

Relevance of Anthropology in Indian Business Research

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ABSTRACT

Anthropological perspective of business is more meaningful as human beings and their culture form the core of any business environment. This motivated some cultural anthropologists to study business organizations in the same manner as they used to study traditional societies. Of late, anthropological concepts, theories and methodologies are becoming instrumental in looking at a business problem for its analysis and solution. The present paper highlights the importance of societal culture and the necessity of ethnographic research methods in handling business problems leading to the evolution of a new branch of applied anthropology known as business anthropology. In this context, the relevance of anthropological knowledge in dealing with business problems is presented in a comprehensive manner. A brief discussion on its historical evolution, contributions of cultural anthropology in explaining various aspects of business, and the recent developmental trend of business anthropology have been discussed along with its significance and scope in Indian context.

Keywords: *Applied anthropology, Business organization, Cultural approach, Consumer culture, Cross-cultural dimension, Ethnographic research methodology, Organisational behaviour, Product design.*

INTRODUCTION

Though some cultural anthropologists have conducted researches in corporate settings in the US since 1930, in today's globalized world, anthropologists play a major role in business where employers, consumers, products, etc. have cultural alliances and a cross-cultural dimension is required for successful business operations. Many organizational experiences reveal that insensitivity to cultural realities of workforces, investments, negotiations, markets etc. can lead to undesirable results. By late 1990s, many anthropologists in US and Europe were recruited and worked as consultants

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in business organizations creating a subfield of applied anthropology called business anthropology. In contemporary situations, organizations cannot ignore the complexity of human behaviour, observed not simply as situational responses but as shaped by societal culture. As culture is an on-going process whose totality of external and internal instincts are arranged as a blueprint for individual and collective human behaviour, its ramifications are also found in business. No other social science is as well-equipped as Anthropology to deal with this perspective, reflecting the need of practitioners of Anthropology in business (Pant and Alberti 1997).

Since 1980s, “the term business anthropology began to be used more generically to mean any application of anthropology to business-oriented problems”, and “when anthropologists became full-time non-academic practitioners in niches related to organizational culture, consumer behavior and marketing and product designing” (Baba 2006). Anthropology’s unique contribution in developing practical ways of studying culture and comprehending its complex role in human behaviour has also been extended to business. Various aspects of culture, such as religious beliefs and customs, which are hard to understand from a cursory glance, often deeply impact the perceptions of potential customers in local markets during a product launch. For example, *Kakuto Chojin*, a three dimensional game, launched by Microsoft Game Studio in 2002, was soon pulled off store shelves due to serious accusation, by some Islamic groups, of containing offensive religious contents (Wintranslation 2011). Similar type of situations in the business world has witnessed the importance of cultural approach in business studies. The omission of a cultural perspective can be counterproductive for individual development, organizational effectiveness, and profits, because cultural factors influence people’s motives, brand comprehension, attitude, and intention to purchase. (Emery and Tian 2003; Lillis and Tian 2009).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

Anthropology examines the roots of human behaviour in the complex interplay between cultural and physical worlds in a nonlinear process called ‘sense making’ to reveal subtle and unconscious motivation, informing people’s behaviour in business. At the core of sense making lies the practice of phenomenology – the study of how people experience life and hermeneutics – products and objects encrusted with cultural meaning. Sense making has particular value in understanding unfamiliar social and cultural context as in new geographical markets or new generations of consumers (Madsbjerg and Rasmussen 2014). As the subject-matter of Anthropology is people, business is an appropriate area of research, which includes the

concepts of culture as an effective means of identifying, collecting, and ordering of data relating to human groups, and the concept of holism- pulling back from the specific problem event or situation under study and putting it in a larger context. Anthropological comparison of groups of people around the world and across diverse cultures for getting a larger understanding of human behaviour, a method known as cross-cultural comparison, has also proved invaluable in international business. As Peacock (1997) in an address to the American Anthropological Association, stated "Anthropology is everywhere, implicitly and potentially, because of its scope which helps us addressing most human issues."

