

Anthropological Perspective on the Contemporary Social Science Research in India

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Abstract

Identity of Anthropology in India is at stake today. The reasons are many, including the general overall situation of the Social Sciences in India. None the less, the discipline of Anthropology which imparted correctives with its in-built interdisciplinary moorings on several fundamental aspects of human institutions and human behavior seems to have deviated from its basic principles of holism, cultural relativism, cross-cultural comparison and intensive, first-hand methods of investigation. As a result, several significant contributions made so far by Anthropology to the understanding of Indian society are being overshadowed by the uncritical aping of quick-fix, top-down, quantitative methodologies of other social sciences. It is high time that this tendency is checked and the fundamentals of anthropology are resurrected to preserve the relevance and identity of the discipline of Anthropology in India.

Key Words: Integrated perspective, Cultural relativism, Ethnographic investigation, Emic perspective, Indian Reality, Social sciences, Western Centricism

Anthropology, which enjoys a unique place in the comity of sciences that claim to understand human phenomena, of late, has been suffering from the undoing of the practitioners of anthropology in India. Otherwise, it would not have landed itself in the present situation wherein its prominence got eroded in the scheme of things of the prestigious Indian Science Congress Association. The section of 'Anthropology and Archaeology' which was almost earmarked for the anthropologists to present their scientific findings every year in the Indian Science Congress, has been recast as the section of 'Anthropology and Behavioral Sciences' much against the opinion of anthropologists. With this the representation of anthropologists has been drastically reduced. When the disciplines like

Economics, Sociology, Social Work, and Political Science from indispensable components of Social Science Faculties in almost 500 universities and in many Indian Institute of Technologies and Indian Institute of Managements, Anthropology hardly figures in ten percent of these institutions. Some Post-graduate departments in South India, of late, have been registering a marked decline in the student admissions. The disciplines like Criminology and Social Work which were in fewer universities compared to the presence of Anthropology in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century have multiplied and increased their presence in many universities and have overtaken Anthropology, which shows its low esteem in the eyes of the planners of higher

education as well as the general public. One also cannot deny the fact that Anthropology hardly finds a place in the State and Central level policy making and planning bodies. In fine, Anthropology as a viable branch of knowledge in India at present is in a crisis. There are ample overt and covert indications to this effect.

It is an irony that the very discipline which had gained respect for its potent theoretical and methodological insights and were found worth incorporating by other disciplines, is today found in a pathetic state. This situation is a self-inflicted one for which the practitioners of the discipline need to seriously ponder over. It appears that the anthropologists in India have drifted away from their basics, indeed from their core theoretical and methodological fundamentals.

Contributions from Anthropology

The most distinguishing and diagnostic feature of anthropology is the first-hand, long-term, in-depth field investigation. This most effective method of empirical investigation is being compromised by none other than the practitioners of the discipline themselves. The ethnographic field-work and ethnographic writing are being diluted.

True to its tenet of 'holism', anthropology as a science of humanity has been comprehensive in its coverage striving to incorporate biological, socio-cultural, historical and linguistic dimensions of human existence with inbuilt interdisciplinary perspective. That is the reason, right from its inception as full-fledged academic discipline in the beginning of the twentieth century, anthropology has

lent very useful and innovative and corrective insights in the understanding of human nature. 'Holism' of anthropology is a most respectful operational concept in the social sciences in general whether it is a matter pertaining to field investigation or a theoretical discussion of human phenomena to delineate the functional relationships between the various dimensions of human life. In this endeavor, 'Culture' as a scientific concept has been more meaningful in understanding the human phenomena- be it biological or linguistic or historical or social existence. Kroeber (1948 & 1952) has rightly shown how 'culture' forms the central focus to understand any human aspect. This is one of the remarkable contributions from the discipline of anthropology. Indeed, anthropology is the most liberating of the sciences.

There are many significant contributions anthropology has made to the body of human knowledge. Among the most notable is the falsifying of the notion and concept of 'race' and 'racism' and the 'ethnocentric' way of understanding the diversity of human societies and cultures in time and space. It is anthropology which debunked the notion of 'cultural superiority' and the way in which the 'blacks' and 'browns' and 'nonwhites' who did not look like the western in their physical and sociocultural features were earlier called as 'savages' and 'barbarians'. Franz Boas' 'cultural relativism' and Malinowski's 'functionalism' amply demolished the ethnocentric outlook that was inbuilt in the understanding of the social and cultural phenomena. It was the anthropological insight which helped UNESCO to formulate a scientific meaning

of what is 'race'. "Anthropologists' commitment to the study of all peoples, regardless of where and when they lived, has cast more light on human nature than all the reflections of sages or the study of laboratory scientists", so said Grace de Laguna in 1941, in his presidential address to the Eastern division of the American Philosophical Association (quoted in Haviland 1999).

Some of the fundamental and established assumptions in the disciplines of Economics, Sociology, Political Science and Psychology were set right by the anthropological study of other cultures. The Victorian way of defining the institutions of 'marriage' and 'family' was proved flawed by the published works of Evanspritchard (1965) and Good enough (1970), Gough (1964), and Leach (1861), among others. 'Money' cannot be taken as the universal criterion to define 'economics' and 'economic transaction' in human societies was amply made clear by, Bohannan (1963), Dalton (1971), Firth (1970), Herskovits (1974) and Malinowski (1961), through their ethnographic investigations. Were it not for the comparative works of Fortes and Bohannan (1957&1963), Evanspritchard (1958), and Easton (1966), everybody would have agreed that with the political scientists who projected that political organization would not exist in human societies without the minimum requirement of a centralized authority, State or Constitution. It was the work of Bohannan (1957, 1963 & 1967), Hoebel (1954 & 1958), and Nader (1965 & 1968), which made it clear that law and legal mechanisms do exist for conflict resolutions in human societies even in the

absence of codified law and legal procedures.

