

**Department of Sociology  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
South Asian University**

**Photography and Method in Sociology and Social Anthropology**

*(Optional Course for Mphil/PhD)*

**Total Credits: 04**

**Objectives of the course**

Photography has emerged as a versatile form of expression today aided substantially by recent technological developments. At one level, it occupies the same kind of power as the written text in domains of discourse; yet at another level, it has not been able to move beyond a set of seemingly occulted and taken-for-granted practices into larger domains of discourse such as its multiple possibilities as a method of research in the sociology and social anthropology like any others ranging from interviews to content analysis. This relative absence manifests itself particularly clearly in South Asian sociology and anthropology even though the global scenario is not much different. This has happened despite the emergence of sub-disciplines such as visual anthropology since the 1980s which claim to have a focus on the visual, which includes photography. This course, designed as a reading seminar will survey a selection of existing literature to better understand a number of interrelated considerations: first, it will look at the historical contextualization of images in general and photography in particular in social sciences with an emphasis on sociology and social anthropology. Second, within this context, it will explore the emergence of visual anthropology and sociology and attempt to understand the limitations of these approaches. Third and finally, the course will attempt to explore why photography in particular has not emerged as a viable method of research in mainstream sociology and social anthropology like any other method with a focus on global as well as South Asian practice of sociology and social anthropology.

**Unit I: 'Images' in different genres of non-fictional writing**

This section will focus on the ways in which images have been used to construct narratives of representation in non-fictional writings of the colonial period and in the early to mid-20th century. The discussion will focus on these narratives as a context within which the use of images in general and photographs in particular emerged in latter ethnographic writings. The themes that will be covered include the following: A. Images in the politics of representation in travel literature; B. Politics of images in early 'ethnographies' as secondary narratives accompanying the written text; C. The place of photos in mid 20th century ethnographies.

1. Bourdieu, Pierre and Marie-Claire Bourdieu. Bourdieu 'The peasant and photography.' In, *Ethnography*, 2004, 5: 601-616.
2. Harper, Douglas. 'Framing Photographic Ethnography: A Case Study. In, *Ethnography*, 2003; 4; 241 -266.
3. Tennent, Emerson. *Ceylon: An Account of the Island* (Second Edition; Volume 1 and 2). London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1859.
4. Wolbert, Barbara. 'The Anthropologist as Photographer: The Visual Construction of Ethnographic Authority.' In, *Visual Anthropology*, Vol. 13, pp 231-343, 2000.
5. Pinney, Christopher. *Photography and Anthropology*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011.
6. Tagg, John. 'The one-Eyed Man and the One-Armed Man: Camera, Culture and the State', 1-49. In, Jon Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

## **Unit 2: Emergence of visual anthropology and its location of imagery and photography**

This section will deal with the emergence of visual anthropology in particular and visual sociology to a lesser extent within the mainstream discourses of sociology and anthropology and the transformation of the position and location of the visual. It will probe in particular the focus on photography within these sub-disciplines and their limitations. It will also attempt to answer the question why the use of photographs in a methodological sense has not moved beyond these specific approaches into mainstream sociology and anthropology. The themes that will be covered include the following: A. The domains of visual anthropology and sociology; B. Limitations of the visual in visual anthropology; C. 'Partial truths', privacy and the ethics of using photographs in ethnography; D. Potentials for the visual in sociology and anthropology.

1. MacDougal, David. 'The Visual in Anthropology.' In, Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy eds., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999 [1997].
2. Metz, Christian. 'Photography and Fetish.' In, *October*, Vol. 34, pp. 81-90, Autumn 1985
3. Pink, Sarah. 'Interdisciplinary Agendas in Visual Research: Re-situating Visual Anthropology.' In, *Visual Studies*, Vol 18, No. 2, 2003; 179-192.
4. Shell, Hanna Rose. *Hide and Seek: Camouflage, Photography and the Media of Reconnaissance*. New York: Zone Books, 2012.
5. Taylor, Lucien. 'Visual Anthropology is Dead, Long Live Visual Anthropology.' In, *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 100, No. 2, pp 534-537, June 1998.
6. Wright, Chris. 'The Third Subject: Perspectives on Visual Anthropology.' In, *Anthropology Today*, Vol. 14; No. 4, pp 16-22, August 1998.

## **Unit 3: Photography in sociology and social anthropology and social sciences in South Asia**

After exploring the practice of sociology and social anthropology in different national locations in South Asia, this section will focus on photography's methodological location in the region by focusing on regional anthropology's focus on photographs. The themes that will be covered include the following: A. Sociology and social anthropology in South Asia: history and current practice; B. Objects of research and methods of research in South Asia: history and current practice; C. Position of photographs in anthropology in the region: history and current practice.

1. Onta, Pratyoush. 'A Suggestive History of First Century of Photographic Consumption in Kathmandu.' In, *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 3(1): 181-212 June 1998.
2. Sahay, K.N. 'The History of Visual Anthropology in India and the Task Ahead.' In, *Visual Anthropology*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 1991.
3. Sahay, K.N. *Visual Anthropology in India and its Development*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 1993.
4. Pinney, Christopher. *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*. London: Reaktion, 1997.

#### **Unit 4: Transcending the methodological limitations**

In the context of the overall discussions in the three previous sections, the final part of the course will attempt to answer a number of interrelated questions to ascertain the relative absence of photography as a method of research in South Asian sociology and anthropology and to explore the possibility of using it in new areas of research. These questions would include the following: A. Is the practice of sociology and anthropology in the region adequately robust and responsive to specific situations in order to transcend pre-existing thematic and methodological innovations?; B. Is it possible to transcend the dominance of the written text in regional ethnography?; C. Are there ethical considerations particular to the region that does not allow something like photography to be perceived and used as a method of social research?

1. Edwards, Elizabeth. 'Objects and Affect: Photography Beyond the Image.' In, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2012, 41: 221-34.
2. Harper, Douglas. 'Talking about Pictures: A case for Photo Elicitation.' In, *Visual Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp 13-26, 2002.
3. Schwartz, Joan M. "Records of Simple Truth and Precision": Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control. *Archivaria* 50.
4. Tagg, John. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988 (Chapters 1 and 7).