

# Colloquium Report

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## 'Experiences with Anthropology'

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This report is a summary of the views expressed by experts of Anthropology on the subject of "My Experiences with Anthropology" in a Colloquium held at the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, on August 16, 2014.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This report is a summary of the views expressed by experts of Anthropology on the subject of "Experiences with Anthropology" in a Colloquium held at the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, on August 16, 2014 from 9.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. The event was chaired by The Head of the Department of Anthropology, Prof. V. K. Srivastava. The eminent speakers to participate in the Colloquium were Prof. Tirloki Nath Pandey (University of California, Santa Cruz), Prof. Subhadra Channa, Prof. P.C. Joshi and Prof.V.R. Rao. The Colloquium offered a unique opportunity to the students, research scholars and teachers of Anthropology to witness the intellectual journey of these renowned academicians. The intensive nature of the Colloquium offered an open platform to the audience to address their views, questions and comments on cross-cutting and critical issues raised during the event. The present report gives a background to the subject "Experience with Anthropology" and discusses in detail the experiences of each of the above mentioned speakers. The colloquium ended with the concluding remarks and a vote of thanks by the Head of the Department of Anthropology, Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava.

## **Introduction**

Study of Man has always been fascinating for those who wish to know more about their own "self" by studying the "others". In a rapidly changing world the discipline of Anthropology is crossing thresholds to go "beyond the obvious", deal with cross-cutting issues related to development of human society at large and establish its footholds in a world that remains destabilised and unexplored. The Colloquium on "My Experience in Anthropology" held at Department of Anthropology on 16th of August 2014 was a unique event in itself as it aimed towards enlightening the students, scholars and teachers of Anthropology towards adopting an committed towards understanding the discipline of Anthropology .The colloquium targeted the key methodological issues of development of Anthropology in India and abroad, re-incorporation of the "culture of Library" in the act of anthropological learning , use of visual technology skills in anthropological works , integration of bio-cultural perspectives to understand specific issues, ,attempting rigorous ethnographic field exercise, discarding of Eurocentric obsessions during analyses of field data, and pursuing anthropology as an act of enterprise which brings may bring an inner transformation in the researcher and makes him or her tolerant towards other cultures. Anthropological experiences should always be savoured in ones memory as it may serve as a guiding light throughout the journey of an anthropologist's life. The present Colloquium report exemplifies this thought.

### **Address by the Head of the Department**

Prof. Srivastava began his address speech by introducing the guest lecturer for the day, Prof. Triroki Nath Pandey, fondly known as 'Triloki'. Prof. Pandey is a professor of Social Anthropology at University of California and visits India in every 2-3 years. He has done fieldwork among the Zuni, Hopi, and the Navajo of the American Southwest, and more recently among the Tharus of India and Nepal and among the Khasi, Garo, and Naga of the north eastern India. He has focused mainly on politics, religion, life, history, and the impact of literacy. His work has comparative and historical dimensions. Some of his publications are- 'Anthropologists at Zuni', 'Patterns of Leadership in Western Pueblo Society.' In North American Indian Anthropology: Essays on Society and Culture, R. DeMallie and A. Ortiz, eds. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. "A Theocracy in Transition: Zuni Politics, 1850-1980."

Prof. Srivastava emphasised that the programme for the day was called a colloquium and not a seminar as its inherent nature was supposed to be that of an academic meeting in which specialists come to deliver addresses on a particular topic or related topics and answer questions related to them in order to promote discussions. Several professors of the department ,experts in their own sub-fields of Anthropology were therefore requested to speak for the sake of motivating the participants of the Colloquium towards expanding their arena of thinking on "My experiences with Anthropology ".The other speakers of the Colloquium were Prof. Subhadhra Channa, Prof. P.C Joshi, Prof. V.R. RaO and Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava.

The concluding remarks and the vote of thanks were delivered by Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Head Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

### **Session 1- Lecture by Prof. T.N. Pandey**

Prof. T. N. Pandey reminisced about his earlier visits to the department. During his lecture he gave several biographical and historical facts to elaborate upon his experiences in anthropology. He said that Anthropology is an important subject in U.S. and he is glad that it is catching up in India.

