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TEACHING OF ANTHROPOLOGY: A TRIBUTE TO DR. ABHIMANYU SHARMA

During my academic years in the Department of Anthropology (henceforth Department), University of Delhi, from 1969 to 1974, for first three years as a graduate (of B.Sc. Honours) and then for two years as a post-graduate student (of M.Sc.), the option (or stream) overwhelmingly popular with the students of M.Sc. (Final) was physical anthropology, also earlier classified as 'advanced physical anthropology'. Although, after Franz Boas, anthropology is generally conceptualized as having four branches, and this view has been endorsed by the American Anthropological Association, it is rarely that a department of anthropology in India has an equal representation of all the four branches in teaching as well as research (Srivastava 2000). My Department represented three branches, with linguistic anthropology not being a part of the curriculum.[1] Of these, physical anthropology was the most expanded with at least a dozen faculty members teaching and researching this subject. Social anthropology, the other option with an equal number of courses, was 'woefully understaffed', with only three teachers in the faculty.[2] Prehistoric archaeology, as it was known at that time, was the most scarcely represented – with only two papers, one in B.Sc. (Honours) and the other in M.Sc. (Previous), in the entire curriculum of five years, and only one teacher, who at that time had a doctorate in physical anthropology, handling the subject, though helped by a teacher of social anthropology, who taught this subject at the level of M.Sc. (Previous).[3]

I found that the students, both in B.Sc. (Honours) and M.Sc. (Previous) were profoundly touched by and impressed with the discipline of social anthropology. I learned from many of them that they had never imagined the content of the topics that were being taught in this specialization. They found social anthropology exciting, stimulating, eye-opening, progressing, and 'close to their lives'. Many of them spent more time reading books on it than in the other branches of anthropology.[4] 'Social anthropology is infectious', were the words of one of my class fellows in M.Sc., Anil Mahajan; sometimes he also spoke of the 'contagion of social anthropology!'[5] It was just not the charm of the subject – its magic and the fact of its being close to human life – but also the way it was taught by Professor Mehra, who developed in many of us both

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the profoundness of the subject and the linguistic sensitivity. He was one of the best teachers I came across in my student career in four departments.[6] I was fortunate to have been taught by him, and later from the early 1980s, when I was a lecturer in sociology in Hindu College, I developed close relations with him and his family. I learnt a lot in informal meetings I had in the evenings with him at his residence.[7]

2

In spite of the impact of social anthropology on the lives of students and the fact that it was being taught far more creatively than the other branches of anthropology, why was it that about two-thirds of the students of M.Sc. (Previous) joined Group-A to specialize in physical anthropology? There were several reasons, of which one has been given earlier. Physical anthropology had more teachers, all with doctoral qualifications, which implied a larger probability of students getting an opportunity to study for a Ph.D. than was the case in social anthropology, a specialization which had, as said previously, three teachers, of whom two were without doctorates and thus could not have supervised doctoral theses.[8]

Furthermore, being positivistic, physical anthropology was far more scoring in examination than was the case with social anthropology. The latter required a larger linguistic skill, besides a substantial reading of highly abstract literature. Being a social science, social anthropology had a different skein of arguments and polemics, sometimes enervating the student. If there were lovers of social anthropology, then there were also its vehement critics.[9] Unlike physical anthropology, social anthropology was therefore ambiguously situated in the minds of students. Incidentally, each year, the topper used to be from physical anthropology; or, let me put it like this: notwithstanding his interest, the topper of M.Sc. (Previous) joined the stream of physical anthropology to keep his position intact, which would entitle him to the University Medal and a Certificate of Appreciation. Moreover, the master's degree was in anthropology, instead of physical or social, which implied that after earning it one could always move into another stream of one's interest, or pursue the academic and professional interests of the organization or institution one eventually served.[10]

There was another reason. Although candidates from a non-biology stream (like of physics and chemistry) or from social sciences (like economics and history) could join master's in anthropology, most of those who ultimately landed in anthropology were from the biology stream.[11] Being trained in the study of concrete facts, drawing diagrams, and memorizing the subject point-wise, they were more at ease in physical anthropology than with social. Continuity between biology and physical anthropology was another reason – in fact, family resemblance existed between zoology and physical anthropology.[12] These students were palpably uncomfortable in social

anthropology (and also archaeology) classes, and wanted to compensate for the loss of marks in these two subjects with high scoring in physical anthropology. They were, needless to say, the right candidates for a degree in physical anthropology.

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Whilst listing these reasons, one cannot discount a host of other individual factors propelling one to opt for physical anthropology, such as "one's interest in genetics or any other branch of physical anthropology", "one's commitment to research in biological variables or the impact of the latter on social and cultural aspects". In addition, in those days, some teachers were habituated to wooing students to join their respective streams and be under their wings for their doctoral degrees. The special reason in my case, for I also read physical anthropology in M.Sc. (Final), was the impact on me right from the days of my graduation of one of my teachers in physical anthropology, Dr. Abhimanyu Sharma.[13] Although, as I said earlier, he was not the only one whose influence on me was tremendous, he provided a model, an 'ideal type', so to say, of how anthropology could be taught.[14]

I read in 1976 in a course on the sociology of education that those who voluntarily join the teaching occupation (or profession) are invariably impressed by one of their teachers. Not only they opt to teach, but also want to teach the way they were taught by their favourite teacher(s). Even those who join teaching as a last resort look for the example of their teacher(s) who taught them well and try to emulate his or her style of teaching and demeanour. The point is that in both cases the role the teacher plays is pivotal. I think, besides parents, the teacher is the other reference individual, who is closely followed in his manners and the ways of teaching. The process of emulation may take place unconsciously, or be consciously and deliberately carried out. It may, however, be noted that all teachers do not occupy the same pedestal in the life of a student. It is the 'good' teacher, who is regarded so by all and not just by a particular person. The greatest bliss for a teacher is when his students speak about him panegyrically without any instrumental need at hand. I have also noted that the students endeavour to know a lot about the teacher they like the most. This includes the layers of his personal life as well.

4

Dr. Sharma was one such 'good teacher', acknowledged by all, more so privately. Once my colleague, Dr. R.P. Mitra, asked Professor P.C. Joshi and me as to why we talked so much about Dr. Sharma than the other teaching members of the Department. That's true. Even those who had earned their doctorates under him tended to avoid any reference to him. I had noticed that a simple mention of him made them restless. It had always been a puzzle to me, for I was not tired of talking about my supervisors, at different rungs of

my research career, and I had always assumed that like me the other doctoral students would speak about their respective supervisors with the same feelings of fondness and affection.

