



VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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UNIVERSITY

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Indira Gandhi National Open University

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

The *Visual Anthropology* bachelor's course introduces the learner to understand the importance of visuals in anthropology. The focus of the course is the interpretation of culture through the medium of visuals like, ethnographic images, films, old and new media etc. with special emphasis on photography and film. The course other than acquainting the learner with visual anthropology's history, intends to familiarise one with the validity of this medium in ethnographic investigation and the assessment of society and culture. In all this, the course will also cover areas which deal with representation of visual medium by anthropologists as the creator or producer and the reader as the receiver and interpreter of various visual symbols and metaphors. The application of visual anthropology is vital for the learner to know and utilise its basics and nuances in the real and virtual world. Hence a discussion on the how different forms of media ranging from mass media to social media and their connections to concerns like ethics, tourism, advertising, market, gender, politics etc. are also a part of this course. Arts and aesthetics as viewed from the context of visuals and what cultures consider as "art" along with interpretation of images, objects and persons and their relationships are central aspects that the course examines. Keeping the main agenda of the course in mind, the course at the end offers a description on the essentials of ethnographic photography and film, including associated theories, critical thoughts, ethical concerns and processes of creation with examples from famous visual anthropological works.

Course Outcomes

After completing the course, a learner is expected to:

- Define the basics of visual anthropology;
- Describe the validity of visuals as an important medium of anthropological study; and
- Examine the various evolving visual matter and visual methods; and

Course Presentation

The Course is divided into three blocks and a practical manual. Each block carries a theme which is reflected in the form of units. There are a total of 11 units in this course and a Practical Manual. Below we provide you with a brief explanation of what each unit covers in the thematic blocks.

Block 1 Introduction to Visual Anthropology

The first thematic block consists of three units. This block gives us a historical backdrop of visual anthropology along with letting us know what visual anthropology is and where its position is in anthropology today. The first unit thus is called, *What is Visual Anthropology?* (Unit 1) and discusses in its fold, the definition of the contested term of 'visual anthropology' and how differently anthropologists viewed visuals in anthropology in the past. The unit identifies different inter-disciplinary visual methods and new techniques of using visual image for research purposes and examines the contributions of anthropologists in media both in India and abroad. The second unit, *History of Visual Anthropology* (Unit 2), provides us with a route of the growth of visual anthropology from the nineteenth century till contemporary (1890 to 1950, 1950 to 1980 and 1980 to present times) and

analyses the rationale behind why anthropology gave more importance to scientific method at the climax of colonialism. The last and third unit of this block is called *Situating Visual Anthropology* (Unit 3). This unit talks about how images and films got accepted as a valid medium for anthropological research. It tries to inform the learners about the distinctions between documentary, feature, and ethnographic films. It also examines how films are interpreted in relation to themes such as gender and patriarchy and finally also involves a part where a discussion on how films can actively engage in various societal concerns. Here this unit takes this up from the perspective of tribal tourism.

This block gives us an entry to what visual anthropology entails and the subsequent blocks provides detailed explanations to enlighten the same.

Block 2 Theory and Representation

The second thematic block has four units. The first unit here is called *Anthropology and Images: A Theoretical Analysis* (Unit 4). This unit deals with the tradition of using images in anthropological research, it attempts to explain the theories of images in anthropology along with the various approaches to images in research. It discusses the major concepts in anthropology related to images and finally looks into the possibilities and challenges of dealing with images in anthropology. The next unit is called *Representation: Politics and Aesthetics* (Unit 5). Here the unit endeavours to illustrate the concept of representation and politics of representation and explains the interrelation between representation and ethnography. The unit discusses various application and practices of visual representation in anthropology which will be helpful for learners to understand visual methodology better. Towards the end of the unit, production of knowledge about the symbolic representation and metaphoric representation is expressed and also clarifies the usages of visual representation in contemporary media and political activism. The third unit here, *Visual Anthropology and its Applications* (Unit 6) talks about the concept of visual anthropology. The unit describes the role of visual anthropology in contemporary media as well as the context in which visual anthropology developed. It attempts to portray the application or scope of visual anthropology and finally tells us as to why it is important to be trained in visual anthropology. The last unit here is called *Anthropology of Arts and Aesthetics* (Unit 7). It defines the basics of art and aesthetics in relation to anthropology and locates the development of arts within anthropology as a methodological tool. The lesson tries to communicate to the learner about the gradual development of the study of art in anthropology and examines the pros and cons attached to art as a domain as well as a perspective in anthropology. The lesson concludes with an analysis of the challenges of writing culture without any ethnocentric biases.

This block thus takes the learner on a journey on what and how theories are used in visual anthropology and how it is represented and applied. It specifically focuses on the study of arts and aesthetics to show its significance in visual anthropology.

Block 3 Ethnographic Photography and Films

This is the last block of this course. There are a total of 3 units here. The first one is entitled *Essentials of Ethnographic Photography* (Unit 8). This unit deals with the basics in ethnographic photography and provides the learner with a brief history of photography in anthropology. It of course describes the

key features of ethnographic photography and attempts to interpret photography in terms of art and aesthetics. Lastly the unit evaluates how pictures and objects of others are interpreted in an anthropological framework in order to comprehend diverse cultures. The next unit is called ***Ethnographic Photography*** (Unit 9). It begins with an explanation of the fundamentals of visual anthropology and explains the association between photography and ethnography. The unit analyses the validity of photography as a tool within social sciences and finally looks into the relation of methodology and photography in ethnography. The second last unit in this block is ***Ethnographic Film*** (Unit 10). The unit imparts to the learner the meaning and history of ethnographic filmmaking in anthropology. Here it attempts to know and teach about other kinds of films from an ethnographic film through the understanding of the attributes of ethnographic films. It also attempts to inform the learner about the ethical and moral responsibilities of the filmmaker towards this profession and his/her subjects and finally the unit examines the ways by which one can use ethnographic films in various ways. The last unit is ***Deciphering of an Ethnographic Film: Case Study*** (Unit 11). This unit takes an ethnographic film as an example and provides an anthropological explanation of how the film depicts the social and cultural lives of the Azande. By doing so, the lesson provides an examination and analysis of an ethnographic film in the context of anthropology and through it lets the student comprehend the importance of ethnographic films in anthropology. Hence the last block informs the learner about the significance of photography and films in anthropological studies.

The three blocks thus meaningfully places before the learner about the pragmatics of visuals in anthropology and how it is an important medium to study human society and culture.

Practical Manual: This practical manual will assist the learner to build a research framework on any concern visually and make her/him ready with the methods discussed in the manual to apply them in actual research scenarios. The learner will be able to check these techniques and practice them and create small projects now and later utilise these same methods in future research work. So the practical manual will help the learner to identify methods and techniques to conduct research, familiarise oneself with the exact way of doing research and learn how to analyse research results to create knowledge.


With this brief about the course, you are now ready to go through each lesson in a comprehensive manner. As you will be doing the major part of the studying on your own, the lessons have been created in such a way to assist you understand the course in an inclusive manner. It is advised that you go through the course sequentially so as to not lose the thread of clarity. As you would find a teacher in a classroom teaching a course in a thematic and chronological manner, similarly you too need to study your course from Unit 1 and end it with the last unit, in this case, Unit 11 followed by the Practical Manual. Units are further divided into sections and sub sections for your easy reading and better understanding. Each unit comes with learning outcomes which outline what is expected from you after the unit is read. Units also contain Check your Progress throughout so as to help you test yourself if you have learnt what you have read. This is a good way to go about the lesson and will help you prepare well for your Term End Examination later as you will learn to frame your answers in your own words rather than just copying and pasting from the sections. Each unit also contains a Summary towards

the end which gives you a brief about what the lesson entails. The units end with References which are cited works mentioned through the lesson and Answers to Check Your Progress, which assists you to know where the answers to your questions are placed. It is reiterated that though the sections where the answers can be sought are given, you should attempt to frame the answers in your own words which will bring clarity in your understanding of the units. In your internal Assignments, you will be given questions/activities where you can test your learning of your methods and techniques.

Good luck with your reading and it is hoped that this course will provide as a basic preliminary training in your journey towards learning and understanding visual anthropology comprehensively.



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BLOCK 1
INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL
ANTHROPOLOGY

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Unit 1
What is Visual Anthropology?

