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Q What methods of anthropological research make it distinct from research in other social sciences?

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## Expounding the Methods of Anthropological Research which make it distinct from Research in other social Sciences

The <sup>core</sup> qualitative research method which make anthropological research unique to that of other social sciences is Ethnography. It is defined as qualitative research method that involves long-term, immersive field-work within a community. The main technique used in ethnography is participant observation. The main aim of ethnography is to seek emic (insider's) perspective about community's culture. The key principles of ethnography which make anthropological research unique to other social sciences is holism and cultural relativism.

1. Key Principles of Ethnography  
which make anthropological research  
unique to <sup>that of</sup> other social sciences

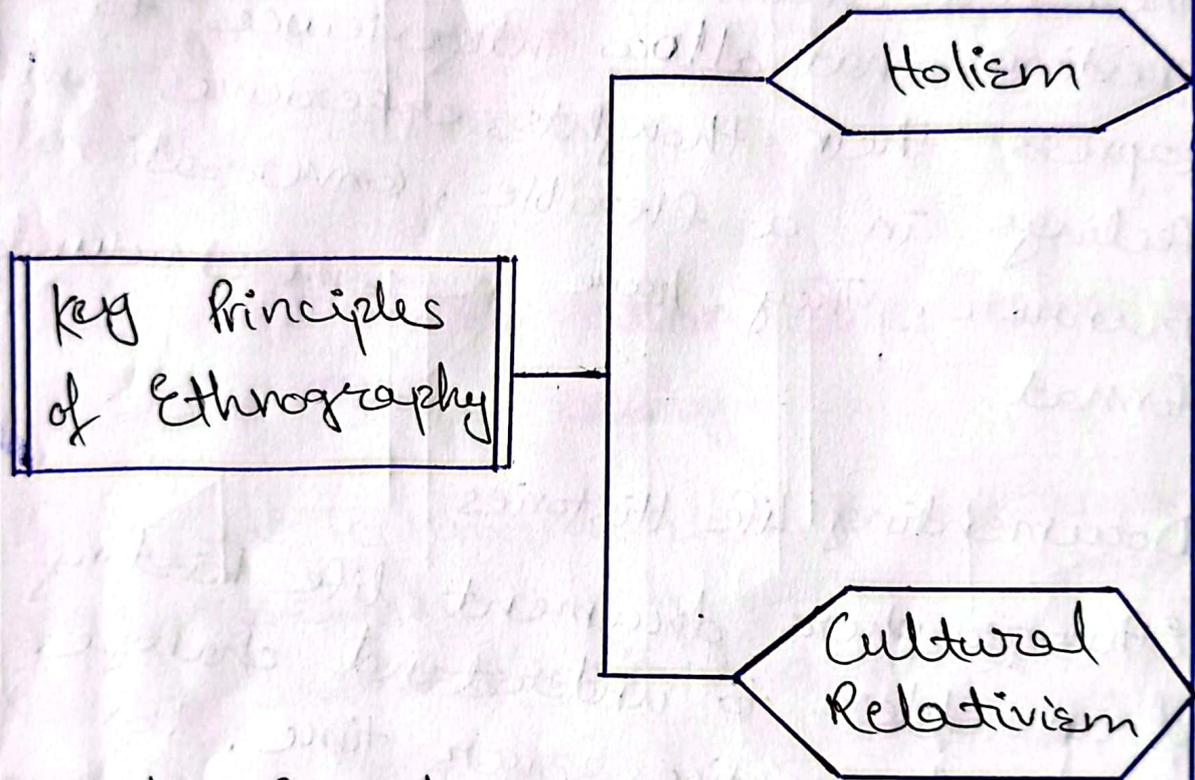


Fig: - Key Principles of Ethnography

i- Holism :-

One of the key principles of ethnography which make anthropological research unique to research in other social sciences is holism. Ethnographers view culture as an integrated whole and examine how religious, political, economic and social aspects are inter-related.

