

Linking Up Applications and Issues in Anthropology with Society

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Abstract

A National Seminar was organized at Chandigarh by the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh on the title "Anthropology and Society: Issues and Applications" on 1-2 February 2007. The discussions that followed were significant endeavours in anthropology in India.

THEME OF THE SEMINAR

Anthropology has always been a study of societies and their cultures, as well as the cultural and biological variations between them. It has included within this ambit the archaeological study of past societies and cultures, the palaeo-anthropological study of the remains of human as also hominoid fossils in order to check out the pathways of evolution. Individuals form groups that coalesce to form societies. Such societies have typical modes of behaviour called culture. This is the basic entity which forms the starting point for anthropological studies and analysis.

Anthropology works on many concepts and ideas relating to societies. Some of these tend to have regional or zonal relevance only. Others are seen to be relevant in a much wider context. In the tussle between the local and the global perspectives of the society, anthropology forms a tenuous link. Even as anthropology extracts its data from individuals within society, it has often been incumbent on anthropologists to return to society certain aspects that benefit society. These aspects are formed from what anthropologists learn about the societies that they study. As a result many of the application areas of anthropology involve uses that benefit society in one way or the other. However, the best reason and use of anthropology as a science of society is that it keeps on collecting and updating its knowledge about changes in society. This ensures that as human beings we learn more about ourselves and about the various issues and complexities that make us truly human.

In other words, the relationship between anthropology has been, and always will be, twofold. It uses the society as the object of its researches. As a part of society it is a subject of itself, too. As a result anthropology may have a reflexive or self-critical function. Further, anthropology as a result of such reflexivity, becomes the object of study of itself. An extension of this would include the study of various biological as well as cultural aspects of society by those anthropologists who also belong to the same society. This is so because culture affects biology in the same way as biology affects culture. This intertwining of the anthropological self with the social self is a continuous process. It is this process that leads to the creation of several issues and applications. Some of these issues and applications have been given below.

Tribes, castes and other ethnic groups are one of the major areas where anthropologists have traditionally been working on in India. A recent feature has not only included issues relating to their bio-cultural setup but also their environmental relations in the context of their cultural relations. There seem to be problems in not only defining traditional bastions of anthropological study like 'tribe', 'caste', 'ethnic group' and 'peasant' but also in the way such groups interact with each other in the context of their environment. New ideas, research methodologies and techniques for handling such issues have had to be developed in each case, which are specific to the study. A review of such works and their results are very much required, especially where new identities are being formed in many areas.

Studies on growth and development have been a very popular area of studies in Indian anthropology. In some cases, standards are being attempted for certain sections of the population. At present, recent technologies and concepts

require that the data be put together and compared in order to create a picture of various sections of the Indian population with regard to growth and development. A major exercise would be required to not only compare local populations but to compare all such studies done in India and put them on a single database for creating better comparisons.

Linked to this is the fact that a lot of work is now being conducted in India on the genetic diversity of various populations. A new resurgence in biotechnology has been an outcome of this trend and has been feeding in to anthropologists who are keen to conduct such genetic researches. A grouping of such individuals would ensure that they share techniques and protocols as well as better ideas and methods to conduct such studies.

The Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, has been one of the premier institutes for conducting palaeo-anthropological researches in India. Further, it has remained a hub of researchers who have worked in many parts of the north-western Indian region on palaeo-anthropological researches. It has conducted many workshops in order to disseminate information on the techniques involved. An interaction with those who are now carrying out researches in palaeo-anthropology as well as prehistoric archaeology would be beneficial to both.

Poverty has become a major development issue in India. Planning and development need to be focused on it in a meaningful manner in order to make an impact on the underlying causes of this phenomenon. It is here that anthropologists have always been contributing. A further area of such development studies are the consequences of new developments. New studies are being conducted on resettlement and rehabilitation of those displaced by such schemes as well as on the ways by which disaster management could be better conducted after major disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. A further aspect of this issue has been that Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been taking initiatives in development schemes. As a result, the government has often been channelizing development-related funds through them. Many anthropologists have been working with such NGOs in development-related areas and their experiences, new innovations and success stories would be a learning experience for everyone. They would then be a showcase for new ideas in anthropology in this regard. The vested interests in communities as well as the marginalized groups in society lead to a differential access to resources. This

varies among individuals even within communities and anthropologists need to uncover through their detailed ethnographies this dynamic.

