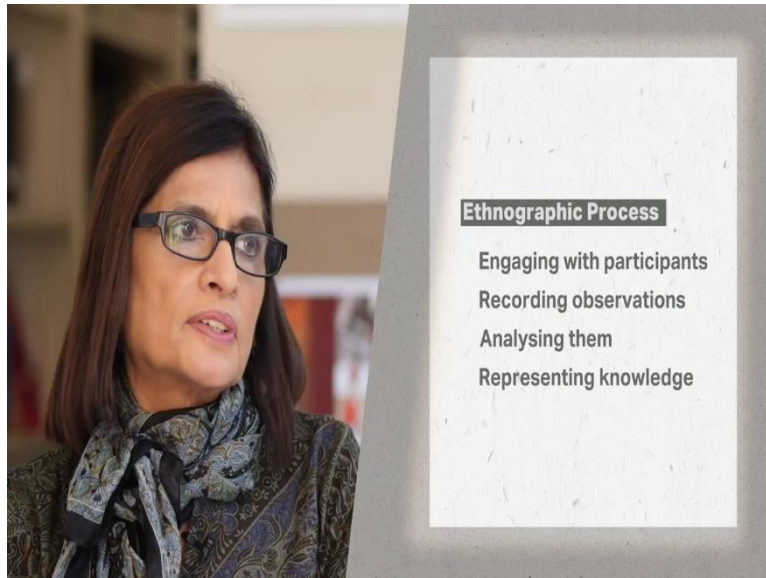


**The Ethnographic Process**  
**Module 2 Section 2**  
**Lecture 9**

Before we actually get down to doing ethnography, we need to understand the process and its underlying principles so that we can do justice to our research

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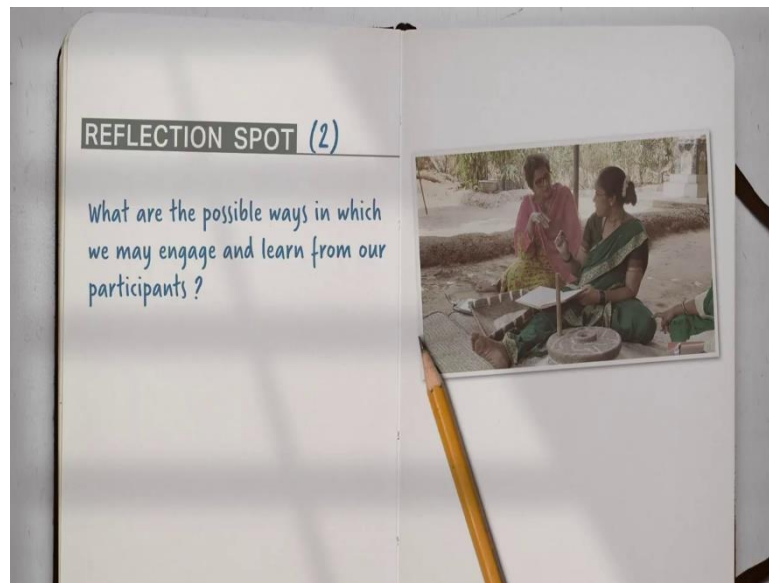
Let's start with process. There are four parts to it. Engaging with our participants, recording and documenting our observations, understanding, and analysing what we have learned, and Representing the knowledge we have derived. While these may appear to be mutually exclusive 'steps' of the process, this is not the case. Ethnographic research is not a linear process constituted of steps and procedures.

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Which is why we would like to refer to these as the elements that form ethnographic practice. This will become clearer as we look at each of these elements in more detail. Let us begin with discussing the first element, the process of engaging with our participants. In ethnography, we learn from our participants by engaging with them, in their context, by which I mean their surroundings, their familiar places.