He further said that- in 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'Anthropology' in U.S. meant study of American Indians. It was believed that Indians have lost and American Indians have won. But there were still 50 million of indigenous people with a great linguistic diversity. There were almost 120 indigenous languages which were at risk. Putting them under 'reservation' was the only thing U.S. Government could do. It was considered by many politicians and public intellectuals that everyone who comes to U.S. should forget their past. 'Indians as Indians has no place in U.S.'. It was considered cheaper option to keep Indians away from cities. In order to preserve their memory and language anthropologists were requested to study them. But back then, Universities had no money. Though museums had money, with that money and donations from various philanthropists like- J. Smith and John Wesley Powell, Anthropology started. Several scholarships and people from other discipline played important role in starting Anthropology as a discipline. However, at that time Anthropology and Sociology used to have joint departments and Sociology wielded more power.

It was the time of disruption in Europe during industrialization and time of rise of individualism, when Anthropology started differentiating from sociology as a discipline. The main difference was the way knowledge was constructed. Anthropology was considered 'study of others'. Comparison as a method came along because U.S. was studying indigenous population. Thus comparison was implicit and not a discovered method.

Till 1930s Anthropology was a collection of interpretations. Professionalization of Anthropology can be accredited to Franz Boas. During this time Cushing wrote- 'The Outlines of Zuni Creation Myth' which later became the basis for structuralism of Levi Strauss. During this time many stalwart Anthropologists/Sociologists published their work on Zuni Indians. Franz Boas also developed the concept of culture which remained dominant for many years. Two dominant theories which characterised Anthropology were- 'Evolutionism' and 'Diffusionism' one gave the sense of time while other provided the concept of space.

During this time another approach 'Social Anthropology' was emerging, though the term was coined in 1908 by Sir James Frazer. Many people from various disciplines were joining Anthropology like- Charles Gabriel Seligman, W.H.R. Rivers, A.C. Haddon etc.

Rivers first came to study Andaman Islanders and attracted students from India, thus India became linked to Anthropology. The pioneers like- J.P. Chattopadhyay and D.N. Majumdar promoted U.S. approach and Anthropology in India primarily started as 'Naga Studies' because tribes collected the imagination of the Anthropologist. But tribes in India have tremendous diversity and there has not been enough work to reflect that diversity.

After Second World War, major transformation started taking place in World politics and Anthropology. Anthropologists were confronted by natives and foreigners. Distinction between British and American Anthropology also became clearer. During 1950s U.S. became world power replacing Britain and U.S. started discovering about native people. U.S. mainly incentivised anthropological studies in India and China. 1950s was an era of focus on India. Cornell University was the first department to study India. Robert Redfield and Milton Singer were among the many who studied India at that time. 1960s was the time of 'Civil War Movement' and 'Red Power Movement'. Kind of resentment was building among indigenous population. They also critiqued their representation in anthropological text.

Anthropology as a discipline is lineal reflection of societal changes. Till 1960s there were almost no women who held academic positions in the department. But during this time gender was becoming a critical issue and women started entering the academia which led to huge transformation of discipline. Insiders were becoming insighters and focus on learning about people from 'Emic' point of view was increasing. Anthropologists also realized that they were only studying stateless societies and this should change. In 1980s and 90s, study of science and study of impact of technology on society was also conducted. Now for Anthropology three things are critical- Education, Environment and Healthcare

In his concluding remarks Prof. Pandey said that even though Anthropology started as study of 'fellow humans', it should stop patronizing and let people speak for themselves. 21<sup>st</sup> century is the first urban century in the India. Even though fund for higher education has decreased 'Emic' Point of view and more participation of women will continue to change the discipline. Anthropology is the creation of forces which shape society and nature of subject changes as these forces change. Now, the relationship between individual and society is getting importance and attention of the discipline.

