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**ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY IN INDIA:  
A REFLECTION AND A PERSPECTIVE\***

I had no opportunity to meet Dr. K.S. Mathur, but I know about his contribution to anthropology in India. My first acquaintance with his name is as editor of *The Eastern Anthropologist*. I read book reviews written by him. As a student of village studies, I am familiar with his Ph.D work on 'Caste and Ritual in a Malwa village' and some of the papers he published based on the work. When I took up this topic for Dr. K.S. Mathur memorial lecture, I realized that Dr. Mathur had a clear vision for economic anthropology.

Mathur (1964) wrote a comment on Manning Nash's book on *Primitive and Peasant Economic Systems* in the prestigious journal *Current Anthropology*. He made an interesting observation that the sub discipline of economic anthropology is different from other sub disciplines of social anthropology. According to Mathur, while the other sub disciplines focus on subjects left out by other disciplines, economic anthropology has the same subject matter as that of economics. He anticipated that economic anthropology conceived by Nash and others as study of primitive and peasant economic systems will be eventually adding the study of modern economies also to its subject matter. Mathur wrote "I feel that economic anthropology is bound to embrace the study of modern economies, much the same way as social anthropology today includes in its study not only primitive and peasant but also urban and industrial societies" (K.S.Mathur,1967:247). In his reply to Mathur's comment, Nash indicated that anthropology is not ready at that particular juncture to venture in to the study of modern economies and mentioned that it may be possible in future. I am mentioning this to point out that Mathur anticipated and expected a broader role to economic anthropology. His interest is more on contemporary society. Referring to the treatment of Manning Nash on jajmani system, Dr. Mathur suggests that the interplay between economy and society can be more fruitfully explored through focused studies in areas where the jajmani system is showing a change.

The present lecture aims to outline anthropological research in India from the perspective of economic anthropology. An attempt has been made to

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examine the economic insights on Indian society and their relevance to the study of contemporary scenario. It may not be possible to identify any Indian anthropologist as specialist in economic anthropology. Economic anthropology as a sub discipline in India can be constructed mainly on the basis of writings that do not directly claim the label, but discussing economic aspects as part of the other interests of respective researchers.

### **Conceptualizing the subject matter**

Nash (1964) pointed that economic anthropologists undertake 'analysis of economic life as a subsystem of society'. Accepting the heterogeneity among primitive and peasant economies, Nash proposed a four dimensional model for understanding the form, function and dynamics of the economies. The four dimensions are (i). Technology and division of labor, (ii). Structure of productive units, (iii). The systems of media of exchange, and (iv) Control of wealth and capital. According to Leclair (1968), the difference between economics and economic anthropology is in the emphasis of non-economic factors. He gave a general theory of economizing as a social process. His model of economic system includes production, distribution, utilization, and the systemic outcome. Leclair emphasized on the need for descriptive studies using the above model for systematic comparison. In view of the existing diversity, it becomes difficult to accurately describe or define economic anthropology, and it has been described as 'something that economic anthropologists do' (Mark Mortiz, 2006: 172). Economic anthropology emerged in to a specialized area of investigation in social anthropology much later, when compared to areas like kinship and religion. According to Dalton (1971) less attention was paid in anthropology to study of economic organization and performance than to kinship and politics. He provided reasons for this state of affairs. Stuart Plattner (1989) defined economic anthropology as the study of economic institutions and behavior using ethnographic methods. According to him, the empirical study of the economy sets anthropology apart from economics. Economic anthropology involves description and analysis of economic life and comparison of economic systems, leading to concepts and generalizations. At times, economic anthropologists appear to be interested in their studies on apparently irrational behavior. But, many of the economic activities that appear to lack rationality do have long term economic and social implications. The holistic approach of anthropologists does not allow them to consider social phenomena in isolation. The emphasis is upon interpenetration of economic organization and social organization as seen from preoccupation with practices like Kula, Potlatch, and Bride-wealth.

