

International Workshop  
on

# IMPROVISING STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH Methodological Concerns

organised by

Indian Anthropological Association & Anthropology Without Borders

12-13 AUGUST 2020

Workshop Report



# Preamble

The present pandemic of COVID 19 has posed a serious challenge to various disciplines of social sciences with special reference to their research plans. There is a need for social scientists to undertake exercises in critical self reflections so as to innovate strategies for continuance of the ongoing research. Not only the universe of study, but also the whole world is getting reoriented in a historically unparalleled way where the efficacy of existing methods are being questioned. The nature of 'field' itself is undergoing rapid transformation and therefore new ways of doing fieldwork need to be identified and strengthened. Inaccessible public spaces should be reached through innovative strategies using technology, media or otherwise. Where the idea of 'new normal' is acquiring greater acceptance, the idea of 'new social' needs to be explored and understood. In its emphasis on 'continuity' social science research has the danger of getting routinised and therefore obsolete. Most of the engaged anthropologists/ scholars are already experimenting with different ways of working through the same techniques and/or methods. A meaningful conger of technology, tools and timing has created a new space for researchers. Answers to research questions are being sought on both, the planes, virtual and actual reality. This is the time to learn from the best practices adopted by individuals and institutions in their respective areas of specialisation.

In its effort to make social science research significant and academically vibrant, Indian Anthropological Association and Anthropology Without Borders take a modest step to organise a two day workshop on (the above theme) the challenges and possibility of doing research during this pandemic. Needless to maintain that the anthropological method of reaching out to the 'others' through a rich ethnographic tradition, is in fact a methodological strategy being adopted by most of the contemporary social scientists who are grounded in their approach with a strong commitment to empirical traditions. Let this be truly an endeavour by Indian Anthropological Association to make anthropology without borders.



# Organising Committee



Professor S.M. Patnaik  
President, IAA  
Patron



Professor Nilika Mehrotra  
Editor, The Indian Anthropologist  
Convenor



Dr. Avitoli G. Zhimo  
Secretary (HQ) cum-Treasurer, IAA  
Convenor

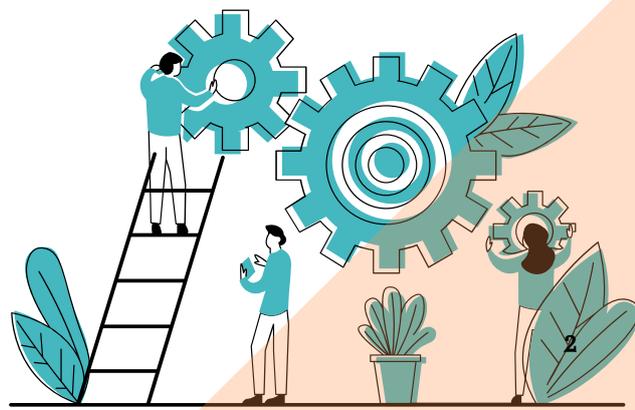
## Steering Committee

- Coordinator : Ms. Loveena Sehra  
Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.
- Co-Host : Ms. Eche Konyak  
Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.
- Report written, compiled and designed by : Ms. Loveena Sehra

## Rapporteurs\*

- Inaugural Session and Session 1 : Ms. Richa Joshi
- Session 2 and 6 : Ms. Dharna Sahay
- Session 3 and 8 : Ms. Sarika Negi
- Session 4 and 5 : Ms. Ankita Mehta
- Session 7 : Ms. Ruchika Sharma

\*Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi



# PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Day One: 12 August 2020, Wednesday.

11.00 am - 12.00 Noon : INAUGURAL SESSION

- Introducing the theme : Dr. Avitoli G. Zhimo ( Secretary (HQ) cum –Treasurer, IAA)  
Professor Nilika Mehrotra (Editor Indian Anthropologist, Journal of IAA).
- Keynote Address : “Fear, Uncertainty and Ethics of Social Research”  
Professor Soumendra Mohan Patnaik  
Vice-Chancellor, Utkal University; President, IAA; National Coordinator, AWB (India Chapter).
- Moderator : Dr. Supriya Singh ( Senior Manager: Projects and Partnerships, Iora Ecological Solutions, Delhi).

## SESSION 1: REVIEWING and ANALYSING SECONDARY LITERATURE (12.00 noon -1.00 pm)

### Speakers

Professor Nita Mathur  
School of Social Sciences,  
Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

Dr. Rajnikant Pandey  
Assistant Professor, Centre for Indigenous Culture Studies,  
Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi.

### Moderator/ Discussant

Dr. Kalindi Sharma  
Assistant Professor,  
Amity Institute of Anthropology, Amity University, Noida.

Break: 1.00pm-2.00 pm

## SESSION 2: REALIGNING LOGISTICS OF RESEARCH (2.00 pm -3.00 pm)

### Speakers

Professor Sukant K. Chaudhury  
Department of Sociology, University of Lucknow.

Dr. Indrani Mukherjee  
Post-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Delhi.

### Moderator/ Discussant

Ms. Sarika Negi  
PhD Scholar,  
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

## SESSION 3: RESEARCHING GENDER ISSUES (3.00 pm -4.00 pm)

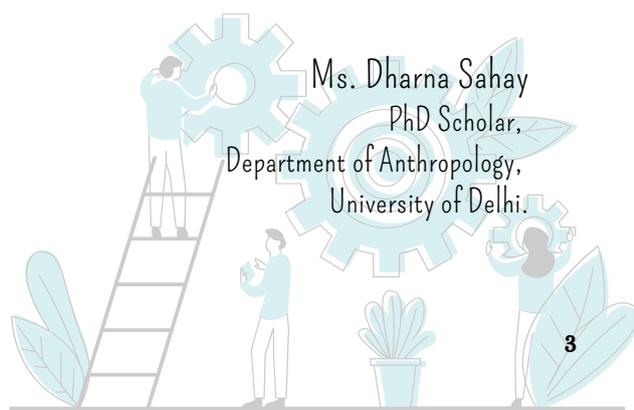
### Speakers

Professor Nilika Mehrotra  
Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Dr. Sumit S. Srivastava  
Assistant Professor, Centre for Development Studies,  
University of Allahabad.

### Moderator/ Discussant

Ms. Dharna Sahay  
PhD Scholar,  
Department of Anthropology,  
University of Delhi.



Day Two: 13 August 2020, Thursday

SESSION 4: RESEARCHING THE NORTH EAST OF INDIA (11.00 am -12.00 noon)

Speakers

Moderator/ Discussant

Dr. Dolly Kikon  
Senior Lecturer, School of Social and Political Sciences,  
University of Melbourne, Australia.

Dr. G. Kanato Chopri  
The New India Foundation Fellow, Bengaluru.

Dr. Lovitoli Jimo  
Assistant Professor, School of Human Studies,  
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Delhi.

SESSION 5: RESEARCH THROUGH VISUALS and MEDIA (12.00 noon- 1.00 pm)

Speakers

Moderator/ Discussant

Dr. Alison Louise Kahn  
Director, Oxford Documentary Film Institute (ODFI), Oxford;  
Senior Tutorial and Research Fellow, Stanford University Overseas  
Program, Oxford.

Dr. Avitoli G. Zhimo  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

Dr. Ratheesh Kumar  
Assistant Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School  
of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Break: 1.00pm-2.00 pm

SESSION 6: PUBLIC and CORPORATE POLICIES (2.00 pm- 3.00 pm)

Speakers

Moderator/ Discussant

Professor Avanish Kumar  
Public Policy and Governance,  
Management Development Institute, Gurgaon.

Dr. Chitra Kadam  
Vice President,  
Ancor Research Labs, Greater Noida.

Dr. Archana Shukla Mukherjee  
Senior Manager: Gender, Diversity and Inclusion,  
Change Alliance Pvt. Ltd.

SESSION 7: PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS and PRACTICES ON THE GROUND (3.00 pm- 4.00 pm)

Speakers

Moderator/ Discussant

Dr. Sunita Reddy  
Associate Professor, Centre of Social Medicine and Community  
Health, School of Social Sciences,  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Dr. Priyanka Khurana  
Assistant Professor,  
Department of Anthropology, Utkal University.

Dr. Surendra KumarJena  
State Nodal Person, MAMTA Health Institute for Mother and Child,  
Bhubaneswar.



## SESSION 8: MENTAL HEALTH and DISABILITY ACCESS (4.00pm- 5.00 pm)

### Speakers

Dr. Mahima Nayar

Independent Researcher; former Assistant Professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

Dr. Shubhangi Vaidya

Associate Professor, School of Inter-Disciplinary and Trans-Disciplinary Studies (SOITS), Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi.

### Moderator/ Discussant

Ms. Ritika Gulyani

PhD Scholar,

Centre for the Study of Social Systems,

School of Social Sciences,

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

Open Panel Discussion (5.00 pm-6.00pm)

Summary and Vote of Thanks :

Ms. Loveena Sehra

## Workshop Highlights

- The workshop was virtually hosted via Zoom Meetings. It was overwhelming to have received registrations from a total of 1275 individuals (which included students, research scholars and faculty members from varied disciplines) all across the country including participants from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Germany, Sri Lanka and others.
- The workshop was attended by more than 450 participants. A total of 370 participants met the criteria for the award of participation certificates.
- The workshop was live streamed at Indian Anthropological Association's (IAA) Facebook Page . The videos are also available at IAA India's YouTube channel.
- The workshop covered various themes like: Importance of literature analysis during Covid-19, realigning logistics for post-lockdown fieldwork, use of visuals and media, and discussions related to the impact of pandemic on contemporary issues like gender, identity, public health, mental health, disability and public policies.



