

INTERRELATION BETWEEN BIOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHY: CULTURAL ANALYSIS AS AN EXPERIMENTAL SYSTEM¹

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ABSTRACT

The interrelationship between ethnography and biographic studies has recently become a popular form of qualitative research. The current discourse on this field of investigation refers exclusively to “evocative autoethnography” that draws upon postmodern sensibilities, whose advocates distance themselves from realist and analytic ethnographic traditions. The dominance of evocative autoethnography and biographic has obscured recognition of the compatibility of autoethnographic investigation with more traditional ethnographic practices. Similarly, the modes of cultural analysis also have been systematically revised over a period, changing its variables that took on new cultural projection. The revision of the 1980’s included new approaches, using ethnography to investigate the changing nature of cultural and social forms. At the end of the twentieth century, inquiries drawn towards multidisciplinary tools that could be employed in making cultural analysis more trenchant and revealing. The most widely applied approach by anthropologists in development projects is the ethnographic approach, which investigates the changing nature of culture and applies qualitative/narrative analysis. The challenge for culture change, according to

¹ The title of the paper has been borrowed from the book *Anthropological Futures* written by Michael M. J. Fischer. In this book the author explores the uses of science studies paradigm of “experimental Systems” to consider how the social scientific notion of culture has evolved as an analytical tool since nineteenth century.

the anthropologist, is to understand the “everyday” form of thinking, expression, verbalization and comprehension. This paper tries to substantiate that performance of expressions are drawn from “cultural schemas”, and such community expression serves to explain more recent community ethnographic transformations. The paper also justifies the voices and expression of community performance as a ritual which has been empirically validated with the appreciation of community-level transformation/adaptation which can perceive to enhance universal ethnographic. The paper justifies the argument through a case study on a tribal-community² in India, their voices of expression and the sacred/ clandestine sexuality performance which has been incorporated within the public ethnography in order to prove their identity as a “tribe”, compromising their sacred value privacy.

Keywords: Ethnographic. Biographic. Cultural analysis. Indian tribal community. Performance and identity crisis..

RESUMO **INTER-RELAÇÃO ENTRE BIOGRAFIA E ETNOGRAFIA: ANÁLISE CULTURAL COMO SISTEMA EXPERIMENTAL**

A inter-relação entre etnografia e estudos biográficos tornou-se, recentemente, uma forma popular de pesquisa qualitativa. O discurso atual sobre esse campo de investigação refere-se exclusivamente à “autoetnografia evocativa”, que se baseia em sensibilidades pós-modernas, cujos defensores se distanciam das tradições etnográficas realistas e analíticas. O domínio da autoetnografia e da biografia evocativas tem obscurecido o reconhecimento da compatibilidade da investigação autoetnográfica com práticas etnográficas mais tradicionais. Do mesmo modo, os modos de análise cultural também foram sistematicamente revistos, ao longo de um período, alterando as suas variáveis, que assumiram uma nova saliência cultural. A revisão dos anos de 1980 incluiu novas abordagens, utilizando a etnografia para investigar a natureza mutável das formas culturais e sociais. No final do século XX, os inquéritos foram conduzidos para ferramentas multidisciplinares que poderiam ser utilizadas para tornar a análise cultural mais trinchada e reveladora. A abordagem mais amplamente aplicada pelos antropólogos em projetos de desenvolvimento é a etnográfica,

2 In India, Constitutional provisions are given special privileges to the communities who are categorised as ‘Other Backward Class (OBC), Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST). Both the Central Government and the State Government maintain its own list of the above OBC, SC and ST list. These communities are provided special privileges in education, employment and political participation. There are so much of identity crises in evolved over a period and the ‘claimers’ find alternative strategies in establishing their community identity to reap their constitutional benefits.

a qual investiga a natureza mutável da cultura e aplica a análise qualitativa/narrativa. O desafio para a mudança cultural, de acordo com o antropólogo, é entender a forma “cotidiana” de pensamento, expressão, verbalização e compreensão. O presente artigo tenta substanciar que o desempenho das expressões é extraído de “esquemas culturais”, e tal expressão comunitária serve para explicar transformações etnográficas comunitárias mais recentes. O artigo também justifica as vozes e a expressão da *performance* comunitária, como um ritual que tem sido empiricamente validado com a apreciação da transformação/adaptação no âmbito da comunidade, que pode perceber para melhorar a etnografia universal. O artigo justifica o argumento por meio de um estudo de caso sobre a comunidade tribal na Índia, suas vozes de expressão e o desempenho sexual sagrado/clandestino, que foi incorporado na etnografia pública, para provar sua identidade como uma “tribo”, comprometendo sua privacidade de valor sagrado.

Palavras-chave: Etnográfico. Biográfica. Análise cultural. Comunidade tribal indiana. Crise de performance e identidade.

