

Subject: Anthropology

Production of Courseware

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Paper No. : 10 Theories and methods in social and cultural Anthropology

Module : 13 Culture and civilization: Robert Redfield



Development Team

Principal Investigator

Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Paper Coordinator

Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Content Writer

Neha Tiwari
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi

Content Reviewer

Prof. Subir Biswas, Department of Anthropology, West Bengal State University, Barasat, West Bengal

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Subject Name	Anthropology
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Learning Outcomes

- To understand the concept of culture through different types of societies
- To understand the concept of civilization
- To know and understand various related topics and subtopics
- To know about the contributions made different scholars to the concept

Introduction

Since the time of postulation of evolutionary theory, anthropologists are familiar with the term civilization, but it was the pioneering work of Robert Redfield of Chicago University, America, whose efforts brought movement in the history and development of anthropology by introduction of study of civilization. According to him the civilization has two main dimensions namely folk and urban. He studied folk-villages and urban centers and also he made an effort to understand the patterns and processes of interaction between them. And hence, he developed the concepts of folk society, urban society and folk-urban continuum. Since then the study of a village as a unit of rural civilization urban center as a unit of urban civilization came into existence. In development of a civilization religion holds an important place and in order to understand the role of religion development of civilization Robert Redfield had developed the concept of Great and Little traditions as he defines civilizations as a complex whole of great and little traditions. According to him the great tradition refers to the formal literate tradition of a civilization, which is regulated by the elites of the society, while, the little tradition refers to formal illiterate tradition of rural people living within a civilization. He has also introduced the term cultural specialist who mediates between the two traditions. Many anthropologists of America such as Oscar Lewis, Mc Kim Marriot, Milton Singer and Mandel Baum supported Redfield's theory and added upon the study of civilization as proposed by Redfield. Redfield and his followers visited India and studied Indian villages in order to understand the Indian civilization.

1. Concept of Folk Society

During 1927-28 Redfield visited a traditional village, Tepoztlan, later on which he published a book in 1930. He considered this village as an ideal type of folk society which is just a polar opposite of the urban society. Also he suggested that there exists no ideal society but the term ideal is a mental construct. Redfield had characterized the folk societies into the following attributes:

- 1) Isolated: The folk society is isolated but has its own territory and it is physically immobile.
- 2) Small in Size: It is a small society in accordance to the number of members and its members are in direct contact with each other.
- 3) Feeling of 'We' and 'They': The folk society contains group sentiments. They know the members of their own society whom they include in 'we' and also who is from outside the group to be kept in 'they'.
- 4) Personal Relation: People here know each other not only by name but by face also.
- 5) Common Interests: They have common interest of leading a good life and food produced commonly in the group is shared by the members of the group.

- 6) Simple Division of Labor: Here division of labor is not on the basis of specialization but on the basis of sex and gender.
- 7) Homogeneity: People of the folk society show similarity in terms of dress, customs, culture and way of life. In their life tradition plays a big role.
- 8) Independent: They produce for subsistence and they are independent in that.
- 9) Kinship System: The family relationships are established since birth and both types of Kinship system are found i.e., Patriarchal and Matriarchal. Range of kinship system is large.
- 10) Magic: Magic has a very important place in this society. People tend to increase the emotions of the group by certain specific experiences.
- 11) Sacred prevails over Secular: here people consider certain objects as sacred and they offer worship to their implements, food items, hearths or any other object which satisfies their needs.
- 12) Economy is for Status: The entire society is status oriented rather than market-oriented. Their production and consumption is according to their needs. There is no concept of market and saving. Barter system is present in them but it is also consumption oriented.

