DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

UNIT 1
Re-Visiting a Field Area
Ethnography 1: The Raj Gonds of Adilibad: A Peasant Culture of the Deccan (Myth and Ritual) by Fürer-Haimendorf
Ethnography 2: The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh: Tradition and Change in an Indian Tribe by Fürer-Haimendorf

UNIT 2
Developmental Anthropology
Ethnography 1: India's Changing Villages: Human Factors in Community Development by S. C. Dube
Ethnography 2: Capitalism, Primitive and Modern: Some Aspects of Tolai Economic Growth by T. Scarlett Epstein

UNIT 3
Indigenous Knowledge
Ethnography 1: Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management by Fikret Berkes
Ethnography 2: Setho: Afrikan Thought and Belief System by Fezekile Futhwa
**Expert Committee**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor Nadeem Hasnain</th>
<th>Faculty of Anthropology SOSS, IGNOU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department of Anthropology</td>
<td>Dr. Rashmi Sinha, Reader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Lucknow</td>
<td>Dr. Rukshana Zaman, Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucknow</td>
<td>Dr. P. Venkataramana, Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Rowena Robinson</td>
<td>Dr. Mitoo Das, Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor of Sociology</td>
<td>Dr. K. Anil Kumar, Assistant Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Institute of Technology Bombay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Nita Mathur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Sociology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School of Social Sciences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGNOU</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dr. V. V. K. Sastry, (Retd.)
Director, Tribal Research Institute
Government of Andhra Pradesh
Hyderabad

Academic Assistance provided by Dr. N. K. Mungreiphy, Research Associate (DBT) for the Expert Committee meeting

**Programme Coordinator:** Dr. Rashmi Sinha, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

**Course Coordinator:** Dr. Rukshana Zaman, SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi

**Content Editor**

Professor Vinay Krs. Srivastava
Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi, Delhi

**Blocks Preparation Team**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block Coordinator</th>
<th>Unit Writers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Rukshana Zaman</td>
<td>Unit 1: Re-Visiting a Field Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOSS, IGNOU</td>
<td>Prof. A. Chellaperumal, Department of Anthropology, University of Pondicherry, Puducherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block 3: Introduction</th>
<th>Unit 2: Developmental Anthropology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Vinay Krs. Srivastava</td>
<td>Dr. Keya Pandey, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Anthropology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Delhi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit 3: Indigenous Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Rahul Patel, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Print Production**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mr. Manjit Singh</th>
<th>Dr. Mitoo Das, Assistant Professor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section Officer (Pub.), SOSS, IGNOU, New Delhi</td>
<td>Discipline of Anthropology, SOSS, IGNOU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

November, 2012

© *Indira Gandhi National Open University*, 2012

ISBN-978-81-266-6257-9

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from *Indira Gandhi National Open University*.

Further information on *Indira Gandhi National Open University* courses may be obtained from the University's office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068.

Printed and published on behalf of *Indira Gandhi National Open University*, New Delhi by the Director, School of Social Sciences.

Laser Typeset by: Metronics Printographics, 27/3 Ward No. 1, Mehrauli, New Delhi-30

Printed at:
An important aspect in anthropological research is the restudy of the same area which was earlier studied. This is done in order to gauge the changes that have occurred in the society under study, along with the continuity maintained from the past. Raymond Firth’s study of the Tikopians is a well known example of restudy. It is also possible that one may carry out two synchronic studies of the same society at different points of time and then compare these to find out the degree of change. However such a study will not be able to throw light on the processes of change. Many scholars have been concerned with the issue of incorporating change in a functional study.

The first unit that you will read is concerned with the revisit of a field area. The books discussed here are those that Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf wrote on the Gonds, the largest tribe of Central India. Fürer-Haimendorf was an Austrian anthropologist who has the distinction of carrying out eighty months’ fieldwork spread between three entirely different cultural areas: Assam, Hyderabad, and upland Nepal.

The second unit comprises the section on development anthropology. The first work is by T. Scarlett Epstein, and the second by S.C. Dube. Whilst Dube is concerned with the changes occurring in Indian villages, Epstein contributes to the study of the relationship between economic development and social change. In the work included here, you will read about her study of the Tolai, a Melanesian tribe of the Gazelle Peninsula. Here, she highlights the presence of certain capitalist features among the Tolai of the pre-contact period which led her to use the term ‘primitive capitalism’ for them. She also discusses the process of evolution of the primitive capitalist economy of the Tolai into the Western capitalist system. In his work, Dube offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of change in village India. His book examines some important human factors in economic development and culture change.

The last unit deals with indigenous knowledge. Firket Berkes’s volume is a contribution to what has come to be known as the ‘traditional ecological knowledge’ (TEK). Taking examples from his fieldwork among the Cree of the Canadian subarctic, he has reservations about the use of the word ‘traditional’ because ‘tradition’ is static, whereas the terms like ‘local’ and ‘indigenous’ are adapted to contemporary needs. TEK is culturally transmitted. The ‘knowledge-practice-belief complex’ is primarily concerned with the relations between living beings, including human. The book furthers the non-dualistic view of nature and culture. The idea that runs through the entire work is that if nature is permeated with sacredness and if human existence is an inalienable part of nature, it is impossible to separate religious ethic from ecology.

The final text here is Fezekile Futhwa’s study of African (the author prefers ‘Afrikan’) thought and beliefs. Born in South Africa, the author says that the word God exists in all Afrikan languages. The indigenous belief of the Afrikans is centred on the concept of Setho, meaning ‘supernatural’. The individual who practices Setho is called Motho. The author argues that the concept of religion cannot be separated from the culture and heritage of a society and therefore, religion should be discussed in its language, otherwise the meaning would be lost forever.
UNIT 1  RE-VISITING A FIELD AREA

Contents

1.1 Introduction
1.2 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad: A Peasant Culture of the Deccan (Myth and Ritual)* is an Example
1.3 Description of the Ethnography
   1.3.1 Intellectual Context
   1.3.2 Fieldwork
   1.3.3 Analysis of Data
   1.3.4 Conclusion
1.4 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
1.5 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography *The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh: Tradition and Change in an Indian Tribe* is an Example
1.6 Description of the Ethnography
   1.6.1 Intellectual Context
   1.6.2 Fieldwork
   1.6.3 Analysis of Data
   1.6.4 Conclusion
1.7 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
1.8 Summary
   References
   Sample Questions

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to understand the:

- concept of tribe;
- organisation of tribal society;
- idea of restudy; and
- changes that come in a society over time.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The extensive study carried out among the Gond, Gondi speaking tribe by Führer-Haimendorf, has come forth with several voluminous works describing in detail the ethnographic account of that tribe. Although Grigson’s and Elwin’s monographs dealt with the Gonds of Bastar, no comparable accounts existed on the Raj Gonds, and this led to the widespread work on the later inhabiting the region between the Godavari and the Penganga, by Führer-Haimendorf. In *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad, Peasant Culture of the Deccan*, an in-depth study is carried on, from the perspectives of the Gond material culture which includes their immediate environment, the population pattern and the village set up, the mythological foundation of their social order comprising, the mythical origin of the Gonds, the mythical origin of their clan deities and the cult of the clan deities,
the inter-relationship existing between the Gonds and other tribal and non-tribal populations, with an emphasis given to the study on the annual cycle, viz. the hot season, the rains, the cold seasons and their association with the Gonds economic activities and ceremonial rites related to agriculture, the basis of Gond’s economy.

The Gonds live so close to earth that their thoughts and daily life are very much ruled by their manifold works in their field, forests and the changing seasons. The whole structure of Gond culture, as of any peasant culture, rests ultimately on the successful raising of the crops. The settlement pattern of the Gond village is not determined by the isolation of individual clans but it is rather near blood relations and families linked by ties of marriage that like to build their houses in close proximity. The social norms regulating the tribal life of the Gonds are firmly rooted in mythology. They derive their validity from the rulings of culture heroes and from the actions of deified ancestors recounted in epics and songs. The Raj Gonds are far from aspiring to inclusion in the Hindu fold considering themselves the true exponents of Gond culture, Gond dialect and above all Gond religion.

The basis of the social structure of Gond is the system of four phratries whose origin is attributed to a mythical cultural hero. Associated with these phratries are one or more totem animals which may be neither killed nor eaten by the respective phratry members. Each phratry is strictly exogamous and subdivided into a number of clans (or pari). It would be difficult to determine the exact number of these clans and no Gond is able to enumerate all the clans of his own phratry. The information about the Gond contact with other populations’, breaking Gond’s traditional feudal organisation are also part of the works that focus on their development. Gond’s mythology and their complex ritual, sanctioned and sustained in almost every phase of their mythical precedents which by and large in recent days are rapidly disintegrating are recorded broadly. The territories inhabited by the Raj Gonds of Hyderabad is easily defined, its boundaries coincide with those of the Adilabad district. These regions are indeed as civilised as any other remote areas of Hyderabad and the environment of plain Gonds has in recent generations changed so much that many of the tribes have lost their familiarity with the forest.

The areas of Gonds, where forest gives way to cultivated land was until few years back Gond country but in the last few decades Maratha, Lambara, Kolams, Naikpods and other population have settled alongside the Gonds. However, the Gonds and the Kolams still remain the predominant population. The Adilabad district comprises the tribal agriculturalists, the associated communities of bards, craftsmen, who economically depend on the tribes and regard agriculture as their secondary occupation, and finally the castes of Telugu and Maratha who are the cultivators, artisans and traders. Besides the bards and craftsmen who, though themselves not of aboriginal stock, have lived for centuries within the orbit of Gond culture, certain communities of a very different order share to-day the tribal habitat in many places. These communities have few traditional associations with the Gonds. Their economy is not complementary with that of the Gonds but is highly competitive and in many cases they have succeeded in ousting the tribes. This immigrant population may be landowners, cultivators, traders and craftsmen. They come from varied cultural background, such as the Marathi and Telugu speaking castes, Banjaras and Muslims. The contact with the outside
castes in the matters of Gond economy, undoubtedly, had gradually led to the alienation of the Gonds’ ancestral land properties.

1.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *The Raj Gonds of Adilabad: A Peasant Culture of the Deccan (Myth and Ritual)* IS AN EXAMPLE

Functional theories focus on the social or psychological functions that religion has for a group or a person. In simpler terms, the functional approach sees religion as performing certain functions for society which can be very well connected to the bond existing between the religion and the appeasement of Gond lives. According to Evans-Pritchard’s argument, religion cannot be understood without the social context and its social function. Myths and oracles played a great role in solving disputes and maintaining social order among the Gonds. In this respect one can also agree with Durkheim, who saw religion as a reflection of the concern for society. He based his view on his research regarding totemism among the aboriginals. With totemism he meant that each of the many clans had a different object, plant, or animal that they held sacred and that symbolises the clan. Durkheim saw it as the original and simplest form of religion. According to Durkheim, the analysis of this simple form of religion could provide the building blocks for more complex religions. He asserted that moralism cannot be separated from religion. The sacred (i.e. religion) reinforces group interest that clashes very often with individual interests. Durkheim held the view that the function of religion is group cohesion often performed by collectively attended rituals and this stands as the foremost force in cementing ties in a tribal community, in this case Gonds.

Geertz outlined culture as “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (1973:89). He believed that the role of anthropologists was to try to interpret the guiding symbols of each culture. Fürer-Haimendorf, through the recordings of myths, oracles, material and non-material aspects of the Gonds, had substantiated with appropriate evidences the symbolic representation of the Gond culture.

Cultural ecology is the study of human adaptations to social and physical environments. Human adaptation refers to both biological and cultural processes that enable a population to survive and reproduce within a given or changing environment. The transition of Gond’s livelihood pattern from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, whereby their cultural practices too have been modified, corresponds to their adaptation to both physical and social environments.

Land is an important unit for agricultural production; it has to be used sustainably to meet the demands. The productivity of agriculture is closely related to the land use and cropping patterns. Therefore, the tribes practicing agriculture are strongly linked up to the lands. While tribal economy is traditionally centered on land and its resources, there are several social factors and religious rituals connected with it. These establish emotional bonds between the rituals and their land, making it more than merely a source of livelihood to the tribes.
Material culture represents the “things” or the “stuff” which we create and use on a daily basis, the “material” products of a culture. These “things” could range from the clothes to the dishes in kitchen. Some artifacts denote the class and social status, while others simply help us to accomplish a specific goal. Most importantly, material culture tells us about a place and a time, about the people who created or used the artifacts, about change over time. Just as we create material culture, so too are we shaped by the material culture that surrounds us.

1.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

1.3.1 Intellectual Context

Gond society has its vertical stratification and its horizontal divisions; the latter are, at least to-day, of more fundamental importance. The physical diversity in a tribe of homogenous language, like the Gonds, may be considered due to the fusion of populations of different racial stock which would have occurred in the far distant past. The model on which the Kolams, the tribal neighbours of Gonds, shaped their new economy, when the tightening of forest law forced them out of their traditional lifestyle, was primarily the peasant economy of Gonds, a population of plough-cultivators already familiar to them through manifold contacts of long standing. But it is not only in agricultural methods and material possessions that Gond influence is discernable. The adoption of certain customs and ceremonies seems to have long preceded economic assimilations and in some aspects of their social life it is difficult to discern under the veneer of Gond influence the traits peculiar to Kolam culture.