Unit 2
History of Visual Anthropology

Unit 3
Situating Visual Anthropology



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UNIT 1 WHAT IS VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY?*

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Interpretation of Culture through Visual Medium
- 1.2 Interdisciplinary Contemporary Visual Methods
- 1.3 Ethnographic Images
- 1.4 Ethnographic Films
- 1.5 Media
- 1.6 Summary
- 1.7 References
- 1.8 Answers to Check your Progress

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the student will learn to:

- Define the contested term of ‘visual anthropology’ and how differently anthropologists viewed visuals in anthropology;
- Identify different inter-disciplinary visual methods and new techniques of using visual image for research purposes; and
- Evaluate the contributions of anthropologists in media both in India and abroad.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term ‘visual anthropology’ was coined by Margaret Mead in the 1960s in opposition to ‘non-verbal anthropology’ which according to her was negative (Pink, 2006). However, the term ‘visual anthropology’ has always been controversial. Jay Ruby (2001-2002) was opposed to the term ‘visual anthropology’, he would rather use ‘anthropology of visual communication’. Sarah Pink (2006) argued that visual anthropology is about visuals and about visual communication. Sol Worth (1980) stated that the term ‘visual anthropology’ was coined after World War II and became associated with using cameras to make records about culture (Worth, 1980).

Visual anthropology is the anthropological study of the visual and the visual study of the anthropological. It is interesting to know that, for much of its history, the term visual anthropology has been synonymously used with ethnographic film. However in the contemporary world, other visual forms have come under the purview of visual anthropology. With the advancement

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in technology, boundaries have expanded further. Changes in theory and embracing new lines of intellectual inquiry have also contributed to expansion of visual anthropology. Visual anthropology has tendency to overlap with the anthropology of art and with the anthropology of material culture. It may also overlap with other disciplines such as media studies, film studies, and photographic history. In the twenty first century, the field of visual anthropology has also overlapped with action anthropology and development studies.

Visual anthropology is a sub discipline that has huge potential to be active in the world. Sarah Pink (2006) argued that rather than simply producing more anthropology for academic audiences, visual anthropologists should take hold of opportunities to commune across academic disciplines and cultural boundaries. Visual as a mode of social intervention is well established in historical and interdisciplinary contexts.

Check Your Progress

1. What is visual anthropology?

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Visual Anthropology is a field that has developed a multiple unifying definitions. Jay Ruby (2005) came up with three different positions of studying visual anthropology.

1. **Ethnographic film and its use in teaching**

Visual anthropology as ethnographic film is the most widely recognised view of the field. The works of founding fathers Tim Asch, Robert Gardner, and John Marshall, have been used as teaching tools. There have been discussions about the relationship of ethnographic film to anthropology and what constitutes ethnographic film. It is also debated as to whether or not a film-maker needs to be a trained anthropologist in order to produce a credible film. Heider (1976) suggested that almost any film about human beings can be considered ethnographic.

The general use of audiovisual aids for teaching has led to the growing interest in ethnographic film. The advent of video and smart classrooms only increased this pedagogical approach. The assumption that visual anthropology is primarily about ethnographic film remains the dominant one.

2. Study of pictorial media especially television and film

Like visual studies, cultural studies, visual culture and media studies, anthropology is now involved in an examination of the consequences of the production and use of pictures. Anthropological pictorial media research has taken three different paths:

- i) Examination of historical photographs to reveal the ideology or the culture of the maker and how that manifests itself within the image.
- ii) Study of indigenous media as a production of culture
- iii) Ethnographic study of the reception of pictorial media. Cultures that were once passive subjects of ethnographic work are now imagining themselves, and critiquing images made by others.

3. Anthropology of visual communication

It is the broadest of the three approaches. Jay Ruby is one of its proponents. It incorporates everything covered in the other two, and provides an overall theoretical umbrella that is lacking elsewhere. This approach is based on the premise that viewing the visible and pictorial worlds as social processes, in which objects and acts are produced with the intention of communicating something to others providing a perspective. It is an enquiry into all that humans make for others to see: costumes, facial expressions, symbolic uses of space, pictorial artifacts, rock engravings, holographs etc. (Ruby 2005).

Check Your Progress

2. What are the different positions in studying visual anthropology?

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1.1 INTERPRETATION OF CULTURES THROUGH VISUAL IMAGES

The uses of visual images can be explained in three categories:

a. Images as writing

Ardent fieldworkers like Malinowski took photographs to support ethnographic data and present them with written text. This kind of usage was more of evidence of 'being there'. The photographs were merely documentary evidence as an aid to his scientific approach. Early anthropologists used photographs as a short cut to give the readers a feel for

the exotic, strange and distant cultures they studied. This kind of tradition of using images continues till today.

Kulick (1999) argued how the photographs can enrich the text. In his dramatic and compelling narrative, anthropologist Don Kulick followed the lives of a group of transgendered prostitutes (called *Travestis* in Portuguese) in the Brazilian city Salvador. Kulick analysed the various ways *Travestis* modify their bodies, explore the motivations that lead them to choose this particular gendered identity, and examines the complex relationships that they maintain with one another, their boyfriends, and their families. Kulick also looks at how *Travestis* earn their living through prostitution and discusses the reasons for prostitution.

Jerry Jacobs' *Sun City* (1974) was an ethnographic description of a retirement community, where photographs were used to illustrate desolation and cleanliness. In the above cases, photographs are being used to make an argument. Pictures and films have been used to support written data, to make arguments more forceful or more profound.

In a reverse case, instead of pictures and films supporting the text, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead made use of photographs as the main medium of communication while the text played the supporting role. Altogether 25000 photographs were taken during their fieldwork in Bali. The *Balinese Character* by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead (1942) had 759 photographs with supporting text. They argued that pictures can convey more of the Balinese ethos and character than words could do alone. Culture is not something that exists in words and texts; it also exists in lives, in bodies, in actions. And photographs can be better than words in conveying this.

However it is crucial to point out that Bateson, Mead and Malinowski were not critical or reflexive about who was taking the pictures, and for what purpose. From Malinowski's scientific collection of facts and data to contemporary uses of photography to tell stories about life in prison, visuals have been used to make arguments. In fact, even the quantitative researchers use visual images in the form of bar charts, pie charts, tables and graphs to support their writing. It can be argued that there is no reason why ethnographers cannot use a similar medium in their presentations and writings as long as they do so self-consciously and reflexively.

Check Your Progress

3. Mention two examples where anthropologists have used images as writing.

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4. In what manner are Bateson and Mead's *Balinese Character* different from conventional anthropological writing?

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b. Found images

The second method of using visual images in ethnographic research is in the analysis and interpretation of visual data produced by the research participants. Visual data can be in the form of posters, advertisements, drawings, diagrams and anything the participant makes can be considered as data, to make sense of their world. These 'found images' are important for the following reasons:

- To explore the participant's view of the world as expressed implicitly through things produced or displayed.
- Questioning what participants have told the researcher at one of time which may lead you to think about what you have been told at a later time. Visual data from the field can also be used for cross-checking field data. A researcher while opting for triangulation method to cross-check her/his data may employ 'found images' too to validate findings.

How images are analysed or interpreted will depend on the ethnographer's theoretical, methodological and philosophical agenda. Hence, images and their interpretations, and the ethnographer's interpretations will be 'context-dependent' to some extent.

Check Your Progress

5. Explain how visual data can be used to cross-check field data.

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c. Creative uses of image

At the dawn of the discipline, anthropology was emulating natural sciences in its achievement of objective knowledge. However, by the end of the 1960s, debates emerged about the value of visual images as objective, representative and systematic. Visual images were seen as too problematic to be taken seriously. Responding to this criticism, anthropologists started employing

visual media in rigorous, scientific ways, to insist that ethnography observes and represents reality rather than telling stories.

The reflexive turn in the 1980s challenged both use of the visual and the idea that ethnography can ever represent reality. Some anthropologists argued visual demands an entire methodology of its own. While some acknowledged contribution of visual media to the discipline as a whole while others said it can only be in a supporting role.

Rather than ‘read’ visual media or use them as a tool to record or illustrate, we should use them to create knowledge. One very creative use of visual image in research is photo elicitation (Collier and Collier 1986). Researchers work with participants asking them to talk and think about how images were made and what they mean. One fine example is to take a family album, sit with the family members, get them to talk about the photographs: who is in them, where was the event, who was left out, why was a particular setting chosen, how was the image constructed and so on.

Other creative ways of using visual data can be:

- Giving cameras to the research participants in order to co-construct the ethnographic story.
- Using film to study close interaction
- Taking photographs to analyse closely visual aspects of the situation later
- Using photographs to supplement filed notes, to aid recall, and to reignite the feeling of strangeness.

Check Your Progress

6. What is photo elicitation?

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d. Autophotography

Another interesting method of using visual media for research is Autophotography. The approach was given by Crank and Cook (2007). This involves participants using video and photography to tell stories about their own lives and is a version of what we might think of as video diary, or digital story telling. It enables research participants to construct their own visual stories. Ruth Holliday (1999, 2000) made use of video diaries in her study of the performative nature of identity. This was a direct and overt exercise, where she asked her queer participants to think about how their identities are

constructed and expressed in everyday life. The visual element served two important functions: empowerment of the respondents and emotional engagement on the part of the academic audience.

