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MY TRYST WITH URBAN STUDIES, SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL: EXPERIENCES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

On 11 April 2017, I conducted my last class on urban anthropology in the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. This paper, taught as an optional in the fourth semester of the master's programme, would have its turn next year, in January 2018, when I would have retired; and so I would not get another opportunity to teach this course, at least in my Department.

That's why it was my last class. I was the lone teacher that day since the other two teachers who taught this paper with me were busy elsewhere and thus could not come. The last 'urban class', so to say, was devoted to a discussion of communalism and secularism in contemporary India. In fact, it was the last topic in the syllabus. I felt quite relieved after the class, for in spite of a fortnight's break when the students were away to Udaipur for their annual fieldwork and thus the classes could not be held, I was able to complete the course satisfactorily and reasonably on time. There were ten more days before their practical examinations were scheduled to begin, which they would be able to spend on finalizing their project tasks and complete their dissertations based on their Udaipur fieldwork. Incidentally I was one of the teachers who accompanied their class for this field study, and hence was a little concerned about the time-bound submission of their dissertations of nearly one hundred pages each.

Although I taught the urban paper to this batch with the same commitment and enthusiasm for which I am known, I was quite disappointed in the beginning when I learnt that only eight students out of a class of twenty-three had opted for this paper. I had taught this class in the previous semester a full paper on classical anthropological theory and last year I had taught them half of the introductory paper on social anthropology. Against this backdrop I thought that at least seventy per cent of the social anthropology students would opt for the paper on urban anthropology, as has been the trend in the past. Although not said publicly, the number of students that joins a particular course is also a reflection on the quality and the teaching style of teacher(s) who conduct(s) that course. However, the role of 'wooing the students'

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cannot be ruled out in which some teachers blatantly indulge on the pretext of being liberal with marks or admitting them under their respective supervisions for the doctoral programme. What gave me some satisfaction about this class of eight was that they were highly motivated and quite a few of them were holding top merit.

Initiation into Urban Sociology

I was drowned in nostalgia on the last day of the 'urban class'. I was reminded of how I came to urban studies. It goes back to September 1976, when on the fifteenth day of this month I was appointed a lecturer (now 'assistant professor') in sociology in a University of Delhi undergraduate college. The position I joined at Hindu College was vacated by Dr. Mohini Anjum who had moved to the Department of Sociology of Jamia Millia Islamia as a reader (now 'associate professor'). The then Teacher-in-Charge of Sociology at my College, Dr. Amrit Srinivasan, handed over to me Dr. Anjum's time-table and her attendance register, which meant that I would be teaching the courses which my predecessor taught.

The papers on the introduction to sociology (for first year), tribes and peasants (for second year), and social stratification (for third year) were familiar to me and I was confident of teaching them well. The problem pertained to the other paper I had to teach the third year class; it was titled Urban Sociology. My apprehension about this paper emerged from the fact that neither did I do a graduation in sociology nor did I read urban sociology in my master's, for this paper was not in our curriculum of 1974-6. The batch of students after mine was the beneficiary of the new syllabus which had optional papers, one of which was on urban sociology.

The paper on urban sociology was new to me, but the Teacher-in-Charge told me that Dr. Anjum had taught quite a lot in this paper to the class. In addition to the theoretical topics, an ethnographic work had also to be taught: R.P. Dore's *City Life in Japan* (1958). Some years later to this course was added another case study: Gugler and Flanagan's *Urbanization and Social Change in West Africa* (1978). I started reading Dore's work, for I thought I would begin my urban class with this.

I met the third year honours class almost ten days after I had formally joined the College. I went to meet the students whenever my class was scheduled to be held in Room No. 27, where sociology classes of all the three years were held, but I had to return disappointed as they had not come. In the mean time I started teaching the other classes; the first class I formally conducted in my life was on the concept of tribe (with the second year students). When finally I could meet the third year students, they already knew about me and had heard of good words about my teaching from their younger friends.

I cannot forget my first interaction with this class. The students seemed to me bigger, taller, healthier, matured, and their 'facial age' appeared to me more than their 'chronological age'. In comparison to the other two classes, their class had just one female student. Besides their physical appearances, they were extremely interactive, intelligent, critical, and impressed me with their broad understanding of sociology. I immediately realized it would not be a 'cakewalk' teaching them; I anticipated them asking me questions, engaging me in debates, giving me tough time in classes, and obviously it meant a rigorous and methodical preparation on my part. Fortunately, what lay ahead was a fortnight's autumn break, from 1 October. From this batch of students have emerged two eminent sociologists, Professors Savyasaachi and Vishvajit Pandya, a famous journalist, Brahma Chellany, and a well known lawyer, Deepak Thakur.

