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# [Commentary] Is Fieldwork losing its grace? Encountering Western and Indian Experience

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## Abstract

Anthropology is primarily a field science as the field provides the basic platform for critical scrutiny of ideas and theories of the discipline. Fieldwork is also an extremely indispensable tool to understand the culture of the 'observed'. Magnificent outcomes of fieldwork in the hands of Malinowski, Mead, Evans-Pritchard, Barth, Firth, Bohannan, Levi-Strauss, Powdermaker, and others have been instrumental in the development of various discourses in anthropology and allied disciplines. Contributions of Indian anthropologists in field studies are also no less significant as these reflect renewed interest in empiricism and the reflexive understanding of the culture of the 'others'. But nowadays fieldwork is getting less importance in western as well as in Indian academics. In this article, I have tried to critically examine various issues in connection with the present days' fieldwork enterprise which is getting a diminishing importance.

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## Introduction

There is a persistent crisis over ethical principles in Anthropology in general and fieldwork in particular since its inception in the West. Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, the Co-chair of the 1985 American Anthropological Association (AAA) symposium on 'Ethics, Professionalism and the Future of Anthropology', observes that such a crisis has developed along with rapid societal changes toward individualism and turning a blind eye towards traditional values (Fluehr-Lobban, 1991:13). The crisis becomes more intense when it comes to the domain of fieldwork. Paul Dresch and Wendy James, both social anthropologists of the University of Oxford, have argued that first-hand fieldwork is not the only prerequisite for researching, writing, and teaching good anthropology, and that we should not forget the importance of the so-called 'arm-chair anthropologists' for whom the advancement of professional fieldwork was only one element among many in the larger project of comparative 'human sciences' (Dresch and James, 2000: 1). This argument does not disgrace anyway

the importance of fieldwork in anthropology. Marcel Mauss, for instance, was a stern proponent of more and better fieldwork<sup>1</sup>, though he did not undermine the importance of using existing historical, linguistic, archaeological, and museological sources to unearth the truth. David Pocock finds anthropology as an 'empirical philosophy', for which fieldwork is the indispensable source (Pocock, 1988: 203). Evans-Pritchard stressed upon the empirical data while he tried to associate anthropology with history. He argued:

*The thesis I have put before you, that social anthropology is a kind of historiography, and therefore ultimately of philosophy or art, implies that it studies societies as moral systems and not as natural systems, that it is interested in design rather than in process, and that it, therefore, seeks patterns and not scientific laws, and interprets rather than explains. These are conceptual, and not merely verbal, differences. The concepts of the natural system and natural law, modeled on the constructs of the natural sciences, have dominated anthropology from its beginnings, and as we look back over the course of its growth I think we can see that they have been responsible for a false scholasticism which has led to one rigid and ambitious formulation after another. Regarded as a special kind of historiography, that is as one of the humanities, social anthropology is released from these essentially philosophical dogmas and given the opportunity, though it may seem paradoxical to say so, to be really empirical and, in the true sense of the word, scientific (Evans-Pritchard, 1962 [1950]: 26).*

David Pocock and Louis Dumont<sup>2</sup> came forward in establishing *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, the journal envisaged for bringing together the enquiries in the field. Thus, the importance of fieldwork in anthropology is beyond question. Anthropology is basically a field science as the field provides the platform for critical scrutiny of its ideas and theories (Fox, 1975). Fieldwork by participant observation is the hallmark of social-cultural anthropology in particular (Epstein, 1967; Jarvie, 1966; Stocking, 1982). It is the field that is instrumental to bring about a marked difference in the orientation of life of its practitioners. Field develops, as Srivastava observes, among learners of anthropology a higher degree of sensitivity towards other people and their problems (Srivastava, 1999). But unfortunately, the quality of fieldwork in Indian anthropology is now poorer as he further observes (Srivastava, 1999: 550). There is a lack of serious fieldwork in anthropology in recent times. In this regard, I am tempted to quote M.N. Srinivas' observation:

*The lack of a fieldwork tradition in the social sciences (excluding social anthropology and sociology) has had adverse results on their growth and development. Most important, it has alienated them from grassroots reality and led to fanciful assumptions about the behaviour of ordinary people. It has resulted in woeful ignorance about the complex interaction of economic, political, and social forces at local levels. (M.N. Srinivas, 1975: 1388)*

In recent times, fieldwork in the West (Dreschet *et al.*, 2000) as well as in many Indian universities appears to be a diluted exercise.

