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ETHNOGRAPHIC LITERATURE IN ANTHROPOLOGY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO ETHNOGRAPHIC TEXTS

Ethnography as Literature

This paper will be divided into two halves: the first will be the briefer half, which will attempt to explain ethnographic literature in anthropology and its role in depicting societies and their ways of life. The second half will represent two ethnographic texts, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* by Bronislaw Malinowski and *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange* by Annette B. Weiner. These two are ethnographic literatures on the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea produced at two entirely different points of time, the first one in 1922 and the second one, a restudy in 1976.

The paper will attempt to delineate how ethnographic literature forms a core part of anthropological study, as these are empirical texts and are created by putting together the experiences of the field, i.e. the society studied, as much as possible in an authentic manner. Broadly describing literature, it would mean a body of any written work (which exhibits particular forms of stylistic elements). So how do ethnographies fall in this category?

The central meaning that ethnography is fundamentally a pragmatic first hand research method is to be comprehended first. It is a research method which is employed to investigate culture by observing society from its perspective and the people inhabiting it. The resulting product which comes out of it, in the form of a written text, is designated as an ethnographic text or ethnographic literature. Hence, it is both a method and a product. In everyday parlance, it is also simply called ethnography.

Ethnographic writings brought about significant development in social and cultural anthropology around the early 20th century with works by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), Margaret Mead (1928), E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), etc., being produced and read universally. Ethnographic texts generally

in its interpretation of the society studied is emic in its presentation, i.e. the people's view point and perceptions of their own society is considered more important than the researcher's or the author's view point. To write an ethnographic text, the author also has to be a participant observer, where s/he would stay with the society to be studied for a long period of time, collect information through observation, participate in events and day to day activities and resort to other means like, interviews, case studies etc. and finally give an account of the society.

Early ethnographies involved varied aspects of a culture and society, like their historical preview, geographical, climatic and habitat description, etc. Along with these descriptions of economy, social structure, language, material culture, clans, religious practices, etc., were provided as observed. With the passage of time, interests in ethnographic studies changed from the observations of actuality to observations of feelings and values behind people's behaviours which are symbolically expressed, and in many cases the first aspect being merged with the latter. This exhibited the ethos of a culture, put forward by Clifford Geertz as thick description, emphasizing the context behind human behaviour, in the seminal book, *The Interpretations of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973). Ethnographies have with time displayed themselves diversely with how the authors have represented them. Levi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques* (1973 {1955}) is about his anthropological works and travels which is autobiographical and ethnographical and followed the literary tradition of writing travel accounts.

In the essay "Ethnographies as Texts" (1982), by Cushman and Marcus, they define ethnographies as text, text as we understand similarly in literary theory or literary criticism, mostly highlighted in works of Derrida (1980 {1967}), Foucault (1972 {1971}) and Williams (1973). Such ethnographies as postulated by Cushman and Marcus were free from disciplinary traditions as they pointed out that "explanation and theory building cannot escape the rhetoric of the language in which they are expressed." (1982: 56).

Today anthropologists and ethnographers accept that an ethnographer while representing the society studied cannot completely be objectively neutral. This was forwarded by James Clifford and George Marcus in their influential and controversial edited book, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). They pointed out that in ethnographic texts, ethnographers can describe societies (individuals and groups) in terms of their subjectivities without displaying any objective superiority. Ethnographies today are dialogic, narrative, collaborative, etc. Whatever the structure of an ethnography, the final product remains a text, a literature, which produces knowledge in the behaviour and transformations of societies and cultures.

After this brief introduction about how ethnographic texts represent a society's activities from the context of culture, I propose to present two

ethnographic texts, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* by Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) and *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange* by Annette B. Weiner (1976) and provide an anthropological delineation of each. These two ethnographic texts depict the cultural and societal study of the Trobriand people in the Trobriand Islands (now known as Kiriwina Islands) of Papua New Guinea located in the northern part of Australia.

Trobriand Islanders and the Authors

Malinowski published his work on the Trobriand Islanders, based on his fieldwork¹ which started in 1914, in three books, the first being the *Argonauts of Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*, the book of our concern in this paper and the second and the third being the *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (1929) and *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935).

