

Apart with the people
whom he studies.



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Apart from this truism, socio-cultural anthropology must greatly rely on observation as it cannot experiment with the object of its study. A discipline must observe or experiment to be called a science. As such anthropology is non experimental or observational science. It is a field science rather than a laboratory science.

(i) Participant Observation:

As an observer of facts, anthropologist cannot be simply an spectator like a camera or a tape recorder. He has to involve himself into interaction with the people whom he studies. He has to involve himself into interaction with the people whom he studies. He must be able to communicate with the people in their owned language. The whole anthropological procedure of field work is based upon a total faith in human beings which can not be attained unless the people and the field worker develop a mutual trust for each other.

It is here that Participant observation become must for a field worker. While he might be adding to his knowledge and information form other secondary sources such as informants, this must be supplemented with living in the community, participating in its activities and constantly observing what people actually do in specific situation. The field worker must also perform some of the roles he intends to study. Though participant observation is a time consuming affair, their is no better substitute for having field worker actually live in the community and perform some of the roles. Participating in meetings, ceremonies, festivals of the people give an insight of the inter-relationship of facts and situations which even direct observation fails to provide.

(ii) Non-Participant Observation:

Observation may be participant or non-participant. There are many things happening around during the stay of the field worker which do not require participation but they are important and the field worker must record them. Thus, an element of alertness all the time to record what meets the eye comes in the category of non-participant observation.

Non participant observe may also involve use of certain control devices including some mechanical appliances generally not used by anthropologists but often used by other social sciences. Such controlled observation techniques have much desired credibility to social sciences as they are capable of yielding much reliable data. Malinowski's study of the Trobriand Islanders highlighted the importance of participant observation in anthropological field work which he carried on with great technical excellence. It breaks down barriers to communication.

Participant observation and some of the more recent techniques developed as part of ethnographic enquiry equip anthropologists to discover both unconscious and conscious levels of culture not easily reported by informants or directly observed by anthropologists. Good ethnography is based both on the field worker's ability to see things from the other person's point of view as well as on the ability to see patterns, relationships and meanings that may not be understood by an informant belonging to the same culture. An anthropologist observes, listens, asks questions and attempts to find a way through with he or she can participate in the life of society over an extended period of time. Informants are the knowledgeable

persons who willingly share the knowledge of their culture with anthropologist.

All anthropologists in the field have a few such key informants with whom they work in the field, and who also explain the culture pattern to anthropologists. They also introduce him to the community and help them establishing rapport with the people thereby preparing a suitable ground for participant observation. 2.

Interview: Observation, participant or non-participant, has its limitations. Because of the human element involved in social science research, direct communication between field worker and the people under study to have an understanding of attitudes, perceptions, expectations, etc. Interviewing is the technique to ensure a systematic communication between a field worker and the people. It is a device for collection data required to test hypothesis in social research. The fact that interview as a technique of data collection is used very widely in social sciences does not imply that it is the best device for collecting social data in all circumstances. There may be many questions lingering in the mind of a field worker the answers to which can only be provided by certain individuals through communication.

This is called interview. The interview method consists in having direct personal contact with persons or groups concerned belonging to the culture under study. There are two kinds of interviews—structured and unstructured. The unstructured interview constitutes unplanned casual meetings with the individuals and groups. Discussions during such meets very often yield some valuable information which the field worker consciously makes note of. The

structured interviews are preplanned. The field worker prepares a schedule of relevant questions about his desired information.

The questions may be serialized in such a way that they may give an impression of natural conversation. They are in a way memorized by the field worker. While interviewing a person, he (interviewee) is not given the impression that he is being systematically interviewed. The answers which come out of such a conversation are also noted down by the field worker carefully after he has returned back to the place of his residence. The interview in general is more flexible. Since the same question can have different meanings to different people, the interviewer can make a change in it. He can also change the order of questions depending upon the responsiveness of the person being interviewed. 3.

The Case Study Method: A case study is an investigation of an individual or a group. It is a form of qualitative analysis involving the very careful and complete observations of a person or an institution. It is an all inclusive and intensive study of an individual. The case study method is employed to study an individual case.

It gained much popularity in social psychology. But selectively, depending upon the demands of study, it is also used by other social sciences. The implication in deploying this method is in depth study getting at the root of the problem. Since the universe of inquiry is very small (a group, an institution or even an individual) the approach is intensive in character. Each case investigated is considered in isolation and unique.

The intent is on qualitative analysis. The method is resorted to when quantification has no scope and quantitative analysis is unlikely to yield desirable results. While it is doubtful and a matter of difference of opinion as to how far this method can lead to valid generalizations, yet as a source of detailed and dependable knowledge about a problem, this method has no equal. Any study of suicides or the practice of self immolation as a cultural practice needs a probe into the stimulation working up a surcharged level of mind with extreme sentiments.

No amount of sophistication in quantification techniques is likely to lead a social scientist studying such problems. 4. Genealogical Method: Genealogy—simply means codifying the gradual spread of kinship relations beginning from some one as ego (the person with whom the kinship bonds are reckoned going upwards through generations. It is preparing family tree. Social-cultural anthropologists studying small scale primitive societies, where kinship forms the basis of their social organizations, have largely devoted themselves to the study of kinship in these societies. In kinship studies, the knowledge about who stands in what relations with whom and what are the terms of calling and reference as used for such relations is very important. Such studies prompted them to prepare genealogies of the families in their universe of studies. Such genealogies, prepared on the basis of facts, provided by the heads or some of the family members, also speak of the range of kinship relations recognized in a society as also the typical network of kinship relations in that society.

It yields an insight into the demographic settlement pattern of the group under study. In a sense, genealogy is virtually a sociological capsule which

has immense potentiality of information about the networks of social relations particularly in small scale societies where kinship pervades over the entire social life of people. The most significant aspect of this method is that only a few 'egos' have to be tackled by the field worker in order to get lots of information. Since most of the information given by the respondents in genealogical method is personal concerning the family, kiths and kinds, it requires establishment of good rapport on the part of the researcher to win their confidence. These limitations apart, the method has proved its worth particularly among small scale societies. Participant observation and the use of genealogical method make anthropological research much different than researches of other social science. 5.

Data Collection: Data collection is the process of collecting data for any specific purpose. It facilitates to a great extent the collection of data from the community. This data is of two types: Primary Data: Primary Data is that which the investigator or the researcher collects himself.

Anthropologist, generally, prefer to work with primary data. Secondary Data: Secondary Data is collected from reference sources like the library, etc. The second method is used for comparative methods.

Techniques of Data Collection:

There are two main techniques of data collection. These are Intensive Fieldwork Methods and Survey Methods. Intensive field work methods include observation, interview, case-study and genealogy. Survey methods are divided into questionnaires, schedules and interview guides.

Both these methods may be rounded off by content analysis. The context dictates the method to be used. Later, a combination of various methods may be used. The nature of research and the kind of data required also influences the decision with regard to the choice of technique. Testing of hypotheses involves survey methods. Intensive fieldwork methods are longitudinal studies (or diachronic) whereas survey methods are cross-sectional (or synchronic). This is due to a problem-oriented form of approach.