

BOOK REVIEWS

The Anthropology of Infectious Diseases: International Health Perspectives

Edited by Marcia C. Inhorn and Peter J. Brown,
Gordon and Breach Publishers, The Netherlands (1997) (Cloth).

Large portions of the world's population suffers from, and struggles against diseases caused by infectious agents. Infectious diseases still remain one of the major causes of death worldwide. Emergence and re-emergence of serious infectious diseases is a threat to human life. Human beings are often held responsible for spreading infections by their activities, though carried out inadvertently. As professional observers and interpreters of human behaviour, anthropologists can play an important role to combat this problem. Medical anthropologists study these diseases in their social and cultural context and their findings can be shared with people in biomedical sciences and international public health organisation.

The volume under review consists of papers which were presented at 91st Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. In addition are other contributors on the problem of infectious diseases. An overcharging theme in the volume is the anthropology of infectious diseases and its empirical documentation. The editors' standpoint manifests itself in a generalized usefulness of anthropological research findings. It is prime time for anthropologists to seize new opportunities and build interdisciplinary bridges in ways heretofore untried. The editors have recommended further studies in the anthropologies of neglected infectious diseases; reconstruction of infectious disease histories; employing methodological triangulation; enriching infectious disease ethnographies and providing political - economic context.

The present volume is organised on the lines of recommendations of the editors in to five sections: Anthropologies, Histories, Methods, Ethnographies and Political Economics. The headings of each of these sections are in plural because "no single theoretical paradigm or methodological orientation" encompasses all this

work. The case studies which describe an infectious disease problem in a particular historical or cultural context have been grouped. However, the editors did not organise the volume by biomedical criteria like the type of pathogen or the route of infection. The chapters are rather incorporated into sections on the basis of their methodological approaches, ethnographic descriptions of the cultural context or the larger political economic context.

The first section includes anthropologies of infectious disease. It describes medical anthropological approaches to the study of infectious diseases and how they have changed over time. Chapter 2 titled 'The Anthropology of Infectious Disease' is a view of literature, reprinted from the *Annual Review of Anthropology*. This presents an overview of research examples about a wide range of infectious diseases focusing on how culturally prescribed behaviour either increases or decreases the risk of disease transmission.

The contributors to part two titled 'Histories', focus on a diachronic analysis of disease and culture. In chapter 3, Harrison demonstrates the contribution of paleopathology to infectious disease research by taking up a case of Valley Fever identified in a human skeleton with severe bone lesions uncovered in an archaeological excavation in Arizona. A microscopic analysis revealed that the bone was infected with the cocci fungi. Harrison's study suggests that population at high epidemiological risk for Valley Fever are disadvantaged at many fronts, and therefore have more exposure to the 'dangerous dirt carrying the cocci fungi'.

The second case, chapter 4, by McClain unfolds a cultural history of small pox, cultural beliefs of peoples, beliefs of virologists and eradication of small pox. She brings to the fore the more ethical debate regarding about the contemporary scientific and technological knowledge and the destruction of two remaining laboratory samples of the small pox virus. The third example in this unit concerns a disease that the WHO targeted but failed to eradicate. Brown (in

chapter 5) traces the cultural history of malaria. This historical analysis suggests that cultural, rather than parasitological or entomological, factors are the primary cause of the current resurgence of Malaria.

Part Three - Methods - demonstrates the advantages of different approaches the qualitative and quantitative methods, analysis of individuals and households, and analytical epidemiology and ethnography in medical and households, and analytical epidemiology and ethnography in medical anthropological work on infectious disease. Coreil and colleagues (in chapter 6) demonstrate the utility of the household as the unit of analysis in the mosquito-borne disease dengue fever. This study provides an important background information on the feasibility of community participation in disease control efforts. It is an important study, for it combines the research strategies of mapping, survey research and direct observation to understand a dengue outbreak in one Dominican community. Inhorn and Buss (in chapter 7) combine the ethnographic and epidemiological methods in the tubal - factor infertility among poor urban Egyptian women. Together, anthropology and epidemiology have a crucial role in identifying factors, especially culture - specific behavioural factors, that place population at risk of health problems such as tubal - factor infertility.

