

**NATIONAL SEMINAR**  
**ANTHROPOLOGY OF  
HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING**

**IN HONOUR OF  
PROF. P. C. JOSHI**

**May 29-30, 2021**



Department of Anthropology  
University of Delhi-110007

## Day 1

### Inaugural Session

Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi organized a two day National Seminar ‘Anthropology of Health and Wellbeing’ in honour of **Prof. P. C. Joshi** on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

Prof. Benrithung Murry, the host of the inaugural session, welcomed the guests and the seminar commenced with the lighting of the lamp ceremony, which was then followed by Saraswati Vandana.



*Photos: Lighting of the Lamp, Saraswati Vandana (left to right)*

The host then invited Prof. M. P. Sachdeva for the welcome address. Prof. Sachdeva welcomed Prof. Joshi, the chief guest Dr. K Rajeshwar Rao, Guest of Honour Prof. R. K. Mutatkar and other guests. He, then, introduced Prof. Joshi, Dr. K Rajeshwar Rao, Prof. R. K. Mutatkar to the audience followed by an introduction of the department. He concluded his address by wishing all the best for the seminar.

After Prof. Sachdeva, Prof. Mondal, the convenor of the seminar, gave the introductory remark about the seminar. Prof. Mondal began his speech by welcoming the dignitaries present. Following that, he recounted the journey of *Homo sapiens sapiens* and the challenges that we have faced to maintain our existence on the planet since our appearance nearly 40000 BP. As currently the world is facing a big health challenge in form of COVID-19 pandemic, the topic of today's national seminar ‘Anthropology of Health and Wellbeing’ appears to be apt. He

concluded his address by recalling the definition of health given by WHO and stating that health is the goal and wellness is the active process of achieving it.



*Photo: Prof. P. R. Mondal giving introductory remark*

Next, the host invited the guest of honour, Prof. R. K. Mutatkar for his address. Prof. Mutatkar



*Photo: Prof. R. K. Mutatkar addressing the seminar*

recalled his 43 years of acquaintance with Prof. Joshi. He further talked about how healthy people are not able to work because of COVID-19. He also talked about health issues in villages and rural community, ethno medicine, tribal health, reverse pharmacology.

After Prof. Mutatkar, the chief guest Dr. K. Rajeshwara Rao addressed the seminar. Dr. Rao started his address by calling Prof. Joshi as the true chief guest of the seminar. Followed which he recited a shloka '*Achary devo bhawah*', and pointed out that, teachers are the ones who build the society. He said that this nation seminar is very contextual and apt. He remarked that public health strategies can be made more robust by integrating health anthropology and health policies.



*Photo: Dr. K. Rajeshwara Rao*

After Dr. Rao, the host invited Prof. K. N. Saraswathy, the organizing secretary, for her address. Prof. Saraswathy began her speech by pointing out towards a surprise – a 'Festschrift in honour of Prof. Joshi'. She recalled the events that led to the decision of publishing the Festschrift. She acknowledged the contributions of authors, reviewers, publisher and everyone involved with the book. She concluded her speech by pointing out that everyone involved with the book worked whole heartedly and gave their best as the book was being written for Prof. Joshi. Joshi Sir's name is the heart and the soul of the book. She finally invited Prof. Joshi to release the book.





*Photo: Book release by Prof. P. C. Joshi;*



*Photo: Prof. P. C. Joshi looking through the Festschrift*

*In photo: Prof. P. R. Mondal, Prof. M. P. Sachdeva, Prof. P. C. Joshi and Prof. K. N. Saraswathy (left to right)*

After the book release, the host invited Prof. Joshi for his address. Prof. Joshi started with acknowledging the presence of dignitaries. He exclaimed that he is feeling overwhelmed. He then brought up the issue of clash of various 'pathies' going on in the country. He pointed out that inherent ethnocentrism in remarks made by various health systems, for instance, the practitioner of allopathy claims that allopathy is the best. Hence, he says that there is need of an equidistant person from all the pathies and introduced the term 'pathy-relativism'. He remarked that anthropologists can be the pathy relativists. Anthropologists can guide the people about which health system or pathy they should choose for their illness. He then shifted the course of his speech to discuss the concept of health. He recalled the holistic definition of health given by WHO and pointed out that health and wellbeing go hand in hand. He talked about his own experience with Khasa community. He talked about the hierarchy of concept of health in that community. He remarked that even in a tribal community health is much more than mere absence of disease. He concluded his speech by remembering late Prof. V. K. Srivastava and his painful absence.