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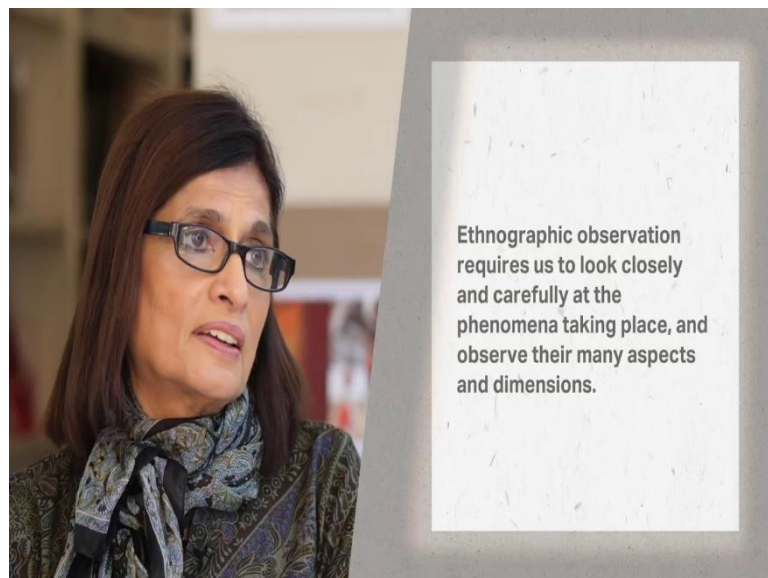




Can you think & write down what are the possible ways by which we may engage and learn from our participants? Many of you may have guessed that observing and interviewing are ways of engaging in ethnographic research. Some of you may have mentioned archived documents and records as sources from which ethnographers may learn. These answers are correct and relevant.

But besides these, there are several other ways: like making interactive games, collaborating on projects, and so on. But for now, we will focus on the most primary one, which is, observation. Observation is not as simple as it may seem. Because observation is not the same as casual 'seeing'.

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To observe means to look at the world around us very carefully and to be alert at every moment. It is an active way of learning and understanding. To observe is to look carefully, with attention, and to apply thought, meaning and empathy.

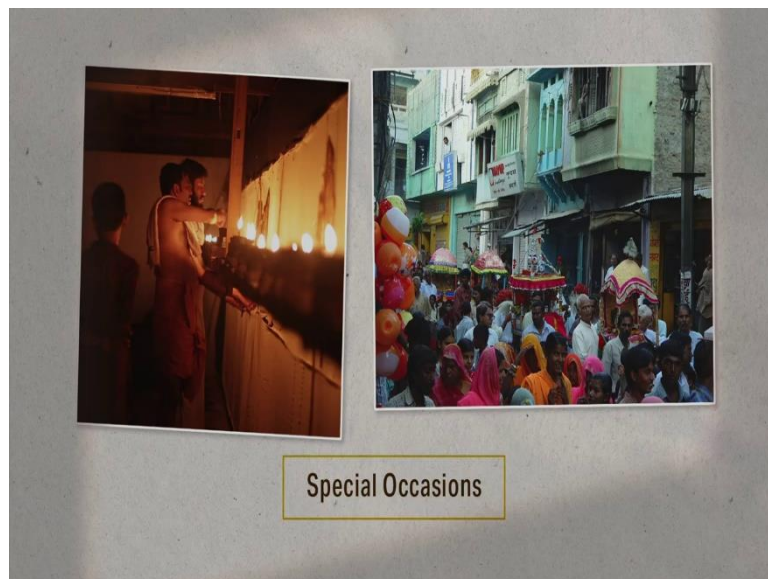


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We observe people and their activities, everyday rituals,

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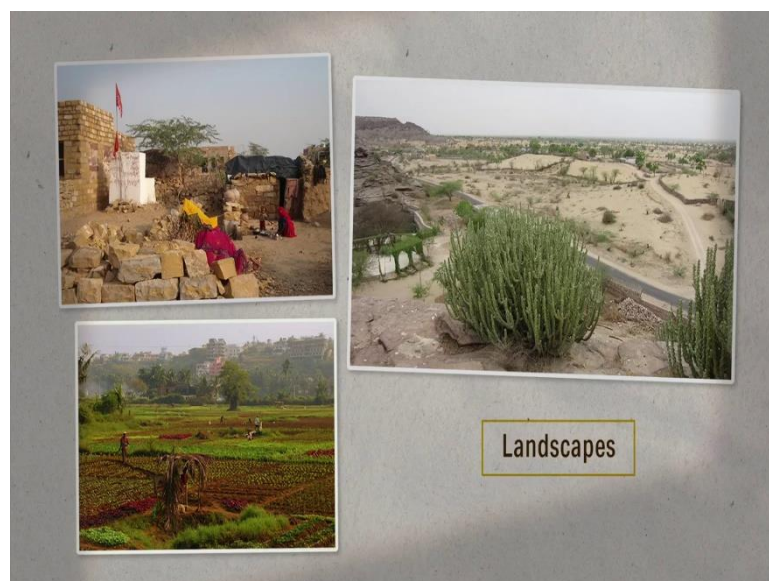
Special occasions.