## Introduction and Welcome address

Indian Anthropological Association (IAA) and Anthropology Without Borders (AWB-India Chapter) organised a two day virtual International Workshop on "*Improvising Strategies for Social Research: Methodological Concerns*" during 12-13 August 2020 via Zoom Meeting.

The host and convenor of the event Dr. Avitoli G. Zhimo (Secretary (HQ) cum-Treasurer, IAA) inaugurated the workshop by extending a warm welcome to the participants. She introduced them to the Indian Anthropological Association (IAA). IAA, a representative body of the professional anthropologists in India, involved in the pursuit of dissemination of knowledge regarding the diversified conditions of human existence. Even though IAA has been focussed in understanding variety of the Indian culture, it does not ignore the important findings of the world anthropology.

Dr. Zhimo reflected on IAA's sensitivity and responsiveness towards significant conceptual and methodological advances that have surfaced from time to time in traditions of British, American and even French anthropology. This has been achieved primarily through its journal, *The Indian Anthropologist*. This journal has successfully endeavoured to reflect the range and diversity of contemporary research and writings on anthropology of India. One of the important goals of IAA is to promote interdisciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity. IAA joined World Council of Anthropological Association (WCAA) in the year 2010, marking its presence in the international arena as well. Since COVID-19 pandemic has posed certain challenges for the practice of anthropology and other social sciences, Dr. Zhimo found it imperative for the practitioners to respond, critique and intervene in the given circumstances.

Contemplating the idea behind the theme of the workshop, Prof. Nilika Mehrotra (Editor, *Indian Anthropologist*) addressed the apprehensions surrounding the research plans evoked in the present scenario. In this phase of 'new sociality' where socialisation is internet based, she emphasised upon the need to re-orient research. Online webinars and workshops are perfect examples of the new kind of sociality, as doing ethnography seemed a distant dream. This disruption is not only at the level of self and that of the community, but between the relationship of the two as they locate themselves in a new social order. As researchers with fieldwork experiences, one may realise that these disruptions seem normal to an anthropologist. Thus, it is time to improvise ways of doing fieldwork and research by recalling the anthropological classics of the 1980's when the post modern moment arrived and led to experiments with ethnography. Professor Mehrotra encouraged learnings from disciplines of science, technology and medical anthropology where disruptions (like the existing pandemic) serve as a 'critical event' (referring to Veena Das, 1995) in tailoring the research. The classical ways of doing anthropological research (using oral histories, folklores, archives) and revisiting contemporary issues can inform and reform our research. Finally, she briefly introduced the structure of the workshop which covered fundamental topics like literature analysis and readjusting logistics, use of visuals and media, to some of the core issues related to gender, identity, public health, mental health, disability and public policies.

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Das, V. (1995). *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Vol. 7). Oxford University Press, Delhi.



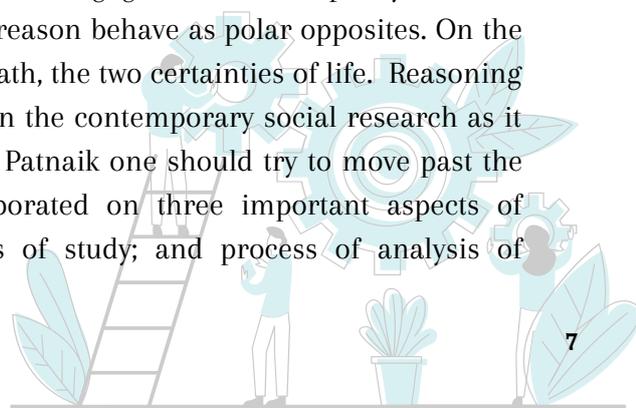
## Keynote Address: “Fear, Uncertainty and Ethics of Social Research”

Setting the workshop in motion, Dr. Supriya Singh, moderator of the session gave an insight into the history of Anthropology Without Borders (AWB). AWB was set up under the rubric of IAA as a formal entity, forming a network of professional anthropologists who act as critical readers, specialists, and analysts of policies to establish a link with a wider audience. It was formed with a vision to serve people by looking into social issues (like sustainability, water, sanitation, education etc.), sharing narratives and stories of people, reviewing policy implications, interventions and related practices in the country. Introducing the title of the keynote lecture of Prof. S.M. Patnaik (President, IAA) which revolved around fear, uncertainty and ethics of social research in the pandemic, Dr. Singh highlighted the issues of social isolation, financial pressures and even mental health that have increased during the pandemic. These issues raise concerns as to how government, civil societies, and researchers can come together to support long term recovery in terms of health, education, economy and so on. In this sphere, the objective is to find ways to overcome the unprecedented situation and visualise the post pandemic world while improving the resilience of the communities to overcome such fears and uncertainties.

Anthropology is a discipline which is closer to the ground and does not shy away from the abstraction. It travels from the ground reality to the realities of higher order, crossing disciplinary and geographical boundaries, transcending into the *in silo* understanding of the discipline. Referring to Professor Mehrotra's concept of 'new sociality' that has changed the relationship between the 'self' and the community, and T.N. Madan's definition of anthropology as a mutual interpretation of each other's cultures, Prof. Patnaik interpreted the nature of the 'new sociality' to be individualistic in a way that it may serve as a 'new normal' for some, a 'new aberration' or 'new pathological' to others.

Dwelling into the sociology or anthropology of fear and uncertainty in the context of research holds promises of creativity in future paradigms and revelations within and across disciplines. Anthropology has singularly focussed upon developing methods to understand the 'other', but has never considered the mutuality that exists between two cultures, amidst the 'self' and the 'other' or the 'self' and the 'field'. In view of the pandemic, Prof. Patnaik reflected on the shift from anthropocene to '*anthro pause*' where a cease in human activity has led to emergence of new biodiversity. It has made us aware of the negative impact of human actions on the environment. Similarly, as a social scientist there is a need to incorporate this new sense of reflexivity into our research work, what Prof. Patnaik called as a 'private' process of research, that is, an opportunity to be critically aware of our reflexive positions and roles.

Prof. Patnaik distinguished 'fear' from 'uncertainty' using Lars Svendsen's *Philosophy of Fear* (2007) who describes emotions (such as fear, jealousy and others) to have a biological component but are shaped by individual experiences and social norms. As reasoning gives us the capacity to react consciously, fear has the power to obstruct it. Thus, fear and reason behave as polar opposites. On the other hand, the idea of 'uncertainty' lies between birth and death, the two certainties of life. Reasoning and free intellect is blurred by fear, and should be guarded in the contemporary social research as it leads to inhibitions and immobility. Thus, according to Prof. Patnaik one should try to move past the 'isms', theories, methods and disciplines. Further, he elaborated on three important aspects of research: social field/ field of study; techniques/ methods of study; and process of analysis of language, data and production of the text.



With the advent of technology, a 'new sociality' came into existence and has become central to social research. In order to overcome the fear of technology, one has to discover ways of coping with and using it for advantage. He cited examples where technology emancipated women in rural part of Bangladesh on one hand and restricted mobility on the other (Huang 2018). He also shared personal fieldwork experiences with the *Bhils* of the Jhabua where technology in the rural space was used more in a collective way (Patnaik 2011).

Ethnography is a close study of social phenomenon in a natural setting. But since the 'natural setting' of the social phenomena is rapidly undergoing transformation, fieldwork in this 'new sociality' is embedded in the essence of the local as well as global. The composite nature of the social field has contributed to the blurring of boundaries, wherein the domestic space has become a workspace in pandemic. This new space has to be realised through embodiment, discourses, new ethics and new morality of social field with a different kind of intellectual commitment. Citing the work of the famous Indian philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1994) who says fear comes with desire and comparison, Prof. Patnaik inspired the researchers to improvise and develop methods which focus on the interface between self and the other while keeping adequate balance between the two. He posits fear to be a product of mutuality which needs to be understood in different cultural contexts as sometimes fear is just a productive mechanism that safeguards us from the perils of life. Furthermore, quoting classical Indologist Bhartihari's work on *Vairagya satakam* (or the Hundred Verses on Renunciation), Prof. Patnaik added that it is important to strike the right balance between mindfulness and detachment from it by a researcher to transcend fear and desire. As researchers, we need to adapt this philosophy to immerse into the social world yet remain outside and detached. Coming to the third aspect of analysis in research, Prof. Patnaik explained the centrality of language and writing in analysis of the findings and revelations of the research. He borrows Derrida's adage of fear of 'writing' to unfold the duality of writing process (Komlik 2017). For Derrida, during the writing stage he is in a constant state of anxiety and fear of critiquing the others to an extent that he experiences vigilance during sleep. Therefore there is a need to understand the location of self at the boundary of consciousness and unconsciousness to reach a liminal stage and overcome fears. This is similar to the concept of *turiya* (pure consciousness) in the Hindu philosophy. Lastly, Prof. Patnaik concluded with Immanuel Kant's dictum which says that there are no ethical considerations if there is no presence of the other and if there is no fear, there is no other. This mutuality of self and others has been a central concern of anthropological discourse and should be kept in mind while discovering the anthropological location of the researcher. The researchers should be reflexive to face disruptions in the fieldwork by using various strategies and inventing ideologies to deal with discipline which is rapidly growing.

