

IGNCA at the 14th ICAES, Williamsburg 1998

The 14th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences was held in the city of Williamsburg, Virginia, July 26 - August 1, 1998. Being the last of the 20th century, this conference was subtitled "The 21st Century : The Future of Anthropology", after a statement from Adrian Johnson, "no discipline is more important for teaching people about themselves and others, and how they may live together in the next century, than anthropology". The objectives of the conference were : First, to reflect the lessons of the past 100 years of anthropology; second to examine to challenge of anthropology in the new millennium; and third to explore the application of insights of anthropology to public policy, education, business, and human services. About 1500 participants came to the conference. There were three plenary sessions, seven workshops, 27 commissions and 100 scientific sessions, each having a number of individual presentations.

I

From the commission symposia and scientific sessions devoted to utilization of anthropological knowledge in human services, it was obvious that the third objective of the conference took centre stage. The global practice of anthropology reflected a deep concern for current issues of national interest. For example : feminist anthropological praxis; women and productive health; society and gender; women and multinational strategies for resistance; gender and education; women and marginalization; gender in the past; women in war; female subjectivity; gender and development; growth and development of the girl child; child labour; human rights; violence; the future of AIDS; alcoholic drinking; non-alcoholic drinks; birth control and abortion; change and problems with food; forcibly displaced peoples; diaspora and migration; race and ethnicity; alternative ways of organizing labour; sustainable development; dispute resolution; disaster management; cross-cultural food encounter; globalization and resource allocation; study of peace; rural legal system; aging; policy, power and governance; cultural heritage; tourism; environment; regional integration; business and industry in the global economy; organization and delivery of foreign aid; folklaw and change; legal pluralism; political prison; small nations : their future in the globalizing world; changing nature of the state; tribal community between tradition and the forces of modernity; building global communities; multicultural education; media, images and language; urgent task in art and music.

This conference made it clear that the traditional probing of "social and cultural anthropology" is hereby closed. There was only one session each on family, kinship, shamanism, ritual, and village. If anthropologists have to be content with the national and international issues of economics and politics, what will be the future of the discipline? Apparently, we know and we do not know.

Reception of "physical anthropology" was also cool. There was one session on genetics, one on dermatoglyphics, one on biocultural anthropology, and one on molecular anthropology. The new interest focuses on what is called "medical anthropology", which is largely the prospective field of social anthropologists studying health and traditional medicine.

Anthropologists' concern for "prehistory and archaeology" appeared to have faded to a great extent. There was one session on "archaeology", another "archaeology in the service of tourism", one on "paleoecology and cultural evolution". A session, on "The study of ancient Maya skeletal remains", using a broad variety of data gathering techniques, ranging from traditional caliper measurements and morphological observations on through radiology, microscopy, isotopic and DNA analyses, has shown the role of biological anthropologist in the designing of archaeological research. There was also a commission on "museums and cultural heritage".

The 14th Congress was both witness and tribute to the late 20th century theory of anthropology, with the stress on new frontiers : "urban anthropology", "medical anthropology", "psychological anthropology",

"philosophical anthropology", "symbolic anthropology", "aesthetical anthropology", "architectural anthropology", "mathematical anthropology", "feminist anthropology", "anthropology of peace", "anthropology of pilgrimage", "anthropology of disaster management", and much else. There was a session on "science in the service of art".

There was also a line of thought seeking indigenization of anthropology. There were three sessions on this theme : (i) "The Making of anthropology in Asia : the past, the present, and the future", which addressed itself to the state of cultural anthropology in Japan, China, Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Its main purpose was to understand the consequences of anthropology being localized for the solution of local problems, within a framework of centre-periphery relationships which are becoming global-local relations. It also tried to ascertain the direction of development of the "global anthropology", which is currently being formed within a network of semi-independent "local anthropologies" which were formerly "divided-and-ruled" by the "metropolitan anthropology". (ii) "Indigenization of anthropology in East and Southeast Asia", which sought to describe notable contrasts between the anthropology of Euro-America and that of East and Southeast Asia. The other concern was to understand these differences in light of histories of the discipline and the broader intellectual climate. And finally, to address the significance of these differences for anthropology as a common global discipline. (iii) "Indigenous knowledge and science in a changing global environment", offered an exposition on how indigenous knowledge is applied in the promotion of man's well-being. It also explored challenges and prospects of integrating indigenous knowledge with western styled scientific knowledge.

The African Anthropological Association presented a session on "African anthropology : new visions", focusing on the emerging trends. There was a session on "Chinese ethnic cultures and their influences in Asia". It took stock of the 56 ethnic groups, each having a distinctive culture and a long history. Due to ecological, economic and political reasons they have moved from one place to another. The organizer's central concern was to find out how their cultures maintain their heritage and exchange with other cultures. There was another session on "Imaging China", devoted to fieldwork and ethnographic writing.

