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**ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES WITH A DIFFERENCE:  
AN APPRAISAL OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF  
SCARLETT T. EPSTEIN**

An attempt to undertake an appraisal of the contribution of Scarlett T. Epstein can be termed as audacious considering the numerous works published by her over a period spanning more than half a century. Epstein is well known variedly as Economic Anthropologist, Development Economist, Development Anthropologist, and in her own words as a practitioner of these disciplines. Epstein started with the studies on socio-economic transformation of peasants and primitives, an interest which occupied her continuously. Later, she moved on to market studies further on to social marketing. Along with these, issues related to population growth, gender related problems, NGO sector, persistence and adaptation of traditional institutions in developing societies, role of entrepreneurship in development, etc., formed the other interests. Inter-disciplinary methodology has always been central to all Epstein's work. Her large number of publications, diverse interests and range of issues dealt with make it difficult even to attempt a bird's eye view of her contributions. However a modest effort has been made here to give an overview of contribution made by Epstein from an anthropological perspective.

**An Economic Anthropologist**

After establishing the importance of socio-political variables for understanding economic development, Epstein (1975, 29-30) claimed that her academic training qualifies her as "anthropological economist" (i.e. an economist conversant with sociological approaches) and an economic anthropologist (i.e. an anthropologist familiar with economic concepts). In an interview given to Alan Macfarlane in 2004, Epstein mentions how her work was received by economists and anthropologists, each discipline treating it as belonging to the other discipline. She felt marginalized in anthropology as anthropologists thought of her as an economist and economists thought of her as an anthropologist. However, Epstein saw the positive side, the advantages of not being accepted either as an economist or as an anthropologist.

She combined the insights from both the disciplines to pursue interdisciplinary approach to societal studies. Collecting quantitative economic material and qualitative socio-political material, she could create her own new method of research and data processing (Epstein, 1998: 73).

It is significant to note that her writings (1967, 1971) could find a place in volumes on economic anthropology edited by both formalists (Raymond Firth) and substantivists (George Dalton). Her studies in marketing give the impression that she is a substantivist. The preoccupation with analyzing unique features of economies, offering location specific, and tailor made remedies and recommendations, not explaining economic development in terms of economic factors and processes, but through traditional socio-political processes indicate substantivist approach. Epstein carried out a brief discussion on the formalist substantivist debate in anthropology (1967). She argued for collection of quantitative economic data from primitive and peasant societies, but mentions in the substantivist tradition, that these societies are organized on different principles in contrast to societies with market economies. She (1975) proposed a new model of socio-economic man in the place of traditional model of economic man. According to T. N. Madan, who wrote introduction to the Indian edition on Tolai (the introduction to the international edition was written by Raymond Firth), 'she has taken in all her studies substantivist view on processes of economic development' (1968: xi). Her work appears to be in the line of formalist analysis also. Epstein's calculation of average product in customary hereditary relations, using concepts from economics such as opportunity cost in traditional settings appear to be in tune with the approach of formalists.

However, it is not possible to identify Epstein exclusively as an Economic Anthropologist. She can also be considered as a development anthropologist from her work. She states "As a qualified development economist and anthropologist who have spent years personally conducting and/or directing socio-economic micro-societal studies in Third World Countries I tried to find out why so many development projects fail to reach their objectives' (1999: 21). In an interview given to Alan Macfarlane, Epstein claimed herself as a practitioner and not as a theorist. This can be seen in the policy concerns and recommendations on various issues identified in her studies, and also from the association with various non-governmental and international organizations.