The uniqueness of anthropological research is both a cause and consequence of data collection in unfamiliar settings. Anthropologists have the ability to begin data collection as an unbounded inquiry with no preconceived notion of what they will discover (Aguilera 1996). Anthropological researches in companies help to discover fundamental differences between the business they *thought* they were in, and the business they actually *are* in. For example, Samsung had a major break-through when it realized that its televisions are best thought of not as large electronic appliances measurable by screen size and resolution, but as home furniture fitting into living spaces alongside other furniture. The need to study human behaviour in natural settings led to the development of ethnographic method, which Malinowski called the "imponderabilia of actual life". Leslie Perlow of Harvard Business School who has applied participant observation in corporate environments, says, "instead of taking ethnographic method to faraway places, one should try to understand the culture of our own work worlds". Ethnographic interviewing involves interviewing a subject again and again in the range of environments, looking for patterns of behaviour and helping to reveal the world people live in and their real motivations. But it does not include analysing shared or contested cultural meanings, practices, and values imputed to brands or products, leaving out individual motivation as key to consumption practices. The real magic of ethnography lies in its cultural analysis which can be more generative (Sunderland and Denny 2007).

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY

Though the history of business anthropology can be traced back to Malinowski's (1920) study of the Pacific 'Kula Ring' trade, Veblen's "The Theory of the Leisure Class" (1899) argued that economists should take larger social and cultural issues into account. This concept when applied in European colonial interest of commercial activities associated with international trade, led to the establishment of 'Colonial Social Science Research Council' (CSSRC) in Great Britain from 1944-1962, which advocated a practical research agenda

for Anthropology in the colonies. But its work became politically incorrect as independence movements grew in force around World War II, leading to its demise in Europe. In USA, industrial revolution had focused in applying Anthropology to industrial research. Besides 'Scientific Management' theory of Taylor (1911) advocated that productive ability of employees in industries should be determined by scientific methods such as skills, actions, and economic rewards for workers to maximize productivity. However, serious labour management conflicts later broke out and an effective way of avoiding this was 'Welfare Capitalism', wherein management began spending money for improving the quality of life of workers through housing, education, and health initiatives.

It is against this backdrop that in 1924, the Western Electric Company began at its Hawthorn Work near Chicago a series of experiments aimed to increase productivity of workforce in collaboration between the National Academy of Sciences and Harvard School of Business. Mayo, a psychologist, initiated a massive interviewed project producing a uniformity of behaviour among individual workers, which conceptualized as their social organization (Schwartzman 1933). He brought in Warner, an anthropologist, as a design consultant who conducted the 'Bank Wiring Observation Room' (BWOR) experimental research, using functionalist theory and anthropological techniques. This research was significant because it was the first qualitative study of understanding human relations as crucial to performance in organization. The creation of 'Human Relation School' of Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) advocated creating harmonious worker-manager relationships to ensure optimal productivity. The down-turn of the economy during the Great Depression led to a lull in studies of industrial anthropology, but it rebounded with the revival of the economy after World War II. In 1936, Warner founded a Committee on 'Human Relation in Industry' in the University of Chicago to support the work of industrial anthropologists like Arensberg (1940), Chapple (1949), Gardner (1949), Whyte (1948), Warner and Low (1947), etc. who were hired by large corporations, viz., Sears, Roebuck and Co, Contain Corporation of America, IBM, Inland Steel Container Company, Libby McNeil and Libby, Bundy Tubing Company, Eastern Company, etc., to work on such problems as high turnover, absenteeism, strikes and poor worker management cooperation. The 'Society for Applied Anthropology' (SFAA) was formed in 1941 and its journal, 'Applied Anthropology', later renamed 'Human Organization' is still the leading American journal of applied anthropology today. In 1946, Gardner, Warner, and Henry formed 'Social Research Incorporated', the first management consulting firm to employ business anthropologists to analyse problems in organizations. Hall (1959) working in the U.S. Department of State provided training in cross-cultural communication to technicians who were working

outside North America. During the 1970s, due of political turmoil, the government was thought to be recruiting anthropologists for covert operations, which were seen as spying on innocent people. In 1971, the American Anthropological Association amended its principles of Professional Responsibility to include a clause, prohibiting research when its outcome was unavailable to the general public. This effectively shut down all consulting work for corporations who typically want proprietary control of such works (Jordan 2010).

