

Report

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'Culture and Development' has been an area of keen study in IGNC. The mutual impact of culture on development and vice versa has been looked into from various perspectives by scholars at the Centre in the past. Currently it is engaged in the task of collating extensive data it collected, over a period of time, on Indian villages, where culture and development are at maximum interplay.

With this in the background, the IGNC organized a workshop-cum-seminar on May 5-7, 2003. The seminar was mainly intended to bring out the scholars' opinions on the study and the subject in order to evolve a systematic, universal, applied and representative report from the data collected.



Participants at the seminar

Project Village India



Prof. R. K. Bhattacharya lighting the lamp at the inauguration of the Seminar

IGNCA took up the UNESCO-UNDP project on village India to study development, keeping heritage and identification of cultural indicators at the core. It collected through field work, data from 87 villages, representative of the country (which has more than six lakh villages). The task was tough as it is difficult to quantify the cultural data and pin point the indicators of development. Mainly, the data collected concern; 1. Roles of cultural heritage of India in shaping the life of people and how these have undergone changes with development; 2. Cross-cultural and multi-cultural aspects of India; 3. Effect of new technologies on existing cultures; 4. People's response to development planning, policies and processes; 5. Hopes, wishes and aspirations of people in relation to technology and development; and 6. Alternate models of rural life comprising the majority of Indian population.

At the seminar, participants discussed the various aspects of data collected and how effectively it can be presented. The proceedings were arranged in six broad sessions that began with introduction. The following five sessions were on Negotiating Change: Agency of the Rural People, Overview: Village Studies Across Time, Presentation of Analysis of IGNC Data Bank on Village Study, Island Villages and

Processes of Change.

Prof. R.K. Bhattacharya, Prof. and Head, Janapada Sampada, IGNC, in his Introduction note to the seminar said, "It is seen that a very comprehensive ground level study of the villages in India has not currently been attempted even at a representational level, specially in the present situation where they are under the aegis of a single nationhood. However, there have been quite a few social scientists who have expounded their views based on their experiences of village India. Their importance is highlighted with our faith in those views and their validity in the light of our own experiences. There has been a shift in the views of the earlier social scientists and the latter ones - from the view of a unified village republic to more interconnected systems, operating within a region or in a larger (or smaller) domain."

The brief for this seminar was to understand certain concepts and issues on the basis of studies of villages that can be placed in the following terms: 1. Identification of the traits that help in the establishment of the role of culture in the development process. 2. Enhancement of traits of culture. Enhancement refers to those aspects of culture that are valued, need to be valued not only by the community within a particular culture but also by others in a pluralistic situation. 3. Understanding of cultures in all their aspects including the material, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, ways of life, rights ensured in the cultures, traditions and beliefs, preserving and maintaining heritage. Heritage to be understood by all that is handed down from one generation to another, the changes that are seen the modifications that are brought about and the innovations that are introduced - all this in the characterizing of cultures and communities. 4. Aspects of development. Development to be looked at from the point of view of the grass root, to discover the relationship of aspirations and perceptions of people to development programmes and 5. Whether cultural diversity is supported and human dignity is maintained; the focus to be on long-term effects of development rather than short term uni-target programmes.

Prof. Indra Nath Choudhuri, Member Secretary, IGNC highlighted the significance of the Indian villages and talked in brief about the initiative of the centre.

Kumar Rana, Liby T. Johnson and Subhrangsu Santra in their joint presentation on "Hold the pen-plough and till the paper-land: Success story of a movement for education and some related issues" told the story of a women's movement that has changed the village educational scenario completely. Establishing of linkages with other development issues and using traditional cultural idioms of Santal tribal society, women of the Bandarjori village in the Dumka district have not only made hundred percent enrolment and attendance at the primary school possible, but also increased children's learning achievement by assuring their studying outside the school. At the same time they have successfully used the traditional cultural idioms not only for objective development but also for greater social impact." Coming to the conclusion they claimed, "the cultural idioms have not only brought the changes, in course of this movement the idioms themselves have changed to a large positive extent."

In his presentation on "Rethinking Indian Village" Dr. Surinder S. Jodhka said, "Village has for long been viewed as an important aspect of social and cultural life of the Indian people." However, he said the older structures of social life have, more or less, changed over the last half a century or so. Though village continues to be residential location for nearly two-third of Indians, one can no longer say that India today is a land of villages. "How could then we talk of village?" he asked.

Professor Sabyasaachi Bhattacharya, Ex-Vice Chancellor, Shantiniketan graced the occasion with his presence as the chief guest. The other dignitaries and scholars whose presence and comments added value to the seminar are: Shri B.P. Singh, former Home Secretary, Government of India, Prof. K.B. Saxena of Institute of Applied Manpower Research, Ms. Vandana Madan of Delhi University, Dr. Lotika Varadarajan, Prof. Lanchman M. Khubchandani, Dr. Suresh Patil, Dr. Tapio Nisula, Prof. Dikshit Sinha, Dr. S.B. Chakrabarti, Shri Kanchan Mukhopadhyay, Smt. Chanda Mukhopadhyay, Dr. Jayant Sarkar, Prof. Hetukar Jha and Shri Boro Baski.

All scholars of Janapada Sampada presented their findings through their papers. The final report on the project is under preparation under the guidance of Prof. R.K. Bhattacharya. The task is expected to be completed soon.

(Report by Dr. Kailash Kumar Mishra)