### **Economic Development and Social Change**

Epstein did fieldwork in Mandya district of Karnataka, a period where the newly provided irrigation facility supported by all India Intensive Agricultural District program (IADP), led to increase in the area under paddy and sugarcane cultivation in those days. The differences in the integration of a dry village and irrigated village into the larger society were explained by

the study (1962). The interactions and conflicts between market processes and traditional institutions formed the focus of the study. A contrast between innovators and conservatives was brought out. Significantly, Epstein's study pointed that economic development may strengthen the existing (in equal) roles and relations, if there is no reallocation of resources. With her study, Epstein rightly questioned the notion of changeless India. She highlighted the underlying rationality in rural economic decision making in 'Economic Development and Social Change'. The responses of people to new economic opportunities, role of innovators and entrepreneurs, growth of educational facilities, stimulants coming from regional development have all formed part of the analysis of the socio-economic dynamics.

The framework used by Epstein to study the social changes resulting from economic development in terms of structural change (economic change, political change, ritual change, familial change, and organizational change) and cultural change has served as an analytical model for several later scholars. I am aware of at least three Ph.D. dissertations comparing wet village and dry village replicating Epstein's model.

### **The Insights into Jajmani system**

A significant offshoot of Epstein's first study is the insights gained in to the working of Jajmani system and its breakdown. When Epstein started her fieldwork in Mandya district in 1954, customary non-market transactions (jajmani relations) are coexisting along with monetary transactions but are in the process of replacement by the latter. To understand this transition she undertook an analysis of the principles underlying the customary hereditary relations. Epstein (1967) showed the rationality behind persisting with customary payments or severing the hereditary relations in pursuit of better opportunities. She explored the implications of the system of hereditary labour relationships for productive efficiency. An important dimension touched upon was the response of people when new opportunities are available. Why some people are ready to take advantage of new opportunities provided by market, while the others are not ready to do so was explained in terms of the impediment posed by traditional institutions, i.e., jajmani obligations. The conclusion given by her is that prescribed hereditary system of rights and duties is a mark of stagnant rather than developing economy.

There were two perspectives on Jajmani system. One (Beidelman, 1959) emphasized the inequalities of the jajmani system as a feudalistic system of hereditary obligations. The other approached it as an egalitarian system of rights and obligations, well known through the famous statement of Wiser stating "Each in turn is master, each in turn is servant" (Wiser, 1936: xxi). The contradictory models of Jajmani system coming from Wiser and Beidelman have been successfully explained by Epstein as contextual outcomes. She demonstrated with the help of quantitative data, the principles on the basis of

which payments are fixed for various services and why the landlords and service castes continue in such relation, even when it is not advantageous for both the parties. She is in agreement with Dumont's view that inequality must not be confused with exploitation. The system takes care of the subsistence needs (1973: 237). Assured subsistence requirement in bad season, and assured supply of labour in good season formed the main considerations for workers and landlords respectively to continue with the relations. The underlying logic of the system is said to be stability in the face of insecurities.

### **Tolai Socio-economic Transformation**

In anthropology, there was a debate on whether there was a universal stage of primitive communism in the development of culture characterized by the absence of private property. Marxists presented primitive communism as a natural condition of early societies. This was countered by several others pointing that in early societies there was limited scope for accumulation of private property, though individualism in property existed universally. Epstein's work on Tolai (1968) of the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain in Papua and New Guinea, was a trend away from the notion of primitive communism popular among a section of anthropologists in those days. Rاپitok is the Tolai Parish selected for intensive study. Their pre-contact economy has been called capitalism. Tolai are considered as capitalist for their emphasis on thriftiness, accumulation of wealth, and concern for private property (1968, xxviii).

