

Perspectives on Tribal Society: A Tribute to V.K. Srivastava's Anthropological Journey

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Abstract

The prolific contributions of V.K. Srivastava to anthropology have shaped our understanding of humankind and cultures. His commitment to anthropological discourse is really admirable. The paper entitled “**Perspectives on Tribal Society: A Tribute to V.K. Srivastava's Anthropological Journey**” is relevant to contemporary anthropological wisdom. In this book, the author highlights the conceptual perspectives on contemporary tribal communities in India and also their institutions and practices, which are part of their daily lives. This book, edited by V.K. Srivastava, was published by Serial Publications, New Delhi, in the year 2013. The book has two sections where twenty articles on different concepts and theoretical foundations for tribes in India. The book concluded by emphasizing the importance of a multidimensional approach to tribal research.

Keywords: Humankind, Culture, Wisdom, Tribe, Anthropology.

INTRODUCTION

The tribute paper may offer a wide range of perspectives, research techniques, about tribal societies in recall of Srivastava's anthropological journey. The author clearly explained about Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, a prominent figure in medical anthropology at the University of Delhi, who had made significant contributions to the academic discourse through research articles and presentations. In 1991, he provided a comprehensive overview of medical anthropology, reviewing international and national works. His paper on

tribal health in Madhya Pradesh explored genetic disorders, infant mortality, and reproductive issues among PVTGs. Lifestyle diseases are connected with religion and social class, as exemplified among the Raika-Rabari community. During the webinar on COVID-19, he discussed the impact of pandemic on tribes.

Prof. Srivastava's thought-provoking insights on mental health, including a country profile and an analysis of formal and traditional healing systems, showcase his holistic approach to the field (Agarwal, 2021). Prof. Guha highlighted the legacy of Vinay Kumar Srivastava, an influential figure in Indian anthropology. Srivastava questioned

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the ethical aspects of anthropological studies, pondering whether researchers have the right to study communities unwilling to be observed. The article delves into Srivastava's thoughts on seeking state support for such studies and the potential vulnerability of communities to external exploitation. He recalls Srivastava's support for his work on Tarak Chandra Das and the Lodhas, showcasing Srivastava's commitment to encourage anthropological research. Srivastava's contributions to *The Eastern Anthropologist*, particularly his advocacy for a national anthropology rooted in local realities and people-centric fieldwork, are highlighted. The article emphasizes Srivastava's call to integrate anthropology's strengths and avoid uncritical reliance on Western models, emphasizing a nuanced and ethical approach to the discipline (Guha, 2021).

The author explores the concept of renunciation, inspired by Vinay Kumar Srivastava's work on religious renunciation. Focusing on the Catholic Angami Naga in northeast India, Joshi examines priesthood in relation to indigenous notions of abstinence. Srivastava's idea that renunciation goes beyond Brahmanical practices is applied to the Angami, who stand outside the Hindu caste system. Joshi delineates a spectrum of renunciation possibilities among the Angami, contrasting Brahmanical forms with ordained abstinence by Catholic priests and nuns and traditional ritual-based abstinence practiced periodically by Angami householders. The article delves into specific instances of mandated abstinence related to sacred rituals, village founding, and hunting, highlighting the variability and context-specific nature of renunciation in different cultural settings (Joshi, 2021). The author pays tribute to the late Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, reminiscing about his humble demeanor and scholarly expertise.

Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava, known as VKS, began his academic journey in anthropology, receiving degrees in the field and Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. He taught sociology at Hindu College, Delhi University, and later became a prominent figure at the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. Prof. Srivastava's diverse teaching covered anthropological theory, urban anthropology, medical anthropology, and tribal societies. Beyond academia, he contributed to national committees on OBC sub-categorization and de-notified communities. Prof. Srivastava served as the Director, Anthropological Survey of India and made significant editorial contributions to academic journals. His legacy encompasses

extensive academic achievements, administrative roles, and valuable contributions to anthropological research (Srivastava, 2021). The author provides a comprehensive overview of Prof. Vinay Kumar Srivastava's life and contributions to anthropology. It covers his academic journey, starting from undergraduate studies in anthropology to obtaining a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. The chapter details his teaching career, including roles at Hindu College and the University of Delhi, where he became a prominent figure in the Department of Anthropology. He also highlights his administrative roles, such as serving as the Head of the Department of Anthropology and Director of the Anthropological Survey of India. The chapter pays tribute to Prof. Srivastava's vibrant academic outreach and his significant impact on the field of anthropology in India (Mitra, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prof. V.K. Srivastava: Early Life & Career

He was born on December 3, 1952, in the Kayastha family of Old Delhi, to B.B. Srivastava and Shanti Devi. He had completed his primary education at the Anglo-Sanskrit Victoria Jubilee Higher Secondary School at Daryaganj. He had received training in sociology and anthropology. He was greatly influenced by the eminent sociologist Prof. André Beteille. In 1972, he had completed a B.Sc. in Anthropology from Hans Raj College, New Delhi. In 1974, he completed a Master of Science (M.Sc.) in Anthropology from the University of Delhi, specializing in physical anthropology. He had completed a master's degree in sociology in 1976 from the University of Delhi. In 1976, he began his career as a lecturer in sociology at the Hindu College, New Delhi. In 1983, he completed an M.Phil in Chinese and Japanese Studies from the University of Delhi.

In 1985, he was posted at the University of Delhi as a lecturer in social anthropology (1985-2017). In 1994, he received his doctorate in social anthropology from Cambridge University, UK. He joined as Director of the Anthropological Survey of India. (2017-2020). He had started his academic career as a lecturer and retired from prestigious institute, Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata, as a Director. He was associated with the Anthropology fraternity for more than 40 years. He is a student-friendly teacher who is really passionate about his subject, which shows in his teaching in the classroom. Prof. V.K. Srivastava

passed away on December 23, 2020. It is a great loss to the anthropology teaching community in India.