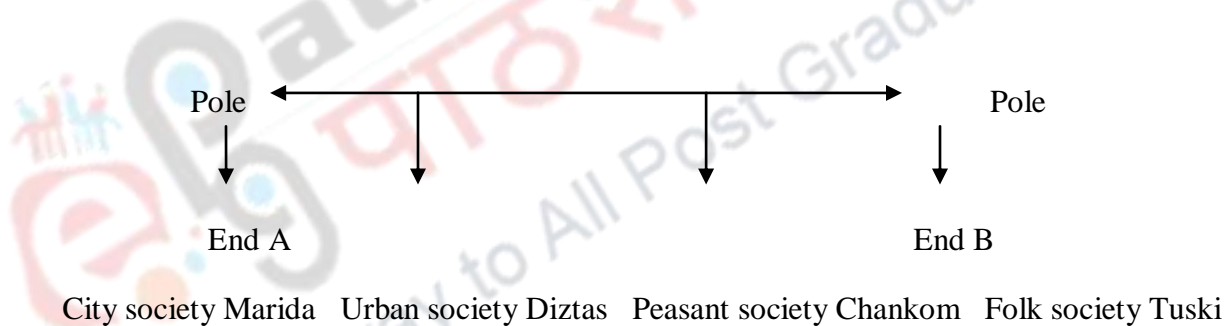
2. Concept of Peasant Society

In 1930 Redfield visited a peasant society known as Chankom. He postulated that a peasant society has a great love for their land. They consider their land as their mother. Land for them nurtures them like, a mother nurtures her child. Their entire economy is based on their land. The peasants produce surplus, and they keep the amount necessary for them with them and sell the rest into the cities. Peasant societies are relatively self-contained, possess their own indigenous culture, structure and values. According to him the peasant society is different from the folk society only because it has developed market system; also they are in contact with the traders of the urban center. Rest all of the characteristic features such as isolation, feeling of 'we' and 'they', personal relation, common interests, kinship systems; homogeneity and magic are similar to that of the folk-society. According to Redfield's observation the peasant society has three main attributes namely: A Reverent Attitude towards Land, The Idea that Agriculture is good and business is bad and Industrious Nature (means hard working is the value of life). As the peasant society is in contact with the urban center so they have certain traits of the urban center also. Thus, it can be said that the peasant society is somewhere in between the folk and the urban society.

3. Concept of Folk-Urban Continuum

In the year 1941, Robert Redfield published a book naming *The Folk Culture of Yucatan*. This book was based upon his comparative study of the four communities namely city society, town society, peasant society and folk and simple society. He has selected these four communities or societies from the Mexican province of Yucatan. The four communities located in the Mexican province with different habitations are Marida (city society), Ditzas (town society), Chankom (a peasant village) and Tuski (village of folk society).

Robert Redfield placed the folk society and the city society at both the ends of the poles. According to him the characteristics of the folk society and that of the city society are different from each other but the characteristics of Chankom were similar to that of Tuski and Ditzas both. But the traits of Chankom were more similar to that of Tuski than that of Ditzas. The traits of Ditzas were similar to that of Marida as both have proper market system and civil administration to rule them. In Ditzas there were certain traits similar to that of Chankom such as presence of market, middlemen, and shops. He concluded that the city society resembled more with the town society and the peasant society resembled to the folk society, therefore he termed Marida and Ditzas as urban community while Chankom and Tuski as folk community. Thus he proposed the concept folk-urban continuum.



Redfield not only proposed the concept of folk-urban continuum but also he characterized the traits of the societies. He said that the folk and urban societies are placed on the opposite poles and very different. The distinction he made between the two societies was based on the dominant traits of the particular group. He said that the moral order is a typical characteristic of the folk society. It signifies binding together of men through implicit conviction as to what is right, and through implicit ideals, which means, in turn, that members of folk society followed their own ideals of the “good life”. The order of the urban society is based on the opposite attributes. The bonds that holds together the urban society is not based upon the “good life”. They do not embed them into human sentiments. They instead are based on mutual usefulness, deliberate coercion and from necessity and expectancy. Redfield also observed that the folk society is coming in contact with the urban society and is inheriting some of its traits and thereby losing its own. Many of the peculiar folk

society traits such as isolation, homogeneity, kinship systems are no more there. Increase in contact, bringing about heterogeneity, is sufficient cause of secularization and individualization. Thus increment in the contacts with the urban society has led to the fading away of certain important folk society traits. Also, the contacts with the urban center leads to heterogeneity and development of market economy and thus indication of disorganization appears.

4. Concept of Little Community

Redfield had also proposed a concept of Little Community. Little Community can be defined as a small group of people living together with same community features. All the community members participate in every community activity. Redfield also had also used the word human whole for the little community. Little communities were also called as small communities by Redfield. The main characteristic features of little communities are distinctiveness, smallness, homogeneity and self-sufficiency. According to him the communities can only be called little communities if they have their own culture and that to different and isolated from the large ones. Redfield also opined that these days only two traits of little communities can be found i.e., smallness and distinctiveness whereas homogeneity and self-sufficiency are no more found. The study of little community was considered very important by Redfield because he opined that the little communities are the basic units and representative of the whole society and scientifically studying the little community provided better understanding of the whole society.

5. Concept of Great and Little Traditions

While studying the peasant society Robert Redfield came across two types of traditions which different from one another and had different origin but were inter-related, inter dependent and interactive with one another. Amongst the two traditions he found that one was formal, in written form, literate and reflective few while, the other was informal, in oral form with no written format, illiterate and reflective many. The former was called as Great Tradition and the latter was called as Little Tradition by Redfield. During his fieldwork he observed that the Great Tradition was being cultivated in the schools and temples located at different places. These places were visited by the peasants. He also found that the priests and the teachers were the mediating link between the two traditions. Thus it can be said that the Great Traditions are being cultivated in the schools and temples with the help of teachers and priests while the Little Tradition works itself out and keeps itself living and going into the illiterate village communities.

For an example we can take up the case of India. India has many religious centers such as Gaya, Kashi etc which have Great tradition. These places have their own traditional schools and temples,

where worshipping and religious teaching along with teaching of Sanskrit, Hindu holy books etc take place. The *Mahantha* or the *Pandit* offers worshipping and teaches their disciples. The *Mahantha* along with his disciples move from village to village among the peasant communities to raise the funds to maintain Sanskrit teaching in the school and for worshipping. He also tells the peasants about the myths and legends associated with the place which strengthens the spiritual belief of the peasants. These teachings are passed on from generation to generation orally. Also the *Mahantha* teaches the importance of pilgrimage to the peasants. This results in the establishment of religious beliefs in the minds of the peasants which in turn results into the rituals performed by the peasants on different occasions. Hence it can be concluded that the cultural specialist's interaction with the peasant community resulted in the interaction of Great Tradition with the Little Tradition. Robert Redfield has used the Cultural Specialists for the people who mediate between the Great and Little Traditions.