1.2 INTER-DISCIPLINARY CONTEMPORARY VISUAL METHODS

Visual images are ubiquitous which, invariably is part of their appeal and their difficulty. As in the case with all sensory experiences, it is easy to forget that interpretation is historical and culture specific (Banks, 2001). Likewise, representations of what we see are influenced by our historical and cultural perspectives. Disciplines like psychology, cultural studies, media studies, semiotics use visual methods for research. Let us take a look at how different disciplines adopt visual methods to interpret visual images.

Banks (2001) argued that social research about pictures involves three set of questions.

- i) What is image made of, what is its content?
- ii) Who took it or made it, when and why?
- iii) How do other people come to have it, how do they read or view it?
- iv) What do they do with it?

Banks (2001) offered a model by which relationship between the social context and the content of image can be understood. However he rejected the idea that an image might be read as if it contained any internal message that we may listen to. For him, to 'read' images, one must attend to both their external and internal narratives. The internal narrative is the image content or the story, and the external narrative is the social context which produced the image.

The ideas put forth by Banks are quite established in visual and media anthropology, however according to cultural geographer Rose (2001), it neglects 'audiencing'. Rose draws from disciplines that engage in the study of visual images and texts (photography, psychology, visual cultures, cultural studies, media studies) rather than anthropology or sociology that concentrate on social usage of images. She was concerned with the social and textual and argued for critical visual methodology, an approach that views visual in terms of cultural significance, social practices and effects of its viewing, and reflects on the specificity of that viewing by various audiences. She proposed a three tier analyses that focused on sites where meanings of images are made: production, the image, and the 'audiencing'[†]. To study 'audiencing' Rose argued that one might consider how audience react to a visual image in order to produce a particular understanding of that image, and how different audiences react to the same image?

[†] Fiske 1994-process by which visual image has its meanings renegotiated, or rejected by particular audience watching in specific circumstances.

Check Your Progress

7. Explain Marcus Banks’ proposed model to interpret visual images.

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8. What is the three tier analysis of visual images adopted by cultural geographers?

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Cultural Studies has impressive presence in visual methods texts. Emmison and Smith (2000) outlined an interdisciplinary tool kit of concepts for visual interpretation. They argued that it is seldom possible to separate the cultures of everyday life from practices of representation, visual or otherwise. Lister and Wells (2001) opined that cultural studies methodology is eclectic, well known for borrowing from other disciplines. It uses ethnographic, psychoanalytical and critical textual methods. Visual cultural studies approach focuses on an image’s social life and history; the cycle of production, circulation and consumption through which meanings are accumulated and transformed; the material properties of images; and how their materiality is linked to social and historical process of ‘looking’; an understanding of images both as representation through which meanings might be conveyed. Visual meanings are thus personal and framed by the wider contexts and processes. Let us categorise the same in their disciplinary context to see how it is viewed:

<i>Anthropology</i>	<i>Cultural Geography</i>	<i>Cultural studies</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A model to understand relationship between the social context and the content of image. ➤ To ‘read’ images, both external and internal narratives are required. The internal narrative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Three tier analyses that focuses on sites where meanings of images are made: production, the image, and the ‘audiencing’. ➤ ‘Audiencing’ consider how an audience reacts to a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Focuses on ‘an image’s social life and history; ➤ The cycle of production, circulation and consumption through which meanings are accumulated and transformed;

<p>is the image content or the story, and external narrative is the social context that produced the image.</p>	<p>visual image in order to produce a particular understanding of that image, and how different audiences react to the same image.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The material properties of images; ➤ And how their materiality is linked to social and historical process of ‘looking’; an understanding of images both as representation through which meanings might be conveyed. ➤ Visual meanings are thus personal and framed by the wider contexts and processes.
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Critical approaches to the interpretation of images have shifted from positivist truth seeking and objectifying approaches, especially across social sciences and humanities. Recent approaches to the interpretation of visual images in anthropology, cultural geography and cultural studies have common key areas:

- The context in which the image is produced
- The content of the image
- The context in and subjectivities through which images are viewed
- Materiality and agency of images

1.3 ETHNOGRAPHIC IMAGES

Most of the monographs written by anthropologists after prolonged fieldwork had images from the field. The photographs captured the lived realities of the people under study. However, if we look into some publication of British officers cum anthropologists, images were only produced as supplement to the text without interpretation. For example, J.H. Hutton published *The Sema Nagas* in 1921. The monograph was the first ever written text about the Sema Naga. While describing the physical appearance of the Sema men and women, Hutton was very blunt; calling Sema women as ugly and stumpy. A black and white photo of a Sema woman was printed on the corresponding page and you may notice that there is nothing ‘ugly’ about the woman in the picture. Another topless picture of a young girl was published too without any interpretation. In regard to the topless picture, let me bring in Rachel Engmann’s (2012) argument about how, “colonial photographs are constructed documents that performed distinct functions in the shaping of

popular Victorian imagination”. Engmann’s argument was in relation to a collection of photographs captured by Frederick Grant in 1884, entitled ‘Fetish and Gold Coast’ held in the British National Archives. A large part of the collection was devoted to images of topless Asante women. Engmann argued that early black female body was known as ‘colonial nude’; they were intended for ‘ethnographic’ and ‘anthropometric’ records, and also to establish colonial discourse of race, ethnicity, and gender juxtaposed around a series of discriminatory metaphorical binaries. Materiality with nakedness is the marker of ‘authentic primitive’. The topless photograph of a young Sema girl should not be seen as ‘authentic primitive’. There is a need to contextualise these ethnographic images. Till the early part of twentieth century, Sema women barely covered their chest to prove their chastity. In fact, breasts were supposed to be an important marker of identifying chastity. It was said that brave warriors’ and chief’s relatives always sought chase girl for a wife. Unfortunately, the context and interpretation were missing from Hutton’s monograph. The photographs were more or less used to reassert their supremacy and also to objectify the ‘other’ so as to construct his ‘self’.

Check Your Progress

9. What are the common key areas found across disciplines to interpret images?

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1.4 ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMS

Visual anthropology and ethnographic films were synonymously used for a long time. Ethnographic films have come a long way: from filming tribal peoples engaged in rituals to postmodern films that blur the boundary between the researcher and the researched. According to David MacDoughall (1970) ethnographic film may be regarded as any film which seeks to reveal one society to another. It could be the physical life of people, or nature of their social experience. It is common to associate ethnographic filmmaking with anthropologists, but the two need not be invariably linked.

One of the earliest ethnographic films, Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* was the work of an explorer and geologist. The most easily identifiable ethnographic films are those that dealt with simple societies that were different from the West, like John Marshall’s *The Hunters*, and Robert Gardner’s *Dead Birds*. Flaherty was not an anthropologist but his film *Nanook of the North* was probably the first ethnographic film for it was both a film and inherently ethnographic. Flaherty’s procedure of making the film

is still emulated by anyone who is attempting to make ethnographic films. He knew his subjects well, knew their language and customs, spent several years filming, and most importantly sought their reaction to their own representation on film.

Ethnographic film-making has its own Malinowski: Peter Loizos (1993) who argued for a realist, scientific, factual account captured on film. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the innovative works of Jean Rouch and MacDougalls, inspired the visual anthropologists to break away from scientific paradigm to produce work that are subjective, reflexive, and offered new visual routes to ethnographic knowledge. Jean Rouch began with documentary records but developed into a comprehensive exploration of the uses of film in revealing other cultures. Rouch's approach has been characterised by a willingness to invite participation of his subjects in the interpretive process. It permits self expression of the people as they know and understand themselves; on the other hand it reveals them to us as they would like to be.

Check Your Progress

10. Based on the case study provided in section 1.4, do you think ethnographic photographs captured by colonial writers establish colonial discourse of race, ethnicity, and gender juxtaposed around series of discriminatory metaphorical binaries?

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11. How is scientific approach to ethnographic filmmaking different from reflexive approach?

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1.5 MEDIA

Anthropologists have always been associated with media. One of the main reasons was the concern of getting their field data and conclusions published.

These publications were in the form of various print media- books, journals, magazines, newspapers. In recent times anthropologists have started to publish in various forms of media - radio, film, television, and recently social media. Anthropologists studying many of the indigenous communities of the world do come across indigenous forms of media such as signal drums, petroglyphs, smoke signals etc. For a long time anthropologists have ignored media in their holistic studies of human beings. Anthropologists have used the medium of print media successfully in reaching other anthropologists and general audience. During the 1930s and 1940s anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Clyde Kluckhohn, and Ashley Montagu wrote a number of books which attracted a general audience and made the public aware of other cultures and of anthropology (Eisellein and Topper, 1976). These books were popular with readers because they maintained their accuracy and were fairly general. Their style of writing was written in such a manner that could be understood by the common man. In contrast, anthropologists have fewer in magazines which are focussed on news and entertainment. The notable exception to this has been Margaret Mead's column in **Redbook** (Eislein, 1976). Through this column, Mead wrote her observations on child development, human sexuality, and human behaviour to a general audience. Another non scholastic inflight magazine of American Airlines, **American Way**, published series of articles about the American Indian written by anthropologists and other experts. Anthropologists have contributed to magazines by providing background information and story ideas. In India, one notable anthropologist who wrote for newspapers on relevant current social issues was Vinay Kumar Srivastava.