RESUMEN **INTERRELACIÓN DE LA BIOGRAFÍA Y LA ETNOGRAFÍA: EL ANÁLISIS CULTURAL COMO SISTEMA EXPERIMENTAL**

La interrelación de la etnografía y los estudios biográficos se ha convertido recientemente en una forma popular de investigación cualitativa. El discurso actual sobre este campo de investigación se refiere exclusivamente a la “autoetnografía evocadora”, que se basa en sensibilidades posmodernas y cuyos defensores se distancian de las tradiciones etnográficas realistas y analíticas. El predominio de la autoetnografía evocativa y la biografía ha oscurecido el reconocimiento de la compatibilidad de la investigación autoetnográfica con las prácticas etnográficas más tradicionales. Del mismo modo, los modos de análisis cultural también han sido revisados sistemáticamente a lo largo de un período de tiempo, cambiando sus variables que adquirieron una nueva relevancia cultural. La revisión de los años ochenta incluyó nuevos enfoques, utilizando la etnografía para investigar la naturaleza cambiante de las formas culturales y sociales. A finales del siglo XX, las investigaciones se centraron en herramientas multidisciplinarias que podrían emplearse para hacer que el análisis cultural fuera más incisivo y revelador. El enfoque más ampliamente aplicado por los antropólogos en los proyectos de de-

sarrollo es el enfoque etnográfico, que investiga la naturaleza cambiante de la cultura aplicando un análisis cualitativo/narrativo. El reto para el cambio cultural, según el antropólogo, es entender esta forma “cotidiana” de pensar, expresarse, verbalizar y comprender. El presente documento trata de corroborar que la interpretación de las expresiones se basa en “esquemas culturales”, y que dicha expresión comunitaria sirve para explicar las nuevas transformaciones etnográficas de la comunidad. El documento también justifica las voces y la expresión de la actuación comunitaria como un ritual que ha sido validado empíricamente con la apreciación de la transformación/adaptación a nivel de la comunidad que puede percibir para mejorar la etnográfica universal. El documento justifica el argumento a través de un estudio de caso de la tribu-comunidad en la India, sus voces de expresión y el desempeño de la sexualidad sagrada/ clandestina que ha sido incorporada dentro de la etnografía pública con el fin de probar su identidad como una “tribu”, comprometiendo su valor sagrado de privacidad.

Palabras clave: Etnográfico. Biográfico. Análisis cultural. Comunidad tribal india. Crisis de desempeño e identidad.

Ethnography and its centrality as a theory

To study any cultural aspects of particular human group that is either a tribe or ethnic group, the data of cultural anthropology are derived ultimately from the direct observation of customary behaviour in particular societies and reporting, evaluating such observations are the tasks of ethnography. Ethnography is one of those words that we have invented by combining two Greek words: *ethno* + *graphy*. Ethno, as you may have guessed, has to do with ethnic or ethnicity. The root ethno means culture. Defining culture is a sticky, complicated business. Culture can be part of what we do; it may be understood as a “total way of life.” However, the definition of culture is even more complicated when applied empirically in developing, pluralistic and stratified societies. The implications of such a complex definition

and application put heavy pressure on simple communities and compromise their values by following alternative approaches.

Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by using the methods of data collection which capture the social meanings to their ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also in the activities, in order to collect the data in a systematic manner but without his/her meaning being imposed on them externally. It involves attribution of the meanings of the human action described and explained by the people. Hence, ethnography is a method for collecting data, but this cannot be distinguished from the broader theoretical and philosophical framework that gives authority to this way of collecting data.

Ethnography is central in the process of research methodology; it involves the intimate familiarity with day-to-day practices and the meanings of social action. To access social meanings, the researcher should observe behaviour/expression and work closely with informants and even participate in the field with them. Several methods of data collection are to be used in ethnography, such as in-depth interviewing, participant observation, studying personal documents and discuss analysis of natural language.

According to Hammersley & Atkinson (1998), ethnography is research with the following distinguish features:

People's behaviour is studied in everyday contexts rather than under unnatural or experimental circumstances created by the researchers; Data are collected by various techniques but primarily by means of observation; Data collection is flexible and unstructured to avoid prefixed arrangements that impose categories on what people say and do; The focus is normally on a single setting or group and is small-scale; The analysis of the data involves attribution of the meanings of the human action described and explained (HAMMERSLEY & ATKINSON, 1998, p. 110-11).

Ethnography becomes one particular way of doing qualitative research and is best summarized Brunt (1999). Field research involves the study of real-life situations. Field researchers therefore observe people in the settings in which they live and participate in their day-to-day activities and try to understand the cognitive perception. The methods that can be used in these studies are mostly unstructured flexible and open-ended.

Ethnographic description and accounting

The belief that fragments of recorded talk, extracts from field notes and reports of observed

actions can reliably represent a social world which cannot be completely described in the restricted spatial confines of an ethnographic text, as long as the ethnographer has been reflexive and thereby established his or her integrity and the authority of the data. The belief that small-scale, micro events in everyday life have at least common features with the broader social world, such that general processes permeate down to and are in part reproduced at the level of people's everyday lives. Thus, microscopic events can illustrate features of broader social processes, as long as the ethnographer sets out the grounds on which these empirical generalizations are made. The belief that people make sense of everyday lives, offering descriptions in their own way and accounting involving a complex reasoning process which must be analyzed if that social world is to be understood, although members' accounts should not be taken at face value.

