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Anthropological Researches in the North-East India

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I stand with humility to pay my homage to one of the great scholar-missionaries, Fr. (Professor) Stephen Fuchs, who represents the best tradition of the missionary compassion with that of the innate human spirit of search for knowledge even among the most neglected core of humanity. He was born on April 30, 1908 at Modling, Austria and his mortal remains were interned there by the side of his mentor, Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt, when he expired on January 17, 2000 after a long life of service to the cause of the Christ and humanity. As a young member of the *Societatis Verbi Divini* (SDV) order, he was inspired by the Diffusionist Theory Culture in anthropology propounded by Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt; came to India in 1934 and devoted next 60 years on studying various aspects of tribal and the Dalit societies. He was incarcerated as a suspect German citizen at various places such as Ahmednagar, Deolali, and Dehra Dun during the Second World War by the British colonial Government. He used the time in the prison to study local languages observing the lives of the Dalits in particular. Once it was realized that he was an Austrian national, he was released in 1945. Immediately after his release, he got busy in his researches and for that he was awarded Ph. D. on 'Ashvamedha Yagnya among the Aryans' from the Vienna University in the year 1950. The Austrian Government honoured him with a medal late in life in 1998.

Among his over a dozen of scholarly books and hundreds of learned articles, *The Children of Hari* (1950) and *Rebellious Prophets*

(1965) are the classics of the Indian anthropological literature. Normally, tradition has been that the anthropologists would study what is termed as a 'tribe', but here was a scholar, who began with the Balahis, an untouchable caste of Nimar district of Madhya Pradesh and the Chamars of Varanasi and Balia districts of Uttar Pradesh. He also worked on Indological theme such as the 'Mythical practice of Ashvamedha Yagnya among the Aryans', campaign for expansion of the state through horse sacrifice. He built his pastoral abode in an ascetic suburb of Bombay, Andheri, where he established the Institute of Indian Culture with an excellent library and music classes and he remained its director for many years to guide its destiny. Along with high grade researches in cultural anthropology, the Institute combined Anthropology, Indology and Sociology in its academic concerns. He taught cultural anthropology at St. Xavier's College, Bombay and was a Special Professor of Ancient Indian Culture at the University of Bombay (Michael, 2010). I invite you all to join me to pay our finest homage to this great soul by 'upholding his vision and meeting squarely the challenges we have to face in translating his vision in to reality in the new millennium' (Jose, 2011). It is a privilege to talk to an informed and concerned audience in his memory and I highly appreciate the gesture of the organizers to ask me for the ritual, though I, and only I, am aware of my limitations in this regard.

Anthropology

Anthropology is the gift to the world of academics from the western scholarship in general and colonial powers in particular. It emerged as that branch of knowledge, which provided information about the distant, exotic and 'unknown communities' through the writings of the explorers looking for new lands, missionaries eager to spread gospel of the Christ among the heathen, and scholar-administrators in search of norms and rules to govern the 'barbarian' communities effectively. And that was also the period of renaissance in Europe, when 'science' was the key to unravel the mystery of the world and anthropology was readily recognized as an emerging academic disciple in the leading universities of the western world. The early anthropologists were naturally not trained in the discipline, as it was yet to emerge as an academic specialty in the established universities. Moreover, they were the 'generalists', who were part anatomists, part pre-historian, part folklorists, linguists, political scientists, psychologists, and sociologists, who visited a distant 'people', different from their own. They provided a rounded picture of

the community through their monographs written in one of the European languages for the European readers. The model general anthropologists were Franz Boas and Alfred Louis Kroeber, W. H. R. Rivers, B. Malinowski, A. R. Raddcliffe-Brown, who trained the first generation of anthropologists in United States of America and the United Kingdom. Again, anthropologists came to be known for intensive field work, ranging up to three years, preferably through the medium of the native languages and would publish at least a monograph, and in course of time such authors would be known by that publication and the community in question through out their lives. Thus, we had B. Malinowski with Trobriand Islanders, E. E. Evans-Pritchard with the Nuer, Margaret Mead with *Coming of Age in Samoa* and the like. The imperial regimes at times commissioned anthropologists to assist them in knotty administrative problems, which led to the emergence of a branch of applied/action/developmental anthropology in course of time. At the end, through a variety of transformation, now anthropology stands on a tripod of state (colonial, welfare or otherwise, e.g. Anthropological Survey of India and host of Tribal Research Institutes), explorers and missionaries (in the form of NGOs now such as the present one) and the academics (in the universities).