Few international journals today allow detailed ethnographies to be published. This problem has become even more acute after the impact factors of journals became a crucial issue in publication of papers and for promotions in India. In order to increase their impact factor, journals have been refusing good research that is not as popular as issues like, for instance, genetics and HIV/AIDS. So mere publication in a foreign journal need not mean that articles or research done is better. Good research is also carried out here and published within. They get accessed by few and are often not known outside a select circle. This is why creating and supporting good journals in India that publish detailed ethnographies are more important than aping those in the West. We need to put together earlier researches in order to understand where we stand today and to put together a bigger picture than has ever been possible. This is why anthropology is so important since it is the holism of the subject that can put together the varieties of knowledge that we find today.

Forensic sciences have been a very fast-developing area of research in anthropology which has always had direct applications. In conjunction with more traditional anthropological techniques like anthropometry, dermatoglyphics, genetics, etc., forensic sciences have been able to develop anthropological ideas to suit their limited aims and objectives very well. As a result of this, new ideas have been often offered by researches in this field of study.

Medical Anthropology has become the fastest growing sub-discipline in anthropology. As a result, it has had many new ways of dealing with health and medical data. On the one hand, the varieties of health data is part of traditional socio-cultural methods of data collection, being originally part of religion in traditional societies, and on the other hand, it involves data collected by biological anthropologists on aspects of the physique, somatotypes, obesity, fat content, as well as other kinds of data. New kinds of studies are also being conducted in cities and urban areas (like slums) as well as in the arena of diseases like AIDS, etc. Apart from poverty, affluence also has led to a large number of diseases which are now being called lifestyle diseases, like heart disease, obesity, hypertension, etc. New integrative methods are now accumulating in all of these areas, which could do with a wider audience and further discussion.

As a result of all these types of new kinds of uses of anthropology in the public sphere as well as in academia, there are now emerging newer modes of research, study and analysis. It is with the purpose of interchange of ideas with respect to these views that this seminar is being organized. I personally hope that many of these issues will be fruitfully discussed here today and that some kind of a consensus on major issues will be reached so that it is passed on to the relevant quarters for possible further action.

SEMINAR OUTLINE

A two-day National Seminar on Anthropology and Society: Issues and Applications was organized by the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh on 1-2 February 2007. The seminar was coordinated by Dr. Abhik Ghosh, who introduced the theme of the seminar to the participants.

The seminar was inaugurated by Prof. R.C. Sobti, the Vice-Chancellor, Panjab University, Chandigarh who highlighted the holistic approach of anthropology as a discipline as a means of confronting the challenges to mankind thrown up in the 21st century by urbanization, modernization, globalization and environmental degradation. He stressed upon the conduct of interdisciplinary research using latest techniques and the incorporation of research oriented teaching in curricula.

Prof. I.J.S. Bansal, the former Dean Academics, Punjabi University, Patiala, elaborated on the utility of anthropology in understanding and solving several problems facing the modern society.

Prof. Indu Talwar, Chairperson, Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, welcomed the delegates and highlighted the achievements of the Department as a nodal centre of research in the region since its inception in 1960. Dr. Rajan Gaur proposed a vote of thanks.

The seminar has received an overwhelming response and more than 75 scholars and researchers from different universities and other institutions of the country attended it and presented their research findings. Concurrent to the seminar, an exhibition on tattooing tradition among the tribals, "Godna", organized by the Department in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, Bhopal, was simultaneously inaugurated.

Three academic sessions were held on the first day. These included issues related to human evolution, growth and

development, malnutrition, poverty, forensic anthropology, health, disease, etc.