## Fieldwork Approach

For a long time, holism has been the unifying framework of research in anthropology. But nowadays the discipline has been overburdened with too much specialization which not only fragmented the discipline but came out with findings with lack of holistic understanding. The prologue of the book *Crisis in Anthropology: View from Spring Hill, 1980*, a substantial outcome of the 'Spring Hill Conference on American Social and Cultural Anthropology: Past and Future' starts with a concern to confront the fragmented nature of anthropology then<sup>3</sup>. Too much specialization makes a practitioner expert in one branch or domain of research but deprived of strength in other dimensions, as Srivastava observes (Srivastava, 2010). As a consequence of a high degree of specialization, students encounter fragmented intellectual progress within the sub-disciplinary boundaries. Again, the *insider's view* has been the suitable approach to many for anthropological research. It is almost taken for granted to many anthropologists in the field that one has to be able to think in terms of people's symbols in order to understand people's thoughts (Evans-Pritchard, 1964 [1951]: 79). It is also preferred by many to yield fieldwork data 'within the mediums, symbols, and experimental worlds which have meaning to [their] respondents' (Vidich, 1955: 354). This is for fieldwork means, in the words of Powdermaker:

*To understand a society, the anthropologist has traditionally immersed himself in it, learning, as far as possible, to think, see, feel, and sometimes act as a member of its culture and at the same time as a trained anthropologist from another culture. (Powdermaker, 1966:9).*

In this context, Pehrson argues, 'I want to become a Lapp so that my people may learn something of your people' (Pehrson, 1957: iv). For fieldwork is the first step that makes a fieldworker become capable, in time, to think and act within the perspectives of two different groups: one in which they are born, and the other in which they are working.

However, there are some others who thought that anthropological research comprises the building of models. Lévi-Strauss, for instance, pointed out that tribal peoples bring order to their worlds by dividing phenomena into categories, without giving us a clear idea of what these categories mean to the people who created and employed them (Lévi-Strauss (1966 [1962]: 35-74). Researchers inclined to acquire an insider's view tend to emphasize the importance of learning new forms of communication, new definitions of behaviour, new social roles, and new meanings for the phenomena of everyday life. Those who wish to construct models try to structure their work in such a manner that they will not need to do any interpreting. Data, for them, are materials collected in such a way that they do not require meaningful understanding; or, more precisely, data are data only when collected according to a series of invariable rules which, in themselves, provide the framework for interpretation. Such kind of data setting is predominantly found among biological anthropology researchers who try to yield data in terms of certain fixed variables with multiple options of answer-keys and without taking into consideration the cultural dynamics of the people under study. There are other researchers who seek to build models, but make an attempt to understand what the models mean to the people who use them. Still, there are others who may get interested in a body of data, a problem, or a hypothesis, so that they will learn new languages, play various roles, take interviews and administer tests, living inside or outside a community.

Moreover, many professional fieldworkers who emphasize the importance of obtaining an 'insider's view' frequently use the techniques favoured by the model builders in order to supplement or facilitate their participation and observation.

For Powdermaker, an anthropologist's fieldwork methodology is not just a collection of information, but entails a humanistic endeavor that requires converting the close personal proximity of friendships gained in the field into the detachment of the scientist-stranger. In her own words:

*Anthropology is a profession in which it is as asset for the practitioners to be somewhat outside of their own society and of the ones they study, and yet be able to step into them and relate to people. Certain personality types carry this dual role of involvement and detachment more easily than do others and even enjoy it. (Powdermaker, 1966: 303)*

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a trend of critical reassessment of ethnographic truth and authority with methodological self-reflexibility and understanding of culture as a 'moving force' rather than a timeless structure (e.g., Rosaldo, 1980). The focus of reflexive ethnography is, Rosaldo argues:

*The truth of objectivism – absolute, universal, timeless – has lost its monopoly status. It now competes, on more nearly equal terms, with the truths of case studies that are embedded in local contexts, shaped by local interests, and colored by local perceptions. (Rosaldo, 1989:21)*