There was no session on Indian anthropology. But 19 Indian scholars (including 6 non-resident Indians) had organized commission symposia and scientific sessions on a wide variety of anthropological themes : maintenance of cultural heritage, tradition and modernity, traditional wisdom in agrotechnology, anthropogenetics of human migration, diaspora and south Asian migration, children in contemporary society, resource management, health for all, forest and people, nomads, changing village, pilgrimage, disaster management, molecular anthropology, family structure and fertility, ethnic plurality and future of state, city and its future, agrarian conflict, gender and development, Bhojapuri dialect, child labour, ecology and social philosophy, and alternate paradigms in anthropology.

II

The IGNA organized a scientific session on the theme : "Alternate Paradigms in Anthropology", Professor B.N. Saraswati was its organizer and chairman. The objective of this search for alternative was different from those aimed at "indigenization of anthropology". Most anthropological researches continue to be governed by the Cartesian-Newtonian-Darwinian paradigms arising from the 17, 18 and 19th century colonial expansion. IGNA's works have made us realize that the prevailing anthropological concepts and categories are not workable at all. Taking cognizance of the intertwining between mind-man-matter, knowledge-experience-culture, and man-nature-culture, we look for new paradigms.

Our morning session was introduced by Professor Saraswati and chaired by Professor T.N. Pandey (California university). In his presentation, "Seeking Alternate Paradigms in anthropology : an Indian Eye-view of Cosmic Anthropological Principle", Professor Saraswati questioned the legitimacy of a scientific thought that divides humanity into the primitive and the civilized worlds defined by physical and technological considerations. He dwelt on, what he calls, "The Sacred Science of Man", which presents a

set of pairs of conceptual categories : one as many, man as microcosm, science as society, theodicy as cosmody, mind as matter, word as world, knowledge as experience, knowledge as culture, nature as culture, ritual as language, tradition as hierohistory. He further gave concrete examples of the cosmic anthropological principle : cosmic hierophany, ecological principle, ordering principle, and transcending principle.

Professor Ajit K. Danda, in his paper on "Anthropology in India : Need for an Alternate Paradigm", pointed out that the Western models in the curriculum and total neglect of indigenous knowledge have done great harm to anthropology as science, inhibiting the growth of the discipline. Professor Makhan Jha's paper, "Man and His Nature in Indian Textual Traditions", also spoke about the inadequacy of Western methodologies in comprehending and explaining Indian reality. He discussed man-nature relationship as expounded in indian classical texts. Dr. A. Capila presented a paper on "Understanding Culture Experientially", stressing that to understand a culture the researcher must go beyond the words and listen to the hum behind the spoken words. Professor S.C. Malik's paper " Dynamics or Cultural Communication : Anthropology of Experience" questioned the assumptions of the post Newtonian discourse on rationality, linear time, subjectivity vs objectivity, nature vs man, and all such categories used for separating the scientific thought from pre-scientific knowledge systems.

The afternoon session was chaired by Professor S.C. Malik. Dr. Yoletal Gonzales Torres (Mexico) spoke on "Dance as a Means of Communication with the Cosmos in Prehistoric Mexico in the Dance of Concheros". She said that even today these dances can help develop a sense of identification with the ancient Mexican culture as also reestablish the communion with the cosmos, the divine, and the human. In her paper, "Cultural Categories of Space and Time", Dr. Molly Kaushal questioned the use of binary categories in defining the organizational principles and functioning of traditional cultures. She also talked about the essential unity and continuity between biological and cosmological principles, between space, time, body, seed and womb, demonstrating that it is possible to write ethnographies without using Western models. Professor Sang-Bok Han (Korea), in his paper "Towards the Development of Anthropology Relevant to the Study of Korean People, Society and Culture", presented a critical review of the development of Euro-American anthropological theories that fulfilled the needs of colonial rulers and reflected the American social, economic and political situations. He discussed the works of the Chinese anthropologist Fei Xiaotong and his concept of 'people's anthropology', and provided guidelines for the future development of Korean anthropology. His paper led to a discussion on ethical issues involved in anthropology and the inability of today's anthropologists to develop a universal language. Professor Rafael A. Lopez-Sanz (Venezuela) spoke on "Paradigms of New Century". Situating his discourse in the postmodern scenario, he brought out the contributions, problems and failings of anthropology and social sciences since their inception. he discussed the paradigm shift in physics and the role and reasons for emergence of new mythologies, music and rituals. At this 'experimental moment', he envisaged the role of the 'third world' as one of an interlocutor, translator mediating between natives and passions, fighting cultural borderlines and situations of crisis. Professor John McKim Malville (U.S.A), in his paper "Self organizing Systems : From Village to Pilgrimage" talked of two types of stable states in the universe : one is a death-like state of perfect equilibrium, and the other an open self-organizing system. internal feedback loops and export of entropy cause stablization, which provides powerful models for complex human systems. he illustrated this with examples taken from astronomy and Indian pilgrimage Centres. Dr. Kumkum Bhattacharya in her presentations on "Breaking the Bounds of Limited perception", spoke about the perception of the 'other' as 'non-developed' and 'self-perception' as 'developed'.