Tolai are 'primitive' people, who came into contact with British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; exposed to new opportunities, entered the market economy. Epstein studied Rاپitok market of the Tolai like an anthropologist, but collected quantitative data like economists which were presented in 28 tables. Tolai socio-economic transformation has been described through the following phases: During the 'contact period' Tolai preferred to sell their produce than sell their labour (1968:166) while participating in the wider economy. There were no migrants from Tolai in the early stage. Next stage in Tolai economic transformation was labeled as 'Transition period'. Locals started working for the expatriates. People who went out as migrant labour became innovators in agriculture when they returned. The next phase labeled as 'agricultural investment period' witnessed the importance of cultivation of cash crops. This was followed by 'investment trail period' where there has been a shift towards agricultural processing and service industry. At the same time there was reduction in subsistence consumption and wastage. The final phase has been the 'tertiary investment period' marked by the rise of retail trading and increased transport facilities. Coca, Cotton and Copra formed the principle items of export. Along with the transformation, the continuity of traditional institutions, and reassertion of traditional differentiation in terms of elders, middle farmers and single men households has been pointed. In her study, Epstein (1968: 176) cautioned that population growth and land shortage coupled with expansion of cash crops are going to affect the initial conditions

of affluence and boom coming from cash crops in small underdeveloped societies like Tolai. Stresses and strains are expected with decline of economic growth due to such land shortage and governments are going to be blamed for this.

The value of the work is stated by T. N. Madan while introducing the Indian edition, that “her lack of concern with per capita growth of output as such, and insistence on the exploration of culture, society, polity and economy gives her work both a range and a depth which underscore its significance” (1968: xi).

### **Socio-economic Dimensions of Population Growth**

Epstein’s concern for demographic changes such as population growth, migration and immigration can be seen in the discussion on the future of Wangala and Dalena (1973). The focus on demographic changes and their impact continued even in the later study (1998). Population growth has been discussed as a problem in the context of development stressing on the need for balanced population distribution (1998: 212-213). Her concern with population growth continues even in the market studies taken up in Papua New Guinea.

The papers coming from the project ‘A cross cultural study of population growth and rural poverty’, published under the editorship of Scarlett T. Epstein and Darrell Jackson (1975) highlight the social context of fertility decisions, and the socio-political changes associated with the population growth. The edited volume consisted of studies from India, Kenya, Nigeria and Sri Lanka. The introduction written by Epstein to this edited volume covers the social dimensions of population growth. She starts the introduction taking up the debate between structuralists who blame imperialism, colonialism and capitalism as responsible for underdevelopment of third world countries; and the Neo-Malthusians who point out population growth as responsible for the problem. Taking off from the well accepted conclusion that reduction in the population growth having a positive effect on economic development, the issues related to population control were discussed. The questions addressed are twofold: i. ‘Factors affecting fertility decisions’ (focus on micro level decision making process), ii. How economic, social, political institutions adopt to change with rapid population growth. The highlight of the introduction is the alternative model proposed by Epstein for analyzing familial changes based on ‘dependency range of nuclear family’ instead of the misleading progression from joint family to nuclear family.

### **South India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (Restudy of Wangala and Dalena)**

Restudies in anthropology resulted in major debates on questions of reliability and validity of research findings. When conducted by different researchers, restudies proved to be highly controversial. But, when they were

conducted by the same researcher, the outcome is an enriching experience. Revisits of Fürer Haimendorf in the case of neighbouring state of Andhra Pradesh, and restudies in the Karnataka state by Epstein resulted in valuable insights. South India, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow is one instance, where restudy has been conducted replicating the previous quantitative and qualitative framework by the same researcher.

Using data from Wangala, Epstein showed the growing prosperity of wet cultivators, due to increased income, and limited consumption expenditure increase, resulting in considerable savings. She also observed that investment in irrigated agriculture giving better returns than non-agricultural investments, hence the attraction towards investment in wet agriculture. An important observation that came out was on widening gap between rich and poor as a result of economic development. Apart from increasing economic differentiation (inequalities), high rate of savings among rich peasants, the receptivity of villagers to take advantage of new opportunities, socio-economic consequences of the decline of joint family system. rise of the practice of dowry, etc. formed other findings.

Epstein (1977) made a distinction between resurveys which focus on change in quantifiable variable, and restudies which aim at analyzing the processes of social change. The former are said to be breadth inquiries and the later are depth inquiries. Both are considered as complimentary to each other. In repeatedly studying Wangala and Dalena, Epstein followed her own prescription that “it is now more efficient, illuminating, and instructive to resurvey and restudy rural areas for which earlier findings are available than to continue examining virgin territories” (1977:128).