*Photo: Prof. P. C. Joshi addressing the seminar*

The inaugural session ended with the vote of thanks by Dr. Chakraverti Mahajan.

## Session 1

The first session of the seminar examined the broad range of questions related to indigenous health and medicine. The lectures in this section critically engaged with the Prof. Joshi's abiding interest in the ethnomedical system of various Himalayan communities, ethnomedical systems of communities in North-East India and South India, the health status of PVTGs, ill-effects of Indian systems of medicine and empowerment of herbal healers.

The first speaker Prof. R. P. Mitra attempted to understand Prof Joshi's contributions to the field of traditional ethnomedical systems. Prof. Mitra noted that Prof Joshi, through his writings, has argued that the traditional ethnomedical systems are an essential part of public health system and care in many of the tribal and rural communities of India. Building on Prof Joshi's work that emphasised the physical body's relationship to the social, ecological and universal dimension of human existence, Prof. Mitra has critically explained Prof Joshi's description of the concept of health and illness in Himalayan communities. Prof. Mitra argued that Prof. Joshi showed that the health care systems of Himalayan communities contain much wisdom and understanding, which we need to propagate and incorporate in our public health care systems, a prerequisite to achieving universal health and wellbeing for all.



*Photo: Prof. R. P. Mitra*

Prof. Abhik Ghosh, the second speaker of the session, argued that anthropologists should critically understand the harms of ISMs and tribal medicines using the same principles that we employ to critically analyse other biomedicines. He further argued that as anthropologists, we should also analyse biomedicine using the same principles adopted for ISMs. Prof. Ghosh believed that medical anthropologists should devise fresh paradigmatic approaches informed by current research on relevant issues rather than those that perpetuate our own biases and are subject to public whims and fancies. Health anthropologists should look within, forward and outward to newer regimes of healthcare that are not yet proposed and practiced today.



*Photo: Prof. Abhik Ghosh*

Based on empirical research conducted among the traditional healers in the state of Sikkim, Dr. Sunita Reddy in her talk argued that, on the one hand, there is a loss of traditional knowledge in healing due to the dwindling of the healers; at the same time, however, there is a renewed interest in herbal medicines world over. In order to revive herbal medicine, there are renewed and vigorous efforts to recognize and document them, but at the same time the healers are anxious about their knowledge being taken away and not being acknowledged for their work. Dr. Reddy brought out the popularity of the healers and their narratives related to the challenges to their everyday practice and in getting herbal medicine. She argued that by recognising and supporting the healers, the primary level healthcare of the poor and marginalised communities should be ensured.



Next speaker, Dr. Avitoli Zhimo in her deliberation described the great wealth of ethnomedical knowledge among the Zeme, a Naga tribal group in Manipur. She detailed Zeme healing beliefs and practices, including their understanding of 'health', 'illness' and 'healing'. The speaker noted the existence of medical pluralism in the Zeme villages.



*Photo: Dr. Avitoli Zhimo*

Prof. S. Sumathi through a case study of the Devendrakula Velalar community, showed that their cognitive ability and knowledge is far superior as far as agriculture, ecology, climate change are concerned and is instrumental in health and wellness of the society. She tried to substantiate that indigenous knowledge of local communities is sagacious when the advancement of technology is at its prudent best. Health and wellness for all is the motto that is the unwritten law. She argued that healthy relation with climate, environment, and land is the way for any community's future.

Last speaker of the session, Dr. Sonia Kaushal, in her talk, noted that the vulnerability related to health becomes more pronounced among PVTGs due to the change and threat to the traditional means of livelihood, displacement, and that migration may place restrictions on the resources. Dr. Kaushal tried to explore healthcare access concerning PVTGs livelihood insecurity by applying Health Access Livelihood Framework. Dr. Kaushal argued, pinpointed and highlighted the factors that impact livelihood and influence resource mobilisation during critical health

conditions. It can help to improve health care access in resource-poor PVT communities. It emphasizes the efforts to ensure universal access to health care and the availability of primary livelihood assets to encourage people to seek treatment.