The *Argonauts of Western Pacific* created quite a stir in the world of anthropology when it was published as it was the first of its kind to clearly demarcate between what an ethnography should be against the popular written records of foreign lands and their people available since the mid eighteenth century. When it came out in 1922, it presented to the world a new dimension in fieldwork methodology, the “participant observation method”. Here Malinowski demonstrated that a researcher, a fieldworker, an ethnographer, whatever her/his role, needs to experience the everyday life of her/his respondents as they live it with them. This daily association with the people studied, helped in collecting, what he called the “imponderabilia of everyday life” which is unique of every culture (Kluckhohn, 1943). Along with this symbolic method he also emphasized on the use of native language and staying with the people studied for a good period of time in order to facilitate intensive fieldwork.

Since then Malinowski and his ideas have influenced a great many scholars and a good many works have been inspired by his ideas. Here it is also important to point out that the publication of Malinowski’s journal, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (which he maintained from 1914-1915 to 1917-1918) in 1967, some two decades after his death, revealed to the world that his claims on fieldwork methodology were highly challengeable. His diary revealed him to be a self absorbed, egoistical person “whose fellow-feeling for the people he lived with was limited in the extreme” (Geertz, 1967), pointing out that unlike his guidance of living with and as the people studied, he felt a sharp detachment towards them. This may be viewed in this line which says “I see the life of the natives as utterly devoid of interest or importance, something as remote from me as the life of a dog” (Malinowski, 1967: 167). Yet for many, Malinowski’s diary was a treasure trove, providing us with an insight into the inner thoughts of one of the greatest giants in anthropology.

Coming back to the *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* as a book, undeniably it is an exemplary piece in terms of being a historic anthropological literature. The book fundamentally talks about the economic organisation of the Trobriand Islanders. Unlike earlier explanations of “primitive” economic systems which portrayed them to be simple, selfish and catering to basic needs, Malinowski in his work submits that such economies are bounded by “complicated forms of social relationship, regulated by custom, sustained and controlled by elaborate ritual and magical ceremonies” (Ginsberg, 1924). He broadly provides a comprehensive description of labour as it exists where along with economic responsibilities, diverse kinds of connected social affiliation that is present among the Islanders is shown. This is done through examples of exchange of gifts, payments and commercial dealings. The system of *Kula*, an amazing form of exchange, forms the main subject of discussion in this book.

On the other hand, Annette Weiner, initially an art student became inclined towards anthropology after reading H. Powdermaker’s *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist* (1966), which was an autobiographical representation of her fieldwork experiences. Weiner joined Bryn Mawr College as a graduate student in anthropology and as part of her pre-doctoral fieldwork, decided to study the inhabitants of Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea. Upon receiving her PhD in 1974, her first publication based on her fieldwork findings in the Trobriand Islands, was published as a book in 1976. This is the book under discussion in this paper, *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange*. Weiner authored another book on them based on her research, *The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea* (1988) and *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While Giving* (1992). However Weiner’s last book also includes discussion on other tribes of Polynesia and Papua New Guinea.

Weiner’s work, one of the early feminist ethnographic accounts in anthropology is considered to be powerful and influential as she took up, though not deliberately, the challenging task of choosing the same area of research as Malinowski’s, whose contribution on the Trobriand Islanders to the anthropological academia, was already recognized to be huge, in terms of both new and convincing methodology and the complex economic transactions of the Trobriand people.

Changes between 1920s and 1970s Influencing Ethnographic Writing

There is a big chronological gap of about sixty years between both the studies as Malinowski conducted his fieldwork from 1914 to 1920 and Weiner did hers from 1971 to 1980. It is but obvious that changes in terms of methodological approaches, theoretical advancements, and empirical situations were to be seen. Weiner’s attempt at this restudy thus brought out various details, which displayed similarities and dissimilarities when compared to Malinowski’s work.

Theoretical orientations during Malinowski's and Weiner's research period were significantly different. Needless to say their respective theoretical leanings affected the way they investigated and penned and presented their works. In the early twentieth century, anthropology was moving away from the notions of evolutionism² to newer ideas. Malinowski rather than depending on inferences based on universal social descriptions, relied on the day to day observations of the people studied in order to understand them and their way of life. Thus he created the studying of people in their present which came to be known as the "ethnographic present", thus "dehistorizing" anthropology. Similarly, when Weiner did her fieldwork in the 1970s, feminism in the academic world of anthropology was gaining momentum. Weiner in her ethnographic account pointed out the importance of women in the economic, social and political sphere in any study of society and also the importance of women researchers.