## **Session2- Lecture by Prof. Subhadra Channa**

Remembering her own Journey, Prof. Channa highlighted on the significance of the ways of anthropological learning emphasising on the incorporation of "culture of library" and gender perspectives approaches in anthropological understandings. She remarked on the inbuilt colonial and Eurocentric nature which lingered for long in the discipline of Anthropology. She compared how ways in which Anthropology could be learnt differed over the period of time. She shared memories of her student days at Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi and credited all her teachers for their intensive lectures even during the time of faculty shortage. She elaborated on the existence of "a culture of Library" that helped them develop the students a habit of reading original the texts of anthropology, making extensive notes, and summarising them. With time, availability of good infrastructure, increase in the number of teachers, internet and other technologies have made access to knowledge much easier for the students. New subjects like Anthropology of Disaster, Medical Anthropology, Urban Anthropology and Gender Studies has made their entry into curriculum with time. Participation of women and therefore has become all the more important to include gender perspectives on each significant issue of anthropological enquiry. Her further concerns indicated towards development of the insight which guides an individual scholar to pursue a particular field of enquiry within the ambit of Anthropology. She recalled that as a budding anthropologist her initial interest lay in exploring analysing from an anthropological perspective how a pre-capitalist occupation changes with capitalist economy as she was very much influenced by Marxist Philosophies. It was only later that she realised that if a researcher brings in ones own political ideology into ones academic works the researcher would be finished by not rising beyond what is called as subjectivity. She continued her discussions by emphasising upon the significance of field visits in anthropological learning. Field visits are perhaps the only way one could enter into a contact with reality and bring about significant changes in one's own persona, academic orientation. She narrated in brief the shocking experiences of her field visits to Jhalagram village in west Bengal, where the villagers were subjected to abject poverty after being hit by the disaster of floods. It was there she experienced the sudden realisation of the meaning of marginalisation. In her opinion it is usually the shock from the field which leads to the researchers' internal transformation.



### **Session 3:- Lecture by Prof. P.C. Joshi**

Prof. P.C. Joshi, the third guest speaker is a teacher par excellence, an extraordinary researcher and an innovator. In this colloquium he used the 'Longitudinal visual Biographical Approach' to share his experiences on how Anthropology unfolded to him. His sequential and systematic display of photographs left the audience in the hall spellbound. The photographs can be broadly divided into five categories-

- Photograph of Stalwarts of Anthropology like- Prof. B.S. Guha, Margaret Mead, Prof. Bhadari, Prof. Tiwari, Prof R.S. Mann, Prof Ranjeet Kothari, Prof. Yogesh Atal, Prof. I.P. Singh and other legendary anthropologists.
- His own journey as a student, scholar, researcher, ethnographer, mentor and teacher of anthropology.
- The tribes and communities he visited for his own ethnographic field studies.
- The anthropological field visits he conducted to train his students in ethnographic researches in the field of Disaster management.
- The significant national and international meetings and conferences in which he participated as a member and a delegate.

Through the Visual anthropological approach it was demonstrated that in order to become an anthropologist one has to begin from learning the very basics of the discipline by associating oneself with a good institution, good teachers and mentors and invest quality time in rigorous ethnographic fieldworks in order to train oneself as a researcher.

Some of the photographs that caught the attention of all members of the colloquium were those of village Chakarata, Jaunsar tribals deity, Baigas' dance, Khasi of Meghalaya, Marias of Narayanpur, Haat in a Bastar, Muriah women of Bastar, Gond house, Balaji site in Rajasthan, disaster affected areas like Bahraich district of U.P, the Barah area of Sunderban of West Bengal, and Nagappatinam devastated with floods, his participation as a delegate in international conferences Cop14 and his photograph with some of his international collaborators in the world of academics like William Sachs. The presentation ended by a serene photograph of 'Ganga Aarti' at Hardiwar.