The students wanted me to teach the paper on urban sociology from the beginning, for it would be a much-awaited revision for them. For me, it was a golden opportunity not only of learning the subject from its basics but also of placing the case studies of Japan and other countries in the context of the debates and theoretical perspectives in urban sociology. The autumn vacation of 1976 was spent in preparing teaching material for urban classes.

Around the same time a god-sent opportunity came when Professor M.S.A. Rao, who was the head of the Delhi Sociology Department and a member of my Selection Committee at Hindu College on 13 September1976, asked me to help him in preparing a bibliography on urban sociology for the master's course he was going to teach in the fourth semester. This additional work was truly insightful. It augmented my reading of the books and articles that were mentioned in the syllabus. After preparing a list of some readings I would meet Professor Rao to apprise him of my progress and the discussions I had with him were later extremely useful in spearheading my lectures. Professor Rao's humility and his mission to delineate new interests in sociology and provide reading material on them touched me profoundly, and at one time, I thought of enrolling myself under him as a doctoral student.

Conducting Observations

My readings included not just those listed in the syllabus, but also those that were not, some of which came from other disciplines well known for the studies on urban societies, such as geography, architecture and planning, ecology, demography and economics. I also sought the advice of some scholars known for urban studies, such as Professor Ashish Bose. Several collections of readings were useful. Later in 1981, I found Press and Smith's (1981) collection quite good – some of the articles included in this volume were so engrossing that I finished reading them in one go. I still remember the one that dealt with the metropolis of Chicago in future. The other paper on mental maps inspired me to carry out a study of the same type in India.

The classes began with full zeal after the autumn vacations. I was keen to have a first-hand experience of studying some aspects of urban Delhi, for I believed that one would be able to teach the discipline of sociology well when one had done some fieldwork in the subject that was expected to be taught. Since I came to read a master's in sociology after having done a master's in anthropology, I had some experience of carrying out field studies in tribal areas for my two dissertations, one for the graduation in anthropology, the other for the master's.

The intensive reading of literature on urban society from different social sciences had equipped me considerably. I was confident in my classes. With the third year class, I had more or less a 'friendly' relationship, good rapport, and one of the reasons for this was the thin age gap between the students and I. I was twenty-three years and nine months when I was appointed a lecturer of sociology at Hindu College against a permanent position.

My reading helped me to list topics that could be taken up for short projects. I was keen to start some fieldwork acquaintance with my city. 'Charity begins at home': Why not study your own household as an example of urban family? Why not study your own neighbourhood for knowledge of relations among the urbanites? Why not carry out a survey on occupations that Delhi urban dwellers in a settlement pursue and how it has changed over time? A catalogue of interesting topics was emerging but a day-long busy schedule at College and the time required for preparing lectures left me with the Sundays and holidays for carrying out short empirical studies on one or the other aspect of urban Delhi. It was intermittent fieldwork, deviating from its text-book counterpart, but adequate enough to generate preliminary insights into the phenomenon under consideration. I wrote the notes of these investigations in a detailed form, augmented my lectures with the examples of these studies, and this added much-needed zest to the otherwise dry lectures on urban sociology. This taught me an important lesson, which I have followed till date: One should continue to carry out one's researches and plough their findings back to teaching.

Among these researches, one was on the cultural characteristics that people of a locality use in their descriptions of the people in other contiguous localities. For such studies I neither followed a sampling frame nor a rigorous research design. For instance, I asked a cross-section of people living in the street of Peepal Mahadev (in Hauz Qazi) about those who dwelt the lanes of Bazar Sita Ram or Balli Maran. In the mid-1970s, the merchant castes (the Baniya) were predominant in the former, whilst the latter was Muslim-dominated. It was interesting to note that people in their descriptions included even the odour of the lanes in which the other communities lived. The 'constructions' of the others were indubitably biased and prejudiced; but they were sometimes equally hilarious, especially when people talked about the habits of the others. In some cases I requested the research participants to

draw the 'mental maps' of their city – people identified the areas of the city that were notorious for the cases of dowry death and bride-burning; and the pockets of poverty and deprivation, of affluence and surplus.

The concept of middle class was rather absent from their thinking; for instance, the residents of the government colony, such as Ramakrishna Puram or Sarojini Nagar, who were all working for the Central and State Governments, were believed to be 'rich and privileged'. For my respondents, the city was neatly divided into the 'poor' and the 'rich': Old Delhi had 'poor people' but they were from 'traditional families', those which nurtured 'strong values and cultural practices'. They were described as *khandani log*, people with 'illustrious family traditions'. Those who dwelt New Delhi were 'culturally rootless but rich.' These notions of people were juxtaposed to the objective inquiries that the sociologists conducted. The cultural constructions of people and the localities greatly conditioned their inter-community interactions.