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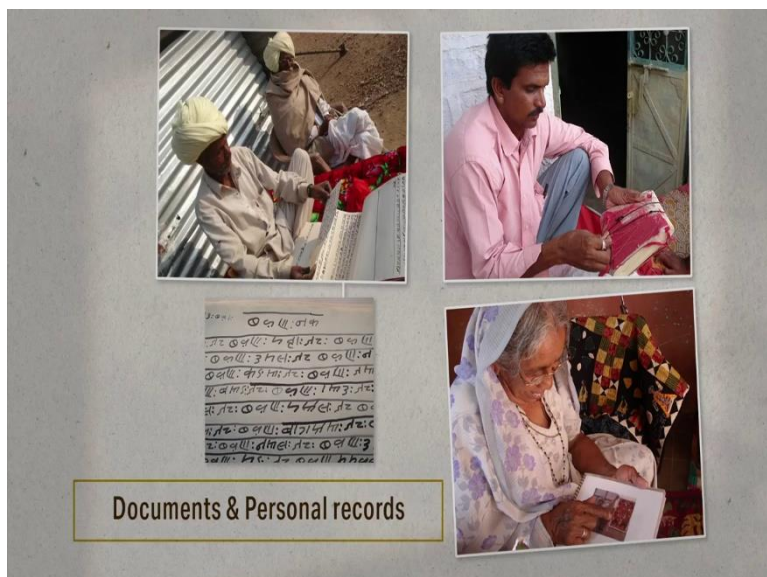
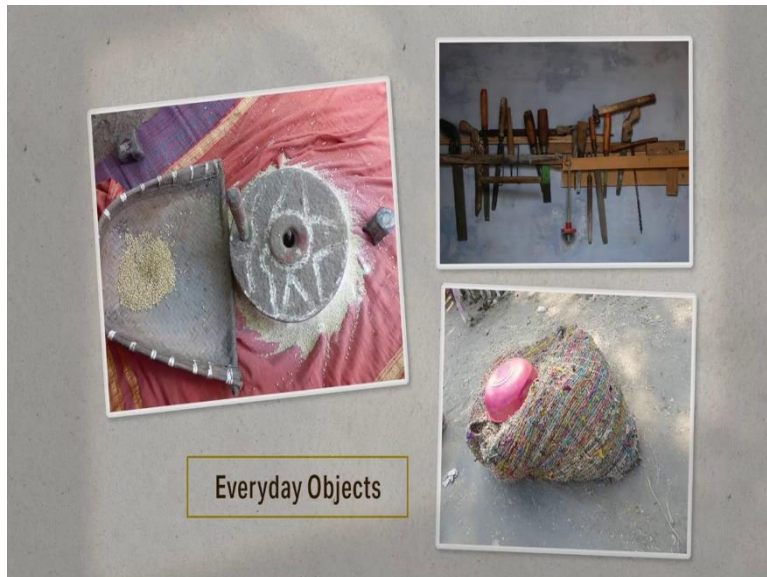
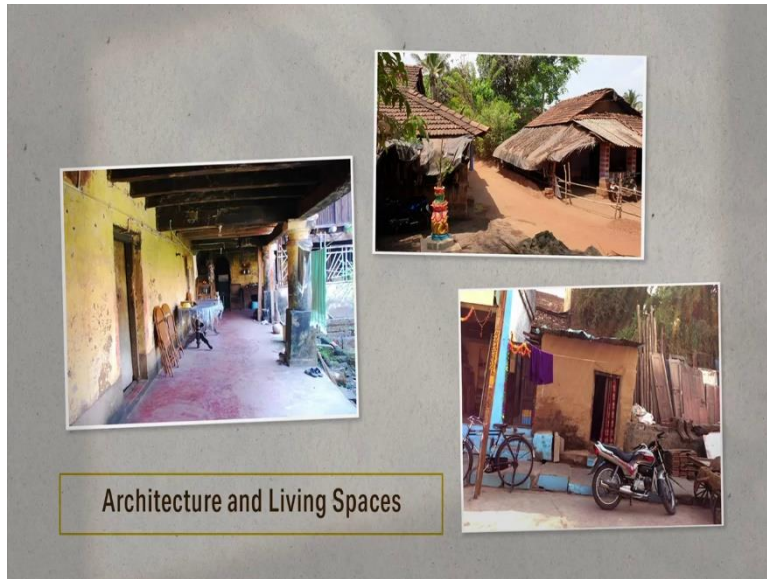
Interactions between people.