Ethnography as a method

Ethnography as a method or theory was invented by Bronislaw Malinowski in 1915. He spent three years on the Trobriand Islands (New Guinea) and invented the modern form of fieldwork and ethnography as its analytic component with documented three types of data such as detailed description of day to day life and activities, all stories, narratives, myths, etc. and Synoptic Charts. Observation of people in their 'cultural contexts' and comprise study and systematic recording of human cultures; rather than studying people from the outside, you learn from people from the inside by aligning your actions with theirs. There is no disagreement among anthropologists on the scope and objectives of ethnography and most agree that it is method to perceive and register human interactions in social activities and scenarios. Anthropologists have emphasised

on the need to get out and mingle among the subjects of enquiry such that their perspectives are involved. As a subject, ethnography describes a culture in its entirety, or a part of culture. The method involves collection of data that describe a culture. In their attempt to achieve their goal of reconstructing the history of a particular culture, anthropologists should be careful not to let their own personal prejudices into play; personal involvement with the subjects under study is critical to understanding the social setting and therefore it is imperative that both sociologists and anthropologists view it as an exercise that will produce knowledge for wider dissemination. (BURKE and KIRK, 2001; BERNARD, 2004; JUPP, 2006; RADCLIFFE-BROWN, 1958; HARVEY, 1987a, 1987b; HAMMERSLEY, 2002a, 2002b). These definitions validate the empirical relevance and scientific documentation of material and non-material aspects of culture as 'writing culture' and justify the compatibility of autoethnographic research and the credibility of autoethnographers.

Autoethnographers

A blurring writing of selves apparent in the early uses of the term 'autoethnography' has had a productive path. In 1962, Kenyatta, the first President of independent Kenya, published the first autoethnography *Facing Mount Kenya*, which is considered too subjective and uncritical (HAYANO, 1979). Thereafter, in 1975, anthropologist Karl Heider formally introduced the term 'autoethnography' in the context of his research on *Dani* people (CHANG, 2008). This autoethnography consisted of cultural accounts of sweet potato grown by the *Dani* people, a *Papuan* culture in the highlands of *Irian Jaya* who were the key informants for Heider's doctoral research (HEIDER, 1975, 2006). Later, Hayano (1979) used the term 'autoethnogra-

phy' in a different way to refer to the study of an ethnographer's 'own people' in the context of himself as a card-playing insider. The culture of card playing in Southern California was his 'autobiographical connection to the ethnography' (CHANG, 2008; DENSHIRE, 2014). Cognitive perspectives suggest that one's self-representation or autobiography affects how one thinks about and gives meaning to experiences. This is not a new phenomenon and has long been termed as 'cultural practice' (MASCUCH, 2013). Even before the 18th century enlightenment, conceptions of political rights, religious discourses from the Protestant Reformation carried notions of introspection. The reflexive aspect of current autobiography shows cognition as a higher priority over the carnal (SHILLING and MELLOR, 1994). Summarised by Robert, (2002, p.04) For Porter, within the enlightenment, "[...] the traditional Puritan genre of spiritual self-examination was supplemented by more secular modes of confession [...]"

Writing culture and autoethnography

Quite literally, ethnography refers to a writing culture. So, how should one "write culture". An ethnographer chooses a site, a place, or a location to study. The focus here is the culture of the people in their site. When anthropologists developed this methodology, they initially researched cultures unlike their own, in faraway places, to learn more about the world. Ethnography is an intersection of social history, interpretive anthropology, travelogues, discourse theory, and textual criticism. Ethnographers analyse examples of cultural description, from Goethe and Catlin to Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, and Le Roy Ladurie, by showing the persistence of allegorical patterns and rhetorical tropes. They assess recent experimental trends and explore the

functions of morality, ethnicity, and power in ethnographic composition (CLIFFORD and MARCUS, 1986).

Similarly, *Writing Culture* argues that ethnography has always been dishevelled with political and epistemological crisis. Western writers no longer portray non-Western people with unchallenged authority. The process of cultural representation is now inescapably contingent, historical, and contestable and dialectical ethnography acting powerfully in the postmodern world system. They challenge all writers in the humanities and social sciences to rethink the poetics and politics of cultural invention. The question of interpretations becomes a popular mode of epistemology and interrelated with other modes of ethnography.

Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-representation and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. Autoethnography is “[...] an alternative method and form of writing [...]” (NEVILLE-JAN, 2003, p. 89). It’s a contestable field; autoethnographers often blur boundaries, crafting fictions and other ways of being true in the interests of rewriting selves in the social world. Writing both selves and others way of life as a documentation perceived as a larger story goes against the scientific academic discourses, foregrounds the challenge that autoethnographers profess as ‘silent authorship’ (DENSHERE, 2014):

By writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher’s voice is not included in the presentation of findings. (HOLT, 2003, p. 2)

Moreover, autoethnographic writing has become increasingly common in a range of disci-

plines, including those drawn on in professional practice. An autoethnography written within/against a profession (EVETTS, 2012; LATHER, 1991) may destabilize boundaries between a professional’s work and the rest of their life and break through the dichotomy between selves and others (REED-DANAHAY, 1997). Autoethnographic writing that shows interactive moments from these social and cultural spaces can be ‘the currency of the contact zones’ (BRODKEY, 1996, p. 28). Especially, with reference to pluralistic Indian context, the writing boundaries vary not only between the various discipline specific professionals but also within the intra professionals (anthropologist) and further create complexity in narration. But still the autoethnographic writing dichotomies between selves and others manifest in hierarchical sense.