Stereotypes are universal, so are the prejudices and the episodes of discrimination. However, this triad (of stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination) was displayed subtly in the streets of Old Delhi. Communities were either visibly respectful towards the others or showed complete indifference. There also existed an opposition of their interests. People spoke derogatorily about the others in their absence, 'behind their back', so to say; but at the same time they had long-term relations of dependence. The communities in the city seemed to be like their counterparts in villages. A wedding, particularly of a girl, in the street meant that all the households would be involved in organizing it. So would be an occasion of death. I heard people say that 'neighbours come first, relatives, later', 'neighbours are more than the relatives in times of exigency', 'relations with neighbours must always be good', 'relatives are jealous of your progress, neighbours are not.' Later I analyzed these observations in a couple of articles (2013, 2014).

Against this backdrop, India's experience of urbanization seemed to be vastly different from what the writings of the Chicago sociologists tried to convey. For them, the Western urban experience was destined to replicate in other parts of the world. City dwellers would have a life saturated with anonymity, secondary relations, atomism, and segmental ties; and this would throw them in a state of sentimental deficit, loneliness, and slim relations of interdependence, culminating in mental illnesses and personality disorders. For these sociologists, urban studies were a triangulation of demography, social organization, and social psychology. That is why they unhesitatingly spoke of psychological variables, without improvising the tests that could establish their fears about the mental states of people.

One of the ideas that dented me was from the observations of Oscar Lewis (1952): Many models of urbanization exist in the world, the Chicago experience of the period of Great Depression (of the 1920s) was one such

example. My studies on Indian cities and my own research investigations in Delhi convinced me of the veracity of this observation. I ornamented my lectures with my studies. Each class was a challenge and a highly fulfilling experience. I read the writings of some Indian sociologists closely, although they were far from being designated as 'urban sociologists'. I think four Indian sociologists have written the best, their writings are insightful, best to read, and they make one think beyond what they have written. My lectures on urban sociology made an abundant use of their writings. Following this approach, I also conveyed to the students the integration of sociological knowledge. The kind of 'fragmented specialization' that existed in other disciplines, where one sub-discipline was unable to converse with the other, was not the story of sociology.

Three of these sociologists whose writings enriched my classes were my teachers: Professors André Béteille, A.M. Shah, and T.N. Madan, and the fourth, the founder of the Delhi Sociology Department, Professor M.N. Srinivas.

Charisma of the Blackboard

The classes had begun after the autumn vacations. Since the Sociology Department of Hindu College had only three teachers to handle eight papers, some of which were divided into two parts, each almost like a full paper, the work load on each one of us was heavy. In addition to the delivery of lectures, the teachers were expected to supervise the students' tutorial writings, council them on how to answer difficult and tricky questions.

I was familiar with the other courses I was teaching, so they required less preparation by comparison to urban sociology. My heart however lay in this course. The annotated bibliographic work I was doing for Professor Rao was indeed a blessing to me. I was able to incorporate newer and fresher readings in my lectures. In fact, I realized later that whilst preparing for these classes I had forgotten the fact that I was teaching an undergraduate class. I was committed to teaching the 'subject', not the 'class'. Moreover, as said earlier, the students of this class were extraordinarily motivated and interested. Not only did they show up for each class but also animatedly participated in the discussions, which happened almost every day, and asked questions. Against this backdrop, I wanted to give them the best, material plucked from different sources and thoroughly mulled upon.

Classes were not large. Those days the total number of seats in each sociology class was fifteen, and above that number, at the maximum two or three more students were admitted. The students were neither undisciplined, nor were they insolent; the only annoying habit of theirs was indulgence in 'side talks', even when the teacher would be addressing the class. If the teacher was tough, burst into a tirade of scolding, or ordered the miscreants to leave the classroom, the disturbance caused was minimal; but I was far from being

rude and strict in that sense. I believed, rather idealistically, that order and discipline should emerge from within and the need of its imposition from outside should be minimal.

The first and second year classes were particularly notorious in this regard. A couple of times in each lecture, I would advise them to refrain from speaking to their neighbours, as it disturbed the entire class, but they would scarcely heed to my mild reprimand. By nature, I always held my tongue back. I would also speak personally to those who disturbed the class reminding them of its 'sacrosanct nature'. Each one of them tendered apology for the incivility, but the moment they were in the class, the first thing they indulged in was to lapse into conversation with their seatmates. It seemed to occur almost involuntarily. I was keenly searching for a strategy to overcome this problem. At last, I chanced upon one.

