

One Day Seminar Report

ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY: CHALLENGES AND ROAD AHEAD



SEMINAR IN HONOUR OF PROF. SUBHADRA CHANNA

Organized by: DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
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A one day seminar was held at the Department of Anthropology on 28th October 2016 on 'Environmental Anthropology Today: Challenges and Road Ahead' to discuss the discipline's commitment to environment and the challenges we as mankind face today. The Seminar was held in honor of Prof Subhadra Channa who is superannuating on 31st October 2016. Keeping up with the tradition of the Department to hold a Seminar to honor the outgoing faculty, this Seminar too was a success.

The Seminar was convened and anchored by Dr R. P.Mitra and chaired by Prof I .S Marwah in the presence of other faculty members. Prof.V.K.Srivastava, Head of the Department, Prof. P.CJoshi, senior faculty member and D.rKumkum Srivastava, senior faculty member, Janaki Devi Memorial College graced the occasion. Also present were guest speaker Dr. Rukshana Zaman from IGNOU, and Mr. Bhriгу from Centre for Culture, Media and Governance, Jamia Milia Islamia.

In the welcome address Dr. R. P.Mitra, acknowledged Prof. Subhadra Channa's immense contribution to the discipline especially to Environmental Anthropology. He further added that the current concerns of various disciplines on environmental issues have long been part of Anthropology. He while introducing the theme of the seminar also reflected on some of the classic studies where anthropologists have shown human-nature relationship and how environment had always been one of the central themes in Anthropology. He while highlighting Prof. Subhadra Channa's contributions also expressed that holding a one day seminar in honor of retiring colleagues was the best way to show gratitude and respect for the

colleague and his/her work. Prof. Channa has made significant contribution in the fields of gender, marginalization studies and cultural ecology. Her passion for environment and its associated concerns led the organizing committee to choose the environment as the theme of the seminar. He further expressed gratitude towards the department and the university for funding all the seminars that are organized.

In his inaugural address senior anthropologist and a former faculty member Prof. I.S.Marwah reflected that Anthropology's concern with the environment has been very long. Numerous anthropologists have contributed to relation between man and environment. He further added that in contemporary times' environmental concerns like climate change, pollution and global warming are highlighted and Anthropology as a discipline has enabled us to address these issues at the local and global level. Prof Marwah in his address encouraged the young research scholars to engage in a dedicated research on Environmental Anthropology to meet the challenges of the present society especially the climate change challenges that the human society faces today. He opined that the sub fields within Anthropology could effectively address the environmental concerns.

Prof.V.K.Srivastava in his address reminisced that in his tenure as the Head of the Department four of his colleagues have retired and each time the Department's tradition of holding a seminar to honor the retiring colleague has been followed. Praising Prof. Subhadra Channa as a prolific, dedicated and hardworking colleague he added that her work covers large arena and her contribution should be brought out in the form of a compendium for reference for future anthropologists. He added that Prof.Channa has carried out intensive field work in very different field sites like the Jad Bhotiyas of the Himalayas and the Washmen community of Delhi. These contrasting ethnographically richworks have been produced as books by well known publishers. He encouraged the younger generation of scholars to learn from such works and focus on newer fragments of Environmental Anthropology like Resource Management, Ecological Development, Man-Environment conflict and Reviving Indigenous ethics. He further added that all environmental studies are essentially anthropological studies. The challenges that the environment faces today is because of the increased interference of man with the nature. And the challenges we face today is because of the disruption of the delicate ecological balance which cannot be restored unless the social component of the environment is addressed.



In her keynote address Prof. Subhadra Channa, while sharing her journey in the Department reminisced that Dr.V.C.Channa had introduced two sub themes i.e. Ecological Anthropology and Psychological Anthropology in the Department and the Delhi's Anthropology Department was the first to introduce these two sub themes.

She also told that she could relate to Ecological Anthropology with much ease and has taught the course in the Department for many years now. She opined that environment studies cannot be done without considering the social component. Giving example of the Yamuna River she shared her experiences that progressive concretization and the removal of green cover has led to the complete deterioration of the Yamuna and the surrounding ecosystem. She forcefully argued that the debate on development and environment has always talked of expansion and construction of infrastructure like building of dams and river linking but never examines on the conservation or judicious use of resources. She further added that with the judicious use of resources it is also necessary to address the issues of inequalities and marginalization. And Anthropology as a discipline not only focuses on the environment and its related concerns but also addresses the inequality and marginalization with respect to availability and affordability of resources. She strongly voted that an academic analysis especially in environmental studies should be separated from ones' political ideologies and since anthropologists are morally involved to the cause of environment, this legacy should be carried forward by the young faculty members and research scholars.

