ENHANCING THE PUBLIC VISIBILITY OF ANTHROPOLOGY: AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THE JOURNEY OF A PRACTITIONER

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The old culture concept is moribund. But in its time, it unified the discipline around a concern with basic questions about the nature of the human species, its biological and socially learned variability, and the proper ways to assess the similarities and differences. Ultimately, a discipline draws its energy from the questions it asks.

Eric Wolf (1980)

In July and August, 1943, when the streets of Calcutta were thronged with the destitutes the writer conceived the plan of making a sample survey of these unfortunate people. To ply those persons who had been moving from door to door for a handful of food with questions of socio-economic interest may appear unkind. We have no record of the past famines of Bengal……The writer intended to overcome this deficiency as far as it lay within his humble means. Moreover, he was well aware that the data would of some help at least to the people as well as to the Government, in future schemes of rehabilitation as well as in long range remedial measures that may be undertaken by the Government.

Tarak Chandra Das (1949)

An anthropologist does not merely play the part of an observer in a game of chess. He has a greater and deeper commitment, namely, that in India he has to draw a lesson from what he observes, so that he can utilize his knowledge in the attainment of the egalitarian ideal which our nation has set before itself as its goal.... And this is where anthropology has a very significant role to play and a heavy responsibility to bear.

Nirmal Kumar Bose (1974)

Abstract: Anthropology is an important subject not only for the Europeans and Americans but also for the Indians and particularly, her ordinary citizens. Anthropologists are observers of human beings in groups but not under controlled situations as in a laboratory. Participation in human affairs is not like a scientific experiment but more akin to the journey of an empathetic traveller or explorer who writes for the public. The public visibility of anthropology in India can also be viewed from the perspective of a traveller,and I have written this article in that genre through my teaching career in a rural university of West Bengal in India being drawn by my students in the whirlpool of sensitive public issues, like land acquisition, joint forest management and the relationship of a university community with the local people, which finally led to'campus anthropology'. Ironically, Western public anthropologists still largely remained oblivious to the public anthropology in post-colonial India.

Keywords: Public Anthropology, Land acquisition, Campus Anthropology, Vidyasagar University, Visibility of anthropology.

WHY ANTHROPOLOGY IS IMPORTANT?

Anthropology is an important subject not only for the Europeans and Americans

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but also for the Indians and particularly for the ordinary citizens. Why this is so?

The subject is no less important than History and Geography and it should be taught from the high school level. Hence, there is an urgent need for making Anthropology visible in all spheres of public life. Apart from technical pieces anthropologists should engage themselves in popular writings on public issues in the form of books, newspaper articles, blogs, and social media posts, so that they reach the public domain outside the academia This is because of the fact that Anthropology is a unique subject, which looks at human beings from a bio-cultural perspective.

Human beings are biological animals who live and survive in groups and no two human groups are alike either biologically or socially. Anthropologists not only study these differences and search for similarities behind the differences and also the differences behind apparent similarities, and they honour and value human biological and societal differences. For the anthropologists, there is no hierarchy in human biology and society. There are only differences which they call variation. Suffice it to say that anthropologists also look at human variation not from a static point of view but from a dynamic standpoint. There is a popular misconception that anthropologists only study the small and simple societies, which are known as 'tribes' in remote and distant places. This is not true; anthropologists study all kinds of human societies in all time and space in a comparative and holistic framework.

Anthropology deals with public issues

A subject like Anthropology, which I have described in a simple language in the above two paragraphs has immense public importance in a country like India, which is full of biological and societal diversities interacting in both cooperative and conflicting manner throughout the centuries. How a tribal student of North-East India in the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University becomes a friend of a Hindu student of Tamil Nadu is no less important to an anthropologist than knowing why racism against Northeast Indians resurfaced in major Indian cities during the Covid-19 pandemic because of their physical features (Haokip, 2021). Anthropologists would attempt to compare both the friendship and enmity among groups of human beings by placing the events within the wider context of politics, economy and culture of the localities and regions. Nothing human is unimportant to anthropology and there is no trivial thing in the dictionary of this unique subject.

Unlike other subjects, like History, Economics, Geography and Political Science, Anthropology uses a peculiar method to look at human societies and cultures, which the anthropologists call fieldwork with participant observation. Put very simply, being humans, anthropologists are observers of human beings in groups but not under controlled situations as in a laboratory. The popular maxim, sometime used in anthropology textbooks: "Field is the laboratory of anthropology" is not true. There is no laboratory for the anthropologists, only behaviour of human

beings as it occurs in 'other' societies.[1] The word 'other' is important as well as controversial. It has a colonial and western connotation since Anthropology was born in the era of colonialism partly to serve the interests of the colonialists (Asad, 1973). But remember that along with the study of others, anthropologists also study themselves, and I as an anthropologist, look at myself through a self-reflexive lens.[2]

Public Anthropology in the West

During the last two decades a group of anthropologists in USA and Great Britain have been trying to develop a kind of anthropology, which they designated as 'Public Anthropology', although the necessity of the attention to public issues by the anthropologists were drawn much earlier (Huizer, 1979; Peacock, 1997) along with the issue of the public image of anthropology (Shore, 1996).In his articles and a book published during 2000-2019 Robert Borofsky, an American anthropologist has been pushing the agenda and justifications for public anthropology (Borofsky, 2000a&b;Borofsky, 2002;Borofsky& Lauri, 2019; Borofsky, 2019). He has developed a Center for a Public Anthropology and was among the founders of a journal named *Public Anthropology* (Vine, 2011) and developed a course on Public Anthropology).[3] In his article 'Public Anthropology. Where to? What next?' published in the May 2000 issue of the *Anthropology News* Borofsky informed that with Renato Rosaldo he coined the termand 'the phrase is taking on a life of its own'. But what does this phrase mean? In Borofsky's words:

"Public anthropology engages issues and audiences beyond today's self-imposed disciplinary boundaries. The focus is on conversations with broad audiences about broad concerns. Although some anthropologists already engage today's big questions regarding rights, health, violence, governance and justice, many refine narrow (and narrower) problems that concern few (and fewer) people outside the discipline. Public anthropology seeks to address broad critical concerns in ways that others beyond the discipline are able to understand what anthropologists can offer to the reframing and easing--if not necessarily always resolving of present-day dilemmas" (Borfsky: 2000b:9).

How does public anthropology will address the 'broad critical concerns' beyond the discipline? According to Borofsky:

"For public anthropology objectivity lies less in the pronouncements of authorities than in conversations among concerned parties. "Truth" does not reside in the exhortations of experts nor in the palaces of power. It develops gradually in the arguments and counterarguments of people. One pronouncement by one expert does not suffice. What is required are challenges and counter-challenges. The broader and more comprehensive the challenges, the broader and more comprehensive the authority of the claims" (Borfsky: 2000b:10).

In Great Britain public anthropology also became an issue, and we find in the

pages of *Anthropology Today* a 2009 Guest Editorial entitled 'Making anthropology public' by Nancy Scheper-Hughes in which she asked at the end of her article:

"If anthropology cannot be put to service as a tool for human liberation why are we bothering with it at all? A public anthropology can play its part in all these developments: it has an opportunity to become an arbiter of emancipatory change not just within the discipline, but for humanity itself" (Schepher-Huges: 2009:3).

The label 'Public Anthropology' as coined by Borofsky and his supporters also got challenged in the pages of *Anthropology News*. In its September 2000 issue Merrill Singer wrote a commentary entitled 'Why I am not a public anthropologist'. In the article, Singer refused to accept Borofsky's 'Public Anthropology' different from 'Applied Anthropology' particularly when anthropologists make important contributions in 'many areas of contemporary public concern' which included environmental issues, nutrition, education, ethics, land reform, and community development. In his words:

"For thousands' of applied anthropologists the Borofsky thesis is invalid. Indeed from A for "aging" to Z for "zoos", applied anthropologists are heavily engaged in public work and often comment on pressing issues... However, given that many applied anthropologists already do the kinds of things that are now being described as PA**,** it is hard to understand why a new label is needed, except as a device for distancing public anthropologists from applied anthropology" (Singer:2000:6).

In another perceptively written review article published in *Anthropology Today* Hugh Gusterson depicted how anthropologists in the print media in the US are still being projected as scientists dealing with strange customs in home and abroad. According to Gusterson, the significant researches of anthropologists on the destructive impact of a liberalized economy on local ecosystems and culture have been largely ignored in the popular media, which inevitably doomed the prospective career of a real public anthropology. I quote him below:

"The problem here is not just that most academic anthropologists are not very good at communicating with the public, but that anthropologists are constructed in the public sphere as having little to say about some of the most urgent and pressing political and economic controversies of the day. Through the 20th century a division of labour arose and ossified in the social sciences, and we are now imprisoned by its lingering force.

According to this division of labour, economists have jurisdiction over economics, and political scientists have jurisdiction over politics and war. Anthropologists insisted from the beginning of the 20th century that they produced holistic descriptions of entire societies, including their economic and political systems, but we were only given a permit to do this as long as we confined ourselves to those marginal societies of little interest to academic economists and political scientists" (Gusterson:2013: 13).

Amid all these new pronouncements on public anthropology and the controversies around it, one of the most interesting things about this discourse in USA and Great Britain is the absence of Indian anthropology. I would give three examples.

Example i

The first is Borofsky's book *An Anthropology of Anthropology* which was endorsed by 35 prominent anthropologists from the western countries is actually a narrowly focused case study on American cultural anthropology (Borofsky, 2019).In their 2019 article Borofsky and Lauri only mentioned about Nirmal Kumar Bose just after describing Fredrik Barth who 'beyond writing numerous newspaper articles, participating in a range of interviews' became a 'public presence in Norway'. Let me quote the authors on what they said about Nirmal Kumar Bose:

"Nirmal Kumar Bose was a leading Indian anthropologist who was also active in the Indian freedom struggle with Mahatma Gandhi and was imprisoned in 1931 during the Salt Satyagraha. A prolific writer, he was the editor, from 1951 until his death, of the journal *Man in India,* the director of the Anthropological Survey of India from 1959 to 1964 and President of The Asiatic Society in 1972" (Borofsky&Lauri: 2019:5).

In his article the authors did not discuss the contributions of Nirmal Kumar Bose in the domain of public anthropology in India, let alone the works of any other Indian anthropologist who did painstaking research towards nation building of India during the post independence period.

Example ii

The second example is an introductory article written for the special double issue of *India Review* by Carole Mcgrahanan, which explored the issues around public anthropology in India. Her exploration revealed the current cultural anthropological and archaeological works of the anthropologists in India and the strength of self-reflective ethnographic fieldwork. Despite serious commitment to an engaged and public anthropology in the Indian context we do not find any discourse on the long history of public anthropology practiced by the Indian anthropologists towards nation building in this exciting and informative exploration (Mcgrahanan, 2006).