The Kolams like the Gonds are organised in exogamous clans and have certain names identical to that of Gonds. Marriages are regulated by the clan system modeled on the Gond lines, and the wedding ceremonial closely imitates the Gond marriage rite. However, the funeral customs of the Kolams are quite distinct from Gond usage. The Naikpods claim to a social status higher than that of Gonds and Kolams, and it is expressed by abstention from both beef and pork, and the poorest Naikpods of the hills who mainly live on the jungle fruits and roots refuse to eat at the houses of the Gond raja. In their social customs, the ceremonies at birth, marriage and death, the Naikpods conform largely to the usage and ritual of the lower Hindu castes.

As bards and guardians of tradition the Pardhans play a vital role in Gond culture, nonetheless it was also noticed that the Pardhans discard their fiddle and abandon their ancient association with the Gond’s, their own as well as their former patrons’ cultural life suffers the loss of the vital element. This development, however, has yet hardly touched the central highlands with its compact aboriginal population and is confined to specific areas of the plains. Yet not all Gonds have Pardhans as their bards. The Khatis are the blacksmiths who enjoy a comparatively good social status and they may enter the Gonds houses unlike the blacksmiths as the Agaria of the Central Provinces; however they do not take part in each others’ food. The Wojaris, brass founders, are those who manufacture the sacred bells and the idols of the Gonds. They are regarded as wonderers and their social status is similar to that of Khatis. An interesting point that has to be noted when the tribal and caste based societies live in contact with each other, is the influence of the caste system on the tribal communities. The Komtis belonging to one of the highest castes of Telugu society, who have become an indispensible element
in Gond economy due to their business relations with the Gonds, and having known the fact that Gonds sacrifice and consume cow they do not treat Gonds in the same manner as such out-castes as Malas and Madigas.

Similarly the Brahmins recognise the Gonds stand on a plane different from that of the Hindu population and in spite of their beef-eating, refrain from treating them as the so-called untouchables; it seems that in this respect they adopt towards the aboriginals the same attitude as towards the Muslims and Christians. On the other hand, no appreciable impression on the Gond culture has been produced by the contact with menial castes such as the Malas and the Madigas. Leather-workers of Madiga caste live in some Gond villages; they perform the function of village servants and supply the Gonds with sandals and other leather goods. In their treatment, the Gonds have followed the lead of Telugu society and consider them-rather illogically- as the so-called untouchables, although to Gond sentiment the Madigas’ habit of beef-eating and their work on cow’s hide is in no way repulsive. When considering the relationship between the Gonds and the neighbouring Muslim populations, in the social sphere, Muslim ideas have little influence on the aboriginal culture, the greatest contradictory being the freedom of Gond and Kolam women.

1.3.2 Fieldwork

Fürer-Haimendorf lived with the people he studied, engaging in their community, learning their language, eating their food, and taking part in their everyday life. Fieldwork however, can take many different forms, here Fürer-Haimendorf, also employed the visual techniques and methods of presentation in the form of photography. He has gathered enormous information by conducting surveys and analysing records such as historical archives and government reports. Several individual and group interviews, the oral histories also formed the major fieldwork. Through the Malinowskian tradition of participant observation, detailed, lengthy and often complex observations of social life can be recorded. By participating in the fabric of daily life as well as more formal ceremonies and rituals, discussing the ideas with the willing members of the community, the fieldworker builds up a progressively deeper understanding of what happens in the society being studied, which may be regarded as a personal transforming experience, whereby not only the culture of the people but also their needs and requirements be understood and brought into light. He undertook extensive fieldwork among the Gonds of Adilabad region. He pointed out that his work was of a neutral character and that consequently there was no danger of his becoming involved in a delicate political situation.

Further, he evidenced the concern felt by many anthropologists of his era that the societies under study were in danger of becoming radically changed or even disappearing in the face of a modernising world. This was, indeed, one of the ethical concerns that drove the work of Fürer-Haimendorf. He also maintained an extensive cross-referencing system, both within his field notebooks. He was committed to field documentation as an ongoing enterprise to be returned again and again, in the pursuit of more and more perfect knowledge, by which he was able to come out with such classic work on the Gonds, forcing the readers and officials to ensure their good living standard.
1.3.3 Analysis of Data

The original four phratries (*saga*) of the Gonds are believed to have later split into clans (*pari*) and then into sub-clans (*khandan*) and the Gonds explain that in the course of time each of the clans obtained a set of objects and began to worship the Persa Pen of their phratry at separate sanctuaries. Though there is significance attributed to the phratries and its deities, some Gonds particularly those living far from the seat of clan God, declare the absence of their knowledge regarding their clan deities, their names and histories, such an attitude may be due to the wide dispersal of families and the impact of modernisation. Gonds are found to live in close contact with populations of different cultural heritage, sometimes sharing one village site and sometimes inhabiting different hamlets, nevertheless their relationship with some of their neighbours is long standing, while with others they have only been thrown together. Yet whatever shape his relations with the members of the other communities may have taken, nowhere is the tribal identity of the Gond impaired nor the distinction between them and other castes obscured. Contacts between different populations is confined to economic exchange and cultural adjustment; it has not led to any appreciable racial blending neither has there been linguistic unification. The difference in physical type between the Kolams and Gonds is not sufficiently great to exclude all the possibility of error in identification.

Like the Gonds, until recently the Kolams subsisted on shifting cultivation and it was due to the introduction of forest conservancy act that they moved to a new mode of livelihood. The more settled mode of life, the closer contact with Gonds and lowlanders, and in good years the ample yield of plough-land create both the wish and the possibility of supplementing the meager household goods, and one can also find Kolams who are dressed up like Gonds.

The Kolams are renowned for their skills in divination and this reputation has led many Gond communities to entrust the cult of certain local deities under the priesthood of Kolams, and the Kolams are known by the names Pujaris by the Gonds. Resembling the Kolams in many respects are the Naikpods, to whom the Gonds refer to as Mache. They are shifting cultivators just like the Kolams. Though they live in proximity to Gonds, there is none of the feeling of relationship or ancient association that prevails between them, as well as with the Kolams. In the greater part of the literature on the Gonds of the Central Provinces, the Pardhans are described as the priests of Gonds. This denomination, however, is definitely misleading, while in places where aboriginal culture is in decay, the position may have become obscured, the Pardhans in the Adilabad and the adjoining area of the Central Provinces cannot by any stretch of imagination be endowed with priestly functions. They are the hereditary bards of the Gonds, the songs and stories which they preserve by oral transmission are the most important depositories of Gond tradition. Many Gond villages contain several houses of Pardhans. They stand usually a little apart from the other houses, but are of the same construction though often rather small.

However now a days, a good many Pardhans have taken up agriculture and work on the fields like any Gond. In the social observances, marriage customs and funeral rites, they follow practically on every detail the Gond pattern. They worship the same Gods as the Gonds and attend most of their religious ceremonies but without taking the part of the officiating priest. The Totis considered as the
Re-Visiting a Field Area

sub-tribe of Pardhans are experts in tattooing. They tattoo the Gonds and in return are paid in cash or grain. Hence they make regular visit to the Gond villages where their services are likely to be required. When the position of the Totis is considered in the social scale, they rank lower than the Pardhans. As long as no forest laws restricted the area open to cultivation, they shifted their fields every few years, cultivating the land round their villages in rotation, without, however changing their dwelling. Thus there exist numerous village-sites that have been inhabited for many generations, but individually Gonds are rather unsteady and will move to another village on slight provocation. Through the horizontal divisions within the Gond society such as the divisions of phratry, runs the vertical structure of an old feudal system. When in the 18th century, the collapse of the Gond kingdoms deprived the tribal chieftains of the political power, this system entered upon a gradual decline, and today the former feudal lords are little more than the caste-headmen. When considering the economic activities of the Gonds there are quite a few points that should be noted as the result of development and Government acts. The crops sown in September and October and grown during cool and dry season have attained their present day importance only with the Gond’s gradual transition from shifting cultivation on the light soils to the permanent tillage of the heavy soils of the plains and valleys. All the Gonds have realised the advantages of the crop rotation and just as in the rains they never grow oil-seed in two consecutive years on the same field, so they sow in the dry season alternatively jowar and cotton. Whereas land cultivated during the rains is generally left fallow in the subsequent cold weather, a field with black cotton soil where pulse has been sown as a rabi crop is often sown with rice in the following rains. However, only men with ample land can afford to change their crops to the best advantage.

1.3.4 Conclusion

In the midst of the materially more advanced and economically aggressive population, Gonds form here and there enclaves of aboriginal culture, living in hamlets at some distance from the larger villages of Hindu and Muslim folk. Despite frequent contact with the outsiders nearly all the Raj Gonds of Adilabad speak Gondi among themselves. There is no one racial type to which the majority of Gonds could be said to conform, but nearly will have indefinable common element in their bearing. Despite the difference in languages and generally also in economic status, the Kolams and Gonds consider themselves related communities. Partaking of meals in each other’s houses is common. However the inter-marriages between the Gonds and Kolams are rare and considered irregular by both the tribes. But the offspring of such union experience no great difficulty in being accepted into one or the other community. The Gond tradition portrays the idea that at least one particular Kolam clan owes its origin to that of Gonds. The Gond system of exogamous phratries and clan rules also Pardhan society, and each Gond has a house Pardhan of his own clan, who plays at certain social functions and is entitled to traditional gifts from his patron as well as share in the movable property left by any member of the family.

Though closely connected with the Gonds’ most sacred rites, the Pardhans are not accorded equal social status. Gonds will not partake of their food or grant them entrance into the interior of their houses. With the infiltration of Hindu ideas this distinction tends to deepen and the Pardhans are now in danger of being classed with the outcastes of Hindu society. Though the settlement of non-
tribal population in and around the Gond villages had exposed them to several socio-economic changes, the acquisition of a village by the non-tribal population such as the Kometi, has pushed the Gond cultivators several times into the burden of rents, and also at worst resulting in the expulsion and replacements by the tenants of other castes. The contacts with the other caste groups have had influence on the cultural practices as well. Though not debarred from pig-keeping by any taboo, the Gonds of today do not breed pigs. The entertainers and sadhus visiting the Gond village, spread among them certain superficial knowledge of popular Hindu beliefs, and it is probably due to them that many Gonds have a vague idea of the figures in the Hindu mythology.

However the influence they exert remains on the surface. And also the cultural influence of the associated tribes and other Hindu population on the Gonds is as yet negligible. They speak their own languages and have their own set of customs which distinguishes them from each other. The myths recounting the origin of the clan-deities and the deeds of divine ancestors form part of elaborate cult which is one of the most vital elements of the Gond culture. The cult of the deities and ancestors of the clan is not restricted to the great annual feasts, but forms an essential part of the Gond’s religious life. As far as the Gond economy is concerned, they still remember the time when there were no forest-laws interfering their agriculture, no excise-rules depriving them of liquor and the accessibility to the forest produce. When the Government restricted the utilisation of what the Gonds considered their own by ancient right, there was wide-spread resentment due to the encroachments on the traditional tribal economy by others. In the economy of the Gonds, too, the reservation of forests wrought important changes. While the Gonds have been cultivating the flat tops of the surrounding hills, on the light soil, and worked in rotation with the ample period of fallow, gave excellent rain crops, the inclusion of most of these hills into forest conservation, led them to rely more and more on the rich black cotton soil in the bed of the valley, changing the variety of crops cultivated. A Gond’s life appears to be consistent, as they do not distinguish between the natural and supernatural world, so he does not place the technical acts of ploughing and sowing in a category different from that of the ritual observances which assure the sprouting of the crops and protect the ripening again.

1.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

The ethnographic study by Fürer-Haimendorf enables the readers to visualise the life of one of the India’s largest aboriginal tribes and helps one to form his own opinion on the merits and demerits of the policies which the government of the states has adopted. The anthropological information gathered gives the account of the culture-contact resulting invariably in the expropriation and economic enslavement of the tribal communities. In order to study a tribal community as a whole, it should be of greater importance that we focus on the mythology and kinship structure of the particular community studied, which not only gives a profound knowledge about its history and significance but also the various inter, intra-relationships and participation of the community members in the social, ritual and economic activities, forming a web. In addition it helps to
understand the formation of the religion, the relationship of individual members of the society to their respective deities and cult-centers. Another aspect to comprehend the tribal culture lies in the study of their material culture, through which one can analyse the state of the community corresponding to its history, and the level of its cultural assimilation and the process of acculturation influencing them.

1.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh: Tradition and Change in an Indian Tribe IS AN EXAMPLE

Historical Particularism posit the idea that every culture is a unique result of its own historical processes, which can be well related to the cultural behaviours of Gonds linked up with their history and mythology.

There exists a symbiotic relationship between the Pardhans, the bards and the Gonds, the agriculturalists. The inter-relationship between these two tribes contributes to the wellbeing of each other. Without the Pardhans, the Gonds would not have the knowledge of their traditional history for which the former is paid by the Gonds. The reason for such a tie between them is usually due to economic favours. Pardhans recite myths of Gonds and epics that are preserved for generations during the rituals and ceremonies, whereby the traditional knowledge of the Gond is kept intact by them. The concept of inter-cultural competence can also be noticed between the relationship of these two cultures.