Peter Kloss (2004) who was in favour of emphasizing on replication than on restudy, opined that replication is more scientific when compared to the ‘vague concept of restudy’. Kloss emphasized that ‘it is not important to compare between two different periods of time, but what is required and is important is to study the processes over a period of time to study continuity and change’ What Kloss has suggested is precisely what Epstein has carried out, i.e. study of continuity and change through replication. Unlike others, Epstein’s restudy did not face the limitations of not having access to material collected from the earlier study, or not being able to replicate the methodology from the earlier study. Also, for Epstein, the interests and goals remained more or less same over decades. Her growing age, and ever rising academic stature did not affect her approach. On the other hand, the maturity and experience are clearly reflected in the insights gained from the restudy. Referring to Epstein’s intensive micro study of small communities, the limitations and advantages of restudies were indicated by Wadly and Derr that. “By reflecting the anthropological bias of a small community study, the restudy does not lend itself to large scale generalizations, but it can provide insight into trends and processes of social change as manifested in one limited

locale” (Wadley and Derr, 1989: 78). Epstein herself accepts the limitations of micro level studies, advocating the need for meso-regional studies. She says “My own village studies would have been much more meaningful had they been set within the context of a broader research scheme focusing on economic development and social change in Mandya region” (1979: 212-213).

### **Market Studies**

Epstein (1982) took interest in the persistence of producer-seller markets in Papua New Guinea, an ethnically heterogeneous country, without a strong centralized political system. The phenomenon of producer-seller trade without bargaining and haggling interested her to examine how prices are arrived at by buyers and sellers. She undertook comparisons with neighbouring regions from the Tolai case. In the study of Rabaul market where shell money, tobacco and cash co-existed as media of exchange, Epstein combined observation description and survey technique to discuss the transactions, pricing mechanism, and turnover. Complete absence of competition in the market has been explained through customs and kinship. How social considerations impeded development of professional market traders has been explained. The adaptation of local economies to the market forces points to a contextual blend of the both, understanding of which is significant. Her study suggested for a webbed system of food marketing than central place market trade for such developing third world countries. On the basis of qualitative and quantitative data, Epstein put forth a number of theoretical prepositions explaining their practical implications.

### **Village Voices (A Practicing Post-modernist)**

While emphasizing the natives point of view, anthropologists have been showing concern for using as many informants as possible fieldwork and allowing them to speak-out in the text. One of the early practitioners of fieldwork, Franz Boas has been critical of many ethnographic accounts which could not be verified and which are based on subjective opinions. He wanted to produce ethnographic material to reflect the mind of people being studied. Boas encouraged American Indians to record information on their own cultures in native tongue. He established the tradition of using informants as equal partners (Ellen 1984: 43-44). The postmodern exponents of anthropology, question the validity of conventional pose of detached observer and argue that one should go into the interactive process involved in ethnography. Reflexivity, polyphony, and dialog form the essence of postmodern deconstruction in anthropology. Polyphony (allowing for multiple voices) aims to avoid the ethnographers’ domination (voice). A dialogic mode of presentation brings out all the exchanges between field worker and informants and includes details about the writer, the informants, the location, the time, and the institutional circumstances of the exchanges between the author and his

informants. The postmodern ethnography prefers the term ‘discourse’ over ‘text’, and emphasizes on the cooperative and collaborative nature of mutual dialogic production of discourse (Tyler 1986: 126).