[...] auto-ethnography invites writers to see themselves and everyone else as human subjects constructed in a tangle of cultural, social and historical situations and relations in contact zones. (BRODKEY, 1996, p. 29)

Furthermore, autoethnography focuses on personal experience; autoethnographers speak against, or provide alternatives to, dominant, taken-for-granted, and harmful cultural scripts, stories, and stereotypes (BOYLORN, 2014). They also offer accounts of personal experience to complement, or fill gaps in, existing research. These accounts may show how the desire for, and practice of, generalization in research can mask important nuances of cultural issues, such as eating disorders (TILLMANN, 2009), depression (JAGO, 2002), and norms of masculinity, desire, and the body (BERRY, 2007).

Another important purpose of autoethnography is to articulate insider knowledge of cultural experience (MATTHES, DAVIS, and POTTER, 2017). Autoethnography is to show how researchers are implicated by their observations

and conclusions and to encourage autoethnographers to write against harmful ethnographic accounts made by others—especially cultural “outsiders”—who try to take advantage of, or irresponsibly regulate, other cultures. The final aim of the autoethnography is to create texts that are accessible to larger audiences, primarily audiences outside of academic settings. Understanding autoethnography requires working at the intersection of *autobiography* and *ethnography*. In writing autobiography—or write about the self—we often call on memory and hindsight to reflect on past experiences; talk with others about the past; examine texts such as photographs, personal journals, and recordings; and may even consult with relevant news stories, blogs, and other archives related to life events (Then we write these experiences to assemble a text that uses principles of storytelling devices, such as narrative voice, character development, and dramatic tension, to create evocative and specific representations of the culture/cultural experience and to give audiences a sense of how being there in the experience feels (ELLIS, 2004).

Typically, ethnographers approach cultural communities with inductive reasoning, allowing observations to guide what they write, that is, their “findings.” Then they consult with, and often connect their findings to more formal research about their experiences. One aim of ethnography is to create a representation of cultural practices that makes these practices familiar for cultural “outsiders.” This is accomplished through the use of thick, vivid, and concrete description, which offers readers a sense of being there in the experience. Taken together, the process, principles, and practices of autobiography and ethnography contribute to the way we write and practice autoethnography, as well as the goals and purposes we have for autoethnographic work (DAVIS, 2008 and POTTER, 2017).

Biography as a methodology

Biographical research is a wide field of different approaches and research strategies with blurred borders and overlapping areas. Therefore, biography seems to provide useful orientation amidst a plethora of empirical strategies and conceptual ideas. The assumption behind biographical research is that by analysing the life of the individual, one can understand and connect the structure and the individual sufficiently (FISCHER-ROSENTHAL, 2000). Thus, intense analysis of a single case is emphasized and the discovery of the issues not revealed in the interview is important for a sufficient case analysis (ZINN, 2004). Biographical research is thrilling, encouraging and fast-moving field which seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future (ROBERTS, 2002). Similarly, when anthropologists try to document the autoethnography of the contemporary vulnerable communities in India (developing country) following ethnographic approach, including their way of life, we are interested in capturing the changing scenario and do interpretations keeping their (people) perspectives prior then the researchers’ perspective.

A family of terms combines to shape the biographical method . . . method, life, self, experience, epiphany, case, autobiography, ethnography, auto-ethnography, biography, ethnography story, discourse, narrative, narrator, fiction, history, personal history, oral history, case history, case study, writing presence, difference, life history, life story, self story, and personal experience story. (DENZIN, 1989, p. 27)

Biographical research is a constituent of qualitative methods: “Qualitative researchers tend to espouse an approach in which theory and empirical investigation are interwoven [...]

during or at the end of fieldwork, rather than being a precursor to it [...]” (BRYMAN, 1988, p. 81). The philosophical and theoretical approach to society embedded in qualitative research has several, including the true reflection of experiences and views of the researched. Biographical research has the important merit of aiding the task of understanding major social shifts by including how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups, and institutions. The advancements in qualitative research in the last century provide clues to an effective understanding of human sciences through the ‘biographical turn’.

Interrelation of biography and ethnography

Chang (2008) argued that addressing self and autobiographical narratives is not new to social scientists, including anthropologists (ANDERSON, 2006; ATKINSON, 2002). Whether they believe culture to be located out there in the public world, or in herein the private sphere of the self, none of the scholars refutes the basic premise that culture and individuals are intricately intertwined. Particularly, anthropologists who locate culture “in the private sphere of the self” value individual interpretations of culture without abandoning the very basic notion group orientation of culture shared by group members. Notion of “Propriospect”, developed further in (1991), refers to an individual version of culture and illustrates this school of thinking. Namely, this concept implies that the basic unit of culture is individuals who can actively interpret their social surroundings. Similarly, on the other hand, anthropological interest in individuals has traditionally manifested itself in life histories, mostly involving self-narratives of the informants like, life histories such as *Sun Chief* (SIMMONS, 1942), *Through Harsh Winters* (TANAKA and KIKUMURA-YANO, 1981).

