

Chapter 10

Understanding Ethnography: An ‘Exotic’ Ethnographer’s Perspective



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Abstract India had been looked upon by anthropologists since the eighteenth century when the British arrived on the pretext of doing business through their East India Company. It has been dominated by research on caste and class connections in the country (Natrajan 2005). Since gaining independence in 1947, India has been the focus of even more anthropologists and sociologists who have conducted much more extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the country. A large majority of these studies were conducted by Westerners looking at the ‘exotic and mystic east’ and trying to make sense of the ‘other’. While undertaking my present ethnographic research on the religious vegetarian tourists in India, I enter into the field with my theoretical knowledge and a set position which stems from my mixed educational upbringing. I see myself sometimes as the outsider, Western-educated scholar who left the country more than 14 years ago looking at a group of religious vegetarians while they are on a holiday. However, I am also an insider as I am still linked to India owing to my land and property in India along with strong family links still based in the country. I have no religious vegetarian history in my immediate family, yet I seem to have a strong awareness of the issues faced by these tourists while they are on a holiday as I travel with members of this community due to my social circle. I learned ethnography from Western education; yet, as I move towards conceiving and performing my own ethnographic research, I realise the struggle which I face with Western paradigms. In this chapter, I, an Indian ‘exotic author’ ethnographic researcher, aim to reveal my own epistemological and ontological beliefs and perspectives on ethnography as a research methodology.

Keywords Ethnography · Insider · Outsider · Native ethnographer · Qualitative research · Exotic ethnographer

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