The World War I happened during the time of Malinowski's stay in the Trobriand Islands and it is due to the war, that Malinowski had to extend his stay there. This can be called a blessing in disguise, as it helped in the formulation of new and noteworthy methodologies by him. Before him most anthropological work was done by armchair anthropologists who had no methodology to offer as they had not been in the field for real. Their accounts were borrowed from travellers and missionaries. Thus most literature on societies and culture were based on conjectures. In comparison, during Weiner's period of field investigation, anthropology was already a developed discipline, where the use of methodology or understanding a people's point of view, was a norm. In the 1970s, anthropologists had become professional fieldworkers and dependence on travellers' accounts was passé.

Also during Malinowski's period of stay, the Trobriand Islands were a colony under the British Empire whereas when Weiner visited them, the Islands were on the verge of achieving freedom which they finally did in 1975. This also added to two distinct circumstances during their fieldworks and final product.

One fact that cannot be contested or denied is that both Malinowski and Weiner were the anthropological representatives of their own respective time. They were pioneers who looked into aspects of change and also believed in fostering transformations in their intellectual outputs. In their field research both used fresh theories to assist their analytical explanations.

Malinowski's concern about the ethnographic present made his enquiries about the historical context of the Trobriand Islanders vague. However Weiner, when doing her study of the same, realised the importance of it. She had not initially gone to the Trobriand Islands to conduct a restudy of Malinowski's work, but her first visit made her rethink her research methodology. She realised that a comparative study of the exchange among

the Trobrianders, and the role of women needed a relook. Thus she points out that, by “going deeper into the things that Malinowski first observed we find the opportunity to view ourselves and the history of anthropology as part of the process of studying others” (Weiner 1988: 9).

Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*

This piece of ethnography starts with a preface by James Frazer, a renowned (though an armchair) anthropologist of his time. Frazer congratulates Malinowski for his “remarkable record of anthropological research” (Malinowski, 1922: viii) complimenting him for devoting so much of his time and using the native language to communicate and understand his respondents better. He is of the opinion that the sole institution on which Malinowski has concentrated, that is the economic system of exchange was not only commercial in nature but also helped in maintaining social relations with themselves and the inhabitants of nearby islands as well, calling this piece of work a complete narrative of the Trobriand Islanders.

The book begins with a chapter on Introduction which in its initial part, gives an idea as to why Malinowski names the Trobriand Islanders as the Argonauts in his book. He describes them as daring expert navigators, diligent builders and traders. Many islanders built strong and huge canoes which were used on sea to either take them to distant lands for trade or to conduct raids.

In this chapter, Malinowski gives a broad sketch of the methods in ethnography and emphasizes on how the beginning of fieldwork is always full of doubtful moments and desperations. However he proceeds with the strategies applied to get closer to the natives and make use of active methods of research. It is in the introduction that Malinowski points out that it is the present behaviour of the natives which is important and assists in building theoretical formulations. The process of personal participation in the natives’ lives and comprehending their ways of thinking and feeling which are connected to their social and economic dealings and their view about their own culture are talked about here. Even though Malinowski proposed new ideas and methods of doing ethnographic fieldwork, the fact that he viewed the natives as savages, and thus appropriating his position as a superior cannot be ignored. This work like those of his time is viewed as part of “salvage anthropology” which dealt with talking about ways of living of people which the Europeans thought would/might become extinct in future.

Coming back to the text, chapters I to III inform us about the Trobriand Islanders, who they are and introduces the essentials of *Kula*, which is a unique system of economic exchange and forms the main content of this book. He informs here the areas in which *Kula* is practiced, the *Kula* district, which is a group of islands connected to each other by this process of exchange. Mythology and magic, which also play a big role in the process of *Kula* is also presented.

In the next chapters (IV to X), Malinowski's reason for calling the Trobriand Islanders, Argonauts is comprehended as he gives a detailed description of the processes of creating the *Waga* (canoe for *Kula*), their sailing customs, the values and significance of canoes which the natives have, and their sea expeditions drawing an allegory with the Argonauts in Greek legends. In all of this, the link with mythology and magic is discussed throughout. The canoe's association to the tribal economics in Trobriands specifically for *Kula* is elaborately illustrated. Along with the *Kula*, the ceremonial magic, exchange of gifts, processes of trade, division of labour, communal labour, association with wealth and social prestige through wealth, collection of food, etc., are all communicated to the reader here. Though broad in nature from the point of view of sailing, the connection depicted with tribal economics cannot be missed.