Slowly as the discipline of anthropology began to be taught in the universities and more and more excellence in various researches were achieved, it became difficult to be a 'generalist anthropologist' for most of practitioners. Moreover, it was possible, and even desirable, to be generalist, when clear boundary of the discipline was blurred and the 'subjects' lived a simple life in 'splendid isolation'. But now, the subject and object, both of them have turned out to be complex. Thus, we have now pre-historians, folklorists, physical anthropologists, social/cultural anthropologists and other specialists among the anthropologists. Most of them are doing excellent works in their chosen sub-specialties, but communication among such anthropologists turned out to be difficult so much so that a professor of anthropology feels that anthropology has turned out something as a 'group of subjects' rather than 'one subject' (Srivastava, 2004). Moreover, a pre-historian communicates more comfortably with the Ancient Historian; a folklorist with linguist; a social anthropologist with sociologist and a cultural anthropologist with psychologist. The researches are also fruitfully pursued across the disciplinary boundaries. This is but natural; as the discipline grows, it tends to become complex. There is another problem in this development: the anthropologists are no more alone on the

'isolated social island of a tribe'. It is not only the administrators, but also the economist, political scientist, historian, sociologist and even a host of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) with whom the anthropologist has rubbed his shoulders while in the field. Further more, the 'subjects of study' are no more passive as in the past, who would willingly volunteer 'information for scientific research'; rather there are communities, which have become hostile to the 'researchers' on the plea that the outside scholars tend to misrepresent their institutions. In such a situation, long term field work with the medium of subjects' language is not that easy. Lastly, what should be the language of the 'report': a native language, or the language of the community under study, or a standard language in which the scholar is comfortable or the academia expects the scholar to file the report?

Among the variety of conceptual tools, the idea of culture was the most crucial concept in the anthropological enterprise. Various definitions, it is most inclusive (or academically imperialist?) definition was provided by E. B. Tylor in the following words: 'culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'. Writing almost a hundred years after Tylor, the doyen of the American anthropologist, Margaret Mead, emphasizes its contemporaneity, when she finds anthropology 'as a field science, whose members work with fresh field material, studying with living speakers of living languages, excavating the earth where archeological remains are still in situ, observing the behavior of real mothers' brothers to real sisters' sons, taking down folklore from men's lips, measuring the bodies and sampling the blood of men who live in their own lands- lands which we have to travel in order to study the people' (Mead, 1968: 5). She goes on: 'we, that is, the White anthropologists, have to travel to lands of the 'tribes' for field work. The basic descriptive technique is field study by observation and participation and verbal interviews of relatively small groups, typically organized on tribal basis. This emphasis tends to become qualitative than quantitative. It is the study of 'other cultures', reported in third person, not necessarily for the subjects, but for others, who may try to understand subjects' culture in non-native tongues'.

A recent understanding of the genesis of anthropology notes in the White men's colonial mindset: '...the object of anthropology was distant in time as the societies studied were still evolving and in the throes of evolution as well as distance in space located as they were far from Europe, be it the Americas, Africa, Australia,

or Asia...The European colonizers invoked this (anthropological) knowledge as an instrument for controlling the colonized. It was not a device to quench the thirst for curiosity; not mere butterfly collection. The colonial governments for example, primarily used anthropological data collected in British India. The enormous expenses incurred for it were justified as the data collected were required for maintenance of law and order. Thus, the non-west had become an object of study for the west and anthropology was the designed discipline for that purpose' (Oommen, 2007: 163). Did we not inherit this type of anthropology from the British at the dawn of Indian independence, when one finds most of the Indian anthropologists seeking for patronage from their former rulers (Sinha, 1991)?