Functionalism, a theory stressing the importance of interdependence among all behaviour patterns and institutions within a social system to its long-term survival is clearly portrayed from the ethnographic account on the Gonds, stressing on the inter-dependency and inter-relationship of various institutions (such as the economic organisation) being linked with religion, and the functioning of each substantiating the existence of the other. The agricultural work and the cult of deities and spirits are inextricably interwoven.

The tribal communities have been marginalised from the mainstream of Indian society through the caste system. They, in turn, consider themselves distinct from the majority of Hindu population, as well as from most other organised forms of religion. Until few years ago cattle was regularly slaughtered for sacrifice and meat was greatly relished by the Gonds, but this practice has been abandoned due to Hindu sentiments. Perhaps the most significant change is the new habit of going on pilgrimage to Hindu temples. However to a large extent the influence of Hindu religion, mythology and festivals is being assimilated into Gonds cultural practices, supporting the idea of sanskritisation.

The relationship between the environment and the subsistence of the Gond population are greatly intact with each other. Gonds, who once largely depended on minor forest produce which are considered with vast economic importance, could no longer in the same way rely on it, due to progressing deforestation.
1.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

Introduction

The process of change and its impacts on the social structure of a tribal community through the way of development is always considered a core of anthropological work. One such effective research on the Gonds of Adilabad district in Andhra Pradesh carried out by Fürer-Haimendorf, stays anew as an example of an extensive ethnographic study, entitled *The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh, Tradition and Change in an Indian Tribe*. A descriptive account of the traditional culture of Gonds along with the process of culture change is explicitly recorded in the above mentioned work. A classic ethnography on the Gonds encompassing the importance of the native language, the importance of political, economical and social roles carried out by the members of the community and in studying the history tracing back to the origin of tribes are specifically focused.

The Gonds, *gondi* (dialect of Dravidian origin) speaking population are regarded as a tribal community with greater prominence in Madhya Pradesh and Hyderabad. The Raj Gonds on the other hand are the division from Gonds, who tried to raise their social status as the result of being Hinduised, considering themselves as separate Hindu castes under new names. The historical position of Gonds is analysed through a brief review of early political events though there is few ambiguity marked. Gonds, though having contacts with the populations of different cultural heritage such as their neighbouring tribal communities- Kolams, Naikpods, Pardhans, Totis and Khatis, and caste-based populations from Maratha and Telugu castes, there is no prominent marking of their identity being impaired.

Gonds are found to subsist largely on agriculture and hence there is great importance and strong sentiments attached to the land. Nevertheless they also carry on with few other subsidiary occupations (such as animal husbandry). The Gond village is considered the social and territorial unit linked with tradition, rituals and kinship, the fabric of tribal community. The social structure of the Gonds is backed up by the formation of phratries, *saga*, the exogamous patrilineal descent groups that share a common mythical past with traditional marriage systems. The Gond social structure is associated with the totem that speaks of their antiquity and these totemic observations are mainly related to animals. The observance of totemic taboos is significant irrespective of the phratries they belong to and it strengthens their phratry solidarity. Through several ceremonies and rituals the solidarity is reaffirmed, which supports each other in few economic and emotional interests.

However, when it comes to judicial proceedings and tribal *panchayat*, parties are not aligned in respect to the phratries. The phratry system not only regulates the internal working of Gond society but also determines the relation between Gonds and the other tribal community. There are several hymns that are enumerated by the Gonds concerning the ritual or mythical attributes. During appropriate rituals and ceremonies (like marriages) these sacred hymns are sung. These convey the formation and importance of clans and phratries with their names. The Gond village is seen as a unit without the discernment of any kind of class differences. The headman and the priest are elected representatives of the villagers. There is a fundamental equality prevailing among the inhabitants of the Gond village. Gond mythology is well complicated that only few exceptionally
have detailed and comprehensive knowledge of ancestry beliefs. With the above introduction on the ethnographic details of Gonds, the following discussion will focus on the detailed description with analysis and summary.

1.6.1 Intellectual Context

The connection between food restriction and the taboo with the clan system plays a significant role, whereby the reader can understand the avoidance of the flesh of certain animals forming a definite bond between the members of the clan or the phratry which indeed is an important factor corresponding to the identity of their social unit.

Through the agnatic line tracing among the Gonds, it is understood that the child inherits only his/her father’s and not the mother’s taboo. A married woman observes both the taboos of her father’s clan and her husbands, the husbands however are not bound to respect his wife’s totemic avoidances. Throughout the life of a Gond woman, her position in the exogamous system is determined by her father’s clan membership.

By discovering the structural relations between the system based on a hierarchy of aristocratic lineages and the segmentary organisation of phratries and clans whose equal status is one of the key notes of Gond’s ideology, the researcher was able to construct a model according to which each clan would contain an aristocratic lineage establishing itself as overlords over those of weaker and smaller clans.

The usage of the concept of ethnopoetics in recording the versions of Gonds oral poetry, narrative performances and myths recitation within the specific cultural context enhances the depth of the study. The association between the Pardhans, the bards and Gonds, the agriculturalists, is considered long-standing and is sanctioned by an elaborate sacred mythology which has been preserved by the Pardhans, which emphasizes the importance given to oral tradition. Fürer-Haimendorf here contradicts Verrier Elwin’s reference to the Pardhans as ‘younger brothers’ of the Gonds. Though Pardhans bear the same clan name as Gonds, yet they are not considered a full member of the clan and do not stand on the same level as the Gond clan members. Though the symbiosis between these two communities is undoubtedly old, it has not been long enough to effect complete assimilation into all spheres of culture.

Fürer-Haimendorf in his study has made a comparison between the South Indian and North Indian tribes on the basis of tribal justice. According to the Gond justice there is no joint responsibility of kinsmen such as prevailing among the North-east tribal community.

Yet another interesting fact is that the months of the Gond year do not coincide with those of the Gregorian calendar, in order to indicate as precisely the possible timing of the ceremonies and ritual the Gondi names of the months will be used in corresponds with their economic activities.

1.6.2 Fieldwork

The field notes and field diaries played a very important role to gather an in-depth and updated data about the Gonds of Andhra Pradesh, where he was able to record the major information on the practical difficulties of Gonds, their social
structure and rituals which were later transformed into reports for the reformation acts. Several case histories were collected in order to understand the dispute between Gonds and the other immigrant non-tribes. With the case histories he was able to establish relations between Gonds and other communities from the past to present and with which the conflicts and problems faced were traced and put to light. Learning the native language and its application in a prolonged field work, fetches greater importance for a reliable data when ethnography is considered. Visual documentation and the collection of photographs in substantiating the data collected with first hand witness, captures the memorable aspects of the culture. Collection of data through oral tradition and ethnopoetics forms an important method for the interpretation of data. The author also emphasised the importance of the genealogy adopted for an extensive study of the kinship information across families and generations. Apart from the above mentioned, he widely used fieldwork questionnaire on marriage, economic status and kinship; house-lists; diagrams and charts on distribution of tribes, families, households, and herds, maps, official correspondence and permits to travel, miscellaneous papers including some relating to travel arrangements and a large collection of published and unpublished works by other authors. However, in addition to all the above said, observation is an important tool used in collecting primary data.

1.6.3 Analysis of Data

By analysing the myths, several facts have emerged. One such analysis regarding the clan and phratry is as follows; the motif of the seven brothers is not confined to any definite period in the growth of the Yerwen Saga, but appears repeatedly and in different variations. The confusions regarding the time and personality pervade the myths of the clan. Equally indeterminate in the matter of clan origins are the myths of the four-brother folk. However the myth of JanguBhai has a definite genealogical sequence that explains the emergence of the Sarpa Saga. The contradiction existing between the fundamental equality of all Gond clans and the feudal system with its various aristocratic lineages of Gond Rajas are brought to the picture. Nevertheless the average Gond is unaware of the inconsistency existing within their social structure. And these two systems are made understandable by analysing the co-existence of the two systems in different planes. The organisation of clans and phratries is without territorial implications and is concerned mainly with the implications of marriage and maintenance of the cult, whereas the feudal system had until recently a territorial and political basis. The mythology which explains and validates the system of exogamous phratries and clans, does not account for the stratification of Gond society according to the concepts of rank. Yet, membership of a raja lineage carries prestige and there are certain ritual functions which only a raja can properly perform.

The Gonds even today are not completely devoid of the knowledge about the system of land that tenure prevailed in feudal times, thus relating the history of feudal times with their present scenario. Hence they possess a tendency to equate the feudal chiefs with the clan heads. However there are several factors leading to the lack of lucidity in the foregoing account of the feudal system recently.

From the usage of genealogical link between all the members of a clan arise questions such as if all the members of the clan and sub-clans claim descent from a common ancestor, it is logical to assume that all the lineages stand in a
brotherly-relationship, and their members regard each other with equal status. The fraternal equality of all clan members is not clearly consistent. The Sitagondikar sub-clan of Atramclan combines a feeling of solidarity with all the other members of their sub-clan, with the notion that he belongs to a class of rajas, distinct from the common mass of the people.

The mythical foundation of the Gond community is largely associated with the maintenance of their social order, yet not always. While a comparative study of Indian religions might have enabled to distinguish between truly tribal gods and deities of Hindu origin one must not assume that the Gonds themselves make a conscious distinction between native and alien gods.

In theory, men are usually held to be superior to women and playing the dominant role in marriage. In practice, however, among the Gonds, relations between the spouses do not always conform to this model, and many women are the equal partners of their husbands, which can also be seen in their economic activities. Women are not meant only for household activities, but also actively contribute to their livelihood. Yet in all the ritual undertakings women are over shadowed by men.

When considering the economy of the Gonds, the commercial relations and particularly the marketing of crops have undergone considerable changes recently. The result of shifting from the cultivation of the traditional food crops such as jowars to the money fetching cash crops, cotton the farmers do not have much grains to sell and many have even to purchase food with some cash they have obtained from the sale of cotton or in the case of poor families from daily labours.

1.6.4 Conclusion

A man’s relationship to other men of his clan belonging to the Gonds remains unaltered from birth to death, and cannot be modified by the creation of any other social ties. Through the detailed ethnographic account of the clan and phratry system, one can very well understand the kinship ties and responsibilities performed within them, which characterises a tribe.

The concept of ‘clan land’ which is a vital force of the tribal community is almost dead among the Gonds of Adilabad. The modern laws of land tenure have superseded the older system of clan territories jointly owned by the members of the clan. Under the modern conditions, the importance of the clan in all respects other than those of ritual and regulation of marriages is clearly on decline and the present system of land tenure combined with the state laws of inheritance leaves little room for the right of the clan to prevent the diversion of the property of any of its members to the people outside the clan. The relationship of the Gonds and Pardhans who were the bards initially has also changed in recent days. Many of the Pardhans today no longer depend on the generosity of the patrons for they now compete with Gonds in the field of agriculture and animal husbandry. There are also cases recorded where few of them have become affluent by their own efforts as cultivators. However the prosperity based on agriculture has not alienated a Pardhan from performing his hereditary art as a bard.

The process of Hinduisation has influenced several other aspects of Gonds lifestyle. A great deal of Hindu mythology is seen into the traditional and poetical myths of Gonds, which in turn have been responsible for the merging of Gond
and Hindu motifs and ideas. The life of the individual Gond and indeed the whole tribal community is sustained almost entirely by the tillage of the soil and the whole nature of Gond culture can be understood best when seen against the background activities which absorb so much of everyone’s time and energy. The conditions of the Gonds have changed considerably over development due to forest conservancy coupled with the general population pressure, commercial relations based on market economy and the invasion of the Gonds region by large number of non-tribal settlers. With the introduction of the market economy, the demand has greatly stimulated the production of cotton, a commodity fetching currently very high prices, whereby many Gonds have reduced the cultivation of their traditional food crops such as jowari and wheat. The traditional pattern of Gond life which developed at a time when tribal communities lived in relative isolation in the highlands is now disturbed at large by close contacts with other populations.

1.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

Through an in-depth ethnographic account, it is not only possible to frame policies for the well-being of, but also ensure the safety and preserve the identity of such groups, who are exploited as a result of development and through the process of cultural change. Such ethnography enables the fellow beings in considering the conflicts and crisis faced by several isolated, homogenised groups and in turn substantiating them with facilities and independence to cope up with the challenges they face. Fürer-Haimendorf has set himself a challenging task amidst people from entirely different culture, being one among them and establishing their rights.