## History of Fieldwork

Descriptive reporting of the customs, inclinations, and accomplishments of 'other' people is almost as old as the fifth century B.C. when Herodotus was instructing and entertaining his Hellenic readers with accounts of the Persians and the Scythians (Dundes, 1968: 614). The Romans continued this practice (e.g., Josephus, ca. A.D. 37-95; Tacitus, A.D. 55-120). In the fifth century, Fa-hsien wrote extensively about his observations in India (Reischauer and Fairbank, 1958: 146). With the rise of the Islamic empires, there are some records of visits to foreign lands (Dundes, 1968: 14-22). The first Europeans to collect and record useful ethnographic data about the 'other' people were the missionaries of the Catholic Church (Chadwick, 1964; Neill, 1964). Social research involving direct observation of groups or institutions in the researchers' own society was carried on in Britain and France as early as the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, who have been referred to as 'pioneers' by subsequent generations of social anthropologists, were a varied lot. Their works centered around the historical reconstruction of past culture. Though most of them were highly theoretical thinkers, many of them set their goal to be improvement of human institutions and human society (e.g., Saint-Simon<sup>4</sup>, 1760-1825; David Hume, 1711-76; Adam Smith, 1723-90; Dr. Thomas Hodgkin<sup>5</sup>). By the late 1890s and early 1900s, some British anthropologists, viz., Haddon, Seligman, Rivers, and Radcliffe-Brown, came out to break the earlier academic tradition of working only from derived sources and went into the field to obtain first-hand data. Lowie (1937: 131) said that Boas must be understood, first of all, as a fieldworker. Kroeber<sup>6</sup> and Lowie were also not very free to talk about fieldwork, as one of their students R.H. Wax stated (1971: 35). By the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars and writers like Maine, Bachofen, Fustel de Coulanges, McLennan and Tylor tried to relate their theories to facts.

Their interest was in the theoretical or conjectural history (Evans-Pritchard, 1964 [1951]: 24). However, the lone exception to this trend was Luis Henry Morgan who did genuine fieldwork, as Evans-Pritchard (2004 [1951]) pointed out. Frazer<sup>7</sup> and Bachofen were always referred to as ‘arm-chair anthropologists’.

It is B. K. Malinowski who had been the first British anthropologist to pitch his tent in the Kiriwinian dwellings and observed and recorded what was actually going on. He championed the idea of ‘fieldwork as making possible total immersion in a particular society’ through his classic presentation of ethnographic details (Malinowski, 1922, 1929, 1935)<sup>8</sup>. He was also the first professional anthropologist to give his readers a relatively detailed account of the methodology he used to obtain his data and a comprehensive picture of what intensive fieldwork was really mean (Malinowski, 1967)<sup>9</sup>. In a subsequent phase, the most ground-breaking writings based on fieldwork came out from Margaret Mead (1928, 1930, 1935)<sup>10</sup>, Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1940, 1951[1964])<sup>11</sup>, Leach (1961)<sup>12</sup>, Fredrik Barth (1959, 1969, 1975)<sup>13</sup>, Raymond Firth (1936)<sup>14</sup>, Laura Bohannan (1954), Claude Levi-Strauss (1955, 1962), Hortense Powdermaker (1933, 1939, 1962, 1966)<sup>15</sup>, among others. This intensive approach to fieldwork was more or less found in India in the works of S. C. Roy (1912, 1915, 1925, 1935)<sup>16</sup>, D. N. Majumder (1937, 1950, 1963)<sup>17</sup>, M. N. Srinivas (1952), S.K. Srivastava (1958)<sup>18</sup>, L.P. Vidyarthi (1961, 1963)<sup>19</sup>, T.C. Das (1945, 1949)<sup>20</sup> and many others mostly up to 1980s, which Indian Anthropology has nearing nowhere afterward. The outcome of fieldwork in recent times most often lacks a ‘thick description’<sup>21</sup>. Fieldwork in most of the Indian university departments nowadays has become a ritual obligation. In this connection, I would like to share my experience in fieldwork here.

## Tragedy of (Malinowskian) Immersion

Anthropological fieldwork tradition demands total immersion within others’ cultures. Fieldwork, specifically participant observation, for Clifford Geertz (1988, 1998), means ‘deep hanging-out’ which requires the fieldworker’s immersion in the day-to-day lives of the people under study for a period from several months to a few years. He emphasizes on close-up study of social and cultural environments (as quoted by Erikson, 1995: 9). But, is it really possible today to conduct fieldwork in a similar manner? In the days of tremendously fast life and with rarely available funding or prolonged leave from the host institutes for extensive fieldwork, how can fieldwork be carried out in its true sense? Is it possible within a very short spell of fieldwork to share behavioural order, food habits, and other things of the community engaged with or to understand the codes and symbols of people with different cultures?