By 1980s, the popular press took a sudden interest in subjects of anthropological expertise largely as the result of American response to Japanese business success. Four best-selling books (Ouchi 1981; Pascale and Athos 1981; Deal and Kennedy 1982; Peters and Waterman 1982) addressed the notion that successful businesses must be concerned with their cultures, and hence began the concept of 'Organizational Culture'. The management interest in Anthropology focused on methodology as reflected in the publications of Morey and Luthans 1984; Schwartzman 1993; Applebaum 1984; Britan 1981; Dubinskas 1988; Sachs 1989. With increasing globalization of business, more anthropologists viz., Hamada 1991; Ojili 1986; Baba 1989; Jordan 1990; Briody and Chrisman 1991, Serrie 1986; Sibley and Hamada 1994, etc. began working in the field of international business consulting. In 1986, the Institute for Research on Learning (IRL) in Palo Alto, California conceived by John Seely-Brown with support of David Kearns, CEO of Xerox Corporation, found solutions to the crisis in learning as outlined in federal commissioned report 'A Nation at Risk'. The work at IRL was interdisciplinary and based on the notion that learning occurs in social situations of meaning and practice as knowledge is socially constructed. Anthropologists like Jordan (1995), Sachs (1989) and others have looked at ways to redesign work spaces so as to better facilitate workers, as members of learning community interact with larger organizational units.

Since 1980s, business anthropologists like McCracken and Saltman at Harvard, Sherry at Northwestern University, Arnould at Nebraska, Olsen at State University of New York-Old Westbury, Costa at Utah, Joy at Concordia, etc. have been playing a critical role in the development of consumer studies while business school faculties like Hill and Kaufman-Scarborough have been using ethnographic methods in their data gathering (Arnold 2001). Consumer behaviour consultants like Paco Underhill have appropriated anthropological techniques for use in their work. In the 1990s, when business anthropologists moved into the field of design, ethnographic methods were also adopted by them. At the Palo Alto Research Centre, project leader Suchman (1987) collaborated with Robinson, head of research of the Dublin Group, wherein they adopted ethnographic methods in product designs.

Business anthropology can now be observed as a well-structured and emerging branch of applied anthropology. Many anthropology departments, viz., Swinburne University of Technology of Australia; University of Copenhagen in Denmark; University of Colorado Boulder, University of North Texas, University Pennsylvania, Wayne State University, Oregon State University, San Jose State University in USA; University College of London, University of Aberdeen in UK etc., have started teaching it as electives in post-graduate courses apart from doctoral level research. International journals such as *Journal of Business Anthropology* and *International Journal of Business Anthropology* are also coming out with their issues at regular intervals. International conferences on application of anthropology in business are being held in China since 2011. Similarly, *Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference (EPIC)*, which began in 2005, is organized every year, attracting scholars and practitioners from industries viz., Intel, Microsoft, and IBM etc. linking anthropology with the business world. The evolution of “Consumer Culture Theory” as the study of consumption choices and behaviour from social and cultural point of view is also a reflection of post-modern society and consumer behaviour. Some of the works in business anthropology written by McCracken (1988, 1995), Baba (1989, 1995, 2006), Sachs (1989), Jordan (1990, 2003, 2010), Briody and Chrisman (1991), Lessinger (1992), Schwartzman (1993), Sibley and Hamada (1994), Sherry (1995), Aguilera (1996), Pant and Alberti (1997), Miles (1998), Arnould and Otnes (1999), Weise (1999), Wasson (2000), Kates and Belk (2001), Squires (2002), Weber and, Camerer (2003), Piacentini (2004), Coupland (2005), Ricks (2006), Sunderland and Denny (2007), Wong and Tracey (2008), Alves (2009), Lillis and Tian (2009), Tian (2010, 2011), Tian et al. (2010, 2011), Tian and Borges (2011), Quirko (2012), Walle (2013), Stewart (2014) etc. show the development and promotion of anthropological inputs in business research and application. Thus, the field of business anthropology continues to grow into the 21st century, with anthropologists and business researchers working in consulting firms, corporate research departments as well as academic institutions.

BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGISTS AT WORK

Anthropologists are helping to solve a wide variety of contemporary business problems. Companies having workers with different educational, ethnic and cultural backgrounds face serious difficulties in creating a coherent organizational culture (Schultz 1995). Xerox PARC employed anthropologists as early as 1979. Now, many consultancies specialize in ethnographic research, and some companies such as General Motors and Dell retain their own ethnographers on staff. Microsoft is said to be the second largest employer of anthropologists in the world. Anthropologists have been hired to investigate sources of trouble, suggest remedies, mediate and open communication

between workers and management. More specifically, they are helpful in the following practices:

Marketing and Consumer Behaviour: From anthropological perspective, marketing is an intervention strategy of planned change with an aim to increase the sale of products. For Sherry (1995), consumption is a way to adapt to changes because consumer behaviour can be used as an adaptive strategy for shaping an individual's quality of life. In marketing, an anthropologist is able to manage the symbolic capital and understand how products and services have connotations and values beyond its tangible benefits (Alves, 2009). Thus, firms have been in search of consumers' tastes and preferences and gain knowledge about the factors, which are driving consumers' wants and decisions. The concept of marketing has also undergone change, the trend being a holistic understanding of consumers' lives 'in context'. As Denny (2002) explains: "My work is in decoding the meaning of brands, bringing products and services to life as cultural beings, understanding their role in the context of everyday life, where meaning is produced and consumed. It is at heart a cultural analysis."

Anthropologists have used material culture, which plays a role in constructing their own and others' identities, for understanding human behaviour (McCracken 1995, 1998). Appadurai (1986) calls for a renewed focus on the circulation of commodities in social life, suggesting on the object of exchange rather than type of exchange. Thus, McCracken (1988) suggests that consumption is processes at work when consumer goods are created, brought, and used, and hence is important for understanding culture. There is also a growing market for experiential consumption (Arnold. et.al. 1999; Creighton 1997). In a cross-cultural study of beauty pageants, Cohen et.al (1996) suggest that there is a world industry devoted to creating culture because in beauty pageants certain characteristics, for example, being tall and thin, have been identified and essentialized while other characteristics are ignored. Anthropologists working on issues relating to consumer behaviour find that consumers both direct and are directed by others. Miller (1998) has written about consumer response to the introduction of a new variety of Coca-Cola, as an example of successful consumer resistance to the dictates of a powerful multinational corporation, and though it is sold globally, it has different local meanings. Kates and Belk (2001) found a more complex situation where consumers showed their resistance by consuming in the Lesbian and Gay Pride Day celebrations in Toronto, Canada. Thus, consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which relations between lived culture and social resources and between meaningful ways of life and symbolic/material resources on which they depend is mediated through market (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Communication and Advertising: In global business, anthropologists study communication strategies and support in defining, projecting and managing the brand value, and the effects of advertising, commercials and promotions (Pant and Alberti 1997). Advertisers and marketing managers use anthropological methods to gain better understanding of consumer needs and product uses. The rapid changes in technology means that consumers need to think about old products in new contexts and the emergence of new markets to increase sales (Denny 2002). McCracken (1995) used archives of popular magazines, newspaper articles and advertisements to trace the advertising history of hairstyle and hair-colours. Anthropologists have explored the mechanism by which advertising forms move cultural meaning from their context into the realm of goods and services (Malefyt and Moeran 2003). Kemper (2003) analyses the presentation of goods by advertising firms using the case of pressed flower and scent in Srilanka where effective television advertisement captures the local image, while managing to be generic at the same time. This explanation accounts for 'glocalization' phenomena that anthropologists have reported in other contexts. Olsen (2003) discusses the role which advertising agency play in detecting cultural shifts taking place in the market and in translating these into changes in marketing technology.