I then realized, and this was my reply to Dr. Mitra, that each teacher has two halves of his personality – the scholarly (and the 'teacherly') self (or 'role-self') and the personal-idiosyncratic self. The latter comprises the image the teacher has of his self, his likes and dislikes, his personality configuration and the continuity of his childhood experiences in his later life, and his relations with the significant others in the institution where he works. It is likely that the teacher may be good in the first self but fall below the expectations of others in the second; and the reverse is also true. We find different combinations of these selves. However, our judgement of a teacher should be largely in terms of his first self, although it is equally true that in normal circumstances, our evaluation is based on a juxtaposition of both the halves of his personality. My understanding of Dr. Sharma is principally in terms of his 'teacherly self'; I intend to familiarize my readers with the way he taught anthropology, the way that had an unswerving effect on his students. For understanding why good teachers are not acknowledged, we need to conduct a separate study of these students.

5

Dr. Sharma impressed everyone in the Department with his presence.[15] In my first year (1969-70), I often used to see him walking on the track in the lawn opposite my Department, almost quarter of an hour before the first class was scheduled. In summer, he was usually in a bush-shirt and a pair of trousers, both of white colour. He wore shining black shoes. While walking towards the Department, he always carried books, files, and notebooks in his hand. On way, he would speak to the gardeners working in the lawn. It seemed as if he was instructing them about something they had inadequately done. His pitch was loud. He could be heard even from a distance.[16] I knew he was a teacher of physical anthropology; I also knew the doctoral students he was supervising. It was because of the closeness among the students of the Department, irrespective of the class they were studying. Senior students (including those pursuing research) tended to patronize their juniors.

My first experience with him as a student was when he was assigned a class per week to teach some topics from a paper on material culture. I was in my B.Sc. (Honours) Second Year (1970-1). Besides him, the other teachers teaching this course were Professors Mehra, S.C. Tiwari, and A.K. Kalla. Professor Mehra taught the concepts of society and culture related to material culture; Professor Tiwari dealt with a comparative study of musical instruments; Professor Kalla lectured on house types; and Dr. Sharma did the techniques of fire-making, and the implements of hunting, food-gathering, fishing, and food-production. The practicals in this paper were largely

supervised by the museum curator, himself a dedicated anthropologist, with a doctorate from Calcutta, Dr. Kamlesh Guha, besides of course the teachers teaching this paper visiting the museum where these classes were held a couple of times to see if everything was going on well. The teachers signed the practical notebooks, although Dr. Guha checked the drawings of the museum exhibits that the students had done.

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I distinctly remember Dr. Sharma's first class. Before he came, one of the laboratory attendants carried to the classroom a number of files, books, and a tray containing artifacts and objects, and kept all of them on the table. We were all intensely touched by the preparation he had made for the class. The class took place in Laboratory-VI. Then, Dr. Sharma entered the classroom with a wad of notes, on pieces of paper of different sizes, tagged all along. It was clear that the wad was ever increasing, with new notes being added to it. Unmistakably, clippings from newspapers were among his notes. His data came from different sources – books, articles, newspapers, magazines; everything around educated him. Later I noted that his notes were in inks of different colours. I also saw him fervently preparing for his lecture in his room before he came to the class to deliver it.

The class began with Dr. Sharma introducing the topic. He wrote a couple of words on the blackboard. Written feebly, they were hardly visible to the backbenchers. For material culture, the other teachers had advised us to consult Lips's *The Origin of Things* (1947) and the *Notes and Queries on Anthropology* (1892). Dr. Guha often referred to his supervisor's (Professor M.N. Basu of the University of Calcutta) thin book on material culture.[17]

Dr. Sharma's lectures were differently composed. All through, he cited the ethnographic accounts of different societies of the world, telling us how they made fire and the instruments they used for this purpose.[18] Looking into his notes, he drew diagrams on the blackboard, labelled them, and provided some information about the society. The entire class was satisfied, for each of its members was able to take sumptuous notes. The general practice those days was to supplement class notes with the material from the books the teachers had advised us to read, and then prepare another set of notes. These were read for examination, exchanged among friends, and not to forget, used for building up new ties of conviviality.

And thence it was revealed that Dr. Sharma's notes were from neither of the books we had been consulting. We had suspected this in class, for several cases of fire-making equipment that were discussed in class were from Indian tribes, and the books we generally consulted gave scant attention to India.[19] That Dr. Sharma's notes were indispensable dawned upon us quite early. Because of this reason, attendance in his class used to be cent per cent. Each

one wanted to take down his class notes and also understand the topic too. I used to see my class fellows competing among them to occupy the front seat so as to have a better look at the blackboard. What Dr. Sharma did was that he collected the instances of fire-making from different ethnographic works, classified them, and examined the relations between different cases. The following year he added more cases to the reservoir of his notes, and of course deleted some, revised his earlier classification of the types, and in this way his lectures each year were different.

In other words, his lectures were never repetitive. His references were never wrong, for he brought to the class the articles he wanted to cite. I am referring here to the days when xeroxing/photocopying had not come into existence. The only way to obtain copies of the articles and books was to either copy them by hand or get them typed. Alternatively, one could request the author to send its copy, or offprint, if it were an article. Those days I used to see the members of the office staff agitatedly typing from the books and articles that the senior faculty members had asked them to do. Carbon copies of this material could be found with the favourite students of the teachers.

Dr. Sharma's teaching of the fire-making instruments was largely descriptive and typological. It was an account of the different ways in which different societies of the 'primitive world', inhabiting variegated eco-systems, made fire. To enrich this, he gave an absorbing account of the discovery of fire, both from literary and anthropological sources. Of particular interest was the evidence of fire in Chou-kou-tien cave, where lived *Sinanthropus pekinensis*. A string of moot questions he discussed was: Was the Peking Man first to discover fire? How did he get the idea of fire-making? Was it from the lightening that struck the dried bunch of leaves, putting it in flames? Was it during the process of making stone implements that fire was first discovered? What would have been the first human experience of fire, particularly in terms of the warmth it gave, the raw food it transformed, keeping the animals at bay? How fire was kept alive? A volley of these questions culminated with Dr. Sharma telling us about fire temples and sacrifice. His imagination inspired us. Some of us rushed to the libraries to read up more on fire, a topic which is still awaiting a wholesome anthropological investigation.