### **Economic Anthropology in India**

In India, from the beginning, anthropologists focused on tribal studies. Attention has been paid towards ethnographic studies, studies on culture

contact and acculturation, and impact of industrialization and urbanization. Later, for researchers within the country and those who came from outside, the interest has been on the study of caste, kinship, village communities, religion, matrilineal societies and so on. Priority was on documenting vanishing cultures (salvage anthropology) and rapidly changing societies. As such there was no concern about specialized sub disciplines. Understanding cultures, structures, processes, pattern, institutions etc. formed the preoccupation. This can be clearly seen from the agendas provided by scholars in 1969 for different regions and communities in India at a seminar titled 'Urgent Research in Social Anthropology'. Following established traditions from the west, anthropologists in India are involved in the understanding of tribal and rural communities, analyzing the social institutions; and study of origins, evolution, diffusion of various goods and practices. The study of economic activities remained secondary to the study of kinship, religion, social organization, and material culture. However, economic aspects of marriage, family and kinship, jajmani relations, village organization, role of caste and religion in economy and development have been taken up for research. Anthropologists carried out predominantly sociological studies, paying minimal attention to economic analysis. For example, David, G. Mandelbaum's (1972) book titled '*Society in India*' in its various chapters covered family, kinship, relations within and outside jati, villages, civilization, mobility and contact. Economic aspects related to family, kinship, village, gift giving and social change are touched upon in different chapters. Even in village studies, not many researchers did focus on economy. Iswaran (1968), Bailey (1957), Epstein (1962) are some of the anthropologists who focused on economic aspects in the village studies. Economic anthropologists question the portrayal of man as 'economic man', for ignoring the social aspects. But, in social anthropology the social aspects are often considered without reference to economic aspects.

Coming to sub disciplines of social anthropology, there are volumes that have been written and edited under the title Applied Anthropology. Books and papers are coming up on Medical Anthropology, Linguistic Anthropology and Communication Anthropology. But there are very few works with the label economic anthropology in their title. Books and monographs on castes and tribes covered economic aspects by including a chapter with the title economy/economic organization/socio-economic changes etc. A book titled '*Essays in Economic Anthropology*' (Gupta, 1974) covered varied topics starting with a general note on 'Economics and Anthropology', followed by an account on fishing, and practices of mutual assistance and cooperation. The essays in the book analyzed the relation between power structures and poverty, and contrasted traditional agriculture with modern agriculture that came with technological advancement. The debates and developments taking place in British and American anthropology found their echo in Indian anthropology. N. K Behura's (1977) book titled '*Anthropological Economics*' has been subtitled Substantivism versus Formalism. In the words of the author, the book is an

attempt to analyze economic phenomena, economic behavior, and economic relations in respect of tribal communities. Apart from discussing on scope and debates in economic anthropology, Behura presented only a typology of tribal communities in India based on their principle economic activity. Sachchidananda (1979) in a paper titled 'Horizons of Economic Anthropology in India', focused on the problems of rural areas, especially scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. According to him, it is not just simple (Tribal) economies that fall under the purview of economic anthropology. He argued for inclusion of 'simple peasant communities, share croppers and land less laborers. Sachchidanada drew attention to peasant studies, as he did not see the justification in differentiating between peasants and tribes practicing agriculture (1979:311).

Economic anthropology gets mentioned in less number of books. Dealing with economic systems of tribals, Vidyarthi and Rai (1977) used the sub heading 'Economic Anthropology and Tribals' in their book titled '*Tribal Cultures of India*'. Under this they discussed the definition of economic anthropology, the treatment of economic activities by economists and a few economic anthropologists. They indicated that only a socio-economic (Substantivist) approach serves the purpose in the tribal context. In the absence of well-defined economic anthropological studies, they have drawn 'economic anthropology of tribal cultures from the descriptive monographs on the tribal communities (pp 94-96). There are introductory books on anthropology which discuss the sub discipline of Economic anthropology but not relating it to Indian context or giving any Indian illustrations (Doshi and Jain, 2005)

Economists (Nag, 1958, Saxena, 1964, Ramaih, 1981) studied tribal economies in the context of general economic theories. John Adams (1972) pointed that in the study of rural Indian economy there is nothing common between by economists and anthropologists. He highlighted the methodological differences between the village studies of anthropologists, and market behavior or price responsiveness studies of the economists. John Adams pleaded for enhanced inter-disciplinary communication. According to him, economists failed to resolve the problems inherent in the analysis of individual farmers or peasant behavior in its social context, and lagged behind in handling processual changes associated with modernization. The methodological weakness of anthropologists has been mentioned as lack of comparability and quantification. Contributors to the volume edited by Bardhan (1989) emphasized on the need for integrating the micro-level studies and restudies of anthropologists with survey based macro level approaches of economists. Scholars from both anthropology and economics emphasized need for methodological complementarities.

