

# ANTHROPOLOGY

## QUESTION NO: 06

### CULTURAL RELATIVISM

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Anthropology is the science of the study of man and its evolution. Humans evolve differently in different cultures. In anthropology, cultural relativism describes to understand or study culture in its own terms. However, cultural relativism is often described in terms of human rights that are universal not relative to any cultural context. Same is the case with the debate on universalism vs. relativism in anthropological thought which is criticized that universalism says fundamental rights are equal for all societies and cultures whereas, relativism says that they are dependent on culture, context and time specific framework. Hence, there is a highlighted debate in anthropology about universalism and relativism.

## B. Cultural Relativism In The Context of Human Rights Debates.

### 1. Cultural Relativism

Cultural Relativism is the process in anthropology which contradicts the concept of ethnocentrism and state's that culture should be viewed in its own terms. It is preferred because it prevents cultural diffusion, however, it is criticized because it justifies domination and colonialism.

### 2. Cultural Relativism In Favor of Human Rights

#### 2.1. Prevents Culture Diffusion

Cultural Relativism prevents culture diffusion and gives freedom to the people to enjoy their cultural values, norms and practices. Moreover, it prevents the external influence in any culture. The ethnographic methods are best suited to explain this as they carry out different tasks to understand their in its own terms.

## 2.2. Promotes Dialogue and Contextual Understanding

Acknowledging cultural context can make human rights interventions more effective and legitimate by considering local realities. Moreover, engaging with cultural differences can foster deeper understanding and strengthen human rights advocacy by addressing diverse perspectives. The participant observation method of cultural contexts best explains this benefit of cultural relativism.

## 3. Cultural Relativism Against Human Rights

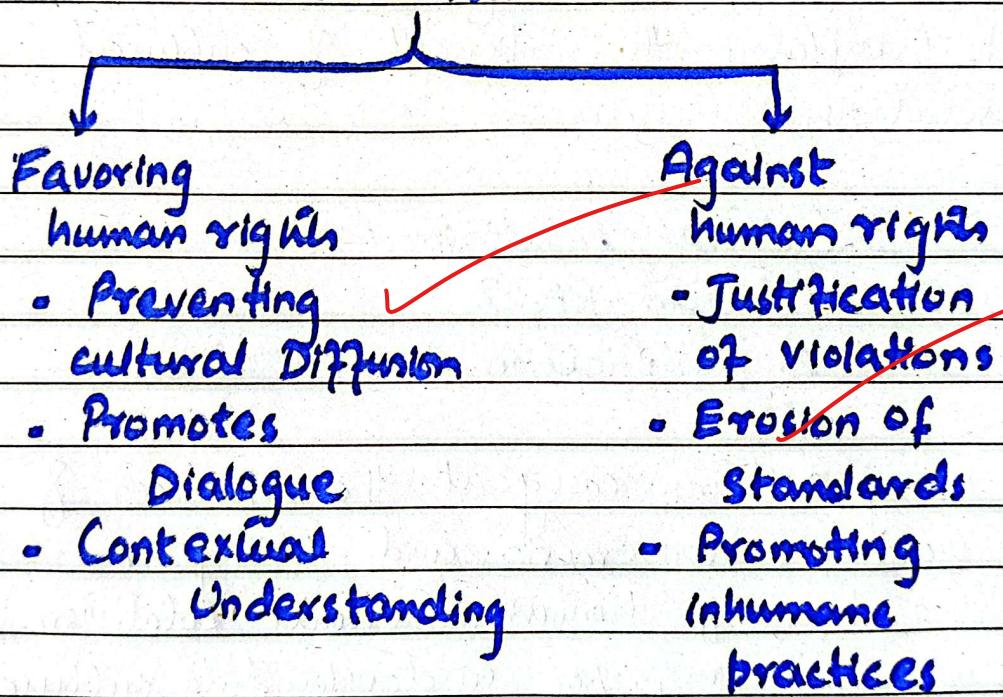
### 3.1. Justification for Violation

Many cultures carry out the practices of violation, abusement and killing on the basis of honour. Cultural Relativism while asking for understanding culture in its own terms justifies this violation which is against fundamental human rights. For instance the Bano Bibi case in Balochistan can not be justified on the basis of cultural relativism.