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We also look at objects and physical environments that form the context.

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Architecture, landscape, objects of everyday use, documents such as diaries, photograph or papers. There are participants may have all of these towards understanding of their lives.

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And we do not always limit our observations to watching from a distance.

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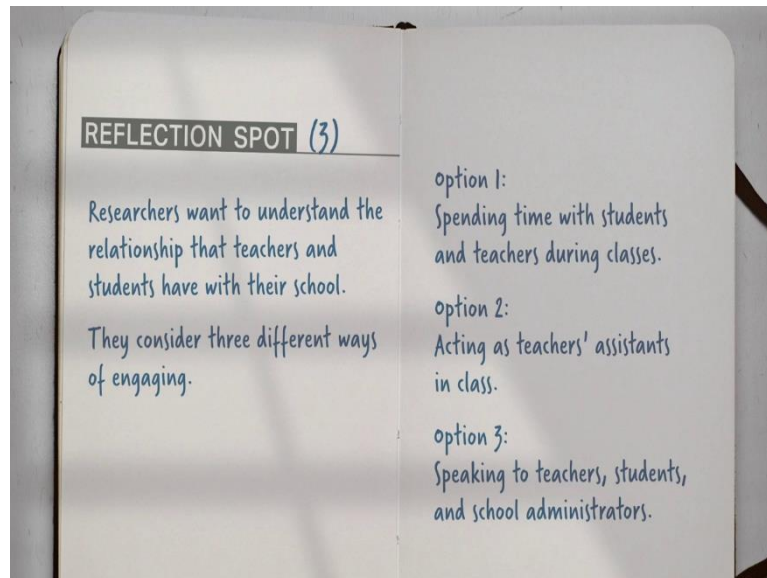
.Often we join in and participate in the daily lives and activities of participants. This form of engagement is called participant observation.

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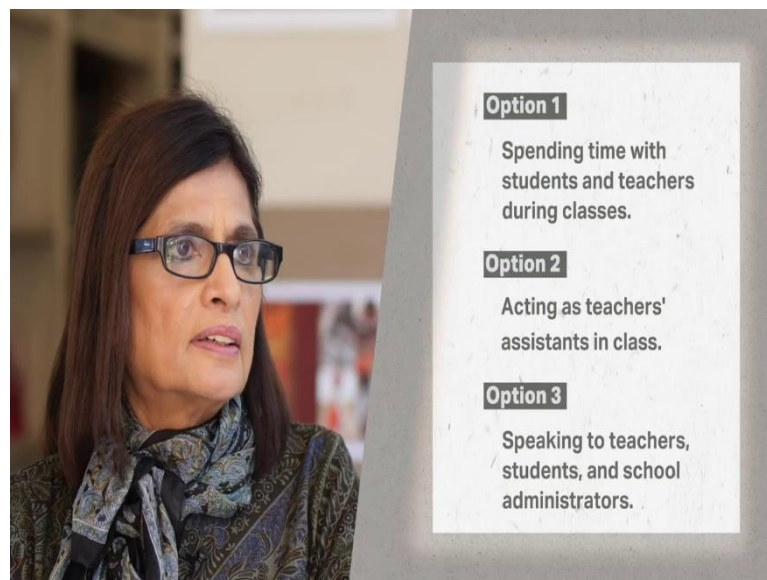
In addition to observing and participating, we also have conversations with participants and even interview them. Through these conversations, we try to understand the phenomenon from their perspectives. Be it observing, participating, or interviewing, the setting of our engagements is always the context of the participant. It could be their home or workplace or any other place that is familiar to them.

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Let us pause the video here and consider a research scenario. Researchers want to study a school, to understand how teachers, students and other stakeholders of the institution feel about it. Towards this, they consider three different ways of engaging. Can you identify the forms of engagement in each of these options?