## Session 2

The lectures in this session talk through multiple questions, including the bio-social understanding of diseases, behaviour concerning diabetes, acute respiratory tract infections and sanitation, and the medicalisation of health systems.

The first speaker of the session, Prof. M. P. Sachdeva discussed the issues of Organ transplant, COVID-19 and AIDS in his lecture. Undoubtedly, medical science has come a long way from facelifts to transplants and with a thought of answer to almost all biological problems. Dr. Sachdeva brings the spotlight on the anthropologists' inherent ability to enable a bio-social purview, in terms of contextualisation of disease, illness, health, and wellbeing.



*Photo: Prof. M. P. Sachdeva*

Next speaker Prof. A. K. Sinha, in his talk, argued that due to lack of awareness and adequate knowledge about the disease, most people harbour myths and misconceptions about diabetes.

Especially, myths among non-diabetic individuals are more pervasive than among the diabetic patients and their attendants; females have more myths and misconceptions about T2DM than male individuals. These myths and misconceptions may have a potential impact on their health-seeking behaviour concerning diabetes, especially on the management of disease of patients living with diabetes. Hence, identifying and understanding the prevailing myths among people in any area will be helpful to create effective and correct awareness for better management of diabetes among patients and others.

Next speaker Dr. B. S. Aribum explored the health-seeking behaviour regarding Acute Respiratory tract Infection (ARI) among the two slum colonies in Delhi. Dr. Aribum noted that the caretakers had a general curative attitude rather than a preventive outlook towards ARI. The considerable reliance of the caretakers on home remedies for treating ARI rather than seeking health care providers was profound among the two slums. Restricted autonomy of the mothers in seeking formal medical care or hospital care appeared to be one of the reasons for the delay in seeking prompt care for ARI.



*Photo: Dr. B. S. Aribum*

Dr. Oinam Hemlata Devi attempts to understand the components of sanitation and its existential challenges. The focus is on the disposal of human excreta. Dr. Devi notes that different factors

have influenced sanitation practices at Karang that have contributed to significant improvements in the hygiene and sanitation behaviour of the people.