Organizational culture: Culture, from organizational perspective, represents the 'unwritten feeling' part of the organization and usually represents values, beliefs, and shared understanding as it is intangible and difficult to define and measure (Cherrington 1989). Trice and Beyer (1993) suggest that a cultural approach is most useful to explain neglected or overlooked aspects of organizations, especially when other approaches are integrated with it. The anthropological viewpoint sees members of an organization as a web of interacting cultural groupings, viz., ethnic, regional, gender, and professional groups, which contribute to the greater cultural picture, making it important to study its interrelated nature by comparing it with cultural universals. (Jordan 2003). Business anthropologists examine organizational phenomena in three inter-related works:

- a) Organizational cultures in technology-based firms: Anthropologists explain and effect modifications in the behaviour of people inside corporations, by introducing the 'native's point of view' (emic approach), as a valid and powerful source of empirical data. They also indulge in workplace ethnography, to analyse diversity and change, identify and manage occupational sub-cultures in work place, analyse interactions among climate, cultures, work patterns, affective micro-system, resolve conflicts and organize the hidden and inarticulate agendas and informal networks. For example, Baba (1995) investigated a major corporation's effort to streamline its product

development process by introducing a single 'strategic' technology system that would replace hundreds of different systems then in operation across dozens of different technical groups.

- b) **Boundary crossing in a global context:** In the 1990s, the literature focused on cross-cultural phenomena in corporate settings, including studies of transplanted firms, firms based outside the US, and firms whose globally distributed employees work virtually. In this new pattern, anthropologists discovered that the lives of individuals and communities are transformed by working in multinational or transnational businesses. This suggests that such businesses are becoming powerful forces by giving meaning and direction to human experiences in postmodern society. For instance, Hamada, (1995) describes a case of alleged sexual harassment lawsuit by an American female factory worker against the Japanese plant manager within a Japanese owned plant in the US.
- c) **Regional perspective on work and corporations:** The regional contextualization of industrial phenomena is modernized by reflecting new themes of global interactions that find expression in regional economic patterns. Of special interest are geographic areas that generate distinctive economic forms, such as Silicon Valley with its high technology start-ups. For example, Gregory's (1984) research depicts how the processes, practices and systems of meanings in social structure present a remarkable capacity of this unique region to generate large number of technology-based start-up firms, despite their high risk of failure.

Globalization and diversity: Anthropologists assist multinational corporations to understand the cultures of countries in which they operate. For example, Hamada (1991) helped Japanese and U.S. businesses understand each other by negotiating everything from factory layout to product appearance between them. Besides, being sensitive to human diversity, anthropologists are valuable for team training and care for changes in new procedures, mergers and corporate restructuring, especially in global companies involving different cultures. Increasing diversity becomes strategic and sensitive to the needs of the people and this has been the focus of anthropologists (Jordan, 2010). The global possibility brought by modern technology allows for complex levels of cultural borrowings, be it products, people or capital (Bestor 1999; Grey 1999; Smarts 1999; Lessinger 1992).

Design Anthropology: According to Industrial Designers Society of America, the design field 'envisions and gives shape to new or modified products and services' (Wasson 2000). As Denny (2002) explains, frequently

the client is asking the anthropologist to discover 'unmet needs'. Meeting consumers' unmet needs is a complex problem, as they frequently cannot articulate and realize what needs may be useful for them (Wasson 2000). Human cognitive abilities make a product easy for human use, for example, if the hardware on a door that you must push to open is flat, it becomes obvious to the user that to open the door, one must push and not pull it (Wasson 2000). Ethnographic techniques help to learn about what people actually do, which, in turn indicates if the design of the product facilitates its use (Squires 2002; Wasson 2000). The importance of observing human behaviour is underscored in Suchman's, (1987) study of human-machine interaction. Another related area of research in product design is product evaluation (Squires 2002), where anthropology has enormous potentiality.