At the end of Prof. Patnaik's lecture, Dr. Singh embarked a discussion by stating how dependence on technology has made our society 'data rich but information poor'. The questions were posed as to what to expect from a post pandemic world, and is it possible to address the issues of equity and equality which has slipped more at present. This was followed by answering queries related to selectivity in literature review; embracing the shift of the academic field into domestic space by being conducive for a pedagogic environment; and lastly how fear acts as an agentive and constructive force in creating opportunities and better performance.

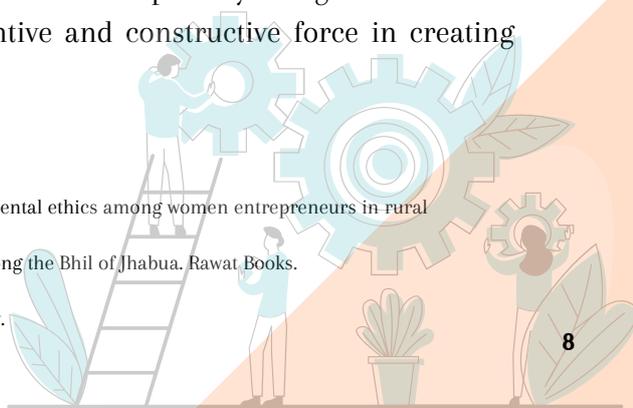
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Huang, J. Q. (2018). Digital aspirations: 'wrong-number' mobile-phone relationships and experimental ethics among women entrepreneurs in rural Bangladesh. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 24(1), 107-125.

Patnaik, S. M. (2011). *Culture, Identity, and Development: An Account of Team Ethnography Among the Bhil of Jhabua*. Rawat Books.

Krishnamurti, J. (1994). *On fear*. Harper Collins.

Komlik, O. (2017). Jacques Derrida on Fears in Writing. *Economic Sociology & Political Economy*.



## Session 1: Reviewing and Analysing Secondary Literature

The first speaker, Professor Nita Mathur talked about the importance of doing literature review in any research. A literature review is carried out not only to identify the gaps in research but more so to locate one's own study in an appropriate theoretical background. It guides the study by developing a perspective and helps in making sense of or interpreting the data. Literature review comprises many literary sources such as research articles, dissertations, books, government records, survey reports, conference proceedings, credible websites, international data base and secondary data which can be used for comparison or first-hand analysis. Review of literature is a process done in stages during a research. In the preliminary stage of this review, one should try to identify gaps and plan the research accordingly which is followed by an exhaustive literature analysis during the writing phase of the study. Some of the important elements to a literature review include being thorough with existing information in the field of research; major formatives and the key researchers in the area; and prime methodologies which can be further applied, developed or modified for your own study. She cited examples from her work where she used to make dance *mudras*, a way of contriving the situation to interview and obtain data while she was trying to relate dance with people's culture. With the help of literature review, she was able to create, develop and use a way of collecting data that many scholars were not aware of.

Analysis of literature review is crucial in order to provide an abstraction, as otherwise, there is a tendency of the text to read descriptive. Thick description of a phenomena can give you an insight into the details of causes, reasons, and *ethos* of the people, but without a critical analysis of literature it may seem illogical and irrelevant. Literature review formulates into a very important chapter of thesis and therefore should be comprehensive and carefully presented. Prof. Mathur shared different ways of doing literature review. A review of literature can be done chronologically to represent the evolution or development of a thought over a period of time. It can be thematic in nature wherein the themes could either be culled out from the objectives of the study or could be chosen from the ones that surfaced during the review of literature. The keywords arising from such a review can further help in digging deeper. Further, a review of literature may be theoretical or methodological in nature. The structure of literature review as a chapter in a thesis or dissertation must introduce, define and explain the topic of research with an appropriate background. The scope of review or a roadmap should be included in order to provide a clear picture of what is being included and excluded with reasons. The main body of this chapter should articulate into a critically analysed thematic review of literature and must summarise the important aspects, flaws of the existing studies and its relevance to your own study.

During the discussion, the lecture paved the way to contextualise review of literature in a holistic way covering not only geopolitical, cultural but also socio-historical context of the study. The question on where to limit and avoid reviewing repetitive literature was pertinently answered. To cover plethora of literature is not possible, and replication of objectives does not justify the purpose of research. Thus, in the inclusion and exclusion of literature, rationale and right judgement play an important role. Addressing another question on how one can incorporate interdisciplinary perspective in a research, the speaker urged researchers to include other disciplines but a caveat given to not to go beyond the limit where their own discipline fails or jeopardises to justify the rationale. The last question on missing detailed literature review in a book, she rightly stated that the aim and motive of any book is to present ideas and arguments over an exhaustive display of literature.

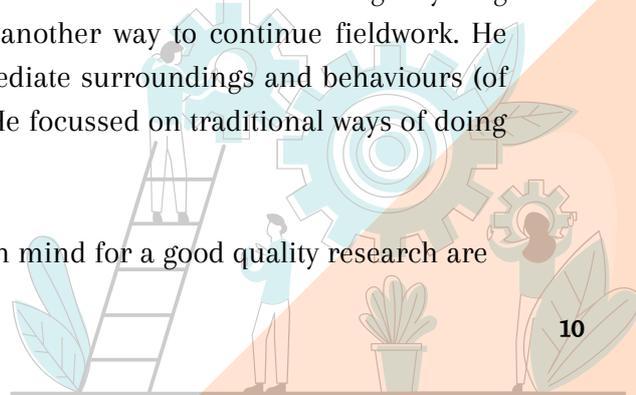
The second speaker of the session, Dr. Rajnikant Pandey narrated his own experience and challenges he faced on ground while entering the anthropological domain of mines, and environmental anthropology during his doctoral thesis. He stressed on Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory where a researcher has to begin a study from scratch. He emphasised on the idea of swimming into the details and intricacies of research at ground level to observe the changes and emergence of new kinds of sociality. With a change in social reality, there is a change in the social research. Therefore, his lecture primarily focused on three main domains. The first concern was raised on restoration of society where new lexicons have emerged post-COVID and social reality is differing from how it existed before. To understand the present COVID pandemic, he applied Victor Turner's concept of 'social drama' where harmony and disharmony in a social process arises during conflict or crisis situation. This pandemic led to a solidarity which can be seen in almost every sphere. Dr. Pandey exclaimed that the power and realm of science and technology is such that it has already encroached major domains of human life. Furthermore, during pandemic it can be seen embedded as a lifeline to various sectors. It has reinforced its power again and promulgates that future knowledge will be based on science and technology. There will be an increased use of virtual space gluing the global as well as local audience in a single thread. The third juncture of lecture was a narration of Dr. Pandey's experiences with literature review. He suggested that the very first key to find relevant literature is your mentor or supervisor, second is to look for articles published in reputed journals and follow the chronology of references and lastly to incorporate both local as well as global context and if possible add vernacular literature too, which gives the local essence in its real sense. Subsequently, he highlighted the mistakes of a researcher while citing references. He also mentioned the four categories of theoretical, empirical, methodological and social citation index in which literature can be categorised. At last, he cited various journals and platforms to look for relevant literature and talked about the importance of meta anthropology which is highly relevant in the ethnographic study. A concern which was raised by the participants regarding the diversity in literature review was satisfied when he suggested to identify and use keywords on search windows like Google Scholar and other advanced platforms such as Web of Science, Social Science Citation Index, EBSCO, Emerald and ProQuest etc.

## Session 2: Realigning Logistics of Research

The old normal was to maintain field diaries, carry interview schedules and make notes. But as we try to adjust with the 'new normal', the practicalities of research have changed. In this view, Prof. Sukant K. Chaudhury and Dr. Indrani Mukherjee talked about the need to strategise logistics of research and assessing the risks especially during fieldworks that will be conducted in the post-lockdown times.

Professor Chaudhary commented that "a fieldworker is always a fieldworker". He talked about his personal experiences and coping mechanism during the lockdown. He shared that he is continuing with his research work by reading literature he always wanted to revisit. He encouraged young scholars to collect data from virtual platform, which is yet another way to continue fieldwork. He referred to Professor Srivastava's thought on observing immediate surroundings and behaviours (of family, community and others) during COVID-19 pandemic. He focussed on traditional ways of doing research in post-COVID times.

According to Prof. Chaudhury, some of the things to be kept in mind for a good quality research are



objectivity, empiricism, relativism, scepticism, ethnical neutrality and simplicity with no duplicity. Since scholars were in different stages of their research work before the lockdown was announced, for the ones who had completed their fieldwork must take this opportunity to refer to field notes, read books and other anthropological sources to build a strong theoretical and conceptual foundation.