### 3.2. Erosion of Standards

Moreover, if all cultural practices are valid according to cultural relativism, it becomes to condemn practices that violates the fundamental human dignity. As there will be no standard of what is right and wrong as it justifies all cultural practices.

### Cultural Relativism



### C. Tension Between Universalism and relativism in Anthropological Thought

#### 1. UNIVERSALISM

Universalism in anthropology and other

fields describes that human rights are universal to be implemented in every society. People in every culture deserves equal fundamental rights irrespective of their cultural values and demands.

## 2. RELATIVISM

Relativism, on the other hand, describes that human rights are culturally dependent. They depends on situation, context and specific time frame. Human rights, rules and laws are dependent on culture specific contexts. Therefore, universal laws can not be applied in all cultures.

## 3. Points of Contradiction

### Universalism

Right to education

Right to live

Respectable Domestic environment

### Relativism

Prevents girls from learning

Honor killing

Gender based violence

## D. Critical Analysis

If critically analyzed, universalism and relativism both are valid in some aspects while invalid in others. For instance, many cultures prevent girls and boys from their basic fundamental rights given to them by law, which is not justified. Whereas, universalism respecting rights and disrupting cultural values in not an absolute way. Therefore, a balanced approach should be carried out which provides basic human rights to all cultures along with preventing cultural diffusion and violation of cultural norms and practices which are justified.

## D. Conclusion

On the way of conclusion, cultural relativism is a landmark approach of anthropology to understand all cultures in their own values along with many limitations which pose certain criticism on cultural relativism based on the fulfillment of basic human rights. Moreover,

universalism vs. relativism plays a major role in creating tension in the field of anthropology which needs to be addressed while attaining a balanced approach.

## QUESTION NO: 05

### "INTERPRETIVE ANTHROPOLOGY"

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Interpretive anthropology remarks a significant shift from positivism which is majorly emphasized on scientific knowledge to understand certain human behaviors and cultures. It is a shift from knowledge to understanding and interpretation of values and behaviors. Clifford Geertz played a significant role in interpretive anthropology through his thick description method. Moreover, the concept of reflexivity in anthropology is the critical self-examination of how the anthropologist's own identity and position shapes his interpretations, and that research can never be neutral, yet it reflects the perceptions of researcher.

## B. Clifford Geertz's Interpretive Anthropology

Clifford Geertz is a famous anthropologist which has shifted the anthropological research method from mere knowledge and judgement based on ~~scientific~~ methods, to interpretive research which defines different meanings of a certain act or behavior.

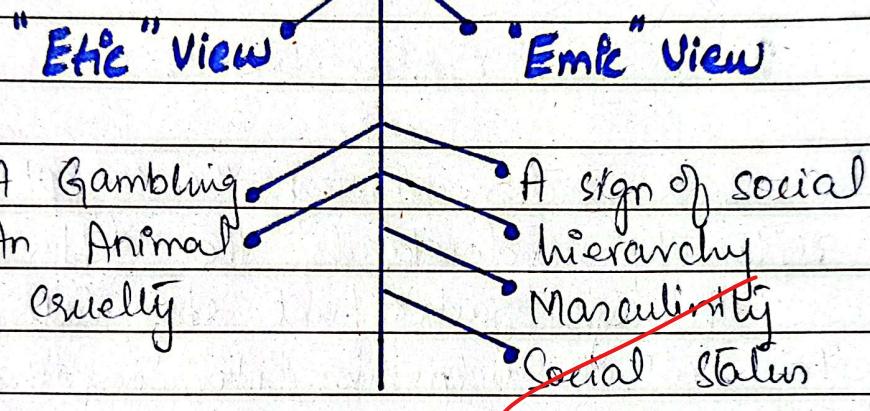
### 1. Interpretation of Eye Wink

Clifford Geertz interpreted the traditional notion of winking an eye. He described the physical act, that the boy contracted his right eyelid. Describing the context, intent and actual meaning of this eye wink. He describes that the boy might have winked conspiratorially to his friend to mock the teachers or engaging in a shared social rebellion. The point of focus is that without this interpretive method, the research would only capture "thin description".