6. Redfield's Definition of Civilization

Redfield propounded his concept of civilization, after formulating the concepts of Great Traditions, Little Traditions and Cultural Specialists, he defined concept of civilization as complex structure of Great Tradition and Little Tradition. According to him civilization has many components such as great tradition, little tradition as well as tribal rural and urban culture. Redfield also postulates that the civilization is an organization associated with the functioning of the cultural specialists in the folk societies. He also views civilization as world view, ethos, temperament, value system, cultural personality etc.

Many of the followers of Redfield had contributed a lot in the Civilization theory. Their efforts cannot be ignored. Following are the brief discussion about some of the members of the civilization school.

7. Oscar Lewis

He visited India in 1951 and conducted his study in Rampur village in U.P. He had very distinctly described the reality of Indian village and opined that Indian village has a deep community sentiment. The relationship here is not only between the two individuals but also between the individual and the nature such as relation of man with his land, house, cattle, plants and other natural objects. All these form the internal basis of the Indian village. He also said that the relations such as man to his land, individual with individual, religious order, political organization, business

relations etc form the extended relationship in the Indian village. He has named this extended relation as 'Rural Cosmopolitan'.

8. Mc Kim Marriot

Mckim Marriott in his "Little Communities in an indigenous Civilization" gave the concept of universalization and parochialization. Universalization is the process by which cultural traits of a little tradition are absorbed into a great tradition. Hence the local process/phenomenon becomes universalized. Parochialization is just the reverse of the universalization phenomenon and in this the written, literate things such as *Vedas*, *Shasstras* are learnt and then modified by the folk or the peasant society and this culminates into their ritualistic practices.

He examined the socio-religious organization in an Indian village Kishangarhi in Uttar Pradesh. According to Marriott, an indigenous civilization is one whose Great Tradition originates by universalization or a carrying forward of materials which are already present in the Little Tradition which it encompasses. Such an indigenous Great Tradition has authority in so far it constitutes a more articulate and refined restatement or systematization of what is already there. He explains the concept by giving examples from the festivals of Little Tradition in Kishangarhi village. He refers to the Festival of Lights in which the local goddess of prosperity and wealth is propitiated. Marriott comments that *Saurti* of this Little Tradition could have been universalized into the goddess *Lakshmi* of the Great Tradition who stands for prosperity and wealth also.

The reverse of universalization is parochialization .It is a process of localization of limitation upon the scope of intelligibility of deprivation of literary form, of reduction to less systematic and less reflective dimensions. The process of parochialization constitutes the characteristic creative work of little communities within India's indigenous civilization. He explains the process through examples from Kishangarhi, the festival of Navarathri in which Nine Durgas are worshiped for nine successive days. In Kishangarhi a female deity *Naurtha* made of mud is worshiped for nine deities. Marriott points out that *Durga* has been parochialized into *Naurtha* the name also being parochialized deriving from *nava ratra* or nine nights.

Marriott concludes that seen through its festivals and deities the religion of the village of Kishangarhi may have originated as resulting from continuous process of communication between a little, local tradition and great traditions. Since both Great and Little traditions exist within the religion of little communities and these communities study of the religion of a little community can contribute to the understanding of processes of universalization and parochialization.

9. Milton Singer

Milton Singer visited India in 1954-55 and made a study on Madras city. He had worked a lot in the contemporary study of religious traditions in India. He had done a deep study on the Great and Little Traditions of Madras and South India. Also he has done textual and contextual analysis of written and oral traditions. He has provided an insight into the study of India with its great and deep rooted heritage. Singer had studied the cultural role of traditional city Madras in South India and has an effort to show how great tradition has modernized itself in the sphere of the little tradition. Singer has developed the concepts of cultural geography, cultural performances, cultural specialists and cultural media such as songs, *bhajans*, *kirtans*, *prarthna* and *geet* etc. He was of the opinion that all these aspects interact and form the basis of interaction between both the great and little traditions. These complex wholes are the sources of interaction between the two traditions.

10. Morris E Opler

Morris E Opler came to India in 1951 and did fine research in a village Senapur in U.P. He along with an Indian anthropologist R.D. Singh developed a concept of unity and extension of Indian villages. They both explained how in a village unity and extension prevails. Whenever there is any celebration, community ritual, marriage or death, rivalry etc the whole village comes together and shows the strong bond of unity among themselves. The village follows the rule of exogamy in marriage. They marry their children outside the group; hence the sign of extended relationships can be traced. This shows the inter-relationship among the distant villages. Also for trade purpose people go out from the village and maintain business relation with the other villages and people. Not only for these issues there are many other factors also which shows extension of the Indian villages. To education, get medical facility, go to pilgrimage, to get connected with urban markets the villagers establish contacts with the outside world thereby showing the extended relations.