Academic Session I was titled as Human Growth and Development. There were thirteen papers on the whole in this session out of which seven papers were presented. This session was chaired by Prof. S.L. Malik while Dr. S.P. Singh was the Co-Chairperson. Navdeep Kaur from Human Genetics Department GNDU, was the first presenter of this seminar. She spoke on Prevalence of over weight and obesity among pre-school children of Amritsar. Lavina Sodhi from Anatomy department of PGIMER, spoke on Physical growth of Punjabi girls. It was a mixed-longitudinally study still showing erratic deviations in weight and skinfolds. She was suggested to use decimal age and tools for socio-economic status. G. Kaur of the Department of Human Biology, at Patiala University, presented a paper on proportionality profile of body girths of sports and non-sports boys. After good question and answers round she was suggested to apply significance test and to use Phantom model for her study. Manjula Uppal from DAV College Batala, presented her paper on Prevalence of Anaemia and Malnutrition in College-going boys and girls from district Gurdaspur. Dr. Daisy Sahni suggested her to incorporate diet pattern of the respondents and to include data on various giardic infections which could be the reason for anaemia and low haemoglobin. Rupinder Bansal from the Department of Human Biology, Patiala University, spoke on Secular trends in Anthropometric measurements and the Jat Sikh girls of Punjab. She was questioned about sampling methods she used and the marital status of the sample population which could affect data and the results. Gayatri Pathmanathan from the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, presented her paper on efficiency of bone age in child growth studies. She laid importance to appraise the growth status of population in public health surveys or research or that of an individual child in clinical investigations on the basis of bone age rather than that of conventional chronological age. Gurparas Kaur was the last presenter in the session. She spoke on Menarcheal status and growth of girls (11-15) years. She was suggested to calculate age at menarche of her sample to include it for publications. Overall this session was quiet interactive as lot many suggestions came up. Chairperson kept the atmosphere very light by his cheerful remarks n commented on the lecture dice which was unsuitable for the first speaker, and underlined the importance of making human friendly furniture taking help of ergonomics.

Academic Session II was on Forensic and Biological Anthropology. The Chairperson was Prof. S. Nath and the Co-Chairperson was Prof. P. Singhal. There were ten papers whole, out of which six papers were presented. The first was on the Prediction of stature using hand and finger measurements among the Shia Muslims of Delhi by Bhavna from Delhi University. She has mentioned about the reconstruction of stature through measurement of hand and fingers. Result of the analysis revealed that the male Shias exhibit greater dimensions for all the measurements than the females and sex difference worked out to be highly significant. The study highlights that the best estimate of stature could be obtained on using hand length among males and ring finger length among females. Suggestions from the listeners claimed that the residual part should be calculated. The next paper was on the reconstruction of bone length from fragmentary dimensions of femur and tibia by Karundee Kaur from Delhi University. In her paper an attempt has been made to reconstruct the femoral and tibial lengths from their fragmentary remains. The next paper was on the estimation of stature from upper extremity measurement among Sunni Muslims of Jaunpur by Parul Arora of Delhi University. The paper was based on the compute multiplication factors and regression formulae for reconstruction of stature among a living population, the Sunni Muslims of Jaunpur using percutaneous lengths of upper arm length, radial length ulnar length, hand length, palm length, and mid finger length for this purpose. The suggestion was put to her that partial regression should be done by keeping age constant. V. Kaul of the Anthropological Survey of India gave an assessment of methodologies employed for tooth emergence studies in Indian populations. This present paper reviews eruption studies on permanent teeth in India. According to the paper there are only 17 studies conducted mostly from northern India. The suggestions were that there were many studies other than 17, and that the demerger method kept out in his work it should be included. Piyusha Majumdar from Delhi University gave a paper on the reconstruction of stature using lower limb measurement among Brahmins of Jaunpur, U.P. Her study presents the multiplication factors for reconstruction of stature using lower limb measurement among the male and female Brahmins of Jaunpur. Suggestions for the paper indicated that she had not formulated regression equations, and it should have been there. The final paper was on the forensic importance of human foot and its importance by Dr. Kewal Krishan of Panjab University. The study has revealed that the mature

foot and its impression are not only unique to our individual but also provide highly valuable clues regarding the present identity. The paper mentioned the unique abnormal horizontal ridge among the Gujjars. Suggestions came in for the paper regarding the fact that the shoe impressions should be taken with that of foot impression for proper analysis. Also he should compare the foot prints of farmers, rickshaw pullers, and sportspersons for better results.