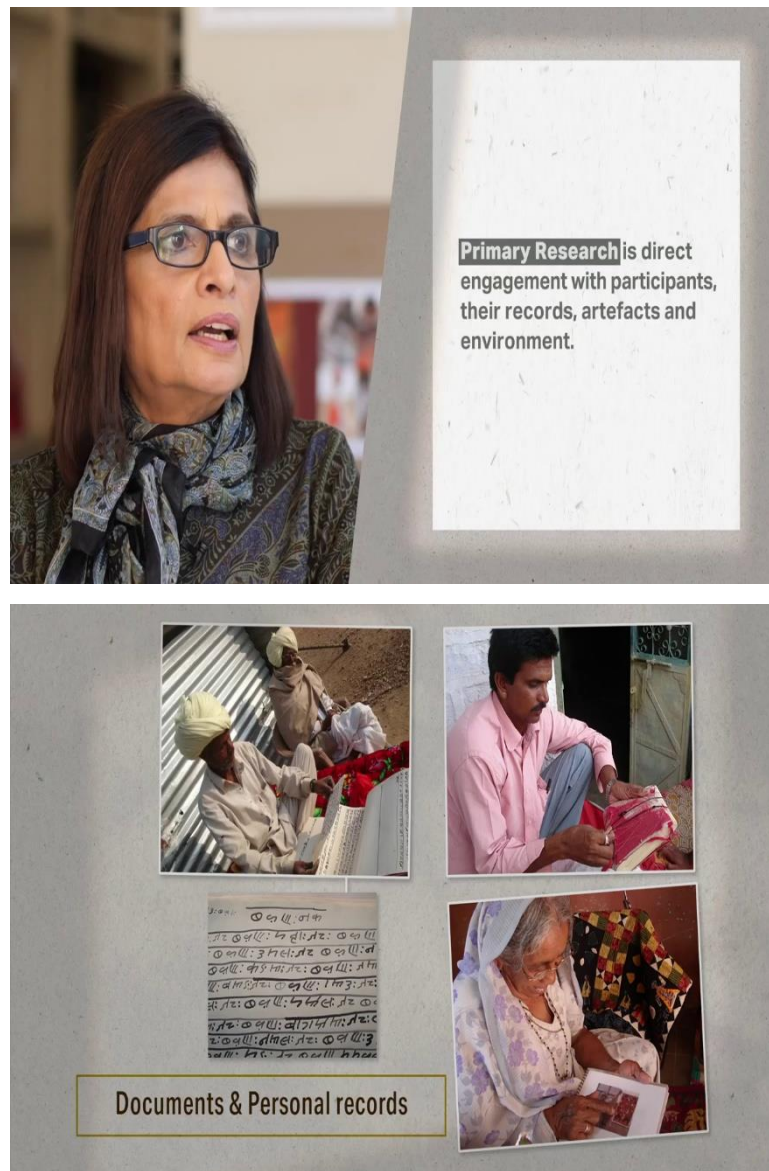
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Many of you may have identified the 3rd option as interviewing. You are correct. Is any of these options participant observation? Recall that in participant observation, a researcher participates in the activities that form the life and context of the 'other'. This is what the researchers are doing in option 2. They participate in the everyday activities of the classroom. So option 2 may be considered as participant observation. And option 1 is observation.

Here, the researchers are not participating in the class activities, but are observing from them the outside.

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Primary research is where we engage directly with participants in their familiar environment. So fieldwork of almost any kind is primary research. As we mentioned earlier, we may also engage with records created by our participants. This too is a form of doing primary research.

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Besides this, we learn from existing sources of knowledge, which we have referred to as secondary research. Secondary research could include previous studies that have dealt with similar subjects. All of these contribute to our exploration of the subject and form the raw material of our research.

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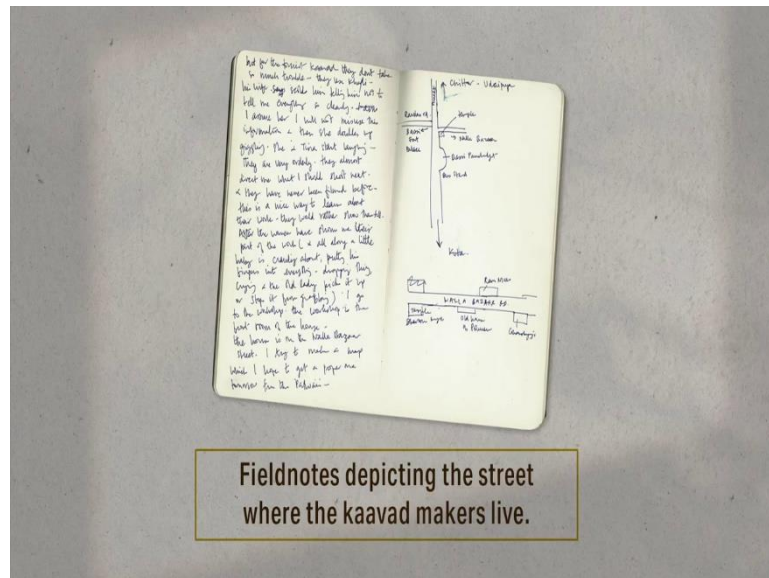


We will discuss each of these forms and approaches to research in much greater detail as we journey along. For now, we move ahead to the next element of the ethnographic process—which is recording.