My limitations and claim as an anthropologist

I was trained in anthropology at Ranchi, where all branches of the discipline was part of the courses; a six weeks long field work followed by a written report was compulsory to all the students. There was also a tradition in the department to hold a weekly seminar, in which all teachers were expected to be present and students were encouraged to actively participate in the discussion. It so happened that Prof. L.P. Vidyarthi, the head of the department, was taking his Post Graduate (Previous) students on an educational excursion tour to Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, NEFA and Sikkim in February-March, 1964 and I was one of them. It was a team of about a dozen of animist, Christian, Hindu, Muslim boys and girls, in which every student was assigned some or other work for smooth travel during the period of excursion. While travelling a place/community or braking journey on the way somewhere, the students were to study hurriedly whatever the literature was available on the place/community. Similarly, travelling by any means of transport or visiting a community/place of interest, one had to observe the environment, people, economy, life-style, behaviour and write them in the diary every day. The diaries would be presented to Dr. Vidyarthi every evening prior to the dinner and he would read them and comment on and discuss the entries one by one in the following days. He would himself open up the discussion, what he had observed at times and would ask some of us to comment on and initiate us in the process of observation, making relevant notes and initiation of discussion on some or other issues. There were occasions, when out of exhaustion or sheer mischief, we did not present the promised daily completed diaries, he would ignore it for a day or so, but

there were occasions, when he went on 'a mock hunger strike' in the absence of the diaries.

Among others, we took part in the cremation of our host in Shillong, anthropologist Verrier Elwin, went to Manipur among the Tankhuls, came to curfew bound newly created state of Nagaland and then visited Galongs in Siang district, NEFA. At the last leg of our excursion, while at Gangtok in Sikkim, I wrote in my diary that except Geoffrey Gorer's *Living in a Lepcha Village*, there was not much study made on Sikkim. Prompt came the comment: 'why can't you take up the challenge to fill the gap'? And the die was cast on that day, perhaps March 12/13th of the year 1964, as I promised my teacher in the presence of the fellow students to undertake to study Sikkim without realizing the implications of it at the time. After that, I wrote an M.A. dissertation on the 'Studies on the Tribes of Northern Region of India', which was based on secondary materials (Sinha, 1965). It appears that every anthropologist is some sort of a romantic creature, as he/she falls in a life long love affairs with the community under study and he/she starts referring to it as my tribe/my village/my community. It did happen with me even prior to initiating my field study on Sikkim, as I was reminded of my promise to my teacher. And my love affairs with Sikkim continue even after about four decades of those eventful days.

I landed myself with a job of lecturer in social anthropology at Gujarat Vidyapeeth, Ahmedabad, far away from Sikkim and soon fed up with arrogant Gandhian idealism of social reform at the Vidyapeeth. I quit the job and got a fellowship for doing Ph. D. in Sociology in the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur (IIT/K), in January, 1968. Once I completed my course work, I was assigned as a candidate to be supervised by Dr. Ali Ashraf, a political sociologist, who had done a study of the 'City Government of Calcutta' earlier. I went on an exploratory visit to Sikkim before I drew my research proposal for the approval of the Research Committee of the Humanities and Social Sciences. I made a presentation to the Committee and after that my supervisor told me: 'Look, Sinha/ I neither know anthropology, nor I do of Sikkim. You are a matured person; you should be smart enough to guard your interests. You go ahead and do your research, but keep me posted with. You will always have my support'. And I did get his at most support, as I was his first Ph.D. student and he found funds for my costly eight months long field study in those trying days of financial crisis. The extent of his confidence in my work may be gauged by the fact that he had chosen Leo E. Rose, Editor the *Asian Survey* and an authority on the Himalayan politics and

S. C. Dube, Director, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla among my thesis examiners, who did recommend award of the proposed degree on the thesis: 'Elite in Sikkim: A Study in Political Development'.

Among the courses required to be completed as preparatory to writing the dissertation, there was a course on 'Community Power Structure'. Among its list of literature was Floyd Hunter's work with the same title and Robert A. Dahl's *Who Governs*. Both the works were based on field study. While Hunter's was based on his intensive field study through anthropological technique of reputational method of American city of Atlanta, Dahl's study was a product of his field data through positional method from New Haven. These studies inspired me and I toyed with the idea of making a comparative study of power structure in the capital cities of the two Himalayan kingdoms of Sikkim and Bhutan: Gangtok and Thimphu, by combining both the above field methods of data collection. Fired with the zeal of a novice enthusiast, I visited Gangtok in February/March, 1969, a town of about 7,000 inhabitants, an ideal site for manageable field work and then to Thimphu, a 'town' of about 3,500 inclusive of the construction labour, who were reportedly more than half of the total. Thus, I wrote in my second book on Bhutan: 'having drawn a tentative research plan, I began corresponding to relevant contacts. It took me no time to learn that none of the two kingdoms had centres of higher education, newspapers, radio stations, and other means of communication in the contemporary sense. No doubt, their capital 'towns' were connected with the wheeled transport recently, but the interior areas—mostly forested and snow-capped hills and mountains—remained in splendid isolation. These were under the charges of the most oriental, despotic rulers, whose whims and eccentricities were legends. Naturally, the persons in authority, whom my letters were addressed to, acknowledged none of my numerous letters'. (Sinha, 2001:9-10).