While the panhuman concepts of 'psychic unity of mankind' by E.B. Tylor (1871) and the fundamental of elementary human thought in the form of 'binary opposition' by Claude Levi-Strauss (1963) did give new directions in the understanding of human nature at pan human level. Malinowski's criticism (1952) of Sigmund Freud's concept of 'Oedipus complex' through his Trobriand data and Audrey I. Richard's disapproval (1932) of Sigmund Freud's theories pinning down every human thinking and behavior to sex, through her data on the Bemba society, have cautioned the scientists of human phenomena to not to ignore the specific cultural context in which the behavior is manifested while concluding for the general aspects of human phenomena. A very much similar critique was launched by Margaret Mead's work (1962) of 'Coming of Age in Samoa' on the ethnocentric generalization of adolescent behavior by the adolescent psychologists.

It is worth noting how the works of Livingstone (1960, 1967&1969) as well as that of Gajdusek (1980) demonstrated that anthropology's holism intersects natural science, social science and humanistic perspectives in understanding the human condition. Otherwise, Livingstone would not have brought to light the difference between 'sickle cell anemia' and 'sickle cell trait' through his elaborate and comprehensive study on history, migration and biological changes effected through ecological adaptation on the original population in the African continent whose descendants are living the United States.

Gajdusek was appropriately awarded the Nobel Prize for cracking the mystery of 'Kuru', a deadly disease among the 'Fore', through his intensive and first-hand field investigation of the life-cycle of the head-hunting Fore (cited in Alland 1980).

Thus, anthropology as a holistic science, has not only been lending comprehensive and integrated perspective to the understanding of human existence incorporating biological, sociocultural, historical and even linguistic dimensions of human living, but also setting right the distortions by other disciplines which claim to understand the human phenomena. All these corrections could be possible because of the perspective that accrues from its strong methodological instrument that constitutes the defining characteristic of the discipline of anthropology. And that is the long-term, intensive ethnographic field investigation. One can go the extent of saying that ethnographic field work is the DNA of the discipline of anthropology.

The Present Paradox

But the present paradox of the discipline of anthropology in India is that this effective method of investigation is being compromised and anthropologists are drifting away towards such methods and approaches which form the antithesis to the very tenets of anthropological investigation. It is out of this method of investigation that the fundamentals of the discipline like 'holism' and 'cultural relativism' are derived. It was Franz Boas and his students in the United States and Bronislaw Malinowski and his successors in the United Kingdom who pioneered the intensive

method of field investigation and gave us the basic principles of the discipline. They pointed out how the long-term, face-to-face interaction with the people in their own language and intimate participation in their day-to-day life enables the researcher to unearth the deeper realities of people's lives in all its totality, which otherwise is not possible with any other tool. The anthropological field work demands as Malinowski (1961) says that the researcher get 'immersed' in the phenomena. But at the same time, the field researcher ought to retain his professional trait of being an anthropologist which Clyde Kluckhohn has called it as 'attached detachment' (1959). Margaret Mead (1968) has gone to the extent of saying that we have ".....no way to make an anthropologist except by sending him into the field; this contact with living material is our distinguishing mark". This most effective method of empirical investigation is being compromised by none other than the practitioners of the discipline themselves. The ethnographic field-work and ethnographic writing are being diluted.

Many of the recent anthropological works do not reflect this element – be it the Ph.D., thesis, or a research or project report. Many of the so called 'ethnographic reports' from the Research organizations or University Departments or Tribal Research Institutes betray of making a farce of anthropological investigation. The spirit of anthropological in-depth investigation is being given up. Field work is being taken lightly and turned into field visits. Researchers undertake morning to evening visits for a couple of weeks intermittently and interact with the people by using a link language or

interpreter. Rarely do they realize that unless the researcher communicates in the native language or slang, it is not possible to understand and perceive the nuances of people's lives. This requires learning to think in the language of the people, not just learning to understand their utterances. Since anthropologists need to think, feel and to see the world as the people do, the emphasis is laid to evaluate not only the literal meaning of the native language but the idiomatic meaning as well. The finer aspects and nuances of people's feelings and emotions, and belief systems can be understood only when the anthropologist is familiar with the indigenous linguistic categories and idioms. That is the reason the ethnographic writings cannot be deemed complete if they do not contain the descriptions and analyses of important phrases and idioms while describing and analyzing their actions and behaviors. But these aspects are not being taken seriously. Andre Beteille has aptly remarked the decline in the rigors of anthropological field work in his 1996 writing. Comparing the Indian researchers with the Western anthropologists, Beteille says that the Indian researchers do it "... in several short spells, but rarely spend as much time in the field as their counterparts from overseas. They also rarely choose to do fieldwork in a region other than the one to which they belong; this enables them to dispense with the trouble of learning a new language and it allows them to take other short cuts that in the end detract from the quality of their field work."(1996:234). With such interactions it is hardly possible to gain the perspective of the people who are being studied.

Understanding the life of the people through 'emic' perspective with this kind of field work is completely ruled out.

