

## Visual Anthropology: A Systematic Representation of Ethnography

By Mainak Chakraborty<sup>\*</sup>, Kaustav Das<sup>±</sup> & Koel Mukherjee<sup>‡</sup>

*In its development of one hundred years, anthropology evolved from travelogues of explorers to in-depth exploration of human from all possible angles. In its every venture, anthropologists were/are always in try to get closer to cultural affairs and dive deeper into human subjectivity. To achieve these purposes a series of theories and methods were developed, which served a lot, but with time it was also felt that readers idea of a research is anchored with and limited within the textual analysis written by the researcher. This dependency on the text was (and still) restricting the researcher to convey an actual image of the studied phenomenon, and also confining the readers from exploring their subjective self in finding meaning. The emergence of using visual aids in anthropology during the 90s opened a pathway for the researcher to make their researched visible to the audience. This visibility opens up many scopes of interpretation that are hitherto invisible. Though, researchers of other disciplines started the use of visual way before anthropologists. But its efficiency in transmitting meaning soon pulled the attention of anthropological social researchers. Since then, visual in anthropology has evolved in its use and presently one of the frontrunning methods in anthropological research. This article is systematically reviewing the history to present of visual anthropology with reference to theoretical development and practical use of the same.*

**Keywords:** *visual anthropology, photograph, ethnography, movies, photovoice*

### Introduction

“A picture is worth a thousand words” is a common phrase been used many times by many people, either genuinely or superficially, to make a statement about a specific moment. It will be not wrong to say that these “thousand words” are actually a thousand perceptions (or even more) that a picture can evoke in the minds of its observers. A picture is a framed memory and can transcend time and space. A picture can make us relive a moment that happened years ago and can transmit meaning flawlessly to a remote observer. For example, the famed painting of the Mona Lisa (Figure 1). Is she smiling? Is it the smile of happiness? Or, melancholy? This 16th-century painting by Da-Vinci is still keeping art historians, researchers and art experts in perplex. With innumerable research articles present, this painting is the epitome of the phrase “a picture is worth a thousand words” (Puchko 2015, Horstmann and Loth 2019). Whether Mona Lisa was an imaginative expression of Da-Vinci or it was an impression of an actual person (many scholars believe the painting depicts *Lisa Gherardini*, wife of the Florentine merchant

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<sup>\*</sup>Senior Research Fellow, Anthropological Survey of India, North West Regional Centre, India.

<sup>±</sup>Faculty Member, Department of Anthropology, Bangabasi College, India..

<sup>‡</sup>Anthropologist, Anthropological Survey of India, Andaman & Nicobar Regional Centre, India.

*Francesco del Giocondo*) is still debated (Horstmann and Loth 2019), but it certainly testifies the potentiality of visual in evoking multidimensional subjectivity.

**Figure 1.** *Mona Lisa, by Leonardo Da Vinci. A Perfect Example of “A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words”*



Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/142QPZjn1UPYiSjv9>, 2021.

These qualities of photographs/pictures soon grabbed the attention of explorers, travellers and researchers from various disciplines. In qualitative research, researchers often combine visual media and ethnographic research to provide a greater understanding of social phenomena. For many years, it has generally been evident that ethnographers who were experienced in fieldwork in a particular culture or society have used multiple media, including photographs, films, and sounds, to collect ethnographic materials. Though, the use of photographs in a meaningful way in anthropology is a much later development. With the start of fieldwork tradition, the discipline chiefly relies upon its qualitative and quantitative methods for enquiry. It is also true that most of its early theoretical development happened when the camera was just another item to carry in the field, and visual is not a method. But soon, researchers and their audience realized that enormous text is not enough to answer the question of visibility. The first documented anthropological use of the film was by Haddon (1898) during an expedition in Torres Straits Islands, including the latest scientific recording devices for taking still photographs, movies, and even experimental colour photographs (Long and Laughren 1993, Griffiths 2002). Even not only Haddon of that time, Franz Boas also used both film and photography during his early work among Kwakiutl Indians (Jacknis 1984) but could not promote any scientific appreciation for the value of photography. Later, Malinowski, an active fieldwork photographer whose more than a thousand photographs were archived at the London School of Economics (Young 1998) advocated in favour of visual methodology in the course of ethnographic fieldwork. The prefix

“visual” is added to the chiefly “written” ethnographic discipline anthropology when the anthropological enquiries and representations start adopting visual techniques. This paradigm shift occurred in the late 90s and mainly took place in research methodology and presentation (Schwartz 1989). But why do we need a camera in the field when we already have stereoscopic eyes and a voluminous memory to see, understand, analyze, interpret and remember? To answer this question, we need to look back into earlier days of written ethnography, its shortcomings and also to look at some biological and psychological facts associated with our cognition that makes visual a more formidable option.