Anthropologists have also been involved with radio since the early years. University-based radio series have also served as vehicles for the dissemination of information about anthropologists, their research, and their perspectives. Anthropologists such as Fred Eggan, Froelich Rainey, Sol Tax, and Robert Redfield were among those who expressed their views and insights on radio. Anthropologists have given lectures or have been interviewed for radio programmes. One good example is Edmund Leach, whose lectures were aired by BBC, as a series of lectures by Edmund Leach as a part of its prestigious Reith Lecture series. As far as television is concerned, 20th century Fox television produced an American crime procedural comedy-drama television series 'Bones' loosely based on the life of a forensic anthropologist. In recent years, National Geographic aired a very popular documentary series called 'Taboo'. This series featured many anthropologists who took part either as the guide or translator and key informant featuring in the interview. In India, anthropology on television has been mostly confined to news that required anthropologist expertise. For example, in November 2018, when an American tourist was murdered by the Sentinelese in Andaman and Nicobar Island, most of the media house aired the interview of anthropologist P.C. Joshi. He was also consulted when the Indian Army found large footprints allegedly of the Yeti in the Himalayas in the month of April 2019.

Check Your Progress

12. Cite some of the indigenous forms of media.

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13. Name the anthropologist whose writings have been frequently published in non-scholastic magazines.

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1.6 SUMMARY

Visual anthropology started with being synonymous to ethnographic films, but over a period of time, it has gone beyond observational cinema. From scientific approach to reflexivity, visual anthropology has come a long way. This does not mean ethnographic films have ceased to appeal to visual anthropology; in fact if we have to go by what Jean Rouch says, the future of anthropological publication is in film. In his words “I am almost sure that in, say 50 years time, there won't be a single anthropological book written to describe behaviour. It will all be done with films” (quoted in Issari 1971:71). Ever since Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, many ethnographic films have been made both in India and abroad. Anthropological Survey of India has produced notable ethnographic films conceptualised by anthropologists. Apart from ethnographic films, analysing and interpretation of photographs are imperative in visual anthropology. The field of visual anthropology is so huge that one can study any anthropological phenomenon within visual anthropology. The methodology remains the same as in its mother discipline anthropology; however, more caution has to be taken in visual anthropology. Since visual anthropology mostly deals with images both still and motion, it is always ethical to seek consent before recording. The people under study should be well aware of what you intend to do with the visual data. After all, as anthropologists, we have responsibility not only to the society we study but also to ourselves.

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1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Visual anthropology is the anthropological study of the visual and the visual study of the anthropological.
2. Ethnographic film and its use in teaching; Study of pictorial media especially television and film; Anthropology of visual communication.
3. Don Kulick in his study of transgendered prostitutes and Jerry Jacobs in his study of retired community.
4. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead made use of photographs as the main medium of communication while the text had the supporting role.
5. Researchers work with participants asking them to talk and think about how images were made and what they mean.
6. It is a Model by which relationship between the social context and the content of image can be understood. To 'read' images, one must attend to both their external and internal narratives. The internal narrative is the image content or the story, and external narrative is the social context that produced the image.
7. Production; the image; and the 'audiencing'
8. The context in which the image is produced; The content of the image; The contexts in and subjectivities through which images are viewed; Materiality and agency of images.
9. Answer on your own
10. Scientific approach: realist, scientific, factual account captured on film.
Reflexive approach: subjective, reflexive, and offered new visual routes to ethnographic knowledge
11. Signal drums, petroglyphs, smoke signals.
12. Margaret Mead

UNIT 2 HISTORY OF VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY*

Contents

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Rise and Decline of Visual data: 1890-1950
- 2.2 Minimal Presence of the Visual: 1950-1980
- 2.3 Reflexivity Turn: 1980s
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 References
- 2.6 Answers to Check your Progress

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the student will learn to:

- Explain the trajectory of visual anthropology from the nineteenth century till contemporary times; and
- Evaluate the rationale behind anthropology giving more importance to scientific method at the climax of colonialism.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Visual anthropology is the anthropological study of the visual and the visual study of the anthropological. You will find it interesting to know that, for much of its history, the term visual anthropology has been synonymously used with ethnographic film. However in the contemporary times, other visual forms have come under the purview of visual anthropology. With the advancement in technology, boundaries have expanded further. It is to be noted that visual anthropology has tendency to overlap with the anthropology of art and with the anthropology of material culture. It may also overlap with other disciplines such as media studies, film studies, and photographic history. In the twenty first century, the field of visual anthropology has also overlapped with action anthropology and development studies. Visual anthropology has become an important part of the discipline of anthropology.

Check Your Progress

1. What is visual anthropology? What are the disciplines that overlap with visual anthropology?

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2.1 RISE AND DECLINE OF VISUAL DATA: 1890-1950

Early anthropologists used multiple media to conduct ethnographic fieldwork and combine spoken words with photographs, films, and sound in their public lectures. It is said that one of the first documented academic anthropological uses of film is Alfred Cort Haddon's 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits Islands, an inter-disciplinary expedition to scientifically study the Island's people. The team was led by anthropologist A. C. Haddon, Britain's leading experimental psychologist, W.H.R. Rivers, William McDougall, C.S. Myers, Sidney H. Ray, Anthony Wilkin, and C. G. Seligmann. The team was equipped with the latest scientific recording instruments. Haddon's scientific project was concerned with the senses and sought to prove a hypothesis of relative significance of vision in civilised and primitive cultures. It was believed that for civilised Europeans, higher senses of sight and hearing are more important, in contrast to lower sense of taste, smell, and touch associated with animality. One task was to test the hypothesis that 'primitive people would show a penchant for the lower or animal senses (Pink 2006). Haddon's filmmaking was considered to be a form of haptic cinema. It could have produced a sensorily rich experience that was incompatible with the scientific approach of twentieth century anthropology.

Besides, Haddon, there were other anthropologists of his time - Franz Boas, Baldwin Spencer, and Frank Gillen who used film and photography. Between 1883-1930, Franz Boas' initial photography pre-dates Haddon's expedition. He contributed multimedia approach to anthropometric studies. In 1894, Franz Boas was invited by the Kwakiutl to witness their winter ceremony at Taxis. It was learnt that Boas captured photographs to document the event. Boas was a part of an endeavour that sought to collect artifacts during the great age of museum building in the United States and Europe from 1875 to 1930. The visual representation of artifacts of ethnographic importance was an important part of academic research. These artifacts were acquired for the Museum of Ethnology in Berlin and the American Museum of Natural History. Franz Boas included 173 figures and 26 plates in his book *The Kwakiutl of Vancouver Island* (1909). Boas studied the Kwakiutl people for more than 40 years. He shot 16 mm motion picture footage of dances, games, and recorded songs and music. He sought to gain those bits of information he felt were missing from his knowledge of the culture. However, he did not complete the analysis of the data he collected nor did he publish the results. Some of his students like Ruth Benedict thought that he could not publish the results due to the theft of his films. But Margaret Mead and Jane Belo claimed that there was no method available which suited his interest in rhythm.

Boas' interests shifted and his photographs were presented in museum collections. He used film only as a source of raw data for triangulation with

other sources. Boas believed that culture could only be understood historically and he did not trust visuals because it showed only the surface. According to him, the study of the human mind was possible only through the medium of language and the mere act of witnessing some exotic behaviour was insufficient. However his students like Margaret Mead continued his legacy and used multi media.

Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen (1894 onwards) used innovative visual methods as part of their participant observation while studying the Australian Aboriginals. They produced photographs of ritual events as they occurred, developed photographs in the field, used them for elicitation. Films were not focused on staged events but capturing moments as it occurred. They integrated film, photography and audio with spoken verbal performance.

Social and cultural anthropology emerged around World War I. Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Radcliffe-Brown, Marcel Mauss were the leading anthropologists at that time. Their approaches differed but they advocated long-term fieldwork, and rejected the evolutionary paradigm. Their aim was to make anthropology a holistic science which aimed to describe cultures as integrated wholes.

In the meantime, senses came to be excluded from 20th century anthropology. The researches were concentrated only on sight and hearing. Consequently sub disciplines like visual, ethnomusicology where 'other' sensory domains are important were ignored. This post-World War I era saw the decline in interest in visual. Franz Boas and Malinowski were considered to be prolific photographers but they focused more on observation and their approaches actually limited the potential of the visual. It is interesting to note that Malinowski was an active fieldwork photographer. Around 1100 images captured by Malinowski are archived in London School of Economics. Malinowski attempted to create photographic record of 'living' people, by using photography extensively in his publication. Despite being a prolific photographer, his visuals were incomparable with the fieldwork experience he advocated.

