



Department of Anthropology

University of Hyderabad

AnthroPost



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Dear Reader,

Greetings from the Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad. I hope you are safe and doing well in these difficult times.

The idea of an e-newsletter came to mind rather suddenly when I was thinking about what is the best way of reaching out to teachers and students of different universities, those anthropologists working in NGOs and other institutions, our alumni and others associated with our department to inform matters relating to our department. Though the Department has been functioning for some time now, since 1978, we did not have any mouthpiece for disseminating the activities and achievements of the Department. The faculty regularly receive queries from Alumni seeking news and updates from us. Our research students as well as students of Master's programme often express that they would be happy to learn more on publication and improve their skills of academic writing. We are keen to address the concerns of our Alumni and current students of the department

particularly. I floated the idea of an online newsletter with my colleagues in my very first faculty meeting after I took over as Head of the Department in July, 2020. The immense encouragement I received from them resulted in not only giving a final shape to the idea quickly, but also to release the first issue in just about 4 months of my first meeting with them in this regard. Here you are reading the first edition of ***Anthropost- the newsletter of the Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad.***

You may think, what do we at the department aim to achieve through this newsletter? Well, we have conceptualised *Anthropost* as a creative space for those associated with our department. We hope our Alumni use this space to tell us what they have been doing in their lives and how they have used anthropology in their careers. For Research Scholars and students in the Department, this is a space to express their views and insights into Anthropology.

Anthropost, will keep you updated with the activities in the

Department. Student, Alumni and faculty achievements such as publications, awards, academic visits or anything interesting, you will find it here.

Anthropost will inform the diversity of research in our department. Two-three research scholars who are about to submit their thesis or those who have just submitted their thesis will inform the findings of their study and their important contribution to the discipline. The students of Masters' programme will be encouraged to write book reviews or give summaries of any 'impactful research' or on their field work experiences.

The constructive critic of our alumni on the content of our courses and their feed back on how we make our discipline more relevant to the contemporary situations and enhance placements of our students is also something that we wish to share with all through the *Anthropost*.

Anthropost will be available online on the Department of Anthropology, University of

Hyderabad website. Do visit the site regularly for updates.

Anthropost is surely a collective effort of all the faculty in the department. However, I must specially thank my colleague, Dr. Sipoy Sarveswar and Ms. Deepika, the student coordinator, for their support in bringing out this first issue. We all wholeheartedly give full credit to Dr. George Tharakan C for the name, *Anthropost*.

I once again wish you and your family good health. Look forward to your active engagement with *Anthropost*.



Prof. BV Sharma
Head, Dept. of Anthropology
University of Hyderabad

Experiencing Anthropology

Anthropology- A Tryst With My Destiny

When I passed out of the University of Hyderabad with a Gold Medal around my neck and a Post-graduate degree in Anthropology way back in 1992, little did I realize that this discipline that I mastered would change my life forever. Change, it did, and how!

As a strategic communications consultant and a filmmaker, I have worked closely with many multinational giants, departments, and ministries in both the National and State governments and multilateral agencies and civil society organizations. Sitting across the table with the clients or brainstorming on various options, maneuvering through the various choices and strategies in designing communication blueprints or scripting corporate films, handling capacity building seminars or navigating government programs or identifying communication bottlenecks, it was my training and grounding in anthropological method, thinking and knowledge that has helped me seamlessly handle all the tasks. I also started mentoring aspirants for the coveted Civil Services in Anthropology the very next year I passed out of the University. The light lit by my teachers in the University was kept alive by thousands of my mentees, many of whom today serve our nation in different capacities across the world. I have had an opportunity to mentor doctors, engineers, management graduates, post-graduates, and even Ph.Ds. Dealing with such a cosmopolitan group of people and helping them understand the nuances of anthropological research and theory has kept me in touch with the goings-on in the discipline even after almost three decades after my formal training.

