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Research Paper

Ethnographic Learnings: Review of the Introductory Chapter "Argonauts of the Western Specific" By Bronislaw Malinowski

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I. Introduction

Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) is undoubtedly the most well-known anthropologist of the twentieth century in the area of ethnography and fieldwork. He is regarded as one of the founding founders of modern social anthropology and is credited for reinventing the fieldwork method. This was partly due to his personality and ego, but it's also conceivable that his impact was partly due to his contributions to the subject. Malinowski earned a PhD in physics and mathematics in 1908, but he switched his emphasis to anthropology and began postgraduate studies in London in 1910. R.G. Marett, who was travelling to Australia at the time, recruited Malinowski three years later. Malinowski then went on to make three journeys to New Guinea, the first of which he spent six months visiting the Mailu of Toulon, and the second and third of which he spent eleven and twelve months visiting the Trobriand Islanders. 'A typical piece of intense work is one in which the worker stays among a group for a year or more and examines every aspect of their life and culture; in which he gets to know every member of the community intimately,' says Malinowski. Malinowski's popularity stems from the methods he used and advocated for in his fieldwork. He established basic fieldwork guidelines, such as staying long enough, learning the native language, mixing with the locals, attempting to understand the indigenous point of view, recording detailed aspects of indigenous life and practises, keeping a field diary, and distinguishing between direct observations and narratives provided by informants and one's own interpretation.

II. Review of the Introductory Chapter

The introductory chapter is one of the most interesting because Malinowski explains in a very sensible and concrete way how work and field study are nothing compared to what is studied in theories. Malinowski's methods and the ethnography's issue are presented in the introduction. The reading's primary purpose is to examine the ethnographic method by referring to Malinowski's experience in the Kula (a trade process in New Guinea). The method consists of three steps: the outline of a society, the feelings of society, and the spirit of society as described by the locals. He has trouble understanding Trobriand culture when he initially comes. He begins by researching local technologies and tools before moving on to more quantitative data gathering. However, he observes that this knowledge is "dead material" that provides no "understanding of any genuine native mind or conduct" since he is unable to get a "native interpretation" of the data or "a grasp of tribal life." He emphasises the necessity of immersing oneself in the culture and becoming a part of it in order to fully comprehend its inner workings.

Furthermore, he emphasises the need to interact directly with people and their culture since doing so allows you to understand better the reasons for actions and the norms that govern them. Malinowski places a high value on culture (knowledge, religion, art, morality, traditions, and habits) and behaviour, allowing us to see the significance of giving details. He also attempted to convey to us that behaviour is significant information for ethnographic research and that it should be observed. In short, in this chapter, Malinowski asserted how he discovers the "secrets" of successful fieldwork. There are a few things that an anthropologist must understand before starting their fieldwork. First, the ethnographer must dwell in the researched culture without any other outsiders. This enables them to witness regular elements of everyday life and, as a result, acquire a "feel" for

the culture. Second, one must "have genuine scientific goals and be familiar with the principles and standards of contemporary ethnography". Third, he must employ unique data-gathering techniques, such as collecting objective data on all aspects of life in "charts or synoptic tables." Malinowski referred to these aspects as the "method of statistical documentation by concrete evidence".

III. Criticism of Malinowski's Contribution to Ethnography

Malinowski's Diary (1967), released after his death, showed that he was not as much integrated into the Trobriand as he had led people to think. Instead, he had hired Trobrianders to become his informants, and instead of visiting them in their homes, he visited them in his own hut, limiting any real connection and understanding. As the indigenous people may 'put on a show' for the western researchers, this approach may result in demand characteristics, undermining his results. Furthermore, he did not invest in the Trobriand indigenous for the sake of human connection or social requirements; instead, he spent an excessive amount of time with European missionaries and merchants that came through. This reveals a severe deficiency of Malinowski's attempts to establish a connection with the locals, contrasting with his published scholarly work. This raises concerns about his work, which was based on fieldwork.

Furthermore, according to Thornton and Skalnik (1993), Malinowski's theories were developed before he conducted any fieldwork: "When reading his earlier work, we must keep in mind Malinowski's dictum, which is repeated throughout his published work, that for social science, theory creates facts, not fact create theories." This adds to the scepticism surrounding Malinowski's notion of culture since the theory was developed based on his fieldwork. In fact, he utilised the Trobrianders to verify a previously existing theory. "The question that defined Malinowski's fieldwork emerged clearly during the period of his most intense theoretical investigations before leaving Europe," Thornton and Skalnik wrote. Thus, although Malinowski may not have lived up to his reputation as the founder of modern intensive fieldwork, where ethnographers should make every effort to build a rapport with those they are studying, his established principles are still relevant today.

IV. Conclusion

In terms of ethnography and fieldwork, Malinowski's contribution was constructive in concept and principle rather than substance. When examining more closely at Malinowski's work more, it offered a unique idea of culture that piqued the attention of many ethnographers, despite the fact that the theory's basis is partly manufactured. Similarly, the fieldwork guidelines suggested by Malinowski provided a revolutionary new approach of doing research that has benefited anthropology and the social sciences; yet, Malinowski did not follow the techniques he encouraged others to adopt in the manner he stated. Malinowski's work was imperfect and possibly even incorrect, but it sparked interest in ethnography, and his recorded techniques were influential in the discipline. His ideas were dubious, and his fieldwork techniques were ineffective owing to the exaggeration of his personal devotion to them. Yet, his corpus of work influenced ethnographic research and fieldwork procedures. As a result, Malinowski's enduring impact and effect on the discipline of anthropology is much more helpful in terms of research methods and suggested principles than the content of his work.

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