In his concluding remarks professor Saraswati once again elaborated on the works carried out in the IGNSA. He invited the participants to come to the Centre and to share the vision of the conceptualizer of the organization, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan. Our session was well attended. It turned out to be one of the most lively sessions, where many distinguished scholars participated in the discussion. They were visibly moved, especially by Molly Kaushal's presentation on the Gaddi concept of space and time.

III

We attended the sessions on "The Making of Anthropology in Asia" organized by Shinji Yamasita, Tokyo; "Indigenization of anthropology in East and Southeast Asia" by Joseph Bosco, Hong Kong; and "Indigenous knowledge and science in a changing global environment", by Jerome O. Gefu, Nigeria; which were directly relevant to the IGNCAs work. It was agreed that we must look further afield. My hope is that we shall continue our dialogue with them. While we cultivate our garden, I suggest, India may hold an Asian Conference on "The Sacred Science of Man", hopefully, in the beginning of the 21st Century.

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After concluding the IGNCAs session we decided to attend the sessions organized by other Asian countries on "indigenous anthropology".

The session on "The Making of anthropology in Asia", by Prof. Shinji Yamashita and Takeo Funabiki (Tokyo University) was devoted to the future of anthropology as 'global anthropology' and the role of Asian anthropologists in the framework of a centre-periphery relationship. Europe and America retain the position of being the centre, and the rest of the world forms the periphery. Periphery cannot ignore the forces at the centre, in view of its economic and political strength. The social sciences at the periphery are seen as dealing with local problems, while questioning the hegemony of the centre. Takeo's paper on "The origins of Japanese anthropology", outlined the history of Japanese colonialism in Asia. The self-image of Japan as 'Colonizing Asian' gave a strange twist to Japanese anthropology which examined others as 'ourselves'. Taking the argument further, Shinji spoke on "Constructing selves and others in Japanese anthropology". He placed the origin of Japanese anthropology within the context of colonial expansion in Asia and Pacific regions, starting with Taiwan in 1895. Japanese and Americans studied the same people. Both saw South as a 'hot', 'backward', 'primitive' and 'innocent' place, which was neither 'West' nor 'East'. Japanese anthropologists looked at this region not through western models of orientalism, but through 'Japanese orientalism' emphasizing similarities rather than differences. Prof. Jerry Eades' paper 'From noble savage to tourist attraction' traced the changes in the stereotypes of the Taiwanese Aborigines ranging from a noble savage to a frontier nuisance. In the contemporary world they are seen as cultural resources in the tourist industry. The paper immediately brought to mind the whole debate on "folkloristics", the construction of a lore to attract foreign tourist. This dangerous trend leads to creation of false identity and an 'on show' cultural heritage, eventually creating cultural vacuum and loss of real identity. Prof. A.B. Shamsul's paper 'Domesticating anthropology the Malaysian way', reflected upon how states domesticate anthropology and appropriate anthropological insights to serve their own interests. Prof. Kyeyoung Park's paper, 'History, theory and Korean anthropology', provided the much needed 'other perspective'. His contention was that anthropology must go beyond writing ethnographies. Societies can inspire innovative theoretical insights. There is a need for indigenous anthropology. Prof. Xin lu's paper 'Past and present : two moments in the history of Chinese anthropology', dealt with reconceptualization of reality and the difference between earlier and modern community studies in China. Prof. Takami Kuwayama's paper, 'The world system of anthropology : dialogue between the centre and periphery', was a summing up of the entire debate. He pointed out the need for enhancing the centre-periphery relationship, the need for communication across national boundaries and for better and closer ties among Asian scholars. He also hoped that the use of new technology, like Internet, will possibly change the unilateral centre-periphery relationship, and that the knowledge and information will flow in both directions, promoting dialogue among peripheral countries. The session on 'Indigenization of anthropology in East and South East Asia' by Prof. Joseph Bosco (Chinese University of Hongkong) was in many ways, a thematic and conceptual continuation of the previous session. Its focus was once again on the centre-periphery relationship. It also brought out the 'insider-outsider' debate and raised the question, whether a 'local' anthropologist, applying western methodologies and concepts, can be called an indigenous anthropologist. It raised several issues such as language problems faced by scholars