Example iii

The third example regarding the omission of the contributions of Indian anthropologists in the Euro-American discourse is a book *Anthropology of Our Times: An Edited Anthology in Public Anthropology* by Sindre Bangstad published in 2017. In the first chapter of the book the editor frankly admitted:

"One would therefore be entirely right in criticizing this volume for displaying

a certain level of "Euro-American" ---- centrism in the background of the invited guests, for leaving out important regions and themes on which committed public anthropologists have worked for decades and centuries (Asia including India and China, Australia, the Pacific), and for being insufficiently representative when it comes to gender. Most anthropological works have their limitations, and this one is no exception" (Bangstad: 2017:19).

What the Western anthropologists missed

The pioneering studies done by Tarak Chandra Das on Bengal famine,(Das,1943), social tensions among the refugees in Bengal by B.S.Guha (Guha, 1959), resettlement of refugees in Andaman Islands by Surajit Sinha(Sinha, 1955), displacement of people by industries and big dams by B.K.RoyBurman (RoyBurman,1961) and Irawati Karve and Jai Nimbkar(Karve &Nimbkar,1969) and also the later pioneering policy focused bio-social researches of Pranab Ganguly (Ganguly, 1975) and Amitabha Basu(Basu,1974) at the Anthropological Survey of India and the Indian Statistical Institute did not find any place in the writings of the public anthropologists of the western countries(see for example, Beck, 2009 ;Besteman, 2013;Fassin, 2018; Tauber &Zinn, 2015).[4] In his aforementioned 2019 book Borofsky briefly described the methodology of the Nobel Laureate economists Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo on their randomized trials in Indian villages about the distribution of mosquito nets among the poor Indian villagers (Borofsky, 2019b).There was no further discussion or description on the enormous researches done by the Indian anthropologists on development, displacement, disease, health and nutrition among the poor and marginalized people in the book written by Borofsky. In this connection it may be worthwhile to mention the publication of a special issue of *Indian Anthropologist* entitled 'Anthropology's contributions to public policy' in 2014 wherein the authors demonstrated how the different tools developed by anthropologists became useful to understand the social and political processes of policymaking in India(Pellisary, 2014).We also do not find any discussion by the western proponents of public anthropology on this valuable contribution of Indian anthropologists. In sum, Western public anthropology still largely remained oblivious about the public anthropology in India.[5]

MY JOURNEY WITH PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

Under the above global (or should I call it western) scenario let me narrate my experience of teaching anthropology for more than two decades in a rural milieu under different kinds of urbanizing influences and the transformations that have occurred within my own psyche regarding the aims and ambitions of public anthropology.[6] My personhood developed mainly as a teacher in Anthropology, because I consider myself basically as a teacher, I love teaching than any other work, I often do. I even consider my research findings or anybody's research

findings in anthropology as matters which must be disseminated to the students and the general public, because there is always somebody who wants to listen to your findings and have a right to know what you are doing out of the taxpayer's money. Every researcher has a social responsibility and that responsibility should force an anthropologist to write popular articles, books, pamphlets, give popular speeches on the streets, in various public forums and engage in popular debates. My dream anthropologist in India must learn the art to become an influential public personality at the local level, through his/her writings, speeches, debates, protests and fearless disclosure of the findings from anthropological research.[7] I, therefore, searched for public anthropological works in India and found them in the pre-independence and early post-independence period during which we had nationalist anthropologists who did substantial applied anthropological research on the public issues around nation building[8] (Guha, 2010; 2019 &2021).

Let me now turn your attention to the kind of public anthropology I was introduced to by my students in a rural institution of higher learning named Vidyasagar University. My students at this non-elite University were very much field oriented. They always liked to go to field and observe human activities. It was my students who first took me to the villages is Paschim Medinipur district in which land for industries were being taken over for industries by the then popular communist government in West Bengal. These students critically viewed this land grab among the displaced families of tribals while doing traditional anthropological fieldwork on their marriage, kinship and a body size and shape. Inspired by these students, I later did my doctoral work in the style of an engaged anthropologist on the policy failures of the government in the same area and wrote articles to generate the concern of the academicians on this public issue (Guha, 2014).Two students (a boy and a girl) aroused my interest to study the problems ofjoint forest management in a village near Karnagargh area. They also did excellent work in collecting punishment records from the Office of the Forest Department on 'illegal' felling of trees for making agricultural implements, which led me to study the government's forest protection initiatives from a critical angle(Guha,Pradhan & Mondal, 2000). Another student, and he is now a teacher of anthropology in a college wrote an excellent article in Bengali on the conservation of bamboo groves in a tribal village made possible by cultural norms around family and kinship ties in Paschim Medinipur district. A student of the first batch in my department did excellent fieldwork in a village in the Nayagram C.D. Block on land which emerged in a river as a common property resource and the unwritten prohibitive rules generated by ordinary villagers regarding the reclamation of land for agriculture with the employment of hired labours outside the family that ultimately resulted in an egalitarian ownership of land that emerged out of a natural process (Pradhan, Guha, & Chakrabarty, 1992).Another student did his doctoral work under my supervision on a scheduled tribe named Lodha who were designated as a 'Criminal Tribe' by

the British colonial administration. Earlier, we were asked by the district magistrate of Paschim Medinipur district to make an impact assessment study of the various development inputs given to this tribe for their development and with my students we did that work. Some of our policy recommendations were also being applied by the administration (Panda and Guha, 2015). One of the most thrilling exposure to public anthropology came to my life when I as one of the team members worked jointly with a Delhi based research organisation (Centre for Women's Development Studies) on the oral history of poor rural women in Medinipur. With my students we did our anthropological fieldwork among the women and then we wrote our ethnographic reports which were read before those women. They vigorously gave their feedback on the ethnography and we rewritten our reports. It was a great learning experience for me which we do not encounter in so called university curricula (Guha, 2002).