1.8 SUMMARY

The myth that tells the origin of the Gond race and the establishment of four phratries is more than history or folklore, they are the pragmatic sanction for the institutions that determine the behaviour of every Gond towards his fellow tribesmen. A relationship of mutual enlivenment links myths and ritual. And without the knowledge of Gond mythology, it would be difficult to study the Gond society. The role of the clan-deities in present day Gond life seems very clear and outstanding, their nature and historical development seems to be extremely complicated. All Gond tradition is oral and consequently subject to almost as many variations as there are narrators. Guardians of the sacred lore are not the Gonds themselves, but their hereditary bards, Pardhans and Totis, who recite at each of the major annual feasts the appropriate myths and legends. On whatever cultural and economic level the Gonds have stood in the past, they have been for several centuries’ peasants with solid homesteads and an economy based on plough-cultivation and cattle breeding. As long as no forest laws restricted the area open to cultivation, they shifted their fields every few years, cultivating the land round their villages in rotation, without, however changing their dwellings. Raj Gonds of Adilabad, who have lived for almost a century and half under the Muslim rule, and have in consequence been less exposed to the influence of the more intolerant exponents of Hinduism, have retained more of their traditional culture than most of the tribesmen in the Central Province.
Gradually the administration was tightened, communications were improved and the Government encouraged the influx of new settlers into the tracts hitherto the undisputed domain of the aboriginals. Hence the effects on the economic and social position of the Gonds were far reaching. The type of Gond settlements in general is larger and more substantial than those of either Kolams or Naikpods. The cult of clan deities stands certainly foremost in the Gonds’ religious consciousness, except perhaps in those areas where tribal culture is already in a state of disintegration. All the deities are thought of in anthropomorphic terms, and their reality is for the average Gond as great as that of his material environment. His religiousness is deeply rooted in his belief in the oneness of the worlds of human beings and spirits, and the conviction that only the man in harmony with the supernatural powers can prosper in this life. The non-tribal populations like the Telugu and Marathi speaking are Hindus and the universality of Hinduism with its peculiar social system has no doubt blurred many distinctions between them and the Gonds recently. Not only with the influence on the social and religious organisations of the Gonds, but also economically are Gonds put into various pressures and situations by non-tribal populations. The Komtis, are the moneylenders and merchants and deal with tribal groups. These moneylenders have become an indispensable part of Gond economy ever since their economic institution started their base on the exchange of goods and services, ruled by payments in money. This in turn would lead to the exploitation of the tribal community. The enumeration of the various populations sharing the Gonds’ habitat may lead to the belief that the independent tribal life of Gonds must largely belong to the past. The Gond land, the habitat of the Gonds, once been called is now opened up to the immigrants from Telengana, ever since the improvement of communication. Hence the Gonds have withdrawn from the plains while in others Gonds have lost their lands and have become tenants of big landowners.

Gonds possess a significant knowledge about the annual seasons, since their major economy is sustained by the season and environment. As soon as the weather is considered reasonably safe, the village elders decide on a day for the ceremonial first sowing. On the eve of the first sowing, rituals and sacrifices are offered to the clan deities anticipating a good yield. They are found to cultivate suitable crops at specific seasons to ensure profitable outcome. The beginning and end of the seasons and first felling and first sowing are always marked with rituals and festivities, throwing light on the inter-twining of their economic and religious structure. Gond months are reckoned from new moon to new moon, and the first day of Chaait is the New Year’s day of the Hindu year. The celebration of marriages is also arranged in accordance with the good harvest and on the amount of availability of food and cash. The choice of crops which the Gond sows in the rains depends largely on the kind of soil of his fields, and only to a small extent on the tendencies of the market. Gonds recognise three types of soils viz. patar- light stony soil, chelkar-light and finer soil and kanar-black cotton soil. Initially when the Gonds were shifting cultivators, they cultivated on the patar and chelkar which required considerable periods of fallow. Now being settled agriculturalists kanar is widely used, since it can be continuously cultivated without manuring, and producing ample cotton, cash crop, enabling their market economy. While in many parts of the plains, the Gonds are indeed hemmed in on all sides by other castes and the growth of their culture is crippled by economic conditions. Nevertheless the Gond culture still flourishes, perhaps not in so grand
Gond society is basically patrilineal society. The kinship system consists of descriptive and classificatory terms. The ties, obligations and rights based on kinship are the principal formative forces of Gond society. Birth, marriage and death, the main social crisis are all opportunities for the manifestation of kinship obligations. The most distinctive feature of Gond religion is the cult of the phratry and clan deities. Hindu attitudes and practices are gradually gaining ground, which hardly makes them realise that in course of time they would transform Gond ideology. An important innovation regarding Gond religion is the virtual transformation of the old cult centre of the Persa Pen into a veritable Hindu temple where not only Gonds but also members of other Hindu castes pay visit.

A comparison between the Gonds attitudes on marriages between past and present does not reveal any immediately perceivable changes. There are also considerable results with the effect of education among the Gonds. With less emphasis on negotiated marriages, the marriage age is rising, and the attendance of many children of both sexes at schools has also the effect of diminishing the likelihood of marriages between the very young children, such as used to be very common. The partial transition from an economy rooted in subsistence agriculture to cash economy coupled with the introduction of a new political system designed to promote democracy through elections have brought about considerable change in the alignment of social forces.

With the introduction of market economy and the education of children, the mobility among the Gonds has greatly increased, which in turn has also brought about change in marriage, family pattern and the traditional lifestyle. The Gonds in the past largely subsisted on slash and burn cultivation growing monsoon crops and due to the availability of sufficient land, today they are plough-cultivators whose farming methods are not fundamentally different from those of the Hindu peasants of the region. When the land was sparse they could shift their fields frequently, cultivating single set of crops during the monsoon sufficed to cover their needs. Greater population density, increased stability of settlements, and the usage of oxen-drawn plough must have led to the extension of cultivation with cash crops such as cotton. The greater part of the agricultural work is organised on the basis of individual families. The important change that has taken place in the economy of the Gonds is the increasing extent of cash crops transactions, and the partial transition from food crops to cash crops. This however is not necessarily bringing an advantage to them, for they are well used to husbanding their stores of grain. There is no comparable tradition regarding the economic use of ready money. The major problem faced by the Gond farmer is the rapid population growth which has lead to a mounting pressure on finite resources of land. The destruction of much of the forest, moreover, is resulting in erosion on the hills slopes and the disturbances of the state of the ecology. As a result of the contacts with outsiders, Gonds undergo marked struggle to retain their ancestral land and their economic independence and to protect themselves from land alienation and erosion of economic and social independence. Their rich agricultural and forest resources are largely exploited. With the introduction of Forest Conservancy Act, the acquisition and retention of the cultivable lands became a problem for the Gonds, making them feel the lack of permanent rights to their land. The areas open for cultivation were now restricted and the Gonds
were no longer sure to find land which they could cultivate on temporary tenure. And even those Gonds who had obtained land (patta) rights, many lost their land to non-tribal. It was recognised that the stabilisation of the Gond’s position could be achieved only by securing their rights in the land they and their forefathers were cultivating, which required reversal of the existing policy concerning the allotment of the land which can be achieved by the organisation of co-operative societies, grain banks supported by the government loans and investment on the legally constituted tribal panchayts with the power of administer.

References


Sample Questions
1) Discuss the traditional occupation of the Raj Gonds of Adilabad, and the shift in it in recent years.
2) Among the Gonds of Andhra Pradesh discuss the process of Hindiusation.
UNIT 2 DEVELOPMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Contents

2.1 Introduction
2.2 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography *India’s Changing Villages: Human Factors in Community Development* is an Example
2.3 Description of the Ethnography
   2.3.1 Intellectual Context
   2.3.2 Fieldwork
   2.3.3 Analysis of Data
   2.3.4 Conclusion
2.4 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
2.5 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography *Capitalism, Primitive and Modern: Some Aspects of Tolai Economic Growth* is an Example
2.6 Description of the Ethnography
   2.6.1 Intellectual Context
   2.6.2 Fieldwork
   2.6.3 Analysis of Data
   2.6.4 Conclusion
2.7 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
2.8 Summary
References
Suggested Reading
Sample Questions

Learning Objectives

This unit will introduce you to:

- the concept of development;
- how anthropologists have studied the notion of development; and
- a comparative study of development in different contexts.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Development anthropology refers to the application of anthropological perspectives to the multidisciplinary branch of development studies. It takes international development and international aid as primary objects. In this branch of anthropology, the term development refers to the social action made by different agents (institutions, business, enterprise, states, independent volunteers) who are trying to modify the economic, technical, political and social life of a given place in the world, especially in impoverished, formerly colonised regions.
Development anthropologists share a commitment to simultaneously critique and contribute to projects and institutions that create and administer Western projects that seek to improve the economic well-being of the most marginalised, and to eliminate their poverty. While some theorists distinguish between the ‘anthropology of development’ (in which development is the object of study) and development anthropology (as an applied practice), this distinction is increasingly thought of as obsolete. With researches on the field, the anthropologist can describe, analyse and understand the different actions of development that took and take place in a given place. The various impacts on the local population, environment, social and economic life are to be examined.

To understand the concept of development and the factors contributing to it we will focus on the ethnographic works (a) *India’s Changing Villages: Human Factors in Community Development* by S.C. Dube and (b) *Capitalism, Primitive and Modern: Some Aspects of Tolai Economic Growth* by T. Scarlett Epstein for the unit.

### 2.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *India’s Changing Villages: Human Factors in Community Development* IS AN EXAMPLE

Indian village was not a stagnant entity as was believed by colonial officers. It was constantly changing, although the pace of change varied from one village to another. Dube’s work is a contribution to the understanding of the processes and products of change in rural India.

### 2.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

This volume as a product of research work owes much to co-workers and associates at the Cornell Field Station, in Western U.P., India. The aim of this study was to examine some of the important human factors involved in externally induced and state directed programmes of economic development and culture change in a technologically under-developed society. The analyses presented here are qualitative rather than quantitative. The universe of the project was a single Community Development Block and there too, attention was focussed mainly on two villages and the author hoped that the problems and conclusions emerging out of the study will have generally speaking some validity for similar projects elsewhere in India.

#### 2.3.1 Intellectual Context

In the second half of the twentieth century, rural India was being exposed to a large number of changes being introduced from outside. The issue was the changes that came in society and their impact on the traditional institutions.

#### 2.3.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted using qualitative research methodology. Fieldwork involved the use of the techniques of observation and interview. Case studies were also collected.
2.3.3 Analysis of Data

The political division of the country had left numerous tangled questions unsolved, caused considerable bloodshed and rioting and brought into the country a large number of uprooted people. The consolidation of the union of India and the integration of these princely states was one of the major tasks before the country. The antiquated land system, with several intermediary tax collectors between the peasant and the government, was crying for reform. For the last few decades there has been considerable awareness of the importance of planning in India. In 1938 the Indian National Congress appointed a National Planning Committee to examine the resources of the nation and prepare plans for its reconstruction. The National Planning Committee of the Indian National Congress had worked under the Chairmanship of Jawahar Lal Nehru for a number of years. Because of certain political developments and generally unsettled conditions in the country, it did not have an uninterrupted career. Although it could not come out with a comprehensive plan, it did much pioneering work by exploring the fundamental economic problems of the country and by examining the possibility of preparing a co-ordinated plan for national economic regeneration.

A Rural Development Project in Action

The People

As a part of the National Community Development Programme the government of Uttar Pradesh selected, among others, a group of villages in one of the western districts of the state for intensive development. The project to be launched in this area was not to be of standard type of community development project, comprising three blocks each consisting of nearly 100 villages, nor was it to be a rural-cum-urban Project: the selected villages were to be constituted into a community development block. At first only 120 villages were selected for inclusion in the block but later on ground of public demand and administrative convenience, 33 more villages were added to the list. Around the middle of the 1953 preparatory work was started and the project itself was inaugurated by the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh on 2nd October 1953.

The area covered by this project was wholly rural. In fact with the exception of the town in which the headquarters of the project was located there were no other urban settlements in the area and the headquarters town itself was excluded from project operations. Judged by average Indian standards the 153 villages in the Development Block were quite advanced agriculturally and economically. Besides its tie with the headquarters of the project, an old, semi rural settlement and centre of grain trade, this area has immediate connections with two other cities. One of these is the seat of the district of which the development block is a part and other is the seat of an adjoining district. While the people have administrative connections only with the district headquarters, many villages which were geographically nearer the other district town naturally look to it for its marketing, medical and educational facilities. There was a small government dispensary at the project headquarters and larger and comparatively better equipped hospitals as well as several highly qualified private medical practitioners, in the two district towns.

Two important types of village settlements were found in the area, some ‘single settlement’ villages others ‘nucleated’ villages. The society was caste structured
and the economy was mainly agricultural. The Rajputs, Tyagis, Jats and Gujars were the important land owning, agricultural castes of the region. These castes were found among both Hindus and Muslims. The relative position and strength of the castes often determine the character and organisation of a village. The social organisation of the village communities was determined by the interplay of several different kinds of solidarities. Kinship, caste and territorial affinities were the major determinants that shape their structure and the organisation. Caste was perhaps the most important single organising principle in those communities and it governs to a very considerable degree the organisation of kinship and territorial units. In that kind of social division, the different segments were kept apart by complex observances related to the concept of ritual pollution. The caste divisions were regarded as divinely ordained and were hierarchically graded. The differences between various segments were defined by tradition and it was regarded as permanent.

In recent decades a number of forces and factors have influenced the caste system and have brought about significant modifications in its form and functioning. Development of modern means of communication, urban contacts, modern education and movements of social reform (such as the Arya Samaj and the Gandhi’s campaigns against untouchability) were important factors affecting caste system. Notwithstanding considerable propaganda in favour of breaking down the barriers of caste it still retains its endogamous character. However rules governing commensality and interpersonal relations between castes have been greatly modified. In regard to these a dual character of behaviour is gradually coming to be recognised. Adherence to traditional forms was considered desirable and necessary in the village but persons going from the villages to urban areas take moderately to city ways. Of course when they return to the village they generally return to the local traditions.