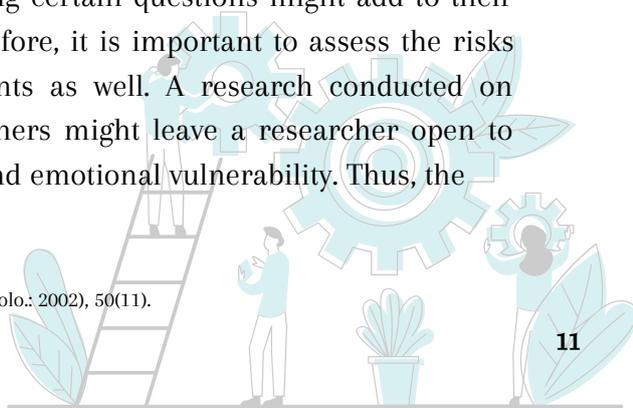
Prof. Chaudhury reflected on the work of Srinivas who wrote *The Remembered Village* (1978) from his memories. At any point of a research study, a researcher gathers enough data to produce related research articles, thesis and a book which comprises only 40% of the actual data that was collected. Introducing the concept of memory ethnography, he encouraged the students to recollect memories and experiences which form the rest 60% of the data. As researchers, we must utilise this time to focus on research methodology and develop a perspective by doing in-depth review of literature. Since it is not possible to start a fresh research work, the best way to be productive during this time is to scrutinise, evaluate and analyse relevant literature. He suggested that for those who were in the middle of their fieldwork must try to get in touch with their respondents (over telephonic conversations) or collect primary data through digital space (using google forms, online surveys). Peer review is another important aspect of research writing where one must discuss and learn from fellow researchers and supervisors/ advisors. Reviewing journal papers and newspaper articles on pandemic issues (such as cross cultural understanding of hygiene, care of the self, rituals, symbols and power, family, integrity, women household work, vulnerability, the issues of the senior citizens, politics of disease, new untouchability, migration and class analysis etc.) can be used to develop case studies. In a nutshell, Prof. Chaudhury deliberated upon personal re-alignment and that of the resources, by increased reliance on print and electronic media.

The next speaker, Dr. Indrani Mukherjee reflected on the realignment of logistics for a post-lockdown research. She discussed the problem social science researchers are facing during the pandemic where the immersion through researcher and participant is not possible. The only solution to keep safe is to avoid physical proximity which departs from the classical data collection method of participant observation. Thus, we are amidst a situation where it is challenging to follow fundamentals of a classical research in anthropology. In view of this, she drew a parallel from the McCrea's eight steps adapted in the logistics management which renders flexibility to a research strategy catering the needs of the present situation (McCrea 2011). She provided a conceptual map where the first step is to introspect the situation to have a proper *assessment of the logistics strategy*. The logistic strategy might depend on the stage of research, prescribed timeline, findings and convenience of the researcher. Those who have been on field should try to analyse, interpret and figure the gaps in order to accumulate specific data in the future.

Given the pandemic situation, some communities (rural and urban poor, migrant and undocumented communities) may be in distress and highly vulnerable. Asking certain questions might add to their burden and may be ethically and morally questionable. Therefore, it is important to assess the risks involved not only for the researchers, but for the informants as well. A research conducted on platforms like social media community groups, blogs and others might leave a researcher open to uncommon situations, adverse reactions by the participants, and emotional vulnerability. Thus, the

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McCrea, B. (2011). 8 steps to supply chain visibility. *Logistics management* (Highlands Ranch, Colo.: 2002), 50(11).



current research environment will require cautious interpretation. Another step is to *rethink the lean inventory strategy* in terms of upgradation of equipment, internet connection etc. She suggested to have a backup plan in terms of alternate research methods that can help augment the available data. Also, the constraints of the method and ethical concerns must be considered before taking the leap. Since digital and virtual space offer a new medium of research, one must engage with articles and books that talk about pursuing qualitative research in pandemic situations using open access news media, open access meetings and discussions on the same to understand how such research is to be carried out (Jowett 2020). One must *collaborate* with other researchers and institutes through virtual workshops, webinars and lecture series to keep yourselves informed about the challenges of the field. Using such digital and virtual platforms to learn about digital ethnographic research during pandemic and the related ethical concerns can help in better understanding of such spaces to collect data.

Dr. Mukherjee underlined the importance of *communication* and sharing experiences with participants to provide support and empathy to establish a better rapport. This can be done through telephonic conversations, designing schedules and surveys, using closed communication and action oriented spaces (via Zoom, Skype, Cisco Webex) as per the relevance of the research plan. Further, one must try to “*go beyond just taking orders*” and use personal judgment while making a decision regarding inclusion or exclusion of the information in your research. Referring to the field of academics, she stressed on the researcher’s right to reserve the information that has or has not been collected even when there’s a voice of authority asking you to share it. Since, COVID-19 has sparked interests in different areas, researchers could use this experiential expertise to delve into informed researches. This may cause a divergence from the initially conceived population but may add to your research as a *comparison*. Dr. Mukherjee emphasised to *use information wisely*. Research conducted during and post-pandemic situations should respect the decision of the respondents in terms of consent to use information as it may affect them in real time.

### Session 3: Researching Gender Issues

Focusing on the mainstream issue of gender and its manifestation on social media, Prof. Nilika Mehrotra gave us examples to help visualise the ways general anthropological concepts like kinship, family, culture and society represent themselves and intersect with gender on social media platforms like Facebook groups, online communities, blogs etc. She shared her experience of being a participant in various online discussions in Facebook groups (academic, non- academic, open and closed) where gender is visible through intersectional lens on social media. She resonated to a non-heteronormative concept of gender. These all-women groups with huge memberships had women who belonged to a middle class working community (professionals like doctors and lawyers, technocrats, bureaucrats, home makers, part time workers). The groups were not pro-feminists and the discussions revolved around construction of identity, profession, gendered experiences, child care, food and other issues wherein women openly presented their viewpoints and experiences to complete strangers. The women felt empowered as they shared their stories and blogs. Prof. Mehrotra reflected on how the conversations in these groups were constructed during important movements (for example, the #MeToo Movement which originally started in the year 2006 but in India it sparked a conversation in 2012 after the incident of gang rape in New Delhi). Amidst the emergence of new nature of gender,

she realised that the views of the participants/ members of the group were tailored by larger political discourses, as one could see people setting ideologies and taking sides in a virtual polarised debate. Thus, the old notion that social media cannot constitute social reality is challenged, as today, lives of people are very much mediated by media discourses. Where on one hand women were sharing their experiences to seek support, advice or sisterhood on social media, another set of people were bringing in extreme form of misogyny and patriarchy in the comments on certain issues. Prof. Mehrotra referred to Victor Turner's postmodern theory on 'social drama' according to which every society has structural undercurrents. These contradictions lead to an explosion causing the people to accuse each other. They identify a 'witch' to be blamed who then needs to be exterminated. The symbolism of the term 'witch' could be understood using Evan Pritchard's conception of it as a cause of misfortune or death (among the Azande) where witches were supposedly part of the society and deserved to be excommunicated. Taking up Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide as a case study and applying the two concepts (social drama and witchcraft), the convict Rhea Chakraborty was labelled as a 'witch' and accused of doing *jaadu tona* by the people and media. The north Indian family norms and ideologies of a 'good son' or 'affinal women' (in this case Rhea being the affinal woman as she was in a live-in relationship with the deceased) were being reflected in the statements by the Bihari community (Yadav 2020). On this account, Prof. Mehrotra advised the use of classical ethnographies to understand contemporary social phenomenon. Also, just as in early 20th century diaries and letters were considered important sources of data, social media interactions can supplement the research too.

Further, as COVID-19 has challenged the concept of social intimacy, there are ethical and safety concerns around forms of qualitative and engaged research. The last speaker for the day, Dr. Sumit S. Srivastava reflected upon redirecting the efforts into activities such as revisiting datasets, refining methodologies and exploring distance approaches to qualitative data. He talked about the digital substitutes of collecting data in the form of digitally conducted interviews and focus group discussions. He drew a comparison between pre- and post-covid methods of doing fieldwork as the researchers witness a 'turn' in the methodological issues. Social researchers who conduct face to face fieldwork (interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, ethnography etc.) are now faced with the challenge of either delaying or re-inventing their methods so that they can continue their research until the measures are relaxed. In this view, he provided a list of online resources which suggest ways of doing fieldwork in pandemic (Glatt 2020; Lupton 2020; Metzler 2020; MQHRG 2020; Nassauer & Legewie 2020; Pink et. al. 2020; Samuels 2020; Taster 2020; WCAA 2020). The guidelines in these resources are Eurocentric in nature and do not consider the existence of the digital divide in the Asian countries. Nonetheless, they may stimulate ideas. Dr. Srivastava shifted his focus to the old issues of gender that are facing new challenges in the existing situation.

The matter of perceived or the real dichotomy between body and self; the issue of representation with gender and caste are the issues that have reformulated and appeared in a new way.