7

The approach adopted for teaching fire-making practices was followed in case of hunting, food-gathering, and fishing technology. I still remember how detailed was the description of rat-trap, an exhibit of which was kept in the Department museum. The discussion of different types of baskets for food-gathering was equally engaging, so was of different types of nets used in West Bengal for fishing. Fresh in my memory is the topic dealing with the construction and overhauling of canoe, scooping it out of a log of wood, attaching out-triggers to it, the advantages of a double-out-trigger canoe over a single

one. When later, I was working on the Trobriand ethnography for a set of lectures to undergraduate students in sociology, reading Bronislaw Malinowski's description of the sailing technology, I was vividly reminded of Dr. Sharma's classes, and made a good impact on the class when I looked at the canoes of the Trobrianders, the dangers they imminently faced, and the summoning of magic to counter these perils affecting the Kula party.

Dr. Sharma took great pains in explaining the similarities and differences between spears and javelins, the use of feathers on spears, and the type of animals that were hunted with each one of them. So was his description of bows and arrows, and the poisoned arrow-heads. In these lectures, he did not miss out the gender dimension. His teaching of the technology of food-gathering, hunting, and fishing was also an introspection into the gender aspects of use, gender relations and stereotypes, although gender studies had hardly made an impact those days.[20] The questions he raised were: Why men were hunters? Why men were spear-wielders? Why women were food-gatherers and collectors? Did women start growing plants of their choice? Did they eventually become the inventors of food-production? Sometimes he also ventured into the Freudian approach, looking at spears, javelins, harpoons, and arrows as phallic symbols. All this was in addition to a utilitarian understanding of these objects.

The teaching of agricultural implements, however, bore a different approach. It seemed that he used fire-making to illustrate the typological approach; by comparison, the evolutionary approach dominated his teaching of agricultural implements. Right in the beginning of his lectures on food-production, he taught us Edward Tylor's paper (1881) on the evolution of plough from the digging-stick. Delineating different types through which the plough had passed, Dr. Sharma ameliorated the discussion with ethnographic details of the societies that practiced different types of food-production. In his inimitable style, he compared the social organizations of hunters and food-gatherers with those of horticulturists, shifting cultivators, and agriculturists. These discussions were sketchy, nevertheless insightful. Later when I read sociology, I was often reminded of Dr. Sharma's classes.

8

Dr. Sharma's command over English was good, but not as literary, profound, and evocative as was of Professor Mehra. By our second year, we had come to know that Professor Mehra had a master's degree in English literature, before he joined anthropology for another post-graduation; Dr. Sharma had an under-graduation in physics before shifting to anthropology. This could conveniently explain the wordsmithy of Professor Mehra in comparison to the precision, quantification, and metric-orientation of Dr. Sharma. The teaching of these two teachers was complementary: Professor Mehra taught love for English language and Dr. Sharma, love for scientific

precision and attitude. Dr. Sharma spoke clearly, laying emphasis on each word, often telling us the spelling of the words he used.

The first semester of M.Sc. saw the domination of two teachers – Professor Mehra, teaching us the paper on the concepts of society and culture, and Dr. Sharma, lecturing on 'fossil man' and conducting practical classes on somatometry. However, these teachers did not teach us the entire papers; for instance, in the paper on society and culture, Professor Marwah was allotted the topic on 'primitive economy'. Since that year (1972) also witnessed one of the longest strikes by students, beginning in the last week of October, lectures on some topics in our courses could not be held. We prepared these topics on our own or decided to leave them in case they figured in the examination papers. Similarly, Professor Kalla shared some topics with Dr. Sharma in the paper on palaeontology; he taught us about the fossil evidences from India.

9

Our introduction to Dr. Sharma as a metric anthropologist was in practical classes. Although he was assisted by another teacher, he gave all the instructions, defining the position of the landmarks, demonstrating how measurements were to be taken, and indices to be calculated. Those of us from B.Sc. (Honours) in anthropology were not new to somatometry. We had done many of the measurements included in the syllabus of M.Sc. in the second year of our graduation; but this introduction to somatometry was qualitatively different from what was done earlier. In his first class, Dr. Sharma spoke of the importance of measurements in anthropology, the scope of anthropometry, the relationship and differences between measurements on bones and skulls and living humans, the elements of subjectivity in somatoscopy and how to overcome them, and why indices were calculated and how they helped us in classification of people, races and ethnic groups. That the subject, earlier reduced to a mechanical exercise of measuring humans, was so interesting and useful was indeed a disclosure to us.

In B.Sc. (Honours) Second Year, this practical was conducted in the following manner: The teacher told the class which measurements were to be taken; the definitions of landmarks were dictated from notes prepared from Singh and Bhasin's *Anthropometry* (1968); some precautions – for example, the head should be in Frankfurt-Horizontal Plane (F-H Plane), or the back should be straight while taking sitting height vertex, or how to fix the different segments of the anthropometric rod, etc. – were quickly told; and then the students were advised to get the instruments issued and start work. The teacher(s) demonstrated the technique of taking measurements on a subject. Advising the class to continue with the work, the teacher(s) left, to return after a while to see if everything was under control. The white sheet of the practical notebook was signed on that day. The description of the practical was written later to be signed be the teacher on some other day, may be at the

end of the term. It was not uncommon those days that the practical class finished well before its stipulated time. The students used to be in a hurry to leave since they did not want to miss the most convenient University Special Buses for going home.

As said earlier, M.Sc. (Previous) somatometry practical course had many body and face measurements we had not done in B.Sc. (Honours) Second Year, but there were several with which we had adequate familiarity. Learning the subject from Dr. Sharma was a novel experience. The distinction between anatomically-oriented and geometrically-oriented landmarks laid the foundation. Then, we knew why 'head length' was called 'maximum head length' and why 'nasal length' was 'nasal length'. Dr. Sharma's instructions on measurements were lengthy; the precautions were detailed. The significance of each measurement was spelled out. So was of the indices that were being taught. Dr. Sharma taught from the original German sources.[21] As our dependence on his notes increased, so was our independence from *Anthropometry,* the pages of which had crushed like wafers because of overuse!