To a great extent, the future shape of the discipline of anthropology and place of anthropologists hinges on the University departments of anthropology as anthropology is mostly taught at the post-graduate level in India. It is intriguing to find that some of these departments have reduced the period of mandatory first-hand field work component from one month to two weeks and teachers excuse themselves from accompanying the students to provide hands-on and constant guidance and supervision in the field. In some cases, the students are given topics and directed to submit their dissertations by conducting field work by themselves, which means the students are free to do their fieldwork wherever they want and as and when it is convenient to finally submit the fieldwork reports within the stipulated period. This kind of field work orientation at a very formative stage of the grooming of anthropologists would have a very adverse impact in generating well-groomed anthropologists for the future. This kind of insensitivity and callousness on the part of the departments has given rise to all sorts of substitution being employed by anthropological researchers for intensive fieldwork that forms the crux of anthropological investigations

'Participant Observation' which forms the 'raison de etre' of ethnographic fieldwork, Nader (1965:158) says "... equip anthropologists to discover both unconscious and conscious levels of culture not easily reported by informants or

observed by anthropologists". "Participant Observation" usually for a year or more is regarded as essential. Participation means living like the people, observing their daily routine and trying to understand subjectively what they think and feel what they do. The anthropologists spend prolonged periods living with the people they study, sharing their joys and sufferings, their deprivations, including sickness, and at times, death of their intimate ones. Anthropologists believe that one cannot fully understand another culture by simply observing it. When we observe a group of people, we find that there is not as much conformity with those ideals as people project. It is here that anthropologist must supplement his/her questions with observations. Questioning brings out the ideal, while observing brings out the real. Both are essential to understand the behavior in any society. It is only by collecting a variety of examples and observing behaviors in many different contexts can one begin to understand the complexity of life in a culture.

This is being unimaginatively replaced by new found 'quasi participant observation', and quick appraisal techniques according to the convenience of the field researcher or at the instance of the agency with whom one is associated. The funding agencies are often in a hurry to complete the process of data collection and report writing. In order to meet the demands and earn the appreciations of the bureaucrats, administrators, and funding agencies who expect quick outputs, the researchers often compromise their time-tested qualitative methods of comprehensive and meaningful understanding of the phenomena in question

and adapt themselves to depend more on quantitative research techniques and surveys for data collection. More often, variables are constructed and related depending on the issue but without taking the base of the society in to consideration. Especially in the case of studies of Indian society, the caste and kinship factors are taken for granted as if we live in a casteless and kinship free society similar to a western society. Hence the assumption is either that caste, family, kinship, marriage alliance do not influence because of modern education and modern development. Further, it is these data which will be projected in the form of tables, graphs, abstract models and formulae which are more eye-catching and impressionistic. This is not to deny the usefulness or the value of these quantitative techniques by themselves. But for a holistic meaningful and comprehensive understanding of any human issue, one need to made a judicious blending of the data collected by the qualitative and quantitative techniques for a rounded understanding of the phenomena. Indeed anthropologists are aware of the value of quantitative and statistical procedures and they do make use of them for various purposes right from the days of Tylor. Otherwise Tylor (1871) would not have held that the future of anthropology lay in statistical investigation. However, reducing people and whatever they do to numbers has a 'dehumanizing effect' and ignores important issues not amenable for enumeration"

But overdependence on quantitative methods, just because they are easy to employ and quick and fast in eliciting information by saving time, would result in

mere description and partial understanding of the phenomena by answering only the questions of 'what?'. The answers to questions of 'why?' remain unanswered. The answers to the questions like, 'what is the present status of literacy?' 'how many live below poverty line?' 'what is the health status of a given population?' 'how many farmers committed suicide?' 'what is the rate of maternal mortality?' 'how many children are malnourished?' are very quickly obtained through quantitative techniques. But answers to the questions 'why the present status of literacy is low?' 'why so many people live below poverty line?' 'why the present health status of the given population is low?' 'why farmers have committed suicide?' 'why there is high rate of maternal mortality?' 'why majority of the children are malnourished?' remain unanswered or are not adequately answered. If what people do, act and say is not understood also in terms of why people do, act and say, the understanding would be incomplete. To find answers for these questions of 'why?' and 'how?' it becomes imperative to employ in-depth qualitative methods of investigation for which the discipline of anthropology is known for. It is the qualitative methods that provide sophisticated strategy to unearth the reality on how and why people act in particular ways. This data in turn facilitate a comprehensive understanding of not only the implications of policies but also provide required policy directions. The fact that human phenomena yield a more meaningful understanding through qualitative methods of investigation rather than quantitative methods has been brought out very lucidly

by the 2009 Nobel Laureate Elinor Ostrom in her work on the "Commons"(1990).

Dilution of Ethnographic Field-work

If at all there is any difference between the field investigations that anthropologists conduct vis-à-vis others, it is the ethnographic field work. That seems to be missing of late, in the work undertaken by most of the anthropologists in India. Ethnographic fieldwork is being flouted in more ways than one by none other than the conscience keepers of the discipline. This is evident from the research output that is turned out by researchers in research organizations claiming to conduct the anthropological research like University departments, Tribal Research Institutes, Social Science Research Institutions and Anthropological Survey of India, and even the M.phil and Ph.D., dissertations and Projects Reports also betray this trend. A closer assessment of these works show a lack of in-depth understanding of the issues they deal with. At times, sweeping generalizations are made based on statistical data without support of the qualitative data. Elaborations on people's indigenous concepts, categories and expression which provide the window in to the deeper aspects of various dimensions of their lives rarely figure in the writings. Quite often, stating the obvious like "higher the education, better is the health condition" or "higher the income, better is their awareness" form most of the content of these works. In other words, most of the dissertations do not reflect the characteristic features of ethnography.