So far my teaching is concerned, but for about two years at Gujarat Vidyapeeth, I have taught sociology for better than three decades in Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur and Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi and North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. I was also briefly associated with Department of Social Anthropology for a term at Cambridge in 1983 and another one at Department of Anthropology, University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC) as a Fulbright Senior Professor in 1989. My writings have been on ethnicity, religion, politics of development in Sikkim and Bhutan, environmental history of North East region,

urbanization in the northeast and sociology of divided frontier communities. I am life member of both the national professional bodies: Indian Anthropological Association and Indian Sociological Association, but I confess that I do attend their sessions rather occasionally. I am academically comfortable in company of both; the anthropologists and sociologists and no body has asked me whether I am an anthropologist or a sociologist. Neither did the question bothers me as I feel equally comfortable in the company of both the crowds. Among others, I was asked to write on the progress of the sociological researches in Northeast region, which I did (Sinha, 2009). And now, the occasion has arrived for me to try my hand to attempt to review anthropological researches on Northeast region. But prior to that, a few words on anthropology in the North East region should be in order.

Early anthropological writings on Northeast India

Two Jesuit missionaries, Cacella and Cabral, possibly the first Europeans, who came to Bhutan, entered the country in 1627 and spent about seven months in the company of the first Zhabsdrung at Cags-ri, the founder of the Bhutanese theocracy. He was anxious to keep the Jesuits in his court and actually lent them a room at his chapel. He even offered them land at sPa-gro for building a church and committed some of his monks to them for instruction. Missionaries' report sent to their superiors at Goa on October 4, 1627 is of 'the greatest importance for understanding of the country, its people and character of the Zhabs-drung' (Aris, 1979: 217). Like these two early missionaries, there were travelers, explorers, adventurers, tea planters and at last administrators, who went to the hills and filed their reports, travelogues, adventure stories, and simply wrote their memoirs on exotic land, vegetation, wild creatures and so-called 'savage' and barbarian peoples. Unlike these two pioneers, Fr. Nicholas Michael Krick (1819-1854) was a member of the *Societe des Missions Etrangères* who came to India in 1850; undertook two trips to present Adi and Mishmi areas; crossed to Tibet and got murdered in October in the Mishmi Hills by Digaru Mishmi chief, Kaisa. The accounts of his journey were published in Paris titled *Ralation d'un Voyage au Tibet* posthumously. Even in those imperial days, he wrote on the Padam, a sub-tribe among the Adis: 'is very active, jolly, a lover of independence, generous, noble-hearted, plain-spoken, more honest than the average Oriental, not over-moderate in eating and drinking' (Elwin, 1972: xxix-xxx). For details one may consult Verrier Elwin's historical anthologies (Elwin, 1969).

Some years back my colleague from NEHU, Professor T.B. Subba and G.C. Ghosh edited a volume titled *Anthropology of North East India*, which very competently reviewed the status of discipline and mapped out research output from the region (Subba, and Ghosh, 2003). Similar exercises were undertaken by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and Anthropological Survey of India from time to time. In 1980's the North Eastern Council organized a similar meet at Shillong, in which R.S. Mann surveyed the researches conducted on the tribal communities of the region. He listed the communities such as Khasi, Ao, Garo, Angami as most studied and small tribes like Bokar, Sulung, and others which were least studied. Those efforts have made my efforts light and at the same time difficult. Right from early British colonial regime, the region and its so-called exotic peoples attracted the attention of the classical ethnographers. E.T. Dalton, the author of the celebrated *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, was a British functionary of the East India Company posted in the region in 1850's and '60's. The materials collected for aborted Ethnographic Fair to be held at Jubbalpore in the Central India was further supplemented by Dalton's own notes collected during his posting in the region, which came handy for the publication, a land mark in ethnographic mapping out of the region (Dalton, 1872).

