

Ethnography as Method in Social Sciences

17 June 2010 ICTD Summer School

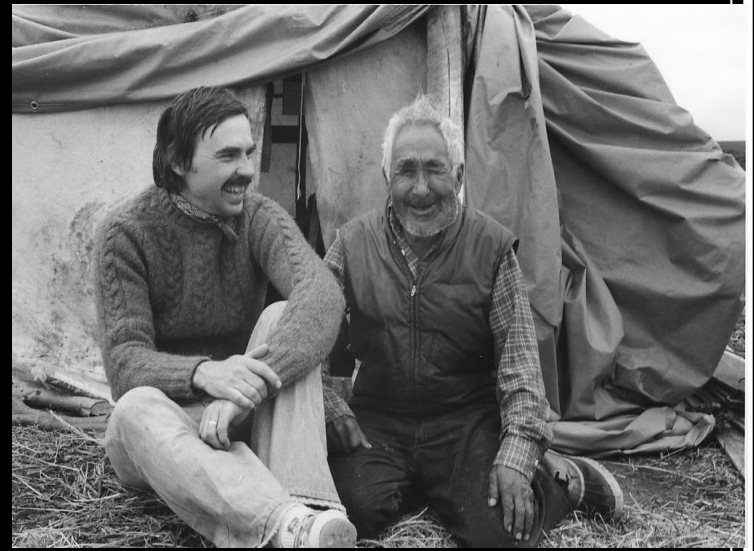
The Origins

- Began as a project complementing colonialism..... First chair 1908
- Academic curiosity?... Of course but..
- To understand 'other' cultures.



Ethnographic Immersion

- In-field study became the only form of understanding social contexts of *'other'* culture

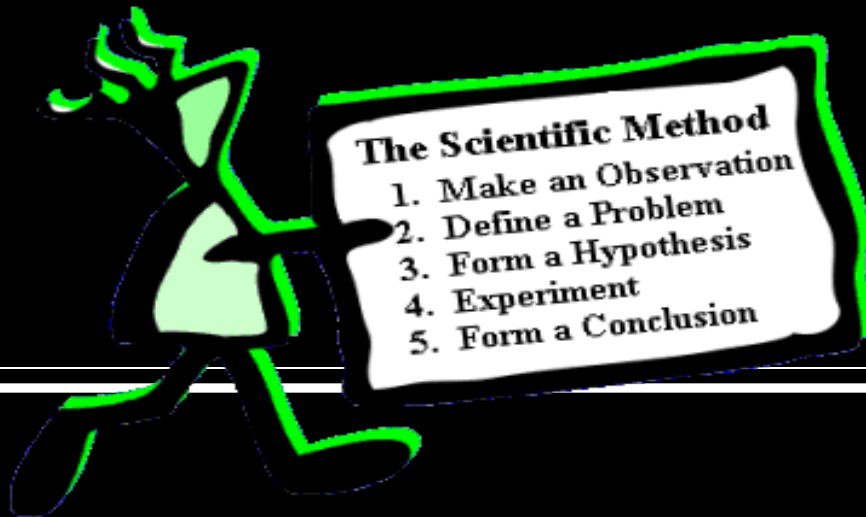


What informs Ethnographic method...

- The spirit of scientific enquiry
- Modeled on zoological/biological Sciences
- To classify the social world into types
- A butterfly collection?!?!

...

- A scientific approach to investigate sociological phenomena
- To record human behaviour, as precisely as possible
- Compare, understand, possibly predict...



Theoretical approaches

- Functional
- Structural
- Interpretative
- Post-modern

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- To observe the 'present'
 - Society : A delicately balanced 'wrist watch'
 - Society as a system with structural properties
 - Relation of connectedness between individuals
 - Structural properties observable in social interactions

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- The field as laboratory
 - Human behaviour subject to scientific scrutiny, leading to...
 - Generalisations
 - Comparisons
 - Classifications

"Classic" Ethnography



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- Reaction to 'society as system', approached through direct observation
 - Deep Structures operating and guiding social tendencies
 - To go beyond the observable and address these structures

Claude Levi-Strauss

Examples.....

- The Raw and the Cooked



Interpretative Anthropology

- Interpretations mediating the 'field' and 'observation'
- The first signs of disciplinary 'crises'
- 'Thick' Description of Culture

Clifford Geertz

Thick Description..

- The Balinese Culture



Thick Description..

- “ One night at the call centre...”



Ethnography revisited.. Let's recollect

- The kind of knowledge ethnography produces – by what method? For whom? about whom? by whom? to what end?
- The ethnographer as a sympathetic and authoritative observer
- Participant observation, as a delicate balance of objectivity and subjectivity.
- Personal involvement mediated by impersonal standards of observation

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- The indigenous ethnographer
 - Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding.

The Ethnographic perspective, is now..

