

News

National Conference on Anthropology and Health: Responses to COVID-19

Two-day National Conference was organized under UGC CAS-II Program by the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, on the theme titled, “Anthropology and Health: Responses to COVID-19”, during March 10-11, 2022. The Chief Patron for the National Conference was Professor Raj Kumar, the Honourable Vice-Chancellor of Panjab University, Chandigarh. The conference was guided by the Patron Dr. Maninder Kaur, Chairperson and Deputy Coordinator UGC CAS-II, Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, and Dr. Jagmahender Singh Sehrawat of the Department of Anthropology was the other coordinator of the conference.

The conference was of a hybrid nature, with four sessions of invited talk by distinguished speakers and four paper presentation sessions. Two sessions of invited talk and two parallel presentation sessions were held on each day of the two-day conference. A total of 97 scholars participated in the conference, out of which 26 participants presented papers based on the different themes of the presentation sessions.

The inauguration ceremony of the conference started at 10 am on 10th March, 2022 in the department in presence of the Chief Guest Dr. Vipin K. Koushal, Medical Superintendent, PGIMER, Chandigarh, and the Guest of Honour Dr. V. Bhalla, formerly Professor of the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh. Prof. Bhalla delivered a brief talk about the pandemic situation in his address.

The first session of the first day (10th March) of the national conference started at 11:30 am and was chaired and co-chaired by Prof. V. Bhalla and Prof. A. K. Sinha respectively. Prof. P. C. Joshi, formerly Vice-Chancellor of the University of Delhi and Professor of Social Anthropology, and Dr. Bal Nagorao Rakshase, Associate Professor, School of Health System Studies, TISS, Mumbai, delivered talk about various issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prof. P. C. Joshi, while speaking on the topic “Anthropology and COVID-19 pandemic”, talked about the idea of disaster as linked to COVID-19. Dr. Bal Nagorao Rakshase, the second speaker of 1st session of invited talk, discussed the topic “Outbreak readiness: what we have learnt from past and present pandemics”. He discussed about outbreak of disease and the reason and standard procedure behind the outbreak and how populations are disproportionately at risk based on access to resources, technology and gender. The session ended at 1:30 pm.

The second invited talk session of the first day started at 2:30 pm. The session was chaired by Prof. V. S. Sahay and co-chaired by Prof. Abhik Ghosh. In this session Dr. Shalina Mehta, formerly Professor of Social Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, and Professor Geetika Ranjan of the Department of Anthropology, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, narrated their personal experiences during the pandemic and talked about auto ethnographic perspective over the course of the lockdown. They mentioned how marginalised and weaker communities were more vulnerable to COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Shalina Mehta gave a lecture on the topic “Entangled narratives of COVID-19 pandemic” and Professor Geetika Ranjan spoke on the topic “Unfolding the idea of being well: An exploration during Covid times”. The session ended at 4:30 pm.

Two parallel presentation sessions were held during 4:40 pm to 6:00 pm, where topics related to ‘COVID-19 and health’ were taken up by various researchers. The parallel presentation Session-I, on the theme ‘Healthcare and COVID-19’, was chaired by Prof. A. K. Sinha and co-chaired by Dr. Maninder Kaur. The Session-II, based on the theme ‘Anthropology and Health’, was chaired and co-chaired by Prof. A. K. Sahani and Dr. J. S. Sehrawat respectively. A total of 13 presentations were made in

these two sessions, 6 in Session-I and 7 in Session-II.

The first session of the invited talk of the second day of conference was held at 10 am on 11th March, 2022. The session was chaired by Prof. Suraksha Aggarwal. Dr. Gyaneshwer Chaubey of the Department of Zoology, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and Dr. Niraj Rai, Scientist, Birbal Sahani Institute of Palaeosciences, Lucknow, talked on the topic "The host susceptibility for SARS-CoV-2 in India". They talked on the topics of population genetics. While Dr. Gyaneshwer Chaubey spoke about the 'Role of genetics in susceptibility to COVID-19', Dr. Niraj Rai talked about reconstructing the genome, from modern to ancient in South Asian context. The session ended at 12 noon.

Two parallel presentation sessions were held from 12 noon to 1:30 pm where diverse topics falling under the theme of anthropology and health were presented. The Session-I of the second day of the conference on the theme 'Impact of COVID-19 on Human Health', was chaired by Prof. Narender Singh; and Session-II, based on the theme 'Anthropology of well-being', was chaired by Prof. Rajesh Gautam and co-chaired by Dr. Ramesh Sahani. A total of 13 research papers were presented in the two parallel sessions with 6 presentations in Session-I and 7 presentations in Session-II of the parallel presentation sessions.

The last invited talk session was held at 2 pm and

was chaired by Prof. R. Siva Prasad. In this session, Prof. Mitashree Mitra, formerly Chairperson, School of Studies in Anthropology, PRSU, Raipur, talked on the topic "Anthropology and health: Responses to COVID-19 with reference to tribes of Chhattisgarh", and she discussed about the tribes of Chhattisgarh and their response to COVID-19 in anthropological context. Prof. Kaushik Bose of the Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, addressed the condition of the adult tribals in India over the period of time in his talk on the topic "Anthropometry based nutritional status of adult tribal populations in India: Past, present and future". The session ended at 4:30 pm.

At the end of the second day of the national conference the Valedictory function was held from 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm with Prof. Deepak K. Behera, Vice-Chancellor, KISS University, Odisha, as the Chief Guest and Prof. S. Gregory, formerly Dean and Chairperson, Department of Anthropology, Kannur University, Kerala, as the Guest of Honour. They highlighted about the importance of anthropological insight in the contemporary times in India.

The conference came to an end with a vote of thanks presented by Prof. Anil Kishore Sinha.

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