The University of Calcutta was established way back in 1857, but it was an affiliating university and teachings were conducted in the colleges. Prior to establishment of the first department of anthropology in India in Calcutta University, a lead was taken in the ethnographic researches in this region way back in 1903, when the concerned administrators got together to establish *Ethnography of Assam* under the editorship of P.R.T. Gordon, the author of the ethnographic classic, *The Khasis*. And within a span of about three decades, *Ethnography of Assam* managed to publish about a dozen and half monographs on all the important communities of the region: Khasis, Garos, Aos, Angamis, Lhota, Rengma, Sema, Mikirs (Karbis), Cacharis, Mizo, Lakhers, and communities from Manipur.

Once the department of anthropology was established in Calcutta University, the scholars began to conduct field studies in the region. Similarly, once the Anthropological Survey of India was established in mid-1940's, it began conducting anthropological expeditions to the region for field study. This was the decade, when the region got its first University at Guwahati in 1948 with a mandate to start teaching and research in anthropology, which it initiated in right earnest. The Department of Anthropology, Guwahati gave instruction and conducted researches in all branches of the discipline. For next two decades, one of greatest

contributions of this institution was to train anthropologists, who could initiate researches in/on the region. In mid sixties, Dibrugarh University was established, which began teaching anthropology from the beginning. With coming of North Eastern Hill University, Shillong and Manipur University, Imphal, two Central Universities in the region, anthropological studies and researches got further boost. It was a simple argument: as there is a concentration of tribal communities in the region, and they must teach anthropology with a view to researching on them. And at least that is what happened at North Eastern Hill University, at Shillong in early 1980's. There was a combined department of sociology and anthropology, with faculty deliberately drawn from both the disciplines to develop a strong social anthropological base within the School of Social Sciences. But it was not to be: the professional anthropological bodies and the academic authorities of the University were determined to play to the sensitive tribal gallery and a separate department was created. Coming to the training of the man power, these universities must be training together at least a hundred anthropologists a year. There are students, who conduct field studies and write their Ph.D. theses after field work. The scholars attached to these academic bodies do come out with their publications. In this context, I remember Directorate of Research in Arunachal Pradesh was very active at one time and came out with a series of monographs on various communities of the state. Furthermore, apart from the regional station of the Anthropological Survey of India at Shillong, various state governments established their Tribal Research Institutes as part of their commitment to the welfare of the scheduled tribal communities, a mandate given to them by the Indian Constitution.

Tribal scene in Northeast India

In the year 1873 when Assam province was separated from Bengal Presidency, the **Inner Line Act** was passed, by which communities residing in the hills were prohibited from crossing an imaginary line to the plains. Similarly, any non-tribal missionary, explorer, traveler, businessman, wood-cutter, hunter, and honey collector was to seek written permission from competent authorities to enter such designated areas. The British intention was to safeguard the tea plantations in the plains from tribal raids. Similarly, they intended to provide security to the non-tribal entrants to the hills from the tribes and tried to see that they did not exploit the 'simple' hill communities. The Governor of the province was to administer such areas at his discretion. Present day Arunachal Pradesh,

Nagaland and Mizoram came under such dispensation. The Government of India Act, 1919, declared these areas as the **Backward Tracts** and kept them away under the special power of the Governor separate from the legislative purview of the province of Assam. In the year 1935, these backward tracts of Lakhimpur, Sadiya, and Balipara frontier tracts, Naga Hills District, and Lushai Hills District were termed as the **Excluded Areas** and the Garo Hills District was clubbed among the **Partially Excluded Areas**. It may not be out of place to inform the readers that the Government of India appointed J.P. Mills, a bureaucrat trained in anthropology, as the first **Tribal Advisor to the Governor of Assam** in 1943, followed by another bureaucrat, Nari K. Rustomji. And for the last ten years, 1953-1964, it was Verrier Elwin, who advised the Governor of Assam on tribal affairs. Once the Constituent Assembly met for drafting the future Constitution of India, it made the provision for listing such excluded and partially excluded areas under the 'Sixth Schedule' of the Indian Constitution with special dispensation. Incidentally, it was Verrier Elwin, who initiated serious anthropological monographic studies on various communities of Arunachal Pradesh by trained anthropologists such as Gallongs, Monpas, Sherdukpens, Akkas, and so on. But with exception of Sachin Roy's study on Padam-Miniyong Culture (Roy, 1966), none of them attracted serious attention as did the earlier publications under the aegis of *Ethnography of Assam* series of monographs.