I have no hesitation to admit, for instance, that in one of my brief fieldwork assignments I was offered *bandia* (an indigenous rice-beer of the tribal people in eastern India) but I found it very difficult to drink due to its strong smell that I could not like. I could not consume it, though my respondents offered this with great interest and enthusiasm. I felt that I could not immerse myself in the cultural life of the community, since I foresaw a barrier between me and my respondents due to this inability on my part. The small field duration did not enable me to remove the barrier between me and the people being observed.

## Issues of accountability and wasting time

In one of my fieldwork assignments during my postgraduate level study, I understood that the 'bheri'<sup>Jalakar</sup> people at Basirhat of North 24-Parganas district in West Bengal, where we were conducting our fieldwork, were promised that their yield in prawn/fish cultivation might be more profitable had they cooperated with us and provided with the data necessary for us. It presumed that we would be able to suggest possible ways of increasing the prawn yield. The 'bheri' owners hosted us with costly meals with prawn, *tangra* and *bhetki*. The outcome of the fieldwork was obvious. Here couldn't we cross all ethical limits?

Postgraduate-level fieldwork in most Indian universities lasts, on average, for 12 to 15 days, or slightly more, at a stretch. Students generally start for their field early in the morning. If the distance between the camp and the field area is relatively long, they generally prefer to conduct fieldwork at a stretch from the morning to afternoon, even up to 3 to 4 pm. Otherwise, if the field area is within a walking distance, they normally carry on fieldwork from about 8.00 am to 1 or 2 pm and then from 4 to 8 or 9 pm every day. This duration obviously includes observation, mapping, and taking interviews, case studies, life histories, etc. In a rough estimate, a field student carries on conversations for at least four hours with his/her respondent(s) every day. Therefore, a batch of 20 students takes, on a rough estimation, 80 hours, i.e., 10 parson-days every day. Obviously, there are instances when more than one fieldworker interacts with one or more respondent (s) at a time. Thus, for the whole field duration fieldworkers take nearly 120 to 140 parson-days of the respondents from the mere economic point of view. But in return, what do they contribute? The answer may be only a little in the form of a research article on the basis of which we can hardly find any public policy to be generated.

## Unbiased position of fieldworker

How far an anthropologist can be unbiased in the field? Is it possible to take a neutral standpoint in, for instance, a violent context where our fellow men have been suffering from torture, human rights violations or atrocities, or even when women and children were subjected to atrocities? Can an anthropologist remain unbiased in the field while studying people in distress or in hunger? (e.g., Nordstrom and Robben 1995). There are extensive instances of anthropologists being involved or interfering in the lives of the people they were studying. One of the most glaring examples of such involvement was that of Richard Clemmer and his associate Joseph Jorgensen, who had openly patronized a 'Hopi Resistance Movement' against the formally recognized Hopi Tribal Government. It was argued that anthropologists' primary responsibility was to the 'people' they study (Jorgensen, 1971). However, Radcliffe-Brown, Firth, Nadel, White, Roheim and Kardiner stressed upon the scientific nature of anthropology. On the contrary, Kluckhohn and Evans-Pritchard favoured its humanistic inclination (Pepper, 1961). Oscar Lewis' works (1959, 1961, 1966) also reflected his empathetic and humanistic standpoint. In an important article published in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Alice Cora Du-Bois (1980) argued that anthropology is not a social or behavioural science but a humanistic philosophy. Highlighting the importance of a humanistic approach to understanding others' problems, Bruce Grindal, a co-founder of the Society of Humanistic Anthropology and founding editor of *Anthropology and Humanism*, argues that this offers anew perspective by

which to define meaningful research and to assess the human consequences of anthropological understanding and involvement (Grindal, 1976:1). He further observes:

*It is what distinguishes us from the countless other subfields that are hell-bent to create ever-increasing piles of formalistic, useless, and often dangerous knowledge. We must be primarily concerned with human life and experience and continue to affect a voice that allows us to communicate those experiences that, although born of specific cultural circumstances, nonetheless transcend culture and thereby enhance our sensibility and awareness of the human condition (Grindal, 1993: 46).*