### **The Incompleteness of Ethnographic Writings and Rise of the Need for Visual Documentation**

The beginning of anthropological writing was started by scholars who were essentially not ethnographers or fieldworkers. Popularly known as “armchair” anthropologists, these scholars collected data from missionaries, colonialist administrators, businessmen, travellers and writers from a distance, that is, there was an era in this discipline when the “subjects” and their cultural setting was not even visible to its researcher. The first step out in the field was taken by L.H. Morgan in his study on Iroquois before 1851, which was followed by Franz Boas in Baffin Land (1883-84) field trip (Srinivas 1959). The beginning of fieldwork tradition makes people and their culture visible and audible to anthropologists, but it only solved the problem of visibility partially, the audience or reader of anthropological texts were still deprived of visual clues about the culture or people they are reading about (MacDougall 1997). Again the “text only” description of culture lacks the ability to produce a visual projection of information, thus restricting the reader to experience the time and space of a described phenomenon embedded in a society and culture (Edwards 2002). This problem was encountered with a less effective solution to bring “exotic or native” people to museums, academic lectures and public displays, as practised by Kroeber and Franz Boas (MacDougall 1997), but still, their presence was just a bodily appearance without their cultural behaviour. With this attempt, visibility was achieved, to some extent, but devoid of its meaning. From the beginning and in the following decades, anthropologists’ “equipment” only consisted of a pen, notebook and set of questionnaires. They went to the field of dying cultures where only a few persons live or reported a fading tradition of war dance or hunting technique (Mead 1974) but only and only in the textual description. Anthropologists had to rely on the memory of informants and the memory of himself or herself while documenting and thereby writing. Margaret Mead (1974) expressed her angst regarding the “text only” approach of Anthropology in the following manner.....

.... ethnographic enquiries came to depend upon words, and words and words, during the period that anthropology was maturing as a science. Relying on words, anthropology became a science of words, and those who relied on words have been very unwilling to let their pupil use new tools... (Mead 1974, p. 5)

The beginning of fieldwork tradition in anthropology and its long practice throughout the history of this discipline led to the development of a series of research methods, either qualitative or quantitative. Rigorously used in many landmark ventures of anthropology, these methods have their limitations, as Ormerod et al. (2004) pointed out quantitative as expensive and lacking the ability to explain the context, whereas qualitative falls victim to the subjective interpretation of reality, which can be numerous, hence not suitable for statistical use. Another difficulty is the modes of using these methods, like taking notes, voice recording or measurement, but sometimes difficult to do because of climate (Mead 1974) or any adverse situation in the field. And all these can only record words or numbers but not expressions, behaviour and actions. In comparison to these methods, photograph(y) has both qualitative understanding and quantitative recording qualities. It can capture material reality and record verbal statements. The photographic evidence can be arranged in many typological schemes (as archaeologists do with potteries) and converted into statistical designs (Collier and Collier 1967). Moreover, as Margaret Mead (1974) opined, “it can catch and preserve behaviours on the verge of extinction”. Apart from its technical superiority, the visual or visual clue is more supportive of our cognitive organization than text (Joe et al. 2019). A number of researches in the field of psychology show that visual feeds have strikingly affected our brain functions (Cavanagh 2011, Joe et al. 2019, Shimojo 2001, University of California – Davis 2013).