Coming to the North East region, its geography and recent history have conspired to give it a distinct regional identity, the region of seven sisters: Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, now added to state of Sikkim. All these states have sizeable presence of scheduled tribes within their limits. Four of them, Arunachal, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland have each more than 60 per cent of their population as the scheduled tribes. Consequently, all the seats from these states to the Indian parliament are reserved for the scheduled tribes. Similarly, all the seats in state assemblies except one in Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland and except five General Seats in Meghalaya are reserved for the scheduled tribes. Out of 30 seats in the Indian parliament from the region, two-thirds are reserved for the scheduled tribes. These four scheduled tribal states are located on the international borders and tribes live in their distinct territories, which are traditionally exclusive to them. Moreover, the Indian Constitution has guaranteed prevalence of their customary rights within their territories, which means no act of Indian Parliament will be automatically applicable to these states.

These states get 90 per cent grant-in-aid for their maintenance from the central government. All of them have their universities funded by the central government. With the exception of Arunchal Pradesh, literacy rate in tribal states is higher than that of the national figure. In comparison to their demographic size, they are reasonably well represented in the all India services compared to their counterparts from other states. The elite among them is highly westernized in their daily style of life and they normally imbibe western values with ease. It is their tribal spirit of sense of defiance against adverse circumstances; recent colonial history and locational advantage of being on the national frontiers that give them extra advantage to negotiate favorably with the Central Government.

Most of the scheduled tribes of North East Region are demographically small in size. And that is why none of the three numerically largest scheduled tribes, Bhil, Gond and Santal, are from North East and their problems are also basically different, as these large tribes live side by side with the hierarchical Hindu caste society. Commenting in a different context, a perceptive scholar has following to record: 'the tribes of Central and Western India are completely different from tribal communities in North East, where there is better education and other facilities and indeed, where tribal political elite have been in power for 50 years, as in the case of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills, which became Meghalaya in 1972. One could remark that so-called primitiveness of the tribes is more in the Fifth Schedule states (outside the North East region), where education, political awareness and empowerment as well as health facilities are extremely poor and income levels at the bottom. The mainstreaming of these groups, where their lands have been taken over by plain settlers and others, has not really helped them very much. Indeed, it has devastated their culture, their environment and their social standing as well as their economic status' (Hazarika, 2004).

Anthropological instruction and research in Northeast India

Indian scholars such as S.C. Roy published monographs on tribes even before the science of man, anthropology, was introduced as an academic discipline in an Indian university. However, formal anthropological training to the Indians began with establishment of department of anthropology in Calcutta University in 1920, when scholars from Calcutta were sent to do field work among the tribes of Assam (Sarkar, 2003). After independence of India, other universities such as Lucknow, Ranchi, Delhi sent at times anthropologists to the region to study various communities. By

the last decade of the 20th century, almost half of a dozen of the universities from the region was imparting training in anthropology. And almost all the students getting trained in these regional universities are mostly from the region and bulk of them hail from the 'tribal' communities. They are taught anthropological theories and concepts through the medium of English; they are trained in the traditional field work method of data collection through participant observation and write their dissertations in typical Malinowskian tradition in English. There is a tendency to select one's own community for the study and invariably under the supervision of a faculty from one's community. Many a times, the incentive for such a study occurs to correct some alleged distortion crept in the earlier studies conducted in the past. They are invariably inspired to seek for the origin of their communities, institutions, customs, and traditions and try to uncover the nuances of various aspects of their socio-cultural set-up.

Four universities teaching anthropology in the region for better than three decades with about four dozen trained anthropologists plus the anthropologists in the research institutes in the region must be commended for providing trained expertise in anthropology for helping understand the communities in a more scientific way. But it becomes equally embarrassing to hear that standard reference on the communities such as Khasi, Garo, Ao, Sema, Lhota and others continue to be standard ethnography written some hundred years back by the colonial scholar-administrators. Perhaps, it is the time to take stock of the quantity and quality of the research out-put. E. R. Leach's study of the Kachin social structure from our eastern neighbourhood, published in 1954, is still considered an anthropological classic from the region. Have we in India trained in anthropological theories and method been able to publish such a classic? Is this question relevant? An Indian Ravindra K. Jain goes abroad, studies Overseas Indians and becomes a world expert on Indian Diaspora. Similarly, an Amitabh Ghosh, after getting his degrees from the universities of Delhi and Oxford, apart from a series of novels, becomes an established authority on Egyptian society and culture. What does it mean? Does it mean that nothing significant has been added to the existing corpus of literature on the communities during the last five decades? Or should we look around in to the content and quality of anthropological expertise, instruction, training and special claim of the field work based out put? After all, anthropology, the science of man, is a costly enterprise compared to other soft sciences such as economics, history, political science, social work, and sociology. And stock taking and introspection

on the problem on hand invariably corrects our perspective for the better.