Brettell (1997) combines the elements of biography and autobiography in the autoethnographical study of her mother who was a successful journalist. In such works, the autobiographies of researchers are invariably enmeshed with the biographies of their mothers. Also, another form of autobiographical involvement in self comes in the category of “native ethnography”, where ethnography is conducted by ethnographers about their own people. More interestingly, ethnographers who sketch autobiographical writings intimately fall in this category in which they expose their ethnographic processes, their personal experiences, or feelings from the field. Such perspectives are justified in the works of *Confessional Tales* (VAN MAANEN, 1988), *Ethnographic Memories* (ELLIS and BOCHNER, 2000), and *Reflexive Ethnographies* (TEDLOCK, 2000). Anthropologists have also been engaged in memoir writing. Wolcott (2004) analysed the use of autoethnography and professes the way it differs from what he proposes leaving the term to the original meaning of Hayano who refers to autoethnography as a study of researching one’s own people—his conscious clarification of the term clearly orients readers. With the rigorous effort to distinguish autoethnography from other self-narrative inquiries, readers will be able to understand this research method by what it stands for, distinguishing it from highly descriptive self narratives such as autobiography and memoir. See also *Bibliography of Writing on Performed Ethnography and Research* (GOLDSTEIN, 2011). The theoretical justification and the conceptual clarification by pioneering researchers enabled further research and its application minimizing the subjectivities. Such an effort in research gives promising result, parochial relevance, interpreting social surroundings with cognitive perspective as well as limiting the ambiguities, especially in cultural analysis.

Cultural analysis and forms of ethnography

The modes of cultural analysis have been revised systematically over a period by changing its variables that took on new cultural salience. The revision of 1980s included new approaches in using ethnography for (a) investigating and mapping the changing nature of cultural and social forms [Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Science (MARCUS and FISCHER, 1986)]; (b) inquiries into multidisciplinary tools that could be employed in making cultural analysis more trenchant and revealing [Writing Culture (CLIFFORD and MARCUS, 1986)]; (c) incorporation of trans-disciplinary approaches, including feminism, deconstruction, film and media studies, new historicism, science and technology studies, cyborg anthropology; (d) reviving area and global studies with fresher ideas about how to do multi-sited ethnographies of mutually dependent activities in dispersed parts of larger systems or networks; and (e) inquiries into second-order modernization and risk society.

The most widely applied approach by anthropologists was ethnographic approach particularly in investigating the changing nature of culture due to development processes. Ethnography matters for contemporary societies and democracy. Such a claim derives from the very activity of the ethnographer, a presence both involved and detached, inscribed in the instant and over time, allowing precise descriptions and multiple perspectives, thus providing a distinctive understanding of the world that deserved to be shared (FASSIN, 2013). Such ethnographic studies about the vulnerable communities are periodically conducted and published in India. These documents are referred to by researchers and administrators, who bring in their interpretations about the community identity according to their profes-

sional perceptions. The interpretations about the culture of these communities were varied and the constitutional nomenclatur³ further created contradictions in India as the communities, researchers, and administrators put forth critical review of the comprehension and the verbalization of communities included in these scheduled lists.

Fabbri points out that an enormous gap separates *comprehension* and *verbalization* and that the merger of the two is derived from the myth of the word (which also dominates semiology), whereby something has meaning only when it can be verbalized, translated into words and *thought* (ECO and LUMLEY, 1994, p. 92). Sasser (1995) brings postmodernism face to face with techno science in this process. Making use of examples such as the superconducting supercollider, he illuminates the cultural context of techno science by exploring how projects/research outputs are contingent upon economic and political support. Drawing on conflicts between Popperians, postmodernists, and feminists, he claims that "translation" between competing discourses about techno science is necessary to avoid cultural collisions and to foster fruitful exchange between divergent discourses. The notion of experimental systems has taken on renewed saliency in recent years, especially in science studies, and particularly the notion that what at one point is an unstable and experimental object to be discovered

3 Indian constitutional set-up is based on the federal principle, sovereignty, divided between the federation and the units. Division of sovereignty implies the creation of boundaries, and this is bound to raise disputes, as to on which side of the boundary the matter falls. The reason is, that neither geographical phenomena, nor social currents, nor political forces, are defined by the boundaries so drawn. Boundaries are drawn by the minds of plurality, unity and diversity. Paradoxically, they are mere intellectual creations, whose actual application to external realities cannot always be the subject matter of unanimity. Differences become insertable in the constitutional list of special categories and the nomenclatures of State and Central government of India and created identity crisis at socio-political and legal levels.

can be stabilized and turned into a tool for the construction of further experiments.