Any field work is not ethnographic field work. Ethnography is not mere collection of information. Mere information has no meaning. It needs validation. It is this which is provided by ethnographic data through analysis from 'emic' perspective in a holistic background. This becomes possible only when anthropologists get involved totally with the phenomena. The time and personal involvement of an anthropologist in the ethnographic field work is incomparable to any other kind of field work. Ethnographic fieldwork demands that the researcher engage in close face-to-face contact with the people by his continuous and long stay observing and participating in their day-to-day activities which is referred to by Malinowski as "imponderabilia of daily life" (1961). Because, the anthropologist has to study the rules of the society and understand its structure that govern everyday life both from the perspective of the participants in the culture and also from the objective analytical point of view of an outsider/researcher. It is incumbent on the anthropological researcher that he interacts with the people in their own local language. Anthropologists are committed to the proposition that one cannot fully understand a culture by simply observing it. That is the reason why ethnographers spend prolonged periods living with the people sharing their joys and sufferings, their deprivations including sickness and sometimes death. Robin Fox (1968:290) has rightly put it thus: "Our hearts, as well as our brains should be with our men and women"

Most of the anthropologists in India seem to be in a hurry to catch up with the methodology of other disciplines which

carry weight and visibility with the policy makers, administrators and funding agencies. They perhaps assume that their methods are not impressive and hence do not attract the attention of the policy makers. The temptation that, when other disciplines with their quick-fix methods and methodologies could impress upon and become closer to the administration and bureaucracy why not we co-opt and imitate their way of doing field research and move closer to the policy making and implementing agencies, is affecting the discipline of anthropology. This unwittingly is being attempted even at the cost of abandoning and compromising the fundamental and widely appreciated methods of research of their own discipline. When other disciplines are realizing the shortcomings of their tools and techniques of research, and are turning towards the anthropological methods, it is an irony that anthropologists are turning away from their own valued methodologies, and bend backwards to adopt the very same methods borrowed by others from anthropology and altered to suit their needs. A case in point is the method of 'Quasi-participant Observation' which is contradiction in terms. Either it has to be 'participant observation' or no 'participant observation'. Because the expression 'participant' in 'participant observation' refers to the total involvement of the researcher in the phenomena. Some anthropologists do mention about having used 'quasi-participant observation' to give a semblance of anthropological touch to their field investigation. This, in no way, should mean that anthropologists ought not to adopt or

incorporate useful and relevant insights from other disciplines in to their research, but not being judicious and prudent in borrowing these methods and getting carried away so much as to ignore their own discipline's time-tested and effective methods and principles amounts to committing 'hara-kiri'.

So far, the experience has shown that the uncritical aping has done more harm than good to the discipline of anthropology in India. Though the intention of borrowing by anthropologists is to project themselves as relevant and also to show that they are in no way inferior or incapable of doing the job as others do, such anthropological works neither evince academic interest nor gain the intended relevance or visibility on par with the other disciplines, precisely because of the disconnect that exist between what they do and what they ought to be doing. On the contrary, this trend is causing immense harm to the status of the discipline of anthropology and its identity in India. As a matter of fact, in many cases, the outcome of such research does not present itself as having the anthropological rigor and uniqueness that it ought to have. More often, one can hardly make out whether such works should be considered anthropological at all- be it in the domain of Social cultural anthropology or in Biological anthropology. Since at a very fundamental level, anthropological studies do not appear dissimilar to the studies done in other disciplines, some would go to the extent of pointing out that there is not much of difference between Social cultural anthropology and Sociology or between Biological anthropology and Human

Biology or Genetics. The other two branches of anthropology viz., Archaeological anthropology and Linguistic anthropology have not yet gained importance as the other counterparts in the University departments in India. Perhaps because, Social cultural anthropologists and Biological anthropologists in India are busy in distancing themselves from each other rather than to think of welding with other branches to present an integrated discipline of Anthropology. If this situation persists, a day would come when it becomes difficult to rationalize the very existence of the discipline of anthropology in India, let alone think about the identity of the discipline.

In an enthusiasm to demonstrate their relevance, most of the anthropologists in India of late, have unwittingly done great disservice not only to their own discipline but also in depicting the Indian social cultural reality. Although, it has all the wherewithal theoretically as well as methodologically, to present a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the Indian reality as it was earlier done by Bailey(1957), Beteille (1971 & 1974), N.K. Bose (1952, 1967 & 1968), Dube (1971 & 1974), Dumont (1970), Gould (1967) Irawati Karve (1961, 1968 & 1969) T.N. Madan (1965) Mariott (1955) B.N. Saraswati (1970), Milton Singer (1959 & 1968), S.K. Singh (1972), Surjit Sinha(1971&1974),M.N. Srinivas(1965&1966), L.P. Vidyarthi (1961,1968,1969) L.P. Vidyarthi & B.K. Rai (1977) and others. Anthropology as a discipline, at present, has hardly demonstrated its potential fully, precisely because of the constraints it has built around

itself by being insensitive to its fundamental tenets.