In chapter 8, Bhattacharyya shows how the use of multiple social science methods can be used to examine the validity and reliability of these methods. The study is based on field work about cultural factors related to Acute Respiratory Infection in West Bengal. The author delineates a variety of methodologies available to social scientists from structured survey instruments (knowledge, attitudes and practices) to focused ethnographic study to participate observation and their strengths, weaknesses, and requirements.

Part four titled Ethnographics, includes four excellent examples of how medical anthropologists examine ethnomedical health cultures and the way ethnomedical beliefs influence health seeking behaviour and clinical treatment of some important infectious diseases. Vecchiato's study (chapter 9) provides an ethnomedical description of native theories of causation, categoriza-

tion, diagnosis and traditional modes of treatment of intestinal parasitism in Southern Ethiopia, using methods developed in linguistic and cognitive anthropology. Nichter (in chapter 10) analyses the semantic domains of illness categories and shows how these native terms do not correspond with the labels in the *International Classification of Diseases*. Mull (chapter 11) reports ethnomedical beliefs regarding the treatment of measles, including beliefs about the Sitala goddess associated with small pox, as well as the traditional beliefs about hot and cold illnesses, play a significant role. Cody and Colleagues (in chapter 12) differentiate between maternal and professional cultural knowledge of Acute Respiratory Infection in Pakistan.

Part Five titled Political Economies, provides three examples of medical anthropologists taking a leading role in adding the political-economic dimension to research on infectious diseases. In chapter 13, Kielmann describes a critical analysis of the cultural and political-economic underpinnings of concepts such as "prostitution" and "risk" as they are used in AIDS prevention discourse in Kenya. Based on a detailed analysis of the cultural context of and economic constraints on individual Kenyan women's lives, Kielmann challenges the culturally loaded category of "prostitute" and demonstrates how the continuing AIDS epidemic needs to be seen in a broader microsociological context. Farmer (in chapter 14) demonstrates the political-economic dimensions of gender and poverty, while at the same time offering a powerful indictment of the depoliticization of standard epidemiological analysis of AIDS in Haiti. By offering a political-economic analysis from the viewpoint of Haitian peasants, Farmer shows how anthropological research can be applied to local empowerment and the development of community control over local health education. Nation and Monte (in chapter 15) describe epidemic politics surrounding an outbreak of Cholera in Brazil. The study shows that the victims of a disease, if they happen to be poor and powerless, may be blamed for the disease by the wider community, including the politically powerful biomedical community.

On the whole, this volume is an important addition to the already existing literature on the

medical anthropology of infectious diseases. The quality of the chapters and assessments by authors are well documented. Had biomedical criteria also been considered by the editors, the volume would have been more holistic in nature. As it is, it will be of tremendous use to specialists in other cognate disciplines, and useful for the purposes of teaching. The contributors cover a wide spectrum - from the issues of methodology to the relationship of medical systems with political and economic aspects. The book has been produced well, however references are not complete in some paper. For instance on page 132, Sevilla-Cases, 1993.

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Tribal Development: Options

Edited by Prasanna K. Samal

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To the long list of volumes already existing on the issues of development of Indian tribes, here is an edited one, running into almost six hundred pages, which is an outcome of a National Seminar organized in May 1996 under the aegis of G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development (Almora). Comprising thirty-six articles, divided into seven sections each having a summary of the papers included therein, and having a set of recommendations as a concluding note, this volume addresses the aspects of environment, population structures, culture and resources, gender, directed and planned changes, in the context of development, along with an important section on the markers of development, an area that engages the attention of all social scientists, particularly economists.

Generally thought to be a specialized area of anthropologists, this volume proves that tribals' development and their problems are no more confined to anthropological expertise, but experts from other disciplines, not only of social science but of biology, can make a seminal contribution to tribal studies. For example, a botanist's understanding of herbs tribals use for medicinal and

cosmetic purposes is bound to be far more valuable than the simple documentation by anthropologists of terms by which local herbs are known and their uses. It is heartening to note that the composition of the Seminar was truly multi-disciplinary; and basing oneself on one's narrow field of specialization, each scholar must have made a rich contribution to the deliberations.

In a short review paper, it is not possible to discuss all the articles of this thick volume. I shall confine my discussion to the 'markers of development' and then, to some of the recommendations.