Anthropology, for me, is not just a mere subject; it's a way of life. It is my *raison de etre*. It changes the way we look at the world; it gives us an opportunity to look at things differently compared to the uninitiated; it gives a pair of eyes through which our beautiful world with so much diversity is a completely different place than what we normally perceive it to be. Anthropology, of all the things it can do, makes you celebrate life, culture, and humanity. A tall structure built is only as strong as its foundations. This is all possible only because of the mentoring that my teachers in the Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, have provided for me. As the adage goes, a good teacher does not provide answers but helps a student ask the right questions. My teachers did just that, and that changed my life forever.



Kartic Godavarthy

Founder, Prabodha Training and Consulting
Director, Grey Scale Media Solutions Pvt. Ltd.

Anthropology-Beyond Academics and Research

Corporate sector is one area, where students of Anthropology are good fit to navigate, and pursue careers of excellence. Corporate strategy is a sub discipline of management education, where learnings of Anthropology synergies the efforts of the big corporation's especially navigating the cultural contexts of various stake holders in the business context. Anthropology as a cultural fit in marketing management pursuits:

Marketing Elements "Need creation, client/ customer weducation & delivery" product or a service or an offering, and importantly Customer Experience Management- CEM or abbreviated as CX

Primary Ingredient of Marketing: "Content" is the king which drives and impacts the ROI of Marketing to a great extent.

The synergies between Anthropology & marketing Concepts are significant

Anthropology concepts such as Malinowski Theory of needs, Participant Observation, descriptive ethnography, is synonymous to marketing concepts such as Maslow hierarchy of needs, case study methodology, content Marketing & management concepts. There is a significant overlap of target group such as Anthropology primary targets segments being a society/community, whereas management targets include aspects of market, and marketing targets are segments of the market which includes aspects of society such as culture & behaviour.

Comparative Ethnography has all the ingredients of concept of competitive strategy based on Michael Porter model tailored around 4P's.

My Career path as an example: As a student of Anthropology from UoH, navigated my career through research discipline at primary research level on various government policy initiatives and implementation with ICMR and Planning Commission. Have worked on Monitoring & evaluation of policy implementation.

My Job functions helped to learn on Entrepreneurship challenges SME/ Micro enterprises and policy interventions at CIIE Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad.

I am able to get opportunities in IT companies such as Hewlett-Packard, IBM, Tech Mahindra & now Xerox Corporation, and consistently scaled up the career in strategy & marketing discipline. I learnt in the process, **"Marketing is an abstract discipline which needs more narratives, perspectives and present ability. It is in abundance in Anthropology discipline and can be used better by marketing teams of MNC's and corporates"**. Students of Anthropology should open up and embrace opportunities beyond academics and social research, it not only enhances the scope of discipline, but also helps students to improve learning for better earning and growth.



Bhaskara Venkatesh

Corporate Consulting Professional
(Associated with CIIE IIM A, ICMR, IAMR, IBM, HP, Tech Mahindra, Conduent)