Yadav, J. (2020, August 8). Sushant Singh Rajput and the burden of being a 'Shravan Kumar' in toxic Bihari families. ThePrint.  
Glatt, Z. 2020. LSE Digital Ethnography Collective Reading List. LSE Digital Ethnography Collective, London School of Economics.  
Lupton, D. (2020, March 17). Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic. A crowdsourced document.  
Lupton, D. (2020, March 31). Webinar: COVID-19 and doing virtual fieldwork.  
Metzler, K. (2020, April 7). How will COVID-19 impact student research projects?  
MQHRG (2020). Resources for doing qualitative research during a pandemic. McGill Qualitative Health Research Group, McGill University.  
Nassauer, A. and Legewie, N.M. (2020, July 15). How COVID-19 could help social science researchers.  
Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., Hjorth, J., Lewis, T., & Tacchi, J. (2016). Digital Ethnography-Principles and Practice. Sage: London.  
Samuels, F. (2020, June). Tips for collecting primary data in a Covid-19 era. ODI.  
Taster, M. (2020, March 31). Editorial: Social science in a time of social distancing. The London School of Economics and Political Science.  
WCAA (2020). Webinar (YouTube Video): Fieldwork in an era of pandemic: digital (and other) alternatives by World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA).



He discussed the overlap between gender, caste, class and the need to research on concerns related to health and socio-economic well-being of the marginalised communities that have aggravated during the pandemic. He contemplated the social and gender identity of a researcher, especially the male researcher researching women issues on field. He recommended the scholars to find answers through review of literature on methodologies and techniques.

At the end of the session, participants raised concerns as to how to avoid bias and pre-conceived notions that men are indifferent to the issues of women; change in perception of familiarity and intimacy with change in mediums of enquiry; the role of a researcher when an informant is at risk; digital medium as a useful or liable source of data collection; relevance of deleted posts as narrative of a person; and role of corporations in data mapping through advertisements and posts.

Day Two : 13 August 2020, Thursday

#### Session 4: Researching the North East of India

The session started with a dialogue where Dr. G. Kanato Chophi asked pertinent questions to Dr. Dolly Kikon on her thoughts on the representation issues of the North East India. She shared her views as to how for an individual the conversation really starts from being the first generation of an *adivasi* or indigenous community before any other form of identity. She refers to the writings of Gloria Jean Watkins aka Bell Hooks that reflected her struggle of coming from an African-American slavery. Thus, before we talk about writing culture, we need to talk about the language that is being used to represent the voice of an individual. She said, " if your entry into the history of violence that we have due to colonisation cannot equip you well enough to have a thought process that liberates you and makes you independent, then how can we even try to find a way to connect that thought to the writing ?". She observed that scholars struggle with the process of reflection, that is, not being able to put thoughts into words. The writings should depict author's thought and position.

She shared her experience in the making of documentary titled "Seasons of Life" (2020) and how visual anthropology as a medium of expression can be used in research. She envisaged as to how the documentary reflects back on her own orality and constitutes her memory, re-imagination and living thoughts. Just as a piece of writing has a structure to it (the introduction, main body and conclusion), in visual ethnography there is a concept of 'frame'. The visual form is one of the ways to think and re-examine the past and the present. She discussed how certain images are used on the website of "Incredible India" (Nagaland Chapter) to promote tourism in the region without people's permission. Most of these images are colonial and violent in nature. Capturing a situation or framing it without giving socio-cultural context sends across wrong notions about the community and should be carefully considered. Next, Dr. Chophi asked her opinion on the controversies related to food (dog meat and bamboo shoot) in North East India region that is seen to impede the process of integration into the mainstream. How can the people of North East India retain their food habits and still participate in the secular and democratic process of India? To this, Dr. Kikon vividly emphasized that 'food' is an integral part of everybody's lives. There is a tendency to conceptualise it and bring it under the wider dominant framework. It is important to note which communities or groups are mainstreaming India in general. The idea of relating food to 'pollution' or categorising it under the binaries of 'good' or 'bad' and 'dirty' or 'clean' goes down to certain practices that are religious or within the social norms.

She gave example of cities like Bombay and Chennai where the housing associations are very clear about their religion, caste, social group and consequently the food habits they follow (vegetarian or non-vegetarian). When Dr. Chophi asked Dr. Kikon as to how ethics should be used to conduct oneself in the field when there is a colonial hangover in the writings on the region (not only in popular media but in serious academic work), she referred to the the writings of Boas and even Malinowski who talked about the 'primitive' and the 'civilised'; 'normal' or 'abnormal'; 'law' and 'disorder'. As the idea of boundaries or borders is very central to anthropology, the concepts of identity, ethics and representation have a colonial conditioning with a notion of decolonialisation. Thus, during our writings, it should be kept in mind that we are not representing the 'other' or the 'outsider' but our own people. And as a discipline, anthropology is very generous to allow such a reflexive conversation.

Further on the conversation on representation, Dr. Lovitoli Jimo raised some methodological concerns in researching the North East of India. She reserved that cultural history and complex trajectories are germane to any region's identity. She argued that folklore, oral traditions, customary practices etc. form important sources for critical examination of the history constructed through archival sources, official records, and writings on colonial experience through tours and expeditions. The politics of power in construction of history is based on the interests and location of who is manufacturing it and the dynamics associated with the process.

Dr. Jimo drew a parallel from the distinctions made in the context of African traditions by Oyèwùmí (1997:80) in the form of history as a lived experience; history as a record of lived experience coded in oral traditions; and the written history. She delineated the historical journey of the North East region of India in the words of colonial administrators, missionaries and ethnographers as given in different colonial records and monographs that were later on used as authentic sources of written history in the post-colonial context. Here, the methodological concerns in the politics of knowledge production about the people and the ways in which they were represented needs to be interrogated closely. The history and progress of any society is mediated through oral knowledge, text, images, media, popular culture and presently through visual world. The entry of colonialism and the Christian missionaries into the north east India led to cultural interpretations which differed from the social reality of the people. It took the form of a body of knowledge that was communicated in a language which gave power to the colonial writers, and led to identity discourse which differed from the people's consciousness. As, "texts are the primary medium (though not the substance) of power" (Smith 1993:347) and the language of power is in the text, the power of this text exerted over the course of time shaped the discourse of the region. She suggested that even though archival history, official records, oral history, folklore, and memories are important sources to learn about a culture's historical background, they need to be corroborated with each other and should be re-validated with the lived experiences of the people. While doing so, the subjective and empirical reality of the observer, his or her social, epistemological and ontological location should also be kept in mind while making use of these resources. This is because if the positionality of the researchers is ignored, it ultimately leads to the ignorance of subject's reality. Thus, the politics behind the access to history needs to be questioned.

The session ended with a discussion about thoughts and 'identity'. Dr. Kikon was asked as to how she

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Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press: London.

Smith, D. (1993). 'A Peculiar Eclipsing: Women's exclusion from man's culture'. Pp. 347-70 in *Sociology: An Introduction: From the Classics to Contemporary Feminism*. Ed. Gordon Bailey and Nolga Gayle. Oxford University Press: Toronto.

identifies with herself as a woman scholar coming from a particular community. She answered that the concept of 'identity' is manifold as an individual may relate to it by identifying certain personal baggages, life experiences, constitutional guarantees, community, tribe, and therefore have a moral, social, political nature to it. Reflecting on the epistemological and ontological assumptions and its impact on the 'identity' of a researcher, Dr. Jimo talked about how one may be an insider, but still be looked as an outsider in the field.

## Session 5: Research Through Visuals and Media

Dr. Alison Kahn presented a power point titled 'Out of the Mouths of Babes: Fieldwork with Digital Children'. Building on Jean Piaget's work on child development stages and Margaret Mead's work with children, she addressed the use of same experiments with digital media that forms the part of children's world today. In a digital age where a film, a video or rather an audio clip could give us a lot of information in terms of emotions, senses and rhythms, she encouraged the use of media not only as a tool of research but also as a part of presenting it. She discussed traditional methods (like participant observation) as a lens through which anthropologists understand people and culture.

Dr. Kahn emphasised the importance of language to understand, translate and interpret a culture, and how it is different when the same approach is used with children as they may not be able to articulate their experiences clearly. Therefore, children must be given space and opportunity to develop a voice. She gave examples as to how research can be done with and through media using story telling techniques that enable children to interpret themselves and learn empathy using digital media. She also referred to the use of digital media as a psychological aid, for example audio representation of children's mood which can tell us about their feelings with sound and rhythm response. Similarly, paying close attention to the child's use of visual and interactive media in relation to stages of childhood development can be helpful for cross-cultural comparison. She said, that normalising fieldwork with children extends relationships beyond the academic forum into the authentic spheres of social relationships. It also helps in rapport establishment with other informants. She employed Marcel Mauss's concept of the 'gift' to pursue an ethnographic method of friendship and fellowship with children. To depict the scope of such an anthropological research, she shared a short video clip that was shot during her fieldwork in Nagaland during Zeme Olympics 2019. It showed how despite language barriers, village children showed acceptance towards her young son with gestures like 'gifting' him an orange and bonding over a lake within twenty minutes of friendship.

Dr. Ratheesh Kumar provided a background to Dr. Kahn's presentation by taking the participants on a theoretical journey of digital media in anthropology. He marked three crucial moments in anthropology where visuals played a significant role and added a whole new characteristic feature to the discipline. The *photographic moment* (early 1940s) started when the first full fledged fieldwork guided by the camera was undertaken by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead and published their photographic essay in 1942. It was one of the key moments where the idea of marking presence and representation with an ethnographic authority was more prominently displayed. There was a split in the objectives of the two anthropologists as Bateson wanted to use camera as the process of filming (moving the camera according to the script), whereas Mead wanted to film first and analyse later.