RECENT TRENDS IN BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY

Of late, an increasing number of consumers are making brand choices, based on computer-mediated communication by pursuing advertising and corporate web-sites, using newsgroups, chat rooms, e-mail list servers, personal World-Wide-Web pages, etc., to share ideas, build groups, and contact fellow-consumers. All these, though less real, have consequential effects on consumer behaviour. In this context, Netnography or adapted ethnography is an online marketing technique for providing consumer insights on symbolism, meanings, and consumption patterns of online consumer groups. Marketing firms such as Cyveillance, eWatch, NetCurrents, and GenuOne and consumer services such as Epinions.com, consumers who Planet Feedback, Bizrate.com, and eComplaints.com have been formed to take advantage of the opportunities posed by cross-consumer electronic communication (Kozinets 2002). Similarly, cyber-ethnography maps social networks, allowing for content analysis, behavioural profile and socio-demographics. Anthropologists employ online analytical programs for studying Facebook, Twitter, Forums and Blogs, which allows quick results as most raw data already exists (Alves 2009).

Entrepreneurship anthropology deals with various economic sectors from education to agri-business, adapting to new realities, such as the rise of working class in Brazil and the virtual world of social networking. Market localization predicts the product's market reception—for example, classical American Oreó's Cookies are different in China, where it seems like a wafer. Brands and trend-monitoring can be made by market ethnographers to observe and talk to users in their natural habitats for discovering the usefulness and perception of brands and products (Alves 2009). Gerontechnology focuses on the interaction between scientific research in ageing, products, services, and sustainable solutions for the aged. Declining

psychophysical abilities demand compensating technology which must be simple, safe, and with a sense of permanence. In order to have a reality picture of ageing, all demographic, institutional and cultural factors must be carefully examined (Pant and Alberti 1997).

‘Ethno-consumerism’ deals with consumer behaviour and marketing, through observation and analysis of differences in the approach to products and services, their acceptability and consumption patterns across social segments, cultural and subcultural groups including age, sex, gender, income, profession, territoriality, ethnicity, etc., (Costa and Bamossy 1995). Studying how customers use or disuse a product is customer anthropology, whose benefits are so immense that global companies like Nokia, Microsoft, Intel, Volkswagen, TESCO, Toyota, etc. are using it to design new products. The competitive advantage gained by these companies are so valuable that they will not admit it, or even publish the results as such information is kept as company secrets. It provides limitless opportunity for continuous product improvements and may even come up with radical innovation based on customer observations – for instance; Apple’s iPod customers often complained that they hate to carry two devices - a cell phone and an iPod which prompted Apple to release the iPhone. In recent years, multinational firms like Motorola, General Motors, Citibank, Toyota, etc., have officially hired anthropologists to provide “Cultural Risk Analysis” for them. Even, Microsoft and Intel have hired anthropological teams to engage in applied research for long-term strategic development (Tian 2010). When Intel became digital in 1990s, it hired anthropologists to interpret the complexities of cultural and social practices and the ways in which these practices might shape people’s relationships with technology, as well as peoples’ patterns of resistance, rejection, adoption, and creative re-use. Bell (2011) who worked in Intel writes, “The challenge has always been how to present our work back at Intel; how can we best take those rich textured rhythms of daily life and render them vividly in an engineering culture. This can be done by finding ways to bring the voices of everyday people back into the process of thinking and designing technology”.

Business organizations that do not understand cultural differences often implement strategies that are doomed to fail. Studies reveal that marketing strategies in one place do not always translate into success in another region, for example, Pepsodent’s attempt to sell its teeth whitening toothpaste in Southeast Asia met with limited success as people chew betel nuts to make their teeth black, which are deemed attractive. These nuts are believed to strengthen their teeth and are associated with a variety of cultural rituals and ceremonies. Similarly, while doing partnership in business, it is important to know the culture of each partner for a successful merger. There are many

instances of failures of corporate partnership due to cultural conflict in mergers, for example, the merger between Daimler-Chrysler failed due to cultural differences; while Daimler-Benz's culture stressed a more formal and structured management style, Chrysler favoured a more relaxed, freewheeling style (Weber and Camerer 2003).