Events and Activities

- * Adhering to the requirement of the prevailing COVID situation, the academic session for this semester is being conducted through virtual classes for IMA, MA, and M.Phil. Students of the Department. The students have adapted to this mode of teaching, and the overall response has been very encouraging.
- * The Department organized a webinar titled '*Prof. F. G. Bailey's memorial lectures*' on 17th July 2020 brought together speakers and participants from various departments and institutions across the country. More than 150 participants overwhelmingly attended the webinar.
- * To mark the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9th August, a timely webinar on 'COVID-19 Pandemic and the Indigenous Peoples in India' was organized by the Department.
- * Our faculty member Dr. Apparao Thamminaina was part of the research team that carried out the project (UGC facilitation Study) titled '*Impact of COVID-19 and pandemic (HINI Virus)*' and submitted the report on 30th June 2020.
- * A project on '*Dropouts among Particularly Vulnerable Groups (PVTGs) of Telangana*' was conducted by Dr. Apparao Thamminaina, and a report was submitted to the Tribal Cultural and Research Institute, Tribal welfare department, Government of Telangana in July 2020.
- * Prof. B.V.Sharma and Dr. Alok Panday have taken up a new project titled '*Antibiotic and vaccine use in poultry in Telangana: Towards understanding the socio-cultural dimensions of acceptability of new generation vaccine formulations against poultry pathogens*' Under the IOE program of the University Of Hyderabad. With a budget of Rs. 30.36 lakhs of the project will be carried out during the period 2020-2023. This is a collaborative project by Prof. B.V.Sharma with Prof. Sharmistha Banerjee and others with the title: '*Development of new generation vaccine formulations against human and poultry pathogens and survey of its possible socio-economic implications in healthcare*' has been initiated with a budget of Rs. 230 Lakhs.
- * Research scholar Anil Gopi's article '*Creating Pantheon -Nature, Colours, and Beliefs: A Visual Narrative of Kaliyattam in Kerala*' found a place in Visual Ethnography, published by University of Basilicata, Italy.
- * Research Scholar, Anakha Ajith's article title '*In the Pursuit of an Identity: Analysing the Case of Male Health Care Providers*' found a place in Masculinities and Social Change Journal.
- * Research Scholar, Gopika J's paper '*Interplay of Culture and Horticulture among the Savars of Antdhra Pradesh, India*' (Co Authored by Prof. BV Sharma) is published in Journal of Anthropological Survey of India.
- * MA student Marupaka Sai Shankara Sumukhi received Rupees one lakh fund from the University of Hyderabad to attend Summer School at London School of Economics and Polity (LSE) for the course '*Human Management and Employment*'.
- * Current MA Student- Hangarga Vishal and students from the recently passed out batch Athira Kamal (Currently pursuing her MPhil in department) and Adita Ghosh, have qualified for the UGC JRF.
- * Current MA students Saggalla Niveditha, Thota Madhan Mohan, Anjana Nair (from recently passed out batch) have cleared the UGC NET in the recently announced UGC Results.
- * There are currently 32 Research Scholar in the Department, and out of this, 24 candidates have fellowships awarded by various funding agencies such as UGC (JRF/SRF) and ICSSR and ICMR.
- * During the 2020-21 admission process, the university received 710 applications for the MA program in Anthropology. The seat application ratio was 1:23. Compared to last year's applications (557), this year, there is a 29.26% increase in the applications received by the Department. This is a remarkable achievement by the Department. No other department or centre in the School of Social Science, UoH, has recorded this kind of exponential growth during last ten years. Integrated Masters in Anthropology was also very encouraging, as the 14 seats are filled in the academic year.

The students, research scholars and faculty of the department, and other readers of Anthropost may send their suggestions for improvement of the Newsletter. Please send your e-mails to anthropost@uohyd.ac.in

Ongoing Research

Anthropology of Caregiving

My thesis is titled '*Dynamics of Nursing in India: The Study of Home-based Care in Kerala*'. This study revolves around the stakeholders involved in the home-based nursing industry that has been in vogue in the study area for the last few decades. The data for the study were collected during 2018-19 from three categories of people viz. the care providers, owners of nursing agencies who supply the care providers, and clients who avail the services. The combined sample size is 200, out of which 150 are the care providers. These care providers are referred to as 'home nurses' in the study area since they are live-in care providers. The research aims to analyze the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of the home nurses and to look into their prior work experiences; to examine the training imparted to these nurses by the nursing agencies, understand their recruitment and retention strategies; to understand the reasons for employing the home nurses and the selection criteria taken into account as provided by the care receivers; to identify the various tasks performed by the home nurses, their roles in the patients' therapy management, and the task segregation that exists between the formal and informal caregivers; and to assess the nature of relationships of the caregivers and the care receivers (both the patients and their families) and to understand the difficulties nurses face in the work. Though the system works towards health care, the activities performed by the caregivers many a time transcend the boundaries of the care plan framed by the nursing agencies. Through the above mentioned objectives, this study intends to look at aspects like the meaning of caregiving as perceived by the different stakeholders and the significance of a care partnership, thoroughly understand the functioning of the home care industry in the state, and thus contribute to an Anthropology of Caregiving.