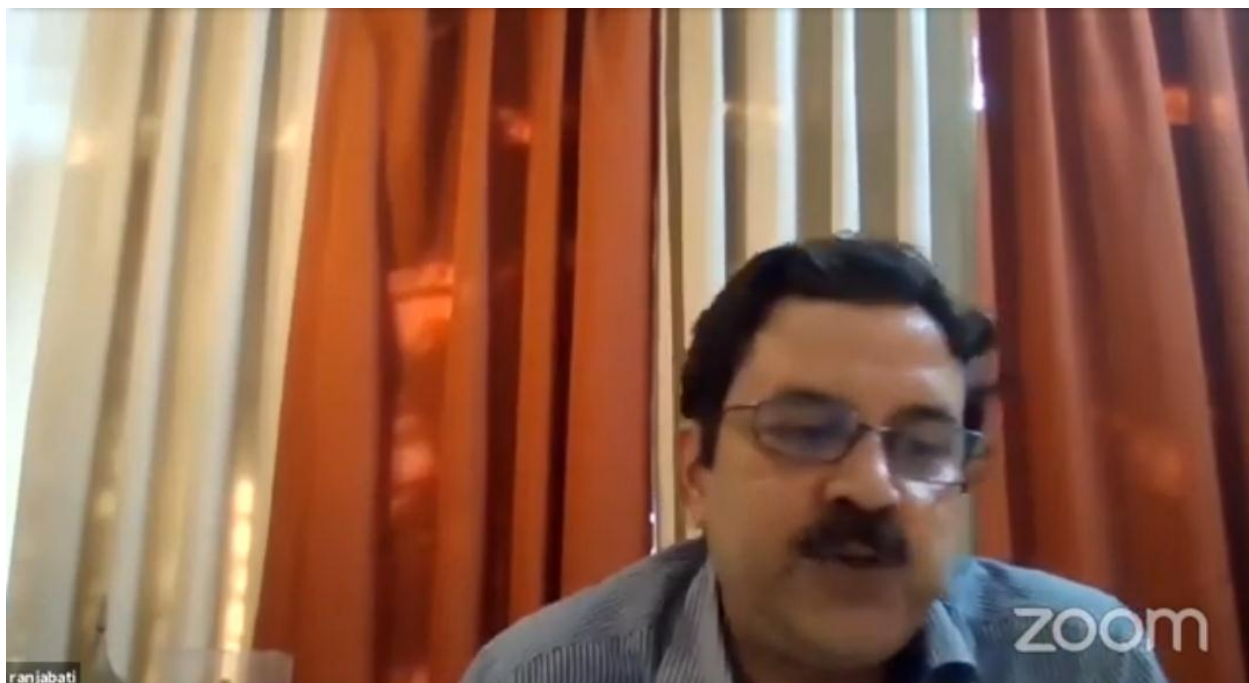
*Photo: Dr. Oinam Hemlata Devi*

Prof. M.P. Sachdeva in his another lecture explored the rapid insurgence of the health system's medicalisation through pertinent anthropological research. He critically evaluated how childbirth and mental illness are among the most medicalised aspects of human life.

### **Session 3**

This session brought together essays on physical health and wellbeing.

The first speaker of the session Prof. Subho Roy attempted to delineate how culture influences the actual lifestyle pattern and eventually shapes body composition and blood pressure levels among the members of an ethnic group. Prof. Roy suggests that ethnic diversity remains embedded in cultural behaviour and practices regarding concerns over health and obesity, hypertension, and associated lifestyle pattern. Moreover, such practices rooted in the belief system of an ethnic group are likely to delineate the health condition of the group members.



*Photo: Prof. Subho Roy*

Prof. Benrithung Murry discussed the challenges and prospects of the screening programmes on  $\beta$ -thalassemia around the world with special focus on the Indian context as India is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic nation.

Prof. Roumi Deb reviewed and analysed the prevalence of Beta Thalassemia in the world and India and provides a road map for possible interventions that will help control the disorder in India.

Based on a detailed literature review Dr. Shivani Chandel tried to understand the association between psycho-social stress and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) among farmers. She argued that there is a need to develop ergonomic intervention and community-based awareness programs among farmers to cope with high-stress levels. Future research should focus on understanding the etiological role of psycho-social stress in the development of chronic MSDs.

Dr. P. Venkatramana in his study, recruited a total of 900 subjects representing three endogamous populations: Reddy, Golla and Madiga of Chittoor district Andhra Pradesh to find out the effect of gender, ethnicity, and residence on 38 anthropometric variables/indices. He evaluated the effect of gender, ethnicity and residence on anthropometric parameters/indices



using a two-way multivariate analysis of variance. The paper showed that gender, ethnicity and residence variables in combination also influence the anthropometric variables/indices contributing 0.9% to 5.7% variation in anthropometric variables/ indices.



*Photo: Dr. P. Venkatramana*

## **Day 2**

### **Session 4**

Over the years, psychological health & wellbeing have become an essential area in health anthropology studies. This of the seminar dealt with the psychological health & wellbeing among adolescents in conflict zones, infertile women and disabled children in an institutional setting.

By reviewing recent literature on mental health of adolescents, caught amidst political conflict, the first speaker Dr. Urfat Anjem Mir critically discussed trauma experiences due to exposure to political conflict. Furthermore, by presenting research-based evidence, the speaker highlighted the need for an individual-centric, socially mediated and culturally applicable approach to studying trauma and mental health among adolescents.



*Photo: Dr. Urfat Anjem Mir*

Infertility affects millions of individuals and couples globally. Dr. Chakraverti Mahajan attempted to understand how infertility impacts North Indian women's psychological health and



*Photo: Dr. Chakraverti Mahajan*

wellbeing. Based on a case-control study, the speaker found a high prevalence of depression, anxiety, stress, and poor psychological and emotional wellbeing among females with infertility

compared to females in the control group. He argued that healthcare professionals should also pay attention to this aspect and consider psychological counselling and psychiatric help them.