Dr. Sharma was in the practical class for its entire duration. His co-teacher also used to come to the class after the instructions had been delivered, but more as a non-interventionist. However, during the time he was there, he responded to the questions of individual students and sometimes signed the practical files as well. Dr. Sharma followed the definitions of landmarks as given in the texts in letter and spirit, but occasionally he coupled these with the methods and procedures he had devised. For example, for height iliospinale, the landmark being iliospinale, if the subject was skinny, without pot-belly, he would advise him to stand facing the wall, trying to touch the white-washed wall with the frontal protuberances of his pelvis. The whiteness of the wall would be marked on his trousers where the pelvis touched. Needless to say, better it would be if the trousers were dark in colour. On these marks would be located the landmark of iliospinale. The height would be taken from the floor to iliospinale with the help of a segment of the anthropometric rod. Dr. Sharma was quick to point out that it might not be easy to locate this landmark in all cases. From this example, it may be inferred that his teaching was so thorough that even after forty years, I would have no problems in conducting somatometric measurements and defining landmarks.

Dr. Sharma preferred that the laboratory recording of the practicals be done the same day. He would stay in the class to sign all practical records. He always advised his students to write a couple of millimeters above the lines on a ruled paper. I followed his advice unfailingly. Later I realized I was able to write straight on a plain paper (without lines), without my lines going up or down. Dr. Sharma liked neat practical files; he used to say that one should work so carefully and attentively that the entire pencil work was finished without ever using an eraser. I always wanted him to look at my

practical records. That I was regular in submitting my practical files was stated by him in a testimonial I obtained from him for the continuation of my post-graduate scholarship.[22]

10

Dr. Sharma was exceptionally regular. Like Professor Mehra, he never missed his class. Even when these teachers were feeling seedy, for a change in weather brought fever or sore throat, they did not miss the class. Even when they did not have classes, they were present in the Department to do their own work or supervise doctoral students. Dr. Sharma used to come to the Department on Sundays and other holidays.[23]

Those years some teachers handled several courses, unlike their other colleagues who were specialists of some branches and confined them to those only. Professor Mehra, for instance, conducted classes on archaeology for M.Sc. (Previous), as said earlier; Professor Tiwari taught a paper on ethnology – racial migrations and admixtures – to B.Sc. (Honours) Final Year. Professor Singh lectured on qualitative research techniques and, as pointed out in note 20, he also lectured on the position of women in tribal societies to M.Sc. (Final) students. Not only that, Professor Singh also supervised doctoral theses in social anthropology.

11

In M.Sc. (Previous), Dr. Sharma taught a course on fossil findings and the evolution of man. Professor Kalla was the other teacher, who dealt with Indian fossil remains. Dr. Sharma taught right from pre-hominids to modern man. Like somatometry, this paper also was not new. We had done a paper on 'fossil man' in B.Sc. (Honours) Second Year; Professor P.K. Datta taught this paper, giving useful notes on each of the pre-hominid and hominid types. For examination purpose, I memorized the characteristics of each of them; the questions in the examination paper were straight and simple. One with sharper mnemonic power did the best. It seemed to us, because of the way it was taught, as if each one of them was an iron-clad category. Besides Professor Datta's notes, the books we consulted, if at all we did, were by Ashley Montagu (1960), Juan Comas (1960), and Buettner-Janusch (1967).

Dr. Sharma's approach was the least typological. He avoided delineating the traits of each of these fossil types; he perhaps thought that the students would be able to read these on their own, or those who had done anthropology in their graduation would know them. His incisive account of the geological time scale, which in fact was the subject matter of his inaugural classes, was a clear indication that he was looking at the process, the probability of one type evolving into the other. He also spoke of the higher primates and how their lines differentiated. To illustrate his lectures, as he had done earlier,

he brought to the class charts, bone fragments, photographs, and articles from different journals. Till then, he had not switched on to the visual method of teaching, which he did a year later, in 1974. In fact, he was the first one to do that in the Department. The subjects he was teaching had elements of concreteness, requiring visuals for an efficacious teaching.

A processual approach to teaching palaeontology was optimally complemented with a description of any archaeological material found therein. That man is *Homo faber* – a tool-making animal – ran through his entire lecture. Some of his lectures were saturated with the details of the evolutionary theory; he would bring concepts from other disciplines to add a 'cherry', so to say, to his arguments. Once he referred to Joseph Needham's work on science and technology in China; at another moment, he used the law of cumulative growth to state that the achievements of culture were additive, for this would explain why it took less number of years for subsequent developments to come. Stone ages lasted millions of years, but it took only a couple of decades for the atomic age to follow. The number of years required for the development of science and technology to occur in later eras shrunk.

The first realization that dawned upon us was that biological evolution was taking place along with cultural evolution. Later, cultural evolution overtook biological evolution. As a consequence, the latter slowed, entering into the phase of micro-evolutionary changes. This was one of the occasions that we realized the unity of the different branches of anthropology. Dr. Sharma spoke of the camps of the Australopithecus man, based on his fertile imagination. Some ideas of their social structure were also floated, particularly of their division of labour. Palaeontology, then, was not a drab, to-be-mugged, specialization. It was like archaeology, where the material evidences had to be interpreted qualitatively, a process that necessitated imagination and a comparative understanding of different locations where fossil evidences were found.

Fresh in my mind are his lectures on Neanderthal man. Dr. Sharma gave examples of some men in the Department who had Neanderthal features or the features of Cro-Magnon. After that we started looking at these men with a different eye. Was there any truth in Darwin's theory of atavism? Or, is each individual an assortment of different features, the overall outcome of which makes him resemble someone of the past era, or even an animal? It is commonly known that some human faces bear resemblance to simians, some to felines. What makes a particular combination of physical features 'beautiful' or 'ugly'? A string of questions that followed made physical anthropology exceedingly bewitching. Dr. Sharma's observations immersed us in the subject. Each of his classes inspired his students to the extent that after it was over, in the words of my colleague, Professor Joshi, they rushed to the University Library to have a look at the references he had given and seek answers to the questions that followed from his lectures. Not many teachers had this ability to cause a state of intellectual inebriation, curiosity, and fulfillment.

That Neanderthal man suffered from osteoarthritis, as was Rudolf Virchow's hypothesis from the fossil find at La Chappelle aux Saint, France, made Dr. Sharma imitate the way the arthritis-ridden man might have walked, where the bowed bones collided while walking. Whether this led to his extinction, since he was unable to run after the game or walk longer distances in search of food, was a moot question. Did the entire settlement of the Neanderthal man suffer from the bone-degeneration disease? Dr. Sharma examined this critically also looking at the probable causes of non-infectious diseases among fossil men. He spoke of the physical activity and diet of Neanderthal man. That he 'bred and bled' was another idea, though debatable, about the extinction of Neanderthal man or his assimilation with Cro-Magnon. Dr. Sharma raised a battery of questions, without necessarily trying to render their answers, telling us that formulating right questions was as much an intellectual exercise as was the attempt to answer them.