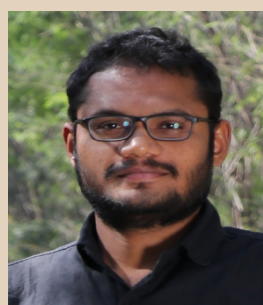


Anakha Ajith

Ph.D. Research Scholar
Dept of Anthropology
University of Hyderabad

Anthropological Understanding of Organ Transplantation

My thesis is titled as '*Fortitude to mitigate suffer; save and prolong the life: A study on human organ transplantation*'. Organ transplantation is a product of scientific and medical technological inventions, which is provided to prolong the lives of human beings. The significance of organ donation involves medical ethics, religion, and society behavior and beliefs. The participants included in this study are living donors and their families, deceased donor family members, recipients, near relatives, transplant coordinator and the other medical fraternity. The period of study was 2018-2019 and it was conducted in Telangana region with the special reference to Hyderabad. The study aims to identify the donors' awareness levels on transplantation of human organs and tissues; such as the legal and ethical aspects and health and medical risks involved in transplantation of organs which they donated or propose to donate; to understand the organ donation by the deceased donors and the role and expectation of family members in successful donation. to understand the perceptions regarding any physical and behavioral transformation consequent to transplantation by the recipients of organs and the explanatory models for the perceived transformations; to study the awareness and preparedness for organ donation among the members of different ethnic groups in a cosmopolitan city; communication channels employed by the stakeholders in diffusing the knowledge of organ donation; socio-religious influences, myths and beliefs practising by the donors; aspects which are considering at the discussion in the process of taking final decision to donate.



T Pavan Kumar

Ph.D. Research Scholar
Dept of Anthropology
University of Hyderabad

Ongoing Research

Anthropology of Special Education and Visual Impairment

My doctoral research under a broad title, *Special education and visual impairment: An ethnography of selected schools in Telangana state* looks at schooling, disability, parental behaviour and policy responses – all through the ethnographic lens of a curious anthropology student.

At the outset, it is an oblivious term ‘inclusive education’, used to refer to the system of education imparted for children with disabilities admitted along with other children in a regular educational set up, that drew my attention. As I reviewed the literature, I realised that there are very few anthropological studies on education of children with disabilities and their choice making in schooling, especially in the context of special education. I then began exploring special schools established for children with visual impairment in Telangana state. Some of these special schools were, indeed, established well before Indian Independence, but that history is for another occasion.

The special schools for visually impaired children have been selected based on their location and the nature of administration. It is an ethnographic study designed to understand the relevance of special education for children with visual impairment and the role they play in their lives. The objective is to gather the data hitherto unknown to an ethnographic eye. Every school has a unique setting, and I had to reinvent myself to keep the conversation smooth and relevant to the context each time I changed the field location. To be specific, I was engaging with multiple field locations, each requiring a distinct use of methods, if not a complete Reinvention of methodology.

There were 370 children across the studied schools, among whom 208 (56%) were boys, and 162 (44%) girls. A total of 64 teachers were interviewed, among whom 48 were non-disabled, and 16 disabled. Besides collecting the basic details from all the participants (children and students), I conducted in-depth interviews of a select few from them. The data gathered therein, be it hard facts or personal conversations, are self-revealing.

Among other things, one of the lessons is that there is a need for anthropological research in India to re-socialise itself when it comes to deciphering the issues of school education of children with disabilities. Unlike the social sphere undergirding urban studies, village studies, studies on simple societies, etc., the interplay of multiple actors embedded in special schools offers anthropology a vast scope to understand the hidden traits of cultures, an all-time endeavour of the discipline. It may not, then, be an exaggeration to state that if there is one promising field of study for the 21st Century Anthropological research, it is the anthropology of special schooling.