In comparison to science teachers, their counterparts in humanities and social science make scant use of the blackboard during their lectures. However, exceptions to this were the teachers from the streams of commerce, economics, psychology, geography, and those teaching foreign languages. In the Delhi Department of Sociology, where I was a master's student from July 1974 to June 1976, the only teacher who made use of the backboard was Professor Béteille. Sometimes the teachers drew kinship diagrams on the blackboard, or the one lecturing on quantitative methods wrote on it the formulae. The practice of using transparencies and slides in teaching, which had become common with some teachers in the Department of Anthropology, had not yet arrived in sociology. The teachers brought their notes to the class and stood for the entire duration of lecturing for fifty minutes. Rarely did anyone sit and teach. It was in contrast to what I saw in my College, where many teachers of social sciences and humanities sat in the class. Sociology teachers were no exception.

I never sat in the class. I would always stand, moving periodically from one end of the room to the other. I would invariably carry a wad of notes but rarely looked into it. I tried my best to remember as much of my lecture as I could. I firmly believed that the best teachers have elephantine memory, and it resulted from the concerted effort they make to remember the details of their subjects. Since I had read psychology for a competitive examination that I was keen on taking, I knew that the mantra of good memory comprised the 'four Rs, viz. remember, revise, recall, and recite'. I used to give a lot of importance to the art of speaking, trying to develop the gift of the gab. In the beginning I did not use the blackboard, although I knew its usefulness. On two occasions, when I was a student, I lectured in the presence of my teachers writing a lot on the blackboard: the first was in November 1971, when Professor H.K. Kumbnani, my teacher of physical anthropology, asked me to give a lecture to my own classmates on the history of Mendel's discovery of the laws of genetics, and on the second occasion, I

lectured on types of villages in my first year master's class which Professor Béteille used to teach.

The 'side talks' worried me. I was often derailed from the chain of my thoughts. And then, one day, it was providential, I entered the second year class, kept my notes on the table, picked up a piece of chalk, and started writing on the blackboard. The moment I did this, the class collapsed into what may euphemistically be called 'pin-drop silence'. I turned my neck to see the miracle. The students had all picked up their pens and were keeping pace with my writing on the blackboard. I discovered the magic of this humble appliance, the blackboard. Each class thereafter witnessed the entire blackboard filled with words, neatly written, with arrows, boxes, and circles converting them into flow charts. I would write from one end of the blackboard to the other. The blackboard was my 'pen drive'; if it was not there or of poor quality, like the ones generally seen in municipal corporation schools, I felt handicapped, though I could still lecture, perhaps unlike today's many 'technology-dependent teachers' who are constrained to cancel their lectures when their pen-drives are jammed or the machines refuse to read. If the blackboard was large, as usually is the case in lecture theatres of science departments, I was particularly delighted. Blackboards helped me in systematizing my lecture. As the latter was spread out on the board, with all technical words written up and connections between ideas drawn up, the students did not have a problem in understanding. Whilst their eyes were fixed on the blackboard, they had no opportunity to fall into side talks. Gradually this habit of theirs was weeded out. I was so beholden to the blackboard that I titled one of my inaugural addresses 'The Magic of the Blackboard' in a workshop on 'The Art of Teaching'.

Developing Insights from Fieldwork

I formally read sociology after having done a graduation and a master's in anthropology (1969-74). One of the most enriching experiences the students gain while doing anthropology is of fieldwork. Anthropology teaches them the contrast of the 'book view' with the 'field view.' Through this they learn the distinction between 'what men say' and 'what they do'. Two years of sociology was training in the 'book view'. The curriculum did not have any 'practical work' or a dissertation based on field work, as was the pattern in anthropology; and once, when in the course of a discussion in a class on industrial sociology, I said that the students would have a better view of a factory if they visited one, I received a mild snub from the teacher.

Urban sociology, by comparison to tribal and rural studies, offered a tremendous opportunity to have a field view. Notwithstanding their moorings, the students lived in cities, and they could carry out as many field studies as they wanted. Studying urban society was like "studying one's own culture", but they needed to develop the skill of observation, look at everything carefully, feel and experience the situation with 'empathy', and attempt to write its

'nuanced account'. Often in my lectures, I emphasized the value of the field view; my point was not that they should go hundreds of miles away for conducting observations, which they would have to do in case they wanted to study a foraging community, but for urban studies, they can study their families, peer groups, and neighbourhoods. I often substantiated my point citing the example of Charles H. Cooley whose concept of 'primary group' emerged from the observations he conducted on his own children. So did Jean Piaget (1952), for his theory of learning. In fact, Cooley (see Jacobs, 2006) called his household 'domestic laboratory'.