‘Village voices – Forty years of rural transformation in South Asia’ is a unique instance, where apart from the author, voices of the co-investigators along with the voices of people are presented. With the collective effort of insiders and outsiders, a balanced picture of positive and negative aspects of development and change emerged, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approach to development. Several mutually interdependent issues have been discussed in village voices. They are social awareness, population growth, water shortage, role of women, appropriate education, democratic decentralization, participatory administration, democracy, political parties, and factions. The negative effects of development such as increasing demands for dowry, rise of alcoholism, alarming rates of unemployment and underemployment did not escape the scrutiny of authors. However, whether it is population growth, education or agricultural technologies, commercial opportunities, financial opportunities, it is the people who speak most in this 1998 study.

The personalities in the field and the experiences of the researchers in their interaction with people lead us towards an understanding of the conditions of production of knowledge, an important condition for the assessment of research output. This has been the effort involved in Village voices. Many a time in field studies, along with the researcher, there will be several investigators who contribute data. But the perspectives coming from the field investigators are submerged in the final product. In village voices, the investigators also present their versions on the dynamics of rural transformation. The other novelty in village voices is the attempt to involve the reader in the lives of the villagers, and introducing a questionnaire designed to encourage a continued dialogue between readers and researchers. The aim of the questionnaire, as stated by Epstein (1998:10) is an attempt towards rehumanising village studies by involving the readers in the lives of villagers and give them a flavour of fieldwork with the hope that “it will encourage you (the reader) to help promote smoother rural changes by involving yourself in one way or another in rural development issues”. The questionnaire for readers has been designed to collect their views on questions arising in the book, and also to know from the reader what more questions could have been more relevant for rural development (Village Voices, Appendix-3).

### **Concern for Developmental Issues**

As seen from the review of the book ‘Opportunity and Response’ by Paul Devitt (1974), from the perspective of applied and development anthropology, the case studies edited by Epstein along with David H Penny are a valuable contribution. The book has ten case studies on rural development



drawn from diverse locales such as India, South East Asia, Indonesia and Polynesia. They also reveal the need to study specific local processes in an economic historical context. The question of why societies react positively or negatively to stimuli coming from outside shaping their development potential has been addressed in the case studies. The case studies are on local response to opportunities coming from outside and the role played by traditional institutions in hindering or facilitating development. For example, Melanesia with an egalitarian big man type of organization has better development potential than India having a hierarchical (caste) system. An economic historical approach underlies all the studies. Epstein's concluding chapter in the book evaluates the development potential in the social, economic, political and environmental aspects of the societies. She not only explains how societies exhibit differential response to development opportunities, but also how the same society responds differently on different occasions.

Economists attribute the stagnant nature of the economy in traditional societies to lack of entrepreneurial qualities. Relative prevalence of entrepreneurship has been a condition to distinguish traditional and modern economies. Epstein (1968) described the emergence of entrepreneurs in the traditional Karnataka villages. She pointed to the receptivity of villagers towards new economic opportunities. The importance of entrepreneurship, which received attention in Epstein's first study, continued to receive attention in all the subsequent works. The role played by entrepreneurs in rich and poor households has been focused upon to demonstrate their importance in heralding economic prosperity and ensuring better quality of life.

Epstein always combined micro and macro analyses. These two dimensions formed inseparable dimensions of her work. In the project on basic needs (Epstein *et al.* 1983), she was involved in the study of basic needs strategies 'from the above'. Along with coauthor Panini, Epstein started with a macro level picture of policy making and planning in Indian setting and Karnataka. But, the discussion focuses on caste, which planners in India never directly address. The chapter on basic needs strategies again highlights the social background of policy makers, administrators and then distance from grassroots reality influencing the perception of basic needs. The operation of various basic needs schemes was discussed with the help of case studies.