Dr. Mitashree Srivastava, in her lecture, explored the issue of adopting children with special needs in India and delved deeper into their mental health & well-being. She argued that laws governing the adoption of children with special needs are stringent and time-consuming, which often become an impediment in their timely adoption, affecting their mental health & wellbeing.



*Photo: Dr. Mitashree Srivastava*

## **Session 5**

This session contained lectures on various other dimensions of women's health and wellbeing, including folate supplementation programme for women, social epidemiology of maternal health, quality of life of disaster struck women, menstruation issues and sustainability.

The first speaker of the session, Prof. K. N. Saraswathy attempted to understand the importance of folic acid supplementation in the Indian context. Since supplementation is a foreign exposure to the fetus which governs the outcomes for the next two generations via genetic and epigenetic modulations, the speaker argued that the nationwide evaluation of the effectiveness of this indiscriminate intervention is the need of the hour.



*Photo: Prof. K. N. Saraswathy*

Dr. Vipin Gupta in his talk highlighted that the pattern of health and disease in a community reflects the unequal distribution of benefits and risks. The analysis of social inequalities in terms



*Photo: Dr. Vipin Gupta*

of health is complicated by socio-cultural diversity within and between communities. He argued that social epidemiologists and medical anthropologists can disentangle these complexities in data collection by developing novel research methods and analytical strategies.

Dr. Minakshi attempted to analyse the Quality of life (QoL) in physical health and mental health functioning among women in Kosi flood-affected Bihar, India. The speaker found out that illiteracy and financial crisis in the form of loan burden were the predictors of poor Quality of Life in affected people.



*Photo:Dr. Minakshi*

Dr. M. Kennedy Singh attempted to understand the practices related to menstruation in the state of Assam with particular reference to the puberty ritual called TuloniBiya and its implication on young adolescent girls. The lecture reveals that though the young girls are found to be well aware of the menstruation process due to the practice of TuloniBiya yet misconceptions still prevail among them as people tend to avoid discussion on menstruation. Therefore, it demands more scientific discussion on this subject matter to remove misconceptions.

Dr. Kalindi Sharma highlighted that within the discourse of environmental management, women have been considered sine qua non ingredient. She critically explored, through paradigms of

