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TECHNIQUES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING

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By: Anita Dua



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**Sample Preview
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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

TECHNIQUES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING

B.S.O.S.-184

Time: 2 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 50

Note: Answer any five questions. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Discuss the process of developing of ethnographic text.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 2, 'Production of a Film and an Ethnographical Text'.

Q. 2. Discuss the influence of structural-functionalism in ethnographic film making.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 9, Q. No. 11

Also Add: There was a functional approach in anthropology, which marked its arrival from 1960s to 70s. This approach strongly believed that distinct, everyday events could be used in the larger anthropological- structural context to make sense. This kind of filming required a style that was of observation with the strong belief that the result of the film was not tampered by the filmmaker. But to film the events as they happened, troubled the filmmaker. They were left with no choice but to construct it to give a structure to fit into an anthropological style. The filmmaker applied thick and thin description. Thick description is a term used by the Clifford Greetz, the cultural anthropologist that describes the thick description as a way of providing cultural context, whereas thin description is a factual account without any interpretation. These two were to be examined at close quarter. The norms of anthropology were acknowledged by the filmmaker who seriously followed the same. The predicament faced by the film style was developed by the filmmaker which combined the observational style of filmmaking and established observation field work. Films were constructed following a set pattern, just like maker and anthropologists were to represent the social world. They were to decide whether it should be a native or individual's point of view or by a filmmaker or

anthropologist perspective. The term 'emic' refers to the involvement of filmmaker and 'etic' refers otherwise. The reasoning between these two terms put the filmmakers and anthropologists in dilemma. Then emerged a more participatory and reflexive style, which gave a new dimension to filmmaking and writer. Filmmaker and the researcher aimed to enlighten the audience/reader, the truth and reality. The truth was partially constructed and expressed as felt by the characters.

Q. 3. Explain features of expository film making.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 20, 'Expository Documentary' and Page No. 25, Q. No. 5.

Q. 4. 'Documentary films are journalistic.' Explain.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 37, 'Documentary Films: Is it Journalistic'.

Q. 5. Elaborate code of ethics in documentary film making.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 38, 'Ethics of Documentary Film Making' and Page No. 39, 'Code of Ethics in Documentary Film Making'.

Q. 6. Discuss gender construction in film with suitable illustrations.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 65, 'Meaning Construction and Gender'.

Q. 7. Elaborate the role of camera movement in film making.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 85, 'Camera Movement' and 'Types of Camera Movement and their Uses'.

Q. 8. Discuss various strategies used in filming oral history.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 110, Q. No. 4.



QUESTION PAPER

December – 2022

(Solved)

TECHNIQUES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING

B.S.O.S.-184

Time: 2 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 50

Note: Answer any five questions. All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Explain how ethnographic texts are used for the production of a film.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 2, 'Production of a Film and an Ethnographical Text'.

Q. 2. Elucidate the contribution of anthropologists in ethnographic film making with an illustration.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 3, 'Ethnographic Films' and Page No. 4, 'Ethnographic Films in India' and Chapter-2, Page No. 30, Q. No. 4.

Q. 3. Discuss the various modes of film making.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 28, Q. No. 1.

Q. 4. Explain the various ethical challenges faced by the film makers. How do they overcome it?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 40, 'Ethical Challenges for the Filmmakers'.

Q. 5. Is a documentary film journalistic? Explain.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 37, 'Documentary Film: Is it Journalistic?'.

Q. 6. Explain the relationships between media, meaning and ideology.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 66, 'Media, Meaning and Ideology'.

Q. 7. Elaborate the various types of shots used in film making.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 79, 'Types of Shots and Their Uses'.

Q. 8. Explain the strategies applied to film interviews.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 113, Q. No. 12.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

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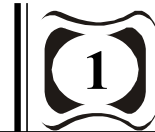


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TECHNIQUES OF ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM MAKING

Anthropology and Film Making: The Text and the Image



CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

INTRODUCTION: SOCIOLOGY, ANTHROPOLOGY AND FILMMAKING: THE TEXT AND THE IMAGE

In this unit, we will learn the important ways to understand culture and society through sociology, anthropology and images. Before we do that, let us understand first the terms Sociology, Anthropology and Film-making. Sociology is the study of human-social relationship and institutions, development, structure and functioning of human society, and social problems. To study at length, sociologists study, investigate and scrutinise the structure of groups, organisations and societies to observe how people interact with these contexts. Anthropology is the science of human beings, their origin, nature and destiny of human beings. Anthropology is the study of people, past and present with a focus on understanding the human conditions, both culturally and biologically.