Empathy is, therefore, an important element of anthropological research that is built upon the relationship between the observed and the observer (Srivastava, 1999). Anthropology must be ready to contest, for Giddens, an unjust system of domination and to bring potentially controversial issues to light (1996:126). Hart (1990:14) argues that anthropology is for making a better, more democratic world for everyone, and for achieving that anthropologists should be 'politically' and 'morally' engaged with social problems. We have seen very recently that in the aftermath of the murders of 17 students and teachers at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 2018 demanded a comprehensive evidence-based approach to prevent gun violence in the USA (Han and Antrosio, 2018). So, an anthropologist ought to have a say on behalf of the people under study. If an anthropologist tries to conduct fieldwork with the true spirit of the scientific approach, it is next to impossible to bring into the approach in reality since both the 'observer' and the 'observed' are human beings. This is because the fieldworker's personal qualities, taste, and viewpoint have an influence on determining the quality of data obtained in fieldwork. Peter Rivière raises several questions in this connection, since the issues have a direct association with the production of data in fieldwork:

*It has become a commonplace of anthropology that an ethnographer's personal qualities and characteristics will have an influence on his or her ethnographic production. Sex, age, educational background, psychological make-up and other features will all bear on what type of information is collected and how it is interpreted. Then there are also other matters as whether the fieldworker is alone, with a partner, or even a family: whether separate accommodation is lived in and self-provisioning is undertaken, as opposed to a high degree of dependency when both food and shelter are provided by the host community. To these factors must be added another set of influences on the outcome – the community's degree of contact with and knowledge of the society from which the fieldworker comes (Rivière, 2000: 27).*

It is no doubt that the interest and personal qualities of individual anthropologists will have a lot to do with what comes out of his or her field research. I again can't resist from quoting Evans-Pritchard with reference to fieldwork exercise:

*Since in anthropological fieldwork much must depend, as I think we would all admit, on the person who conducts it, it may be asked whether the same results would have been obtained had another person made a particular investigation. This is a very difficult question. My own answer would be, and I think that the evidence we have on*



*the matter shows it to be a correct one, that the bare record of fact would be much the same, though there would, of course, be some individual differences even at the level of perception... but while I think that different anthropologists who studied the same people would record much the same facts in their notebooks, I believe that they would write different kinds of books. Within the limits imposed by their discipline and the culture under investigation anthropologists are guided in choice of themes, in selection and arrangements of facts to illustrate them, and in judgment of what is and what is not significant, by their different interests, reflecting differences in personality, of education, of social status, of political views, of religious convictions, and so forth... the personality of an anthropologist cannot be eliminated from his work anymore than the personality of an historian can be eliminated from his (Evans-Pritchard, 1951: 83-84).*

Evans-Pritchard further commented that ‘To some extent at any rate, people who belong to different cultures would notice different facts and perceive them in a different way’. He also stated that the facts recorded in our notebooks are not social facts but ethnographic facts. It means that the selection and interpretation that produces them are shaped by the culture of the ethnographer (Evans-Pritchard, 1951: 85). Rosaldo, one of the leading anthropologists during the 1980s and 1990s for his critical reassessment of ethnographic truth and authority and for promotion of methodological self-reflexibility, was deeply committed to anthropology’s humanistic and interpretative mission (Vivanco, 2015:194).

## Language bar and the verifiability of the field data

In one of our fieldwork at Kendujhar district of Odisha in 1988, a section of a conversation of one of our co-fieldworkers with her woman informant may be cited here:

*“Aap ki Sahar kanha giya?” (Where has your husband gone?)*

*“Gujar giya”. (passed away [ but she understood this as he has gone somewhere])*

*“Kob lotega?” (When does he come back?)*

It is not hard to imagine what reaction came out from the informant. Here the interviewer obviously didn’t understand the Hindi language of the respondent. Even she failed to read the face of the respondent, which appeared pale at that moment. This is because she was concentrating more on the language content. Incidentally, this conversation earned an untoward incident since it hurt the sentiment of the bereaved woman who just crossed her teen age. All these misunderstandings came out as the result of poor rapport establishment within a brief span of fieldwork and of not appropriately learning the language of the ‘observed’, with an outstanding exception of Sahay’s work in India that was conducted among the Nicobarese in Chowra island of the Nicobar archipelago (Sahay, 2020).