This inculcated among my students deep appreciation for fieldwork. That their observations were original, virginal, conducted fastidiously, was evident from their tutorial writings and the articles they contributed to the college magazine known as *Indraprastha*. I tried my best to make my lectures situated in comparative ethnography. I thought the key to Claude Lévi-Strauss's success as a 'master theoretician' lay in his unparalleled command over ethnographic details, especially of the Indian communities in the Americas and Canada. A professional sociologist (and also, anthropologist), I would tell my students, should try to read at least one ethnography in a month and a half: 'Ethnography is the soul of our discipline'. So while discussing the social life of Shitayama-cho, the Japanese neighbourhood that Dore had studied, I borrowed examples from Maurice Freedman's (see Skinner, ed., 1979) work on China, besides of course taking illustrations from the writings of James Abegglen (1958), Ezra Vogel (1979), and Chie Nakane (1970). Examples from Indian communities were always referred.

In the nine years, from September 1976 to January 1985 that I spent at Hindu College, I had several effervescent interactions in the urban class. They invigorated my understanding, also encouraging the students compose their arguments properly. I always listened to the students patiently, even when some of them, the belligerent ones, used to cut me off in the middle of my lecture. Sometimes I was completely unsettled in my mind about the answers to the query raised. For me, the class room was a 'laboratory', full of serendipity, full of surprises, and full of anxiety, rendering an incredible situation to create ideas, to throw challenges, and be ever ready to learn from the fresh, the *tabula rasa* brains. *Ipso facto*, I acquired clarity on certain ideas while presenting them before the class, or during discussions or 'question-answer sessions', to which the last five to ten minutes of the class were set aside. Sometimes there were non-verbal expressions of dissent on the faces of students, but never did a discussion turn ugly.

One day, in 1978, when the second batch was being coached in urban sociology, I decided to write each evening an account of the discussion I had in the class, the questions asked and the replies I tried to give. The inspiration for this came from Professor Madan, who once told me that his teacher, Professor D.N. Majumdar, asked him to write each of his lectures after it had

been delivered; all these lectures were later compiled as a book. I wrote on the discussion that took place in the class. Most of it pertained to the third year class as the younger students generally wore a silent posture, but by the time they were in the final year, they became freer with their voice. They participated in the discussions on their own and also on my promptings. My notes on the classes were extremely useful in planning lectures for the subsequent years. I wholeheartedly adhered to the maxim that one must not go to the class without preparation, albeit one's authority over a subject.

All courses I was teaching (and also, not teaching) were dear to me, but over time I developed especial fascination for urban studies, for I saw it as the meeting point of sociological and anthropological theories. Also, the 'field' was not only in one's neighbourhood but also in one's own consciousness. Streaks of urbanity were in the 'insides' of all the members of the class, as they hailed from a town or city, and, if not, they have had sufficient experience of living in urban locations. Besides advising them to keep on pursuing their own observations on aspects of cities, on a couple of occasions I escorted small groups of students on what are today called 'transect walks' to Old Delhi. Once the students of Miranda House, another college of Delhi University where sociology was also taught, also accompanied us. Their teacher, Dr. Khadija Ansari Gupta, had also come. It was a memorable day-long trip, for Dr. Gupta, who was brought up in Lucknow, provided a comparative account of the old cities of both Delhi and Lucknow. We spoke to the local people, went into their houses, collected histories of their households, patterns of spatial mobility, commercialization of the localities, unauthorized constructions, etc. On all collective visits to Old Delhi, I treated the group with the traditional sweetmeat called *jalebi,* from a shop that claimed to have an antiquity of more than a century and a half.

Such visits did not however lead to any productive writing, since fieldwork was not a part of the curriculum. Later, in December 1982, we were able to get some money (Rs. 15 per student per day for visiting a place for educational purposes for a maximum of ten days) from the Ministry of Education, Government of India, and organized the first fieldwork of our Department, visiting Bikaner (Rajasthan). Whilst we visited two villages, one multi-caste and the other of Muslims, I made all the students spend several hours in the town of Bikaner, and try to understand the articulation of the rural and the urban. The students learnt about the unbroken continuity between the town and the villages, which prepared them to question the concepts of 'culture shock' and 'cultural inadequacy'. When a rural dweller came to the town in connection with a work in the court, to sell his cart of wool, to see a film, to buy fancy clothes or clarified butter, he did not feel any deficiency of the dialect and cultural mannerism, and was able to deal with the urban world without being exploited or lost. This experience of Bikaner, or later, of Bhuj (Gujarat), was extremely valuable in teaching the classification

of cities, especially the distinction that Redfield and Singer (1954) made between orthogenetic and heterogenetic cities.