### **Ethnographic monographs on Tribal communities**

Economic aspects of indigenous communities have been portrayed in the ethnographic monographs on tribal communizes. Several ethnographic

monographs contained descriptive accounts of economic life, housing, weaving, weapons, implements and other aspects of material culture. Under the label economic organization focus was on livelihood pursuits such as hunting, food gathering, shifting cultivation, pastoralism, and agricultural operations. Study of traditional economies in isolation has become untenable after colonial contact. Later, the economic problems of these people as a result of culture contact and governmental policies received attention. Many pursued studies on the role of forest in tribal economies and the impact of forest policies. In the survey of Research on tribes, Sachchidanada (1985) reviewed several studies focusing on description of tribal economies; economic transformation due to culture contact, role of markets, government policies, and impact of industrialization (1985: 85-88). The edited volume (K. S. Singh, 1982) titled '*Economies of tribes and their transformation*', covered wide ranging topics on tribal economies such as shift from nomadism to settled agriculture, shifting cultivation, agrarian structure, and impact of industrialization. Many authors dealt with economic changes due to impact of money economy, changes in subsistence pattern, impact of industries etc. Shift from subsistence crops to commercial crops and the consequences for the tribal communities has been an area tribal for research.

While focusing on the contact between non-tribal cultures and tribal cultures and the resultant socio-economic changes, several scholars have thrown light on the economic exploitation of the tribals and the problems faced by them. Peasantization of tribals as they moved from subsistence economy to market economy formed an aspect of the study of socio-economic change. Problems of shifting cultivators, land alienation, impact of industrialization, displacement due to projects etc. have delineated the social implications of economic change, apart from highlighting the marginalization to tribal people. Study of bonded labor formed an extension of this.

### **From tribal to peasant: The socio-economic perspective**

Though tribal economies received attention initially, the shift took place towards peasant economies in the later period. Though not using the label Economic Anthropology, Andre Beteille (1971, 1972) made significant contribution to the field. He surveyed the developments in the discipline tracing the neglect of the study of land relations. He stressed on the application of anthropological approach to the study of agrarian systems and highlighted on the importance of utilization, control and ownership of land. For Beteille, the topics to be investigated are technology, work cycle, organization of production and agrarian hierarchy.

Starting from Malinowski's (1922) description of Kula exchange, and the well-known study by Marcel Mauss (1925) on '*The Gift*'; scholars focused on the significance of exchanges and exchange systems in simple societies. This trend is reflected in the studies in India also. Practices based on the

principles of reciprocity and redistribution among tribal communities received the attention. Mandelbaum's study in the Nilgiris of Tamilnadu discussed the classic illustration of how economic and non-economic factors combine to produce economic results in supplying essential goods and services to the tribal communities of Toda, Kota, Badaga, and Kurmba (Described in Herskovits, 1940, 156-159). Walter Neale (1957) argued that village economy in India can be better understood through the concepts of reciprocity and redistribution, than in terms of concepts from conventional economic theory. He described the distribution of harvest towards payments for services rendered by different village functionaries in the village economy. The ruler also received a share in the harvest, but, Neale felt that it is inappropriate to consider this as land revenue or tax. The functioning of reciprocal and redistributive exchanges in an inter island situation was analyzed by Sahay (1979). The study conducted by Iravati Karve and Acharya (1970) showed that the term market as conceptualized by economists is not applicable in the context of tribal society. It was suggested that the term market place is more relevant to describe tribal weekly markets. According to them, the main role of market is that of communication which takes place through exchange of commodities, meeting of people, exchange of ideas, and entertainments. The formalist way of applying supply demand analysis is not found suitable in traditional Indian villages due the predominance of hereditary patron-client relations. Majority of the scholars applied substantivist perspective for the study of traditional Indian society. This is due the intertwined nature of economic and social institutions. Studies on gift (Jonathan Parry, 1986, Raheja, 1988) can be mentioned here. It is shown that the Hindu practice of 'Danadharma' poses a number of difficulties for general theories of exchange's because there may not be expectation or obligation to reciprocate in these practices. Another extension of substantivist thesis can be seen in the arguments that the distinction between gifts and commodities is not valid in the tribal situations. The gift exchanges are found to be sharing certain aspects of commodity exchange depending on the social relations and the context (Thrarakan, 2007).

