

Department of Anthropology
University of Delhi

Eminent lecture series

*Application of Anthropological Knowledge in studies on Tribal Welfare, Communal Harmony,
Civil Society and Sanitation and Hygiene*

By

Dr. Lalit Kumar

Former Adviser, Planning Commission

Chair: Dr. R. P.Mitra

Rapporteur: Kalyani Sahal

As a part of eminent lecture series, Department of Anthropology organized a lecture titled “Application of Anthropological Knowledge in studies on Tribal Welfare, Communal Harmony, Civil Society and Sanitation and Hygiene” by Dr. Lalit Kumar at 2:30 p.m. on 12/04/2019. Dr. R.P. Mitra chaired the session. Prof. P.C. Joshi (Head), Prof. (Retd.) Subharda Channa and department faculty -Dr. Avitoli Zhimo, Dr. Mahajan, Dr. Mitashree, Dr. M. Kennedy Singh and M.Phil, Ph.D. and Post-doc. research scholars were present.

Dr. Lalit Kumar is a distinguished alumnus of the same department and at present working with the Sulabh international as senior advisor. His lecture was basically a gist of his life experiences and engagements with different sectors- government as well as non-government organizations in different capacities.

His lecture was divided into following parts charting his career graph through different phases:

1. Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi (1970-80):

His anthropological journey in the department of Anthropology, University of Delhi started in 1970 when he joined the B.Sc. and completed M.Sc. and Ph.D. from the same department in 1980. He quoted Levi-Strauss that “Anthropologists are a strange breed they like to make familiar look mysterious and complicated” to emphasize anthropologists have knack of making simple phenomena to look complicated and vice-versa. He gained much insight into

the subject during his first fieldwork in Bhimtal with Prof. Marwah in 1972. For his doctoral research, he worked in Kashmir Valley on the topic 'Micro-evolutionary dynamics of Ahmadiyyas of Kashmir valley'. He coined that 'anthropologists enjoy while working and work while enjoying'.

2. SC and ST Commission, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Social Welfare (1981-1988):

While working in Ministry, his anthropological background helped him immensely in bringing out the nuanced and much deeper field realities. He talked about two projects wherein he utilized his anthropological knowledge.

The first project was on '*Akhand Shikar*' (Tribal hunt) in Simlipal Tiger Reserve (STR) located in Mayurbhanj, Orissa as many tribals were reported to be arrested under forest acts and wildlife protection acts. He carried out fieldwork and made suggestions to provide small pockets within forests where ritualistic hunting is permitted for forest dwelling tribal communities during religious ceremonies.

He undertook the second project for Ministry of Social Welfare to examine the demand for granting the SC status to Tanti, Tatwe, Khatwe, Pan and Swasea communities. All these communities are weaver communities inhabiting the areas surrounding Ranchi. Pan and Swasea were originally SC but gave up their status due to influence of sanskritization. But later on they demanded to be included into SC category. Other weaver communities from adjoining areas like Tanti, Tatwe and Khatwe also joined them in their demand for inclusion in SC category. Based on his study, he recommended that Pan and Swasea communities should be granted SC status but not the other three weaver communities.

3. University of Arizona and Newberry Library Chicago, USA (1989-1990):

He joined University of Arizona for post-doctoral research in 1989. He worked with Native Americans in USA. He talked about his meetings with Prof. Vine Deloria who recommended in his book *Custer Died for your Sins* (1969) that 'Native Americans should not cooperate with anthropologists, believing they exploited Native Americans in order to advance their own academic career'. Dr. Kumar rebutted Prof. Deloria's standpoint claiming anthropologists also work for the welfare of indigenous people. He emphasized the role of

action anthropology for active engagement of anthropologists with the communities. After this short stay in USA, Dr. Kumar returned India and joined Planning Commission.

4. Planning Commission (1991-2008):

Working with Planning Commission (now Niti Aayog) the premier think tank has been the most satisfactorily phase of Dr. Kumar's career wherein anthropological knowledge was applied on daily basis to various development related policy issues. He played an instrumental role in drafting the 'National Policy on the Voluntary Sector' after a number of consultations with Voluntary Organizations, Non- Government Organizations, Civil Society and state and central government officials. This policy was approved by the cabinet in 2007. He talked about the studies he carried out on condition of manual scavengers, likely impact of sea level rise on islanders of Lakshadweep and implementation of various flagship schemes in 20 districts along with Ministry of State during his tenure in Planning Commission.

5. NFCH, Ministry of Home Affairs (2008-2012):

He joined Ministry of Home Affairs and served as a secretary of National foundation for Community Harmony (NCFH). He shared his experiences of brief engagement with Ministry of Home Affairs. He published book on interfaith dialogues with a foreword by Dr. Karan Singh. NCFH made Dr. Shah Faesal (IAS topper from Kupwara) its brand ambassador and released a video of him by then Union Home Minister to promote interfaith dialogue. Dr. Kumar also worked to facilitate interaction and exposure among violence affected children from Kashmir, Assam and Manipur. After 2012, he returned to Planning Commission for 2013 and during this one year he carried out fieldwork among Andaman islanders and recommended to integrate human diversity with biological diversity in order to promote tourism in the concerned area.

6. Sulabh International (2014-till date):

In the last part of his lecture, he focused on his engagement with the Sulabh International and its establishment, functions, roles in the society for promoting sanitation and cleanliness. He associated with the Sulabh International in 2014 and at present working as a

senior advisor. The Sulabh international was founded by Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak in 1970s in Patna almost at the same time when Dr. Lalit initiated his anthropological journey in Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

Dr. Pathak worked immensely for emancipation of manual scavengers and liberation of widows. A training center 'Darkness to Light' was established in Alwar, Rajasthan by Sulabh International. Dr. Pathak facilitated the conversion ceremony for ex-scavengers to the uppermost echelons of Hindu caste i.e. Brahmans and many of them opted to be called Brahmans. This kind of social engineering is termed as 'Sulabhization'.

Dr. Kumar mentioned about Swach Bharat Campaign, an imitative of Modi government that has helped in bringing the issue of sanitation in limelight. He discussed about four S- Scale, scheme, stigma and sustainability and four P- political commitment, partnership, public funding and people's participation that were required for success of any sanitation campaign. Swach Bharat Mission fulfilled these criteria. He demonstrated the model of twin pit toilet launched by the Sulabh International.

He also talked about the projects undertaken by the Sulabh under mandatory Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) scheme. Sulabh has collaborated with 146 companies from October, 2014 to December, 2018 under CSR scheme.

International Toilet Museum has been established by Sulabh International to showcase the history of toilets and sanitation practices since Harappa civilization. Dr. Kumar invited the students to visit the museum and learn more about history of toilets.

The Sulabh International and its founder Dr. Pathak received the prestigious International Gandhi Peace Prize on 26/02/2019 for advocating the merits of sanitation and importance of toilets in the days when not many were there.

Lastly, he concluded the lecture by making a fervent call for all the anthropologists to actively engage in action anthropology as highlighted by the words of Gandhiji- 'An ounce of action is better than tons of knowledge'. In the nutshell, his lecture was an elaborative

account of his engagements with different sectors and how he used anthropological knowledge in different domains throughout his life.

It was followed with an interaction with scholars where some questions and observations were made by them and Dr. Kumar addressed each of their concerns. Finally the session ended with concluding remarks from Dr. R.P. Mitra.

It was followed by distribution of study material to the student from Sulabh International.