

Facts and Fantasy of Knowledge Retrospective of Ethnography for the Future of Anthropology

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Abstract: Future of anthropology rests upon the retrospective of ethnography and critical assessment of present to denote the reported facts and fantasy of knowledge. It's a kind of looking back to go ahead. The present paper is organized in this conceptual framework. It contains three objectives which are closely interrelated. First is to address the retrospective of ethnography in searching for strength of its intellectual foundation. It revisits the ethnographic trend in social science to know the gradual development of anthropology as a discipline. Second is to figure out the contemporary predicament of anthropology. It deals with how contemporary crisis in anthropology dignifies ethnography, the way of inquiry and output of research, as fantasy. Subsequently, the paper will address what are the real facts that have produced the malaise for anthropology in contemporary world. Finally, it talks about the future of anthropology with some propositions recurrently discussed in anthropological scholarship.

Key words: Anthropology, ethnography, fantasy, retrospective

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology is recurrently encountering some predicaments with its ground theories and disciplinary landscape. Critics accuse anthropology for not being enabled to accommodate diversified issues in contemporary world. Due to the failure of reshaping its theory, methodology and area of study to accumulate the contemporary complicated issues, anthropology is often assumed in crisis with its future. Its whole intellectual background is regarded as fantasy of knowledge. Subsequently, the reasons why anthropology is in crisis, is perceived as facts. This crisis is measured as 'the problem of praxis and epistemology of contemporary anthropology'^[1]. This crisis stemmed from both the orthodoxies of anthropology and appeal of rapid changing world for the last three decades. Within the discipline, scholars have been deliberately concerned about this predicament and trying to set forth the applicability of anthropology for future. But, due to un-unified attempts and disorganized initiatives, there is yet to establish any widely accepted landscape of anthropological knowledge. Contemporary anthropological scholarship is continuum producing newer terminologies such as interpretative anthropology^[2,3], Hermeneutic Anthropology^[4], Creative Anthropology^[5], Postmodern Anthropology^[6-12], Radical Anthropology^[13], Critical Anthropology^[14-16], Public Anthropology, New Boasian Anthropology^[17], etc. attempting to cope with the crisis. This sort of attempt rather promotes the disciplinary crisis into new complex of

diversity. After the publication of *Writing Culture*^[8] and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*^[9], the crisis of anthropology vigorously appeared to uncover the fantasy of anthropological knowledge. Besides anthropology, scholars from different disciplines, even from different parts of the world, have been continuously attacking anthropological knowledge. These tendencies of attacking and questioning pose anthropology in its skeptic future. In this complicated and critical position of discipline, it requires to retrospect of ethnography, the way of inquiry and product of research, to outline the future ground for anthropology.

The present study attempts to look at retrospective of ethnography to address the so-called fantasy of anthropological knowledge. By addressing the fantasy of ethnography, it will assess the facts of knowledge pertaining to contemporary issues to identify the predicament and crisis of anthropology. By doing so, the study will discuss the future of anthropology with some propositions about how to regain its glorious position in social science.

Looking back at a glance: Retrospectives of ethnography:

The retrospective of ethnography requires critical discussion about intellectual history of anthropology. Intellectual history has often been discussed in dividing different periodical phases. Among the early anthropologists, A.C. Haddon^[18], T.K. Penniman^[19] and R. Lowie^[20] wrote the history of anthropology. Of all, Penniman's classification is well-cited. Penniman divided the development of anthropology into four phases such

as, Formulatory period (before 1835), Convergent Period (from 1835-1859), Constructive period (from 1859-1900) and Critical Period (from 1900-1935). Later, Fred Eggan^[21] and Sol Tax^[22] also tried to sketch an intellectual history of anthropology. Fred Eggan classified the four stages such as First Stage (1860-1900), Second Stage (1900-1930), Third Stage (1930-1960), Fourth Stage (1960-onward). Very recently, Denzin wrote the intellectual history of anthropology. He categorized into five phases such as Traditional period (from early 1900s to World War II), Modernist phase (from post war to 1970s), Blurred Genres (from 1970s to 1986), Crisis of Representation (from 1986 to present) and Fifth moment (Present trend tends to building future) etc. Refraining from these sorts of classification, I intend to discuss the retrospective of ethnography in three consecutive phases such as; 1) Sun-rising stage of ethnography (from late nineteenth century evolutionism to early twentieth century scientific ethnography); 2) Sun-shining stage of ethnography (from early twentieth century structural/functionalist period to early seventies of twentieth century experimental ethnography) and 3) Sun-setting stage of Ethnography (ethnography with crisis of representation and problem of relevance for the last three decades).