Transition to Urban Anthropology

On 21 January 1985, I became a faculty member of the Department of Anthropology. Since I joined the Department after winter vacations when the teaching schedule had fully settled down and teachers were racing against time to finish the courses, as the practical examinations were expected to begin in mid-March, I was not officially assigned any course to teach. However, one of the senior teachers, Professor J.S. Bhandari, shared one of his papers with me, on tribes and peasants for the B.Sc. (Hons.) final year. I was asked to teach the section on peasants in this paper.

The next academic session (1985-6) began. I was given the graduation papers to teach, as the senior teachers had been teaching all the master's courses for years and did not want to give them up. As it was the annual mode of teaching, the optional papers had to be taken in the beginning of the year, along with the compulsory courses. Since social anthropology had just five teachers, I being the fifth, the other four had to teach almost all the optional courses. Professor Bhandari used to teach three optional courses on tribal India, communication anthropology, and urban anthropology. That year, students opted for all the three. Realizing that the teaching of three optional courses, in addition to one compulsory, will be a gargantuan task, Professor Bhandari decided to entrust me with the teaching of the paper on urban anthropology. He did not know that I had taught urban sociology at the graduation level for nine years and had great fascination for this specialization. I graciously accepted the offer to teach this paper to a class of two students.

The contents of the syllabus were not unfamiliar to me. Overlapping existed between the papers on urban sociology and urban anthropology, but the anthropologists laid more emphasis on the writings of Robert Redfield (see Wilcox, 2004), Milton Singer (1972), Aidan Southall (1973), and Richard Fox (1977). To this bouquet, I later added Cohn's 1996 work.

The core concept in these writings was the 'rural-urban continuum'. If archaeologists were concerned with the emergence of cities, the anthropologists' interest lay in the migration of tribespersons to towns and cities in search of the survival strategies and the kind of adaptations they make to the new locations. In other words, urban sociologists studied the 'urban man', whereas their counterparts in anthropology looked at the 'tribal man in the city'. Urban studies were central to sociology, since it started as the systematic and scientific study of complex, modern, developed, and Western societies. It was also the study of the 'us' – the sociologist studied his or her own society. By comparison, anthropology, to begin with, was the study of simple, 'primitive', pre-literate, and non-Western societies; it was the study of the 'them'. Sociologists started

with the study of cities because this was the starting point of their discipline; anthropologists reached the towns and cities travelling with the tribal people who migrated to these locations. As the tribes were changing so was the subject that studied them.

It was important that I understood these differences between urban sociology and urban anthropology correctly, notwithstanding their similarities, for I feared that I might end up teaching urban sociology to the students of urban anthropology. I needed a sort of 're-socialization': reading anthropological writings and developing lectures on them. To give an example. For the Japanese experience of urbanization, in addition to what I knew, I concentrated upon Ruth Benedict's (1946) work. Later to this I added a lesser known paper that one of my teachers at Cambridge, Leo Howe (1990), had written. Regardless of the reputation of anthropologists as mainly concerned with the study of tribes and peasantry, some of them had written perceptively about towns and cities, some had also carried out surveys on cities, such as D.N. Majumdar (1960) and N.K. Bose (1968).

I spoke to the students on the experiences of the tribal groups of Bihar when they came in contact with the industrial world in the town of Hatia; the lecture was based on the empirical studies that L.P. Vidyarthi and his students (see Sachchidananda and Mandal, 1985) had carried out. The case of the Santal of Chota Nagpur was particularly interesting, for I argued in the class that the efforts of Raghunath Murmu to create a script for his community, a script that is known as Ol Chikki, was made possible because of the urbanization of the area, however incipient it was. All these examples made a strong impact on the students, since they seemed to know a lot about tribes in India. The teaching in anthropology wavered between philosophical-orientation of the subject and the information on the 'unchanging' tribal world. Other social formations were not touched upon, and my earnest duty as a teacher was to apprise them of the different types of societies and the dynamic linkages between them. I placed urban society in the context of tribal and peasant societies, and also the opposite way round. This perspective of teaching societies in a holistic manner and then focusing upon the study of towns and cities was different from the way I handled urban sociology at Hindu College.

Many teachers do not realize the fact that their students talk a lot about them. They make fun of their teachers, mime them, call them by 'funny and teasing names', and in case a teacher displays his bias for particular students, or has a particularistic relationship with a student, he becomes the butt of ridicule. At the same time, the teaching styles of individual teachers are talked about. The reputation of a teacher precedes him. One of the reasons, as I pointed out earlier, of why some courses are opted more than the others is the teacher who is expected to teach. The miracle of teaching two students was such that the following year the entire class of social anthropology students opted to read urban anthropology. The pattern was repeated in the last batch

(1987-8) I taught before I proceeded to the University of Cambridge to read for a doctorate.