How do we make our observations concrete and make them available to us for later reflection? That is where recording comes in. We record our observations by taking notes, recording audio, or by making sketches, photographs, or videos of all that we are observing or being told about.

Our records are documents of our observations. They are also notes of our experiences, perceptions and thoughts from fieldwork. For us, recording is not simply an act of note-taking; it is also a way to interpret or think through our learnings.

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Take, for example, these notes I had made during my fieldwork with the Kaavad storytellers. I have made detailed notes of the events that were taking place, even the most minute ones. But I have also made notes of what I was thinking as I was observing these events. So, as I was observing, I was interpreting my observations. This act of interpreting is the next element of our ethnographic process.

Take, for example, these notes I had made during my fieldwork with the Kaavad storytellers. I have made detailed notes of the events that were taking place, even the most minute ones. But I have also made notes of what I was thinking as I was observing these events. So, as I was observing, I was interpreting my observations. This act of interpreting is the next element



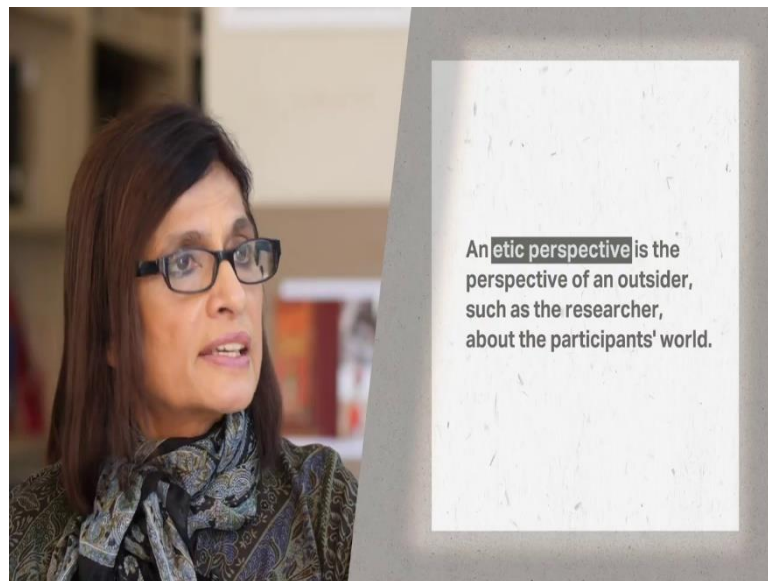
of our ethnographic process. To derive meaning from an observation, we often look at it from different points of view

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We take into account the perspectives of different participants and their positions in the context. This is called an emic perspective.

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And we include in it our own perspective, and our position with respect to our participants. This is referred to as the etic perspective. In interpreting our learnings and observations, we bring together both. And we try to ensure that we do not place our perspective before that of our participants.