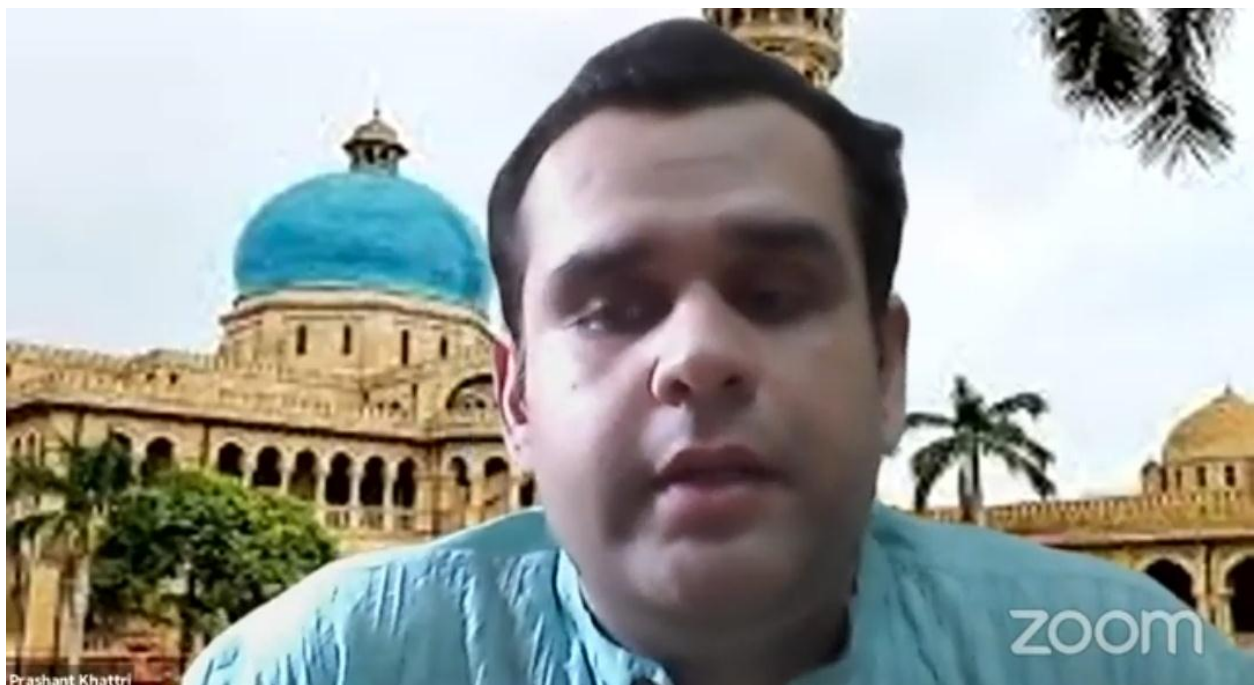


ecofeminism, locations of gender vis-à-vis sustainable development focusing on women's health and wellbeing in India.

### **Session 6**

The lectures in the seminar coincided with a critical event in world history. The coronavirus pandemic has raised many questions for anthropologists interested in studying shared humanity and its welfare. Session 6 of the seminar dealt with some of the critical questions related to the pandemic and its implications for humans and other beings.

Dr. Prashant Khattri, in his talk, compared the pandemic with a disaster. He argued that disasters have been defined as events where the coping capacity of the affected population is challenged. The COVID-19 pandemic, the essay argued, qualifies under this definition, and the management of a medical emergency is being done using the Disaster Management Act, 2005 at the national level. Dr. Khattri advocated that the field of disaster studies offers a wide range of concepts and theories to conceptualise the pandemic and provides a wide lens to comprehensively understand the pandemic, and opens up the scope for a critical understanding of the situation.