#### **Session4:- Lecture by Prof. V.R. Rao**

Prof. Rao narrated substantive insights on his experiences with anthropology as an administrator, researcher and teacher at various renowned organisations and institutes of Anthropology like the Anthropological Survey of India, The Indian Council of Medical Research and Department of anthropology, University of Delhi. He highlighted the bureaucratic hindrances in solving many issues due to the lack of knowledge of the cultural contexts of problems being investigated at hand. Applicability to solve society's problem by addressing a local problem and linking it to the global perspective via using a multidisciplinary approach or bio-cultural approach are the need of the hour. He stated that disciplines like history, physics, chemistry and medicine are revolutionising and so is the discipline of Anthropology is also in the process of its own revolutionising as it is employing multidisciplinary approach in analysing problems at hand. His ideas on the very concept of issue were also quite inspiring. He stressed on the importance of viewing an issue in investigation without any socio-cultural or biological biasness. An issue is an issue and its significance lies in understanding it from a local to a global perspective or vice versa. He emphasised on being well acquainted with the latest technology. He also emphasised on fact that besides having the updated knowledge of use of technology in scientific enquiry it was also important to understand the different ways in which particular institutes are adopting and operating technology in a better way to enhance the resolution of their works. In his views technology did not belong to any particular discipline and the discipline didn't belong to any particular individual so a researcher should try to be updated with available technology and should not think that if one is not alive the discipline will not grow.

His Presentation on 'Human Origins and Peopling of India' was a perfect example of aforesaid multidisciplinary approach and the fact that collaborative works with institutes and organisations that have manpower and state of the art technology can for sample collections and other experimental techniques could yield wonders. It could trace the ancient most roots of human beings and solve some significant puzzles of the human society. One such puzzle is the culture, language and origin of the Andamanese, which has been a matter of speculation since many years.

Prof. V.R. Rao briefed the audience about combining both genomic and non genomic approaches to examine the origin and migration of the enigmatic tribes of Andaman, and answer the big question that are their any population in mainland India who are related to the Andamanese and if yes how much affinities do the individual populations have with the Andamanese. By using the Y chromosome and mt. DNA as markers on a sample population

3283 individuals of 35 tribal populations of Mainland and three populations from Andaman archipelago his team tried finding the answers. He also stresses on the combination of the knowledge of genetic phylogeny, genetic archaeology, language phylogeny and knowledge of mythical distribution in order to reach significant conclusions may be drawn on the culture, language and origin of tribes. It is believed that the anatomically modern humans ultimately derive from a fairly limited gene pool that was situated in African continent over eighty millennia. It is presumed that these ancestors of anatomically modern humans held in common just a series of common genes but also a set of linguistic, social organization and mythological traits which were taken out of Africa along with the genes and like these genes were transformed and innovated after leaving Africa in the global history of mythology .

The issue of Ignorance of the Palaeolithic cognitive inheritance in aesthetic behaviour of the Jarawas of the Andaman Islands was also discussed. One of the interesting facts that emerged from Prof. Rao's presentation was the eurocentric obsession of the mainstream archaeologists with zoo morphs when addressing the issue of graphic production of the Pleistocene and early Holocene art. This has been detrimental to the development of balance studies of development of early systems.

The construct of Palaeo-art is evidently based on Archaeological finds. To quote Prof. Rao "Study of Palaeolithic art does not focus on archaeological records, rather it taps into the living evidence in order to examine the scope of an alternative source for recording and enriching the discussions on the beginnings of art, in that sense it is hoped that the consideration of the art of the Jarawas of the Andaman islands can contribute the discussion of cognitive anthropology".

The available database on Art Traditions of the indigenous groups by and large invokes a great variety of figurative, (non-iconic, geometric) art, the hunter gatherer groups of the Andaman by and large exist with a geometric tradition by and large lacking any figurative component. This may be quite useful in understanding Cultural Revolution models of the sudden origin of modern human behaviour around throughout the old world 40000 years ago. It seems that mainstream archaeologists simply do not wish to know how early art forms developed, unless they feature pretty animal pictures. Globally around 99 percent of Pleistocene art motifs are non iconic, therefore the European infatuation with zoo morphs has retarded palaeo-art research for about a century. As far as mythical links are concerned, Andamanese mythical signatures confirm link of Gondawana mythology to Laurasian cluster.