**Project, Achievements and Its Response**

Although the ideal of the Community Development Project was to work for the many sided development of the entire community, from the work being done in two villages it was clear that the best organised activities were confined to the field of agricultural extension, and consequently, the group of agriculturalists benefitted the most from them. The benefit went to the elite group and to the more affluent and influential agriculturalists. The gains to poorer agriculturalists were considerably smaller. Being suspicious of government officials they did not seek help from the project as often. For the economic development of this group as well as for that of the artisans and agricultural labourers, no programmes were initiated by the project. Some programmes for the welfare of women, younger people and the untouchables were undertaken, but their organisation lacked imagination, and consequently they failed to make the desired impact.

In the sphere of public health and sanitation some significant steps were taken, but they only touched the surface of the problem. They were far below the needs of the community and did not in any appreciable measure change the attitude and outlook of the people towards nutrition, hygiene and health. The social education programme made the least impact. It was treated as a step child and was started more as a formal obligation than for its basic aims of awakening the community to its own needs.
An analysis of the motivation of village people in accepting the project sponsored programmes shows that they offered their co-operation mainly for the following reasons:

1) Economic advantage and convenience
2) Prestige of the individual, family, kin group, caste and village
3) Novelty of innovations
4) Compliance to the wishes of government and village leaders

The main obstacles in the way of the greater acceptance of the programme were:-

1) The general apathy of a considerable part of the village population.
2) Suspicion and distrust of officials and outsiders.
3) Failure on the part of the project to evolve effective and adequate media of communication.
4) Tradition and cultural factors.

These factors have vitally affected the implementation of the programme.

State Officials as agents of Change

By setting up the orientation and training programmes and by making a conscious effort to evolve a set of operational principles to guide the officials engaged in development activity, the planners have shown both foresight and a genuine interest in equipping the officials to function as agents of change. Through periodical publications and seminars and conferences the government has tried to evaluate the success of its plans and had provided a forum for exchange and communication of ideas. To the credit of the planners it must be said that they have not hesitated to deviate boldly from established practices where the need or wisdom of such departure was indicated. Human factors involved in the change over from the old pattern of organisation and methods of work can now be appraised empirically. This experience should enable the planners and the administrators of the development programme to device more effective training programmes, and alter the administrative machinery suitably. Planning so far appears to be from the top to down. Because of the undue curbs on project autonomy its officials hesitated to demonstrate much initiative. What was worse they tended on the official level to accept orders from above i.e. from state headquarters, without question or comment and this often despite pronounced private reservations. As an outcome of this trend the officials were oriented less towards the village people and more towards the pleasing of their official superiors. Sympathetic but honest evaluation could wean the official away from the kind of self deception that a quest after impressive records as such sometimes entails. It could help towards a better definition of ends as well as towards a development of suitable means for attaining them. Only through insights provided by such work can we hope to transform ‘bureaucrats’ into ‘agents of change’.

Problems of Communication

The process of communication has been identified in one sentence as ‘who says what to whom, how, with what effect’. Between the originators of ideas, innovations and programmes and the audience to whom they are addressed they are significant factors of content, method and mechanism. The methods of communicating the programme to the villager, recommended in the development
literature and emphasised in the training of the officials can be classified under three main categories:

1) Contact
2) Demonstration
3) People’s Participation

Several methods were adopted to communicate the programme to the people. Important among them were slogans, pictures and posters, pamphlets and publication, movies, tournament and competitions, exhibitions and conferences, propaganda meetings, fraternization, visits by dignitaries, meetings and speeches, social education classes and community centres, group discussions and individual contacts, camps and sightseeing tours and work with local agents of communication. The ultimate outcome of the process—what effect—is determined as much by certain cultural factors as by intermediate factors of communication. In the context of the societies like the one to which this study refers the factors as well as the process and results of communication are governed and influenced by the cultural predisposition, cultural screens and processes of cultural adaptation in the community to which the message is addressed. An understanding of these factors is of vital significance for the successful implementation of the development programme.

Cultural Factors in Community Development

There has been a growing realisation among the rural extension experts and technical assistance workers that even some of the less involved technological or economic innovations have latent cultural and social dimensions that need careful consideration if the success of these programmes is to be assured. From this study a number of points emerged that illustrate the range and effectiveness of cultural factors influencing such programmes.

- **Habits and Taste:** The habits and taste of the people have determined the initial response of the community to a large number of innovations and programmes promoted by the community development project. The improved varieties of wheat seed promoted by the project were in the beginning not very enthusiastically received by the community because of their flat taste and also largely because of the difficulties women folk experienced in using flour from them to make the conventional type of unleavened bread.

- **Social Practices and Traditions:** When it comes down to established social practices neither appeals on scientific grounds nor logic can easily persuade the village people to give up their traditional life ways. As a part of the programme the village level workers got compost pits dug outside the settlements in a number of villages. The local village councils passed resolutions making it obligatory for the villagers to use these pits. However, most of these pits remains unused. Cultural factors explain the failure on the part of the people to use them. Traditionally it was the work of the women to clean the house and the cattle shed and deposit refuse and dung in one corner of the courtyard or in an open space near the house. While women of even the highest castes can do this kind of work at their homes, those belonging to the highest castes are not expected to be seen carrying
loads from their houses all the way to compost pits on the outskirts of the village. Men could not do so because culturally such a task is defined as women’s work. As very few families could afford to engage servants to do this work the traditional practice was never seriously threatened and continues.

- **The Area of Belief:** The state has been actively promoting programmes to introduce better methods of cattle breeding, but without much success. The agriculturalists recognise the importance of good draft cattle, and indeed invest large sums of money in buying animals of good breed. But locally they cannot do much to change the methods of cattle breeding, because of the presence in the villages of a large number of scrub bulls. The government has distributed free or at subsidized rates a large number of pedigree bulls in the area, but they are not much help because no effective ways can be devised to dispose of the scrub bulls. Being the mount of Lord Shiva, a bull is regarded as sacred. Traditional practices rooted in beliefs offer obstacles to the acceptance of a wide range of programmes in the fields of rural health and hygiene, and of practices connected with maternity and child care.

- **Social Structure:** The interplay of factors affecting programmes of directed change in the general area of the social structure is extremely complex. In this sphere it is necessary to take account of social segmentation and stratification, role differentiation in terms of age, sex, and types and levels of leaderships and vital factors of group dynamics and factionalism within the community. Welfare measures among untouchables were adversely criticised by the upper castes as politically motivated steps for vote getting that developed disturbing notions among the untouchables. The presence of women from the untouchable caste in the adult education classes started by the project in an important village of the development block resulted in the boycott of the class by the women of the upper castes. Age and experience are considered as desirable, often a necessary, attribute of positions of leadership and influence. As a consequence of this norm measures initiated by the project always need the blessings and support of the more tradition bound elders. Projects initiated and run by the younger age groups are viewed as temporary developments of minor significance and are rarely taken seriously by the community. This has to be considered in the selection of the local agents of change and the initiation of projects with long range effects.

- **Attitudes and Values:** In respect to attitudes, it is necessary to consider the village people’s view of change. Does the village people consider it necessary and desirable? Then it is useful to find out their attitude towards the promoters of change. Do the people trust them? Or do they have any misgivings about their motivations? Finally it is necessary to determine the attitude of the people to the actual action program and to the methods adopted for implementing it. Indicative of this divergence are the two extremes of thought; one hoping that a free Indian government will undo the evil influence of an alien government and will re-establish the society on its traditional foundations by recognising and enforcing the relative statuses of different castes and another reflected in the thinking of the politically conscious leaders of the lower castes that the government will take active steps to eradicate the barriers separating the high castes from the low castes and the rich from the poor.
## 2.3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion it may be said that in devising action programmes of community development, especially in their educational aspects it is necessary to keep in mind the cultural factors that vitally influence their acceptance or rejections by the people. Many programmes are rejected not because the people are traditional, conservative or ‘primitive’ but because the innovations, in all their ramifications, do not fit into the total cultural setting of the community. A balanced and critical evaluation of the motivations and mechanism of change in these societies, together with the analysis of the cultural determinants of acceptance and rejection, can provide fruitful insights towards better planning and execution of development programmes.

## 2.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

The ethnography abundantly tells us that cultural factors are extremely important in affecting the programmes of development. The planners and development specialists should keep in mind those factors.

## 2.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY Capitalism, Primitive and Modern: Some Aspects of Tolai Economic Growth IS AN EXAMPLE

This work is an example of the studies of change. One of the major criticisms of the functional approach was that it was unable to account for change, and this led to a particular concept about communities that they were changeless. In reality, it was not so. The focus thus shifted from the study of society as an ordered whole to how it was changing over time.

## 2.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

This book is about the Tolai, a Melanesian people living on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, to the north east of the mainland of New Guinea. The Tolai are reported to have been cannibals until about the end of the last century, yet nowadays they are regarded as one of the most sophisticated and advanced people of the whole of the territory of Papua and New Guinea.

This study revealed many interesting aspects in the economic life and development of these people, some of which have an interest and significance which goes far beyond the affairs of the Tolai people and those immediately concerned with them. The purpose of this book is to describe and discuss these aspects of Tolai economic development and to analyse the general theoretical implications which emerge.

At the end of the nineteenth century the Tolai were technologically still extremely primitive, they uses sharp pieces of bamboo, stone axes and pointed sticks as their main tools. Yet only fifty years later they already owned a large number of motor vehicles, as well as costly copra driers and cocoa fermentaries. In terms of per capita cash income, however the Tolai are still underdeveloped and poor.
2.6.1 Intellectual Context

In this book the author has examined the forces which facilitated this comparatively rapid economic progress of the Tolai and the obstacles which have prevented an even greater expansion as well as those which are likely to impede the path to future continuous economic growth. An attempt has been made to analyse the impact of economic change on the traditional Tolai social system: which aspects persisted and which aspects changed. The flexible social system operating with the monetised economy provided a fertile ground for economic development. In fact it can be regarded as having been a system of primitive capitalism with great emphasis on thriftiness and accumulation of wealth rather than primitive communism without any concept of private property.

2.6.2 Fieldwork

This work was done by combining the typical anthropological fieldwork methods with the historical method. Anthropological fieldwork involved the use of the techniques of observation and interview. The impact of Europeans on the lives of people was studied using archival method.

2.6.3 Analysis of Data

The data was analysed using the methods of qualitative research.

The Impact of Europeans on the Tolai Economic Life

The impact of European contact on Tolai economic life meant a widening of the market-foreign traders were keen to acquire coconuts and labour-and the innovation of the new capitals, as well as consumer goods. By 1960 the Tolai had passed through four distinct phases in their economic progress. In the ‘transition period’ they got the first glimpse of the new tools and the goods made available by the traders either in exchange for Tolai coconuts or labour or both. During the second phase the ‘agricultural investment period’ they rapidly extended their coconut plantings. They also increased their production of food crops to supply foreign settlers as well as the growing non-Tolai native labour force on the expatriate plantations in the area. This increase in production resulted in a considerable addition to Tolai income. However, since their consumption did not increase in proportion to their income, they began to look around for profitable investment opportunities for their accumulated cash resources. Consequently they entered their ‘investment trial period’ during which they experimented with enterprises in the sphere of agricultural processing, such as copra driers, and servicing industries, such as transport and retail trade. As a result of their inexperience of organising and operating enterprises, a high proportion of their initial ventures failed. However they learnt by their experience and after World War II passed into the fourth phase of economic progress the ‘tertiary investment period’ during which the number of Tolai who owned vehicles and retail stores grew considerably and the proportion of business failures was greatly reduced. However even at this stage agriculture still provided the basis to the economy.

Economic Change

In order to examine the economic change in a small scale society the author has taken a big Tolai group Rapitok, a frontier settlement and discusses in detail the mutual interaction between traditional social organisation and the new forces of change. The Rapitak population interacted with the wider economy; administrative
policy played an important part in shaping their economic progress, in that they followed the advice from the administration given since the last war and planted cocoa extensively, the development and profitability of transport and retail enterprises. Economic differentiation in Rapitok was expressed in terms of productive rather than non-productive assets and the customary social differentiation between elders, middle farmers and single men households re-asserted itself under the new conditions. By examining Rapitok’s cash balance of payments we see that its link with the wider economy is based largely on the export of cash crops; copra and cocoa. However, cash cropping did not make great demands on Rapitok’s economic resources: ample highly fertile land was available and subsistence as well as new cash crops needed little labour.

New economic opportunities did not therefore provide an alternative to customary behaviour rather the inhabitants could superimpose their new cash earning activities on to their traditional life. This in turn enabled their traditional social system to survive practically unimpaired by the new forces of change. However, the increasing rate of cash crop expansion coupled with a rapidly growing population produced a scarcity of land, more so each year. This began to undermine the traditional social organisation. The existence of large capital assets, such as trucks and copra driers, as well as large areas under perennial cash crops, affected in particular the customary system of matrilineal inheritance. Conversely matrilineal inheritance affected economic growth.

Tolai Cocoa Project

The new councils which were empowered to levy rates and taxes were keen to sponsor local economic development so as to help provide increasing prosperity. At that time it was already clear that centrally controlled fermentaries were needed to make the cocoa enterprise a success. These two factors combined brought about the union between the new cocoa industry and the new councils in the form of the Tolai cocoa project, which developed in three phases.