### **Exchange of goods and services in Indian Villages**

Exchange of goods and services between different castes in Indian villages received the attention of many anthropologists. In this, the main focus has been on the study of inter-caste relations. Economic dimension remained as of secondary significance. Inter-caste relations have been mentioned in several colonial writings, but jajmani system received attention after the publication of Wiser's (1938) book. Wiser consider jajmani system as a system of redistribution and portrayed a picture of cohesive and formal system. The next important person to draw attention on jajmani system is Beidelman (1959). His perspective on jajmani system is that of a feudalistic system with hereditary obligations. He emphasized on the inequalities. This is in contrast to Wiser's (1936) view that the system is an egalitarian one

with mutual rights and obligations. The famous statement of Wiser that “each in turn is master, each in turn is servant” reflects this point of view (1936: xii). Harper (1959) undertook a comparison of two types of jajmani system one for commercial crops and the second for subsistence crops. Manning Nash (1966) discussed the relation between economy and the social system using jajmani system as an illustration. Nash concludes that economy is a sub system and is most dynamic segment of the social system, that many fundamental changes in society originated in the economic sphere and that the continuity of social system is intimately related to a given level of performance of the economy (1966:101). How the system leads to social and economic integration and exploitation was discussed by Parry (1979:74-83). Even in tribal communities the presence of jajmani system and working of jajmani type relations have been discussed (Mahapatra, 1982). Many scholars discussed various aspects of jajmani system and the reasons for the disintegration of the system.

The understanding that Jajmani system was neither an ancient phenomena nor it existed all over the India has been a later development. It has been argued that it was a construction of colonial writers who have conceived it as a system (Peter Mayer, 1984, Fuller, 1992). Mayer indicated that the act of invention by Wiser later endorsed by Beidelman, was further encompassed by Dumont’s ideology of caste system. The preoccupation with the understanding of a coherent jajmani system led to ignoring the dynamic nature of inter-caste relations in Indian villages. With an over emphasis on the social roles, networks, and norms etc., the economic dimensions of the exchange of goods and services have been neglected. The descriptions of grain distribution at the time of harvest made scholars to stress on the non-economic nature of the transactions and relations. In reality it is common knowledge that villages differed in the caste composition and there have been several other options for exchange. There is wide variation in the presence of caste groups and the nature of relations between them. Services which are required on regular basis came under the purview of jajmani type of relations while services that are required occasionally like that of goldsmith come under the purview of contractual relations. Commander (1983) who carried out detailed discussion on various studies on jajmani system in North India showed that nowhere jajmani relations resemble the pure model that was constructed on the religious and mythological foundations.

In institutions like jajmani system, exclusively social or exclusively economic analysis will only lead to a partial understanding of the inter-caste relations. This is due to the overlap between caste and class in the Indian villages. However, the importance given to social relations, ritual obligations, and political power in the study of jajmani system resulted in anthropologists underplaying the economic aspects of jajmani relations. This static approach to the concept of jajmani system led to anthropologists to ignore the dynamic

nature of inter-caste relations in Indian village where new economic and social relations have been continuously emerging.