I have written articles and gave lectures based on the results of these field observations and experiences in many seminars and workshops and also wrote popular articles in the newspapers and literary magazines, which attracted general and non-anthropologist publics. My Ph.D. students have chosen many interesting problems through their observations in the field and I have been continuously writing with them on their problems and they are also presenting papers in various seminars and conferences. My lesson from the fieldwork of my students is that whenever I allowed them to think independently to select their own problems and field sites, good results have come out to engage my anthropology on public issues. I just gave those books, which I found interesting, and papers to read and further inspired them to read new things but never forced them to select research problems. In the classes, I have seen that whenever students were allowed to talk in the class seminars, they talked and I never found any student who did not like the class seminars. My public anthropology grew out of my students and I still love to grow with their ideas.

Another important aspect of enhancing the public visibility of anthropological research findings is writing in the vernacular. In a linguistically diverse country like India anthropologists should not shun away from popularizing the subject by writing in local languages. In fact writing in the vernacular is not an easy task. It entails many difficulties. First of all, if you write in the vernacular and particularly for the educated laypersons, you have to avoid technical terms and jargons and secondly, you will not earn any reward in getting promotions. But if you can write an interesting article on the importance of anthropological observations in a simple language in the vernacular, then it will reach an audience who knows little or nothing about anthropology. Take for example, rainwater harvesting by the local people. I wrote popular articles in Bengali on this subject from an anthropological perspective, which became extremely popular among the public. Is it not doing public anthropology and making anthropology more visible beyond the academy?

For the English speaking world, writing popular articles in English (which her /his mother tongue) is probably less difficult and challenging for a well accomplished and professional anthropologist who is teaching in a university or doing anthropological research in an Institute in UK and USA. I took up this challenge and started writing popular articles in local newspapers and also in little magazines on what I was then teaching in the classes, Kuru disease, sickle- cell anaemia and malaria, kinship, joint forest management and other topics. I also started to write popular articles from anthropological angle after viewing films shown by Medinipur film society. These anthropological articles in Bengali newspapers became popular in the town and in the rural areas of Medinipur district. Along with these, I also began to write popular articles in English on land acquisition, the topic of my doctoral research at least a decade before the Singur and Nandigram episodes in 2006-7(see for example, Guha, 1998).After writing for thirty years, I published a book in Bengali, which is a collection of my anthropological articles written for the general public (Guha, 2018).[9] Believe me or not, through these popular articles in the vernacular and also in English in the newspapers and popular magazines, I still use to get interesting online and offline responses from many ordinary persons outside the academia. Many people and organisations invited me to write in their magazines and talk in popular meetings and seminars, and I also used these opportunities to make anthropology and my research findings more publicly visible.

CAMPUS ANTHROPOLOGY: A NEW CHAPTER IN PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY?

The term 'campus anthropology' is not yet in existence in the literature. Can an anthropologist study her/his own university campus by employing the methods of fieldwork and use of data from the archives? I made an attempt to narrate my anthropological endeavors to study a small university in which I taught anthropology, located on the margins of the habitations of indigenous populations in West Bengal, India. The situation offered me not only a unique opportunity for the micro-level observation of frictions between the elites of the society and the underprivileged sections of the country labeled as 'tribes' but also to engage myself in continuous dialogues with the university authorities as well as the poor people around my university campus. I borrow the metaphor 'Friction' from a recent book by Anna Tsing in which she viewed friction for the diverse and conflicting interactions that make up our contemporary globalized world(Tsing, 2005). The campus of a university in India is not also devoid of frictions. The friction becomes detectable at many levels, which I attempt to describe ethnographically, in the form of narratives flowing out from the discourses of elites and the downtrodden. The attempt to study universities as anthropological subjects may lead to a new sub-discipline of 'campus anthropology' which may have immense implications for a public anthropology in India and abroad. Universities have become inseparable from the sociopolitical

reality of a nation-state. They bring in varieties of socioeconomic groups within the campus cutting across region, class, caste, religion and gender but at the same time universities also marginalize some people particularly the underprivileged by a kind of elitism, which is built into the structure of the university. Ironically enough, these centres of highest learning also champion high ideals regarding the elimination of poverty, illiteracy and various forms of social inequality. The university campus is one of the physical symbols of the elitism of a university. The campus is an enclosed space often encircled by boundary walls, which separates the university from its surroundings. The university administration makes sincere efforts to protect their campus with high walls and security forces but not through participatory management by involving the local inhabitants. Under this background, let me describe the case of the establishment of Vidyasagar University in the erstwhile Medinipur district of West Bengal