A Mahalakshmi
Ph.D. Research Scholar
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Learning the Art and Science of Anthropological Fieldwork

Learning to Unlearn: Experience in the Field

Imagine this; you work every day for two years building up your knowledge- reading countless articles, monographs, theories and practical guides, learning to unlearn your prejudices and to let go of the superiority of self to make yourself open to 'other' ideas, philosophies and worldviews. All of this, in preparation for the moment you get to step out of the classroom and into the field. And imagine, after all this training, you still feel utterly incompetent and befuddled when you finally are in the field. That was what my first fieldwork was for me. But then, it was also enlightening.

For every anthropology student, the first fieldwork is a rite of passage. In December 2019, following a tradition as old as the department itself, the department of anthropology led its latest batch of students to our first full-fledged fieldwork under the guidance of two well-experienced anthropologists. Before venturing into the rural villages at the foothills of Nallamalai Hills in Telangana, I was an ambitious, slightly arrogant post-grad who bowed down to the power of the written word. Afterwards, I came back to the comfort of university life still ambitious but a lot less arrogant and more than a smidgen less reliant on the authority of the written text. To say that the experience of living among the Chenchu tribe and learning their lives was humbling, would be an understatement. I went in, equipped with my bookish knowledge, expecting the people to bare their joys and worries and sorrows to a total stranger yet unwilling to offer them any of mine.

There are concepts in anthropological fieldwork that demand us to behave in certain ways in the field, to be culturally relative, to be reflexive of ourselves and to be objective where we can. However, when the moment of truth came, I found it challenging to draw the line between researcher and participant, and between stereotype and fact. My handful of weeks in the field taught me that human groups could be as diverse and dynamic as the creatures that constitute them, and it isn't honest or ethical to assume that you know everything about them. Or to believe that what you know is constant.



Athira Kamal
M.Phil. Research Scholar
Dept of Anthropology
University of Hyderabad

Picture Courtesy Ms. Sreemanvi Maddela

Learning the Art and Science of Anthropological Fieldwork

Living the Field

In many ways demonstrating what you have experienced becomes delightfully easy than living in the moment. I am no different when I state this, especially after bagging a chance to be placed along with classmates during my MA Dissertation. We did not have much choice as it was a mandatory paper to get our master's degree.

The place designated to carry out this work was in hamlets of Dhararam and Rayavaram villages under Lingala Mandal of Nagar Kurnool district, Telangana, in December 2019. The fieldwork was carried among the Chenchus. We had few pre-field seminars and meet-ups where professors guided and helped select a specific theme and build on it. By this time, you feel to get a taste of what interests you (theme-wise), and if you are lucky enough, you would also be looking forward to ways of getting all the data required with your varied interactions.

Academically speaking, without fieldwork that is regarded as the heart of anthropology, it would be quite irritating to retrospect and look back in the future. Having lived the moment, I now can say with a sense of pride and joy that I truly deserve the master's degree in anthropology. I say this not because I am a 'straight-A' student, but because the opportunity to conduct fieldwork and submit a dissertation of our findings makes one feel worthy of being a student of anthropology. Furthermore, the concepts and methodologies that you have learned theoretically in the classes for three long semesters finally come alive during the fieldwork. The chance to plan, work, and organize as a team makes you learn from your peers as well as provide you an opportunity to weigh in to introspect yourself.

The field would offer different contextualities that surprise you no matter how prepared you are with textual knowledge. The field offers a fresh yet living experience that makes you question most of your pre-determined and preordained perceptions built about people and societies. There would be by, and large at least a few people that you would get attached to even though you belong to different worlds, and that is the turning point where the discomforts of not living a comparatively lavish lifestyle would start draining down. Friendship and other relationships get a new meaning. It is not always bliss to be surrounded by people and to pose questions that might be uncomfortable to get a piece of information from. That is where the humour and the intelligence of your companions come into play. A sense of being a part of the whole gives you an utmost sense of satisfaction. Furthermore, I end this by stating 'in many ways demonstrating what you have experienced becomes delightfully easy but not as worthy of living in the moment.'