Sun rising stage : Birth stage of ethnography : Approximately, anthropology as a discipline emerged in the mid 19th century. The disciplinary claim of anthropology was consolidated with the study of Henry Morgan (1818-1881) in America and Edward Tylor (1832-1917), James Frazer (1854-1941), Henry Maine (1822-1888) etc. in England. They appeared with their work on social and cultural evolution of human society. Principally, Morgan is often considered as the founding father of American Anthropology and Tylor with others are the same in England. Of course, A.C. Haddon^[16], was considered as the ancestors of field expedition in England. They were famous for Torres Straits Expedition which was conducted in 1898.

Morgan wrote on Iroquois community. Besides, he collected thousands of secondary data, including archaeological and ethnographic, to formulate the evolutionary theory with comparative studies. He compared the cultures in order to determine their relative positions on a single scale of development or success. The assumption that all human cultures develop along a single or unilinear path is perhaps best expressed by Morgan's evolutionary stages savagery, barbarism and civilization. On the other hand, Tylor wrote on primitive people's mentality, in particular on animism (the idea that all living things were produced by a spiritual force and have souls, and also that spirits and demons exist), made

great advances to the understanding of primitive religions. He was also one of the founders of evolutionary theory of society. Frazer's well known Golden Bough (1890) and Henry Maine's Ancient Law (1861) also contributed a lot in this endeavor to establish the ground of anthropology as discipline.

In their period, I termed as sun-rising stage, the evolutionary theory was accepted with great appreciation. On the basis of their studies, either by supporting or opposing, the classical anthropology and the period of scientific ethnography was established in the early twentieth century. But now, more than century later, their studies have been criticized accusing them as armchair anthropologists and highly ethnocentric unilinear evolutionists and so forth.

Sun-shining stage: Classical stage of ethnography: Classical stage of ethnography was attributed with the name of Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) and Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) in England and Franz Boas (1858-1942) in America. Malinowski conducted intensive field study in Trobriand Island and wrote a well celebrated ethnography Argonauts of Western Pacific (1922). His field work experience became the model in anthropology for the later generation for its exceptional features, such as learning local language, living with the people researcher intends to study and understand the people trying to grasp the native's point of view etc. Both the field work and product of fieldwork got status of classical and scientific ethnography after the publication of Argonauts of Western Pacific. This claim was consolidated by Radcliffe-Brown, when in the same year his well-known ethnography The Andaman Islanders (1922) came out after long-term intensive fieldwork in Andaman Island. Their contributions led to establish the theory of functionalism and structural-functionalism in anthropology. Later, a galaxy of British anthropologists, the followers of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, consolidated the ground of anthropology with their substantial studies such as Raymond Firth (1901-2002), Evans-Prichard, (1902-1973), Meyer Fortes (1906-1983) and Edmund Leach (1910-1989).

In America, Franz Boas established the concept of cultural relativism and the importance of history, geography and particularity in the study of culture in anthropological research. Franz Boas is best known for his work with the Kwakiutl Indians from Northern Vancouver and the adjacent mainland of British Columbia, Canada. While studying the Kwakiutl, he established a new concept of culture and race and argued that everything was important to the study of culture. Boas added cultural relativism to the body of anthropological

theory and believed in historical particularism; cultural relativism pointed out that the differences in peoples were the results of historical, social and geographic conditions. Historical particularism deals with each culture as having a unique history and one should not assume universal laws govern how cultures operate. In fact, this was the period when anthropology started its journey with its classic and scientific ethnography in social science. Like England, Boas also trained a number of American anthropologists who strengthened the journey and ground of anthropology. Few names of his renowned students are Alfred Kroeber (1876-1960), Robert Lowie (1883-1957), Edwin Sapir (1884-1939), Clark Wissler (1870-1947), Ruth Benedict (1887-1948), and Margaret Mead (1901-1978) etc.