writing in their native languages, and differences between interpretations of culture by local anthropologists and outsiders. Prof. Singney C.H. Cheung's paper, 'Depiction of the Ainu in Japan' once again focused on the 'insider-outsider' debate. It talked of Japan as a homogenous society and wondered why Japanese anthropologists hesitate to study their own culture. He said the number of works on Japan done by Japanese anthropologists is very small, as Japanese are reluctant to look at themselves as subjects. It is mainly the Americans who talk a lot about Japanese identity and have created a niche for themselves. Prof. Gordon C. Mathews paper on 'The tensions between Japanese and American anthropological depictions of Japan' claimed that the inevitable gap that exists between Japanese and American depictions of Japan is due to the fact that they are addressing two different sets of audience. When these depictions cross borders, gaps in comprehension emerge, both try to assert their superiority over the other. But it is possible for these anthropologists to work together in significant ways, as some works have shown. He also raised the issue of centre-periphery relationship between Japanese and American anthropologists and wondered if these very tensions that exist between the two may shape up the very basis of anthropological knowledge in future. Dr. Joseph Bosco's paper 'Local theories and nativism in the anthropology of Taiwan', discussed the researches conducted in the field of popular religion by native anthropologists who used indigenous concepts which were ignored or overlooked by foreign anthropologists. 'American scholars' interest in local culture is related with the general questions concerning Sinology, whereas local scholars are more interested in their own culture and hence their work does not separate folklore from anthropology. Dr. David Wu's paper 'Chinese national dance and discourse of Chinese culture', raised the issue of how the interpretation of tradition by a native Chinese trained as an anthropologist in the U.S.A., is different from the anthropologist brought up and educated in China. He based his arguments on the study of Chinese dance by these two types of anthropologists. For an indigenous folklorist and native anthropologist, this dance is a minority dance. For an outsider, it becomes a national dance ordering China. Related with this is the third issue : recreation and reinvention of cultural tradition as a nationalistic representation. Dr. Chee Beng Tan's paper 'Ethnicity and indigenization of anthropology in Malaysia' questioned the validity of local anthropology, dependent on 'western models', being qualified as 'indigenous anthropology'. In a multiethnic society like Malaysia, the idea of indigenization carries an ethnic dimension. He wondered if there really is any such thing as 'indigenous anthropology'.

Both the sessions were based on Southeast Asian experiences. Problems were looked at through Japanese-American and American-Chinese angles. However, the issues that were raised in these sessions, have their resonances outside the East and Southeast Asian regions. The centre-periphery equation is equally valid for the Indian situation. Though, it is true that Indian anthropologists have been able to create a niche for themselves and are well known in international circles. But can it be said that what we Indians have is an 'indigenous anthropology'. Like the Malaysians we too have appropriated Western models. As in the case of Southeast Asian anthropologists, anthropologists writing in Indian languages are not taken seriously. They are seldom translated or cited. The centre-periphery relationship is an important concern and a strategy must be evolved to foster a more equal terms of dialogue between the two. However indigenization cannot be understood purely in this context. How do we understand the term indigenization? Do we mean by this an ethnoanthropology or ethnosociology visualized by McKim Marriott, supported by some and contested by many others, not without valid reasons.

The conference was a learning experience for me. It gave me an opportunity to interact with scholars coming from different parts of the world. For me this was a great opportunity to learn about their work and share my work with them. I discussed my project with both senior and young scholars and got a positive feedback. Dialogue with them has helped me look at my Gaddi data from new and many different angles. I also became aware of new issues, aspects and questions that need to be explored further.

Not being a trained anthropologist, I gained many insights into anthropology as a discipline, the wide range of aspects that it studies, the problem it faces at the end of the 20th century, and the tasks that lie ahead of it. Unlike the anthropology of the past, the anthropology of today seems to be rooted in the city. It is concerned with the problems that face the modern man. The scientists gathered in Williamsburg were addressing the modern-man on problems of contemporary society looking at future with a sense of hope. The past was being approached with a new perspective in order to find solutions for contemporary

problems of : health, resource management, ecology, planning, gender issues, justice, politics, over-all human development and well-being. In a nutshell, I can say that papers presented in these sessions were about 'Man', with a capital 'M' and once again the need was felt to define man in terms of man-nature continuum. And the single most reason for this need being the breaking down of all forms of social structures, starting with family to modern Nation-State. Search for congeniality has led us back to tradition, not for a romantic escape, but for practical solutions and guidance for future. However, I will be naive, if I do not acknowledge the politics of 'New Anthropology', emergence of new power equations between centre and periphery, creation of small centres within the 'periphery'. The fact remains that it is still the Euro-Western worldview that decides and dictates the categories of modern scientific discourse.

Molly Kaushal