## Cultural Relativism

A principle which contends that every culture is unique because of its unique history and experiences so each culture must be understood within its own historical and cultural contexts rather than being judged by the standards of other culture.

## 2. Participant Observation: Core Technique used in Ethnography

The main technique used in anthropological research which makes anthropological research unique to that of other social sciences is participant observation. This technique includes immersion of a researcher within a community to observe and engage in cultural practices of that community. It helps in seeking emic perspective (insider's perspective) about community's culture. It helps in understanding the underlying perception and internal motivations behind cultural practices.

### 3. Ethnography and Interpretive Power of Thick Description

Ethnography and interpretive power of thick description are highly correlated.

They make research in anthropology unique to that of other social sciences.

Definition of Thick Description

“It involves interpreting rituals, symbols, social and cultural behavior by uncovering deeper symbolic meanings embedded in them.”

Clifford

Geertz' Analysis of Balinese Cockfight

Clifford Geertz analyzed how Balinese cockfight is a reflection of beliefs and social values.

i- Balinese Cockfight: A Reflection of Beliefs

This cockfight reflects Balinese Hinduism and spiritual beliefs.

a- Rituals of Purification: Before and

after cockfights, participants perform religious rituals to purify the space.

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This reflects that Balinese cockfight is not seen as an individual game but it is seen as sacred encounter with fate and supernatural forces.

**b. Belief in fate:** The outcome of Balinese cockfight is interpreted as sign of divine will, reflecting their belief in karma and cosmological order.

## ii- Balinese Cockfight: A Reflection of Social Values

Correlation between Deep play and Honour  
Greeretz borrowed the concept of Deep play from Jeremy Bentham referring to activities where stakes are so high that participants play for symbolic gains not just material gains. High stakes cockfights are not primarily about money, they are more about prestige, honour and reputation. This interpretive approach makes anthropology unique to other social sciences.

#### 4. Examples of Ethnography which clearly show that anthropological research is unique to Research in other Social Sciences

##### i- Bronislaw Malinowski's work with Trobriand Islanders

Malinowski conducted long-term immersive fieldwork among Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea to demonstrate that kula ring is not merely an economic ritual; in fact it is a reflection of beliefs, values and social structure.

##### a- Kula Ring: A Reflection of Beliefs

Trobriand Islanders believe that kula objects possess supernatural forces (mana) that influence human fate. Before embarking on kula expeditions, participants perform rituals and magic spells. This reflects their belief in supernatural forces.

##### b- Kula Ring: A Reflection of Social Structure Only high ranking chiefs and influential

men play a key role in kula exchange, demonstrating hierarchical nature of Trobriand society.

## ii. Margaret Mead's Work in Samoa

It is a classic example <sup>of ethnography</sup> that shows research in anthropology is unique to other social sciences. Mead concluded that adolescence is not a universally stressful period in fact it is shaped by cultural factors (Coming of Age in Samoa, 1939).

### a- Childhood practices leading to traumatic transition to adulthood in West

Mead found that in West children face emotional isolation and western parents often impose moral, behavioral and academic expectations leaving little space for self-exploration. ~~Em~~ Repression of sexuality was noted as a major cause of emotional turmoil among western youth.

She compared this to Samoa in following way.

## b. Childhood Practices leading to Less Stressful transition to Adulthood in Samoa

In Samoa, there was extended family system. Children were raised not only by parents but also by extended kin and older peers who provided them emotional support. Samoan children enjoyed wide freedom in childhood. They did not face strict instruction. Moreover, in Samoa there were open attitudes toward sexuality that is why there was less stressful transition to adulthood in Samoa.

## Concluding Thoughts

Ethnography is the main anthropological research method which makes research in anthropology unique <sup>that of</sup> to other social sciences. It helps in gaining emic perspective about community's culture.

Clifford Geertz's analysis of Balinese cockfight; Malinowski's work on kula ring; Margaret Mead's work in Samoa show that research in anthropology is unique.