His Research Interests & Publications

The renowned anthropologist Prof. V.K. Srivastava focuses his studies on social structures, cultural dynamics, and indigenous societies. His books explore cultural diversity, identity, and the effects of globalization on traditional civilizations, delving into the nexus between anthropology and modern challenges. The works of Prof. Srivastava have a major contribution to the understanding of society and anthropological discourse. His research interests are based on different dimensions such as religion, caste, tribe, ecology, health, livelihood, customary law, anthropological theory, ethnographic fieldwork, anthropological methodology, urban anthropology, medical anthropology, and public anthropology. He has published 21 books and 126 manuscripts.

His Contribution towards Anthropology: Special Reference to India

The contribution of Prof. V.K. Srivastava to anthropology is highly recommended in the current anthropological literature, particularly in the Indian context. The book "Tribes in India: Concepts, Institutions, and Practices," edited by V.K. Srivastava, offers an in-depth perspective on the several tribal populations that contribute significantly to India's cultural fabric. This book explores the details of many tribes, dissecting their social structures, traditions, and way of life. Prof. V.K. Srivastava clearly mentioned that the book was dedicated to institutions such as Hindu College and the University of Delhi, which taught me the art of being and teaching.

This book covered twenty articles. The first chapter of the book was written by a great scholar, Prof. K.K. Mishra, under the title "Tribe" and "Tribalism," where the author highlights the concepts of tribe and tribalism. In the beginning of the writing, the author notes that looking into the diversity of people belongs to tribal groups. It is very difficult to describe the clear definition of the term tribe. He also notes that many anthropologists prefer the term "ethnic group" for "tribe". He also clearly defined the concept and definition of "tribalism". According to Gulliver, tribalism may be understood as a conscious effort that a tribal community makes to maintain its "basic structure" and "local autonomy," notwithstanding the changing circumstances in its economic and political life. The last paper in this volume, authored

by V.K. Srivastava, carries into the domain of legal anthropology, a field that has unfortunately been overlooked, despite the significant role anthropologists played in documenting and understanding customary laws during the formative phase. The editor himself wrote three articles in this book. We focus on three articles by Prof. V.K. Srivastava, i.e., A Critical Reading of the Draft of "The National Tribal Policy (A Policy for the Scheduled Tribes of India)". (Tribal Anthropology), On Tribal Economy and Society (Economic Anthropology), and Understanding Tribal Issues of Deprivation and Poverty: A Prolegomenon to Legal Anthropology (Legal Anthropology). In his first article, he pointed out that anthropologists are nervous about the issue of defining the term "tribe."

He pointed out the issue that sometimes it is very difficult to differentiate between castes and tribes. He further pointed out that the key criteria and characteristics affirmed by the Lokur Committee for scheduled tribes are really relevant today or not, and what do primitive traits mean? He also noted that the terms primitive and savage were used by the classical evolutionists for simple societies were widely circulated among anthropologists. He contends that the draft of national tribal policy is not immutable. It examines the issues of tribal life in detail, points out all the aspects related to tribal life, and suggests certain points for further study. He also pointed out that it should be critically examined to assess its effectiveness. He discussed the relationships between the tribal and economic systems while providing a critical explanation of various community perspectives on ecological sustainability. The shifting nature of tribal economies from substantive to formalist within the economic system is a topic covered by economic anthropologists. He also quoted the concept of Karl Polanyi, i.e., a formal and substantive economy, where one is based on the principle of maximization of profit and the other on the fulfilment of one's needs.

Today, economic anthropologists are concerned with the study of changing tribal realities and the differentiation of the economic system. The customary legal structure safeguards tribal interests and guarantees their well-being and advancement toward sustainability. He critically analysed why development benefits are not as fruitful as they should be in real terms instead of institutional hierarchy. He also highlighted the reason why institutional structure cannot give concrete results: there is an absence of interest among the functionaries who plan and execute the

programs for the development of the tribals. He also suggested that sociologists and anthropologists should investigate the dynamic, harmonious interplay between law and culture.

Legacy of Prof. V.K. Srivastava: Special Reference to India

The legacy of Prof. V.K. Srivastava includes a substantial amount of ethnographic research that offers insightful information about certain cultural groups in India. His involvement in education could have an everlasting legacy of influencing students and the upcoming generation of anthropologists. His involvement in advocacy and policy work was commendable. Prof. V.K. Srivastava always tried to highlight the essential needs of tribals and suggested appropriate solutions from his anthropological wisdom. He was affiliated with three prestigious institutions: the Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata; the Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi; and Hindu College, New Delhi. It is highly recommended to learn about Prof. V.K. Srivastava's administrative legacy and endowment in the subject of Indian anthropology. Prof. V.K. Srivastava was an anthropologist from India who holds a prominent position in Indian administration. He popularized anthropology in India, so his legacy will persist, serving as a continued source of inspiration for many of us.

CONCLUSION

The concluding remarks serve as reflections on paying tribute to the legacy of Prof. V.K. Srivastava, who enriched our understanding of tribal societies. Prof. V.K. Srivastava's research on tribal societies

really inspires future anthropologists to continue exploring tribal societies, learn from their wisdom, and work towards a more inclusive and interconnected world. The future generations are inspired by Prof. V.K. Srivastava's anthropological journey, which becomes an anthropological knowledge house. "Tribes in India: Concepts, Institutions, and Practices" is a worthy publication that helps to bridge the gap between academic studies and general readers. This book is quite beneficial for someone who wants to have a thorough knowledge and perspective analysis of this distinct culture within the nation, by studying the articles where sympathetic representation of Indian tribe's is presented.

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