On the other hand, a vigorous intellectual trend from France appeared to contribute to anthropological knowledge. Successively from Montesquieu (1689-1755), Saint-Simon (1760-1825), Auguste Comte (1798-1857) to Durkheim (1858-1917) and finally Levi-Strauss (1908-present) contributed a lot to the body of anthropological knowledge. In the study of human society and culture, France positivism, structuralism and structural-Marxism also enriched the appeal of anthropology. Worth noting that, Levi-Strauss's structuralism strongly influenced British social anthropology in particular and anthropology in general. Besides, some regional but outstanding anthropological voices from different parts of the world such as Germany, Mexico, Japan, and India etc. contributed a lot in the wider applicability of anthropology in the study of human society and culture.

Following this classical stage, later many schools and conceptual framework has been developed with outstanding appeal to the study human society and culture such as, culture and personality schools (Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict), New-evolutionary School (Leslie White, Julian Stewart, Gordon Childe), Cultural Ecology (Roy Reppaport, Marvin Harris), Symbolic Anthropology (Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Marry Doglous), Structural Marxism (Althusser, Godelier, Friedman) etc. This may be considered, I propose to term, as the sun-shining stage of ethnography.

Sun-setting stage: Critical stage of ethnography: During the period from early to late twentieth century, anthropology became gradually appealing discipline in social science for its distinctive method of inquiry, grand theory to understand human society and culture and its unique product. Anthropology contributed a lot to the global scholarship and intellectual highway providing insightful and outstanding knowledge about human society and culture clustered prevailing in different parts

of the world. In consequence, anthropology became a most fascinating discipline among all in social science. But, late quarter of twentieth century, there were a growing critiques and debates questing anthropological knowledge and grand theory of anthropology. The shining sun of anthropology apparently seemed to set towards new stage. The critique appeared just after the publication of Malinowski's field diary, *A diary in the strict sense of term* (1967) which disclosed the ethnocentrism in ethnography and its linkage with colonial power. Besides, fall of European colony in different regions, gradual unmasking American politics of knowledge, awareness about race and racism, feminist movement, growing voices from indigenous people and colonial legacy with ethnography etc. posed anthropology upon the burning oven of critiques and questions. These growing debates were manifested by the publication of *Reinventing Anthropology*^[16], *Anthropology and Colonial Encounter*^[6] and *Orientalism*^[23] etc. Anthropologists themselves started to question their positions, rethink their way of doing field work, refigure their subject of research, reorganize their product of research etc. which led anthropology to fall in crisis and predicament with its praxis and epistemology. George Stocking wrote, The publication of Malinowski's field diary (1967) helped to focus emerging concerns about the interaction of ethnographers with their subject people. And all of these took place in the shadow of United States's involvement in the culminating phase of quarter century of postcolonial warfare in Vietnam in which the role of anthropologists was to become a controversial issue. By 1970, anthropology was sometimes spoken of as the child or daughter of western imperialism and as a form of scientific colonialism. In the context of more general reaction against structural-functionalism and other forms of 'positivism' in the social sciences, some began to speak of a crisis of representation and to call for its reinvention (1991:3). Having all these critiques, fascination to ethnography became the fantasy of knowledge.

Facts and fantasy of knowledge: Contemporary anthropology: After emergence of strong critiques, classical anthropological landscape became under big questions and the ethnographic research and ethnography, the product of research, turned into the fantasy of knowledge. 'Going to the field, living with the people to enjoy the romancism of field work, taking notes and fashionable pictures, coming back home and writing ethnography and press them before the audience who became astonished knowing excited and exotic, nude and naked, savage and primitive etc.' the whole process

of ethnography became completely a fantasy in the name of science and knowledge. So, what are the facts that have made ethnography as fantasy of knowledge? Though the facts appeared against the grand theory of anthropology in the late twentieth century after the few publications^[6,16,23], it took real and vigorous shame after the appearance of *Writing Culture* (1986) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986). After then, anthropology is frequently conceived as the discipline under crisis of representation. Hundreds of literatures have been already written on the contemporary crisis of anthropology. If we scrutinize, we can sum up the pulse of facts of contemporary ethnography in largely four sections.