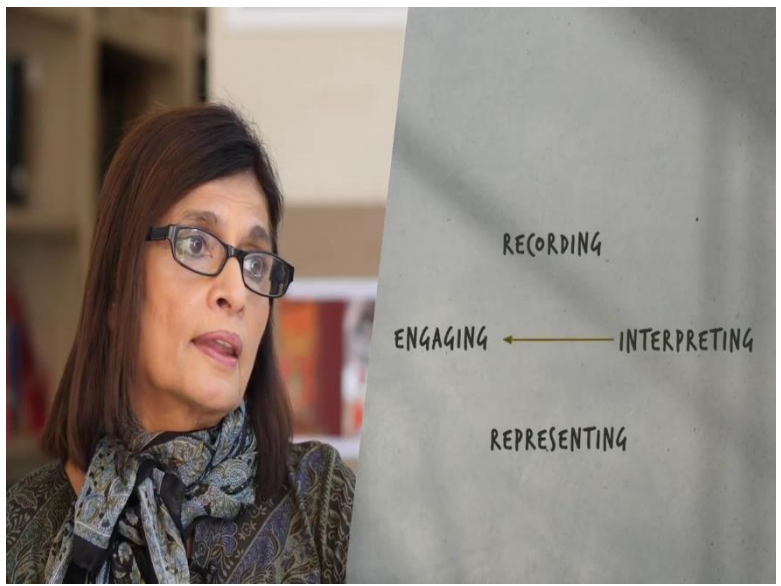
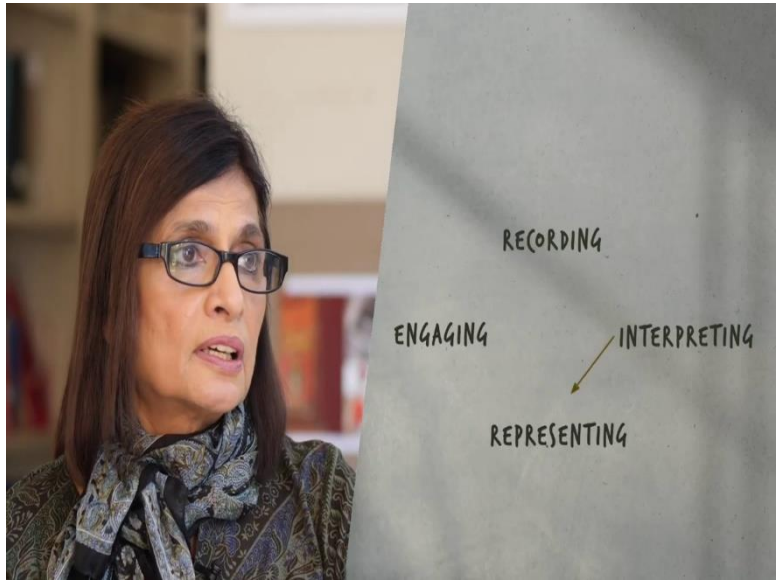
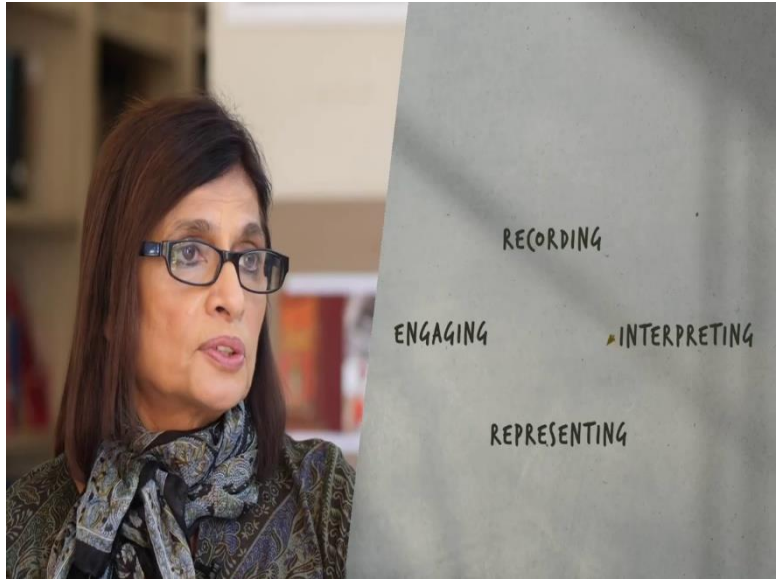
For those of you who are interested in learning more about the etic and emic perspectives in ethnographic research, we have some material for you. And there's a quiz that you can take to revise and test your knowledge on the subject. As we interpret and analyse our engagements,

we may also turn to other studies, or research done in the past, to provide frameworks that may inform our ways of seeing.

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It is important to remember, though, that observing, recording, and understanding the observations are not really considered separate from one another. They are not step 1, 2, 3. Instead, they are parts of a single iterative process, going back and forth or around each other.

It is important to remember though that observing, recording understanding the observations are not really considered separate from one another they are not step 1, 2, 3. Instead they are parts of a single iterative process.

