. Ethnographers must formally or informally seek consent (for taking photographs, tape recording, etc) to conduct fieldwork. It depends on the nature of request and the consent changes according to the context of the study. Honesty is another important aspect that the ethnographers keep in mind while collecting data and must be open about their task, explaining what they plan to study, how and why and hence deceptive techniques are unwarrantable. Ethnographers need the trust of the people they work with to complete their task, as actions speak louder than words. Ethnographic descriptions should be usually detailed and revealing and hence the ethnographers must exercise judgment in every instance in which an individual's identity becomes public. Ethnographers should offer the result of their research in its final form as a type of reciprocity but not become an obtrusive, contaminating or unethical activity.

As one advances in fieldwork there comes a stage towards the end where the ethnographer comes in contact with issues of what is known as guilty knowledge and dirty hands. '**Guilty knowledge**' is knowledge about illegitimate and criminal activities. '**Dirty hands**' is a term where the ethnographer cannot come out guiltless of misconduct. An ethnographer has ethical responsibility

to the community studied hence s/he is not supposed to divulge such cases for own gain in her/his research work.

Ethics and quality are also intrinsic elements in ethnographic work. Ethnographers have to maintain the quality of the process as well as outcome of their efforts. A lack of rigour or energy at any stage will diminish the quality and accuracy of the final product. Similarly, any decay in human relations during fieldwork will have an adverse impact on the ethnography. Any of these deficiencies can endanger the group under study through misrepresentation and misunderstanding.

Meeting scientific and ethical obligations to participants, colleagues, institutional sponsors, and tax payers requires rigorous efforts. A rigorous effort contributes meaning to a knowledge base. Thus, ethics guide the first and last steps of ethnography. Ethnographers stand at ethical cross roads throughout their research. This fact of ethnographic life sharpens the senses and ultimately refines and enhances the quality of the endeavour.

2.7 USES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

It is worth recalling that ethnography is a method of approach for studying an ethnic group on all aspects of its life. There are three basic usages of this study which are explained below:

Knowledge Generation

In the first use, it is an attempt to understand society by the generation of knowledge in a rigorous and systematic manner in order to produce generic propositional answers to questions about social life and organization. It means that ethnography can generate knowledge on a variety of subject matters relevant to different academic disciplines and to many occupations and working lives. Ethnographic enquiry can describe the folk structures of the group or way of life in the form of field realities, i.e., 'native' social meanings in the field, examine meanings of events and things concerning to the people under study, and can advocate research models in order to improve the behaviour of the people in the setting.

Theory-Building in Ethnographic Research

In the case of second usage, ethnography helps in theory-building. A theory is a set of interrelated propositions about human affairs and the social world that explain their regularities and properties. The generation of theory is sometimes listed as one of the criteria to judge ethnography. Some ethnographers have sought to produce nomothetic studies which aim at abstract generalisations and focus on the discovery of general patterns and the structural regularities in everyday behaviour. On the contrary, ideographic studies seek to explore the unique features of an individual case in order to discover social meaning it has for the participants. As such theory evolves during actual research and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection and theory and data.

Application of Ethnographic Research in Policy-Making

The third advantage of ethnographic research is its application to policy-making. Application of qualitative research reinforces the growth of applied ethnography

as it increases the chances of policy makers using ethnographic data in policy decisions which in turn make them more likely to support and fund future ethnographic research. Hence, the main features of ethnographic data are their richness and depth and so ethnography is premised on the belief that this is vital. As such, it can help to provide the worldview and social meanings of those affected by some policy or intervention strategy; it can help to provide the views of those thought to be part of the problem that the policy is intended to address; it can be used to evaluate the effects of policy; it can be used to identify the unintended consequences of policy initiatives; it can be used to provide cumulative evidence that supplies policy makers with a body of knowledge that is used to inform decision making and to supplement narrow quantitative information and add flesh to some factual data used to inform decision-making, etc.

In the area of feminism, ethnography serves as a powerful methodological tool, as it relies on interpretation and inter-subjective understanding between researchers and informants and aims at (1) documenting the lives and activities of women, (2) understanding the narratives of women from their points of view and (3) conceptualising women's behaviour as a byproduct of socio-cultural contexts.

Activity

Explain the uses of Ethnography.

2.8 SUMMARY

In the field of social science research ethnographic study attains utmost importance, as it is a record of a society in actual situation. It is a tool to be used for ensuring archaeological anthropology, a combination of anthropology and archaeology of past human history. It can be useful for studying right from the higher classes of society to the lowest strata in order to answer certain untenable questions. However, it requires methods and techniques to be followed for tapping good results which can explain the possible answers or understanding certain social groups in actual situations like daily events, social customs, rituals, inherent but hidden practices that can not be noticed or known through books, journals and other study materials, etc. Hence, ethnographic study has a significant position in social science research which requires an immense understanding of the subject matter of the social groups among which it has to be carried out. This is an important tool to be used in the post-modern and global moment which can still demonstrate how local processes are transformed under the pressure of globalisation and show how these global processes are themselves mediated by local factors to create localised variations and particularities. As such along with the persistence of local specialised social meanings, a form of ethnographic realism survives in the post-modern situations under the influence of post-postmodern practices and hence it stands as a technique used for ever, especially in the fields of anthropology, folklore, tribal studies, archaeology, etc.

Reference

Denzin, N. 1970. *Sociological Methods- A Source Book*. Chicago: Aldine.

Suggested Reading

Brewer, J.D. 2000. *Ethnography*. Buckingham and Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Hammersley, M. and P. Atkinson. 1983. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Tavistock.

Kenneth S. Goldstein 1992. *A Guide for Fieldworkers in Folklore*. Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates Inc.

Rynkiewicz, M.A. and Spradley, J.P. 1976. *Ethics and Anthropology: Dilemmas in Fieldwork*. New York: John Wiley.

White, W.F. 1955. *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sample Questions

- 1) What is ethnography? Explain its importance.
- 2) Write about the aims, objectives and concepts of ethnographic research.
- 3) What are the anthropological concepts of ethnographic study?
- 4) Examine the methodology of ethnography.
- 5) Why should ethnographers have ethics? What are the principles of ethics that ethnographers must follow?
- 6) Explain how ethnography is useful in social science research.