### **Rationality and traditional institutions**

The British efforts to augment their land revenue collection in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century resulted in several studies by British administrators. Administrators studied the revenue collection methods in different regions in India for developing an effective revenue collection system. Fixing responsibility for revenue collection at different levels was an important step. For purposes like this, study of rural economies started from the colonial period. Baden-Powell (1892) described the land-tenure and land revenue systems in different provinces of British India. Holt Mackenzie prepared a note on various forms of land revenue in West Bengal in 1819. He observed that the distribution harvest to different functionaries is devoid of any economic rationality. Functionaries were said to be paid without considering the quality or quantity of services rendered. As such there existed no possibility of paying more for better workers or removing inefficient workers. Credit goes to Epstein (1968) for clarifying the differences in the formulations of Wisner and Beidelman and undertaking an analysis of change and continuity in jajmani relations. The rationality underlying payments to workers was explained by the study of Epstein. She explained the rationality in persisting with customary payments, or severing the hereditary relations in pursuit of better opportunities. The workers opted for stability in the face of insecurities and accepted hereditarily fixed payments. Preferring an assured supply of labourers at a future needy date, land lords retained workers even when they are not required. She explored the implications of the system of hereditary labour relationships for productive efficiency and concluded that hereditary system of rights and duties is a mark of stagnant rather than developing economy. The adaptation of customary relations to suit the conditions in cities has been observed by Sylvia Vatuk (1972). She showed the functioning of jajmani relations with local modifications and cash payments in Meerut city.

The colonial project of documenting cultures and histories resulted in projecting Indian village communities as self-sufficient little republics and unchanging. This widely subscribed colonial view of economically self-sufficient village has been questioned later by scholars. Srinivas (1987) pointed to the villagers contribution to rulers, non-availability of several essential commodities such as salt in the village, and the role played by weekly markets and periodical fairs as examples that go contrary to the prevailing view that Indian villages are self-contained isolates (Srinivas, 1987: 36-39). Under the dominant paradigm of structural-functionalism, many studies emphasized on the unity, harmony, and integration existing in the Indian villages. The stress was on mutual help and security which formed the underlying consideration. What was interesting for the western scholars is the lack of free market which



implied lack of competitive spirit. The domination of structural-functional models and avoiding a historical perspective resulted in a static picture of village economy in Indian anthropology. This can be seen in many village studies. There were only a few studies following conflict model or Marxist analysis. However, scholars like Jan Breman (1989) and Appaduri (1989) pointed that village as unit of analysis has limitations, due to the presence of substantial migration and the existence of multiple links with commercial centers.

The debates on rationality and irrationality in traditional institutions influenced some studies. The institutions of caste and religion were seen as the basis of the economic processes in India. Questioning the view that non-economic activities are economic waste, Herskovits (1940) quoted the example of Urali community from Travencore area in South India. Their adherence to the ceremonial calendar makes them more efficient than their neighboring communities of Paliyan and Mannan. The obligations to perform the rituals made them as time conscious farmers. One of the well known debates on cattle population in India can be mentioned here. Many western scholars felt that, the large cattle population in India which is said to be un-productive and under-productive, is the result of the Hindu belief system, in which cow worship is an integral part. These views were countered by scholars who highlighted economic and ecological considerations. Writing on India's 'sacred cattle', Harris (1972) opined that "irrational, non-economic and exotic aspects of Indian Cattle Complex are greatly emphasized at the expense of rational, economic and mundane interpretations (Harris, 1972:377).

The social institutions operating in India have their own rationalities. It is pointed that economic rationality is one of the several social rationalities at work in the economy. Milton Singer (1972) showed the balance between economic rationality and religious values in his study of industrialists in Madras city. The industrialists could justify their departure from traditionally ordained life style by quoting from religious texts and religious functionaries. Religion which is supposed to be a conservative force also provided justification for dynamic entrepreneurial endeavors. Raymond Owens (1971) argued that economic self-interest is a principle cause for the maintenance or breakup of commensal joint families, and what is rational differs from individual to individual and from group to group (Owens 1971: 247). The breakdown of traditional coping mechanisms in the wake of availability of new opportunities has been discussed by Subhadra Channa (1985). Her study showed that individuals readily broke from the community for economic gains though it means foregoing the advantage of community support systems.

### **Economic and entrepreneurial dimensions of family, caste, and religion**

Increased participation in cash economy and moving across local boundaries to distant markets has profound socio-economic consequences.

Impact of money on subsistence economies, competition for opportunities and maximization of profits engaged the attention of anthropologists. Scarlet Epstein's (1962) study of two villages in Karnataka titled '*Economic Development and Social Change*', is a landmark study in several respects. Epstein described the emergence of entrepreneurs in a village located near a town and pointed that villages are not slow to react to new economic opportunities. The differences in the economic and social integration of a dry village and irrigated village into the larger society were explained in the study. The interactions and conflicts between market processes and traditional institutions were highlighted in the study of Epstein. The study pointed that economic development may strengthen the existing (unequal) roles and relations, if there is no reallocation of resources i.e. land. Qualitative and quantitative techniques were employed in the study of structural and cultural changes. Economic development and social change has been a much researched topic. Restudy of these villages by Epstein (1973) resulted in obtaining longitudinal insights on socio-economic change.