The book advances with a complete intricate chapter (XI) on the sociology of *Kula* (explained below) which compliments Malinowski's method of participant observation and the use of a holistic approach. The later chapters (XII to XVIII) mostly deal with magic in the *Kula* commune.

The final chapter (XXII) on what *Kula* signifies to the author is a short piece which is where Malinowski finally provides his analysis, his interpretation of the text and his observations, which till this time, was just a documentation of his observations. This chapter is important as his objective of presenting a justifiable and authentic research method, i.e. participant observation, is taken care of. Thus he invites his readers to give interpretations of their own on the basis of the conclusions drawn from observation. This was a completely new dimension provided to the world of anthropology at that point of time, which changed the way in which society was earlier studied and understood.

***Kula*: The System of Exchange and Significance of Wealth**

The *Kula* is the chief matter of this book through which all other social, economic and political activities are connected. To describe a *Kula*, it is a system of exchange followed by the Trobriand Islanders. Along with the Trobriand Islanders, the *Kula* is practiced by nearby island communities and thus forms a ring. This ring covers 18 island groups in the Massim archipelago. The significance of canoes is noted here, as these are used to travel a great distance to exchange the precious *Kula* items. These items contain red shell-disc necklaces called *veigun* or *soulava* and white shell armbands called *mwali* among other associated items. The *veigun* is traded from the south to the north, in which the ring is circled in a clockwise direction and the *mwali* is traded from the north to the south by forming a ring in an anticlockwise manner. So if the process of giving these gifts starts with an armband, then the gift exchanging ceremony should be closed with a necklace and vice versa.

Along with the *Kula* exchange, trading of other commodity items is also conducted known as *gimwali* which in English would denote barter. In

Kula, a display of greatness is observed where honour and dignity are most important whereas in the trade exchanges, there is strong bargaining as this is done for economic purposes (Mauss, 1990 {1925}). In the Trobriand Islands the exchange was controlled by the chiefs though in some other islands with which they exchanged these valuables this was not the case. *Kula* items are not used for trade purposes but it was conducted to augment one's social status and standing in society. The Kula ceremony is performed with designated well laid out customs which involve magic too. The proper form of *Kula* exchange helps in building and retaining durable and enduring relationships between the participating groups who are known as *karayta'u* meaning partners.

In terms of this economic and social exchange, it is important to understand how wealth is understood by the Trobriand Islanders. The most treasured items among men's wealth are stone axes, the *Kula* items and yams. The first two are goods which imply prestige. There were other items too which exhibited their high craftsmanship, and thus considered valuable. Thus any one with such items or in a position to offer them to others indicated their superior wealthy position in Trobriand society.

The production of yam also added to their wealthy position in their society. A Trobriand man gives away three quarters of his produce to his chief as a mark of respect and some of the produce to his sister's or mother's affinal family, being a matriarchal society. The produce before being given away is kept on display for the villagers. This is also another way to gain prestige.

Similarly in *Kula* exchange, every gift received was expected to be returned with an equally valuable gift. Again, bringing back home a renowned *Kula* valuable portrayed the trader's skill in trading. Both situations brought prestige to the one involved in such acts. More valuables and resources added meant to be able to include more valuable partners and in the cyclical process, present oneself to more access to even more resources and valuables, thus increasing the possibility of increasing one's status in society. Every gift given had to be returned with a gift. Thus along with being a form of simple exchange, it was linked to social obligations and duties, what Malinowski called "a social act" (1922: 177). More than an economic gain, it gave the giver superiority in status. On the other hand it also pressurized the receiver to give something in return, making the process of giving central. However it did help in maintaining social relationships and their statuses. The more one could give the higher in status one would raise. Therefore ownership was usually temporary and permanent ownership would indicate stinginess, the worst attribute one could possess. The significance of magic and superstition was that gifts have an aura of goodness in them which helps in warding off evil and sickness and death.