In his presentation on Human-Wildlife Conflict, Prof.P.C.Joshi, challenged the anthropocentric ideas i.e. superiority of human beings over non-human living beings. This disparity has led to the exploitation of nature and non-human living beings by the humans leading to environmental degradation and global warming. Prof Joshi enumerated numerous examples to argue that the scientific system of environmental management and scientific forestry which has anthropocentric orientation has led to destruction of natural biodiversity. This is in contrast to the traditional/tribal perspective on environmental management which is integrative and holistic and such a notion of environment is ahead of the post-modern idea of environment and ecology. The presentation offered examples from Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve where this traditional and scientific view of the biosphere has been quite apparent. The paper further talked of the human-wild animal conflict which recently been an area of

concern due to deforestation, poaching and urbanization in spite of Government's adequate focus on wildlife management program. And Anthropology as a discipline favors and respects the traditional wisdom for wildlife management. A case of Khos inhabiting Jaunsar Bawar region of the Dehradun district in the state of Uttarakhand presented by Prof. Joshi reflected that all the wild animals are considered children of the jungle fairy goddess and human beings have no right over jungle animals and thus the human-wild animal conflict is missing among the Khos. The human wildlife conflict arises because of the human interference with the wild habitat and the traditional wildlife and resource management practices. The traditional practices should be documented and encouraged and such ideas should be included in management of wildlife and handling of human –wildlife conflict.



Taking back us to history was an altogether unique presentation given by Dr. Kumkum Srivastava, faculty member, Department of history at the Janaki Devi Memorial College. The presentation showed the Mughals engagement with the environment. The Mughal memoirs *Baburnama* shows that the Mughals had great knowledge of flora and fauna which is reflected in their paintings. Dr. Kumkum revealed that the paintings are an original depiction of the plants, trees, animals and birds and have been minutely described. The Mughal memoirs display in great detail the flora and fauna which have been studied with respect to their habitat, physical features and seasons in which they are seen. The keen interest in wildlife by the Mughals not only reflects their engagement with nature but additionally this information was used in management, treatment and breeding of flora and fauna by the Mughal leaders who were naturalists. And this association of man and nature is aptly reflected in the Mughal era paintings. And these paintings have been a unique source for reconstructing the history of the wildlife of that articular era. This depiction of flora and fauna is also visible in the Mughal architecture.

Dr. Avitoli Zhimo, a young faculty member at the Department of Anthropology provided a very reflexive account of her visit to a very remote village called Impa inhabited by a Zeme Naga tribe. The village is located at the border of Manipur and Nagaland. The people have deep faith in the traditional system of medicine and rely exclusively on their own herbal cures for various ailments ranging from small illnesses like cough and colds to bone setting. Despite the introduction of health dispensary in 2014, people still depend on the local healers and herbs. The use of traditional herbal medicines available from the dense

forests of the area offers human-nature dependence. She also highlighted ethical concerns that emerged from her fieldwork which was conducted under DU R&D grant.

Another presentation by Dr.Rukshana Zaman, faculty member at IGNOU offered a peculiar case of a Dargah in a Hindu dominated village of Mashobara in Kasuali district of Himachal Pradesh. The Dargah was looked after by the Hindu population and it is believed that prayers at the Dargah cures people of burns, rashes and other minor and major ailments. The Dargah has framed pictures of Gods and Goddesses and salt is given as an offering on every Thursday evening after lighting earthen lamps. Unlike in many places where women are not allowed, this particular Dargah allowed women to offer prayers. The salt being a scarce commodity in this high altitude village is a valued thing and is thus offered at the Dargah .The presentation interlinked Ecology, Cosmology and Religion and presented how the local socio-cultural life influenced the religious practices of the people.

Another guest speaker Mr. Bhrigu from Center for Culture, Media and Governance, Jamia Milia Islamia in his presentation presented a case study of the city of Guwahati and its delicate ecological balance that has been disrupted by the rapid urbanization. The Assam type houses with tiled roof have been replaced by the RCC type houses and with influx of population from the neighboring areas, the wetlands were filled. The delicate balance of the city with its environment has changed drastically leading to water logging and floods. And the development projects which were supposed to make lives better made certain irreparable changes in the terrain of the city which has drastically changed the lives of the inhabitants. The presentation questioned the mindless urbanization process that has taken place without taking into consideration the consequences of such a process.

In his concluding remarks, the Head of the Department thanked all the participants and speakers for the enthusiastic participation in the Seminar and thanked the teaching staff and the support staff for organizing the Seminar.

Dr.Murray in his Vote of Thanks expressed deep gratitude to the Head of the Department for holding the Seminar. He also thanked the Chairperson Prof I.S.Marwah for chairing the session. Dr. Murray thanked the Conveners for organizing such a vibrant and relevant theme. He also thanked the teaching and the non-teaching staff and the Research scholars who had helped in the organizing of the Seminar. He thanked Dr.R.P.Mitra for convening the Seminar and also thanked Prof. Subhadra Channa for her contribution to the Department and the discipline.