- Distinctively intimate and inquisitive
- Deployed in diverse and novel contexts.
- Turns up in many unlikely places
 - Travelogues
 - Autobiographies
 - Advertising
 - Novels
 - Rock Music



Ethnography utilizes a mix of methods...

- Participant observation
- In-context interviews
- Semi-structured interviews
- Diary studies
- Collaging/visual representations
- Triangulation with statistical data
- Application of theoretical frameworks

**“My TV is the family Oven/Toaster/Grill”
Personalizing TV for the Indian Audience**

6 months of Ethnography

11 Families, 40 Persons-Mumbai, India



Recommendations for IPTV

The Lambas Joint-family

- Offers on advanced features for little extra cost
 - Multi-angle, enhanced sports channel
- Shows for women e.g. Interactive cuisine
- Live religious/spiritual events
- Good scope for DVR. Need propaganda and tutorial
- Free offers on movies on VOD
- Multi-user features for each TV
- Personalizing TV for a nuclear unit might be novel



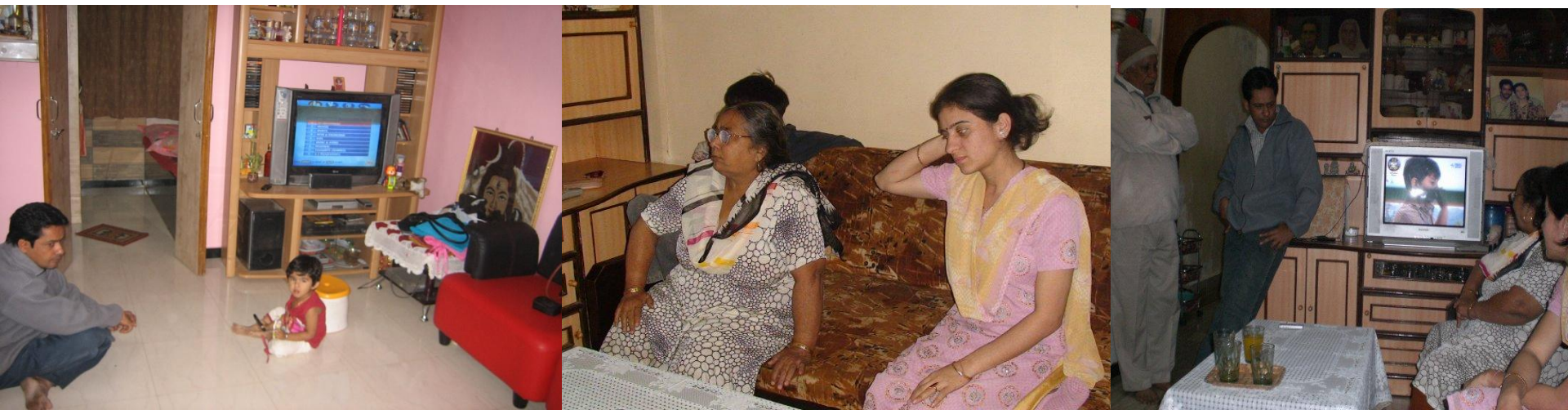
Background

**Patriarchal 3 generational
Male breadwinners
Paternal grandparent/s, One + sons and family**

**The Lamba family
Joint-family**

**Family TV, Connected, Show me,
satisfied status quo**

- **Independent TV per nuclear unit**
 - Drawing room or bedroom per family unit
 - All TV's have shared viewing
- **Mother-** Otherwise occupied, adjusts to Male preference
- **Father-** Drives prime time choice, Niche TV
- **Child-** Controlled and pampered by elders. Watch dedicated content
- **Grandparents-** Grandma's choice. Women collect around her TV
- **Top Content-** Soaps, Sports, movies, religious/spiritual content



TV Viewing Dynamics

**The Lambas
Joint-family**

Typical viewing

- **Morning-** Religious/spiritual watched by all
- **Until lunch-** Intermittent watching by grandparents
- **Post-lunch to evening-** Women watch their choice-Soaps
- **Prime time-** Sports, sit-coms, soaps
- **Late night-** Parents independent viewing in-room TV- sports, news, movies
- **Week-end-** Movies, sports

Typical Viewer

- Grandmother and Fathers drive shared watching behaviour
- **Father holds remote**
- **Child** watch dedicated and family channels
- **Sports Channels win over others**
- **Even with multiple TVs entire family collect around a popular TV show**



Overall Attitudes

**Lambas
Joint-family**

- Parental control is part of life-style
- Strong demarcation of gender in all spheres of life
- Less scope for independent consumption choices
- Always grey market/bargain prices but TV and home electronics is branded
- Male family members decide TV services, technology purchases
- Want multiple devices to address diversity



Readings...

- Notes and Queries in Anthropology
- George E Marcus and Michael M J Fisher *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* <http://www.amazon.com/Anthropology-Cultural-Critique-Experimental-Sciences/dp/0226504506>
- Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520206809>