Vidyasagar University and its Dilemma

Vidyasagar University was established by an Act passed in the West Bengal State Legislative Assembly in the year 1981. The University Grants Commission (UGC) recognized this University on condition that it should develop in a non- traditional line incorporating subjects, which would have rural development oriented bias. Accordingly, departments like Economics with rural development, Political Science with rural administration, Anthropology with tribal culture, Commerce with farm management, Applied mathematics with oceanology and Library and information science were introduced in 1985-86 academic session. The Vidyasagar University Act in its section entitled "The University and its officers" mentioned in its clause 4(2) that the institution shall have the power to 'to organize specialized diploma, degree or post-graduate courses… in such subjects as Tribal languages, habitats and customs, rural administration forestry… regional resources planning, ecology and environmental studies.'(*The Vidyasagar University Act, 1985*) the clause 4(5) in the Act is more remarkable which emphatically stated that the University shall have the "*power to make such academic studies as may contribute to the improvement of economic conditions and welfare of the people in general and the tribal people in particular."(Ibid)*[Emphasis mine]. With this pro-poor and pro-tribal legislation passed in the state assembly of the Left Front Government (LFG) of West Bengal and taking its name after the famous nineteenth century social reformer Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, the non-traditional University started its journey by affiliating 30 undergraduate colleges from Calcutta University within the administrative jurisdiction of the erstwhile Medinipur district.

The 150 acres of non-agricultural land on which the Vidyasagar University campus was constructed is still being perceived by the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages as a reservoir of common pool resource on which they have

been enjoying customary usufructory rights for several generations. The adjoining villages named Muradanga, Tantigeria and Phulpahari are inhabited by poverty stricken Munda, Oraon and other Scheduled Caste people. On the northeastern side of the campus there is a small settlement of after cure leprosy patients belonging to Scheduled Tribes and Castes who live a highly marginalized existence in the town and represent one of the weakest sections of the locality. Closer observation reveals that the people around the campus of Vidyasagar University do not present a homogeneous entity in terms of economic and sociocultural features but they share at least three interesting characteristics, which are important for the present discourse. These characteristics are enumerated below:

1. All these groups of people used to enjoy *usufructory rights* of grazing, firewood and other non-timber forest product collection and rights of passage through this land without getting any resistance from any quarter before the establishment of Vidyasagar University. The present campus land was a kind of open access resource and /or common pool resource to these groups of people.

2. Since the establishment of the University all these groups of people are experiencing resistance from the University although the responses towards this resistance are not similar for all the groups.

3. All these groups of people distinguish themselves from the University community, although no specific term has been found to emerge yet in the vocabulary of these people to designate the paired opposition: "University Community" vis-à-vis the "Local Community". The Levi-Straussian binary opposite does not seem to be very much helpful in this context (Guha, 2001).

We and them

Under this broad background let me present my own interactions with some of the tribal villagers of the locality for whom our campus is their commons. Let me begin with an old Munda villager of Muradanga. His name was Raghunath Singh. He was about sixty years old when I first met him in the year 1987. He was a dark skinned lean man who was strong enough to pedal a three-wheeled cycle rickshaw with passengers in its seat in Medinipur town. It was his occupation since he could not engage himself in cultivation. Raghunath was a man of wit and humour. He used to tell stories of the past. He narrated his childhood when this Gopgarh area was covered with big sal and other trees and people from the Medinipur town did not dare to come to this place even during the daylight hours. This was a heaven for the large snakes, wolves and jackals and occasionally also used to roam in this area. 'The land of your university was never used for cultivation'. Raghunath went on saying 'It is the grazing field of our cattle, our women collect fuel from your ground and our children play here. The Rajas of Gop gave this land to us. We defended our

village from the attacks of the robbers with our bow and arrow and village unity.' 'But' Raghunath used to continue 'now your guards are creating problems for us'. He frequently lamented over the rapid weakening of the collective strength of the inhabitants of his village. I later learnt that Raghunath's sons did not look after him properly. After four or five years, he suddenly became much older and could not pedal the rickshaw anymore. Raghunath started to beg on the streets of Medinipur. Every Sunday morning he reached our campus limping with the help of a stick and collected some coins from the residents of the University quarters and then used to go to the town. After not seeing him for some weeks, I enquired with a young man of Muradanga and came to know that Raghunath had died a few days ago. In 1997, few years after the death of Raghunath, the university authority employed a Calcutta based private security agency to protect and guard the campus from the 'encroachers'. The university authority had also started a plantation of akashmoni, eucalyptus, sirish and some fruit trees on the western residential side of the campus. The cost of employing of employing the security agency was Rs.4,80,000/- not a negligible amount for the University. The main task of the security guards was to drive away the grazing animals of Muradanga and Saltola. The people of the neighbouring villages adopted interesting strategies to continue the grazing of their animal. on this traditional common pool resource base. One strategy was to play a hide and seek game with the security guards and the other was to send the grazing animals in night to the campus land when it was very difficult for the security men to locate the animals. The proposed plantation of the University however did not materialize due to various reasons. For example, the grazing animals ate up many saplings; some were also taken away by the villagers any some died for the lack of proper care and protection. There was no attempt on the part of the University to involve the tribal villagers in the protection of the plantation of the University although a specific proposal was submitted by the Anthropology department of the University in this regard.