### **Reasons for More Acceptance: Evolutionary, Biological and Psychological Perspective**

Why do we need a camera? It is a very legitimate question since we have stereoscopic vision, an informed mind and voluminous memory. But another rightful and challenging question was raised by John Collier Jr. and Collier M. (1967): how good observers we are? Challenging because observation is nothing less than a weapon for an anthropologist. But still, can we observe everything? Or, in another way, are we conscious about everything? This issue of consciousness was first addressed by Sigmund Freud, who proposed the concept of “unconscious” with the other two, “conscious” and “pre-conscious” (Freud 1963). The unconscious is the innermost layer of our mind, it is unspoken, unexplored and perhaps unknown, but it subtly affects our conscious activities. This dialectics between conscious and unconscious runs always inside the mind of, whether, it may be the anthropologist or the subject. With the mind, this “unconscious” also exists in the outside world. We know many aspects of human behaviour, society and culture but every bit of our pre-known ideas gets challenged when we enter a new community. It is not that we are always unaware of the happening, at least theoretically, but its practical manifestation in a specific time and space amazes us. We cannot understand it until we see it. That unseen part is the “unconscious” to us. Decades later, during the 1930s, Benjamin (1931) refined the concept of the “unconscious” by Freud and added a major idea in it. The idea of “unseen”, it is out there, perhaps we know it in a dormant way but we never see it. He termed this phenomenon as



“optical unconscious” (Smith and Sliwinski 2017). This “optical unconscious” could be a great hurdle for anthropologists to understand facts in the field situation. An example of optical unconsciousness from a day in the field will be befitting here.

A conversation was going on with stone dressers of Kashmir and they were narrating the damages caused to their business during the flood of 2013. They appealed to the state authority for compensation but were denied on the ground that they were dealing with stones, authorities concluded, and stone cannot be harmed by water. At that time, researchers found authorities correct because what possible harm could be caused to stone by water? They asked the same question to the stone dresser and, in reply get some photographs of devastated stone workshops. These photographs (Figures 2 and 3) were taken by the stone dressers themselves after the devastating flood ripped off their workshops and damaged their products and tools. Even the concerned authority and researchers had no idea of what a flood could do to stones, but these photographs give testimony in favour of stone dressers and prove their claim as rightful. And the loss was financial because they had to purchase all the raw materials again and have to pay the labours twice for the same job. That is why they needed the compensation. Researchers there are known to about the stone craft business, but the tits and bits of the trade are “unconscious” to them. Such incidents always happen in a field situation, and our unaided eyes fail to grasp it because it may be too small, too quick, and too subtle or not happening at that time. Here situates the importance of a camera and study of photographs (Mitra and Chakraborty 2019).

**Figures 2 and 3.** *Photographs of Disaster Taken by Stone Dressers*



Source: Mitra and Chakraborty 2019.

Another trouble arose when we were out in the field and floated by the fragmented nature of phenomena and ended up only dealing with some parts or fragments of it (Collier and Collier 1967). This process has some limitations, such as erroneous understanding of what the researcher is asking about by the respondent and difficulties from the end of the researcher to make the participant understand because of the language barrier. Practically, certain inquiries can hardly be researched verbally and explained textually because they cannot be explained perfectly by a verbal explanation of the informant. It is even tough for

the reader to visualize it from a text-only narration written by social media scientists. Visual stimulation is a better way out, captured a priori the discussion with the informant, which may yield answers to questions that the anthropologist would not have asked or planned to ask. Apart from that, certain issues are largely impossible to communicate through texts, such as movement, position, posture (Thurnherr 2012), consciousness, cognition, sensory experience etc. (Taylor 1998). In these cases, the use of visual clues during and post-research is the key for better understanding and transmitting information, allowing the reader to de-anchor and explore the sea of subjective interpretation.

Most importantly, from its inception to today, visual evolved as people's medium, unlike text, in terms of mass acceptance, producers and audience. It crossed the boundaries of elite, educated, wealthy and every other kind of sophistication and developed as a household item for almost every stratum of society (Nuska 2019). Almost every household has a family photo album which is chromatographically sequenced family history and a unit level representation of society. With modern innovations in visual media in different shapes, such as small cheap digital cameras, smartphones, and computers, visual reaches everyone (Dewan 2015). The advent of social media platforms pushed visual a step forward. It becomes a representative "avatar" of every person who uses visual media. Undoubtedly, the count of such people is way higher than text consumers.