In anthropological fieldwork, we generally collect numerous case studies on different issues of the people under



study as incontestable proof of truth. But do we have appropriate tools to test the verifiability of the case studies? We generally employ repetitive interviews with the same informant on the same issue or event, or sometimes try to validate the collected data through cross-verification with fellow members of the people under study. But the data so procured are not absolutely unquestionable. Sometimes we take photographs or do audiovisual recordings but without the required consent of the respondents. And, if we take the formal consent following the ethical guidelines, it affects the reaction or expression of views of the respondents since they become more conscious about their opinion that is being recorded in one or another form. So, the question of maintaining ethical principles in anthropological fieldwork is hardly practicable. A fieldworker can't even report always the truth unearthed in the field. An interesting example will suffice my point. It was the tragicomical imbroglio of 1919 to 1920, which was imposed upon none other than Frantz Boas, often called the founder of anthropology in America, on the ethical ground by the American Anthropological Association in 1918. He was the only member of the association ever to be censured and expelled till the 1960s (Stocking, 1968: 273). His offence was that he came out with the truth that 'at least four' anthropologists had served as spies under cover of scholarly research during World War I (Boas, 1919: 729; AAA, 1920: 93-84). He reported the fact in *The Nation* with 'incontrovertible proof', which he discovered 'accidentally' in his fieldwork. Similarly, in 2001 in one of our fieldworks near Lodhasuli in Jhargram of West Bengal, we discovered that there was a dreaded gang of armed robbers, which was operating across the Bombay road (the National Highway No. 6) and used to loot and sometimes kill the resisting passengers of vehicles and truck drivers. Surprisingly we did not feel the crudeness among them when they were interacting with us. Rather, they were very cooperative. We could not disclose this to anyone.

## Fieldwork Ethics

The first serious systematic concern with ethics as such in the anthropological profession came about 30 years later after World War II, when in 1948 the American Anthropological Association (AAA) adopted the 'Resolution of Freedom of Publication', urging 'all sponsoring institutions to guarantee their research scientists complete freedom to interpret and publish their findings without censorship or interference, provided that the interests of (those) studied are protected' (AAA, 1949: 370).

The contemporary issues of ethics emerged by the late 1970s when voices were raised within the AAA that the Principles of Professional Responsibility (PPR, adopted in 1971) were not adequate to serve the needs of the practicing anthropologists (Fluehr-Lobban, 1991:7). In the 1971 code, the principal responsibility of anthropologist was to the people under study. The codes of professional ethics were first proposed and presented at the 1984 annual meeting of the AAA. In the proposed revision of the 1984 codes, the moral responsibility of individual anthropologists was considered to be 'varied and contextual'. However, the 1971 version of professional ethics was reaffirmed in the proposed revision of 1990. Later on, this was again revised and came out as the *Code of Ethics of AAA, 1998* which provided the guidelines for any anthropological work<sup>22</sup>. Having all the guidelines, we face a dilemma on whether to mention the name of the community in the report, particularly in the context of deviant or extremist behaviour. This is because it will disclose the privacy of people and may earn legal prosecution from the administration, on the one hand, and if suppressed, it becomes

questionable on the ground of authenticity of the data, on the other. Very recently, INCAA, the apex body of professional anthropologists in India, has taken the initiative to frame the model ethical guidelines for practitioners in the discipline.

## Conclusion

Every discipline is built upon some unique ideas and paradigms of its own. Fieldwork, other than the holistic approach and comparative method, is the hallmark of the discipline of anthropology. If this is neglected, the discipline will eventually fail to come up with, in the words of Geertz (1986:23), 'new forms of inventiveness and subtlety'. Without such inventiveness, the discipline will eventually lose its social significance as well. Fieldwork is the only mechanism that enables anthropologists to comprehend the socio-cultural dynamics of a society under study. If anthropologists fail to understand the dynamics, they, and by their act of failure toward such understanding the discipline also, lose their/its relevance in society as well as in academics. The practice of fieldwork with fading importance has already led to the microscopic presence of anthropologists in policy-framing enterprises in India as well as in western countries. Though this requires investing much time and energy, this has no alternative. Love and dedication to the field make the practitioners more empathic to the people and society, and thereby make the outcome more significant to solving contemporary problems. Researchers should also try to come out of their comfort zones and look into the newer challenges our society faces today to make the discipline more feasible.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This was quoted by Luis Dumont (1972:11). However, Mauss conducted only one brief field trip to North Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Both of whom were teaching at Oxford in the post-War years.

<sup>3</sup> As commented by Dell H. Hymes in his book review on *Crisis in anthropology: View from the Spring Hill, 1980* (E.A. Hoebel, Richard Currier and Susan Kaiser, eds., New York: Garland). *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 14 (3), 219-221.