I would now narrate the anecdote of 'Saltola', which is the name of the settlement of leprosy-affected patients who have been living by the side of the boundary wall of the University on the east. If one comes through the metal road of Tantigeria to reach Vidyasagar University in the night one may not even know the existence of this group of people who have planted a good number of indigenous varieties of trees. They do not have electricity, latrines and supply of safe drinking water from the municipality. They are of course voters and their settlement is known to the general public and the district administration as a settlement of lepers or *'kusthapally'*. They also graze their cattle and collect the fuel from the University campus. In course of my anthropological encounters, I came to know about the indigenous name of this settlement. The inhabitants of this place call their settlement by two interesting appellations, one is *'thutapara'* which means 'a hamlet of physically handicapped people' since 'thuta' in spoken Bengali means a

person whose limbs, particularly the hands have become non-functional. *'Thuta'* symbolizes a person affected by leprosy. This has a derogatory connotation and many people of the town designate this colony by this term and the inhabitants also use it in their daily conversation although they would not usually mention this name of their settlement to a newcomer. The other name by which the inhabitants refer to their settlement is 'Saltola'. Saltola means 'a hamlet where on can find sal trees' *(shorearobusta)*. And here comes the anecdote. In one evening, while I was discussing the problems of getting *patta* (a deed of right over land awarded by the state government to landless and poor families) for the families of this settlement with its inhabitants, a very energetic cultivator, Nagen Ari who belonged to the Sabar tribe narrated an incident. Let me translate Nagen's narrative in verbatim: "When I came from Gokulpur to this area there was a very big *sal*tree at this place. We used to enjoy its cool shadow and our children played beneath its huge canopy. It was about twenty years ago. But one day few men from the Tantigeria panchayat office came to this place and told that they would hack down the tree for using its wood to make the furniture of their office. We objected by saying that you won't get much wood from this tree because it has already been bored by the termites." Nagen continued, " The panchayat men didn't care since they were unable to understand this from outside. They brought their men and felled the tree but not much wood was obtained. Our prediction was correct." Then Nagen said with an emphatic smile. "You see, although the tree has gone but we call this place 'Saltola'. which means that this was the abode of the huge *Sal*." Three years ago, the district administration made a move to rehabilitate the inhabitants of Saltola in another place in Tantigeria, which is about 1 kilometer from Saltola. The district administration seemed to be more interested to shift these families from near the University campus than giving them *pattas* on this land and the general attitude of the University community was not also favourable to these after cure leprosy patients although, we have not found any individual in Saltola currently affected by the disease. We carried out a socio-demographic survey at Saltola and another adjoining colony in 1995 among the 74 households in collaboration of an NGO who runs a hospital for the leprosy patients. We have found that there were 100 deformed persons (47 males and 53 females) who were once affected by the disease and no individual below twenty years of age was neither found to be deformed nor affected by leprosy (Bhuniya, Guha and Das, 1996). With the effort of the district administration 12 families from Saltola were shifted in a resettlement colony and all these families now lament for leaving Saltola since in the resettlement colony they could not continue the village life of Saltola. Moreover, very recently in 2004, the district administration has given land *patta* to the families whom they could not resettle. Here we may recall one interesting incident regarding the attitude of the University community towards the marginalized families of Saltola. In the year 1997, the members of the University community decided to organize a procession

on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th year of country's Independence and they had also resolved to distribute some fruits and sweets to the poor people of the locality. Interestingly, neither Muradanga nor Saltola was selected for this purpose. Someone suggested the name of Saltola but it was rejected on the ground that many members of the University community might not like to visit a 'leper colony' on such an occasion. On 15th August 1997, the procession, under the leadership of the then vice-chancellor Professor Amiya Kumar Deb passed by the side of Saltola (I also participated in it) and traveled some important parts of the Medinipur town and finally donated the fruits and sweets to the authority of the district hospital for its distribution to the patients.

FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL

I wrote up an ethnography of my university campus in which I was engaged in carrying out dialogues with the marginalized people around us as well as with my university authorities to convince them regarding the participatory management of the space delimited as our 'campus'. I also made sincere attempts to make my story heard by my anthropological colleagues in India and abroad through speaking in seminars and sending my ethnography to journals for publication. I sent my paper on campus anthropology to *Current Anthropology* and *Anthropology Today*. Both declined to publish it but I learnt a lot from the criticisms of the editorial boards of these journals. Then after presenting it in a conference organized by the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) held at the University of Western Australia, Perth in 2011, I submitted a longer version for publication in the journal *Anthropological Forum*. The comments of the reviewers were excellent and what was most interesting was that the journal wanted me to place my story in a global context of the marginalization of the indigenous people by the expansion of university campuses in other places and countries. I picked up the cases of two American universities, Columbia and Pennsylvania and found interesting stories which I narrate below.

Displacement by Columbia University

The displacement of local communities by the expansion of the campus of Columbia University dates back to the 1960s. In a more recent period during the Fall of 2002 Columbia University officially announced its plan to build a new campus in the Manhattanville area of West Harlem in New York City. It was a seven-billion-dollar development plan against which the diverse local communities mainly comprising people of colour, lower and middle income groups, as well as a section of the university's own students, began to protest and formed a coalition to preserve community, since according to them Columbia University's expansion plan would displace thousands of low-income families and business groups and jeopardise the local cultural and ethnic diversity which the university ironically publicised to attract

students from all over the world[10] The protest of the local community against the expansion of Columbia University continued through 2002 to 2007 and the local government of Manhattan (Community Board 9) joined hands with the protesters and is currently struggling to convince the New York City authorities and Columbia University to adopt the 197-A plan, which proposed a range of actions that would ensure an environment-and-culture-friendly resettlement programme for the local low-and-middle-income residents, along with the growth of the university. On April 27 in 2006 the Coalition to Preserve Community organised a rally and press conference which moved from the gates of Columbia University's main campus to its administrative offices and denounced Columbia's aggressive tactics in trying to displace the residents and business owners in the expansion zone who did not want to sell out their property to the university.[11] The case of Columbia University revealed that there is ample scope for studying the relationship between a university and its neighbouring communities in the context of campus expansion by the anthropologists from an interdisciplinary perspective, involving urban planners, environmental scientists, legal experts, historians, political scientists and urban sociologists.