Now the communities in the region have changed from simple to complex posing a question to anthropological approach to holistic study. Moreover, now the anthropologists have to cohabit with economists, geographers, historians, linguists, political scientists, sociologists and others for the field work, as field work based on participant technique is no more a monopoly of anthropologists. We are aware of emic and etic approaches to socio-cultural phenomena and a happy cohabitation between the two is always welcome, because such efforts will certainly enrich our understanding of the cultural phenomena. But scholars may like to ponder over the regionally emerging trends in anthropological enterprise: Does anthropology continue to be a 'study of other cultures'? Have the anthropologically trained native scholars evolve their own ethno-methodology and native conceptual categories to contest the conventional anthropological views of tribal world? In other words, have they proposed an alternative/uniquely regional methodology for studying one's own community by the trained native anthropologists?

Still further pursuing the earlier issues, what should be the medium of language for data collection and report writing? What should be the length of field stay for a meaningful study for members of the community under study? What should be the medium of dissertation? Should it continue to be English, and then whom is it reported to? In other words, is such an exercise within the ambit of anthropological tradition of studying other cultures? In case it is not, which one may suspect, then should we define anthropology differently for the region? Then, what type of anthropology will it be and how different or similar will it be from the main anthropological traditions? In case it is not possible, then should it not be considered as 'sociological anthropology', in which instead of historical reconstruction, a general theory of comparative sociology is considered the goal of anthropology (Leach, 1982: 21). In this context, we may have to educate the public, and especially non-specialist scientific public, who normally consider anthropology as a study of tribes, who are equated with backwardness and primitive world.

There is another problem. And this originates with study of changing the cultural phenomena. Study of the aspect of change requires a bench line data base from where variation can be measured. In case of the tribal communities of North East region, what should be the logical bench line for understanding the tribal culture? One hastens to add that culture has to be seen as a dynamic

entity. However, it has to be a real cultural construct, which is logically different from such other societal entities. It has to be autonomous in itself and it explains itself within its own context. Our first problem in North East region is to identify the 'tribes'. Let us ask the obvious question: Do the communities studied by the British scholar-administrators such as P.R.T. Gordon, J.H. Hutton, J. P. Mills and others continue to be the 'tribes' as proposed earlier? What makes them different from other non-tribal communities? In case they are the tribes, who are the scheduled tribes in India? In other words, are the tribes and scheduled tribes co-terminus? We feel these simple questions beg answers from the community of scholars (Sinha, 2008).

No community in the region is any more in complete isolation, as they used to be in the past. Thus, stable uniformity among the institutions within even the smallest of the communities is no more possible. Forces of democratic dispensation, monetized economy, introduction of the Christianity, incorporation of the hill region within the state system, new means of transportation and communication, extension of welfare activities, media exposure and host of other forces have compelled the ethnic intelligentsia to evaluate their customs, institutions and values afresh. A segment of more articulate among them apprehends that non-ethnic individuals may misrepresent their traditions outside in a negative light. With a view to avoid such a possibility, they at times stop welcoming external 'good doers' inclusive of anthropologists among them. Thus, if a committed anthropologist desires to follow in the footsteps of B. Malinowski for the field work among the tribes of North East India of today, he should be ready to face some possible unpleasant music. My lamentable music on the status of anthropological enterprise in the region (at least to some of the members of the audience) comes to end and I assure you all that I am a die-hard optimist about relevance of anthropology. My belief in anthropology gets firm all the more, once I draw inspiration from sage like Fr. Stephen Fuchs' perseverance to marshal anthropological expertise to uncover the darkness around weaker segment of our society. I invite you all, fellow anthropologists, to endeavour to make anthropology more and more appropriate, relevant, sophisticated and richer discipline, may I say, for the cause of the people of the region.

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