Filmmaking is the process by which a motion picture is produced. It involves distinct stages of planning, developing, filming and completing the film and getting it ready to show. A photographic image or a film is an important way of understanding culture and society. It goes beyond racial and social restrictions, where people find it difficult to communicate. A film can be conventional documentary or an ethnographic film. An image or a film, be it cinema, a documentary or an ethnographic, help us look deeper into society and culture. Most dominant practice of ethnographic films, prove to be a true account of societies. Strategies of grassroots may involve and require communication support, organisation or so on. In next sections, we will discuss the close connectivity between text and image. Text refers to written data and image refers to

photographs and films. We will further discuss how a research tool, called ethnography is developed.

Why Ethnography?

It is universally accepted that one has to reach the grassroots to find facts to prove and show, followed by elaborate process of exploring, using different techniques. Similarly, ethnography is a research technique based on field work to observe, analyze and describe human behaviour in closed quarters. It is a sociological method to find out more about people's social lives, their daily routine, connectivity, sources of livelihood, etc. The focus is on understanding the lives of people, through their daily routines and their social circle and structure. Obviously, a researcher has to and follows various techniques to get suitable and relevant data to get appropriate knowledge. The techniques include group discussions, interviews, participant's observation of non-participants is equally important and so does a set of questions based on specific pattern, on the basis of these techniques, a researcher reaches a conclusion. Now the question is which one is better or more appropriate—the visual or the text? Or are they considered at par? A visual is a picture, a piece of film, or display, used to illustrate or accompany something.

Basically, it relates to sight or seeing. A text is a book or other written or printed work, regarded in terms of its context, rather than its physical form. Importance of both the visual and the text cannot be denied. Both are equally important that enable to understand society and culture. But what matters the most is the true portrayal of events. Whether the facts by the image are of more authenticity or by the visual. What we have to understand is that visual ethnography is a means of producing knowledge and of understanding the world. Visual ethnography is an approach to ethnography that

uses visual methods, such as photography, film and video-visual recording of communication process between communities or individuals, by a means of filming of photographing, is of significance.

The researcher observes the specific features of various social communities on the site and documents. It is also understandable the relationship between the text and the visual to understand society and culture. In the world today, visuals/texts are used to convey messages and communicate ideas in a variety of way. These texts include print media, such as poster and flyers, as well as non-print ones like websites and online advertisement. The use of visual media in communication is similar to using written text. However, written and visual media are responded by human brain, quite differently as visual imagery is quite similar, it makes clearer the nature of things compared and written language a code, a system of words, letters, figures and symbols. We can neither underestimate nor ignore their importance and role. Thus, it is important to consider different ethnographic films. The development, indeed affected the way the films are shot and largely influenced the research.

Production of a Film and an Ethnographical Text

In this section, we will learn how sociologists and anthropologists collect data, their methods, strategies and sources. Generally, both of them bank on written text to tell us about societies and social life. It cannot be denied the even for written text, one should have enough raw data to compile and save. This cannot be done overnight. Certain techniques and strategies are to be followed. These include interviews, group-discussion, participation and non-participation of observant. Initially, the data in rough format is collected, which is known as field notes. Field notes refer to qualitative notes recorded by researchers in the course of field research during or after their observation of a specific phenomenon they are studying. The notes are intended to be read as evidence that gives meaning and aids in the understanding of the phenomenon. It may take months or years for a researcher to write down observations in a notebook. The interviews, which are recorded using audio device are transcribed. To transcribe is to make a written copy, especially a typewritten copy of dictated material notes taken during a lecture or interview or other spoken material to make an exact copy (a document, text etc.) to write in another language. Following this precedence, data is analysed and put on a structured format accordingly.