Academic Session III was on Tribes, Castes, Ethnic Groups and Their Environment. There were seven papers on the whole in this session out of which only three papers were presented. This session was chaired by Prof. L. S. Sidhu while Prof. S.M.S. Chahal was the Co-Chair Person. The first paper of this session was presented by I.C. Naik from JNU. He presented his case study on the problem of tribal development and livelihood in Orissa. He was suggested to incorporate some data to support his facts and observations. Chakerverti Mahajan of the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University Chandigarh talked in detail about Sacred Complex. He presented a case study of a village in Himachal. He was suggested to look into other sacred complexes operation in Himachal Pradesh. Third and the last paper of this session was presented by Dr. Amandeep Singh from G.M.C.H. Sector-32. He presented a case study based on a single individual to compare stature using skull measurement with actual height. He was suggested to use a rotometer for measuring skull curvature.

A very colourful and interesting cultural programme preceded the dinner hosted by the Anthropological Association of the host Department.

On the second day the fourth and the fifth academic sessions were held in which over 20 research papers were presented.

The fourth session on "Human Genetics and Evolution" was chaired and co-chaired by Prof. Chitrlekha Verma and Prof. M.P. Sachdeva, respectively. There were nineteen papers on the whole in this session out of which thirteen papers were presented. This has been the longest session of the seminar. The first paper was presented by Eminent Scholar Dr. A.R. Sankhyan, he highlighted different academic issues confronting Paleoanthropologists such as identification of last common ancestor of Chimpanzee and hominids. He concluded that hominoid evolution in Hominid origins is an intercontinental event which was not confined to a single continent. He talked about some current issues and challenges of Indian Palaeoanthropology. According to him the great bio-cultural diversity of India enhances the

relevance of palaeo-anthropology in India, but we have stopped conducting further palaeo-anthropological researches in India. Also he shared his experience of traveling through the great African Rift Valley. Dr. Rajeev Patnaik from Geology Department Panjab University Chandigarh, presented a paper on the Stratigraphy of Hominin bearing quaternary Sediments of central Narmada valley. These Quaternary deposits have been recently divided into 7 formations – Pilikarar, Dhansi, Surjkund, Beneta, Hiradpur, Buraras, and Ramnagar. The paper reviews the stratigraphy in the light of new field observations, radio carbon, ESR and U. series dating. He also emphasized on correct dating of cranium to reach the correct age of the findings. The 3rd paper titled as “Secrets of Cemetery: A Comprehensive Postmortem Report on The Prehistoric Skeletal People of Adichanallur”. From here, recoveries of more than 50 types of baked earthenware utensils, funeral ashes, thousands of metallic objects of bronze, copper and raw gold ornaments, necklaces, wire bangles, statues and coins were discovered. Combination of multiple aspects is focused on skeletons from 169 clay urns by T.S. and his team. Parameters included bone pathology, forensic anthropology, odontology, osteogenetics, etc. investigations revealed that caucasoids, mongoloid, and Negroid elements were found among prehistoric people of Adichanallur. The next paper had been presented by N. Kiranmala Devi of Department of Anthropology, Delhi University. Her subject was inter and intra population variations 6 alu indel Markers Among Four Population Groups of Manipur. She studied 3 tribal (Paite, Thadou and Kom) and Meiteis (non-tribals of Manipur) and screened for 6 alu markers (PV92, FX111B, D1, APO, ACE, PLAT). She found average heterozygosity to be high in the entire studied population. Gene diversity was found to be 6.8% of all, lower than that of African population groups. A paper on Aberrant Heterosis in Hemoglobinopathies with Special Reference to α -Thalassemia and Structurally Abnormal Hemoglobins E and S in Orissa by Dr. R.S. Balgir from Division of Human Genetics – ICMR – Orissa was presented. Intravenous blood samples were collected along with the background data including age, sex, caste, place of origin, reproductive history, etc. of the study highlights the rare occurrence of double heterozygosity of abnormal hemoglobin, i.e., HbE and S with α -thalassemia mutation from Orissa. Studied showed that index cases with Hb E- α -thalassemia and sickle cell #946;-thalassemia manifest variable clinical, hematological and prognostic profile. The next paper was presented by Deepti Shukla from Department