Some biological factors prove the use of visuals in research as advantageous. The relationship between human cognition and pictures has been observed since the prehistoric era. Even before the advent of language and writing, human have expressed their ideas in pictures, it is evident from the wall paintings made by our prehistoric ancestors. In due course of history, the images on the wall slowly evolved into pictographs, petrograms, petroglyphs and ideograms. But does a picture or visual clue has some close association with our memory and perception? Well, studies showed it has. Pictures and words express similar semantic codes, but pictures are more memorable because it has more distinctive visual features (Nelson 1979, Hockley 2008). For example, the textual definition of "Apple" tells us about a fruit that is red and has depression at two poles. There may be fruits of similar description also. But a picture of an apple gives us a clear view of the shape and colour, and at the same time, it can act as a proper identification tool. Nelson (1979) explained this phenomenon in his sensory-semantic model. Harper (2002) opined that the part of the brain which processes visual information is evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal clues, and only the use of verbal clues led to less use of brains activity, in contrast, to the use of verbal-visual clues. Dewan (2015) also stresses that pictures are easier to recognize and process and easier to recall. Words create our memory with a single code, that is verbal, but photographs do so with double code, that is one visual and the other verbal.

### **Use of Photographs or Visual Aids in Social Sciences**

But despite of its tremendous potentiality, the inclusion of visual as a subdiscipline or to develop as a methodology of anthropology was not smooth and even today, as Taylor (1998) opined a marginal approach. The ethnographic

research was largely engrossed with verbal bias until World War I (de Brigard 1975). Researchers and their commanding institutions negate the possibilities of the visual method by the logic of cost-effectiveness, lack of specialized skills for doing photographic research (Mead 1974) and not having the idea of what exactly to do with photographs (Collier and Collier 1967, MacDougall 1997). The postwar revolution in the academic sphere and technological advances facilitated the development of ethnographic visual presentation (de Brigard 1975). Though, visual or use of a camera in research was initiated by other disciplines and way before trained anthropologists adopted it. In 1902, photographer Edward Muybridge published an eleven-volume book with 20000 photographs consisting of movements of animal and human, which was followed by French physiologist Marey who did the same with animal, birds and insects' movements. The importance of Marey's work lies in his development of a camera that could photograph twelve frames per second, the predecessor of motion picture (Collier and Collier 1967). From the perspective of social research, the works of Felix-Louis Regnault can be regarded as the first use of films in ethnography. In collaboration with Marey's associate Charles Comte, a physician turned anthropologist, Regnault, filmed a Wolof woman making pots (1895) followed by climbing trees, squatting, walking by Wolof, Fulani and Diola people in a cross-cultural study fashion. Regnault also proposed the formation of an anthropological film archive (de Brigard 1975, Regnault 1931).

Cameras are not uncommon in Anthropological field trips since they became portable and carriable but rarely used as a technique under methodological guidance. The first photographs or films were simply travelling pieces, captured images of places and events with no real involvement (Preloran 1974), and/or a confirmation or proof of physical appearance of certain things or sample of reality (Collier and Collier 1967). These early attempts fell short in the potential use of visual technique but can be termed as antecedents and early attempts of using visual in the social sciences. The restricted scope for perception in those images was criticized by scholars (Collier and Collier 1967, Wright 1991, MacDougall 1997) and raised questions regarding the theoretical framework and methodological application of visual media. In brief, three questions are most important; first, how a camera can aid research? Second, what will be the type or kind of ethnographic/ anthropologically meaningful photography? And third, what will be the role of the researcher in the visual process? John Collier, Jr. (1967) explained the usefulness of the camera in the following manner.....

...cameras machinery allows us to see without fatigue, the exposure is just detailed as the first. The memory of the film replaces the notebook and issues complete notation under the most trying circumstances. The reliably repetitive use of a camera allows for comparable observation of an event as many times as the needs of research. It is one of the first steps in evidence refinement that turns raw circumstances into data that is manageable in research analysis.... (Collier and Collier 1967, p. 9)