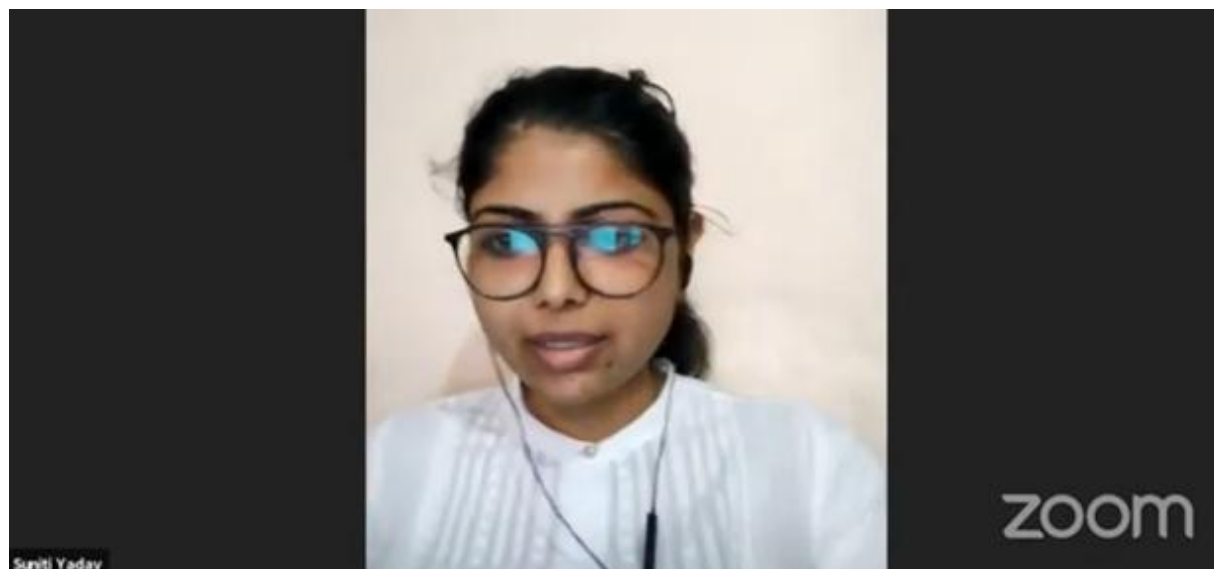


*Photo: Dr. Prashant Khatri*

Prof. P. R. Mondal highlighted that COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease. For studying the pathogenesis and medical biology of viral diseases, non-human primate models have been utilized. However, unlike in humans, no single non-human primate model can be sufficient to recognise the pathogenesis of this virus. So for this reason, several non-human primate models have been utilised to understand this virus's molecular mechanisms and pathogenesis. He argued that it is evident from studies that African and Asian monkeys and apes are much more susceptible to COVID-19 disease than American monkeys. He advocated that measures and precautions must be taken by the scientists dealing with these non-human primates for their survival or endurance during the times of COVID-19.

Dr. Naorem Kiranmala Devi tried to understand the direct and indirect risks posed by COVID-19 on maternal and child health in both the short and long term with the help of a detailed literature review. She also compared the effect of SARS-CoV-2 with other coronaviruses on pregnancy. She discovered that the direct effect of the incidence of COVID-19 on pregnancy is not as severe as SARS or MERS. However, the indirect effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal and child health is of socioeconomic in nature. The COVID-19 has led to shortage of maternal and child health care, and unavailability of healthy food during lockdown and psychological turmoil can be far more critical. She suggests that long term epigenetic implications cannot be ruled out.

Dr. Suniti Yadav in her lecture argued that anthropologists have a significant role to play in the



*Photo: Dr. Suniti Yadav*

success of vaccination drives. She suggested an urgent need to understand the community behaviour towards vaccine acceptance and bridge the gap between the community and healthcare systems. She argued that social scientists, including anthropologists, should undertake rapid studies to understand individuals and communities' dilemmas, confusion, fears, and indecisiveness. She advocated a multipronged approach by augmenting the agendas from vaccine coverage for immunity to the end of the pandemic at this crucial juncture of human history.

### **Valedictory Session**

Dr. Kiranmala Devi invited Prof. M. P. Sachdeva for his remarks. Prof. Sachdeva welcomed the chief guest, guest of honour, and other guests he then handed over the dais to Prof. Mitra. Prof. Mitra outlined an overview of the seminar and recounted the key takeaways. Dr. Mahajan further summarized the proceedings of the seminar.

The host then invited the guest of honour Prof. A. K. Kalla for his address. Prof. Kalla recalled the youth years of Prof. Joshi. He mentioned that he was the one who selected him at IHBAS and later at DU as well. Prof. Kalla mentioned that Prof. Joshi was shy but hardworking as a student. He concluded his remarks by acknowledging multifaceted personality of Prof. Joshi.



*Photo: Prof. A. K. Kalla*

Dr. Devi then invited Prof. Behera to address the audience. In his address Prof. Behera recalled his association with Prof. Joshi. He recounted the admirable qualities of Prof. Joshi. He discussed the charismatic leadership qualities of Prof. Joshi. He called Prof. Joshi a ‘wonderful innovator.’ He concluded his remarks by expressing his desire to see Prof. Joshi as the full time vice chancellor.



*Photo: Prof. D. K. Behera*

After Prof. Behera, Prof. Marwah addressed the audience. Prof. Marwah talked about the student years of Prof. Joshi. He recalled the field work of Prof. Joshi on Khasa community. He remarked that Prof. Joshi is a kind friend. In the end of his speech he wishes that Prof. should become the full time vice chancellor.

Dr. Devi, then invited Prof. Joshi for his speech. Prof. Joshi started his speech by exclaiming that he felt ‘pampered’. He stated that future of medical anthropology is secured with Prof. Mitra and Dr. Mahajan at helm. According to him ‘healing is not mere taking of medicines.’ He further stated that a lot of studies has been done on health seeking behaviour and anthropologists have been interested in knowing why people go for a particular healing tradition. He explained that we need to understand the patient’s perspective on what are outcomes when a particular tradition is chosen. According to him anthropologists need to come to the center stage and negotiate

between different healing traditions. He said he felt relieved after listening to various presenters as the seminar made him believe that future of medical anthropology is in safe hands.

Finally, Dr. Suniti Yadav read out the vote of thanks which marked the culmination of seminar.



*Photo: Valedictory Session*

***End of Report***