of Anthropology, Delhi. Her paper was titled “surname analysis: its importance in identifying genetically homogenous population”. Surname analysis of 2 tribal population of Rajasthan – Rathodis and Patelias was done. 600 ever married women were interviewed for various demographic parameters including surnames. Both populations showed higher value of RP and RPr suggesting them to be genetically homogenous groups. The seventh paper had been presented by Ekta Sinha of the Department of Anthropology, Delhi on Beta Globin Gene polymorphism and haplotypic diversity amongst Thadou and Paite of Manipur. Allele frequency among Thadou varies from 0.11 – 0.78, whereas among Paite it ranges from 0.07-1.00. Out of 8 possible half groups all are found to be present in Thadou and 0.00 – 0.734 in Paite. Next paper read out was of Gagandeep Ram Walia of Department of Human Biology, Patiala. Her subject was T-helper – 1/T-helper 2 Paradigm in fetal allograft survival. The study showed that there is increased production of pro-inflammatory Th-1 type Cytokines (TNF- α , IFN- γ and IL – 2) and a reduced production of anti-inflammatory Th-2 type Cytokines (IL-4 and IL-10) in women with immunologically mediated recurrent pregnancy loss as compared to women with normal pregnancy suggesting Th-1 bias in pregnancy failure while Th-2 bias in successful pregnancy. The ninth paper was presented by Mansi Gouniyal of Department of Anthropology, Delhi University. Her paper was on study of A1A2BO and Rh(D) among the Brahmins of Mussorie, Uttarakhand. The study was conducted in 2 educational institutions. The study describes population variation among limited area and time frame of an ecological zone. Also provided genetics of distribution of various polymorphic genetic markers for present population groups and were also compared with Himalayan population groups. The next paper has been presented by Rupak Mukhopadhyay, Department of Anthropology, Delhi University, titled “Dopamine Receptor D2 (DRD2) Haplotype Diversity Among Four Population Groups Of Andhra Pradesh. DR (DRD2) is expressed in Central Nervous System and has a high affinity for many anti-drugs (psychotic drugs). The study found out that ancestral haplotype B2D2A1 is present in high frequency, i.e., (0.359) among Thotis than other tribal groups of the Nilgiris. The comparative study showed the remarkable genetic diversity/affinity among the population groups. Dr. Kulwant Singh of CFSL, Chandigarh, presented his paper on STR-Polymorphism of “Forensic Loci” in Baniyas, Khatrias, and Jatts of Punjab. A total of 100 individuals of above castes

were typed at 15 autosomal STR markers using applied bio-system. The average heterozygosity was estimated 0.767, 0.783 and 0.831 from Baniyas, Khattris and Jatts respectively. The results reported from the study has created a valuable data base for forensic anthropology and evolutionary studies. The next paper was presented by Dr. (Mrs.) Vijay Grover from M.M. Institute of Medical Science and Research, Mullana. Her study was to access the anthropometric and socio-demographic profile of children between 6-18 months in Delhi. She conducted her study on 150 children of 6-11 months in rural-urban slum field areas. Statistical 't' test was applied to the data collected on basis of anthropometric measurements and rural-urban results were compared and found that the mean weight of the urban slum male children was higher. According to Mrs. Grover, the main reason behind this is poverty and unimproved nutritional conditions. Harmanjot Kaur, research scholar of Department of Human Biology, Punjabi University, Patiala, read out the last paper of the session on Parental Obesity: Classification of Dietary Habits. The study has been conducted on 408 obese and non-obese parents from 35-75 years of age belonging to 204 families of Ludhiana. The obese subjects were categorized into 5 classes on the basis of their BMI according to WHO as: Overweight 0.70%, Pre-obese 55.80%, Obese I 30.07%, Obese II 10.87%, Obese III 2.54%. She further talked of android and gynoid types of obese categories. Her study shows that obesity is found more frequently in females than males. Also, she talked of relationship of obesity with diabetes and in her study Obese II and I were closer to risk of diabetes. The reasons found were dietary habits, role of lipase/Fat cells, role of Leptin, physical activity, etc.