The classes of urban anthropology used to be inordinately long. Since anthropology was placed under the Faculty of Science, its syllabus had kept a practical class with each theory paper. Each practical class was of three hours. The 'practical classes' in social anthropology meant that the students would be trained in fieldwork and survey methods of data collection; in addition, they should work on a project, collect and analyze the data pertaining to the research questions identified, then write it up as a short article and submit it as a 'practical record', for which certain marks were set aside in the examination. Since the students had done a full paper on research methods in the first year of their master's, the need to repeat the topics was redundant. A couple of lectures on the precautions that must be kept in mind while carrying out fieldwork in urban societies was enough, and then they would go to their ethnographic landscapes for collecting data. In other words, the practical classes could be profitably used for teaching topics from the theory papers. Thus, the students attended to their project work during the weekends or after the classes. The location they chose for study was closer to their residences; in case they were hostlers, the problems pertained to ethnicity or social organization of the hostel.

In these long 'theory' afternoon classes, for practical classes were post-lunch, I was quite liberal with the topics – I deviated from the main topics, spoke to them about other areas, sometimes long and unending debates were chosen for deliberation, but eventually, after a long detour, I returned to the main topic that was being taught. I remember many such pleasant episodes of 'running astray', as I called them. They were time-consuming, nonetheless contributed profitably to the delineation of new ideas which I tried to write every evening, later incorporating them in my lectures.

The big difference between the teaching of urban sociology and urban anthropology was in terms of the practical training. The students explored new, unconventional areas for study, and produced highly engaging studies. I still remember a project on the parks and gardens, and morning-walkers, another one on a Sufi shrine in Delhi, yet another on the zoological garden. Some projects put forth challenges. There were some projects in Old Delhi that the students pursued where I also joined them in data collection.

One such project was on the community of horse-tenders called *saes*, who described them as belonging to the caste of Kayastha and liberally used the surname Verma, which is generally used by Kayastha, the caste of the scribes. The *saes* had their own street in Sita Ram Bazar of Old Delhi, where they were continuing to live the way they had been living for years. Earlier they tended horses which were harnessed in the cart (*tonga*) – one of the main modes of transport in the city – but with the advent of the mechanized

conveyance, the scenario changed. With the decline in the horse-driven carts, their occupation of supplying horses to the drivers (who were invariably Muslim) suffered a setback. The *saes* moved to other occupations, some educated men sought jobs in government offices, and at that point of time, they started describing them as Kayastha.

It was a fine case of upward mobility in caste hierarchy without any change in their ritual complex or establishing marital alliances with the original Kayastha, many of whom lived in a street that was known after the name of their caste, Gali Kayasthan. One of the *saes* boys became my good acquaintance. He told me that his elders started calling them Kayastha because they knew well that the 'true Kayastha' would never confront them on this issue. Surely, it was a case of upper caste mobility which is different from what Srinivas (1989) called Sanskritization.

Group Teaching

I taught urban anthropology to three batches (from 1985-8) before I proceeded on study leave to the United Kingdom from higher studies. I returned in 1993 and the optional paper I chose to teach was on medical anthropology. This choice was principally because of the reading I had done on medical anthropology at Cambridge. I also attended the lectures that Dr. Gilbert Lewis (1980) delivered on health profiles and illnesses of people of both the tribal and the urban worlds. In the early 1980s, I had read the doctoral dissertation of Professor P.C. Joshi which left an indelible impact on me. The paper on medical anthropology was a common option, which meant that it could be opted by students of both the specializations in physical anthropology and social anthropology. This course gave me an additional opportunity to explore the medical practices of urban dwellers.

I taught medical anthropology from 1993 to 2003, and handed over this course to Professor P.C. Joshi who joined the Department in April 2003. I returned to the teaching of urban anthropology from July 1993 with which I continued till March 2010, when I joined Hindu College as its Principal. There I taught the courses on sociological theory and methods but not on urban sociology. The period of my lien from the Department finished in March 2012 and I rejoined my parent institution. From July 2012, I once again began with the teaching of urban anthropology. For all those years I was away on study leave or lien, this paper was not offered as an option. And, from July 1985 till March 2013, I was the only teacher teaching this paper.