Tracing their links with exodus out of Africa, world mythology is classified into two major clusters in tune with genetic archaeology

1. Gondawana cluster and

2. Lurasian cluster.

Andamanese anthropological myths were used to locate their deep rooting and probable link to world mythological substratum. Andamanese mythology is closer to Gondawana traits, nevertheless some Laurasian features are found in Andamanese mythology. Mythological patterns are congruent with the migration routes of anatomically modern humans. By comparing the genetic archaeology with dominant mythological patterns is that M31/M32 phylogeny confirms that Andamanese were the oldest Indian colonisers along the southern route of migration during Pleistocene.

## Discussion

Some of the major issues being discussed were related to emergence of new paradigms in anthropology and the changing notions of 'subjectivity', claims over objectivity, position of the observer. They were followed by discussions on the question of ethnography being a construct during colonial times. Critical issues of representation being a political act, involvement of women in the world of anthropology, more and more gender participation in anthropology etc.

Prof. Pandey responded to various questions asked to him on his experience of data collection as an Indian anthropologist among the Zuni. He said that as an Indian anthropologist he did have certain advantages in data collection as there was no colonial heritage history inherent in his approach to study them. He emphasised that learning other cultures helps an individual to understand his own culture in a better way. He elaborated on the fact that absence of notions of hierarchy in the American society made him privileged and more receptive towards the problems of the Zuni. M After some anthropological studies, Zuni Indians started exercising their sovereignty and anthropologists were being ousted by them. But they talked to him as he (Prof. Pandey) was different from Americans.

He also commented on the writing culture and said that in the changing paradigm men in anthropology should be very careful regarding the ways of women are bringing in new dimensions to anthropological knowledge. Last but not the least the colloquium tried finding out answer to the big question of Anthropology's usefulness to the society and the efforts that may be undertaken in the direction.

### **Vote of Thanks and Concluding remarks by Prof. V.K. Srivastava**

Head of the Department thanked all the professors for sharing their experiences in Anthropology. He summarized all the lectures and further talked about his own journey in Anthropology. According to him it is important to know, who all are coming to Anthropology, why do they join Anthropology and how Anthropology transforms them. He recalled that there once existed a notion that, those who come to Anthropology were the rejected lot. It was believed that those who came to anthropology were the ones who were shopping around for a discipline and came to anthropology for a short while. He elaborated on the content thematic analyses of write up of students about their experiences in Anthropology. His analyses made him reach to the conclusion that that Anthropology has deeply impacted the students. It has made them more syncretic, tolerant and pluralistic, as it exposes them to wide variety of cultures and teaches them the understandings of 'Others' and 'Us'. He also recommended that Anthropology should be made part of all the courses and curriculums. His genuine concern for the growth of the subject of Anthropology was implicit in his statement that "Paradoxically, when all other disciplines are being enriched by using anthropological methods and approaches, Anthropology departments all over the countries are shrinking." Departments in South India and ASI (Anthropological Survey of India) are in dismal state. Now more women, tribal and several minority groups are entering Anthropology. The applicability of Anthropology is making it to enter into hospitals etc. its development in its correct and true form is possible only in the departments of anthropology which are unfortunately shrinking. Quality of ethnographic fieldworks are declining as unfortunately most of the researchers go to their own communities and come out with works which are rich in content but lack some important, some good phrases. He stressed that this doesn't meant that one should go to exotic communities for fieldworks, it just meant that even if the field is right there in neighbourhood it should be diligently attempted using techniques of de-familiarisation. New horizons should be explored and anthropology should enter into new areas like psychology, medical and study of children. Producing good anthropology, readable ethnographies and revitalizing long field work traditions, recognition of what is called 'the other actors', growth of anthropological organisations are the some areas Anthropologists should now focus upon. He ended his presentation by shedding some light on the grand history of department of anthropology. Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, established in 1947, produced thousands of good post-graduates and hundreds of scholars and also its history is recorded in the form of discipline studies.