The tradition of taking photographs to support one's ethnographic data dates back to Malinowski. Photographs were presented with written text as visual evidence of 'being there'. Photographs were documentary evidence which aided his scientific approach of study. Early anthropologists especially in the first half of the twentieth century used photographs as a shortcut to give the readers a feel for the 'exotic', strange and distant cultures. Despite the reflexivity turn, this tradition of using photographs to support written data is still being continued.

It is important to understand the process by which social anthropology established itself as a scientific discipline which consequently led to the rejection of the visual, sensory and applied. The scientific approach to anthropology at that time rejected the subjectivity of photograph and film to use visual metaphors – diagrams, grids, maps to objectify knowledge. It

homogenised representational strategies that privileged vision-centered consumption of ethnographic experience, narrative genre of static ethnographic present, thereby excluded sensory experience. The first half of twentieth century saw interwar years, economic depression, social unrest, colonial expansion. Social anthropology was funded by virtue of its relationship with the colonial office. (Pink 2006).

Meanwhile an explorer and Geologist Robert Flaherty who had no training in anthropology spent years filming the Inuit, and he released his film ‘Nanook of the North’ in 1922. It was probably the first true ethnographic film, for it was both a film and inherently ethnographic (Macdougall, 1969). Flaherty was not a trained anthropologist but the procedure he followed still inspires anyone attempting to make anthropological films. He knew the people well, he could understand and speak their language, and most importantly he spent several years filming among the Inuit. Flaherty was reflexive enough to playback the motion visuals to Nanook and his folks in order to seek their reactions to their own representation on film. He was able to foresee films as a means for a new kind of exploration and documentation of reality, and indeed he pursued his insight with thoroughness. Flaherty’s ‘Nanook of the North’ has not lost any of its immediacy. Yes there are certain fabrications which some ethnographic filmmakers may avoid, still it remains one of the most valid and effective summations of another culture, yet attempted on film.

The first forty years of cinema is considered the silent era of anthropological film (1895-1935). It is said that for every amateurism attempt that a field researcher made to record some situation with a cine camera, there was another much more successful, much more memorable and promising attempt to produce a real movie in a primitive setting, and this was done by people like Flaherty, Cooper, Schoedsack, who had no training in anthropology. They were all explorers.

Check Your Progress

2. Who were the members of Torres Straits expedition? What was the expedition all about?

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3. Name two prominent pupils of Franz Boas.

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4. Why did Franz Boas never trust visual data?

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5. In what way was photographs used in scientific approach?

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6. Explain the innovative visual methods used by Spencer and Gillen.

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7. Which film is considered to be the earliest ethnographic film?

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2.2 MINIMAL PRESENCE OF THE VISUAL: 1950-1980

In the mid-twentieth century after Franz Boas and Malinowski, photography and film were not entirely absent from any anthropological endeavour. Anthropologist like Evans-Pritchard, Paul Sterling, Julian Pitt-Rivers used photographs from their respective fieldworks in publication. However, the ethnographic photography was mostly seen as illustration rather than an analytical tool.

The period from 1935-1965, was a crucial turning point in the history of visual anthropology. Though visual anthropology had marginalised presence, yet this period saw its use by the likes of Margaret Mead in America and Jean

Rouch in France. It has been said that Mead, working with Gregory Bateson as cameraman, shot more film for a single research project than the entire output of all anthropological film during the preceding period from 1895-1935 (Hockings. 1995).

A more ambitious project of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson's photography and film was in Bali (1942). Mead was convinced that visual anthropology could serve as scientific and objective anthropology. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead worked among the Balinese from 1936-1939, and published a book called *Balinese Character*. In this book, photographs are the main medium of communication. It is said that Bateson captured more than 25000 photographs randomly and spontaneously of natural events. Both Bateson and Mead argued that pictures can convey more of Balinese ethos and characters than words. They believed that culture is not something that exists in words and texts; it exists in lives, in bodies and actions, and what better than photographs to convey this.

Jean Rouch who began his work after World War II, has put together a massive collection of over 110 films, most dealing with African Cultures and all of a highly professional quality (Hockings, 1995). In the late 1940s, Jean Rouch introduced 16mm cinema to anthropology. Rouch's earlier films were given recognition and between 1949 and 1965, he won half a dozen international awards. Rouch is described as the human instrument of a technical revolution, but he was never completely satisfied with the idea of a direct cinema resting on the potentialities of synchronous sound. He did not like the idea of the unseen observer, invisible witness, or the neutral narrator. Rouch's films were characterised by imperfect shots, slanting horizon lines, unusual cutting points, and the chaotic allure of films. These raw unpolished films were precisely what Jean Rouch preferred. His important films include 'La Pyramide Humaine' (1961); 'Les Maitres Fous' (1955), 'Moi, un Noir' (1959), and 'Chronique d'un itd' (1961). He blurred the boundaries of "genres." 'He and his Nigerian Friends' (Moi, un Noir) created some sort of ethno-fictions, but within the limits of documentary film. Rouch essentially counted on his own strength and means. The logistics of Rouch's films were rather modest; he never used tripod, he preferred to carry camera on his shoulder, he preferred a soundman to be a native from the place he was shooting, and an editor.

Visual was a contested approach during post war period of theoretical, scientific and objective anthropology. This did not prevent the establishment of visual anthropology. In USA, official acceptance of visual anthropology as a credible scholarly undertaking in early 70s happened when the Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication became established as subsection of the American Anthropological Association. At that time, the approach to visual anthropology was published by the journal *Studies in Visual Communication*. It stated that visual anthropology is:

- i) Study of human nonlinguistic forms of communication, which includes visual technology for collection and analysis of data
- ii) Study of visual products such as films, images as communicative activity.
- iii) Usage of visual media for presentation of research-findings data that otherwise may remain verbally unrealised.

The Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester played an important role in the development of visual anthropology in the 1980s. The centre emerged as one of the leading sites for anthropological filmmaking. In the later part of the twentieth century, ethnographic filmmaking was the dominant practice in visual anthropology. Applied anthropology also developed simultaneously, though remained a contested field.

Visual anthropology was to some extent applied in other ways but not frequently reported. However some exceptions like films made by Ian Dunlop, David MacDougall, and Roger Sandall on the Australian Aborigines did bring forth the aboriginal issues to the public domain. It is said that these films were made at the request of the aboriginals, and were produced to serve the interest of both the subjects and ethnographic filmmakers. Thus, since the 1970s, indigenous media has become very popular in visual anthropology.

Check Your Progress

- 8. Which anthropologists made use of photographs as a main medium of communication and not just to support the text?

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- 9. Name the famous French visual anthropologist whose approach has been characterised by a willingness to invite participation of his subjects in the interpretive process.

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10. Name three ethnographic films made by Jean Rouch.

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11. Name the ethnographic filmmakers who made films on the Australian Aborigines.

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2.3 REFLEXIVITY TURN: 1980s

In the later part of the twentieth century visual anthropology was dominated by the practice of ethnographic filmmaking. By the 1980s and 1990s ethnographic films emerged as a subjective and reflexive genre. For example, films of Jean Rouch, and David MacDougall rejected past attempts to serve scientific anthropology and attempted to interrogate relationship of films to anthropological writing. Visual anthropology started to gain popularity in the 1990s partly as a consequence of the crisis in representation, and theoretical developments which laid emphasis on the body and phenomenology. By the end of the twentieth century, scientific anthropology was declining in favour of subjective and reflexive approach that favoured experimentation, and new technologies.

In the contemporary context of visual anthropology, the close association with ethnographic filmmaking is diminishing. Filmmaking has gone beyond observational cinema; it has moved towards using a wider range of visual media and technologies (Pink 2006). Visual technologies are increasingly being embedded in anthropological research. The acceptance of visual and access to new media in the present globalised world motivate anthropologists to take video and still cameras to the field. Visual anthropologists are challenged to engage their own work with contemporary developments in anthropological theories. Sarah Pink (2006) in her book *Situating Visual Anthropology* attempted to place the visual within a sensory anthropology, to see what is the relationship between visual and other senses, and how we can understand the visual as a form of experience, and as a medium of representation. David MacDougall (1997) argued that some aspects of knowledge can best be communicated by visual means. Pink (2006) was of the opinion, that there are also other aspects that are best communicated through smell, touch, or sound.

In between 1999 to 2001 visual research methods thrived across disciplines. Visual anthropology has defined its visual research methodology with a base in anthropology. Visual anthropology has gone beyond that which is often attributed to it by virtue of its association in the past with colonial photography and ethnographic film. In the later part of twentieth century, visual anthropology was synonymously used with ethnographic films however, that trend has diminished. Visual anthropology has moved towards a wide range of visual media and technologies. Even ethnographic filmmaking practices have become more participatory and reflexive. Digital technologies have become economically accessible and user friendly. This has led to visual methodologies been used by anthropologists comfortably. It is argued that the way forward is to integrate visual into mainstream anthropology and to incorporate anthropological aims into ethnographic filmmaking. It is important for ethnographic filmmakers to make theoretically informed visual representations.