One of the disappointments the reader is bound to have pertains to the last section, the markers of development, which consists of six papers. Only one of them has any relevance to the rubric under which these papers have been classified, and this concerns the possibility of expanding tourism in tribal areas. It is disheartening to note that the UN Index of Development (and the consequent debate on this) has not been taken up for any reference, let alone a systematic discussion. Neither have the authors nor editors (general and sectional) touched upon the concept of the quality of life. One would have expected in this volume a critical perusal of economic and social indices of development and their relevance to tribal studies. Does development make people happy, integrating them with their society, and giving them a meaning of life and existence? This — and other questions regarding qualitative dimensions of development — are extremely significant; let us not forget that Jawahar Lal Nehru said that we should not judge results by the amount of money spent on development programmes, or the statistical details of the beneficiaries, but in terms of the quality of human character that evolves because of these directed and planned changes.

Unfortunately Indian anthropology, and all those disciplines (and sub-disciplines) which tend to ape it, seem to be content with a microscopic (often a bird's-eye view) of a community. No attempt is made to systematically compare one's results with other studies; and the local problems are not related with global issues and debates. That's one of the reasons why anthropological (and quasi-anthropological) writings

are unable to create any impact in the world of theoretical and applied academics. Ethnographic pieces we churn out are superficial. The quality of our field work is often poor, and our analytical strength is extremely limited. Because we fail to produce a good anthropology, we tend to hide behind the list of 'prescriptions' — 'What is to be done?' The latter take precedence over a meticulous understanding of society and its institutions, which in fact is the true aim of anthropology. It is an interpretive science of society, and not of policy prescriptions. 'What is' is far more important than 'what should be'. The latter should logically follow from a carefully conducted empirical study.

Can tourism be regarded as an index of development of the local people? It is not possible to give an unambiguous answer to this question. Surely, native trekkers assisting and guiding tourists are expected to earn handsomely. But this economic gain is accursed if it is at the expense of the destruction of the habitat. Perhaps we would also blame the local guides and trekkers for axing the branch of the tree on which they are perched. Well known are the cases of towns and cities in the Himalayas which are in a state of critical equilibrium because of tourist influx. The number of hotels which are now mushrooming in the Himalayan region, are putting insurmountable pressure on local resources. The worst aspect of the 'market mentality' is that local people usually convert their residences into 'lodges' and their kitchens into 'messes' during the tourist season, and they often live huddled in whatever space is left for them in the house.

An escalation in the number of seismic episodes and landslides is an indication of the fury of nature which can no longer withstand its overexploitation. Against this background, shouldn't we think in terms of eco-sensitive guided tours rather than permitting the 'careless' tourists (who are careless because they do not have their moorings in that area) to go berserk in their use of the local resources? Shouldn't we develop the local products and their marketing which will make people self-reliant, rather than promoting tourism for revenue in tribal area? Shouldn't we diligently work out the models of eco-tourism, each consistent with the demands of the local habitat? Shouldn't the tourists be

apprised in a more formal way with the ecological problems of the area they intend to visit and the precautions they are required to observe? The point is: ecology is first; economy is later. There are better ways of accelerating economy, but not at the cost (and demise) of ecology.

The last section of this volume sums up the recommendations. They are all in line with the model of indigenous development. The tribal institutions need to be strengthened. Not only should the tribals decide the type and nature of technological and institutional changes they want in their community but it is through their institutions that these changes be carried out. The five propositions given by Nehru are still relevant for delineating an approach for tribal development.

One of the recommendations of this volume is about changing the term 'tribe' by 'traditional': a 'tribal society' should be called a 'traditional society'. Why should such a change be effected is explained nowhere. The preference for 'traditional society' is because the latter 'lives in close vicinity of nature'; it does not damage or destroy the eco-system.

Contrary to this opinion, we submit that every society (irrespective of its scale of development) exploits its habitat and is proximate to nature. It is wrong to believe that modern society is 'away' from (or 'alien' to) nature. The concern for environment is ubiquitous in all societies. A traditional society preserves its environment by not overexploiting it because it has fewer individuals with negligible social stratification and a frugal living. By comparison, a modern society consciously debates the strategies to preserve its eco-system. It knows full well that it has far more individuals than are there in a traditional society, and these individuals are stratified and for maintaining their lifestyles and status, they overexploit their resources. Eco-preservation is a latent practice amongst the traditional people whereas it is a manifest concern for the modern. We have tremendous faith in the programmes of ecological sustainability devised after great thoughtfulness of modern man. We definitely learn from the examples of traditional society, but we should refrain from glorifying it, or arguing in favour of its revival which is not possible. Certain changes are irrevocable. Modernity is one of them. It is also contagious. Traditional societies in their

pristine form and glory do not exist now; they have either been transformed or are in the process of transition. Therefore, to call a tribal society 'traditional' is incorrect.