### 2. "Thick Description" → Clifford Geertz The Bali Cockfight

Greer famously wrote, "Man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun." The role of anthropologist is not to measure the web but to understand or interpret the meanings of it.

### Cockfight in Bali



### C. Implications Of Reflexivity on Anthropological Research

The practice of reflexivity gained importance in 1980's and 90's. Reflexivity refers to the critical and continuous self-reflection of anthropologists in their researches. Their background, biases and role in research influence the research and calls the objectivity.

#### 1. Challenges the Objectivity of Research

Reflexivity challenges the objectivity of pure anthropological research by acknowledging the fact that researchers are also the part of social world. So they can never be completely detached or separated from the research they are carrying out. Hence, it offers the more realistic research by anthropologists.

## 2. Enhanced Ethical Perspectives

Moreover, researchers through the concept of reflexivity understands the different views through participant observation method which helps in enhancing the ethical perspectives of research. One understanding his or her own perspective would be able to understand the other's perspective in the best manner.

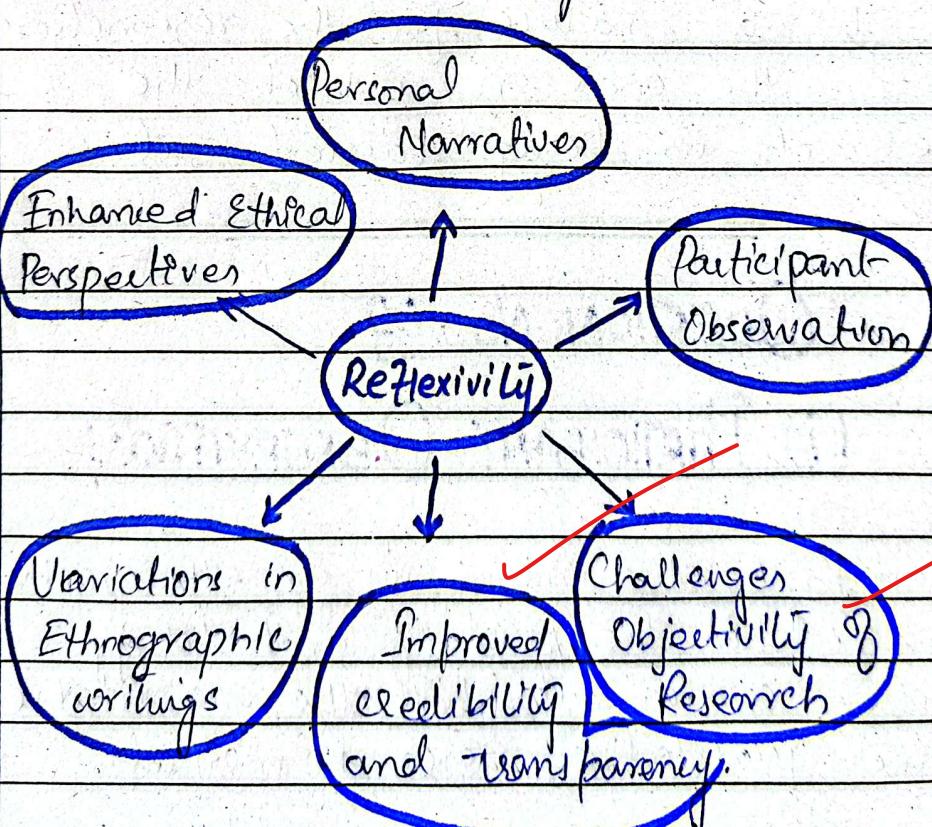
## 3. Improved Credibility and Transparency

Reflexivity also offers the improved credibility and transparency of the research carried out. It reflects the position of the researcher and authenticity of the research as it gives the natural and highly interpreted

perspective

## 4. Evolution of Ethnographic "Writings" ✓

The authenticity of researcher and the views written in ethnographic research from participant observation method and interviews and surveys, reflects the originality of research and findings. These works often incorporate personal narratives, dialogue with participants and varied formats to present a more complete picture of research experience and findings.