### **Cultural Sensitivity into Social Marketing Strategies**

The ideas of social marketing and social entrepreneurship are of recent usage. Epstein edited, individually and jointly, manuals useful for those involved in social marketing. The manuals are i. culturally adapted market research in the development process, ii. Manual for 'development market research investigators', and iii. 'Social marketing in health and population. The objective of social marketing is to encourage socially desirable behavioural changes. She dedicated the volume on 'Social marketing in health and

population (1999) 'to all those who devote their energies to encourage behavioral changes that are undoubtedly in the peoples own best interest'. Focus of the manuals is on client led rather than top-down development and on culturally adopted research. Epstein's contribution can be mainly seen in emphasizing on the importance of cultural sensitivity in marketing strategies, Another important aspect is contribution to methodological aspects of social marketing through involvement in production of training materials and manuals. Decades of understanding of grass roots socio-cultural reality formed the strength of Epstein in these endeavours. The user friendly manuals with the easy to read language makes it easy to grasp the content effortlessly.

### **Social Anthropological Concerns**

The foremost area of investigation for Epstein is economic development coming from external stimuli. But, she always gave equal importance to social dimensions. In the study of Karnataka villages, the interplay between social and economic factors was demonstrated in the analysis of changes in the joint family system, and the shift from the practice of bride-price to dowry, preference for sons, and social relations between upper castes and Dalits, etc. In the case of Tolai of New Guinea, customary focus is on how social system survived the radically altered economic circumstances. The similarity with the persistence of hereditary system of payments in South India can be seen here. Shift from matrilineal organization to patrilineal organization has been traced back to impact of market forces among Tolai. In this community, the preference for private traders, instead of selling the Cocoa beans to the project agencies established by the government has been explained using social factors like rules of inheritance. One of the understandings of people's kinship system, pattern of inheritance, land holding, and residences as well as inputs, outputs and sale of Cocoa helped to understand Tolai Coca growers' reluctance to prefer selling Cocoa to Chinese traders, avoiding the government supported Tolai Cocoa project (1975: 43).

Similarly the concern for women, their role and contribution to work received the attention of Epstein in all her studies. For example in the study of market the insights provided are quite revealing. Why women participate more in market than men has been explained. The rule of patrilocal residence takes women away from their own people, but market provides an opportunity to meet friends and relatives.

In the manual on social marketing (1999) conspicuously found is the typical anthropological emphasis on role and impact of culture. Significance of socialization process, role of mothers, and the perpetuating nature of culture have been emphasized. Epstein identified key cultural variables from the lifestyle, activities, and interests of the people.

In typical anthropological fashion, Epstein brings the analogy of marriage in the discussion on the relation between anthropology and economics. Among the three types of marriages possible (love marriage, marriage of convenience, and arranged marriage) between economics and anthropology, Epstein feels that a marriage of convenience can result in excellent working relation between the macro approach of economics and the social anthropologists' micro-approach (1975: 30), she examined the history of 'courtship' for this marriage of convenience. She opines that it is social anthropology which made all the advances, while economics tend to decline the offer.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology adopted by Epstein is characterized by a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, whether it is outcome of economic opportunities or planned social engineering, Epstein gives equal importance to quantitative variables and qualitative data, while advocating for collaboration between anthropology and economics. Her narration is full of specific illustrations coming from observation and interviews in a typical ethnographic fashion. But quantitative data is always on hand to illustrate the trends.

A remarkable feature of Epstein publications is the detailed description of methodology followed in the study. This gives a clear indication of the nature of data collected which formed the basis of the conclusions and propositions. The way in which she (1973) described the stratified random sampling and crop statistics, property data, household budgets, wedding expenses, is clear enough for anyone who wants to replicate the study. It makes it easy for anyone interested in replication of the study in a different setting. The Appendix provided for the book urban food marketing (1982) titled the 'craft of market studies' provides all the details of fieldwork process, schedules that were used and the instructions given to the investigators.