A much-awaited respite came to me when from July 2013, Dr. Chakraverti Mahajan and Dr. M. Kennedy Singh were also listed as the teachers for urban anthropology. Three of us decided to teach the class in the pattern of a panel discussion. The desks in the room were arranged to form a round table. The teachers sat in a row facing the class. That was the first time

in my entire career that I stopped writing in this class on the blackboard. The sole reason was that since there were two other teachers in the class, it would not be an example of good manners if one of them stood up and started lecturing, when the class had to be patterned after the model of a 'discussion group' or 'seminar'; it was not the design of pedagogy to be followed in the M.Sc. (final year) class, the class of senior students.

One of the major issues that greatly concerned me, and also the other teachers, was the stagnation of the syllabuses of different papers. In some departments, the course content persisted unchanged for decades. The process of introducing changes in the syllabus in my university was long, time-consuming, and infested with bureaucratic hurdles. The departments mustered a lot of courage when it came to the revision of the courses. This process was different from what was observed in some other universities where the teacher decided the structure of the course and changed it every academic year.

We were bound by the syllabus because questions in the examination would be based on it. Mostly the examiners in undergraduate courses were from other colleges or could even be from other universities. At the master's level, in small departments, the teacher is the examiner, but one of the duties of the moderation committee that approves the question paper is to certify that the questions asked in the examination are not out of the course. Thus, even if the teacher asks a question on a topic not listed in the course structure, but what he has taught to the class, would be axed by the moderation committee for being out of the syllabus. The teacher may teach new topics which are not in the syllabus, but cannot ask questions on them. Moreover, my experience has been that the students who know the examination system quite well show little interest if a topic beyond the confines of the syllabus is being taught to them, for they know of its improbability of being considered for the examination. I also observed whilst teaching the undergraduate classes at Hindu College, and also at Miranda House where I used to teach some topics to the first year class, that the students were principally interested in getting marks, thus they wanted to prepare from the point of examination and were least interested in learning more. Tutorials written by students from other colleges, which had fetched good marks, were in circulation.

Since the system of internal assessment had been introduced in the university, the students were expected to write tutorials, or take class or home tests, or make a presentation in the class, or follow any other mode of evaluation that the teacher devised. Drs. Mahajan and Kennedy Singh suggested in 2013 when they joined me for the course on urban anthropology that they would send the students articles (by e-mail), recent and on new topics that were not part of the syllabus, and ask each one of them to choose two of them and make class room presentations on each one. Later, the articles were chosen for each student keeping in view his or her interest and the usual class performance. This way was novel for striking a balance between the requirements of the

syllabus and the new material that was available and the students should know about it.

More is merrier. With Drs. Mahajan and Kennedy Singh, it was a new experience in group teaching. Never would a class be missed, for if one was on leave, the others were there to meet the students. It was also an experience in teaching in the mode of a seminar or a workshop. However, not all the students specializing in social anthropology opted to read urban anthropology as was the pattern in the beginning when I started teaching it in the mid-1980s. Many reasons could be identified. The number of teachers in social anthropology increased from four before I joined the Department in 1985 to nine twenty years later. More options could then be offered. Subjects like psychological anthropology, gender studies, anthropology of disasters, and ecological anthropology acquired greater popularity within anthropology.

Urban anthropology, a specialization that became popular from the 1960s, showed the dynamism of anthropology. It tried to question the myopic image of anthropology as the study of the isolated 'primitive societies'. It played the same role that the peasant studies did in the early 1940s, after the Mexican studies that Redfield (1958) had carried out. Before that anthropologists looked for communities that were insulated from the outside world – those which were not a part of the civilization. Urban anthropology showed that one of the directions of change for tribal people was the milieu of towns and cities. A large number of migrants to cities employed in the tertiary sector of economy were the displaced and assetless people from tribal areas. Urban anthropology also showed the value of anthropological methodology (based on a lengthy stay with the community to access the 'within' view) in studying urban settlements, and also that no more is the study of town and city a preserve of sociologists, geographers, and economist.

My last class in urban anthropology was on the rise of communalism in urban India and in other parts of the world. The issues taken up were concerned with the idea of the 'composite culture', and after Benedict Anderson (1983), the role of the print media (and now the electronic and social media) in drawing the boundaries around communities, pitting one against the other, and thus not only fuelling the strains and tensions between people but also creating new ones. I also forayed into the sociology of biases, prejudices and hatred, the so-called 'racial conflicts', and the discrimination and exclusion of communities. Through urban studies I could reach the different niches of anthropological and sociological knowledge; it was mainly because an urban society encompasses the tribal and peasant formations. The opposite however may not be correct, but the process of urbanization is like a python which crawls ahead engulfing the villages and fringe communities. The omnipresence of the urban is what I wanted to grasp and render in my classes and writings.

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