The data is repeatedly referred to the field notes and written and rewritten several times. It is a painstaking process, where the researcher after making a detailed research, outlines the story and finishes his first draft. This is followed by constant revising, editing and re-editing. If the researcher feels to find more about facts, he can revisit the field to gather fresh data. The rough notes are translated into sentences and finally into paragraphs. What finally reaches the public is the final edited version in the form of a book or an article. For instance, the written texts like the Nuer by E.E.Evans Pritchard tell us about the Nuers of southern Sudan. The Nuer people are the second largest ethnic group in South Sudan. The text is a detailed written study of a single specialised subject and aspect of it. This is based on the field notes of researcher. Like the people of Nuer, the researcher may live for months in a place to find out facts about a particular topic. The data may be collected through research technologies that are not fixed earlier. Most important data is collected from people or activities that are considered strange. Considered strange means being noticeably different; to do something that make other people stare, laugh or applaud. After collecting data from noticeably different people and their activities the process of narration begins. This reconstruction is accepted in written ethnographic accounts based on the peripheral (not as important as the main aim) vision, of the researcher. In short, we can say that data is collected by a number of techniques in written ethnographic text which is gathered along the course of the field work, followed by selected presentation analysis. When it comes to films, these too are ways to understand society.

Ethnographic films are referred here. It is difficult to define ethnographic film as all films reflect social life. A film generally begins with an idea and a script followed by shooting and editing ethnographic film which is a non-fiction film, often similar to a documentary film and anthropological research. Definitions of the term are not definite as some academics claim it as more documentary, less anthropological while other think that it rests somewhere between the field of anthropology and documentaring a footage. And a film is produced after a reconstruction of the raw footage just like that of a book after a long process of editing and re-editing. The final story of a film is just as the smooth portrayal of a book. Both the film and book are produced and written after a repeated process of reconstruction in the form of editing, or rewriting.

DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY: FILMS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Written Ethnographies

Monographs are a detailed written study of a single specialised subject or an aspect of it. A long formal book dealing with a group in which animals, plants, species etc., have similar characteristics. For example, a monograph is a book on how a human body uses vitamin D. Monographs were produced in the 1020s and 1930s, based on field work. The two kinds of monographs are academia and for general public. Malinowski, a highly-influential anthropologist, is particularly known for his field work in the Trobriand Island where he helped popularise methods of fieldwork. Malinowski emphasized the importance of detailed observation and argued that anthropologists must have daily contact with their informants if they are to adequately record their everyday life that is so important to understanding a different culture. Margaret Mead, an American cultural anthropologist, wrote more popular ethnographies on the process of bringing up a child. Her theory was that children learn by watching the adult behaviour. She is best known for her studies of the people of Oceania.

Photographs

Photographs served as subjective and scientific documentation in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Objective documentation is an observable and measurable data. Photographs provide evidence and served as a record. The photographs hold rational and effective meanings in anthropology, where they were embedded in the relationships of the production of evidence. Photographic 'affect' is considered as a mode of history, meaning and identity. Scientific documentation is the study of the recording and retrieval of information. Photographs were considered to be simply, of authenticity. Early anthropologists like Franz Boss, Frank Gillen and Bronislaw Malinowski used photographs as a part of field work. Photographs and images are used as illustrations for exhibitions. These photos are either forgotten or sent to museum, once they are made public. Visual anthropology, which includes both producing media, such as ethnographic, films, exhibitions and photography was approached through a positivist approach.

Positivist approach is to use a brief, clear discussion. The search reflects some theories and

applies it to the object of study. This approach believed that camera describes reality as it is, without any kind of human interference or awareness. The recorded data in the form of a picture proved authenticity without any beliefs that are not founded by knowledge. The positive approach to filmmaking was criticised by contemporary theories that felt and stressed that the focus of developmental understanding must be on systematic change. They believe that records are tampered by the researcher. But as technology advanced, so was the use of the film camera to record events, which will be discussed in the next section.

Ethnographic Films

An ethnographic film is a non-fiction film, which combines documentary filming and anthropological researches. These films were produced for the public in 1920s. These were educational film and of unusual or interesting people because of a different country or culture. For example *Nanook of the North* the *Ax Fight*, *Dead Birds and the Mad Masters*, *The Feast*. The *Ax Fight* and *the feast*, filmed in 1960s are ethnographic accounts of an Amazonian rainforest people, the Yanomamo. The commercial players showed interest in the films for public and that led to the production of films of natives-someone born in a particular region. These films were criticized by the anthropologists as being ethnocentric which means based on the attitude that one's own group is superior. Someone who is ethnocentric, judges other culture by comparing them to his own, familiar culture, followed by colonialist approach. It implies domination of people's life and culture. The main goal is to extract economic benefits. These films were not considered to be serious ethnographic films. The pioneers to use ethnographic films to form and add to their written work were, Bateson and Mead, two well-known, distinguished American anthropologists.