The two divergent conceptions, Mead's 'extension of the eye' and Bateson's 'extension of the mind' led to a representational model of culture. This problem never sort closure in the context of anthropological fieldwork, but placed the impact of ethnographic authority.

The *moment of textuality* came when Clifford Geertz defined culture as an assemblage of text, a part of the communication system. As culture became a textual category (a semiotic field), cultural events (festivals, rituals etc.) became part of a spectacle in an anthropological imagination and the textuality of these events became crucial. With this, the idea of semiotic analysis became central and there was a transition from observation to interpretation in a Gatesian sense. A crucial point to be underlined here are the mediations that happen with a text and an ethnographer. Dr. Kumar referred to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure on structural linguistics which talks about three significant dimensions in a linguistic text : the speaker (the maker of the text), the utterance (the text) and the listener (the audience, reader, listener or viewer). This is also emphasised by Patricia Uberoi (2006) where she talks about a communication triangle where text is central. The ability to combine and give equal relevance to the three dimensions marks a significant departure of anthropological investigation from the understanding of a text in the cultural studies.

The *digital moment* in the 21st century completes the communication triangle wherein we look at how the text is made, received or circulated for the consumption of its meaning. In this moment the visual is neither coming from the field nor as a textualised event. Daniel Miller's (2011) work on use of Facebook depicted the intermixing of two kinds- the digitalised visuals and the content in the digital media. Miller tried to establish a connection between the visual, the text (that is digitally formulated) and the community of the users (the Trinidadian youth on Caribbean Island, India). A methodological alignment could be seen at this intermixing or interface between the digital field of the visual and the people who are interacting (the Trinidadian youth). Therefore, the three moments in the history of anthropology dealt with media, visual and text in ways in which they often overlapped. Dr. Kumar alluded to the changes in the field (a new kind of ethnographic authority) that is slowly emerging and is not the production of the pandemic. This fragmentation of field has led to experiments and studies that utilise all the senses of a human feeling. It was flagged by Manuel Castells (1996) where he talked about how the digital technology has become a separate layer in our social structure. Situating the idea of how ethnographic authority could be, Dr. Kumar used Yuval Harari's (2014) work to signify that the authority of the human or an individual to understand his/her culture has somewhat been replaced by the idea of algorithms. In a time when the field has been temporarily suspended, it is time to understand the digitalised ways of doing research and go back to the texts (the audio, the visual and other kinds of available texts) encountered in the field. Also, in order to tackle questions like: whether algorithms will analyse the human feelings better rendering the human ethnographers obsolete; whether such an analysis is neutral and objective; should we go back to the textual strategies in the Gatesian sense, Dr. Kumar suggested that these challenges should be conceptually addressed rather than tackling them as problem solving mechanism.

During the discussion, Dr. Kahn took up the fundamental issue of vulnerability of children in digital space, challenges towards their mental health and safeguard from the loss of privacy.

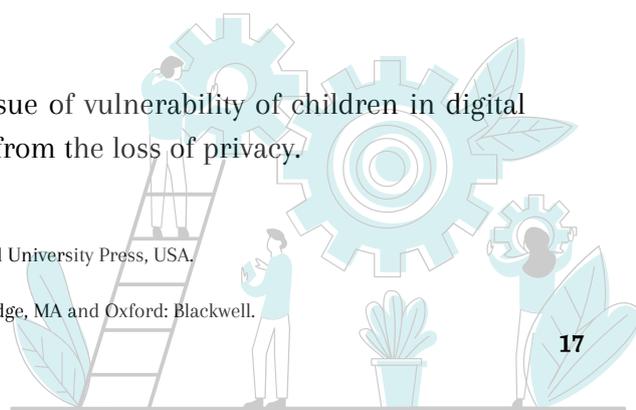
Geertz, C. (1973). The Interpretation of Cultures (Vol. 5019). Basic books.

Uberoi, P. (2006). Freedom and Destiny: Gender, Family, and Popular Culture in India. Oxford University Press, USA.

Miller, D. (2011). Tales from Facebook. Polity Press, UK.

Castells, M. (1996). The Information Age: The Rise of the Network Society (Volume I). Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell.

Harari, Y. N. (2014). Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind. Random House, UK.



Since children are technologically astute than the previous generations it becomes difficult for parents to foresee the threats involved. But to prevent any harm, children's activities on digital platform should be monitored. She also dealt with the ethical concerns involved in filming with children in terms of choosing safe field spaces where children are accompanied by parents/guardians. To avoid breach of privacy she chose her family members for filming and the purpose of study was made completely transparent to the children's parents. She ensured sharing of data in a controlled environment. Dr. Kumar took up the point of position of traditional fieldwork in anthropology after the pandemic situation where he discussed that at present, field is visual and auditory in nature, this transformation makes an ethnographer to take up strategies to work with different cultural artefacts which are available in textual form.

## Session 6: Public and Corporate Policies

" Will COVID-19 unset surprises?", pondering over this question Prof. Avanish Kumar deliberated upon the paradigms of policy research and its significance especially in the present times. He spotted multiple questions that have surfaced due to COVID-19 pandemic in terms of whether it will lead to : ousting of current paradigms of economic value creation; change in the notion of 'capital' (social, cultural, financial or otherwise); change of daily wage employee-employer relationship; lives and working of people in the corporate or government sector; a shift in education and health system; change in the traditional government structure surging into a virtual platform and so on. He dealt with researcher's pressing dilemmas regarding the relevance of their research work post-COVID. For this, he suggested the researchers to identify and fill the validity gap or the life expectancy of research beyond pandemic. He insisted upon the need to assess the extent of scientific uncertainty that will lead to the distortion or inaction in the domain of research, scope of the field methods of data collection and considerations of issues around timings, communication, research results. He exclaimed that in policy research, attention should be given to the environment (work or natural environment), policy content, conceptualisation and profit making. This is because the prototype for conceptualisation and the idea of 'profit' may change after the pandemic along with redefining of the rationale or the scientific discussion about meaning, methods and measurements.

Demonstrating the contributions that anthropological theory and ethnographic methods can make to the study of contemporary society and in policy making, Prof. Kumar highlighted the strengths of the discipline (MacClancy 2019). In terms of professional socialisation and training, ethnographic fieldwork is at the core of what Stocking (1995) calls as anthropology's 'methodological values' (Gupta & Ferguson 1997). With its scientific grounding in society and the understanding of people's choices, anthropologists can link practice with policy to provide solutions to other disciplines as well.

Due to COVID, 'observation' as a method took a backseat. To make up for this and otherwise as well, a clear conceptualisation of policy learning is essential for research. Prof. Kumar differentiated the learning and conceptualisation of policy issues under two inter-related heads: policy learning and political learning. Policy learning deals with instruments of policy learning (validity of policy instruments and implementation designs); social policy learning (social construction or social

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MacClancy, J. (Ed.). (2019). *Exotic No More: Anthropology for the Contemporary World*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

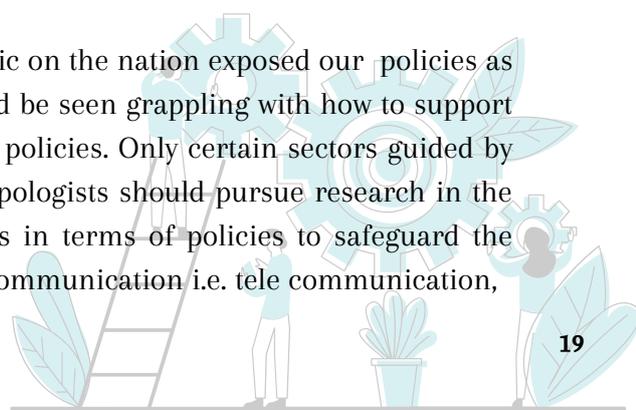
Gupta, A., & Ferguson, J. (1997). *Discipline and Practice: 'The Field' as Site, Method, and Location in Anthropology*. In Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Eds.), *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Sciences* (pp. 1-46). University of California Press, London.

Stocking Jr, G. W. (1995). *Delimiting Anthropology: Historical Reflections on the Boundaries of a Boundless Discipline*. *Social Research*, 62(4): 933-966.

learning on the scope of policy goals) whereas in a political framework, it entails lessons on political feasibility of policy goals. In addition to this, it is important to argue for validity or logical explanation or justification of empirical position using a reliable procedure to derive at the knowledge. Adding to David Hume's theory of causation where 'cause and effect' have a natural relation, Prof. Kumar insisted that in addition to the evidence, understanding of causation (symptoms and cause) is imperative to set the the direction for future. Consequently, without value judgment (for example, putting up a rational argument which is towards pre-poor) one cannot create a direction. Lastly, the process used to arrive at a deliberation is also critical in policy research. After the problem has been identified, it is pivotal to describe it as it will direct data collection and collation. The description of a problem structures the argument and analysis for it to be placed in the larger administrative or institutional goal. There is a need to be articulate while framing research questions as process oriented questions point to theoretical underpinnings. Lastly, Prof. Kumar recommended two alternatives for effective engagement of anthropologists with respect to public policy. Anthropology research should be made available in a usable form to a wider audience for them to read it and accept the argument such that the 'issue' is not ignored. As anthropologists we need to turn the efforts to engage in trans-disciplinary applied studies towards inclusion rather than isolation of communities from mainstream development.