The Case of the University of Pennsylvania

The expansion of the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) presents a story different from Columbia in regard to the campus versus community relationship. The displacement of the local community by the university began significantly in 1872 when Penn was faced with a massive influx of students after the Second World War. The University of Pennsylvania expanded into the neighbouring community with the aid of the federal slum clearance programme; areas around the university were designated as blighted and the eminent domain of the state was used for the redevelopment of the surrounding city. The Federal Housing Act of 1949 allowed Penn to rebuild West Philadelphia. Interestingly, in a recent period, a well documented unpublished senior Honours thesis in American History, at Penn written by Elyse Sudow, searched for the causes of the poor relationship between the University of Pennsylvania and the residents of West Philadelphia. In this thesis, Sudow attempted to find an explanation of this 'poor relationship' other than displacement of the neighbouring communities by the expansion of Penn. According to Sudow:

"…the theory that displacement due to Penn's physical plant expansion in the 1950's and 1960's was the root cause of the conflict appeared far too simplistic an explanation for such a complex problem" (Sudow: 1999: 76).

The alternative explanation advanced by the author is also very interesting from an anthropological point of view. The author traced the roots of social strain between the members of the University of Pennsylvania who were predominantly White and the surrounding Afro-American community. I quote again:

"Tension between the two sides has developed a mutual misunderstanding, and in many cases, White universities impose their own value system on the surrounding community. In response the communities skirting urban universities, most of which tend to be majority African American, feel dominated and pushed around by the university" (Sudow: 1999: 78).

DISPLACEMENT IS NOT THE LAST WORD

Universities do not always push out people. They also involve them. I also found a case of one US University, which involved its surrounding community while developing the campus and that was interesting for me. It was a new programme developed by Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin which went on to involve the surrounding community in the process of campus expansion. Unlike Columbia and Pennsylvania, Marquette University has made significant efforts to improve the relationship between the university and its surrounding community.

Two examples

Marquette is an old and inner city university in USA which opened its doors in 1881 and moved to its present location at the turn of the last century. The university expanded in the usual manner like other urban universities in the USA through large scale acquisition of buildings and open spaces. The goal was to create an expanded and cohesive campus separate and distinct from the surrounding community, and it was largely achieved. (Farbstein and Wener, 1996). This period of expansion was not accompanied by any collaboration with the local community. Marquette became a powerful neighbour, like Columbia and Pennsylvania with an appetite for community property. But, then during the early 1990s student enrolment at the university gradually declined at the time of an increasing crime rate in the city and the poor relationship of the university with its neighbours. However, things began to change during 1991 when a Jesuit Father Albert DiUlio joined as president of the university and formed a research team to use the intellectual resources of the university to improve the conditions of the neighborhood. The team consisting of the faculties and students of the university gathered data to identify and assess the value of all the properties surrounding the university campus and the rehabilitation costs of displacement to be caused by the expansion of the institution. This new and innovative initiative was designated as 'Campus Circle', which was sponsored by Marquette University as a neighborhood revitalisation programme. One important dimension of Campus Circle was to develop academic courses having service learning components. Marquette established an Institute for Urban Life and with the support from U.S. Department of Education provided academic and practical training for students to work for the surrounding community. I quote from Farbstein and Wener:

"Professor Eva Soeka, director of the programme, points out that, while other universities view service learning as volunteerism, theirs is a "significantly different model" with a "focus on an academic nexus; that is, complete integration into the curriculum." Over one thousand students have been placed in projects since spring 1994 through dozens of courses as varied as "Urban Politics", "Philosophy of Peace," "Family Communication," and "Native Peoples of North America." Placements include schools, jails, political offices, community centers and hospitals" (Farbstein and Wener: 1996: 37).

The project Campus Circle however was also charged with the allegation of evicting low-income tenants and a paternalistic attitude towards it's largely minority non-white neighborhood. But, by and large the Marquette experiment in developing the idea of Campus Circle was unique. The university won the prestigious Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence in 1995.