Indian Social Cultural Reality

The Indian social cultural reality despite bearing broad overall commonalities presents a layered complex diversity of life-styles and multiplicity of languages at the ground-level. For thousands of years, villages existed as republics (Maine 1954). Even within villages, hierarchy and diversity among castes lent another dimension to the social tapestry. This vertical and horizontal woops and warps weaves like a fabric making the Indian social and cultural reality, a type by itself. The field-based studies have pointed out that almost every 40 miles, variation occur in such aspects as language, customs, rituals, folklore, food habits, marriage alliance and kinship. Such a complex phenomena, to begin with, warrants a micro level analysis and investigation with qualitative methodologies and subsequently supplemented with macro level analysis with quantitative survey methods. Unless these intricacies and their dynamics are recognized, it is not easy to meaningfully describe the Indian reality. The multi-layered Indian reality whose micro level can be more effectively understood by anthropological methods is being understood by non-anthropological methods by none other than anthropologists themselves. It is this trend which is causing more harm to the discipline of anthropology in India.

The aim of building an equitable and just Indian social order is laudable, and quite justifiably the social science disciplines ought to devote considerable part of their

energies to gear their techniques and methodologies to facilitate achieve this goal. But this goal can be achieved in phased manner with a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the complex Indian reality in the first place. This is possible when one creates a systematic and scientific data-base beginning from the grass-root level. This exercise had begun but in a small way with the ethnographic studies of villages, tribes and regions before the drastic and very radical changes were effected with opening up of the economy for globalised influences almost two and a half decades back. But this trend was sidelined the moment high-speed, fast changes and reforms began. The anthropologists shifted their focus and got sucked into the speed to catch up with other social scientists to conduct quick studies on reforms and changes without preparing a proper base-line. Perhaps, they began to feel that they do not have much time to go for holistic grass-root level studies and lest fall behind others in globalizing India. In fact, the micro-realities were also neglected and were given lesser importance in most of the studies undertaken by the social scientists. The dictum, “think globally and act locally” was followed more in breach which almost got converted in to, “think globally, act globally and forget locally”. This trend needs to be checked and regulated by bringing to the fore the need of conducting exhaustive studies at the micro-level. It is in this context that the discipline of anthropology and its practitioners in India could play a very vital role.

More often, the social sciences in India, by and large, have laid emphasis on the macro

level studies and as such they have tended to adopt the 'top-down', 'one size-fits all' approaches sidelining the micro level understandings. Perhaps, it is this emphasis which has blinded the majority of the social scientists to the contradictions that exist in Indian society today. Nonetheless, it has generated a huge amount of quantitative data on different aspects of people of India, like data on population, income, health, mortality and morbidity rates, education, employment, farm produce, , poverty, per capita income, gross domestic product, maternal mortality, child and infant mortality, etc. The developmental programmes introduced on the basis of these data have hardly made dent in the pathetic situation of the tribal and rural segments of the population at the grass-root level. If at all any impact and improvements are seen, they are found only in the urban and metropolitan areas .Such perspectives and approaches have hardly been able to capture the rural and tribal realities in India which in fact constitutes the two-thirds of the Indian society. Had the social sciences developed a systematic and qualitative data-base on the grass-root realities of India, the rural economy and the tribal life would not have presented a scenario as it is seen today with farmers committing suicides and tribal people seeking refuge in Naxalite activities. It is said that, of late, the number of poor , especially the working poor in rural and tribal areas have been increasing day-by – day.

But the present trend in most of the disciplines to place a premium on macro level reality and quantitative techniques has made the researchers, policy makers and

administrators to become oblivious or to grossly underestimate the micro level realities ultimately resulting in the invisibility of the vulnerability and exploitation of the people at micro level. This perspective is evident in planning and policy making at both central and state level administrations. It is because of this reason that Indian society is confronted with several contradictions and paradoxes today. Even as India witnessed unprecedented 'economic growth' and with many dollar billionaires in the world, it also has, as Arjun Sen Gupta's (2006)survey on the unorganized sector indicate that more than 70 per cent of the people live with less than Rs.20/- a day. Agricultural economy is in a dire state with thousands of tons of food grains rotting. Tarun Das wrote that India is a 'Super power of Poverty'. Though India has world class hospitals, every 2 seconds one woman dies due to delivery complications and 7000 children die every day due to malnutrition. India's social and human development indicators are below some of the Asian countries

Such contradictions are bound to occur when not much has been done to understand the micro level realities of a vast and complex civilization like India. Though considerable data has been produced at the macro level, the concepts and categories that are used in creating the macro level data-base are replete with ambiguity and vagueness. For instance, the categories like, 'Scheduled Caste'(S.C), 'Scheduled Tribe'(S.T), 'Other Backward Class'(O.B.C), 'Hindu', 'Muslim', 'Christian', 'High income', 'Low income', 'Poor and below poverty line', etc., which