Need for Cultural Analysis

The test of cultural analysis is to develop translation and mediation (conciliation) tools that could help gain knowledge of visible differences of interests, access, power, needs, desires, and philosophical perspective. To anticipate the conversation that anthropology has been having in the past decade with science studies the notion of experimental systems as developed in science studies, particularly Hans-Jorg Rheinberger's *Towards a History of Epistemic Things* (1997), viewed as a way of thinking about how the anthropological and social science notion of culture, has evolved as an analytical tool (FISCHER, 2009). The cultural analysis technique considers ways in which these tools and material infrastructures sharpen the understanding thereby blocking the existing ones and come with alternative interpretations. Fischer explores anthropology as a mode of philosophical inquiry and means for elucidating the complex and shifting interlinking of human bonds and social interactions at a global level.

Fischer uses "experimental systems" and shows how the social scientific notion of culture has evolved as an analytical tool since the 19th century. Experimental systems are working units for a scientist or a group of scientists and are simultaneously local, social, institutional, technical, instrumental, and the above all, epistemic units. An experimental system is a unit of research designed to give answers to questions we are not able to ask clearly. In a typical case, it is as Francois Jacob puts, "a machine for making the future". It is a device that not only generates answers but also, as a prerequisite, shapes the questions to be answered. An experimental system is a device to materialize questions. It cogenerates the phe-

nomena or material entities and the concepts they come to embody.

The development of experimental system depends on extracting differences without destroying its reproductive coherence. Together, this makes up its differential reproduction. The articulation, dislocation, and reorientation of an experimental system appears to be governed by a movement that has been described (by Jacob) as a play of possibilities. With Derrida, we might also speak of a "game" of difference. It is precisely the characteristic of "fall(ing) prey to its own work" that brings the scientific enterprise to what Derrida calls "the enterprise of deconstruction" (RHEINBERGER, 1998, p. 287-288, p. 291). "Webs of connection" can be understood as "labyrinth", wherein is difficult to distinguish one narrative from another because each is linked in more than one way to every other (SASSOWER, 1989). Such scientific enterprises began in the 1960s in the name of 'post-structuralism' and facilitated the art of cultural critical analysis. Post-structuralism as deconstruction is not concerned with the effect of a position, but with the relation between its foundations and its most distant claims.

According to Popper (1957, p. 25), the experimental method is "a means of acquiring knowledge by comparing the results obtained with the results expected". This is an age-old method which acquires scientific charters when applied consciously and critically. Regarding the 'holistic approach', Popper says the term 'whole' has two different usages: One usage refers to its origin in Gestalt psychology, where the term 'whole' is referred to certain special aspects of a thing in question, that is, those which make it appear an organized structure rather than a mere stack. This method looks for a configuration or a structure in the given aspect by being selective. The second usage refers to 'whole' being used to refer to "the totality" of all the properties or aspects of

a thing and especially of the relations holding between its constituent parts (POPPER, 1957, p. 76). The difference between Gestalt usage and this usage is so great that in one sense they are exactly contradictory. While the Gestalt approach is indispensably selective, the other is anti-selective.

The changing conditions and the process of development among the vulnerable/ minorities/subjugated communities⁴ enhanced the above-mentioned selective and anti-selective perspectives. These are also known as ‘top-down approaches’ that led to ‘bottom-up approaches’ and the grounded theories of alternative thinking. The stratified and hierarchical societies endorse these practises and justify the norms in the name of affirmative action, reservation, standardisations, and so on. Such special privileges are constitutionally defined universally with the objective of creating ‘just societies’ limiting the disparities.

The Constitution of India provides many safeguards/ special privileges for Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) to ensure their systemic socio-economic development and also to protect them against all forms of injustice. The Government of India has issued the list of SC and ST communities, which is updated from time to time by specific Presidential Orders. These safeguards are being enforced through legislative provisions and executive instructions. Based on these lists, the administrative system in India distributes all the programmes/policies among identified SC/ST/OBC beneficiaries. This paper explores the relevance of the ‘culture’ concept as a mode of philosophical inquiry, explicating the labyrinth involved in existing structures/systems and eliciting the need for different interpretations of certain ideologies and expressions

⁴ The SC and ST communities are generally perceived as vulnerable/ subjugated communities by the academician and administrators.

used to refer to their ‘tribal identities’, which are included in Government of Tamil Nadu list of Tribes.

If we analyse keeping in reference Derrida’s deconstructions, we can conclude that there are no starting points, first points or pure origins. An origin is usually defined by what follows it and is therefore also originated from something else. Any defined origin therefore part of an endless chain, rather than a first beginning.

Therefore, specific focus on venues of actions and strategies will result in different, if not new, categories and classifications. (SAS-SOWER, 1995) rather than continuing the use of traditional categories and classifications.

Epistemological and ontological debate

Over a period of time, there have been several debates in anthropological theory and method, and the effort has been to make relevant point of departure for newer kinds of epistemic and ontological applications. “critical anthropology” is concerned with modern sites or interlocutors (RABINOW, 2008; TSING, 2005; FISCHER, 2009; MOL, 2002), which avoid bounded or ontologically realist demarcation, and can offer critical tools for, and insights into, an epistemic and ontological practice that enables alternative worlds and forms of desired action. While deliberating about James Clifford and George Marcus’s *Writing Culture*, Starn (2012) highlighted it as pioneering work for discussions on reflexivity and representation. In addition to Marcus and Fischer’s (2014) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, and other influential works, the essays in *Writing Culture* appear to challenge the old disciplinary principles of truth, science, and objectivity relating to epistemic murky new-fashioned literary theory and other doubting influences. Such broad outlook

has helped in understanding the role that theory and new methods play in research.