Now, the question arises, what will be the kind or type of ethnographic/ anthropological photograph? A brief but satisfying answer was given by Elizabeth Edwards (1992, p. 13) is, "an anthropological photograph is any photograph from

which an anthropologist could gain useful, meaningful visual information". Regarding the use of the visual method, Marcus Banks (1995) has suggested three major actions to follow, are – making visual representations by producing images of studied (and understudy) societies; examining pre-existing visual representations to gather information about the society; and collaborating with social actors in the production of visual representation. So, the camera (or photograph and film), in collaboration with the methodological framework, will act as an extension of researchers' observation, thus perception (Collier and Collier 1967). Dona Schwartz (1989) explained the triadic relationship between photographer, image and audience in visual ethnographic research. First, the researcher who takes the photograph, in that view the photograph entails the ideas of the researcher, which creates the second actor, the image itself. An image is an "unmediated and unbiased" as well as a free form of abstraction visual record. Lastly and most importantly, the third actor is the audience who construct the meaning of the photograph, which may be different from the other two. Roland Barthes (1964) described this phenomenon as "polysemic", which can be used (in different contexts) to express two or more different meanings. Visual is the "next level" method in social research, but is only visual media is adequate to comprehensively complete a research and can sensibly used to disseminate research data? From our understanding, it is not. Imagine a museum of prehistoric artefacts without mentioning their cultural stage and mode of use, or a photobook of traditional (of any culture) costume and accessories without mentioning their gender specification, ritualistic specialization and professional connection. Visual media without a verbal clue can only lead to two directions, either endless abstraction or imagination or hardly feasible to analyze. Visual media is not a cure for all problems in ethnographic research, rather a supplementary use of it with verbal information (or vice e versa), what Thurnherr (2012) suggested as "middle ground", will be a more effective research tool. Thurnherr's "middle ground" can be understood from Figure 4. The first impression of an observer about this picture will be a village ritual is going on, and persons in peculiar attire (in white cloaks and colourful headgear) are performing the ritual, while others in the photograph are observers. But this photograph also represents the hierarchical distance among villagers, which is not understandable or imaginable until explained in words. The persons performing the rituals and others who are closer to them belong to a higher caste. Whereas, persons sitting at a distance belong to a lower caste and are not allowed to get close to ritual performers.

After the development of the camera, several platforms adopted it and started using it in different ways. The "other" world became visible to us in the shape of news pictures, documentaries, melodramas, travelogues, advertisements and ethnographic films. (Gruber et al. 1959, Jacobs 1974, Hocking 2003). The ethnographic film has pulled the attention of social scientists and is still the most widely produced product of visual anthropology. Ethnographic films are not always produced by the anthropologist or even under the anthropological framework, for example, *Pather Panchali* (1955), directed by Satyajit Ray, is the most eloquent depiction of the rural Bengali lifestyle ever made. MacDougall (1981) opined that ethnographic film doesn't necessarily be made within the

discipline of anthropology; rather, any film made to describe a culture is an ethnographic film. While Jay Ruby (1975) forwarded a differing idea and said that ethnographic films should be based on four anthropological criteria, defining the whole or portion of culture; theoretically informed; detailed methodology and use of anthropological language. Hence, an ethnographic film can only be made by an anthropologist or ethnologist (Urem 2015).

**Figure 4.** *Village Ritual Going on*



Source: Mitra et al. 2018.

In the following decades, ethnographic films and photographs became an integral part of anthropological research. Books and even many research articles published in recent times are full of photographs. All these films and photographs are produced either by the anthropologists themselves or under their direction. The photographed are the people, their lifestyle, their problems, their festivals, their sorrow, their happiness and almost everything under ethical boundaries. Robert J. Flaherty is regarded as the torchbearer of the series of ethnographic documentaries produced by others after his *Nanook of the North: A Story of Life and Love in the Actual Arctic Circle* (1922). This film was standout from its racial predecessors, like *Birth of a Nation* (1915) by D.W. Griffith, and was a contrast of “humanistic, poignant, dramatic, starkly beautiful and sympathetic look at an Inuit hunter struggle to survive in an inhospitable environment” (Kaurismaki 2009). An explorer by nature, Flaherty went on with many more documentaries like *The Pottery Maker* (1925), *Moana* (1926), *Industrial Britain* (1931) etc. (Essner et al. 1987). Apart from being ethnographically rich and explorative, Flaherty’s movies are way free of ethnocentric bias and racial inclination. With colonial industrial expansion explorers’ spreads across the world and encountered exotic cultures. Some of these encounters graduated into documentaries, for example, *Song of Ceylong* (1934). The film is based on the cultural and religious customs of Sinhalese of, now, Sri Lanka and the effects of advanced industrialization on such customs (Graham 1980). Mead and Bateson dived deep into the customs of