often figure in the macro level national surveys, do not concur with the ground level realities. The administrative categories like 'S.C', 'S.T', and 'O.B.C' and the terms like 'Hindu' and 'Christian' indicating religious communities are treated as if the people belonging to these categories form a monolithic social unit and hence are same everywhere in India. Caste forms the base of Indian society with Kinship as its reinforcing principle. So much so that even religion which is depicted as a single unified category operates like a caste for all practical purposes at the ground level. For instance, 'Muslims' or 'Christians' in India do not form context-free monolithic functional categories at the grass-root level. Their social structure and culture vary depending on the historical, linguistic and hierarchical factors in a particular micro level region (Many anthropological studies have shown how a Hindu belonging to a particular caste in one region is not the same in another region. A 'Namboodri Brahmin' of Kerala is not the same as the 'Saraswath Brahmin' of Maharashtra. Similarly, a Muslim of Kerala is not the same as a Muslim in Karnataka. Sometimes, in the same state, like Karnataka, Muslims of the rural part of North Karnataka considers themselves to be unique by themselves. They differ in their speech, marriage practices, food habits, rituals, customs and beliefs (Khan 1994). This is not to mean that they do not have commonalities at a higher level. But day-to-day life and social interaction at the ground level do not depend on the higher level commonalities. Even the expressions 'S.C' and 'S.T' which are often treated in the national level and state level

demographic and social surveys as universal categories are in fact vary from one state to another, not to mention about their internal divisions and hierarchies which have given rise to conflicts and deprivations among themselves. The people belonging to 'S.C' in one state are categorized as 'S.T' in another state, like the 'Lamani' who are 'S.C' in Karnataka is 'S.T' in the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh. It is these straitjacket categories which form the significant units of Social research in many research investigations even when the researcher focuses his/her attention on the micro level units. To project a group of people at the level of a settlement or a village grossly as 'Scheduled Caste' does not convey much meaning unless the researcher brings out how this group of people are known locally and whether the category 'Scheduled Caste' in the given situation is constituted by a single caste with sub-castes or several castes with specific indigenous nomenclatures in that specific social setting. If such nuances of social reality have been ignored because of macro level obsession and different castes or sub-castes have been steam-rolled to present them as forming a single social category as 'Scheduled Caste', this amounts to the distortion of ground realities. Indeed, such understanding of the social situation remains partial and perfunctory. It is in this context, that the anthropological micro level procedures and perspectives with 'emic' insights prove more relevant. It is understandable that these kinds of ambiguous usages exist in some of the social science disciplines as their predominant macro level perspective hardly provides

scope to look into the nuances of ground-level realities. But to see this happening in the ethnographic investigations and anthropological works is disturbing. The very anthropologists who are supposed to take initiative in setting right such distortions are seen becoming a party to misrepresentations.

Deviations in Anthropology

Anthropology emerged as a viable and independent discipline with unique perspectives and approaches because of its focus on simple societies like tribes. It is the study of smaller social units like tribes and villages which paved the way for the expansion and stretching of its theoretical and methodological repertoire to cover the larger units such as culture-areas and cultural zones and also the national level cultures. But of late, the imitation bug which has bitten the anthropologists in India drives them away from their discipline's core principles and prompts them to study even the tribes and tribal problems in the same way as the other disciplines do. Till recently, instead of correcting the 'ethnocentric' usage of the adjective "Primitive" appended by the administration to the life-style of some of the tribes in India as 'Primitive Tribal Groups' (PTGs), many anthropologists did not hesitate to use this ethnocentric qualifier. It is only now that they are rechristened as "Vulnerable Tribal Groups". The anthropological studies on tribes and tribal problems (as seen in many dissertations and project reports) hardly differ either in method and or in their theoretical leanings from the work produced in other disciplines, so much so that other disciplines have thought it appropriate to

evolve a branch of their own to study the tribes. Thus has come into being a branch of study called 'Tribal Sociology' in one of the South Indian Universities. Indeed, India presents a rich arena for the study of tribes. Despite India having one of the largest populations of tribes in the world, Anthropologists in India have not created an exhaustive and systematic ethnographic data-base on tribes. The variety and complexity of tribal life in India provides a tremendous scope for creating a scientific micro level data-base akin to the 'Human Relations Area Files (HRAF)' of Yale University developed by G.P. Murdock and his followers in the United States. Though we have the 'People of India' volumes generated by the Anthropological Survey of India, they are not as exhaustive and scientific as they ought to have been precisely because of the dilution that has also crept in to the methodology adopted by the Anthropological Survey of India.

Theoretically, the tenet of 'holism' not only takes in to consideration all the facets of human phenomena, but it also aims to understand all the diversities of human life in time and space. Right from its beginning, the discipline's objective has been to understand human nature by not leaving any variety of human life untouched – be it a life which existed in the remote past or about the life of the people living in the unreachable spaces on the globe. Otherwise, anthropologists, unlike other human sciences, would not have dared to go to the remote and wild forests and inhospitable places to live and understand the cannibals whom others fear to interact even now. To that extent, sciences other than anthropology

remain partial human sciences in so far as they get confined to a part of the humanity.

Methodologically, 'Holism' of anthropology directs a researcher to not to leave any aspect of life of the people uncovered while studying a society or a topic in a chosen social unit. That is the reason why the study of 'kinship', which forms the core aspect of human life and said to be a 'cultural universal' became an indispensable part of anthropological studies right from its inception. The study of kinship can almost be considered as an anthropological invention. Because, it was anthropology which let others know how important this core aspect of human life is, to understand the human nature. Edmund Leach aptly points out "... for an anthropologist, kinship is the hard core" (1967:10). At one time, It was the study of kinship which provided the critical identity to the discipline of anthropology, as no other discipline worth the name touched upon kinship dimension of human life in such detail as to get into its biological and mathematical ramifications. Irrespective of the level of technological development and the livelihood pattern of the human societies, kinship serves as a cementing mechanism, through exchange of women, to bind individuals and groups. Kinship and kinteminalogical systems which encompass the understanding of interpersonal and intergroup relationships beginning with marriage, family formation to the extended conanguineal and affinal relationships traversing economic, political, and religious domains of human life, formed the focus of many Indian anthropologists till the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century. But now, this kind