Suggestions to replace the word 'tribe' by some other neutral term have come up in past also. The reasons given have been: anthropologically speaking, the tribe (a 'cultural isolate') does not exist because it has been transformed (de-tribalized) over time; the term tribe is value-loaded, in the sense that it carries a number of stereotypes which today are completely outmoded; and the people for whom it was used by the colonial masters, have strongly reacted against it, and so, respecting their sentiments, we should avoid using it. The terms suggested for replacement are community and ethnic group. They are supposed to be preceded by the name of the people (e.g. Oraon community/ Rabari ethnic group).

However, we should not forget that besides being a colonial construct, the term tribe designated a type of society which could be qualitatively distinguished from caste. Both tribe and caste constituted two poles of the continuum, well known in anthropology as the tribe-caste continuum. Differences between tribe and caste were marked sharply in some areas, whereas in others they tended to narrow down greatly. With the advent of modernity, all traditional societies — be they tribe or caste — have been affected, although the magnitude of change varies amongst them. Today, by tribe, we do not mean a 'cultural isolate', or one of the first stages (after band) in the evolution of human society. By this we mean, a category of society which in the past had many characteristics that qualified its inclusion as a tribe (an anthropological term), but is now undergoing the processes of acculturation and transculturation. In spite of a number of changes that have appeared in its social organization and culture, its members have a discernible sense of identity and belongingness, or in the words of Franklin Giddings, 'a consciousness of kind'. In this sense of 'one-ness', which is the hallmark of ethnicity, that we today speak of tribe. I think this term encapsulates certain aspects of the history of anthropology. It serves our purpose with reference to social taxonomy; therefore, there does not seem to be a need to

replace it. But we should definitely combat the stereotypes associated with it. No term is ethically-vacuous. We should try our best to free it from prejudices.

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Conserving The Sacred : For Biodiversity Management

Edited By P.S. Ramakrishnan, K.G. Sexana,
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Close human-forest linkage and animistic belief system of the traditional societies all over the world have often maintained a portion of their natural ecosystem types as 'Sacred groves' or as 'sacred landscapes' for cultural/religious reasons. Programmes on sacred sites and cultural values are considered important under UNESCO's MAB Programme, as they facilitate better understanding of these self organized systems of traditional resource management. This volume under review is sponsored by UNESCO, New Delhi. It emphasizes upon conserving the 'sacred', in all its spatial dimensions ranging from species to landscape levels.

This edited book is a critical evaluation of the 'sacred', from a variety of perspectives : (a) ecological, social anthropological and cultural attributes of the sacred groves; (b) spatial dimensions of the sacred leading to species to landscape level analysis; (c) ecological/social interphase of conserving the 'sacred' determining ecosystem/landscape level functional attributes; (d) the whole issue of managing the 'sacred' in the contemporary context of declining natural resources, land degradation and rehabilitation ecology; (e) management related policy implications.

The volume aims at synthesizing the current state of knowledge on the subject through a series of commissioned articles from international experts and through case studies from India and from South-Asian Region. The articles in the volume are organized into three parts. Part I, starting with conceptual issues cover historical,

social, cultural and ecological perspective. Burrows (Chapter 6) in his article titled 'where nothing is sacred' raises some ethical issues, emphasizing the thin dividing line between 'sacred' and 'profane'. Part II includes case histories from different parts of the world. In view of the large body of information available from India, sacred groves from different parts of India have been dealt with, along with the groves from the South Asian region, and those from other parts of the world. Part III deals with biodiversity conservation issues in the context of ecosystem/landscape

functions. Management strategies and policy consideration have also been discussed in this section.

This book will be of immense interest to national government, international bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, scientists researchers, managers, NGOs and students concerned with approaches to sustainable use of biodiversity and its management.

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