Balinese dance and explored the difference in cross-cultural perception. Their film *Trance and Dance in Bali (1951)* shows that the westerly believed peculiar events of trance can be normal and sacred in other beliefs (Weynard 2016). The most famous and commercially successful movie was the instalments of *Gods Must be Crazy* (henceforth GMC), 1980 and 1989, respectively, by Jamie Usy on the Bushman. Whether these movies are documentaries or not is much debated as Usy himself termed his ventures solely for entertainment purposes. Despite its commercial success, these movies pulled much anthropological critique which accused GMC franchisee of racial discourse and white political propagandism while covering the real essence of Bushman life (Tomaselli 2006). Regarding the “real essence” one documentary film in India by Robert Gardner is worth mentioning here. *Forest of Bliss (1986)* catches the “juxtaposition and interpenetration” of life and death as per Hindu ideology in Varanasi, India (Chopra 1989). In the 2015 movie, *The Anthropologist* by Seth Kramer, Daniel A. Miller and Jeremy Newberger pan through the life of an anthropologist mother and her daughter and their travel to places affected by climate change. The movie showcases human adaptability in changing scenarios in a contrasting and juxtaposing event of climate change and the change of relation between a grown-up daughter and her mother (Genzlinger 2016). In the following year, another anthropological movie was released, which is standout from others in its method of storytelling. *The Possibility of Spirits (2016)* by Mattijs Van De Port encountered the events of spirit possession in Brazil. Mattijs goes reflexively, saying, “I don’t know what it is that I’m filming”, teasing the fact that anthropologists can record the phenomena but cannot explain everything (Van de Port 2017). He leaves the scope for subjective understanding for the viewers by not trying to explain what is happening (Feldman et al. 2019, Van de Port 2017). Another movie, which follows the method of reflexive and non-explanation, was *The Slave Genesis (2017)* by Aneez K. Mapila. The movie is about the life, exploitation and slavery of the Paniya people of Kerala. Aneez adorned the movie with a recollection of his life lived with Paniyas’ and the movie goes on primarily through visuals and less narrative. About which Aneez said, “I wanted the audience to interpret the film primarily through these (visual), and not through dialogues”<sup>1</sup>. This movie won the National Film Award for Best Anthropological/Ethnographic Film in the year 2017, together with *Name/Place/Animal/Thing (2017)*<sup>2</sup>. The movie is about the unique naming tradition of the HakkiPikki community of Karnataka.

In the course of history, anthropological/ethnographic filmmaking gradually evolved from an explanatory exploration of the whole culture to issue a specific recording of phenomena while leaving scope for subjective interpretation. But, as anthropologists are always trying to include the “studied” as research participants,

<sup>1</sup>“I don’t want people to see *The Slave Genesis* as an anthropological film”: Aneez K Mapila. Interview of Aneez K Mapila by Sreelakshmi for Indian Cultural Forum. Published in Indian Cultural Forum Website on April 18, 2018. Accessed from <https://archive.indianculturalforum.in/2018/04/18/the-slave-genesis-65-national-award-aneez-k-mappila/> on April 24, 2020, 13:55 IST.

<sup>2</sup>“Film on HakkiPikkitribals wins national award” by Nita Sathyendran published in The Hindu on April 18, 2018. Accessed from <https://www.thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/nitin-r-on-his-national-award-winning-debut-film-nameplaceanimalthing/article23584385.ece> on April 24, 2020, 14:07 IST.



there is a small glitch with the use of the visual method. That is, what we see in an ethnographic film and photographs is actually through the eyes of an ethnographer, who is behind the camera and controlling the lens. The observed is passive and only be active when the researcher allows so. This issue was addressed by Wang and Burris (1994) with their newly formulated technique, which was known as “photo novella” during its inception but later and now known as “Photovoice”. The most important character of this technique is to enable the voice of the people. In this technique, it’s the people who handle the camera in place of the researcher to explore their own community. This technique has three objectives, first, enabling people (understudy) to visually document the issues, aspects and concerns of their own community from their own eyes and on their terms; second, to generate critical discourse and perception among the community members through group discussions based on the documentation; and third, empowering people with a capacity of needs assessment and reach the policymakers (Wang and Burris 1994, Wang and Burris 1997, Latz et al. 2016). Photovoice became a frequently used technique in community-based participatory research and has been extensively used in complex public health problems (Nykiforuk et al. 2011), homelessness, education, feminist research etc. (Ewald 1985, Hubbard 1994, Sutton-Brown 2014, Latz et al. 2016). It is such a technique that is usable by the participants, unlike the other social research techniques. And its effectiveness is not limited to only research but also contributes to activating people in problem-solving.