Many scholars focused on the role of religion and caste in economy. The stagnant nature of the economy has been attributed to lack of entrepreneurial qualities in the people. The argument of Max Weber, that religious beliefs form an obstacle for industrialization in India was countered effectively by Milton Singer (1972). He showed the emergence of entrepreneurs from traditional castes in Madras city, who successfully combined tradition with modern industry. Their motivations and adaptations through innovative practices like 'compartmentalization' were described by Singer. A study of 'business leaders' of third generation including entrepreneurs of software industry in Madras city was carried out by Harris (2003). In this study, the observations made by Singer were found to be relevant even after liberalization and globalization. Harris observed the continuing importance of religion and caste distinctions in influencing the employment patterns due to long standing connections between caste background and educational opportunity. In a study of entrepreneurs of engineering firms near Calcutta, Owens (1971) showed the advantage of keeping large families together for reducing consumption expenditure. It is observed that only when the family firm exceeds a critical level with many non-productive family members, it starts getting divided.

Many western scholars reinforced the prevailing notion that caste, religion and joint family are obstacles to modernization of Indian society. The role played by these institutions has been used to explain the lack of dynamism in the Indian society. The important role played by caste, even in business and industry emerged from field studies. Role of caste associations has been studied by scholars like Kolenda (2006) who pointed out that they are functioning as vehicles of socio-economic mobility. The existence of corporatist forms based directly or indirectly on caste has been pointed. The continuing importance of joint family even in the modern industry has been pointed out

(Singer, 1968, Harris, 2003). The relation between modern organized, and labor intensive unorganized sectors of industry was analyzed following anthropological approach by Holmstrom (1984). This study also brought out the importance of social relations for getting employment in organized sector. Relative prevalence of entrepreneurship has been a condition to distinguish traditional and modern economies. Barbara Harris-White (2003) stressed on understanding of traditional institutions as important in the study of Indian economy even after globalization. She showed that accumulation is not only organized through labour, capital and the state, but also through gender, religion, and caste. The discussion of interdependence between production and reproduction received the attention. In the Tamilnadu town Varni, reinforcement of patriarchy in the market economy has been pointed by Babara Harris-White. Even after globalization, Indian economy is found to be socially regulated. Interplay between caste and economy is continuing and caste clustering in the occupations can be seen.

### **Socio-economic changes and economic problems**

The entry of simple societies in monetized economy and its consequences in the form of exploitation by money lenders is another area of inquiry falling in the domain of economic anthropology. Penetration of commercial economy in to rural economy and its consequences received the attention of several scholars. Bailey's (1957) study showed how penetration of state and market in to the villages resulted in significant changes in the resource utilization pattern, and subsequently in the socio-economic relations. The entry of mercantile economy, and land becoming a saleable commodity resulted in breakdown of existing economic organization. The methodological approach of the study in combining structural functionalism and historical approach to delineate social and economic changes has been a trendsetting one. Bailey's study in a way reflects two trends that continue in Indian anthropology even today. i. Study of socio-economic consequences of contact, ii. Study of impact of government policies on tribal communities. Studies on impact of industrialization on tribal communities highlighted the negative impact of urban and industrial complexes on tribal communities. At the same time the positive gains of education and formal employment are also acknowledged. K.S Singh (1985) mentions settled agriculture, acculturation, and a determined acculturated minority resulted in state formation among the Chero community of Chota Nagpur. B.S Cohn (1987) traced the change in economic structures during the colonial and post-colonial periods. In the course of consolidating their rule, colonial rulers set up procedures for settling the disputes, established rights in lands, and obligations towards the state. How micro level changes are linked to these macro-level processes has been brought out by Cohn.