In this connection, it may be relevant to mention the case of Manomanium Sundaharnar University in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu. According to a report published in a national daily, this small and young University has set an example in conducting action oriented research projects by involving the local people in many rural development schemes which include organic farming, wasteland development and acquaculture. Dr.N.Sukumaran, Head of the Centre for Environmental Sciences of this University said in a training-cum-seminar programme in the Agricultural Science Centre at Kapgari in West Medinipur: 'The key to our success lies in the fact that the faculties and the students of the centre regularly meet the locals to understand their problems and solve them'(The Statesman, 1998). Interestingly, two faculties of Vidyasagar University from its Botany and Zoology Departments were sent to M.S.University to get an exposure on organic farming through vermiculture in collaboration with the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi. Ironically, neither the tribal women of Muradanga nor the women of Saltola were involved in developing vermicompost by the Botany and the Zoology Departments of Vidyasagar University. My paper on campus anthropology was finally published in *Anthropological Forum* and if you give a Google search you will find my paper (Guha, 2013).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would say that learning anthropology with the students and writing in the popular print and online media was complimentary as well as a challenging experience for me. I still wish, if my students could read more storybooks, practiced to write popular articles, used the computer to read, write and participate in the social media on anthropology and did more fieldworks in their own localities on their chosen problems, and if the teachers always encouraged them to search for new problems on which anthropological knowledge gained from the classrooms

could be applied, then Human Resource Development in the learning of public anthropology would have been much more interesting that the way they exist at present in India. The public visibility of Anthropology as a subject dealing with public issues can only be enhanced by putting people first and students and the media can become excitingly useful in this journey of a teacher. At least this is my experience of teaching anthropology and doing research in a lesser known university in India. Ergo, I echo (in my own language) the wonderful ideas of Clifford Geertz's narrative (Geertz, 1999) in his famous Charles Homer Haskins lecture: the life of an anthropologist is after all is a life of learning.

Notes

1.   For a recent interesting discussion one may read the first chapter of Tim Ingold's book *Anthropology: why it matters* (2018). As regards field and laboratory Ingold moved further to view fieldwork as an activity where the anthropologists take others seriously and receive knowledge from the people whom they study.

2.   Cris Shore, however observed that anthropologists though skilled in describing the identity of others find themselves 'deeply troubled and confused' when they are given the task of defining their own identity (Shore, 1996).

3.   The editorial board of the journal of *Public Anthropology* is dominated by the anthropologists of USA and European countries with only 4 members of from Peru, China, South Africa and Japan out of 43 members (https://brill.com/view/journals/puan/puan-overview.xml? contents=editorialContent-48382. Accessed on 11.10.2021).

4.   The potential of the biological and social-cultural anthropologists towards nation building in post-colonial India was highlighted by T.C.Das and S.S.Sarkar in their Indian Science Congress lectures in 1941 and 1951(Das, 1941; Sarkar, 1951). Amitabha Basu, a student of Das and Sarkar carried their legacy and raised the issue of moral commitment of the Indian anthropologists towards the people from whom we collect our data (Basu, 1974).

5.   Interestingly, Frederik Barth in his interview entitled 'Envisioning a more public anthropology' taken by Rob Borofsky on 18th April 2001 mentioned that there was more 'public interest' in anthropology and anthropologists in India, Mexico Brazil ,and in Scandinavia(Barth 2001). In the rest of his interview Barth, however did not elaborate on this statement (Center for Public Anthropology 2001 https://courses.lumenlearning.com/

suny-culturalanthropology/chapter/barth/ accessed on 03.10.2021).

6. While accompanying Prof. Ramkrishna Mukherjee on the occasion of the P.C.Mahalanobis birth centenary celebration at the Indian Statistical Institute in a car,Prof.Mukherjee asked me about the level of urbanization at Vidyasagar University! I frankly told Prof. Mukherjee that Vidyasagar University was established to cater to the needs of a rural society. Prof. Mukherjee immediately shifted the discussion. This was one of my first urbanizing influences from an eminent sociologist of India. Long after this incident, I used to get frequent shocks whenever I hear Kolkata based intellectuals to refer to our university as 'Medinipur' or 'Midnapore University' instead of Vidyasagar University!

7. My teacher Prof.Surajit Sinha has the most lasting and prominent effect on my teaching and research career at VU, through his personal communications. Prof.Sinha always encouraged me to write in local Bengali newspapers and advised me to play the role of 'bridge' rather than that of a 'buffer' between the 'local' and the 'global' dimensions of anthropological knowledge systems.

8. Tarak Chandra Das is still being remembered in Indian anthropological circles for his meticulous ethnography of the sociocultural life of the PurumKukis of Manipur. Many Indian anthropologists take pride in the fact that T.Das' Purum ethnography was used and quoted by the British anthropologist Rodney Needham in his prize winning book which defended Levi-Strauss. But it is an irony that T.Das' path breaking anthropological study on Bengal Famine of 1943(Das, 1949) is hardly mentioned as an example of a pioneering work on the study of the miserable condition of the dispossessed Bengal peasantry during the last phase of the British rule in India. I never heard an anthropologist to mention in any seminar or public meeting that the major part of Das' book was submitted to the Famine Inquiry Commission and the Commission adopted some of the suggestions advanced by T.Das (see the Preface of *Bengal Famine*). Even the Nobel winning economist Amartya Sen had just given the reference of T.Das' book without mentioning the originality of Das' work in terms of its theoretical and policy relevance (see Sen, 1999). Incidentally, *Bengal Famine* was published by the Calcutta University in 1949 and out of print since long. There is no effort till today on the part of Calcutta University to reprint this pioneering work in a new field of anthropology.

9. The book has been reviewed in the most widely circulated Bengali daily named *Ananda Bazar Patrika*on 27.05.2018.

10. Columbia's West Harlem Expansion: A Look at the Issues 2010. http://www.columbia. edu/cu/cssn/expansion/infosheets/scegbooklet (short-edge).pdf. Accessed on 21.06.2012.

11. (stopcolumbia.wordpress.com/past-struggles/2012. Accessed on 17.07.2012).

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