of holistic and comprehensive coverage of the human phenomena inclusive of kinship dimension both at the level of empirical investigation as well as at the level of analysis and report writing is conspicuously absent, though the Indian society is primarily built upon kinship and caste. Kinship provides the base for caste. Caste and kinship are all pervading and universal as far as Indian society is concerned. If caste is more explicit and overt in human behavior at micro level, it is very implicit and covert at the macro level of the Indian social cultural reality. Recently, some studies have brought the effective presence of caste in several domains including the Indian Corporate Boards. The continued relevance of caste in electoral politics, importance of family and kinship in local politics, dominance of upper castes in virtually every public institution, consideration of caste representation in cabinet formation in the governments, and also in the appointment of Vice-Chancellors in state universities are commonly known instances of the critical importance of caste and kinship in India. In spite of all pervading and overarching nature of caste and kinship, social and behavioral researchers in India rarely bring out qualitative analyses of their importance at the grass-root level. Given the western centric elements in their theories and methodologies, the social researchers tend to take it for granted that caste, kinship and marriage would no longer be influential once the people are modern enlightened with higher education and have raised their economic and political standing, as compared to those who are poor, illiterate and underdeveloped. Especially, when it

comes to kinship, many social science disciplines take it for granted or as 'ceteris paribus' while understanding the social cultural life in India. It is understandable that the disciplines other than anthropology cannot conceptualize the significance of kinship, but to see anthropologists toeing the line of other disciplines in sidelining the understanding of kinship is intriguing. The fact that Indian reality which needs to be understood more comprehensively by anthropological methods is being understood by non-anthropological perspectives by none other than anthropologists themselves is a sad commentary on the discipline of anthropology in India.

The nuts and bolts of complex Indian social cultural reality can be deciphered if the micro level as well as macro level investigation is carried out in phases and in a complementary way. It is for this reason that we need both qualitative and quantitative investigations to be undertaken by the disciplines which have the respective expertise in a co-ordinate fashion. As such, the discipline of anthropology is as much important as other disciplines for creating sound data-base at micro level with regional patterns as well as macro level quantitative data- base, for the planners and policy makers. But especially for Anthropologists whose studies are not confined to their own culture, as is often the case in other social science disciplines, can find a gold mine in Indian social cultural reality with its rich diversity, plurality with complex variety of languages and a deep and continuous history. However, anthropologists in India, instead of utilizing this opportunity, are drifting away for their own peril.

Uncritical Borrowing

Although, Anthropology in India is claimed as an integrated holistic discipline aimed at understanding the human phenomena in all its dimensions, is seen pulled in different directions, so much so that, at times, it looks not being sure whether it could be considered as an integrated discipline at all. Because, some anthropologists (based on personal interaction) argue that things have changed and lot of advancement has occurred, sophisticated and more effective techniques and hence it becomes relevant for the specialists in anthropology to keep themselves in constant with touch with other disciplines and adopt their methodologies. Of late, it is not difficult to see how Biological anthropologists find it more useful and relevant to interact with Biologists, Geneticists and Biotechnologists or Microbiologists, than with their primary siblings in Social cultural, Linguistic or Archaeological anthropologists. The Biological anthropologists have moved away from the traditional anthropometric and somatometric studies to DNA studies and Genomic analysis, and have advanced so much that they feel they need not be tied down to their disciplines core tenets or to remain in touch with other specializations of their parent discipline. Similarly, the Social cultural anthropologists present themselves as having advanced too far ahead of the good old studies of tribes in remote jungles and hills, to urban and modern societies and modern social and cultural issues and hence, they think it more proper to be in touch with disciplines like Economics, Psychology, Sociology, Demography, and Epidemiology, adopting "so called" advanced, rapid and

sophisticated techniques and to seek 'quick-fix' solutions. They go further to argue that these are the more suitable techniques in the present days compared to the good old, outdated methods like long-term, time-consuming field investigations. This trend, of course, is not conspicuous in Archaeological studies or Linguistic studies, as these specializations have not got the scope in the university departments to flourish or develop to the same extent as the other two.

The interdisciplinary interactions by themselves are by no means detrimental. In fact, Lewis (1952:454) did talk about the eclecticism of anthropologists and their readiness to borrow whatever techniques are available. But the uncritical borrowings and imitations from the other disciplines to gain the limelight without scrutinizing their compatibility and appropriateness with their theoretical and methodological insights, has not only been affecting the moorings of the discipline of anthropology, but also giving rise to disintegrating tendencies by creating distance between its major branches. In some of the university departments of anthropology, Social cultural anthropologists grudgingly curb or do not provide scope for the development of Biological anthropology nor for the introduction of Linguistic and Archaeological anthropology. And Biological anthropologists do not hide proclaiming that they need not be bothered about the component of ethnographic field work or with archaeological or Linguistic dimensions of human life as they have hardly anything to do with biological studies and hence they better align with biological

sciences or claim a separate academic existence for themselves. Two of the anthropology departments in South Indian universities are the classic examples, wherein this intention was translated into action. But, in one of these universities, because of the UGC-SAP scheme, the Social cultural anthropologists and Biological anthropologists came back to live together under compulsion. But this did not bring about any integration or productive welding of the relationships nor made much impact on the style of working of the specialists, which the UGC experts hoped for.