Typologies constructed by substantivists put market exchange as advanced type. For Polanyi (1944), rise of market exchange was the 'great

transformation' which separate traditional economies from market economies. While anthropologists are traditionally interested in exchange systems, markets received much attention by economic anthropologists. In the earlier part of 19th century traders from non-tribal centers developed contacts with hilly and forested tribal areas in central and eastern India. Along with them cash economy also entered and the dependence of tribals on money became inevitable. The non-tribal traders who made their entry into tribal areas made use of this situation to establish a flourishing business of trade cum money lending. They made use of traditional institutions like ceremonial friendship in furthering their economic interests. Non tribal centers nearer to the tribal areas emerged as operational bases. The weekly markets play a significant socio-cultural role in the life of the tribal communities apart from their economic role. The tribals look forward to the week day to attend the market and rarely misses the visit. The weekly markets flourish despite the presence of itinerant traders and regular shops established by both private and government agencies. Dharani P. Sinha (1968) studied an inter tribal market focusing on culture change. The impact of monetization on social and cultural values has been shown in this study. Karve and Acharya (1970) showed how the weekly market has a multipurpose role as it formed a source of varied information such as eligible spouses, developmental programmes etc.

Various dimensions of the organization of weekly markets in tribal areas that are of interest for economic anthropologists include: their growth from seasonal to regular markets; domination by particular group of traders in the market organization; the seasonality in transactions; participation of tribal entrepreneurs; persistence of traditional exchanges and barter transactions in certain commodities at weekly market and also village level; patronage of tribals in terms of preference to certain markets for specified commodities; weekly market versus itinerant traders and permanently established shops; exploitative practices at weekly markets; and role of market in stimulating growth and development.

There have been debates about the nature of marriage payments in anthropology and the most well known example can be on the issue of using the term bride-wealth in the place of the term bride-price. The debates on bride-price and dowry taking place in the world anthropology are reflected in studies conducted in India also. Srinivas (1984) felt that that the shift from bride-price to dowry in India has taken place after the entry of English education. The imbalance between demand and supply in terms of less number of educated employed grooms and more number of aspiring brides has been one of the factors for the rise of dowry amounts. We can see similar shift taking place in the tribal areas with the entry of education and employment. The shift from bride price to dowry among some of the tribal communities is a significant outcome of contact with non-tribals (Mishra, 1982). Dowry norms that were caste specific initially came under the influence of market demands

later. Link between dowry rates and capitalist tendencies can be seen in several communities as suggested by Barbara Harris-white (2003). Both bride-price and dowry have socio-economic dimensions that are of interest for economic anthropologists.

### **Economic development**

Scholars like Marx, Weber, and Myrdal viewed the traditional institutions of India such as village communities, social structure (caste system) and cultural ideology (Hindu religion), as obstacles for economic development. This was countered by scholars with empirical evidences. (Discussed in Madan, 1983: 26-53). Economists do stress that economic development needs as a prerequisite, certain social processes like change in the social and political structures and cultural values. Another requirement is a certain level of savings and investments. As anthropologists focused more on traditional societies, they paid more attention to social processes and ignored take-off approach which stressed on the level of saving. With the advancement of development, radical changes have taken place in resource deployment, labor relations, consumption pattern and choice making. The analyses of these processes offer a challenge of great interest and importance to economic anthropology. In the context of planned economic development, Sachchidananda (1982) stressed on the importance of economic anthropology. According to him the strains generated by the forces of modernization and the changes in the social structure and values need to be taken up by economic anthropologists for studies.

In the context of planned development, anthropologists are interested in decision making in economic processes. The customs and traditions of society related to economic practices, and the extent to which they are adhered to form two different things. There exists a variation in the choices available to people or the decision making process across societies which is of interest for economic anthropologists.

Applied anthropologists emphasized on culture as the determining factor in the acceptance and rejection of development innovations. But, an economic anthropologist will approach the same with a different frame of mind. Apart from cultural logic, economic advantage also gets equal attention in this approach. Development and under development, or dynamism and conservatism at village level cannot be understood if the totality of the socio-economic system is not taken in to account. A holistic approach to the understanding of poverty and ameliorating the conditions of the rural poor necessitates socio-economic study of villages. The conditions of origin of poverty and its perpetuation can only be appreciated if the socio-economic system is examined and the nature of resistance or lack of resistance to the domination of the rich is understood.