Malinowski through these notions of wealth, status, giving, and temporary ownership tried to explain and disqualify the earlier notions of

“primitive societies” which existed at that time. Before Malinowski’s work, the “savages” as they were addressed at that time, were depicted as selfish beings who worked only to satisfy their basic requirements. This was proved wrong by Malinowski’s portrayal of the Trobrianders who valued the concept of giving and thus gaining prestige through it. He hoped this portrayal would enlighten the dogmatic European understanding of people whom they did not consider “civilized” and provide them an understanding of human nature.

Weiner’s *Women of Value, Men of Renown*

This monograph, *Women of Value, Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange*, which comes out 54 years after Malinowski’s 1922 publication is a benchmark in the anthropological literature of its time. It acts as a critique to Malinowski’s *Argonauts of Western Pacific* and posits his neglect in studying carefully the role of women in exchange. At the same time Weiner gives the reader a vivid description of Trobriand ethnography, exchange economy, transactional analysis of life-cycle rituals and the status of women in Trobriand society. The book is based on fieldwork findings conducted for 11 months during the period between 1971 and 1972.

In this ethnographic restudy, the book starts with an account where Weiner informs us that within her arrival itself she was taken to view a five hour exchange ceremony, a complex mortuary exchange ritual, which was completely carried out by and for women. For Malinowski this seemed to be “the most difficult and bewildering aspect of Trobriand culture” (1967: 126). It was obvious that the time factor, separating Weiner’s and Malinowski’s work, allowed Weiner to view some things the way Malinowski did and others strikingly differently, which he misunderstood and misinterpreted. Weiner gives due attention to the changes that have occurred over time and more than a strong criticism of Malinowski’s work, what she presents is a comparison which reads as an analytical piece for the readers. The most significant area which she concentrates on as mentioned above and which Malinowski overlooked, is “the importance of women’s work, influence and wealth in determining male behaviour and the nature of Trobriand society.”³

Weiner maintains a balance in her writing style, giving narratives and descriptions by which she places her readers into a rational framework. Weiner draws analysis of her work from the thoughts on gift exchange of Mauss (1990 {1925}), Lévi-Strauss (1969 {1949}) and Barth (1967) and as for explaining exchange as linked to power, she depends on the thoughts of R. N. Adams (1975).

Weiner’s book is viewed more as an essay on social exchange. Many earlier studies of the Melanesian peoples depicted that women were feared and were a threat to men because female sexuality was associated with polluting capabilities. This claim was refuted by Weiner as she showed that it

is in fact their sexuality that is of immense value to their society, as their sexuality is connected to its restoration and continuity. Her account of the mortuary ceremonies illustrates her claim and it is to be noted that neither Malinowski nor H. A. Powell (he visited Trobriand Islands after Malinowski and before Weiner) described emphatically.

Weiner's book shows her interest in knowing the "control that men and women have over their physical and cosmological resources and the power that this control gives them" (Berde, 1978: 248). Her interest also extends to finding out the differences in powers exercised by men and women and how these are expressed. She searches for the symbolic meanings that the items of exchange that men and women use have. In case of the mortuary ceremonies power of women is symbolically represented by the skirts and bundles made out of dry banana leaves which are offered. These articles signify regeneration and reassert the divine permanence of blood through cosmological time. In comparison men's possessions in terms of wealth which comprises shells and stone items, or land, etc., have power but as they do not have sanctity linked to them, such power can be threatened and be lost.

To clearly divide how Weiner went about her book, we can divide her way of framing the content of the book in three ways: to recount her ethnographic experience as observed by her in the Kaibwaga Village on Kiriwina Island; to provide a comparative account of her study with Malinowski's study; and to put forward her own theoretical notions. She handles these three aspects beautifully and convincingly combining them categorically to produce an amalgamated and consistent text.

In terms of designing an ethnography, she renders a clear and captivating depiction of the Trobriand Islanders. Here many of her descriptions match with what Malinowski had talked about, ranging from the *Kula* voyages, tricky trading tactics, production of yam and their display, use of magic to fulfill wishes, etc. However her piece is not a reconfirmation of what Malinowski had asserted during his time. Her interest like him is on exchange but her perspective is different from him and in fact she digs deeper than him by touching areas which he thought were not worth researching. For Malinowski, in the case of *urigubu*, i.e. the gifting of yam, he understood it to be a transaction which concentrated on the matrilineal connections of the Trobriand social structure. However Weiner showed in her text that this was not the case alone and that this transaction occurred between different types of relatives thus expressing various ties. Similarly, in the context of funeral exchanges, Malinowski, though he mentioned their complex features, he did not venture to investigate them. By not doing so, he missed out on a big portion of women's public role and power accumulation, which provides a different image of Trobriand social organisation.