Sin of forefather: Colonial legacy: The first critique against anthropological knowledge was its connection with imperialism and colonial legacy. Anthropology as a discipline is often blamed as the child of western imperialism' (Gough, 1968), 'off-springs of western imperialism^[25], handmaiden of colonialism and later many anthropologists, also outside anthropology (for instance Said's *Orientalism* etc) wrote numerous articles and books accusing anthropology for its colonial legacy. Asad^[6], Said^[23], Cohen^[26] and Rosaldo^[14] robustly talked about colonial bequest of anthropology. Karim^[27] wrote the production of ethnographic knowledge through participant observation was also a useful way for British Colonial Office to get on with its job better- to rule colonies with the minimum amount of opposition and conflict' (1996:115). Ironically speaking, early anthropological history reveals the strong colonial linkage with the production of knowledge through ethnographic field study. Victorian and armchair anthropologists were more or less directly involved in western imperialism and colonial expansion upon the people whom they studied. Barrett^[28] wrote, The bulk of past anthropological studies have dealt with improvised peoples, who are often intimidated by researchers such studies have had the unfortunate result of showing governments and their agencies how to control these peoples more efficiently'. Talal Asad edited *Anthropology and Colonial Encounter* (1973), for the first time, raised an intellectual dispute about the colonial legacy in the domain of anthropology. The question has been raised concerning who; why; what; or in what context for whom, the ethnographic data have been collected and used. Who uses this data, for what purpose, how the other is constructed by whom, who is we and who is they etc. argument resulted strong threat against the established epistemology of anthropological theory and methodology as well as way of looking at the issues.

Subject talks of subjectivity: Natives' fight back: Second critique was well-known as Native's Fight Back

which virtually stemmed from first one. This sort of criticism attacked the establishment of ethnography in connection with power relationship of knowledge in the name of science. This critique was posed by scholars from third world, African region and from those who were once the subject of anthropological study. It was consolidated by the left wing and those who intended to incorporate Marxism in anthropological knowledge. This critique has been reported as the native's fight back against western scholarship in connection with western hegemony and Anglo-American intellectual imperialism and 'scholastic prisoners^[29]. In terms of power relation, anthropologists are often being accused of holding unquestioned authority in constructing others etc. It is also a big question whether anthropologists can ever truly represent a foreign culture or whether anthropological discourses are not ultimately condemned to redundancy, the prisoners of their own authoritative images and linguistics protocols from which they can never escape^[7,8,30]. Ahmed and Shore illustrated, 'It also challenges the traditional role of anthropologists as undisputed 'expert' and authority of this or that group of people, able to speak for and about those people while remaining largely unaccountable and to them or to others. Pollier and Roseberry asserted, from the consideration of power relations in which knowledge is constructed towards an egocentric and nihilistic celebration of the ethnographer as author, creator and consumer of the other. In this way, the authority of sketching other and constructing others has been undergone with strong criticism^[8,11,33] in relation with 'power' in anthropological knowledge. Anthropological construction of native, aboriginal and tribal people who began to speak^[34-37] during the 70s in twentieth century which also appeared as a major crisis in anthropology.