Taking the issue forward, Dr. Archana Shukla Mukherjee discussed the implementation mechanism of public policies that impact the corporate policies as well. Any government public policy should make sure not to fuel the uncertainties that arise during a pandemic. A pre-established forward looking policy framework committed to provide a safety net to vulnerable people (especially migrant workers, women and children in particular) must exist. Initiatives taken should be widely publicised such that affected people are aware of their entitlements and the ways to access it. There is a need to connect policy to practice with the help of civil society organisations. Engagement with the cultural gatekeepers at the community is required as their involvement and participation can help in better community outreach. They form an important pillar not only to provide information and authentic data, but also the actual situation at ground level where organisations cannot reach through telephonic connections or digital platforms. Even though government announced various relief packages on food, hygiene, transport and emergency cash issues, concerns related to social security were neglected. Relaxation of labor laws and disproportionality during the pandemic has impacted the labourers, especially women workers that has not only increased financial pressures but other social stresses (example domestic violence). To counter this, a responsible migration facilitation centre should be established which strengthens the social security, delivery system, ethical recruitment practices enabling protection of workers. Schemes like the one where Delhi government came up with a portal that connects job seekers to employers should be promoted. Specialists like anthropologists who understand the community and their vulnerabilities (gender issues, social exclusion) should be involved in such initiatives.

In the last 3-4 months of lockdown, the impact of the pandemic on the nation exposed our policies as most sectors were unable to deal with it. The businesses could be seen grappling with how to support their work force. They were unable to implement emergency policies. Only certain sectors guided by public policies were able to handle the situation. The anthropologists should pursue research in the arena of emergency management schemes to find solutions in terms of policies to safeguard the interests of people. Also, looking at capabilities of employee communication i.e. tele communication,



personal family leaves to minimise disruptions, supplier-chain disruptions, purchasing practices of the buyers and retailers should be looked into to inform the policies.

According to Dr. Mukherjee, we need to adapt a 'people first' mindset while framing corporate policies. The first priority during a pandemic should be the safety and well-being of the work force. She listed a number of pandemic planning considerations that include: providing safe workplace; support (in terms of childcare, transportation, lease etc.); two way employee tracking to disseminate critical information by companies; trainings to enhance employee preparedness; stretching the boundaries of traditional resilience plans; reviewing and updating crisis communication plans and standard operating procedures; regular briefings on emerging threats or issues and many more.

The discussion at the end of the session reviewed issues related to limited scope and applicability of anthropological interventions in policy formulation due to small population studies; role of advocacy in the field of higher education policy research; and role of corporate social responsibility in safeguarding rights of the married working women in private companies.

## **Session 7: Public Health Concerns and Practices on the Ground**

The moderator, Dr. Priyanka Khurana opened the session by introducing the public health issues that have ascended during the unprecedented pandemic health crisis not only at global but domestic levels as well. For example- congenital diseases, environmental pollution related health hazards, HIV AIDS incidences, maternal and childcare health etc. along with multiple humanitarian crisis. According to Dr. Khurana, understanding the severity of these health issues is only one side of the coin. Coming up with a solution in the form of universal and equal health coverage is another. This requires administrators, academicians, and scholars to look into the ground realities of the community, their socio-cultural fabric in general. On this note, the first speaker of the session Dr. Sunita Reddy discussed the contributions of medical anthropology to public health sector in the form of feminist studies, cultural studies, community health and others that have contributed to the understanding of health and well-being. She talked about different health systems and health care services available across the world where 80% of the global population is depended on different types of codified and non-codified healing systems in addition to the biomedical system. Anthropologists have focused on non-codifying healing systems which include tribal medicine, indigenous medicine, folk medicine and certain home remedies. Dr. Reddy talked about research areas that can be explored by the anthropologists in the light of the recent events due to COVID-19. A growing interest in codified healing systems like AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) and other health care services on the basis of their accessibility, affordability, availability and acceptability can be explored by the anthropologists. A public health understanding of community's health service choices can give an insight into their socio-cultural beliefs related to health and medicine.

There is a marked difference in the way public health is understood by different disciplines, a comparison of which can be useful. Dr. Reddy pointed out the difference in the perspective of a sociologist and an anthropologists. Where the former is more focused at social determinants of health, social institutions (like hospitals), and doctor-patient relationship in general; the latter deals with experiences of illness. Since 'illness' is much more personal and experiences can be individualistic, anthropologists study the lived experiences of a patient and their families.

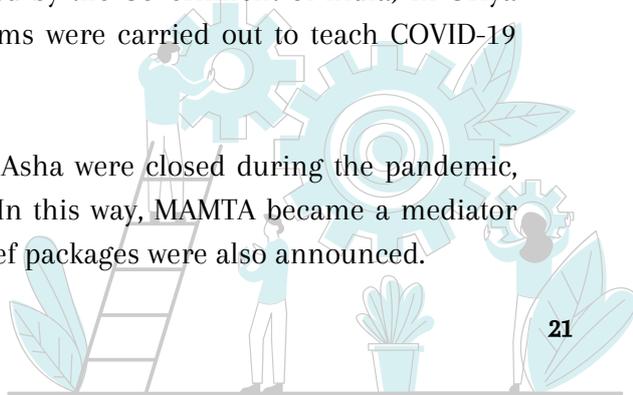
Further, concepts like pain, stigma, differential treatment, and social suffering are anthropologically relevant and should be explored using the works of Erving Goffman, Arthur Kleinman, Paul Farmers and Nancy Schepers-Hughes.

The COVID-19 situation can be used to understand the involvement of anthropologists in the processes where the dignity of the individual has been violated, lack of bereavement and ritual rites where the dead bodies were not handed over to the families, and the related mental health implications. Issues like social exclusion, discrimination, stigma faced by the medical staff are other aspects that can be looked upon. Apart from this, anthropological research can be pursued to study the suffering of patients with chronic illness who were neglected during the pandemic. The role of social media, journalism and other internet sources can be analysed given the 'infodemics' during the current pandemic. It has led to an increase in anxiety, depression and fear among people. Dr. Reddy also pinpointed the challenges associated with hospital or community based research carried out in and on the present pandemic situation in terms of data collection, interacting with people and convincing them for an interview or rather retrieving permission to work at a hospital. Therefore, she encouraged the researchers to explore other sources for information to carry out the study. Under the given scenario where fieldwork studies pose a huge risk to the researcher as well as the informants, attempts should be made to collect data through online interviews, digital questionnaires, large datasets made available by various agencies, social support groups, and review of literature.

Further, Dr. Surendra Kumar Jena discussed the issues and challenges in the application of interventions at the ground level and finds the process similar to how a research is conducted. He shared his experience using Western Orissa as a case study where his organisation MAMTA has been working in the public health sector for women and child health; adolescent health; gender rights; poverty; entitlements and accountability issues at the village level. The organisation works to provide support to civil societies and government in carrying out research and implementing schemes. He depicted the critical role played by local self-governance i.e. *Panchayati Raj* especially during management of disasters like cyclones, earthquakes, floods, draughts and the present pandemic. He reflected on the perception of the community members and their belief over the working of the *panchayat*, which makes them comfortable to communicate their issues. Therefore, according to Dr. Jena the involvement of such local institutions is imperative if a scheme has to be successfully implemented.

He mentioned various interventions that were launched during the pandemic. For example, a community mobilisation tool on hand washing was set in motion for which the community people had to be encouraged for increased participation. This helped his team to establish rapport with people. Further, campaigns like 'one minute please' were carried out where contact numbers of women (pregnant mothers, adolescent mothers and parents of adolescents) were collected for telephonic counselling on concerns and safety parameters related to COVID-19. Dr. Jena's team translated the materials and modules on COVID-19 (circulated by the Government of India) in Oriya language for the communities. Community outreach programs were carried out to teach COVID-19 practices.

Since all public distribution systems (PDS), *aaganwadis* and Asha were closed during the pandemic, Dr. Jena's team tried to facilitate PDS to start their services. In this way, MAMTA became a mediator between the community and these local agencies. Certain relief packages were also announced.



A participatory research analysing the strength of ANMs (Auxiliary nurse midwife), *aanganwadis*, and Ashas in terms of capacity building, research and development, information dissemination, advocacy and a formative research on the needs of the people was taken up by MAMTA. The data was presented to the government for funding of community sensitisation activities. This was done by collecting case studies that substantiated the quantitative data. Dr. Jena said that such a research helps in capacity building plans.

Next, a mobile application was launched for the use of *aaganwadis* and Asha workers who fed the data related to COVID-19 (number of cases, symptoms etc.). Media fellowships (delivery based incentives) were introduced to encourage rural grass-root journalism by identifying certain community members who were willing to collect authentic data and write stories related to the pandemic. This involved interviewing the *sarpanch* of *panchayats*, visiting quarantine centres, staff of *aaganwadis*, block BPOs, district magistrates, and the community people. This idea was later adapted by other agencies which led to publications of articles by people from all parts of the state. Self Help Groups (SHGs) were helped and encouraged to prepare food for quarantine centres. To do so, MAMTA helped the women led SHGs in building their capacity by training them to counsel other people.