Weiner's difference of opinion from Malinowski is exhibited with tact and respect. However she does not shy away from pointing the flaws of his

work, be it in the residence pattern, where Malinowski shows that young men move to their maternal uncles' village, which Weiner shows as incorrect or brother-sister taboo in terms of sexual matters, which Malinowski said was not practiced. She finds the errors communicated by Malinowski quite worrying, as his hypothesis posited that Trobriand "social organisation is based on native ignorance of the facts of physiological paternity" (Montague, 1979: 97) might have made his outlook too uncritical in his research.

It is not to say that Malinowski did not mention women in his ethnography. He did talk about the importance of women in *Kula* exchanges, however his study on *Kula* exchanges only provides elaborate description of men's role in them. In his monograph, women are designated a periphery position. Malinowski also mentions women and their status in many parts of his book. He says, "in many matters [women] have their own way, and control several aspects of tribal life" (Malinowski, 1922: 54); and, "women also enjoy a very independent position, and are exceedingly well treated, and in tribal and festive affairs they play a prominent part. Some women, even, owing to their magical powers, wield a considerable influence". (Malinowski, 1922: 37). But beyond this he did not go on to provide an extensive description about women's involvement in Trobriand society. For example, he mentions that women have influence over *Kula* exchange but he does not explain what or how their influence is executed. What Weiner observes in her book is that for the most part, "Malinowski saw women as reproductive objects" (Weiner 1976: 16-17) and preservers of family traditions.

With an attempt to show gender differences and bring forth women's significant role in exchange, Weiner tried to talk about "the way different objects and styles of exchange denote varying values of social relationships" (Weiner, 1976: xv). Hence she portrayed Trobriand exchange as depicting wealth of men and women's, cooperation and forms of reciprocity between the two.

So a yam house is a display building for both a husband and wife. Or in terms of interdependence, at the death of a woman's clan member, her husband would bring his social network, the men who provide the leaves from banana trees for the creation of bundles and skirts used in the mortuary ceremony. The wealthier he is, the stronger his social network would be. Similarly, for women who distribute these bundles and skirts during mortuary ceremonies, the more one is able to give, the more she rises in status along with her husband.

These bundles and skirts were the objects of women's wealth. "Skirts stood for the power of women and bundles for women's milk and nurturance" (Weiner, 1976: 119). The display of such public wealth was done during the time of mortuary ceremonies. From the point of view of trading exchange, 30,000 bundles would bring about five hundred dollars in cash. Thus women

with most distribution capacities were considered to be of significance among the Trobriands.

Thus the wealth of men and women was used to manage social ties. In case of women, it helped in family maintenance, like buying of family land. These mortuary ceremonies allowed men and women to be recognized socially and financially in public. Power politics was also displayed in the contexts of oppositional relationships. Exchange among the Trobriands contributes to power display, where giving and magic are ways to attain it, and was used by both genders. For Weiner, Trobriand society was connected because of the existence of exchange. Men depended on women and vice versa for their exchanges to be successful, by which they created their statuses and wealth. However the domain of power for both men and women were separate, within which they controlled their own set of resources and power (Weiner 1976).

Weiner in her book, though she begins by accounting women similar positions of power like men, towards the end of it, she postulates that women are indeed more powerful than the men. This she wrote because for her, men were participants in the social arena only whereas women were part of both the social and cosmic arena, where the *Kula* ceremony allowed men to establish social power, women's mortuary celebrations, by virtue of it being a transgenerational ceremony, made their presence a-historical and continuous.

Weiner's work is equally exemplary like Malinowski's as her theoretical contributions to it and comprehension of women's participation and position brought a completely new light in anthropological studies of her time. Till then the feminist anthropological authors were not clearly able to place women seriously as having significant social positions of power in the cultures they studied. The worry was in terms of the intellects questioning that if women were important, how was it that men exercised all the power. They presumed that what women did was let the men be in the public sphere whereas they acted from behind by supporting and assisting them.