Sense and sensitivity of gender: Feminist encounter: Third critique appeared from the growing voice of feminist discourse building during the last three decades of twentieth century. During the 70s of the last century, there was growing awareness about feminist movement. This feminist movement also reflected in anthropology specifically in doing field work, collecting ethnographic data and writing ethnographic text etc. Feminist anthropology, as a sub-discipline, took strong position embracing the gender biased construction of knowledge in the name of ethnography^[38]. The issue of positionality of a researcher has been most keenly debated by feminist ethnographers, because feminist ethnographers are extremely conscientious about their claim to sisterhood with those women who study, yet at the same time through writing ethnography they are repeating the same act of power and representation as others^[33,35,39,40]. The worst thing is that they may collect data on the claim that

they are sisters and therefore they understand better. Going back to their own research setting they will write ethnographies that will give them intellectual and professional establishment perhaps at the expense of, or by use of their sisterly knowledge. This goes against the primary political agenda of feminism which aims to liberate all womanhood. Now, the unitary womanhood is itself questioned. So, many questions that feminist ethnography poses onto itself is relevant to all of anthropologists, who endeavor to represent other cultures and how or for whom, by whom etc. This is, in fact, the most vigorous attack toward the knowledge industry of anthropology^[39].

Call and recall of time: Problems of relevance:

Finally, anthropology is questioned whether it is able to take into account the new world order and its multi-faced issues as its subjects of study. The world is drastically changing in the name of post-colonialism, post-industrialism, post-structuralism; post-modernism etc. In this changing world system, anthropology is in doubt to embrace the numerous recurrent issues as its subject matter^[28]. Barrett^[29] explained, Self-doubt, introspection and general anxiety about the future of the discipline have plagued anthropologists for several years. While this has been partly due to the failure of anthropological theory to advance and to its incapacity to cope with a complex and contradictory universe. In this age of globalization and high-tech society, how anthropology will respond with its traditional theory and methodology etc. is a big question in the present predicament of anthropology. Ahmed and Shore^[31] questioned. The question is where does all this leave anthropology today? How is it responding to these changes and how relevant is it to understanding those key issues confronting the modern world as it enters the next millennium?. Long^[41] questioned, 'Important dimensions of change involve the rapid dissemination of scientific knowledge and technology, culture and communications, the restructuring of the study, industry and economic life and the fragmentation and reorganization of power domains leading to the emergence of new social and political identities. How anthropology will respond to these?. This sort of ceaseless questioning about the relevance of anthropology with the changing world in 21st century put anthropology in the crisis of its ethics and theory, text and context, praxis and epistemology.

Waiting for new sun-rising: The future of anthropology:

If the whole classic establishment and grand theory of ethnography is regarded as the fantasy of knowledge, it becomes a question what is the future of anthropology. Claude Levi-Strauss wrote in mid 1960s about the future of anthropology by giving adequate

information about how many exotic, tribal, ethnic people had been living in different parts of the world to ensure the future ethnographers about the subject of study^[25]. It appears as funny prescriptions for the ethnographers for twenty first century. I will review and sum up recent but well-referred texts where there are some propositions regarding the future of anthropology. A compilation of articles edited by Akber Ahmed and Cris Shore^[31] was published under the title of *The Future of Anthropology: It's Relevance to the Contemporary World*. They, with other contributors in this volume, tried to establish that anthropology is fully able to relate its disciplinary expertise to study any contemporary issue even AIDs, gender discourse, tourism, media and cultural imperialism even highly technological and modern society societies etc.^[31].

Henrietta Moore^[42] edited another compilation entitled *The Future of Anthropological Knowledge* where we see some innovative voices about the future of anthropology. Moore, with other contributors, tried to address the issues of contemporary changing world such as electronic micrographs, globalization, modernity and geo-politics, local vs. global dichotomy, war discourse etc. and set forth some propositions how anthropologists could work. They, Moore and other contributors, proposed to study on ethnographers' own society, diversified social issues, critical and completed issues of the changing world. Besides, they suggested to do research in different parts of the world but with different manners and fashions, beyond anthropological orthodoxies, to cope with the existing debates in anthropology. James^[43] Peacock wrote. *The Future of Anthropology* where he also suggested of being optimistic about the subjects of research, ethnographic field work, interpretation of field data and the product of research as now anthropologists are more aware of their position and responsibility. Lawrence Kuznar^[44] proposed about *Reclaiming the Scientific Anthropology* by applying new strategy of ethnographic field method and writing ethnography not only for the intellectuals but also for the people about whom the ethnography is written. Akhil Gupta *et al*^[15] compiled a seminal work entitled *Anthropological Location: Boundaries and Ground of a Field Science*, where they, with other contributors, were of opinions that field does not necessarily denote the place or village or any other location etc. It might be any issue, any subject, and any non-land area of study which an ethnographer can do field work. Norman Denzin^[3] wrote a book entitled *Interpretative Ethnography: Ethnographic Practice for 21st Century* where he argued about what might be the shape of anthropology in 21st century. He urged 21st century ethnography would be completely interpretative where fieldwork paradox, primitive-civilized issue, synchronic-diachronic issue and observer. Observed people dichotomy and so