First phase: In 1951, after the series of meetings between the councils, leading growers and officers of the departments of Agriculture and Native Affairs, it was decided that initially each council would appropriate funds from its revenue to construct fermentary units at strategic places in their areas and would further provide recoverable advances to enable each fermentary to start operating.

Second Phase: Cocoa production increased rapidly in the early 1950’s and more fermenting facilities were urgently required. Considerable capital investment, beyond the revenue resources of the councils, was needed. Accordingly the councils concerned applied to the administration for financial assistance.

Third Phase: Even the expanded fermenting capacity proved unable to cope with the rapidly growing production. Consequently in 1955 officers of the department of Native Affairs and Agriculture set about carefully examining the whole cocoa industry, including the count of all native cocoa trees and an estimate of future wet bean production.

The Drift away from the Project

Inspite of its obvious usefulness, the project has had to face serious competition from European and Chinese traders ever since its inception. In order to protect their enterprise the local government councils ruled that it was illegal for any
Tolai to sell cocoa outside the project. A number of Tolai were actually fined for offences under this rule. At the 29th meeting of the board a motion was proposed by a leading Tolai and passed by a large majority that the Minister be requested to bring the legislation to compel all Tolai people within council areas to take their wet beans to council fermentaries. However the administration, in accordance with the policy of encouraging competitive enterprise in the territory, has not thought such protective legislation desirable or justifiable. The drift away from the project has taken on considerable proportions.

A number of reasons are frequently advanced to account for the project’s decreasing popularity. Some hold that Chinese traders nowadays offer illicit methylated spirit to Tolai who are attracted by this and consequently take their wet beans to traders rather than the project. Though this may be so in a number of cases it cannot possibly account for the whole of the cocoa sales to independent traders nor can there be regular theft of such large quantities that stolen cocoa can provide a major source of cocoa sold outside the project.

Again it was sometimes argued that the Tolai like to take their wet beans to Rabual whenever they want to make a purchase in order to have ready cash available on the spot. Saturday is the day on which most people make their way to Rabual to visit the market. Yet none of the project fermentaries accepts wet beans at the weekend. In order to overcome this disadvantage the project started a buying station at Rabual market. It operated for three months but was then discontinued because it was found uneconomic.

What then may be deciding factor for so much cocoa being sold outside the project? This question has puzzled many of the people concerned. Some regard cocoa sales to Chinese traders as a sign of plain irrationality; others attribute it to sheer contrariness. The most outspoken critics of ‘irresponsible’ attitudes are some leading Tolai themselves. One of the most respected elders in the area encouraged his audience of cocoa growers to beat up anyone they found taking wet beans to traders rather than to the project. This might be taken to indicate that there was political opposition between supporters of the project and those who sell outside it: that the drift away from the fermentaries represented a breakaway political movement. However, while the project supporters’ openly declared their loyalty to council fermentaries, those who sold their cocoa to traders almost always did so secretly: they collected their wet beans early in the morning and then took them to traders under shelter of darkness. There has, as yet not been any overt movement of Tolai declaring openly that they wished to sell their cocoa outside their project.

**Matrilineal Inheritance and Cocoa Sales**

A considerable number of Rapitok men, who have had their own matrilineage lands planted with cocoa by their sons, wish to conceal this fact from their fellow parishioners. The Rapitok data clearly show that the complex pattern of landholding and inheritance constitutes the crux of the drift away from the project. There were no doubt a number of other contributory factors. Yet none of these individual factors could possibly account for the increasing proportion of the cocoa sales to independent traders. The increasing drift away from the project was in fact largely a result of the difficulties arising from the introduction of perennial cash crops into a society with a traditional social system according to which inheritance followed the matrilineal line of descent, whereas residence
was patri-virilocal. The rapid growth of population accompanied by extensive cash cropping accounted for the increasing demand and competition for land. Sons could no longer be accommodated in their fathers’ parish according to the customary system of landholding, unless they had claims to land there on the basis of their own descent groups.

2.6.4 Conclusion

The Tolai case study illustrates the crucial part- foreign contact- in particular a foreign administration- plays in the sphere of economic development of small scale societies. Even with such favourable pre-conditions of growth as were found among the Tolai, their economy remained stagnant until its growth potential was fertilised by the European contact. Though the people were quick to respond to new economic opportunities they did not have the inventiveness to start new enterprises of their own accord. The shape and form of their development is entirely due to stimulus originating from outside rather than to spontaneous indigenous ventures. At first the German and subsequently the Australian administration encouraged coconut planting. This ultimately resulted into an extensive copra production. The Japanese ordered rice cultivation, therefore rice was grown then immediately after World War II the armies offered vehicles cheaply and the Tolai bought them. Since the last war the Australian authorities in the area have sponsored the production of cocoa. Again people followed the lead. The administration thus directly affects the pattern of indigenous economic growth apart from affecting it indirectly by providing education and other facilities. It is therefore the responsibility of the administration in underdeveloped societies to direct development in a way most beneficial to indigenous population. In doing this officials may be well advised to bear certain considerations in mind.

2.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

Change occurs when a community comes in contact with outside world. This ethnography advances our understanding of the situations of contact. Like in the Tolai case, the foreign administration played an important role in economic development. Till the time the external intervention was not there, the community was static. Contact with the outside world brings about transformative changes.

2.8 SUMMARY

Both the ethnographies discussed in this unit show that people are not passive; they are also not tradition-bound. They have a critical look at the development measures and how they would benefit them.

References


**Suggested Reading**


**Sample Questions**

1) What do you mean by development anthropology? Illustrate with examples from S.C. Dube’s *India's Changing Villages*.

2) Write an essay on the cultural factors contributing to community development program in India.

3) Write in short the impacts of Europeans on Tolai economic system.

4) Briefly describe the Community Development Project achievements and the responses of the Tolai villagers to the program.
UNIT 3 INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Contents

3.1 Introduction
3.2 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management is an Example
3.3 Description of the Ethnography
   3.3.1 Intellectual Context
   3.3.2 Fieldwork
   3.3.3 Analysis of Data
   3.3.4 Conclusion
3.4 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
3.5 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography Setho: Afrikan Thought and Belief System is an Example
3.6 Description of the Ethnography
   3.6.1 Intellectual Context
   3.6.2 Fieldwork
   3.6.3 Analysis of Data
   3.6.4 Conclusion
3.7 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding
3.8 Summary
   References
   Suggested Reading
   Sample Questions

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you will know:

- the concept of indigenous knowledge;
- the place of this knowledge in the lives of people;
- aspects of this knowledge in two societies; and
- the need to preserve it.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, anthropologists have strongly felt about the rights of people and how they were being trampled and undermined by the external forces of development and change. As these communities are changing, their knowledge systems- technically called indigenous knowledge – are also disappearing. It is not only a loss of inestimable value but also without their knowledge systems, the people feel decimated, isolated, and lost. The action anthropologists work towards the preservation of this knowledge- let the people chose what they want to retain and what they wish to give up. Against these ideas of people’s autonomy that these two ethnographic accounts may be situated.
3.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management IS AN EXAMPLE

This work is a contribution to ecological anthropology. Each community improvises a set of techniques and a world view to adapt to the environment. In most societies this world view is rooted in religion, the sanction of which help in the preservation of the environment. Because of the close interaction between religion and ecological knowledge, the ‘ecology becomes sacred’, hence ‘sacred ecology’.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management is a holistic study of TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge). The book is about traditional ecological knowledge in resource management.

3.3.1 Intellectual Context

Need for ecological insights from indigenous practices of resource use and to develop a new ecological ethic in part by learning from the wisdom of traditional knowledge holders gave rise to this volume divided in three parts, quoting Cree Indian hunters, to explain various concepts and aspects of TEK and explains how to make indigenous knowledge (IK) applicable to contemporary problems. Berkes was earlier a marine scientist and applied ecologist but later shifted to human ecology and environment and the work by him is an outcome of extensive fieldwork conducted on James Bay Cree Indians.

3.3.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted using the standard anthropological methods. The author spent a long time with the people, collecting their understanding of their environment. The local conceptions were noted down and interpreted. The author also made use of the historical material; and all this was contrasted to the western conception of sustainability.

3.3.3 Analysis of Data

The Cree Indians

The James Bay Cree region lies to the east and south-east of James Bay and south-east of Hudson Bay. It has been inhabited by the James Bay Cree since the glaciers left about 5,000 years ago. The Cree now number some 12,000 people and live in nine distinct settlements from which they hunt approximately 375,000 square kilometers of land. (The word “Cree” in this chapter refers specifically to the James Bay Cree.)

The total resident population of the eight Cree communities in 1987, according to the list of beneficiaries of the James Bay Agreement, numbered 8,590. The land, which is snow covered for six to eight months of the year, is unsuitable for growing crops or for grazing domestic animals. For these reasons, the traditional
Cree economy consists of hunting, fishing, and gathering wild berries, in contrast to the agricultural economies of Indian groups farther south, such as the Hurons and the Iroquois. The five coastal communities, Whapmagoostui, Chisasibi, Wemindji, Eastmain, and Waskaganish, and the inland community of Nemaska are relatively isolated. Over the past 10 years, the rate of social and cultural change has been particularly rapid in the Cree communities, increasing the influence of non-Native North American society on Cree society. The Cree have an extensive set of ideas about types and causes of illness, as well as a number of traditional remedies from plant and animal sources. Unfortunately, these ideas have not been incorporated into the medical services currently provided in the Cree communities (Robinson, 1988:1607-08).

**Cree World View “from the Inside” as viewed by Berkes (1999)**

**Understanding Traditional Ecological Knowledge among the Cree Indians**

James Bay Cree Indians are independent hunter-trapper-fisher and rural population at periphery of a dominant society. To get an animal in the Cree view does not mean to encounter it by chance, but to receive the animal. The animal is given to the hunter. A successful hunt is not simply the result of the intention and work of the hunter; it is also the outcome of the intention and actions of the animals. In the process of hunting a hunter enters into a reciprocal relationship: animals are given to hunters to meet their needs and wants, and in return the hunters incur obligations to the animals. Thus, the Cree conception of hunting involves a complex and moral relationship in which the outcome of the hunt is a result of the mutual efforts of the hunter and the environment. This is a subtle and accurate ecological perspective. It may seem odd that animal killed should be conceptualised as gifts, and it is important therefore to note that Cree do not radically separate the concepts of “human” and “animals.” In their everyday experience in the bush they continually observe examples of the intelligence and will power of animals. They express this by saying that animals are “like persons”; they act as if they are capable of independent action, and they are causally responsible for things they do (Feit 1995:3-4).

**Belief system of Cree**

Berkes (1986b) opines that in the belief system of Cree, the living environment is a community of beings that are supernatural as well as natural. These beings possess what Westerners’ might consider extra normal powers. They have spirits that are sentient; they are watchful and aware of people’s behaviour. Hence, Cree of Chisasibi have great faith in animal spirits. Berkes (1999:30) focused on three Cree beliefs to illustrate their world view viz. (a) It is the animals, not people, who control the success of the hunt. (b) Hunter and fishermen have obligations to show respect to the animals to ensure a productive hunt. (c) A continued, proper use is necessary for maintaining production of animals.

**Characteristics of the Cree World view**

1) The hunter’s obligations towards animals are interwined with social obligations, so that the environmental ethic of the Chisasibi Cree is an integral part of a comprehensive philosophy of life.

2) The Cree world view is that animals in the past were able to communicate with humans and they are well aware about the human actions. Cree legends attest to such type of views. Cree believe that hunters have no power over
the game; animals control the success of hunt. Hunters have certain obligations to fulfill towards the animals; maintaining a respectful relationship, i.e. game has to be pursued and animals have the last say as to whether they will be caught.

3) Cree world teaches their youths to respect the animals.

4) According to Cree beliefs the success of a hunter peaks with age and after reaching its zenith, it again starts declining and his sons inherit part of an old hunter’s success. This is a cyclic process in which the amount of animals available remains constant but the distribution of success varies.

5) The disappearance and reappearance of animals take place in a cycle. The belief in the eventual return of disappearing animals is very strong.

6) Cree express their respect to animals in many ways like- an attitude of humility is maintained towards animal; animal is approached and killed with respect; animal is carried to camp with respect, offerings are made to them, butchering and consumption is done with respect and remains are disposed off in a proper manner. The Cree do not consider the killing of game as an act of violence. The hunter loves the animals he kills (Preston 1975).

Cree social values such as reciprocity apply to human-animal as well as to social relationships as a continued proper use of resources is important for sustainability. Such type of beliefs among Cree people indicates a cosmology in which humans are part of a “community of beings” within an ecological system. The Cree world view emerging in the volume is not a unique one. It is consistent with Colorado (1988) characterisation of native science as holistic and religious grounded in empirical observation (Berkes, 1999:9).

**Efficiency, Abundance, and Reliability of Cree Subsistence Hunting Practices**

The Cree hunters do not encounter game on a haphazard basis but they carefully plan and organise their hunting activities. Hunting is organised into an annual cycle of activities so that each species of game is used at times likely to produce an efficient, abundant, and reliable supply of food (Feit 1995:7).