Dr. Sharma rarely referred to the books familiar to us. Our training in the course on fossil man in under-graduation had built a good substratum for us to absorb Dr. Sharma's teaching, entirely based on research papers from various journals. I sumptuously enjoyed this paper, for it was not only a guided tour to the field of human evolution, but also offered a number of research topics that could be taken up for further investigation.

12

One of the important branches of physical anthropology is ethnology. It deals with the migration of populations; conflicts and wars among them; displacement, retreatism, and miscegenation; aspects of parvenu or assimilation; heterogenization and melting-pot effects, and genic exchanges and evolution. Ethnology, in succinct terms, is the bio-cultural archeology and history of populations. Like palaeontology, here also different branches of anthropology rally together, and a student of anthropology possessing a fair understanding of these branches can do justice to its teaching. And, like the papers on human palaeontology, in our graduation, we had done papers on ethnology and racial classification, in which the various classifications of human races – including the ones that Herbert Risley and B.S. Guha gave – had been taught. We were also familiar with the debate surrounding the concept of race and its contest with the other concepts such as 'ethnic group', 'phenotypic patterns', or 'genetic stock'.

Here also, Dr. Sharma's lectures were a subtle attack on the typological approach. He laid stress on two ideas: first, race is a groupal concept; for supporting this, he often quoted C.S. Coon: "You cannot tap a person and say you belong to such-n-such race."[24] Sharing of the same set of physical features – visible, identifiable, describable – by the members of a group reinforced among them a 'consciousness of kind', to borrow a phrase from Franklin

Giddings. So we would have terms like 'Black Politics', 'Black Music', 'Black Writers', 'White Politicians', 'White Masters.'

Secondly, a 'racial community', so to say, may become (or be transformed) to a 'community for itself', heralding a movement for its rights, as in case of several Black movements for equal rights and justice, but it is not closed and impervious. The members of such a community have mating and marriage alliances with other such communities, besides of course having a plexus of social and economic ties. As a result of inter-racial unions – of marriage, live-in relationship, and yielding successful fertility – offspring bearing different racial strains are born, thus leading to a blurring of the stark differences.[25] Unmistakeable continuities, thus, exist between races, as a result of the admixtures that had been going on for thousands of years. The conclusion is not only that 'pure races do not exist', but also that different conglomerations of physical characteristics may be placed on different continua of physical characteristics, such as skin colour, nose shape, head form, limb proportions, etc. Take, for instance, the continuum of skin colour – one pole could be white, the other black; or one could be white, the other yellow; or one could be yellow, the other black. Dr. Sharma's point was that if race on one hand is a primordial characteristic, having the ability to form a community, on the other, it can melt down. In both cases, the processual analysis would have precedence over all other approaches to the study of the racially-segregated and mixed societies. His conclusion seemed to us laudable.

In Indian context, Dr. Sharma seemed to subscribe to the theory of Aryan invasion. The influence of R.P. Chanda's (1916) work on his thinking was large. The tall, fair-complexioned people with light-coloured eyes, who spoke Aryan languages, stepped into the Indian continent from its north-western frontiers. These agro-pastoral people came via Pamir (in Central Asia), literally huddling through the Indus Valley Civilization. As a result, the Dravidian speakers, short and dark-complexioned, the architects of the first urbanization, were pushed further to the Gangetic basin, and then, further to Central and South India. Against this backdrop, Dr. Sharma explained why as we move from north to south, skin colour becomes darker. The 'wheatish complexion', which in any case is a subjective term, to which most north Indians say they belong to, resulted from inter-racial marriages.

Dr. Sharma did not confine him to the biological aspects as one would have imagined, since he was a physical anthropologist. He often ascended to the terrain of explanations in the realm of culture, such as Dravidian gods were dark (like Siva), mother goddesses were concerned with 'fertility', the morphology of the mother goddess indicated her Dravidian origin, the word *ammā* was Dravidian in origin, and many others that he had picked up from the Census of India, 1931. Cultures and biologies were mixed assemblages – it was not only that the epicanthic fold was found among several populations from north-east to that of Orissa, but also Durga Puja had its own dynamics

of diffusion. In his teaching, Dr. Sharma incorporated the element of time, in the form of evolution in biology, and history in the study of culture.

We had read Risley's and Guha's classifications earlier, but Dr. Sharma touched upon those areas in them which were surprisingly new. In the first case, he examined the inverse relationship that Risley's anthropometric studies drew between nasal index and caste status – higher castes have sharper noses by comparison to the lower. For rebutting Risley, Dr. Sharma referred to the anthropometric work of Bhupendranath Datta (1944).[26] The overall inference was that India was far more complex than what Risley had imagined. Mating patterns varied from one region to the other. In spite of the barriers of caste and the practice of untouchability, sexual relations cut across different communities. He was quick to point out that the biological implications of hypergamous and hypogamous marriages had remained almost poorly studied.

In Guha's classification, he examined the suggestion about the autochthones of India. Was India an ethnic vacuum? If it was, why was it so? Were Negrito the original inhabitants of India? Dr. Sharma was interested in Guha's hypothesis about the Kadar – bearing the Negrito strain – as being the indigenous people. With Dr. A.K. Mitra, he had written a manuscript on the Kadar.[27] Also, he contributed to Bala Ratnam's *Anthropology on the March* (1963) an article on Negrito elements in Indian populations. The question he examined was whether India had Negrito infiltration or a form of Negrito strain had an indigenous origin. The aforementioned article was a summary of different views on Negrito strains in India. Dr. Sharma had also sent his co-authored manuscript to Dr. B.S. Guha for comments and the latter were quoted in his paper. That Negrito problem was worthy of consideration, in light of new facts and techniques of investigation, was a profitable conclusion of this work.