The use of photovoice techniques in the field can be way less expensive than other techniques in visual studies. Though the creators and earlier users of this technique used disposable cameras which they hand over to participants to capture images, at present-day availability of mobile phone cameras makes using this technique a lot easier. Almost every person in cities and many people in village communities possess camera phones which can capture good quality images/videos. Simultaneous development in the field of digital media can also be useful for the photovoice technique. For example, the very recently developed mobile cinematography. In this trend, amateur (mostly) photographers use smartphones for filming in different genres of cinema. Mobile cinematography is all about how a mobile (or smartphone) can be used as the primary camera in the art and process of movie-making. A visual ethnographer equipped with the knowledge of the principles of photovoice and mobile cinematography can engage community (understudy) persons who will narrate (by filming) a social issue in their way. Similarly, the ethnographer will audio-visually record the moments when the group discussion based on the recordings are ongoing, needs assessment is building up. Such ventures could yield amazing results in problem identification, showcasing issues from the perspective of people and reaching people of the outside world and policymakers.

## **Discussion**

Gradually but steadily, visual has penetrated in almost every discipline. Though a late runner, anthropology has also adopted it and has produced a good

number of ethnographic films dating back to the emergence of modern ethnography (Xiong and Li 2021). Visual anthropology has become a handy, helpful tool for defining both the possibilities and limitations of the film and writing for theorizing the experiences about the others (Pink 2006). Visual is popular culture now where people are not only passionate consumers of visual media but also avid producers. Cameras are no longer a grandee, and exclusive possession of riches and anthropologists, even after the advent of small point-n-shoot cameras and smartphones, visuals became a household medium to see the world and represent the self (Nuska 2019). Here situates the importance of taking visual measures in anthropological studies. Especially the newly evolved photovoice technique has the potentiality to get into the perspective of “co-researchers” (Woodgate et al. 2017) and going a step closer to the idea of a participatory approach. In photovoice, the people under study are “co-researchers” or co-authors of the research because they will reflect their ideas through symbolic images or video, which is free of bias of the anthropologist and can minimize the unforced error committed by anthropologist’s etic self. Again, visual is a handy tool for the people to participate in research because reflexive writing or comprehensive speaking may not be a feasible job for a, for example, less educated shepherd, but he can surely make a video of how they assess the age of a sheep by using traditional knowledge. For example, the snapshot (Figure 5) is taken from a video made by a shepherd while another shepherd explains the traditional knowledge of estimating the age of a sheep by counting the number of teeth it has. No textual description of it can even stand a chance before this direct visual description by the practising community.

**Figure 5.** *Estimating the Age of Sheep by Counting Teeth*



Source: Mitra et al. 2019.

## Conclusion

Ruth Benedict once said, “The purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences” (Haviland 2005). It clearly denotes that anthropological ventures and findings should have a greater reach, beyond the academicians, to the general public. Now, reaching the general public of various education levels, diverse economic backgrounds, and age groups with specialized research findings is not easy. The language and style of narration used in research articles and books

cannot evoke interest among them. It is the same way in which a social researcher may not find any interest in reading a research article on quantum physics. This gap of interest can be bridged by using infographic presentation. For example, an ethnographic account presented in the form of a coffee table book, which is largely pictorial with less but adequate description in simple language, or informative TV shows with anthropological inputs often aired in channels like BBC World and National Geographic. All these visual presentations are made by keeping in mind the habit of consumption of visual data of the people. To be a people's discipline, anthropology needs to dive deep into the fast-changing consumption behaviour while seeking active participation from peoples end and finally dissemination of findings in accordance to people's consumption behaviour.

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