**The Social Organisation of Hunting and the Power to Manage Game Resources**

The Cree have a distinct system of rights and responsibilities concerning land, resources, community and social relations - a system of land and resource tenure, and of self-governance. This system provides a means with which the hunters can fulfill their responsibilities to animals and spirits and contribute to the conditions necessary for their mutual survival.

Cree society is organised around principles of community, responsible autonomy, and reciprocity. The central resources of land and wildlife are not considered to be owned because people are born and die while the land continues. The land is passed on from previous generations and will be transmitted to future generations. The land and the animals are God’s creations, and, to the extent that humans use or control them, they do so as part of a broad social community united by reciprocal obligations. These gifts and obligations are not solely individual; they involve
the wider human community as well, so that all people have a right of access to land and resources to sustain themselves. This right extends to all Cree, and to others as well, but along with the rights go responsibilities to contribute to the continued productivity of the land and animals. The exercise and fulfillment of such responsibility requires knowledge and a subtle responsiveness to the relationships with animals and spirits and imply a willingness to exercise self-control and participation in a community of responsibility. The Cree are efficient enough at hunting that they could deplete the game. Regulation is both an individual and a community responsibility and is assisted through a system of stewardships (Feit 1995:8-9).

**Eco-friendly Fishing Practices of the Cree**

- Traditional system of fishing which provides ecological and resource management insights.

- Two basic strategies of fishing (a) small-mesh gill nets were used within commuting distance of the village i.e. in a radius of 15 kms; (b) Mix of larger-mesh gill nets were used further away.

- Most distant locations were fished mainly with larger mesh sizes and were visited rarely once every five to ten years. Traditional rule of thumb of rotating over a cycle of 4 years was followed as in case of beaver trapping i.e. Rotation and resting was followed.

Three Cree practices known as ‘Secr ets of Cree system’- are the sets of management practices incorporate- (1) Concentrating fishing effort on aggregation of fish, or otherwise adopt for hunting if the catch is poor.(2) Rotational or pulse-fishing. (3) Use of a mix of gill net mesh sizes.

Cree during fishing also monitored key environmental signals and then decided when, where and how the fishing can be done in better way conserving the ecosystem as well. They also took into consideration fish health, sex or fatness and unusual patterns in behaviour and distributions as well. The conduct in fishery was guided by the need of food for social obligation, community exchange and hence helped in minimising waste of resources and proved to be a boon for ecosystem.

**Pantheism** is an important feature of the Cree world view. It is also found among the Iroquois. However, such type of religious-beliefs/world view help to maintain a balance in ecosystem. Cree believe that the continued use of resources is important to achieve a sustainable productive harvest. Cree trappers follow ‘rotation’/resting in hunting areas. They continuously observe the environment and monitor the health of the beaver-vegetation system.

*Pantheism* is a profound feeling of reverence for Nature and the wider Universe. It fuses religion and science, and concern for humans with concern for nature. It provides the most solid basis for environmental ethics. It is a religion that requires no faith other than common sense, no revelation other than open eyes and a mind open to evidence, no guru other than your own self. *Every seed is awakened and so is all animal life. It is through this mysterious power that we too have our being and we therefore yield to our animal neighbors the same right as ourselves, to inhabit this land.* (file:///I:/14-12-11%20CREE%20INDIANS/indians%20PANTHEISM.htm)
It is not accidental that pantheism is often taken to be a view inherently sympathetic to ecological concerns. This makes a decision to deal with ecology alongside pantheistic ethics less artificial than it might be. A pantheistic ecological ethic will not be anthropocentric. This rules out the notion of man as a “steward of nature,” whether his own or God’s, who is responsible for nature. It also rules out utilitarian, contractarian, and Kantian approaches. The pantheist’s ethic and environmental ethic together are metaphysically based in terms of the Divine Unity. Everything that is part of the Divine Unity (as everything is) is also part of the moral community. Aldo Leopold (1949: 219, 240) says, “The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively, the land … A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community.”

Other than the idea of pantheism, there is also a person who plays a very important role in Cree ecosystem management well known in Cree world as Tallyman (uuchimaau)

**Tallyman (uuchimaau)**

- Plays important and culturally significant role for Cree people.
- Has broader significance to the field of sustainable management.
- Senior grassroots manager.
- Ecological embeddedness is found.
- Acts as political leader and ensures no one goes hungry in the group. Some believe that in old age he also becomes a spiritual leader very similar to ‘shaman’. Similar to Tallyman of the Cree, the Shaman (Kakushapitak) among the Innu (Montagnais) is respected as great hunter as he knew where to hunt.

The uuchimaau/Tallyman/steward fulfills his responsibility by coordinating the activities of families using the ‘trap line’, ensuring that particular species of animals (especially beaver, the focus of fur-trade activity) are not over harvested and that the widely scattered camps are bringing in enough food to meet everyone’s needs. Some hunting leaders are specialists because of their skill in coordinating a particular activity, such as the caribou hunt. More permanent and wide-ranging stewardship of a ‘trap line’ (not, strictly speaking a ‘line’ at all, but an area of land or ‘territory’), is a privilege inherited from an elder hunter, usually an agnatic kinsman, but occasionally a maternal uncle or unrelated mentor, whose special relationship with a young man will involve education in the responsibilities of being a custodian of the hunter’s territory. No uuchimaau would long retain his status if he mismanaged through incompetence or attempted to hoard resources in a bid to accumulate political control (Niezen 2009:11-12).
• The steward’s authority is, in principle, spiritually sanctioned, thus obligating him to protect and share the resources. In general, all members of a community have the right to hunt on any land on a short-term basis, while traveling through, while camping for brief periods, or while using small game or fish resources. However, extended and intensive use of the larger game resources is generally considered to be under the supervision and approval of the stewards.

• Stewards generally grow up in a territory on which they hunt repeatedly over many years before they take over their role. During this time they build up extensive ties with the spirits of the land and acquire a vast knowledge of its resources. They are constantly aware of the changing conditions of the game populations. Each steward has the right to decide if the hunting territory will be used intensively in any season, how many and which people can use it, how much they can hunt of each key species, and where and when they can hunt. The stewards do not exercise these powers in an authoritarian manner.

• Stewards usually act by suggestion and by non-personal public commentaries on the situation, and their knowledge, their spiritual ties to the land, and the sacred sanctions for their statements give them considerable influence. Typically, each steward inherits his position from a previous steward, and he has the duty to designate his successor. In practice, the system of hunting-territory stewardships works to maintain an ongoing balance between harvests and game (adopted from Feit 1995:9-10).

**Tukano Cosmology**

- Individual considers himself/herself a part of complex network of interaction of entire universe. Individual is in a set of relationships with animals, plants and environment. Such behaviour is aimed at conservation of ecological balance. For this Tukano develop many regulatory mechanisms and ensue that they are respected by all the members of the society.

- Tukano ‘Shamans’ plays the role of the shaman as a healer of illness, not so much at the individual level, but at the level of “supra-individual structures” that is parts of ecosystems that are disturbed by human action. Hence, shaman restablishes the hunting rules and controls the depletion of natural resources. In this ‘Shaman’ acts as a very powerful force to control and manage the resources, (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976:311-315).

**Dubun Community**

- Indigenous group, resides near Kinabalu National Park (Borneo). Inventory was prepared on Kinabalu Park to record medicinal, edible and decorative plants. Ecological awareness based on ancestral knowledge.

**Zulu Herbalists of South Africa**

- Silverglen Nature Reserve (220 hectares) located between Umlazi and Chatsworth, Medicinal plant nursery. ‘Zulu herbalists’, who are heirs to a mystic oral tradition and identify the important plants disappearing and grow them, play very important role in the park and conservation of medicinal plants.
Berkes (1999:107) formed a hypothesis that a conservation ethic can develop if a resource is important or limiting, predictable and depletable and it is effectively under the control of the social group in question so that the group can reap the benefits of conservation. For this he chooses the caribou hunting and management. He believes that monitoring of ‘caribou fat content’ is not merely an area specific bit of local knowledge but rather a principle of traditional ecological knowledge widely applicable across the whole area and it also provides a index of health for both the individual animal and the herd.

**Some ways to conserve Indigenous Knowledge**

- Adaptive management
- Address the unity and diversity of indigenous systems
- Participatory and community based resource management
- Integrate local values into decision making
- Bridging of gap between utilitarianism (human-centric ethics) and biocentric ethics.

### 3.3.4 Conclusion

This study is an example of a harmonious interaction that people have with their environment. People know that they cannot survive unless they draw their resources from the environment and at the same time, they should not harm it, for if it is destroyed, it would also signal people’s collective demise. Thus, they have to opt for a strategy that helps in safeguarding the environment.

### 3.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

This book is an example of the indigenous knowledge of people and how it can be collected. Anthropologists think that if these thoughts are not recorded soon, they are bound to disappear. These thoughts tell us how different societies interacted with their respective environments.

### 3.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *Setho – Afrikan Thought and Belief System* IS AN EXAMPLE

This book is a study of the indigenous thoughts of a people from South Africa. Anthropologists think that if these thoughts are not recorded soon, they are bound to disappear. These thoughts tell us how different societies interacted with their respective environments.

### 3.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

Fezekile Futhwa’s book entitled, *Setho – Afrikan Thought & Belief System*, is a detailed study of African thought and belief system. It explains ‘Setho’ as a belief system, its characteristic features, its cultural elements, mythological aspects related to it, rites and rituals, norms and customs prevailing in the African society. The author, Futhwa was born in apartheid South Africa. He was baptised and
adopted the Christian way of life and worship. Later on, tired out of harassment, his family got relocated to a homeland named Qwaqwa in 1979. He chose Africanness and never set his foot in church ever since. During his quest for African belief system he realised that, “faith and belief is the right term and not religion. Religion is the aftermath of the commercialisation of faith, something to which we do not subscribe as Africans.”

3.6.1 Intellectual Context

The intellectual context is that people’s knowledge needs to be documented, for there is every possibility that it would come to an end. This project could be called ‘salvage anthropology’.

3.6.2 Fieldwork

Intensive fieldwork was conducted among the Basotho of South Africa using the standard anthropological methods. The author spent a long time with the people conducting different varieties of observation and interview. Case studies of different people were also collected.

3.6.3 Analysis of Data

About the area and the people

The book is based on Basotho people of South Africa. The ancestors of the Sotho people entered the area south of the Limpopo river in several migrations. In time, they became dispersed over the vast interior plateau between the eastern escarpment and the arid western regions and formed four subgroups viz., the Tswana, North Sotho, South Sotho and East Sotho. Those who settled in the western regions preferred to be called Batswana (Tswana) while those living in the southern regions called themselves Basotho. The Sothos living in the northern areas also preferred the name Basotho but were sometimes referred to as Pedi. However, not all the North Sotho use this name. The East Sotho people lived in the Lowveld area of the Northern Province but lost their distinguishing characteristics and, in time, became assimilated into the present-day North Sotho group. The South Sotho or Basotho people settled in the area that was to become known first as Basutoland and later as Lesotho.

Understanding African Thought & Belief System- through the lens of Futhwa

Faith and belief are an integral part of human life and society. Belief is the psychological state in which an individual holds a proposition or premise to be true. Faith is the confident belief or trust in the truth or trustworthiness of a person, concept or thing. All humans therefore hold the conviction that their understanding of God is true and valid. But neither can ever be proven since faith is a belief. Religion is therefore never about the validity of the belief itself, rather about the cultural norms and practices of the belief. Religion is the systematic enactment of beliefs (Futhwa 2011: 4).

Mythology for creation of state

- African Basotho people believe that the place of origin for human beings was Ntsoana Tsatsi- a place in Far East. ‘Ntsoana Tsatsi’ means a place where sun begins to shine. It is also believed that at this place ancestors returned after their death.
• Creation mythology has three symbols viz. the Sun (represented by the East), the Water (represented by the River), and the Mythological (represented by the Reeds).

• The sun is considered as God who brings sunshine which represents ‘hope’. East signifies beginning and end of life. That’s why all rituals are performed facing eastwards. (Futhwa 2011:11)

• River symbolises the transition between life stages and it represents the window between this life and rest of the spirit world. In river itself traditional healers were bestowed with their healing capabilities and river gives shelter to ‘reptiles’ which are physical representations of the spirit world.

• Reeds stand guard between earth and spirit world and are symbol of purity. They are at the mouth of the gate to spirit world and hold the knowledge which controls subconscious mind (Futhwa 2011:11)

Fundamentals of African Thought & Belief

• Belief in the Supreme Being.

• Supreme Being is believed to inhabit all space.

• ‘Humanism’ - the value of humankind as the centre of life.

• Respect for elders.

• ‘Communality’ - community harmony and cohesion, private and public morality is found in the society.

• Family and human life is given importance.

Indigenous belief

The indigenous belief of the people of Africa in the supernatural is known as Setho. Motho is an individual (person) who practices Setho, i.e. someone who is born and raised within Setho. Botho is the value system encompassing the lifestyle and norms of Batho (plural for Motho= community). Hence, Botho is an integral part of a people’s lifestyle and is a practical manifestation of how people live in Africa.

Elements of Setho

In Religious Sphere

• There is widespread belief in supreme God who is unique expressed through prayers and worships.