13

In January 1974, Dr. Sharma incorporated the visual method in his teaching. One would then see him spending time after his classes in what was then called the 'dark room', since photographic work used to be conducted there. The photographer-cum-artist used to be one Mr. Sahni; he prepared slides for Dr. Sharma's classes.[28] It was in my last semester of M.Sc. that Dr. Sharma lectured on a newly-introduced topic on pair-bond relations using slides to show its different aspects. Whilst some students dismissed Dr. Sharma's slide show as untrammelled voyeurism, the others found it novel, extremely captivating, for it took up for discussion topics on which lips were generally sealed. He was a fire-ball if any student, on seeing the slides, giggled or indulged in side talks. He demanded undivided attention from students in his classes. I cannot forget the incident when he ordered one of my class fellows to leave the room as he burst into laughter on seeing a slide showing mounting behaviour among monkeys. He tendered apology for his unwarranted act.

For teaching this subject, Dr. Sharma leaned on the writings of Desmond Morris, a zoologist, who shot to prominence for his eminently-readable books on the ethology of behaviour, the continuities between animal and human behaviour. Accidentally, I saw Morris's new book titled *Intimate Behaviour* (1971) in Delhi Public Library, and got it issued. The following day, enthusiastically, I showed its copy to Dr. Sharma. It was the first time that I found him unaware of this publication. My cursory glance at this book convinced me of its relevance to the topic that was being taught in our class. Dr. Sharma borrowed the book from me for a couple of days. He read it up in the shortest possible time, as he later told me, and asked his typist to type up its relevant portions which he used in his lectures. Unfailingly he acknowledged me in the class for lending him Morris's book to read.

In his lectures, Dr. Sharma explored the biological aspects of pair-bonding among human beings as well as monkeys and higher apes. He lengthily examined the roles of the five senses we are endowed with in bonding ties. I remember the attention he paid to odour in intimate relations. Here also, as was in his lectures on material culture, he culled examples from different communities of the world to bring home the social and cultural aspects of pair-bond relations. The message he gave was that for academic pursuits, none of the topics was tabooed. Academicians rose above, should I say, the barriers and boundaries, proscriptions and preferences, the societies created and reinforced through sanctions and rewards. Intellectual quests occupied a different realm. When later I read Anthony Giddens's *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), Dr. Sharma's lectures on bonding relations came alive in my mind. I always feel that some of these teachers were far ahead of their time. In their classes, they spoke of the ideas which were innovative and ground-breaking; had they written on them and published articles, they would have been today the internationally acknowledged pioneers of these thoughts.

14

I was quite close to Dr. Sharma. Although sometimes he ridiculed me for asking what he thought were stupid questions, he always thought I was a good student, who should stay in academics. However, my heart was elsewhere – I wanted to be in one of the civil services. During my M.Sc., I had appeared for the Indian Police Service Examination and done well, which in fact encouraged me to appear for Allied Services as well as the Administrative and Foreign Services Examination. I wanted to opt for sociology as one of the options. Indubitably, social anthropology that I had learned in the Department provided me with a good foundation to learn sociology. There were, however, umpteen number of topics that needed to be prepared for the papers on sociology – the lower and the higher.[29] After sound consideration and debate at home, I decided to enroll for a master's degree in sociology at the Delhi School of Economics.

By doing so, I disappointed three teachers of mine – one, who expected me to study dental arches; another, who wanted me to pursue the topic on which I had written my master's thesis, i.e. sex chromatin bodies; and Dr. Sharma, who suggested that I study the patterns of the ossification of pelvis.[30] I was keen to work under Dr. Sharma's guidance, but the career goal I had set forth made me leave the Department. Two years later, in 1976, Dr. Sharma, in an interview to *The Hindustan Times* said that the students joining anthropology were the 'rejected lot', in the sense that since they were not able to secure admission in any other course, they had no option but to seek refuge in anthropology. He also mentioned that most of the anthropology students were women, who did extremely well in study and examination by comparison to their male counterparts. Since I was a topper, and the toppers of the batches of 1971 and 1972 were also male, I wrote a rejoinder to Dr. Sharma's comments. True to his character, to my letter, he gave a vehement reply. I had no ammunition to counter it. Later, I regretted writing this letter.[31]

I met Dr. Sharma in October 1976 after I had joined Hindu College as a lecturer in sociology. I told him that I was trying to emulate his style of teaching. With his eyes rounding up, he released a faint smile. He spoke to me about his early days as a lecturer in Rangoon, and then, at the Delhi Department. He remembered the incident in Rome when, on learning that 'Dr. Sharma' had yet not obtained his doctorate, the 'doctoral audience' temporarily dropped their 'doctoral titles' – Mr. Sharma's lecture on dermatoglyphic patterns was so brilliant that 'they felt humbled'! He was scholarly in everything he did, whether it was a paper on Kachin kin terms or hand prints.

15

Dr. Sharma bubbled with energy. He brimmed with enthusiasm. As I noted earlier, he spoke at high pitch. He was an exemplar of agility in class. He was a non-smoker in days when every second person used to be addicted to tobacco. He was extremely hard working and meticulous. Well known was the fact that he had designed many anthropometric instruments for Una and Company that manufactured them. Even when he owned a car and drove it to the Department, he was seen walking a lot.

Against this backdrop, none could have imagined that this short-statured, medium-built man, at the age of forty-eight, needed aortic valve replacement. For his ailment, he was being treated at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), under the care of Dr. Gopi Nath. In India of 1978 cardiac surgery was in infancy. From New Zealand was imported a valve for him. However, he could not survive the strains of surgery. On 25 September 1978, his mortal remains were consigned to flames.

A couple of days before Dr. Sharma was scheduled for surgery, Professor Joshi and I went to see him in the hospital. He was not in his room

when we reached. Just when we were waiting for him, the toilet door opened. Dr. Sharma walked out of it, slowly, carefully. He was frail, faint his voice. He was pleased to see us. He avoided talking to us about his illness. All he said was we should devote ourselves to the growth of anthropology. His heart was in the Department; he was thinking of anthropology.

16

Finally, a note on the method adopted for writing up this paper, which is neither on his contribution to anthropology nor a critical assessment of his writings. His collection of material cultural articles was exhibited in the museum of the Department; at that time, a placard bearing his name was also placed next to the assemblage. After his death, his wife and son, I was told, took away with them some of his books and papers, but most of his notes, field collections and study material found refuge in a small cell of the dark room to be eventually rendered termite-ridden.

Thus, I could not have consulted any of his papers for this paper. As was common those days, my class notes were shared by my junior fellows, and they never came back; there was no reason they would come back, for they were passed on down the line. In other words, I was left with a bank of memories, of classes, of informal interactions with teachers outside the class. I shared my memories of Dr. Sharma with Professor Joshi who has the same degree of admiration for Dr. Sharma as I have. When I started traversing the lanes of my memory from 1969 to 1974, events and episodes of those days started surfacing clearly; I could see everything happening. Like the densely-wrinkled old woman, who looked behind and the Titanic came to animation, in the same way, Dr. Sharma's classes emerged lifefully and I enjoyed being once again his student. I have made use for this paper what I would call 'memorized participant observation recalled and reflected upon'.

