BSOE-144 : READING ETHNOGRAPHIES
Tutor Marked Assignments

Programme Code : BAG/BAFSO/BAM
Course Code: BSOE –144
Assignment Code: ASST /TMA /2026-27
Total Marks: 100

There are three Sections in the Assignment. You have to answer all the questions.

Section I

Answer the following Descriptive Category questions in about 400 words each.

1. What is interpretive ethnography? Discuss the history and development of ethnography. 20

2. Examine in detail the position of women in Mukkuvar Society of Tamil Nadu. 20

Section II

Answer the following Middle Category questions in about 250 words each.

3. Discuss the various ethical issues that guide ethnographic research. 10

4. Describe the characteristics of the classical ethnography. 10

5. What do you understand by Voluntary Participation? 10

Section III

Answer the following Short Category questions in about 100 words each.

6. What is meant by ‘sites of natural world’? 06

7. What is scientific ethnography? 06

8. Discuss the one of the stage of feminist ethnography? 06

9. Which are the prominent castes that the Coorgs interact with? 06

10. What is Continuous Globalization? 06

1. What is interpretive ethnography? Discuss the history and development of ethnography. (20)

Answer

Interpretive ethnography is an approach to understanding social life by examining the meanings that people attach to their actions, relationships, symbols and institutions. It does not treat a culture merely as a collection of externally observable customs. Instead, it asks what a practice signifies to the participants and how that significance is produced in a particular context. Clifford Geertz was an influential advocate of this perspective. Drawing on the idea of culture as a web of meanings, he argued that an ethnographer should offer a “thick description”: an account that explains the social meaning of an action rather than only recording its physical appearance.

Meaning and method of interpretation

An ordinary observation might report that people gather for a ritual, exchange gifts or engage in a competitive event. An interpretive study asks why these actions matter: what they communicate about honour, obligation, identity, social position and belonging. Geertz's celebrated interpretation of the Balinese cockfight, for example, connects a seemingly recreational contest to status, masculinity and wider social relationships. The researcher attempts to understand meanings from within the community while recognising that the written account is still an interpretation produced by the researcher. Participation, prolonged observation, interviews, language learning and careful attention to context make such understanding possible.

Interpretive ethnography is therefore not simply a subjective opinion. Interpretations should be supported by observable events, people's accounts, repeated patterns and the researcher's transparent reasoning. Different members of a community may disagree about a custom; a careful ethnographer records that disagreement rather than presenting one person's view as universal. The approach is particularly useful for understanding rituals, beliefs, symbolic boundaries and everyday behaviour, although it must also examine the material inequalities and power relations that shape meaning.

Early development of ethnography

Ethnographic descriptions have a long history in travellers' accounts, historical writings and reports about unfamiliar communities. However, early observers often relied on brief visits, second-hand information and their own cultural prejudices. During the nineteenth century, anthropology became a more organised academic discipline. Scholars such as E. B. Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan compared societies through evolutionary frameworks, often arranging