BUSINESS ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

It is a fact that a full-fledged practice of business anthropology is yet to start in India. Although some studies have been conducted so far, these are not enough and much more can be done. However, it is also noticed that business anthropology is growing both in academic as well as in practical fields. The ethnographic explorations of trust in Indian business by Harriss (2003) explained that in the new context created by globalization, there has been a shift in institutional innovation in India. This shift is from a reliance on personalized relationships or selective trust to a reliance upon abstract principles and professional codes, and the language of trust frequently conceals, or seeks to conceal relationships of power. Part of the context of these changes is not only the in the changing business environment but also in the loosening of family and kinship organizations. This often means sacrificing the short- term gains for the family for the long- term welfare of business. In an essay Mazzarella (2003), explored cultural politics of mass consumerism in a global marketplace and shifts the attention to a site where global brands meet local markets. By telling the story of a major consumer electronics company and its attempts to establish itself in the Indian mobile cell phone market, he showed how the creation of a commodity image that is simultaneously Indian and cosmopolitan, has presented a central tension. Mediating the complex relationship between local advertising agencies and multinational clients, this tension was also reflective of a larger tension between globalizing markets and Indian cultural specificity. The ethnographic work of Varman and Costa (2008) on social norms is intended to unravel the non-instrumental core of embedded markets. They offered a theory of "the invisible hand of social norms," where consumer and seller behaviour have expressive, moral, and emotional underpinnings that cannot be understood without a broader conceptualization of human motives and actions. This ethnography provided a rich understanding of the role of community and the behavioural dimensions of markets. This helped to deconstruct the current axiomatic treatment of transaction-centric markets and reconstruct the market as a socially embedded institution in which community ties are formed and sustained. Mangaraj and Upali (2009) discussed the role of culture in the design of consumer products based on the technology of pervasive computing by highlighting culture-centric designs and the importance of ethnographic research methods in the collection of consumer data. Mangaraj and Upali

(2013) looked at business anthropology in a holistic perspective, stressing a cultural approach for anthropological modelling of business problems and advocating an endogenous management strategy for obtaining an effective and sustainable business solution. Singh (2013) explained how understanding the cultural characteristics of high performing organizations have become very important in the present scenario. His findings highlighted the fact that culture reflects the personality of the organizations, comprising of the assumptions, values, norms and tangible signs of organization's members and their behaviour. He also explained how the role of culture is increasingly being considered as an important determinant in understanding organization's behaviour, as it can affect organizational attitude, identity, business- governmental relationship, technology transfer etc. Sigamani and Malhotra (2013) discussed the evolution of HR outsourcing and how it has varied over time. They illustrated the instrumentality of HR outsourcing and discussed how different organizations have utilized this tool of strategic HR as an asset to increase their values. They also found that every organization had its own way of exploiting their options available in an outsourcing. Venkatraman, *et al.* (2013) provided case studies of four women in positions ranging from lower management to Senior Management in the IT industry in the city of Chennai. They also provided snapshots of their work, their life outside work, commitment to work-teams and family and how they tried to balance the two while striving for a vertical mobility in their occupation. Upali and Mangaraj (2013) discussed the diversity of the unique design-language of Indian sari and highlighted the cultural perspectives of sari design. They also viewed the intangible cultural heritage of the weaver as a competitive advantage in the design strategy of this cultural product in the present day competitive marketing environment. Jeffrey and Doron (2013) in their study elaborated the diffusion of cell phones among a spectrum of users from different socio-economic background and portrayed the powerful transformations and disruptions to traditional communication ecologies in a stratified society of India. Using an ethnographic approach, Sanchez (2015) in his paper discussed the relationships among capitalism, violence, corruption and labour politics in contemporary India based on a field research among a "casualised" workforce in the industrial city of Jamshedpur.