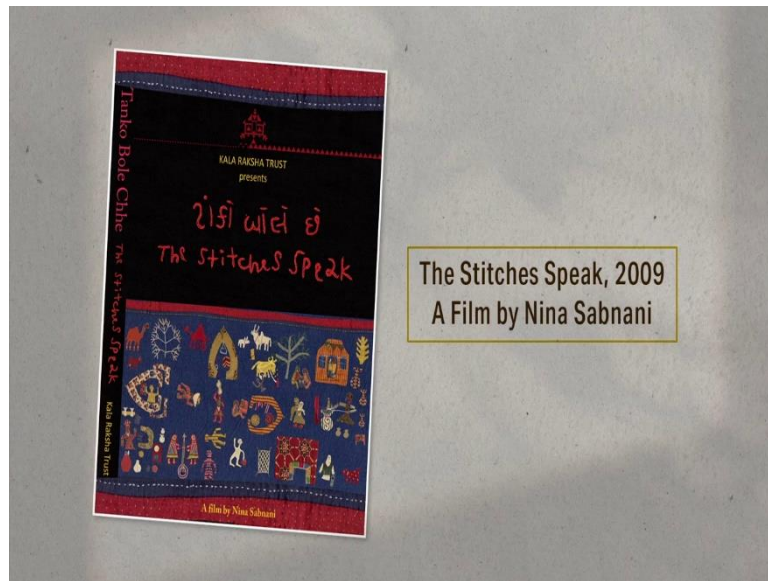
Finally, we attempt to put together the seemingly scattered pieces of observations we have made and the connections we have drawn into a cohesive whole. This collation is essential for understanding the phenomenon we are studying and the social and cultural structures within which it is located. And in doing this, we work towards presenting the outcome of our ethnographic research, that is, the ethnographic knowledge we have constructed.

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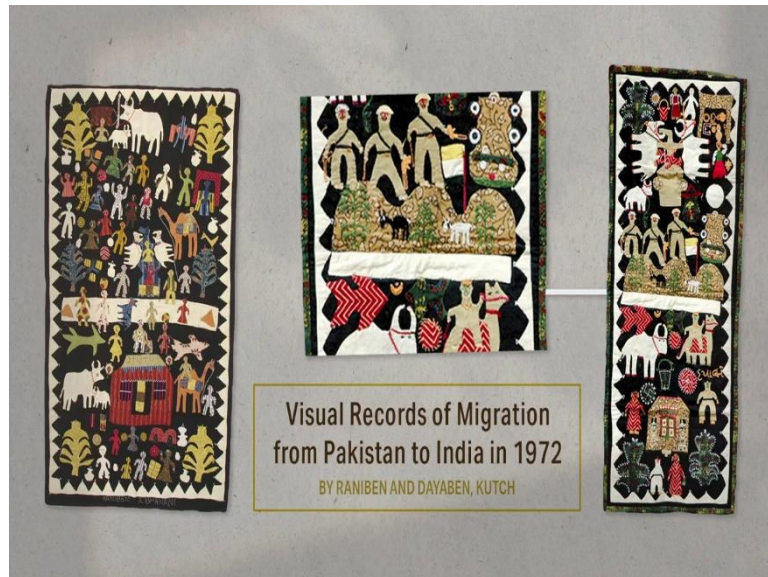


And therefore, representing our research is also a way of analysing it.

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The Stitches Speak, 2009  
A Film by Nina Sabnani



Visual Records of Migration  
from Pakistan to India in 1972  
BY RANIBEN AND DAYABEN, KUTCH



We crossed the desert through the night.





*Prakash Bhai:* I was a kid then. Maybe eight years old.



*Raniben:* We had a cart with us and also a camel.



*Raniben:* We had a cart with us and also a camel.





Prakash Bhai: I knew we were going somewhere



but I didn't know we were leaving our home forever.





*Raniben:* But they wouldn't let us in.





*Prakash Bhai:* There was no one there.



It was totally desolate, almost like a jungle.





To illustrate what I mean, I would like to introduce to you one of my works: the animated film, *The Stitches Speak*. The film is an ethnographic representation, depicting my research with the embroidery artists of Kutch. These women embroidered elaborate tapestries depicting their journeys of migration and the earthquake. Some of these migrations occurred across the border from Pakistan into India.

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In this clip, we heard the voice of my participant Raniben, describing the long journey of migration that she and her community made across the border from Pakistan into India. The clip is composed of her spoken narrative, the embroidered images that she created depicting this migration, and also based on my understanding of the subject gathered from multiple participants and sources. The making of the film was an attempt at representing these pieces of knowledge, and it was in putting them all together, that I started to see the themes that emerged from my engagement with Raniben and her fellow artists.

The ideas of home, loss of home, migration, and memories that defined the lives of my participants became tangible in the representation that I constructed. And so the film is both representation and analysis of my engagements with the artists.

I am sure you are still wondering how is ethnography both a process and an outcome? Or what makes a work ethnographic in nature? Why don't you reflect on this for a bit and we will come back to you soon.