## D. CONCLUSION

On the way of conclusion, anthropology is a vast field for research on humans and their behaviors in different aspects which cannot be understood only from an "etic" (outsider's view). However, it requires an "emic" (insider's) view to understand the variety and actual meanings of certain behaviors. Clifford Geertz's played a major role in this research methodology.

Moreover, the reflexivity in anthropology gives the greater the natural and more close to reality perspectives of human nature for the researchers and the ones on which the research is being carried out.

### QUESTION NO: 08

#### (i) PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation is an ethnographic method in the field of anthropology which carries out both the quantitative and qualitative research methods.

DATE: 1/1

DAY: 1/1

In the field of anthropology, researchers carry out participant observation method to get an "emic" view of a specific culture. Researchers spend a long time in that culture, eat with them, play with them, participate in their rituals and ceremonies and involves participants in their research method to know their thoughts about their own culture.

**Example :**

### MEAD'S STUDY OF SAMOA

Margaret Mead, the student of Franz Boas carried out research in Samoa, questioning "Adolescence in Tuvalu is 'nature' or 'culture'." Spending 9 months in Samoa, she found that adolescence in Samoa is very calm and relaxing, no jealousy and hate and no rebellious acts, while in America, adolescence comes with violence, rebellion and aggression. She concluded that the rebellions in adolescence is not universal, instead it is shaped by culture.

Therefore, through participant observation method, cultures can be interpreted in a best manner.

## (ii) ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography is an anthropological research method in which anthropologists spend a long time in different cultures to understand that culture from an insider's view. For instance, Bronislaw Malinowski spent 9 years in Trobriand Islands to conduct an ethnographic research of their culture.

Example :

### Bronislaw Malinowski - KULA RING

Bronislaw Malinowski conducted an ethnographic research in Trobriand Island and noticed their trading methods. The Kula Ring was a trading practice in which Sovaia "the necklace of red shell" was traded in clockwise direction while Mwali "the bracelet with white shell" in opposite direction.

A person receiving necklace from the basket would later give something of more value to someone. In this way, they trade and women also help their men while providing them their wealth. It also represents the status and ensures the circulation of wealth.

Hence, this is an ethnographic method in

spends a long time in another culture to better interpret that culture.

## (vi) COMPARATIVE METHOD

Comparative method of research in anthropology gives a researcher better understanding of other cultures while comparing one culture with another. Without making a comparison of distinctive aspects, research and the researcher would lag in the interpretation of multiple cultures and their relativism in nature.

"The comparative approach involves systematically comparing cultures to identify similarities, differences, and universal patterns in human behavior."

Comparative method also known as cross-cultural research method combats ethnocentrism which highlights that one's own culture is superior and centre of everything. Comparative method contradicts the concept of ethnocentrism while offering a broad understanding of multiple cultures.

### For Example:

- Comparing (kinship) system in African

Tibet (matrilineal) vs. South Asian Societies (Patrilineal).

- Comparing economic exchanges (gift economies in the Trobriand Islands vs. capitalist markets in Western Societies).

#### (iv) CASE STUDY METHOD

Case study method is the quantitative research method in which anthropologists carry out different case studies, collect them and analyze them. Then they use the ~~interpretive~~ approach to deduct specific meanings of certain case studies.

##### Example:

Analyzing the case study of Bano. Bano case in Balochistan highlights different perspectives from an "etic" view. For instance, criticizing ethnocentrism on the basis of ~~honor~~ being as one's own culture is the best and over-emphasizing cultural relativism from the perspective of understanding one's culture in its own terms.

Hence, it is the case study method which anthropologists carries out in their research methodologies to understand cultures.