But when it comes to curriculum content and its teaching, it is amply reflected that the subject of anthropology is taught in about 36 universities in India as a discipline that deals with whole spectrum of human phenomena and that it does not draw boundaries between the different facets of human life, as other disciplines do. In fact, the natural and social sciences project a compartmentalized view of human existence. Since, anthropology as a holistic discipline is inherently interdisciplinary and eclectic as Lewis has pointed out, perhaps no discipline provides such prodigious openness for borrowing and lending of theoretical and methodological insights from other disciplines for meaningful and a comprehensive understanding of human phenomena, as anthropology does. Otherwise, the founding fathers of the holistic discipline would not have been geographers like Franz Boas, Physicist like Malinowski, Experimental Psychologist like Radcliffe-Brown, lawyers like Morgan and McLennan, Anatomist like Elliot Smith, Classical Scholar like Frazer, Marine

Zoologist like Haddon, Physiologist like Rivers, Engineer like Edmund Leach and literary scholars like Kroeber and Benedict. But to use this eclectic scope to connect oneself to other disciplines as a license to dilute the fundamentals of one's own discipline amounts to causing immense harm to the identity of anthropology in India

It is a truism that traditional boundaries and contours of disciplines constantly extend and change. New frontiers and new formulations emerge giving rise to new specializations according to the necessities and relevance at a particular point of time. But these developments would not obliterate the basics of the disciplines. Rather, on the other hand such developments strengthen and enhance the significance of the core aspects of the disciplines. But the present indulgence of anthropologists of compromising significant methodological elements of their discipline which are universally appreciated, to gain short-term popularity and recognition is going to bode ill for its future. This is happening especially at a time when the social sciences in India are being accused of underperformance and as users of knowledge rather than producers of knowledge (Singh 2012). It is oxymoronic that the very same disciplines which were once criticized for adopting truncated ethnocentric perspectives and methods by anthropological studies are being seen as role models by the present anthropologists.

The social sciences in general being western-centric or Euro-American centric was pointed out by ethnographic studies in the first half of the twentieth century itself. That this criticism was not perfunctory, and

that it also applies to the social sciences in India, is evident from the comments of the Indian reviewers on the UNESCO World Social Science Report 2010 (Alvares 2011, Singh 2011). The performance of Social Sciences in India is said to be dismal compared to those in some of the countries in the developing world. One of the main reasons being intellectual dependence on the Western insights. The social sciences in India have not only been jinxed with western centricism, but have mostly adopted 'top-down', 'one-size fits all' approaches. They also have failed to prepare a systematic data-base on the micro level Indian reality, especially on the rural and tribal hinterlands. It is because of this reason that today, even after almost six and half decades of independence and eleven five-year plans and quarter century of globalization, we find glaring contradiction and conflicts in the Indian Social life. (viz., inequality, health disparity, malnourishment, etc.).

Had the anthropologists in India not opted to unimaginatively follow the other sciences by remaining stuck to their basics and time-tested theoretical and methodological principles, perhaps, they would have become more relevant today than at any time to make meaningful depiction of the Indian reality for the planners and policy makers. It is the wholesale imitation and relating themselves to other sciences without a critical scrutiny that constitute the mother of all problems for anthropology in India today. The status of anthropology in India has diminished, not because anthropologists have been doing anthropology, but because most of the anthropologists have not been

doing anthropology and betraying all the tendencies of becoming unanthropological.

Conclusion

Unless a concerted and collective effort is made to revive, revitalize and strengthen the basic principles at the theoretical and methodological levels and invest maximum energies to train and orient the young anthropologists who join the graduate and post-graduate courses (if possible, even those at higher-secondary and school levels—thanks to Department of Anthropology at Kannur University for introducing the discipline of Anthropology at higher-secondary level in Kerala state) accordingly, the discipline of anthropology in India will be in the danger of becoming irrelevant. It will not be out of place, if I mention that anthropology could be thought of as one of the subjects at the school level too, because it is the only discipline which provides a combined holistic view of human phenomena with judicious mix of scientific and humanistic approaches. This is precisely the reason why anthropological insights bear the potential of correcting the other sciences of human phenomena as and when they err. Anthropology is a science with a difference, because unlike other sciences, it tries to integrate and synthesize those aspects of human existence which are seen separately, and hence it needs to chalk out its own path to retain its identity rather than to vanish into oblivion by drifting away from its fundamentals. It is time that anthropologists

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in India sit up and ponder over to consolidate their core competence and maintain their distinct methodological and theoretical insights by being both biological and social cultural science unlike other sciences who always like to see C.P. Snow 's divide between 'Science' and 'Humanities'.

It is by salvaging and consolidating the holistic departments of anthropology in the Universities with strong commitment to ethnographic field work methods and by following the principles of 'cultural relativism', 'cross-cultural comparison' that the anthropologists in India will be able to bring back the glory of the discipline of anthropology that it was in most part of the twentieth century.

Let me conclude by quoting Rappaport who made a very apt observation on the amalgamation of scientific and humanistic approaches, thus: "It has been crucial to anthropology because it truly reflects the condition a species that lives and can only live in terms of meanings that it must construct in a world devoid of intrinsic meaning, yet subject to natural law.... Without the continued grounding in the empirical that scientific aspects of our tradition provide, our interpretive efforts may float off into literary criticism and in to particularistic forms of history. Without the interpretive tradition, the scientific tradition that grounds us will never get off the ground". (Rappaport 1994:76).

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