This is what Weiner refuted and explained that a study of the Trobriand ethnography would show that women did have a place for themselves in the public sphere and that if ethnographers, either men or women were unable to see it, it was because they are guided by Western biases which do not allow "women as exercising public power and downplay the significance of these activities." (Montague, 1979: 97) Extremely well written with a clear feminist approach, this book acts as the perfect successor to Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Weiner's book places women in the centre of study and the interconnectedness that is present between the Trobriand Islanders, be it women or men. Though not a sexually egalitarian society was observed, women's participation, contribution and display of power cannot be negated.

Conclusion

After going through both the texts and their similarities and differences, we may place that ethnographic literature guides in the depiction and understanding of societies and cultures to a great extent. It not only provides a detailed account of various aspects of society but also helps us to formulate theories or utilize existing theories to assist anthropological studies. It is but obvious that ethnographic literature represents societies differently at different points of times.

Drawing from these two ethnographic texts, we are able to view a varied imagery of the same people studied at two different points of time. This is observed in terms of the research methodology used by the authors, the theoretical leanings shown by each to describe the Trobriands, the ways of observing the society, the behaviour of the people studied, their delineation and their interpretations, all differ with the shift in time. Thus literature may represent society distinctly when elucidated by different persons at different points of time.

So, ethnographic literature is in a way, a biographical representation of societies. Based on observation which is highly participatory in nature, such literature may illustrate societies in myriad ways. The importance of ethnographic literature is not completely to be done away with as they also provide readers or scholars of social sciences, a view of societies and their cultures.

However this delineation of ethnographic texts cannot end without pointing out their flaws. As good and convincing ethnographic literatures may sound about providing an authentic representation of society, it may not completely be the case. Though ethnographic literatures are well documented written bodies, the reliability of ethnographic descriptions are often questioned. No ethnographic text can be free of the prejudices of the author. The author, if s/he is from a different "superior" background will always view the studied society from the point of view of an outsider. The use of the emic approach which researchers vouch by, is in the process of writing and gives way to the subjective beliefs of the author. For example, in the texts of Malinowski and Weiner, their description about sustenance of prestige and power through the process of exchange may be interpreted as the view point of the author, who from an Eurocentric platform would want to exhibit the Trobrianders as "civilized" as they expect them to be, not more, not less. What appears in the literature finally may be the ideological point of view of the author, which gets reflected as the ideological portrayal of the literature and the people described in it.

To cite another aspect, the wish to not see modern amenities' inflow into the society, Weiner observes that except for an aerodrome, tourism and some western clothing, she is not able to see any fathomable changes. She

insists that the traditional customs are very much alive and are central to the Trobriand way of life. This observation comes from the author herself, who does not consider it important to look into the influences of tourism, more so as the country was on the verge of independence, where new ideas and expectations for a new free country is not documented. The bias of the western researcher/author to view an alien culture as not at par with her/him, is ingrained in her/his outlook while studying and depicting such cultures.

It can be easily agreed upon that “any written representation of reality will involve some degree of fictionalisation” (Laterza, 2007: 125). With the use of certain theoretical approaches, the ethnographer chooses the applicable facts from whatever is observed along with adding knowledge from her/his own history. Literary means are employed in such a way that only essential elements of reality are conveyed as wished by the ethnographer.

The means by which fieldwork is also conducted cannot always be said to be perfect. Malinowski’s introduction to participant observation and Weiner following it in her work along with other means, cannot be trusted to produce a genuine and original piece of the people studied. Participation to a particular level may be possible, but however hard one may try, one cannot convert into a real Trobriand or for that matter into somebody for any culture studied and then depict it in written form. Other methods like interviews and collection of case studies also may face similar issues of reality, where one cannot be sure if the responses provided by the respondents are true.

We find that ethnographic literature and anthropologists have been used by many government organisations in designing policies. These policies will not be properly implemented or be effective till the ideas used to understand societies are valid. In today’s world, we have now started seeing the use of the participation of the respondents themselves in collecting data and anything that is printed is done mostly only after the permission of the society studied. We also find ethnographers who are natives and locals, who believe that true description of a culture and society can only come from inside.

NOTES

1. An anthropological method of investigation to collect empirical data by means of available anthropological techniques and tools.
2. An anthropological classical theory which postulated that humans moved in a unilinear way from simple to complex in the process of social evolution; for example, from savagery to barbarism to civilization. The propounders of this theory were Europeans with ethnocentric beliefs. This theory is defunct now.
3. <http://cengagesites.com/academic/assets/sites/4254/papua.html>

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