Finally, Dr. Jena suggested that as a response mechanism, there is a need to strengthen the monitoring supervision of all on-field active workers working against COVID-19, especially the representatives of civil societies and government organisations who should be trained and counselled for the same. Community participation and social inclusion is indispensable especially during a disaster. Comprehensiveness of the services by collaboration of various departments (health, education, social welfare) should be compelled.

At the end of the session concerns of the participants were acknowledged. The queries were related to the authenticity and reliability of information from organisations like WHO (who have changed their stand during the pandemic) and other social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook; use of virtual ethnography in a developing country like India; the role of media and communication of every department to disseminate data regarding the inflow and outflow of COVID patients by the NGOs, organisations, hospitals and mortuaries; the power of politics in communication of such information; and the efficiency of Gram Panchayats at the village level in handling COVID like situations.

## Session 8: Mental Health and Disability Access

Dr. Shubhangi Vaidya elucidated on the anthropology of disability and its expectations with the phrase 'disability access' in terms of equal socio-cultural and economic opportunities for persons with disabilities. Disability as a category is studied from a human rights and inclusion perspective by disciplines like social work, rehabilitation studies, and special education. Various activist streams of inquiry on the subject has also come up from social sciences like gender studies, women development studies and others. But there are very few examples of sociological and anthropological interventions in the area of disability. In a world of new subjectivities and new identity assertions, anthropology's role in the conceptualisation of disability is essential for a base of interdisciplinary perspectives. In this regard, Dr. Vaidya gave an overview of important contributions of Indian sociologists and anthropologists who theorised the concept of 'disability' and capacitated it beyond its acquired limitations to physicality.

She talked about one of the earliest studies on disability by Ruth Benedict (1934) which looked at epilepsy in a cross cultural context. It gave an insight into how a condition which may be considered as a disabling one, illness or some kind of deviance in a modern western society has a different connotation in other cultures. This brings out the anthropological notion of 'alterity' and apposite role of anthropology in understanding issues of disability. The conceptual vocabulary of anthropology engages with perceptions on body, personhood, humanness, citizenship, human rights, gender and so on. It has questioned the binaries of culture and nature, and is therefore capable of handling the diversity in 'disability' as category which is neither flat nor homogenous. Similarly, Dr. Vaidya highlighted Erving Goffman's (1963) abstraction on stigma and devalued identities which is extremely important in the disability discourse. Bogdan and Taylor's (1982) study on mental retardation views construction of categories, a product of a social structure or habitus that comes into being as a result of industrialisation.

The arguments around 'disability' as a natural category or a constructed one, the notion of 'embodiment' and 'lived realities' from the feminist understanding of disability have been discussed in the anthropological literature. Similarly, Dr. Vaidya introduced writings by Nilika Mehrotra (an anthropologist who looked at local understandings of categories, etymologies, idioms related to disability), Renu Adlakha (a sociologist who conducted an ethnographic study of women with schizophrenia, their families and the medical system in a hospital space) and Anita Ghai (a psychologist who shed light on gender, cultural, western and local understandings of disability).

Additionally, Dr. Vaidya discussed the crucial role of anthropological methods (fieldwork and ethnography) in gaining an emic perspective. She elaborated through her experience of working with autistic children the notions of reflexivity, location as a parent and a position as a researcher referring to 'researching up' in terms of the power dynamics between the researcher and the researched. She detailed the quandaries of representation, membership or affiliation to a category and their impact on the research in disability studies. She also talked about issues of rendering care, motherhood, parenthood, family and kinship which are deeply embedded in the reality of disability. Dr. Vaidya touched upon the COVID necessitated behavioural changes where communication has become challenging for people with auditory or other sensory disabilities. She argued that COVID induced lockdown can be seen as an opportunity to explore and comprehend the way people with and without disabilities are coping with their lives, as for some it may have become more challenging and for others it may have caused some relief.

The last speaker for the workshop, Dr. Mahima Nayar talked on mental health as a psycho-social disability. She took a note of international classification of disability in health domain which includes body functioning, activity and participation, and contextual factors (personal and environmental factors in disability and mental health). Here, anthropology has a great role in exploring the environment of the person which is ultimately reflected in the mental health. She looked at mental health from the perspective of disaster management (pandemic as a disaster). In the Indian context, theories on mental health range from biochemical (drug -disease) to supernatural ones where madness and mental health has been explained through various factors like negotiations in the

Benedict, R. (1934). Anthropology and the Abnormal. *The Journal of General Psychology*, 10(1), 59-82.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. J. (1982). *Inside Out: The Social Meaning of Mental Retardation*. University of Toronto Press.

everyday lives, families, rituals etc. Mental health has also been seen to exist as a continuum where mental health and mental illness are two extreme ends.

Referring to her study on psychosocial distress conducted during COVID, she talked about various micro factors that interact with an individual at social, cultural, economic and political levels. Since pandemic has led to some major changes in terms of how these relationships are lived, everybody is experiencing stress and anxiety issues. But in a situation like this, do we look it as an illness or a disease is the question to be asked. Even though there are differences in these experiences, our location as a person (stratified under the categories of gender, disability, class and caste) has impacted the way we are living in the pandemic in terms of our access to resources and technology. There is a need to carry out research in this area to understand how the lives of the people have restructured in the pandemic as they try to organise it at their homes.

Unlike a natural disaster which has an aftermath, the current pandemic can be seen as a disaster being witnessed in the real time. Dr. Nayar looked at the differential levels of anxieties experienced by the marginalised people (migrant workers) who were living the event and the people who were exposed to the coverage on the struggles of the workers. It has affected the mental health of the people in terms of increased irritability, anger issues and nightmares. This has led to an extensive use of drugs, alcohol, and caffeine which in the long term can cause sleep disturbances, agitation and aggression. She talked about post-disaster mental health which in the light of COVID is difficult to be marked as the disaster is still continuing. Further, she discussed the coping mechanisms, recovery and resilience factors that help individuals deal with the disaster. She suggested it to be studied under the two paradigms: (1) individuals that have the capacity to access inner wisdom/potential and manifest it in everyday activities irrespective of the fact whether there is illness or wellness (resilience and realising potential); (2) the concept of post traumatic growth can also be explored as disasters do not always lead to deterioration of mental health. Also, researchers can take into account the impact of religion, spirituality and healing practices on post traumatic growth or post traumatic mental health. Ending the session at a positive note, Dr. Nayar narrated the story of a visually impaired girl from an urban slum whose lifelong dream of taking up a leadership role was fulfilled in the lockdown when she became a leader of the group and imparts soft skill training. Thus, Dr. Nayar affirmed the scholars to research the areas of strength in narratives to understand how people manage to survive in adverse circumstances with the help of different support systems.

The session ended with a discussion with participants on the matters of anxiety due to media and effective ways to address it; role of civil societies and initiatives of the NGOs in disability access and mental health especially during the pandemic; levels of taking consent from the guardians/ parents and other support systems during telephonic interviews; the 'othering' of disability and marginalising the marginalised (who is spreading the disease).

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## Open Session: Q/A Round

At the end of the workshop a one hour open session was announced by the convenors to address the queries of the participants. Prof. Nilika Mehrotra, Prof. S.M. Patnaik, and Dr. Shubhangi Vaidya stimulated the participants with their knowledge on the following themes which also paved the way for future research:

- New areas that could be explored by the researchers in gender studies.
- Collection of narratives on the lived experiences of women from marginalised communities (on a private issue like infertility which requires privacy) in the time of pandemic where they cannot be contacted through telephones.
- Reflections on the '*anthro pause*': socio-geological aspect.
- Avoiding gender bias in gender studies, intersectionality of gender, reflexivity and political positions of a researcher in such studies.
- Anthropological studies on diseases like cervical cancer, 'illness as a metaphor'.
- Surviving strategies and coping mechanisms of students and scholars who had to move back to their hometowns; experiencing the duality of their respective lifestyles (urban life vs rural life)
- The false notion of agrarian activities as an extension of household work.
- The issues of middle/upper class professional women who bare the double burden, and had to sacrifice jobs to care for the child and families, especially during pandemic.
- Subtle manifestations of caste and everyday caste practices in the mundane activities of the urban middle class families.
- Caste behaviours in matrimonial advertisements, caste associations and that of a diasporic Indian working outside India.
- Public vs private statements in interviews, the issues of conducting a media anthropology research.
- The changes in terms of our understanding of 'trauma' 'mourning' and 'memory' of the dead, changes in social behaviours, and the psychological impact on families of the dead in the Covid pandemic.
- Families commemorating traditions, rituals and practices when a person has died from coronavirus. How these practices will be reshaped in the future.

The workshop successfully brought together diverse issues ranging from challenges to strategies and also possible solutions in the context of doing social science research during the times of Pandemic. Learnings and insights would be taken to help and support scholars in their respective areas of research.

**The workshop ended with concluding remarks and vote of thanks.**

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