The fifth session dealing with social and cultural issues was chaired by Dr. G. Gandhi and co-chaired by Dr. S.M. Patnaik. Academic Session V was poverty, planning, development, NGO's and Applied Anthropology, Bio-Social Anthropology of health, medicine and disease. 6 papers were presented. The first paper was presented by Dr Amarjeet Singh. He was of the view that media, particularly TV might cause negative impact on the viewers. He showed us one of the advertisements and criticized the way two ladies were talking about AIDS and uski jaankaari on a rickshaw. He was of the opinion that people should not talk to their children about AIDS. He was later given suggestion that advertisement might not have been properly made but still talking about AIDS to the children might help more in bringing down the percentage of AIDS cases. The second paper was presented by Deepti Saxena, Research Scholar,

Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi on fertility and mortality among the Rajputs of Bhatta village, Mussoorie, district Dehradun, Uttaranchal. She pointed out that fertility is vital parameter for demographic study and that it's a positive force through which the population expands counteracting the force of attraction of mortality. The study was conducted on the Rajput women of Bhatta village to focus on fertility and mortality. Young dependency ratio and the old dependency ratios were studied. According to her, literate mothers showed less number of child death. The third paper was presented by Dr. S M Patnaik of Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi. According to him, tourism is complex phenomenon, becoming more and more important nowadays. He studied Nagas which according to him are heterogeneous from within. He studied the different effects of tourism on environment. He mentioned that even songs are made according to the different types of paddy. But due to tourism, now out of 51 only 23 paddy left. Tourism affected by bringing in drugs, prostitution, liquor and undesired activities according to his study. Lastly, he pointed out that fragile natural ecology is differentially handled. The fourth paper was presented by Parul Sharma, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh. She spoke on prevalence of dental carries in Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh. She found higher prevalence of dental carries in males than in females, and suggested the need to study altitudinal differences in the population spread over different geographical area. The fifth paper was presented by Vikas Vashisht, a student of M Sc (Hons.) Final Year, Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He studied 55 households studying the impact on industry near agricultural fields. According to him, the industrial waste not only affected yield but also the health of the farmers and their animals. Even the animals have to be taken to long distances for grazing. 96.43% of the population he studies was of the view that industrialization has not only affected farmers, animals, the crops but also caused noise pollution, air pollution, etc. He concluded by saying that industries should be away from agricultural fields. He made an important recommendations to the Government of India to demarcate the confusing boundaries in terms of agricultural fields and the industry of the village under consideration. The sixth paper was presented by Inaoba Singh, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh. He studied the management of HIV/AIDS in Manipur. He articulated the work of NGO's from an emic point of view. He not only

studied how the church and other women organizations were helping to bring down the percentage of HIV/AIDS but still lack of cooperation from people and because of lack of funds, accommodation and manpower these organizations were not able to do so.

A very lively discussion rounded up the seminar when new application areas for urgent anthropological research were requested for from the participants. This session was ably handled by Dr. K.D. Sharma.

The valedictory function was presided over by Prof. V. Bhalla, Ex-Emeritus Fellow, UGC. Prof. Bhalla elaborated the practical applications of anthropological researches in dealing with some problems that the society was now facing due to environmental degradation, urbanization and lifestyle changes. Earlier, Prof. Indu Talwar welcomed the delegates and Dr. Abhik Ghosh later proposed a vote of thanks.

Figure 1

Dr. Rajan Gaur, Prof. Shalina Mehta, Dr. K.D. Sharma, Prof. Indu Talwar, Prof. Surya Prakash, Dr. Baldev Singh, Dr. Gayatri Pathmanathan, Dr. Abhik Ghosh



Figure 2

Prof. Indu Talwar, Dr. Abhik Ghosh, Prof. I.J.S. Bansal with

Prof. R.C. Sobti at the dais during the inaugural function of the seminar.



Figure 3

Dr. Kewal Krishan in discussion with Prof. S.L. Malik at the venue of the Seminar during a tea break.



References

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