After World War II, by 1950s, anthropological films-making, encouraged something else to happen. The international committee on ethnographic and sociological films associated with UNESCO was formed, which organised many events and film festivals. Besides these, filmmakers like Jean Rouch, John Marshall, Robert Gardner and Timothy Asch's contribution to ethnographic filmmaking is acknowledged and appreciated. These were the people, who believed and supported the idea that films are an important anthropological tool to record data. As the

technology advanced, so was the approach towards filmmaking. Kind of movement gave access to filmmaker to go for past events through witnesses and viewers, whom viewers can also see. Some footage that was shot for an earlier production the filmmaker realised that long shots can be used along with footage and written material. The style of these films is that of observation and a firm belief that presence of camera is not important. This was called the 'fly on the wall' approach where the truth was pointed contrary to earlier films. Fly on the wall approach was followed by the Cinema-verite movement which believed that truth can be filmed without affecting the consequence.

This style of filmmaking goes to Jean Rouch, who believed that filmmaker can be present in front of camera. The attempt was to communicate directly with individuals rather than to interview style. This also helps to prove the authenticity of what was being filmed. The filmmakers were desirous to make their presentation more obvious and evident. They wished to expose reality in its true form, that reality is not simple. The idea of reflexive anthropology, that means to think carefully about who has done the research and how, and under what conditions it was written. The idea of a reflexive anthropology enlightens the audience about the ways, which helped in constructing the truth. David and Judith Mac Dougall in the 21st century developed a reflexive filming style, where the researcher has the power to illustrate the research in a specific manner. To conclude, we can say today's filmmakers follow a certain style of filming, where the filmmaker has to share the space with others to discuss and decide the way the film is to be shot.

Ethnographic Films in India

The information films of India and the Films Division took hold of the earliest ethnographic films after Independence. These films were often based on tribes, their origin, lives, culture, etc. Some of the examples are given here: *Oraons of Bihar* 1955. Paul Zils, head of the information films of India in British India, was the first to make ethnographic film in India. The film was based on the largest tribe in South Asia; about half of them live in Bihar. Their language is Dravidian, also known as Kuruch. The headman of an Oraon village is called 'munda'. *The Flute and the Arrow*, 1957. This film was made by Russian filmmaker Roman Karmen and Swede Aren Sucksdorff. This film is based on the Murias of Bastar. The Murias are the indigenous or aboriginal (Adivasi) scheduled tribe,

dark-skinned people of the Bastar district of Chhattisgarh, India. They are part of the Gondi People. *Tree of Wealth* 1943-1956 was directed by Bhaskar, supported by information Films of India. The film was about the importance of the coconut for the people of Kerala – the film throws light on the way coconut palms are processed and used. It further shows the picking, drying, extraction, manufacturing of matting, bags, brooms and fuel. *The Vanishing Tribe*- 1959. The vanishing tribe by Paul Zils is on the Todas of the Nilgiris. The Todas are one of the well-known tribals of southern India. They live in communities in the Nilgiri Hills. In the film, we can see the tribal culture and life style of Toda people. *Close to Nature*, 1967. This film by Shyam Benegal is about the tribal in Madhya Pradesh. The life of the tribal of Bastar has been depicted in the film. It explains how the development programmes have enriched their lives. *Change in Themes*: With the onset of industrialisation and modernisation, there was a drastic change in the themes of films made.

Mani Kaul, a prominent Indian filmmaker, made films on the fast-disappearing folk, arts and artists. His film, 'The Puppeteers' in 1953 was on the vanishing art of Puppeteering of Rajasthan. (The filmmaker introduces the family that has persevered this unique art for hundreds of years. In 1977, he made *Chitrakathi* on the folk artists of western India.) Chitrakathi consists of two words Chitra and kathi, which means Picture and Katha means story respectively. So Chitrakatha is the narration of a story with a visual aid. Chitrakatha originally relates to caste-narrated stories with pictures belonging to different places, to earn their livelihood. So Chitrakatha is the narration of a story with a visual aid. The ethnographic film-making in 1990 began to be more popular and effective. These films are on several themes.

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL JOURNEY OF THE TEXT AND THE IMAGE

In this section we will learn the development of ethnographic filmmaking. There was a pivotal shift from a colonial positive outlook to that of field work was based on humanist science. The period between 1913-1920 was crucial as it saw evolution. It was a tradition to stay with the subject to form a friendly relationship and be scientific too. It was most common in established anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers. Reflexivity in filmmaking is that makes audience aware of the filmmaking process. Reflexivity is defined by such devices as looking into the camera