In the process of culture analysis along with political economic process analysis, critical approaches emerged as emphasised by Friedman and Friedman (2013). According to them, capitalism develops within cultural or social processes that promote the political economy to a dominant position. We have proposed that there are two major aspects of social processes. The first aspect refers to the mere distinctiveness of social process and is not a representation of those processes or schemes that organize them. It is rather, the properties of the processes themselves, that is, particular ways of producing, dominating, accumulating, and so on. The second aspect is culture as representation, code, or scheme, as structures of meaning produced on the basis of social experience in historical conditions that articulate pre-existing historical configurations with particular existential situations. Thus, one cannot say that culture was born out of nothing, that is, it is never *ex nihilo*; it always appears as a historical transformation. It holds significance within the population and is related to the fact that it makes sense in particular circumstances as it connects to historically constitute shared social experiences. Cultural production involves objectification, and in this process it can become determinant in the sense that it can be social subjects or social situations. As for the meaning of production, it is dependent on the existential conditions from which the meaning originates, but it can take on a life of its own in the sense attributed to it by as a scheme of meaningful organization.

It has been established that there are a number of possible dimensions to the concept of culture. Within the context of multiculturalism, most commentators are referring to the shared body of knowledge, beliefs, and practices through which a group of people under-

stand and identify them. Most often, the cultural groups referred to in 'multicultural' are also assumed to share a family-like heritage or history (CURTIS and PETTIGREW, 2009).

Social change during the last decades of the 20th century paved the way for a renewed focus on identity and difference as key components of postmodern social theory (LEMERT, 1997, p. 35). These include the rise of new social movements, the re-emergence of ethnicity and continuing vitality of traditional cultures. Such events changed modernism's long-standing claim to be the universal culture of human progress.

In the past years, the study of identity and difference has become a crucial hallmark of thinkers influenced by postmodern and post-structural theory. Identity refers to the characteristics determining who or what a person is, either individually or collectively, and the ways that this is culturally constructed. Sarana (1965) while talking about comparative methods pointed out that the social sciences experimentation was not possible in the same way and to the same extent as it was in the case of the natural sciences. The social sciences method could best be called 'quasi-experimental'. The method which could approximate experimentation in the natural science was usually called, to quote Nadel, "somewhat loosely the Comparative Method" (RADCLIFFE-BROWN, 1951, p. 22).

The drafting committee of the Indian Constitution took into account cultural factors/ethnographies of the various communities and classified them as Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, and Other Backward Classes at the national level and the classification of the same was carried out by the state government authorities/committees. The verbalization and the translation process of words and thoughts reflected controversies at different levels and affected the communities in receiving the safe-

guards constitutionally guaranteed due to linguistic plurality. This paper explores the utility of 'cultural analysis' as a mode of philosophical inquiry and attempts to find the labyrinth whose walls erected over a period simultaneously blind and guide the administrators and anthropologists. The constructed existing ethnographic knowledge of the various communities limits the space and the direction of their development. The administrative and legal structures force one to move beyond without destroying the reproductive coherences of the issues following 'experimental systems'. In our case study, the community compromised their values of the belief system and performed private rituals in public to establish their 'tribal' identity, thus satisfying the mainstream ideology of 'Tribe'. The author was enthused by the given opportunity and documented the tribal rituals, thus placing cultural analysis as an 'experimental system' and justifying the same as part of ethnography.

Methodology

Qualitative research studies, including biographical research, draw on various theoretical approaches such as ethnomethodology, phenomenology, narrative analysis, symbolic interactionism, discourse theory, conversational analysis, and others (for example, SILVERMAN, 1993); Hammersley and Atkinson, The theoretical argument has exhausted the available references and tries to build-up strong premises. Within social sciences, anthropology has a unique feature of combining the concepts as theory as well as methodology. The qualitative methodology has been justified at all levels with its endorsed analysis techniques. This paper provides empirical evidence of an Indian tribal practice in Tamil Nadu State, using ethnographic approach, case study, observation, key informant Interview and visual documentation.

'Performative' production and dissemination: a case study

Jones (2006) felt that dissatisfaction with limitations in publication and presentation in biographic narrative data led him to explore the possibilities of "performative" social science. Biographic work in social science seeks new ways of attaining greater "sensibility" to humanistic concerns. A central problem with a synthesis of the arts and social sciences within biographic production is epistemological; newer approaches are required as the status of existing forms of production and dissemination as academically valuable is contestable and ambiguous. In addition, the cooperation between the narrator and the researcher in biographic investigations also deserves to be foregrounded in a "performative" way that will involve research participants/narrators in the production and dissemination of their own stories. Thus, engagement in cooperation itself becomes a creative act, often stretching the boundaries of our understanding and prodding us to come up with fresh and innovative ways of overcoming practical obstacles in knowledge transfer. Goldstein (2008a, 2008b) raised many questions about performance ethnography. Insensitivity of researchers can undermine the performance of vulnerable communities as they display their politics, narrative, expression, body language, costume and story line. The performer or narrator does not claim any benefit of authorship, instead hopes that the anthropologist has enough empathy toward the performer and the subjects under study and looks forward to be a 'beneficiary'⁵.