Epstein (1975) advocated interdisciplinary studies and need for training students in at least two disciplines. She identified time, quantification and planning as major obstacles for the marriage between micro and macro studies. Epstein feels that the 'ideal way of collection of data is by personal participation or observation (1967:161). According to her, it is necessary to use sampling if the total universe is more than 300 persons, i.e., about sixty households. Next step is to decide whether a random sample or stratified sample is needed. Then comes the weighing of different individuals according to their sex and age. For example, males and females in different age groups work or consume food unequally. Coefficients can be employed for this purpose. However, she feels that it is rarely possible. Different individuals work in different places in economic pursuits, and all of them cannot be observed. Also one must be careful about reliability of information by collecting periodic

checks. She presented number of schedules she has used for the collection of economic data, along with valuable tips based on her own experience. Focus is on production statistics and consumption statistics in finer details. Quoting from her own studies in India, she argued that a purely qualitative approach could not have explained the differences between the two villages she studied in India (1967:179). She showed that the kind of data that are collected in industrial societies can also be collected in primitive and peasant societies. According to Epstein, collection of quantitative data requires more energy and patience, but, the returns are commensurately rewarding.

### **Bold Predictions and Policy Recommendations**

Unlike many other scholars from the West who studied in India, Epstein has concern for policy implications. She has several bold views which Indian scholars normally do not express. Epstein's interest in policy recommendation can be seen from her restudy where she realized the need "to work out policy implications of the findings and translate them in to action oriented programs to try and improve the living of the poorest sections in the societies" (1979: 224).

Epstein makes use of insights coming from case studies from India and New Guinea to derive policy prescriptions. In the case study on rural wages in South India dealing with interplay between economic and social variables, Epstein showed the cash wages of labourers falling in real terms, whereas customary payments, wherever they existed remained unaffected. Profit maximization in commercial crops, and subsistence orientation in food crops was seen in the case of farmers. On the other hand abundant supply of labour due to population growth and availability of migrant labour, the workers lacked bargaining power. She hypothesized that "net population growth in rural communities with a skewed income distribution accompanied by, or following introduction of cash crops and consequent monetization will, in a period for inflation result in cash wages falling in real terms; whereas quantity of customary rewards remain unchanged" (1975: 40).

She suggested for introduction of agricultural minimum wages in terms of fixed quantities of staple crop grown in the area (1973:262, 1975:61). She pointed to the ineffectiveness of minimum agricultural wages legislation (1975: 41). The Food for Work program implemented by Government of India for several decades can be seen as vindication of her recommendation. From her micro studies in Mysore villages, Epstein could make recommendations to planners for encouraging rural small scale entrepreneurs for integrating micro regions into regional economy.

An important policy recommendation (1973) was on the need to give preference to landless in providing non-agricultural jobs. Non agricultural employment for landless labourers only (1973:246) is a bold point of view which

attracted criticism (Rosen, 1974). Another significant recommendation is for providing assistance to farmers based on their economic position, but not on caste consideration. According to Epstein “the policy of giving relief on the basis of caste membership necessarily reinforces intra-caste links and removes any chance of diminishing the importance of caste as a principle of social organization” (1973: 191). She stated that government’s policies have given a new lease of life to an institution that has been abolished by the constitution.

Social scientists normally do not venture into predictions based on their field studies. But Epstein has the confidence to do so. She opines that only by making predictions we can expose our analyses to rigorous testing (1979:225). A unique feature of Epstein’s writings is the attempts to predict how the villages are going to change. Epstein not only undertakes the bold venture of making predictions, which social scientists normally avoid, she (1998: 199) even analyzed her predictions that went wrong and explained them.

### Summing up

The contribution of Epstein is multi-faceted and inter-disciplinary. Starting from 1954, the association of an anthropologist, with one’s own field area provided a rare opportunity to monitor and analyze socio-economic transformation, leading to valuable insights. The publications of over four decades based on field studies carried out is a unique feat in the history of world anthropology. Scarlett T. Epstein is a model to be emulated by anthropologists and social scientists for her long term fieldwork tracing the dynamics of transformation with sound methodology.

This is a revised version of the paper presented in the national seminar held at Mysore in 2010 in honour of Scarlett T.Epstein

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