NOTES

1. A couple of times the need to introduce a paper on linguistic anthropology was pointed out both in formal and informal discussions in the Department, however, a concerted effort in this direction was never made. In British universities also, courses on linguistic anthropology are not taught. The tacit understanding is that linguistic anthropology is well taken care of in departments of linguistics. Some Indian anthropologists have definitely made efforts to write on and teach papers on linguistic anthropology. Two names that instantly come to my mind are of Professors Gopala Sarana and Kamal K. Misra.

2. This phrase 'woefully understaffed' was used in the first proposal the Department prepared in 1985-6 for applying to the University Grants Commission (U.G.C.) for the Special Assistance Programme. In so far as I can remember the author of this phrase was Professor I.S. Marwah. The three teachers teaching social anthropology at that time were Professors J.D. Mehra, J.S. Bhandari, and I.S. Marwah.

3. Professor D.K. Bhattacharya taught us archaeology in B.Sc. (Honours) First Year, and in M.Sc. (Previous), when he was on leave, Professor Mehra taught us this paper.

Later Professor Bhattacharya did a D.Litt. from the University of Ranchi, submitting a thesis in prehistoric archaeology.

4. They, however, did not find prehistoric archaeology that interesting. Most of us resorted to committing the archaeological facts to memory and then reproducing them in the examination.

5. I wrote an obituary on him in 2003.

6. I studied in Departments of Anthropology, Sociology, and Chinese and Japanese Studies in the University of Delhi, and then read for a doctorate at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge. The Department of Chinese and Japanese Studies is now known as the Department of East Asian Studies.

7. I wrote a short paper on him in 1988 which was meant for private circulation. I also dedicated to him my edited book of 2014.

8. Professor Mehra was the only teacher in social anthropology who had a doctorate. Later Professor Bhandari earned his doctorate from the University of Ranchi.

9. Some of them unhesitatingly and publicly said that it was nothing but 'story-telling'.

10. Many students, I know of, who after having done their doctorates on topics in physical anthropology, have joined non-governmental organizations carrying out social work and consultancy in issues of importance to social science.

11. Not many students came from the non-biology stream, and those who came joined social anthropology. Two examples that instantaneously come to my mind are of Professor Subhadra Mitra Channa and Dr. Anil Mahajan. Both joined anthropology after having studied physics in under-graduation.

12. I also know of physical anthropologists who were appointed examiners of theses in zoological subjects.

13. He joined the Department as a Lecturer on 26 July 1955. On 20 July 1968, he became a Reader. He died on 24 September 1978. His obituary appeared in the second issue of the *Spectra of Anthropological Progress* in 1979.

14. One may consult Mandelbaum's edited volume (1963) on the teaching of anthropology for how anthropology has been taught and is expected to be taught. This paper of mine is on 'Dr. Sharma in the classroom'. Underlying idea here is that classroom situations are worthy of study.

15. His former student, Professor Vijendra Bhalla, said: "Dr. Sharma's presence did not go unnoticed."

16. Later Dr. Sharma drove his car to the Department. The car bore a Chandigarh number. We later learned that he had bought it from Professor S.R.K. Chopra, who was the head of the Anthropology Department in Panjab University. That Dr. Sharma came in his car did not mean that the gardeners were spared. Like the other days when he walked to the Department, he would go to the lawns for a stroll and instruct the gardeners.

17. I have lost the complete reference of this book. After Dr. Basu's death, Dr. Guha worked for his Ph.D. under the supervision of Professor P.K. Bhowmick.

18. He often gave the example of the Kachin of Burma, with whom he had done a short stint of fieldwork.

19. Perhaps the only exception was Basu's book.

20. However, in the paper on cultural diversity of India, there used to be a topic on the status of women, which was taught by Professor Indera P. Singh.

21. We learnt that Dr. A.K. Mitra who had joined the Department after having served the Anthropological Survey of India knew German and had translated the original sources where anthropometric techniques were discussed. His notes were used by many teachers in the Department.

22. See Appendix 1.

23. The rooms that now house cytogenetic and forensic laboratories, and some of the teachers' rooms in that block had not been built. It was an open space and one could walk to the Department easily after jumping over the fence.

24. I do not know its exact reference.

25. The example he invariably gave was of the mulattoes.

26. While teaching this text, Dr. Sharma reminded us that Bhupendranath Datta was Swami Vivekanand's younger brother.

27. This manuscript perhaps was not published.

28. Dr. Sharma used to be friendly with the non-teaching staff of the Department.

29. This was the system of the civil services examination prior to 1979.

30. Dr. Sharma was innovative in the research topics he sometimes advised his students to pursue. For instance, he advised one of his female doctoral students to study the growth of mammary glands among women.

31. See Appendix 2.

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This is the revised text of the paper presented on 7 November 2014 in a Seminar titled 'Celebrating the Spirit of Anthropology', held in the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi.

Appendix 1

Phone : [225329
221421/17

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
DELHI-7

Ref. No.

Dated the 24th July, 1973.

This is to certify that Vinay Kumar Srivastava is known to me for the last four years as a student of this department. He secured the First Class First position in the University in B.Sc. (Hons.) Examination in Anthropology (607/900 i.e. 67.44%). In the M.Sc.(Previous) Examination, he has secured 315/500 marks (63%).