As ethnographers, we observe, participate

5 The members of each communities listed out by the Government has been credited as an 'eligible' person to get special privileges in education, employment and the political participation and entitled to get the community certificate as per the list he/she falls within.

in, and write about a culture and/or a cultural experience (e.g., body image, dating, parenthood, depression, caretaking, death). We enter the cultural “field” for an extended amount of time, take “field notes” about our participation, and interview cultural members (insiders) about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

As a case in study, a detailed analysis of practices of *Kurumans* is illustrated in the following. There are 705 Communities in India which have been categorised as ‘Scheduled Tribe’. Both the central and state governments maintain their respective lists of STs and provide special privileges to them. Tamil Nadu has 36 communities listed out as STs: *Kurumans*⁶ caste is in 18th position in this list. *Kurumans* have been struggling to establish their tribal identity for a long time. The Department of Anthropology, University of Madras, India, has been closely working with the community for over three decades and successfully documented their ethnography for various purposes. Changes in the structure of the ethnography due to theoretical and conceptual development necessitated autoethnographies and cultural analysis as an experimental system and applied periodically. The sexuality ritual life-cycle ceremony of the community has all along been performed privately in a sacred manner. Previous ethnographic coverage does not have any details about *Kasavamma koothu* of *Kurumans*; so, in order to prove their identity, the ceremony was performed in public and documented as ‘public ethnography’.

6 They are traditional shepherds, inhabitant of hill range along the borders of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. They reared a special variety of sheep called *Kuri aadu*, with thick black wool and rare in that geography. They were traditionally nomadic in nature. They were never being part of the mainstream caste structure and highly homogeneous and endogamous group. The relevance of *Kasavamma Koothu* is significant life cycle ritual in the lives of young *Kurumans* as it serves them to evolve as ‘man’.

Figure 01: The process documentation of *Kasavamma Koothu* ritual



Source: The author’s field work conducted in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu (2018).

Figure 02: Young children learn the values through *Kasavamma Koothu*



Source: The author’s field work conducted in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu (2018).

Kasavamma koothu is an important life-cycle ceremony of *Kurumans*, which is performed once in five years. It is highly parochial and, in the earlier times, outsiders were strictly not permitted. The performers are men and the role is well defined by the community. Traditionally, the performance was strictly for the *Kurumans* and not enacted for public view. The name *kasavamma* is given to a man who is considered personification of female in the tribe (Figure 1). The community head decides the day of performance following various activities. God *Veerabadra* is taken out of his temple and brought out in the midst of the community for solving five-year-long pending issues of the community including blessing

community-based ceremonies such as tonsuring, ear boring, naming, marriage, and so on. Every stage of the ritual is performed with folk songs. The covert value of the ritual involves indulging in sexuality by a chosen adult youth who demonstrates with *Kasavamma* the significance of sexual act, using sexual objects and by singing *sobanir* (frenzy sexual songs). It is believed that young *Kurumans*, who are always on the move, will develop a deep sense of family bond and will take steps in their lives to settle down by way of marriage, children, etc. (Figure 2) for the illustration of the act. Joking relations are exhibited with the approval of the community elders. The basic cultural transformation of the ritual is to educate youth and prepare them for life. The beginning of the ritual starts by decorating *Veerabadr* with beautiful flowers, and placing him on *mannai* (wooden pan). This is followed by singing and dancing, consuming locally brewed fermented *manchanai* (juice) and reaching a frenzy state both physically and mentally. The community considers such act and the following elated state of youth as genuine and sacred. By this time, it is dusk and the community youth identify their spouses and start a new phase in their lives. The entire performance is done with a deep sense of holiness and every stage of the performance has its own cognitive meaning in their every-day life.

Conclusion

Beyond the binary distinction of evocative-ethnography and autoethnography, the analytical forms lead to the question of scientific validation as well as ethical issues. Autoethnography requires a reflexive examination of conceptions of both self (community) and culture (public perception). An embodied, affective and sensory ethnography involves the ethnographer and his or her encounters with the research

subjects and their practices. The encounters shaped by their engagement with ethnographic practice in the midst of the migration, diffusion, revival, appropriation justify autoethnography. *Kasavamma Koothu* was enacted in public and documented by the anthropologist. The administrators salaciously viewed performance and considered it as a 'barbaric act'; though anthropologists agreed that such a practice is part of a tribal culture and should be dealt with a high degree of sensitivity.

To conclude, this case study ties in well with the findings of anthropologists worldwide that while ethnography is a helpful tool in understanding culture and deriving behavioural trends, the researchers will need to ensure that his or her personal opinions about sensitive tribal or culture tendencies do not dilute the sanctity of the tribal performances. While such findings are shared among peers and authorities, the purpose should not be restricted to gain self-prominence. They should also ensure that their findings are not exploited unduly by the society at large in the name of tribal development—but it remains to be seen if these tribal practices can be left as witnessed without any exploitation. Further research will concentrate on this important aspect.

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