Check Your Progress

12. What is the way forward to sustain visual anthropology?

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2.4 SUMMARY

Margaret Mead called anthropology as the science of words (Mead, 1995). According to her, anthropologists depended on what informants say based on her/his memory rather than observation of contemporary events. There were many reasons as to why departments of anthropology across the world refused to include film-making and continued to insist on note-taking. Anthropologists who relied on words were not willing to let their students use new tools. The pupils in turn slavishly followed the methods that their predecessors used. Photography and making films needed specialised skill and gift. The neglect of film in universities was the cost factor. Film equipment, processing, analysis required both time and money, and therefore it became prohibitive. That was the period where visual anthropology had marginalised presence. Times have changed. With the establishment of American Anthropological Association in America, and Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in Manchester, the presence of visual anthropology was felt strongly. In the later part of the nineteenth century, visual data were more focused on capturing what is 'primitive', 'exotic' and 'strange'. With the turn of reflexivity in the 1980s, ethnographic films have become more reflexive, and participatory. In the twenty first century, visual anthropology has moved beyond observational cinema, it has taken into consideration new media, and

digital technologies. The advancement of digital technologies has cut down the cost of making ethnographic films. In 2018, visual anthropology students of the Department of Anthropology (University of Delhi) used smartphones (i-phones, Samsung Galaxy etc.) to capture raw video footage, recorded audio (narration) and edited their films in the Visual Anthropology Lab using Adobe Premiere Pro CC video editing software. The software is also easily purchased online. Visual anthropology is not only about ethnographic filmmaking. Visual anthropology is about the visual and about visual communication, even if this is reasserted in terms of a relationship between visual and other elements of experience, practice, material culture, fieldwork and representation. Sarah Pink (2006) proposed that visual anthropology's practices have to be re-situated, its identity need to be asserted in terms of its relationship with other areas of anthropological theory and methodology.

Check Your Progress

13. Why did Margaret Mead call anthropology as 'Science of Words'?

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2.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Refer to the 1st paragraph of Section 2.0
2. Refer to the 1st paragraph of Section 2.1
3. Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead
4. Refer to the 3rd paragraph of Section 2.1

5. Refer to the 7th and 8th paragraph of Section 2.1
6. Refer to the 5th paragraph of Section 2.1
7. Robert Flaherty's "Nanook of the North"
8. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead
9. Jean Rouch
10. Les Maîtres Fous (1955); La Pyramide humaine (1961); and Moi, un Noir (1959)
11. Ian Dunlop, David MacDougall, and Roger Sandall
12. Refer to the 3rd paragraph of Section 2.3
13. Refer to the 1st paragraph of Section 2.4



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UNIT 3 SITUATING VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY*

Contents

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Acceptance of Images and Films as a Valid Medium for Ethnographic Research
- 3.2 Visuals as Text, Hypertext, and Context
- 3.3 Documentary Films, Feature Films, and Ethnographic Films
- 3.4 Interpretation of Films in terms of Violence, Patriarchy, and Gender
- 3.5 Films and Tribal Tourism
- 3.6 Summary
- 3.7 References
- 3.8 Answers to Check your Progress

Learning Outcomes

After reading this unit, the student will learn to:

- Describe how images and films got accepted as a valid medium for anthropological research;
- Identify the distinctions between documentary, feature, and ethnographic films;
- Evaluate how films are interpreted in relation to themes such as gender and patriarchy; and
- Examine how films may be used to advance tribal tourism.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, we studied what visual anthropology is and how it has developed over time as a subfield of anthropology. Now, in this unit, we will expand on the topic by looking at the role of pictures and films in anthropology. To do so, we will first examine how images were recognised as a medium for anthropological study, as well as the text, hypertext, and context that accompany them. Visual anthropology has a lengthy history of experimentation and, like literary texts, is capable of not just contextualising topics, but also immersing the viewer in an experience (Wright, 2010). One of the outcomes of these experiments was ethnographic filmmaking, which altered the way ethnographies are currently seen, and in this unit, we will examine this aspect along with other types of films, such as documentaries and feature films. Besides, in terms of contextualising the subject,

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photographs and videos in anthropology have been interpreted in a variety of ways, including patriarchy, gender, violence, and tribal tourism, all of which will be discussed in length in this course.

3.1 ACCEPTANCE OF IMAGES AND FILMS AS A VALID MEDIUM FOR ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Traditionally, anthropology depended on written texts to describe and depict many cultures and communities through ethnographies. Although the induction of photographs and films dates back to the 1890s, when A.C. Haddon used the camera to capture people across time and space, it has always been disputed whether visual approaches qualify as a genuine ethnographic medium. Earlier visual approaches went out of favour among anthropologists owing to a variety of technological issues, including bulky cameras, prohibitively costly equipment, and ethnographers' focus in the observable and evident manifestation of culture. Later in history, anthropologists focused on more intangible aspects of life, and the strands that bound society together to form a coherent whole, and it was difficult to imagine capturing these aspects with an instrument that only captured visual reality. However, as technology advanced, visual anthropologists have begun to use the camera as a tool for discovery and exploration within ethnographic research, rather than as a mere objective recording device. This is demonstrated in films such as *The Hunters* (1957) and *Dead Birds* (1964), which were produced as part of various research expeditions. Despite, or perhaps exactly because of, the development of ethnographic film during this period, the potential of film and images to transmit anthropological knowledge emerged as a source of scepticism and concern within the field. The 'iconophobia' of conventional anthropologists resulted in the subfield's ostracism (Taylor, 1996; Mead, 2003). Whereas text was thought to be capable of theory and analysis, images were thought to be more difficult to manage and hence more prone to be misread or misconstrued (MacDougall, 1999). However, cameras can be used to initiate conversations, provoke meaningful performances, and illuminate what Margaret Mead referred to as the 'intangibles of social life'. These intangibles may be more accurately represented through observation of those verbal and non-verbal aspects which are frequently overlooked in written ethnographies. So, this way, cameras are capable of capturing much more than just virtual reality.

Images and films are viewed as critical tools for studying cultures and communities that transcend cultural, racial, socioeconomic, and language barriers in contemporary anthropology. They are effective instruments for both the understanding and exploring processes inherent in fieldwork and the depiction of sensory elements of anthropological information (Bhatia 2021). Implicitly, films and images can be utilised to do study (i.e., to analyse something) and to disseminate the findings (i.e., to convey information about something). Additionally, both can be classified as anthropological if the

information sought is scientifically relevant in this discipline, and as ethnographic if the method used to obtain the information requires ethnography. The extent to which the material brought to light is consistent with "whatever is out there" – whether it is referred to as reality, a pro-filmic event, or something else – remains a point of contention (Iverson & Simonsen 2010).

Rather than seeing pictures and videos as supplements to words, many visual anthropologists emphasise the complementary relationship between text and image, with each amplifying the other. For instance, some visual anthropologists claim that writing does not have to be the major medium of transmitting ethnographic knowledge for a specific project, as is the case with Anna Grimshaw's anthropological biography films about the lives of selected individuals in a tiny fishing village in Maine (Grimshaw 2013, 2016). Others demonstrate how language and video may be used in tandem to intensify anthropological research, such in *Descending with Angels* (Suhr 2019), which combines an ethnographic film with a written monograph on Islamic dispossession and psychiatry in Denmark. Besides, the *visual* in visual anthropology has enabled and obligated anthropologists to share study materials and acknowledge the cultural contexts of visual understanding. Not only for study objectives but also as a way of giving back to the persons and communities whose lives and experiences provide the 'data' that makes anthropology feasible (Jackson 2004, Lozada 2006). Thus, as images and films have become more prevalent in ethnographic research, we have begun to recognise these visual anthropological features as a fully acceptable medium for generating ethnographies and monographs about cultures across time and space.

3.2 VISUALS AS TEXT, HYPERTEXT, AND CONTEXT

According to some visual anthropologists, there are unacceptable distinctions between ethnographic visuals and text. For ages, written words have been utilised to depict specific and personal experiences, while abstract concepts may be conveyed on film using diagrams, maps, and narration. Thus, what is interesting is not so much the inherent qualities of cinema and literature as it is how anthropologists employ these mediums. It is more relevant to analyse how cinema and literature have been utilised to transmit anthropological and ethnographic concepts, the advantages of each, and the connections they bear to practises and discourses that are traditionally characterised as anthropological and ethnographic (Pink 2006). Besides, with the prominence of visuals in ethnographic studies, it was recognised that ethnographic videos and images might generate similar knowledge as written texts by following the same theoretical design. Since the beginning of visual discourses in anthropology, attempts have been made to bridge the gap between visual and traditional anthropology by emphasising films that may connect more directly with anthropological textual discourses. This is seen in Robert

Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), where the filmmaker intercuts titles with the video, as well as in Margaret Mead's voice-overs in her films. These titles and voice-overs are necessary in order to comprehend the pictures as their author intended. The visuals illustrate the anthropologist's arguments, which are conveyed and considered through textuality. Both mediums are utilised in conjunction to generate knowledge, which brings us to our next topics, hypertext and context.