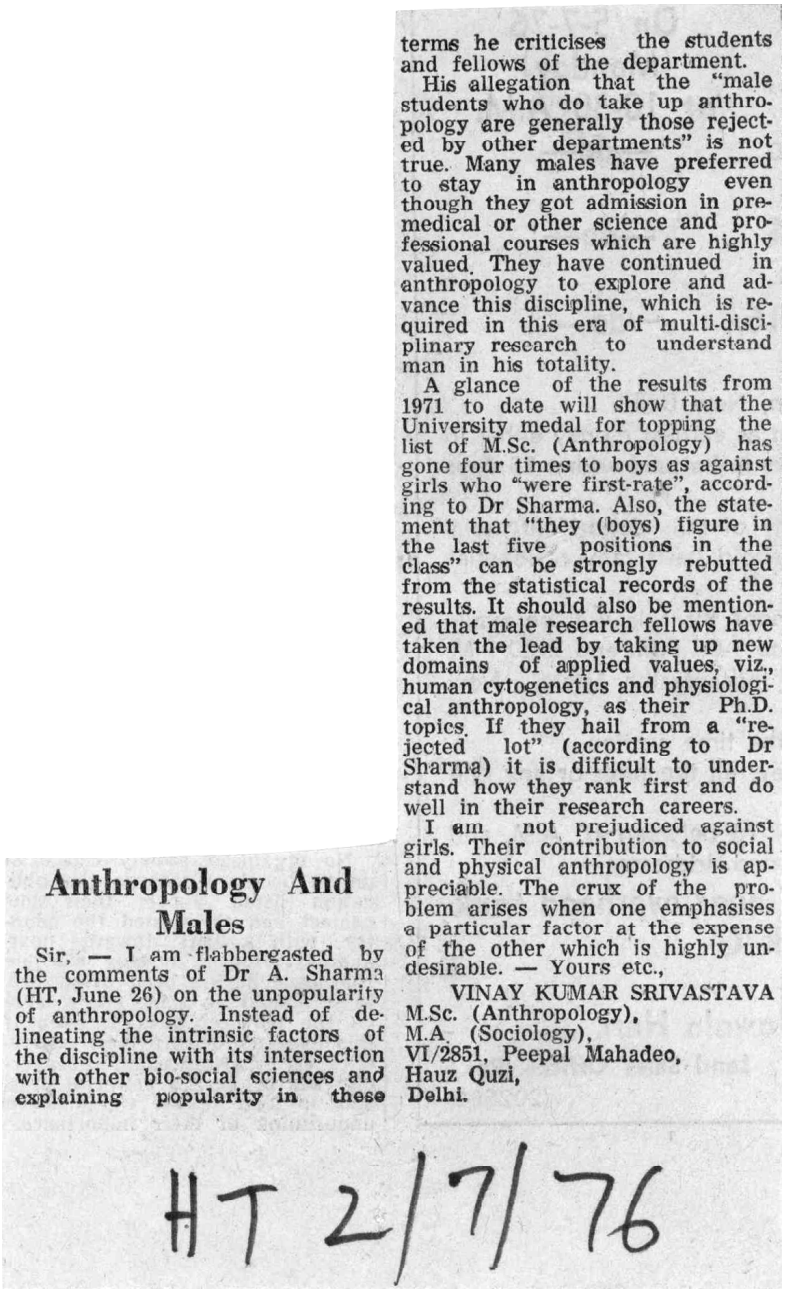
He has been regular in submission of his laboratory records and is a hardworking youngman who wishes to make a career in Anthropology.

Abhimanyu Sharma

(Dr. Abhimanyu Sharma)
Reader in Physical Anthropology,
University of Delhi, Delhi-7.

jr.

Appendix 2



Anthropology And Males

Sir, — I am flabbergasted by the comments of Dr A. Sharma (HT, June 26) on the unpopularity of anthropology. Instead of delineating the intrinsic factors of the discipline with its intersection with other bio-social sciences and explaining popularity in these terms he criticises the students and fellows of the department.

His allegation that the "male students who do take up anthropology are generally those rejected by other departments" is not true. Many males have preferred to stay in anthropology even though they got admission in premedical or other science and professional courses which are highly valued. They have continued in anthropology to explore and advance this discipline, which is required in this era of multi-disciplinary research to understand man in his totality.

A glance of the results from 1971 to date will show that the University medal for topping the list of M.Sc. (Anthropology) has gone four times to boys as against girls who "were first-rate", according to Dr Sharma. Also, the statement that "they (boys) figure in the last five positions in the class" can be strongly rebutted from the statistical records of the results. It should also be mentioned that male research fellows have taken the lead by taking up new domains of applied values, viz., human cytogenetics and physiological anthropology, as their Ph.D. topics. If they hail from a "rejected lot" (according to Dr Sharma) it is difficult to understand how they rank first and do well in their research careers.

I am not prejudiced against girls. Their contribution to social and physical anthropology is appreciable. The crux of the problem arises when one emphasises a particular factor at the expense of the other which is highly undesirable. — Yours etc.,

VINAY KUMAR SRIVASTAVA
M.Sc. (Anthropology),
M.A. (Sociology),
VI/2851, Peepal Mahadeo,
Hauz Quzi,
Delhi.

HT 2/7/76

Appendix 2

Anthropology and Males

Sir,—I am both amused and disturbed on reading Mr V K. Srivastava's letter (H.T., July 2) for slightly differing reasons—amused because a streak of male chauvinism is in evidence and disturbed because a gold medallist like him has not grasped the generalities of issues involved in the innocuous report brought out by your correspondent (HT, June 26). Before talking to me, she had already found out that Anthropology must be a low priority for students not only from the lowest eligibility conditions we have but also because we admit students from various subjects.

Right from the first year class, the male students keep on trying for placement in suitable jobs—one has been chosen by the Air Force from the M.Sc. (Previous) last year while another two are trying to go to a medical college/IAS. Thus the answer to the question, do we succeed in filling our statutory quota of seats at the Honours' and Master's level is in the negative. We are more than anybody else worried about the declining numbers and for that reason we admitted 30 students last year in the M.Sc. (Previous) but the story of drop-outs repeated itself. I know of no case when a student came to Anthropology or stayed on in Anthropology after getting admission to a professional course; the only case on record in my personal knowledge is of a young boy who left M.A. English as late as Aug. 18 in favour of Anthropology in a certain year, though there may be a few others not known to me. Mr Srivastava, himself, is a glaring example of how and why even gold medallists leave.

That "girls were first rate" again refers to their overall performance as compared to the male students, exceptions only proving a general phenomenon, without any notion of one sex being superior/inferior to the other! To cite one example, the last Final Year class had 18 girls and two boys out of whom first division has gone to five girls and one boy, while the other boy is sixth from the bottom.

I would like to be illuminated upon the point of "the new domains of applied values" that Mr Srivastava has talked of so glibly for new domains are rare occurrences these days, unless by the expression he means things other than new techniques, new equipment, new compound measurements. Or perhaps he means new pastures and changed geographic localities?

Since "delineating the intrinsic factors" was not what the correspondent wished to inquire of me, I shall refrain from making any comments on the subject.—Yours etc.,

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Delhi.

HT 6/7/76