• Sense of ‘sacred’ and ‘mystery’ is deeply embedded like they have a feeling of high reverence for sacred places, persons and objects.

• Myths and funerary customs explain their belief in ‘life after death’, similar to the idea of ‘metempsychosis’.

• It is believed that invisible world of spirits and ancestors is always present and the intentions of these spirits can be ascertained; care is taken to ascertain the will of the spirit to whom sacrifices may be due or from whom protection may be sought.
Indigenous Knowledge

• No dichotomy exists between life and religion and ancestors are believed to be a mediator between God and human beings.

• Before offering sacrifices to God bodily and spiritual purification is required.

• It is believed that ‘sin’ hampers public good hence to promote public welfare periodical purification rites are performed.

In Ritual Sphere

• Ancestors and the dead are invoked by rites and various rites form an essential part of social life. Rites of passage, of initiation and of consecration are widespread and many rites of purification of individuals and communities are found. Sick persons are healed in rites. Cycle of rituals for various seasons is observed. Stages of life are sanctified by ritual action. During any crisis rituals are performed.

• During ritual performances each individual ensures that body and soul, is totally involved and each person contributes his share in a spirit of participation.

• In rituals, through dress and the arrangements of the places of worship they try to preserve religious sacredness and purity.

In Religious-Moral Sphere

• Children are given much importance and practice of abortion is an abomination. Taboos and rituals help in maintaining sacredness of life. Human dignity is considered important.

• Moderation in the use of alcohol is inculcated: only adults may drink. Drunkenness is shameful.

In Religious-Cultural Sphere

• Old folk are held in high esteem and community regards their wisdom as prophetic. Moral education of youth is taken seriously. Youths are initiated gradually to learn social and cultural practices.

• Cultural provisions are established to maintain stability of marriage as it is considered as an alliance between families and person.

In Religious-Social Sphere

• There exists a very strong sense of sharing and of solidarity and belonging among the kith and kin and people of the same clan. Both nuclear and joint families are found. Hospitality is performed as a duty.

• Respect for authorities; poor, sick, widowed and orphans are taken care of.

Botho Value System

• Botho literally means ‘humanity’.

• The value system found in Setho is termed as Botho (Ubuntu).

• Botho is a set of characteristics that define the patterns of behaviour by Africans. This in effect defines the lifestyle of an African. Behaviour that does not comply with these characteristics is unacceptable and there are penalties for non compliance.
Development and Change

**Characteristics of Botho**

- Communality, hospitality, humility, justice, tolerance, respect, family, kinship, language, clan, shared responsibility and accountability are considered important for Botho.

**Penalties for non compliance of Botho**

- The first level of punishment is termed as *Kgalemo* (reprimand) and non compliance with the values is to be reprimanded, depending on the severity of the act. Not too serious matters will do with just a verbal reprimand. Some times depending on the severity of non compliance, stick shall be used.

- The second level of punishment is termed as *Tefiso* (fine). For serious crimes people are charged formally and shall be made to pay by means of an animal (sheep, a goat or a cow), depending on the nature of the crime. A cow is the highest price that a person can be made to pay. In today’s times when people do not own livestock, the price shall be put on the head of the animal in question by the offended party, and the offender shall be obliged to pay the requisite amount in lieu of stock (Futhwa 2011:16-17).

- When the council feels that cow is not enough then *Banishment*, the third punishment is opted for. The banishment could be for a specified time frame or sometimes it lasts a lifetime in line with the nature of the crime.

### Ancestral Rites

The Basotho practice ancestral worship. They believed that the spirit leaves the body after death but still hovers nearby.

**Mokete wa Tjhai**

- *Mokete wa tjhai* is a winter time ritual of appeasement for the good yield in the fields during harvest. It is a celebration of abundance in which ancestors are thanked for the good fortune.

**Lesokwana**

- *Lesokwana* is a ritual play by young people in the community which is played only during times of drought. It symbolises prayers of the nation to the ancestors to bring rain.

**Ho Thwasa**

- *Ho thwasa* is the ritual of training an individual to become a traditional healer.

(Futhwa 2011:26-27)
**Indigenous Knowledge**

**Places which are considered sacred in African belief system**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sacred place</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesaka</td>
<td>Cattle kraal</td>
<td>Family space where spirits of ancestors are invoked; also represents wealth. <em>Lesakeng</em> is related place where sacrificial animals are slaughtered for rituals, and the symbolic link between man and animal is carried out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leifo</td>
<td>Cooking space of homestead</td>
<td>Only place where folklore and night stories can be told in a homestead. Symbolises life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seotlwana</td>
<td>Single unit of housing structure, homestead</td>
<td>Each serves specific purpose. Separate units for parents, children etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mophato</td>
<td>Initiation school</td>
<td>Place where the rite of passage from boyhood to manhood is performed. Generally initiation (<em>lebollo</em>) is meant for male children but some clans perform for females too. Purpose of mophato is to prepare young adults for the challenges of adulthood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mabitla</td>
<td>Burial ground</td>
<td>Resting place for ancestors. It symbolises the physical link between the living and the ancestors. By law, everyone who visits mabitla must wash their hands with water mixed with aloe to take away the spell of the dead. To accord the respect to the dead they point to the graves using the thumb and not the index finger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lepatlelo</td>
<td>Battle field or open space in the village</td>
<td>The battle grounds and the grounds used for communal / societal gatherings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntlong</td>
<td>Unit where woman delivers a child</td>
<td>This place is banned for males and only father of the child (after ten days of birth) may enter the place other than midwives. Critical function of ntlong is that it is here where navel/ placenta (<em>mokgubu / inkaba</em>) of the child is buried. The burial of <em>mokgubu</em> is the first ritual of linking the child with nature.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Diboko**, (‘totem’ names in English) are the focal point of identity in African Basotho people living in the South. All of them identify themselves with specific wild animals, which are then regarded as sacred by the nation which identifies itself by the name of that animal. This means that people belonging to a particular totem name are not allowed to kill or eat the meat of an animal through which they identify themselves. Diboko (totem) are essentially a direct account of lineage as these can be traced back to their origin. Diboko effectively defines a way in which members identify themselves through customs and praise song. All the different diboko have their own typical and special praise songs which are sung to identify themselves, and also these songs serve as chants during ancestral rituals.
**Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

The Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) policy was adopted in South Africa in 2004. IKS policy drivers in South Africa include:

- the affirmation of African cultural values in the face of globalisation – a clear imperative given the need to promote a positive African identity;
- practical measures for the development of services provided by IK holders and practitioners, with a particular focus on traditional medicine, but also including areas such as agriculture, indigenous languages and folklore;
- underpinning the contribution of indigenous knowledge to the economy – the role of indigenous knowledge in employment and wealth creation; and
- interfaces with other knowledge systems, for example indigenous knowledge is used together with modern biotechnology in the pharmaceutical and other sectors to increase the rate of innovation (Futhwa 2011:96-97).

**Focus areas for indigenous knowledge systems include:**

**Language**

Knowledge and competency of indigenous South African languages is fast disappearing. Preserving and developing indigenous languages is paramount to addressing socio-economic issues facing the country.

**Remedies**

The knowledge and skills that is inherent in African communal life of ordinary remedies for common ailments must be preserved. All members of society are taught, from a young age, what plants and herbs to use for these ailments such as flu, cold, headache, stomach ache, snake bites, fever, nose bleeding and the like. This is knowledge that ensures all in society are healthy as no one need consult a specialist for them (Futhwa 2011:96-97).

**Most common traditional knowledge remedies in South Africa (Futhwa 2011:97-98)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vernacular Name of plant/ herb</th>
<th>Ailment(S)</th>
<th>Method of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kgwana</td>
<td>Bed wetting habit of children</td>
<td>Four stripped grass mouse which is roasted and eaten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesoko</td>
<td>Curing flu</td>
<td>Dried roots of the plant are either chewed or boiled in water than drank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lekgala</td>
<td>Stomach ache, running tummies, constipation of infants</td>
<td>Juice of leaves is taken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lengana</td>
<td>Flu, asthma</td>
<td>Leaves are dried and then used as tobacco to smoke or the wet leaves are boiled and then drank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kooma ya Lekoko</td>
<td>Head aches, blocked nasals</td>
<td>Leaves are dried and grinded to powder and then taken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matekwane</td>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>The leaves are boiled and then drank.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebabetseya</td>
<td>For revitalising the mind, body and spirit.</td>
<td>A person takes a bath with the leaves mixed in the water.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Traditional healers** were very influential in traditional Basotho society and they diagnosed and treated various diseases, helped people with their personal problems and prevented bad things from happening. To be able to fulfill his/her duties, the **Nkgekge** used medicines made from animal and plant material. The **Lethuela** on the other hand, threw bones and, depending on their position, decided what had caused the illness and how to treat it. This approach necessitated the use of magic and making contact with the spirits. Sacrifices and the observance of certain taboos were means of making peace with the spirits and causing illness to depart. A **senohe** was honoured as a person who was able to see what others could not and this gift enabled him/her to establish the causes of illness and to foretell future events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Medicine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The WHO observes that it is difficult to assign one definition to the broad range of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>characteristics and elements of traditional medicine, but that a working definition is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>essential. It thus concludes that traditional medicines: [Include] diverse health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and/or mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises applied singularly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or in combination to maintain well-being, as well as to treat, diagnose or prevent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illness. (WHO 2002-05: 7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Traditional Basotho Doctors/ Healers**

**Nkgekge**
- Traditionally, men Nkgekge are found among Basotho.
- Fully qualified practitioner of traditional medicine.
- Specialty is administering medicine for curing ailments.
- Highly trained in plants and natural organisms.

**Lethuela**
- Fully qualified practitioner of divination. They do practice medicine also but are       
  specialised in divination.
- They practice divination through the use of traditional artifacts such as bones         
  and shells.
- Most of Lethuela are women. They play a significant role in acting as linkages         
  between the living and ancestors. They are the ones called upon to preside at rituals     
  and ceremonies.
- Also specialised in the interpretation of dreams.

**Lethwasa**
- A trainee lethuela who is still undergoing training.

**Modes of transferring traditional knowledge**

**Neletsano Taba**
- Also known as neano taba, is oral literature; where teachings and learning takes place in 
  the form of verbal communication between members of a society.
Ditshomo
- Are folk tales. Folk tales are defined as “a story or legend that is passed down orally from one generation to the next and becomes part of a community’s tradition.”

Dithotokiso
- Poetry in praise of self, the other, nature or any other object of beauty in the eyes of the poet.

Dithoko
- Poetry that speaks of totem names. They are a celebration of clans, historical figures, kings, priests and diboko (totems).

Basotho indigenous art and items of material culture
Basotho, like many other indigenous societies, have art forms that are unique to them and which cannot be found anywhere else. These are art forms that have been handed down from generation to generation, and for the most part cannot be learned in formal learning institutions. Their acquisition and assimilation is purely a cultural trait as they form part of normal life of Basotho. Most of them are common knowledge to Basotho while others become specialisations for those who become practicing experts in them.

Ditema are unique artistic (geographic) patterns that Basotho women paint on the walls of their huts.

Mokgoro is the traditional thatched Basotho hut. The hut is made of mud bricks, cemented using mud and plastered with cow dung inside out.

Maseka is the art of sewing patterns using insulated copper wire, skillfully woven exclusively by men.

Thebe is the cow hide shield used as a shield by warriors.

Molamu is the fighting stick carried by men and boys from puberty.

Seqha is the bow that Basotho have adopted from the Khoi and the San.

Tswibila is a weapon for young boys who have not graduated to carrying molamu.

Mopotjwana is the calabash used for drinking moqombothi, the traditional beer.

Mopotjo is the traditional container made of clay. Lately it is mostly used for carrying moqombothi, the traditional beer.

Modianyewe is the Basotho hat made of grass. It is also known as Mokorotlo.

Lelwala is the grinding stone used by women to grind food stuff such as grain, sorghum and maize.

Seshweshwe is the traditional wear for Basotho women. It is worn by married women and signifies one’s status in society. It is worn with tuku, head gear, or with mokorotlo.

Tsheyia is three pronged garment traditionally worn by Basotho men.

Thethana is the traditional apron worn by Basotho girls.

Lesolanka is the blanket that is worn exclusively by Basotho.
3.6.4 Conclusion

This book describes the beliefs and ritual complexes of a people in South Africa. Their system is very elaborate as the above discussion makes it clear. The term people use for their supernatural system is called setho. People believe in the existence of omniscient God, relationship with whom is expressed through prayers and worship. Ancestors lie between the ‘world of Gods’ and the ‘world of living’, and they mediate these two spheres. If people want divine blessings, they should invite their ancestors who in turn will approach God. The book shows how different spheres of life interact.

3.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

This ethnography advances our understanding of the role of religion in every aspect of people’s life. The world view of people is embedded in religion. Around religion, an elaborate system is built up. In these societies, religion is the core of culture.

3.8 SUMMARY

Both these ethnographies discussed here are concerned with the indigenous knowledge of people. The aim to document these is also very strong.

References


**Suggested Readings**


**Sample Questions**

1) Discuss the belief system of Cree and state the characteristics of the Cree worldview.

2) Outline some of the traditional remedies in South Africa as discussed in Futhwa’s work.