Hypertext refers to any writing that has hyperlinks to other sources of information. We utilise pictures and films in visual anthropology to construct multilinear, multimedia, and interactive texts that communicate conceptually, institutionally, and ethnographically. Sarah Pink's projects establish reflexive connections between ethnographic research, visual representation, and written contextualisation and argument; they both mimic and depart from established genres of written and visual representation within their respective disciplines, and they employ written words to contextualise ethnographic video footage. Now, contextualisation is required in ethnographic videos and photographs, as there has already been widespread criticism of the use of visuals in anthropological research. Visuals serve as context, assisting the spectator in determining why, when, and how certain situations connect to the culture under study. Visual anthropologists are invited to consider novel ways of presenting and framing research when images are viewed as text or hypertext. While pictures and videos cannot entirely replace ethnographic texts, with sufficient hyper textuality and context, they may establish significant connections with writing. Thus, the meaning of every picture may be decided in part by the environment in which it was created, and hypertext enables us to rapidly switch across mediums to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Check Your Progress

1. Why was visual anthropology not first deemed a viable tool for ethnographic research?

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2. What do you understand by visuals as text, hypertext, and context?

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3.3 DOCUMENTARY FILMS, FEATURE FILMS, AND ETHNOGRAPHIC FILMS

What distinguishes a documentary from a feature film or an ethnographic film? To that end, this section will briefly discuss each of the three. The primary distinction between these various types of films is their aim. To comprehend ethnographic films completely, we must first define and comprehend feature films and documentary films. Let us begin with feature films and then go on to documentaries and ethnographic films. What is a feature film, then? A feature film, in the simplest definition, is a film created purely for the goal of entertaining the audience/viewers. You may have seen numerous commercial Hollywood or Bollywood films in genres such as comedy, action, romance, mystery, thriller, horror, and adventure. The primary goal of these films is to entertain the audience and they serve as a diversion from reality. Additionally, feature films require a larger budget than documentary films do due to the involvement of a big number of individuals. Additionally, it must include a screenplay with dialogues and narration and maybe filmed using actors and sets. Now if a filmmaker wishes to represent true stories with his or her camera, the end product is a documentary, which brings us to the next area of this issue.

What is a documentary? To be fair, you probably have an instinctive sense of when a film is being created as a documentary. When one examines some of the most significant documentary films created over the last two decades, they are all about events that happened; they focus on historical subjects such as biographies or wider social justice movements and real-world conflicts. Additionally, they give a forum for social critique and criticism using tactics such as interviews and guerrilla filmmaking. Documentaries are concerned with the lives of actual people rather than fictitious characters as in feature films, and as a result, they frequently include real individuals portraying themselves for the camera rather than actors playing the part of someone else. Nichols (2017) identifies three basic assumptions regarding documentary films as follows:

1. Documentaries are about realism; they depict real-world events and adhere to established truths.

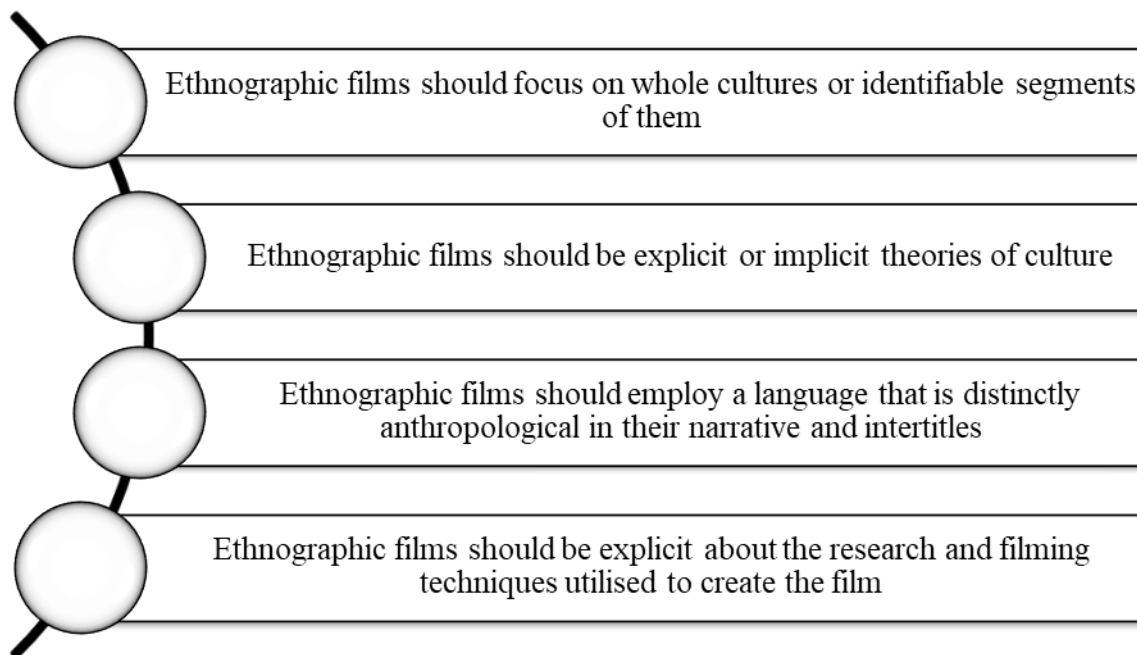
2. Documentaries focus on real individuals who exist or have lived in the past; they do not create fictional characters to convey a story.

3. Documentaries show stories about real-world occurrences.

While it is natural for viewers to identify a film as a documentary when it exhibits these traits, academic film historians have frequently struggled to establish a single agreed definition that encompasses the genre. If you search the internet, you are likely to come across some form of John Grierson's 1930s description of documentary as the creative presentation of reality. However, Grierson's definition is likewise particularly ambiguous. Nichols believes that there is an inherent conflict between the idea of creative treatment, which conjures up images of cinematic editing and narrativity in fiction, and the concept of fact, which conjures up images of journalistic and historical work. Additionally, documentary films are frequently arranged around a primary thesis that expresses the filmmaker's beliefs and prejudices. This synthesis of artistic treatment and reasoning with editing design to strengthen the filmmaker's claims about real-world occurrences distinguishes documentaries from other types of cinemas, such as surveillance video or animal behaviour. In academic parlance, this sort of non-documentary reality video possesses a very high degree of transparency or indexicality. In basic terms, it refers to video that tries to recreate precisely what occurs in front of the camera with a limited editorial voice and where clarity and indexicality are critical for surveillance or scientific research material.

Documentary films have lower indexicality and the most critically acclaimed documentaries are sometimes highly styled, intensively edited, and use music to amplify the dramatic and emotional effect of situations. As a result, philosophers such as Bill Nichols frequently emphasise that documentary films are not copies of reality, but rather interpretations of it. To paraphrase Nichol's introduction to documentary, we evaluate a reproduction, such as a scan or a photocopy, based on its authenticity to the original subject, while we evaluate a representation of a topic using a different set of criteria. We evaluate it based on the information it gives, the quality of its viewpoints, and the monetary value we place on its creation. In that sense, documentary films and fiction have a lot in common stylistically, and many filmmakers have incorporated documentary conventions into their fictional works, using interviews, free camera footage, and historical footage to ground their subject matter in a gritty, more relatable real-world context. However, what if a documentary filmmaker wishes to communicate facts or an argument without resorting to stylistic representation? What if they intend to objectively capture cultural occurrences with a high degree of indexicality, for example, for social scientific research? At this point, documentaries can be termed ethnographic films.

While ethnographic filmmakers utilise films to acquire data that might support qualitative research in writing or stand alone as an ethnographic output, the technical divide between ethnographic and documentary film is everything from black and white. Jay Ruby, an anthropologist from the 1970s, established these four characteristics that are frequently used to differentiate ethnographic films from the larger documentary genre:



To qualify as ethnographic, a film must first focus on and contextualise an entire culture or a particular cultural activity. For instance, John Marshall's *The Hunters* (1957) follows a group of Bushmen on a Kalahari giraffe hunt. We not only learn about Giraffe hunting but also about the larger family relationships and agricultural practices that contribute to the definition of the *Saan* peoples' traditions. Thus, ethnographic films tend to situate certain beliefs and practises within a wider socio-cultural context; they are neither biography, investigative journalism, nor social advocacy documentaries. Moreover, ethnographic films must be produced by an ethnographic technique and theoretical grasp of culture, as well as using anthropological terminology in their voice-overs or intertitles. This is the most overtly academic component of ethnographic filmmaking, and it readily distinguishes films created for social scientists or students of cultural studies and anthropology. Additionally, filmmakers and anthropologists such as John Marshall and Timothy Ash authored books to accompany their films, contextualising and enhancing the audience's understanding of each video as a source of ethnographic data. This also brings us to the fourth criterion: films and filmmakers must be transparent about their research and filmmaking processes. Theorists quickly realised that cinema, as a medium for social scientific study, is incapable of presenting an unmediated picture of its topic. The filmmaker's decisions about what to shoot, when to shoot, and how to shoot all bring possible implicit biases that might impact how an audience perceives the topic of a film. This is one of the apparent benefits of cinema as a storytelling medium, but it creates considerable challenges for the objective aims of scientific study. To deconstruct and contextualise their own possible biases that may be accidentally replicated in their films, ethnographic filmmakers occasionally provide additional footage to explain how and why they shot and edited specific scenes. Thus, all ethnographic films are documentary films in a sense, but not all documentary films are ethnographic (Smith 2021).