forth might be less important. Rather, interpretation would be the underlying thrust of the practice in 21st century ethnography. George Marcus^[46] wrote *Ethnography through Thin and Thick* where he proposed that the multi-faced ethnography would be the ethnography of coming days. He was optimistic about the multi-faced ethnography would be enabled to meet the need of time and encounter the critiques generated regarding anthropological knowledge.

Marshal Sahlins^[47] composed *What is Anthropological Enlightenment? Some Lessons from the Twentieth Century* where he proposed to reassess the anthropological enlightenment and learn lessons for the re-figuration of future of anthropology. Ward Goodenough^[47] wrote *Anthropology in the 20th Century and Beyond* where he optimistically proposed not to be worried about the future of anthropology.

He proposed to reorganize the future of anthropology in regional level rather universal model of anthropology. Besides, Goodenough had strong faith on the potentiality of ethnography to regain its lost horizons. Very recently, American Anthropologists offered a special issue where there was a strong sought to go back to Boasian cultural relativism with some reformations in the name of New Boasian Anthropology: as a theory for 21st century^[17]. In this process, some very optimistic voices appeared about the bright future of anthropology, the stage of new sun-rising.

CONCLUSIONS

Started this study with the retrospective of ethnography and ended the discussion reviewing the propositions for the future of anthropology provided by contemporary literatures. One thing is clear that anthropology is currently passing a critical time. Ortner termed it 'classical symptoms'^[40] and Marcus and Fischer termed it experimental and pregnant period (1986: ix). This crisis and critical period started from 1970s where there was a burred genres to break down the disciplinary boundaries in social sciences. Geertz^[2] stated that anthropology was also going through this blurred genres and it was getting reshape under shared knowledge. During that period, anthropologists started to refine the field work strategies and recreate the style of writing ethnography. An experimental trend and tendencies has been observed in every stage of ethnographic research project. These sorts of tendencies have been contributed in making the crisis of contemporary anthropology more complicated and diversified. However, the contemporary predicament is identified as the crisis of representations^[8,9] and the Problems of Relevance^[3]. The crisis of representation has been being overcome because ethnographers have become gradually

more sympathetic with the subject of study, morally sensitive with the people they study, professionally more concern with the social crisis and intellectually more aware about the power relationship with knowledge that is deeply rooted in historical context of anthropology and the people they studied^[12,36]. In case of problem of relevance, I think, anthropology has already overcome because now anthropologists are studying not only so-called tribal and ethnic issues rather it has been bringing all the issues related human existence under the list of its research agenda. Now anthropologists are working even on reproductive health technology, digital world and cyber culture, social stigma of Anglo-American societies, climatic changes and environment degradation, globalization and malaise of postmodernism etc. And the results of ethnographic research have been proved more substantial and authentic than others in social science. Those who are worried about the future of anthropology are in little ignorance about the potentiality and strength of ethnography. I would like to rejoin my tone with the optimistic sense of Marshal Sahlins. He, I fully agree, wrote, *This panic just when all about them the peoples are talking up their culture. Now everyone has culture: only the anthropologists could doubt it. But why lose our nerve? Presented by history with a novel set of cultural structures, practices, and politics, anthropology should take the opportunity to renew itself. The discipline seems as well off as it ever was, with culture disappearing just as we have learning how to perceive them, and then reappearing in a new ways we had never imagined*^[46]. The realm of social science is now waiting for this unimagined appearance of anthropology.

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