Looking at the Asian context, although "Business Anthropology" is growing at a much faster rate in China, the coming days will also see more and more works in the application of anthropological concepts, theories and its ethnographic research methods into several strategic business problems in an emerging economy like India due to its multi-cultural characteristics. In particular, many multinational corporations in India have already started their business operations or are outsourcing old firms. For example, some organizations in India, viz., Nokia, Xerox, Microsoft have already recruited

anthropologists for their business research and operations. They realize that it is, after all, people who use technology, and hence it is essential for the company to know how people adapt to technology. With the help of ethnographic studies, Godrej and Boyce were able to develop the “Chotukool” fridge that responds to the specific needs of people in rural India. A “deep drive” into customer environment helped in conceptualizing how rural shopping experience differs from urban settings, and was instrumental in the launching of many successful rural products (e.g. Hindustan Lever’s shampoo sachets). In the recent past, Renault Duster, a predominantly European car won the hearts of stubborn Indian customers. To understand them, Renault carried out an ethnographic study across the Indian cities, spread over two months and threw up 41 modifications that the European Duster needed. During this period, the product development team not only tried to understand the lives and needs of the target customers, but also identified what they liked and did not like about their vehicles. The premier American fast food chain-McDonald’s has introduced several new products specifically for Indian consumers for its acceptance and at the same time has suitably blended into the changing Indian socio-cultural landscape. Due to the fact that around 83% of Indians do not eat beef or pork, the company has replaced its core product, beef based Big Mac by Maharaja Mac (a mutton-based burger) as an appropriate cultural fit. Similarly, for vegetarian customers McDonald’s offers veggie burgers enforcing strict standards in product development, viewing at the cultural sensitivity of the vegetarian consumers of Indian society.

The contemporary situation presents opportunities as well as urgent needs for inputs from business anthropology as the economy is now opening up its boundaries for global business. In the meantime, it is a positive sign that some academic departments in Indian universities are now adopting business anthropology in their curriculum, looking at the current business scenario and the unique approach of anthropology in handling business problems across a spectrum of cultures. For example, the Post-graduate Department of Anthropology at Utkal University recently introduced a paper on “Anthropology of Business and Organizational Development” in its Master’s degree curriculum. A few doctoral scholars have started research on this sub-branch of anthropology which also forms a part-theme of some of the Indian Anthropological Conferences, e.g. Indian Anthropological Congress (2015), National Seminar on Anthropological Research in India: Traditions and Transitions (2015) etc.

CONCLUSION

Business is a set of planned activities designed for providing goods and services to consumers whereas society is a group of people having common

cultural values. So, societal cultural environment is the key concept in understanding and defining the relationship between business and society that forms an integral part in the success of any business operation. As the type of business organisations and their management principles available for the Indian economy are mostly based on the western societal culture in terms of family, kinship, division of labour, social networking, concept of social and economic organisations, etc., there is immense scope for anthropologists to work in this behavioural dimension of business with a new emerging cultural paradigm where their expertise has the greatest need when the philosophy of business has entered into every sphere of living in the present globalized world. While the socio-economic dimension of globalization has been widely studied, comparatively very less attention has been given to cultural dimension, even though there is a significant culture change in Indian societies. In this context, an endogenous business strategy requires a thorough investigation of culture for its consideration in various stages of management of business organizations that utilise the cultural energies of the people for finding acceptable local solution. Therefore, effective and sustainable business operation should accept and use the forceful cultural factors like value and belief systems, traditional knowledge and skill of the society. Hence, in the cultural framework of business, societal culture plays the vital role in the sense that:

- (i) **Culture acts as the basis for business:** Culture is itself the source of objectives in business. The aspirations, satisfaction pattern etc. in local areas are culture-dependent which are linked to mentalities, traditions, beliefs and value systems of the local people and hence culture determines the objectives and strategies of business..
- (ii) **Culture acts as the resource for business.** The way of life of people and their resource utilisation pattern are the important ingredients for business decision-making. Like any other resource, it is an important resource and at the same time acts as stimulant or barrier in business operations.

Besides, the comparative perspective in cultural approach leads to cross-cultural business whose aim is to produce and market goods and services; and communicate with foreign market and consumers. Hence, business has to understand cultural differences and establishes a global mind-set. International business, cross-cultural marketing, cross-cultural business communications are some of the areas, where the influence of cultural factors has been largely observed for a successful potential competition (Tian & Trotter, 2012).

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