They may be of interest to ethnographers in that all films are cultural products, and the documentary genre provides an excellent platform for creative and cultural expression. However, unless a film meets specific social scientific criteria, visual anthropologists and cinema historians typically do not consider it ethnographic. And Jay Ruby's standards are far from ideal for determining if a film is ethnographic. Even if a film does not satisfy all these requirements, it is nevertheless regarded as a classic of the genre. But they provide a jumping-off place for those of us interested in visual anthropology to explore the grey area between documentary and ethnographic filmmaking, as well as the ambiguity between the two words that are frequently seen in academic circles.

Check Your Progress

- 3. What is the purpose of a feature film, a documentary, and an ethnographic film?

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- 4. What are the three basic assumptions regarding the documentary films as identified by Bill Nichols?

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- 5. What are the four characteristics given by Jay Ruby that differentiates an ethnographic film from the documentary genre?

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3.4 INTERPRETATION OF FILMS IN TERMS OF VIOLENCE, PATRIARCHY, AND GENDER

Due to the ubiquity and diversity of media as a source of mass consumption, as well as its effect on the construction of ideas and the generation of disputes, media, identity, and gender have become fundamental to the field of visual anthropology. Films have had an increasing impact on Indian

audiences as well, and as a result of globalisation, this influence has shifted dramatically. As a result of this rising demand, films have addressed topics such as patriarchy and gender-based violence as women are the primary consumers of the media, and the discipline is particularly concerned with how they are depicted in the medium (Tere 2012). Films have impacted the cultural, social, and political values of the people in this region in a very clear way.

Anthropologists', more particularly feminists', interest in the film derives from their concern over women's under- and mis-representation in films. The feminist approach to cinema raises several pertinent questions, including how women are represented on screen, how women's issues are addressed in the film, what feminism means to filmmakers, how the feminist agenda manifests on screen, how the female character is positioned in relation to the male character, and what role women filmmakers and writers play in depicting women's issues through the film (Jain and Rai 2009). These facets of a film can only be revealed via critical examination, inspection, and introspection, and by examining the objectification, exclusion, silence, and stereotyping of female characters in the film, anthropologists have attempted to do so in addition to other fields of study and practise.

In films such as Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), the male character was defined as the central figure of the film's narrative, the figure that the camera followed, while the female character functioned as a spectacle to offer pleasure to the male audience. Similarly, Tere 2012, constructs an argument on how women are portrayed in Hindi cinema based on a variety of feminist film criticism strands that have undoubtedly enhanced our knowledge of women on screen. Regardless of the genre, cinematic tales have unquestionably been man dominated and male-focused throughout history. Women lacked any sense of self-sufficiency, and their journey throughout the film was explored in connection to the male protagonist. If we confine ourselves to Bollywood, there are countless instances of such films that are rife with gender prejudice and patriarchal attitude. For instance, there was a line in the 2014 film *2 States* that said, "*bhoo di ho ya jawan, melodrama is dunya ki sari auraton ke khoon mai hota hain.*" (Whether they are old or young, all women are born with melodrama) and similarly, in *Ra-One* (2011), the film's poster portrays the hero (*Shahrukh Khan*) cradling the lead actress, *Kareena Kapoor*, in his arms. It establishes his image as her saviour, which the film's plot also does. There are several instances of such films, across all genres, in which women are depicted to be not only physically inferior to males, but also cognitively inferior to them. Similarly, films like *Mard* (1985) demonstrate a similar bias towards males with phrases such as "*Mard ko dard nahi hota*" (Man does not feel the pain) and the narratives like '*Men do not cry*'. The filmmakers make no attempts to link traits such as intelligence and decision-making equally with all of the film's actors, regardless of their gender.

However, with recent advancements, filmmakers have rejected such typical

cinematic standards and included the female perspective. For instance, Abeer Zaibak Haddad's film on 'honour killing' demonstrates the grave threat to the physical safety of girls and women. Similarly, Yael Katzir's film depicts the fight of Jewish women for religious rights. It is said that both Arab and Jewish women are denied fundamental rights due to their subjugation to patriarchal rule. Both films highlight the state's inability to protect women's rights and safety, as well as women's complicity in men's subjugation (Hertzog 2019). Similarly, in Bollywood, films were made that questioned these preconceptions and emphasised the centrality of women in the plot. Rituparno Ghosh focused on these issues as well, directing films on women's standing in Indian society.

Check Your Progress

6. How do films impact audiences?

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7. Discuss the feminist approach to cinema.

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3.5 FILMS AND TRIBAL TOURISM

Tribal tourism allows non-tribal individuals to visit and stay with tribal people like tourists, during which time they can experience tribal culture and customs. In doing so, the policymakers aim to offer jobs and economic independence to tribe members, restore the region's cultural legacy, and help in the outreach of development initiatives in these regions. Despite many plans and projects aimed at boosting tribal tourism in India, the rich cultural legacy of tribal peoples in India continues to receive far less attention than it deserves. To address this issue, the notion of filming tribal communities was developed in order to attract tourists to visit tribal regions. Numerous documentaries have been created that showcase the enormous diversity of tribal cultures found throughout the country. Even in Jharkhand's 2020 tourism policy, a proposal to build a film city in collaboration with the Public Relations Department was included, with up to 15% upfront subsidy for any film filmed in Jharkhand. Seral Murmu, a young filmmaker from Jharkhand,

is a household figure in the state's burgeoning tribal film industry. *Sondhayni* (2019), his latest film, depicts the socio-political challenges confronting indigenous tribes living in places touched by the Naxalite movement. The film is in *Santhali* and also highlights the tribe's heritage, an art form, and way of life. Similarly, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs published a film on the *'Tribes of Uttarakhand'* in 2018 to boost tribal tourism in Uttarakhand. The documentary portrays the tribes and their cultural legacies throughout the area. In Uttar Pradesh, the ministry published a documentary about the *Tharu* tribe, which details the group's history. Films have also been used to promote tribal tourism in the northeast, and a recent one from *Prasar Bharati Archives* is titled *'Nagaland-A Documentary,'* which highlights the region's various cultures and exquisite scenery.

Thus, while these initiatives successfully drew the public's attention to the tourist department, they also had some negative consequences. In areas where tribal tourism has grown in popularity, the traditions of certain indigenous villages have shifted, transforming some significant sacred rites into spectacles. Tribal tourism has also had a detrimental effect on indigenous people that are averse to interaction with the outside world. The debate remains as to how tribal tourism may be made more ethical and indigenous communities protected from foreign exploitation. Perhaps most importantly, tourists should be educated about the detrimental consequences that tribal tourism can have on indigenous populations. Additionally, if not employed positively, visuals may be damaging to tribal cultures in all aspects. Like for Murmu, films are more than a means of pleasure; they are a vital instrument for telling his people's untold stories.

Check Your Progress

- 8. Discuss the cinematic interventions to promote tribal tourism.

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3.6 SUMMARY

To summarise, we learned that images and videos have carved a path for themselves in anthropological discourse and have been improving with each passing day. There is no distinction between images and texts, since both may be used in conjunction with one another to aid in the comprehension of the cultures. Additionally, ethnographic filmmaking has grown into a distinct genre distinct from documentaries and feature films. And with this division emerged ethnographicness in images and films recorded in a variety of cultures and places. With contemporary and postmodern perspectives on the

area, such photographs and films are also understood in terms of violence, gender, and patriarchy. Not only that but films are increasingly being used to promote tourism in tribal regions, with success. Without a doubt, such initiatives have limits, but the future appears to belong to technology, and it is imperative that we as anthropologists adapt to technological advancements in order to serve humankind in an ever-changing world.

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3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Refer to the first paragraph of section 3.1
2. Refer to section 3.2
3. Refer to the first paragraph of section 3.3
4. Refer to the second paragraph of section 3.3
5. Refer to the fifth paragraph of section 3.3
6. Refer to the first paragraph of section 3.4
7. Refer to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th paragraph of section 3.4
8. Refer to section 3.5



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