All economic development programmes at village level have implications for social relations. For example, assignment of land to landless

makes them independent from the traditional village land lords. National Rural Employment Guarantees Scheme releases the poor from the exploitative bondage with land lords. This has implications for the availability of agricultural labour in the villages and their bargaining power. Self-employment programmes and self-help groups enable the artisans to take advantage of market opportunities. The role of self-help groups in micro-credit is said to be making low income households to be self-reliant. Studies showed the caste and other social dimensions of the informal mechanisms and micro credit structures at village level. Economic anthropological approach is the most appropriate approach to dwell in to these changes.

### **Conclusion**

Economic anthropology did not receive the attention that is commensurate with its potential in India. It is not a unified field as there are diverse schools of thought. Further the diversity across cultures and the variability in their levels of development does not allow any overarching generalization. The preoccupation with social institutions of tribes and castes, the preference to functionalist and structural functionalist approaches, and the leaning towards substantivist approach resulted in the neglect of the study of economic phenomenon in Indian anthropology. The available studies need reexamination from economic perspective. The perspective from Economic anthropology will certainly enrich the understanding of Indian society where socio-economic phenomena continue to overlap. Decision making in programmes and processes of economic development, and their socio-cultural ramifications should be focused upon. In the wake of economic globalization the adaptations and the dynamics of social institutions can be a significant area of research for economic anthropology in India. In accordance with the expectations of Dr. Mathur, Economic anthropologists should move beyond the tribal and peasant societies and embrace the study of urban and industrial societies.

The insights coming from economic anthropology can be applied in varied settings such as from decision making in agriculture to shopping preferences in a departmental store and the underlying economic and non-economic considerations. Farming systems research dwells in to typical interests of economic anthropologists i.e. examining the processes of production and consumptions decision. It analyses the social relations and ramifications underlying economic decision making in agriculture.

Tribal areas moved from barter economy to cash economy during the last century. The economic integration of the local economies in to local, regional and national markets along with the socio-cultural consequences need to be delineated. After demonetization in 2016, they are slowly pushed towards cash less and digital economy. It will be of interest to understand the effects of these processes on tribal systems. The predicaments and adaptations of tribal communities to the emerging scenario will be of specific interest.

Varieties of economic changes that occurred in different parts of India have affected the inter caste relations in rural areas. Shifts in the ownership of land and subsequent change in power structures have resulted in far reaching changes in Indian villages. The dominant upper castes are in the process of being replaced by middle level castes and other backwards classes in the rural areas. Study of the caste processes can be fruitful only when economic analysis becomes integral to such studies.

Different types of informal chit funds and kitty parties emerged as important avenues for credit for small investments or to tide over urgent cash needs. In these practices we can see a combination of reciprocity, redistribution and market principle operating simultaneously. These forms flourish in all classes of people in rural and urban areas. They are informal mechanisms having several advantages over banks and other formal credit institutions. There is need to understand the contemporary forms of exchanges like kitty parties and other types of pooling systems which continue to be socio-economic transactions. What from the pooling and sharing practices take in the digital era will be interesting to look in to. Examining different forms of microcredit structures will be helpful in harnessing traditional practices to contemporary needs.

One may raise a question that why sub disciplines are required in a subject like anthropology which is holistic in perspective. In fact many anthropologists made significant contributions without using the names of sub disciplines like applied anthropology. But, specializations are there and are necessary for theoretical and conceptual advancement. They facilitate better explanations and understanding. There may be apprehensions over anthropology disappearing or losing its identity with super specializations. There are concerns that overspecializations leading to fragmentation of the discipline in to unrecognizable domains (see Srivatsava, 2007). In fact, a specialization like economic anthropology with its focus on interplay between the major domains of social and economic will enable more integration with in social anthropology.

It can also be pointed that using existing theories and concepts of economic anthropology will make us look at Indian society through western eyes. Several economic exchanges in India involve a combination of reciprocity, redistribution and market considerations. We have seen that the applicability of concepts like 'gift' has already been questioned in the Indian context. There is a strong case of non-applicability of western concepts and need for Indianizing concepts. There is need to examine the existing typologies and categories for better appreciation of the socio-economic phenomena. I believe that examining western theories and concepts in Indian context will lead to development of more appropriate concepts and can lead to more Indianizing of the discipline.

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