<sup>4</sup> He hoped to develop a "positive science of social relations" and insisted that scientists must analyze facts and not concepts (Evans-Pritchard, 1964 [1951]: 23).

<sup>5</sup> He wanted to study people and help them after he had learned how they lived and what they wanted (Reining, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> But, Rosalie H. Wax (1971: 30) objected calling his type of work “fieldwork”. Margaret Mead (1966: 314), however, termed his kind of fieldwork as ‘excavating in a culture’.

<sup>7</sup> In this connection Evans-Pritchard argued, ‘It is indeed surprising that, with the exception of Morgan’s study of the Iroquois, not a single anthropologist conducted field studies till the end of the nineteenth century. It is even more remarkable that it does not seem to have occurred to them that a writer on anthropological topics might at least have a look, if only a glimpse, at one or two specimens of what he spent his life writing about. William James tells us that when he asked Sir James Frazer about natives he had known, Frazer exclaimed, ‘But Heaven forbid’ (Évans-Pritchard, 2004 [1951]: 64-85; Eggan, 1968:145).

<sup>8</sup> His description of fieldwork is available in his 1922 work (Malinowski, 1961 [1922]: 4).

<sup>9</sup> In spite of spending two years among the Trobriand Islanders, he encountered social distance between himself and the Trobrianders that led him to misinterpret the Trobriand system of magic and religion (M. L. Wax, 2001:95). Malinowski’s roles in the field more as an interrogator and observer than a participant led him to the pitfall of theoretical misinterpretation of Trobriand culture (cf. Geertz, 1967; Firth, ed., 1957).

<sup>10</sup> Mead carried out fieldwork in the isolated French Polynesian island Samoa for her famous study on female adolescence and published *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928).

<sup>11</sup> Evans-Pritchard made three field trips for about 20 months during 1926-1930 among the Azande and lived with the Nuer for about one year in several visits between 1930 and 1936, and cemented his position as an ethnographer and as an Africanist, as argued by Shipton and Lyons (2015:57), through his works (Evans-Pritchard, 1937, 1940).

<sup>12</sup> Leach’s *Political System of Highland Burma* (1954) earned persistent criticism on the ground that this work lacked solid empirical data. Such weakness was overthrown by Leach in his *Pul Eliya* (1961), a study on the irrigation system in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in which he spent six months in the field. His observation was that economic and ecological factors embedded in the irrigation system shaped everything in the culture.

<sup>13</sup> Barth conducted fieldwork in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan, New Guinea, and Norway, and his monographs (1959, 1969, 1975) reflect his exceptional talent in fieldwork.

<sup>14</sup> Firth who was trained under Malinowski carried out fieldwork in the isolated Polynesian island, Tikopia, during 1928-29 and came out with an excellent work *We, The Tikopia* (1936).

<sup>15</sup> Powdermaker conducted her pioneering fieldwork on Lesu, a New Ireland island outlier in New Guinea, resulting in the monograph *Life in Lesu* (1933). She also did fieldwork in Indianola, Mississippi, in 1932 to study the psychological dynamics of race relations and racism, resulting in *After Freedom* (1939), and in the Copper Belt town of Luanshya in Northern Rhodesia in 1953-54 resulting in *Copper Town* (1962).

<sup>16</sup> He focused basically on the tribes of South Bihar and was known as ‘the father of Indian ethnology’.

<sup>17</sup> Known for his seminal contribution to the changing Ho of Singhbhum (1937, 1950) and on the polyandrous Khasa (1963).

<sup>18</sup> Carried out extensive fieldwork among the Tharus of Nainital (1952).

<sup>19</sup> With the apparent influence of the Chicago School of Anthropology, Vidyarthi conducted extensive fieldwork across India and his publications (1961, 1963) were self-reflective of his academic excellence.

<sup>20</sup> His ethnography on the Purums (1945) was one of the major sources of the database in the debate between alliance and descent theorists in Anglo-American Anthropology. His empirical study on the devastation caused by the Bengal famine of 1943 (Das, 1949) was 'unparallel' in the history of anthropology.

<sup>21</sup> A mode of interpretative theory of culture that was highlighted by Clifford Geertz (Geertz, 1973).

<sup>22</sup> Please see the Final Report of the Commission to Review the AAA Statement on Ethics ([americananthro.org](http://americananthro.org)).

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