Alakananda Kolipaka
MA in Anthropology (2018-2020)
Dept of Anthropology
University of Hyderabad

Impactful Research

Beyond marriage in a global cultural economy

Marriage as a social institution has been an operative aspect of research with emphasis on the norms of the predominant groups such as lineages, clans, tribes or castes and thereby portraying societies as structurally or functionally coherent entities governed by these rules. In a globalised cultural economy, the institutions of kinship, family and marriage are also affected by globalisation and technological changes. Such a situation demands a shift in the emphasis from norms to individual responses to these changes. The book *Marrying in South Asia: Shifting Concepts, Changing Practices in a Globalising World* edited by Ravinder Kaur and Rajni Palriwala is a guiding work for scholars interested in relooking at marriage from the perspective of what marriage means for those within and outside the institution. The authors discourage a unidirectional framework from accounting for the dynamics in marriage and family and instead call for viewing it as a process largely affected by globalisation. Assumptions that equate dominant practices to norms must be abandoned to understand the unconventional, the unheard, and the underrepresented. Gender and agency could be effective analytical tools as well as observable phenomena while making sense of the new, whether it is contemporary match-making, sexuality, and relationships or notions of relatedness that fall outside the purview of marriage and family (yet affected by these institutions). Then, a comprehensive outlook of the institutions of marriage and family may develop, which is inclusive of open relationships, transnational families, and the dismissal of the heteronormative narrative. Agency is informed by processes of globalization, migration and this is reflected in the newer expressions of relatedness when individuals do not want to depend on shared understandings or norms but would go beyond them to negotiate with situations around them. Drawing from the framework suggested by Kaur and Palriwala, I attempted to understand pre-marital cohabitation, conventionally popular by the term- live-in relationships of heterosexual couples in urban India as an expression of the agency with respect to marital choices. Through the snow-ball sampling technique and extensive use of semi-structured interviews, fieldwork was carried out in New Delhi-NCR and Bengaluru to map perceptions of conjugality for individuals in live-in relationships and in turn, how these perceptions impact marriage as an institution.

Martin Savransky, *The Adventure of Relevance: An Ethics of Social Enquiry*, with a foreword by Isabelle Stengers (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 254 pp.

Given that the review is going to appear under the section of 'Impactful Research', the book under review was felt to be having the appropriate content to contribute towards what the former may mean. In the current academic scenario where the relevance of social sciences is being questioned, Savransky's speculative reconstruction of an ethics of social inquiry aims to induce a different care of knowledge in the contemporary social sciences (p.90). This is in contrast with what he calls an 'ethics of estrangement', prevalent in much contemporary social science, where bare facts are differentiated from matters concerning society (i. e., as nature and culture) which prompts scientists to resign to the task of engaging the publics for social sciences to stay relevant. This implies that the public in question are passive receivers of the 'knowledge' that (social) scientists alone possess. He contends that it is social inquiry itself which needs to 'invent', so that it may answer the situated question of 'how is it here, that, things come to matter?'. For the author, this question of relevance isn't something that can be specified in advance. Knowing in advance precludes the question by having a ready answer even before an inquiry. So, relevance is an achievement rather than being a given.

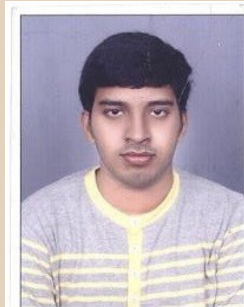
Once it is acknowledged that how things come to matter is something which is unknown, it becomes an 'encounter' with 'heterogeneous bodies, objects, movements, questions and senses of relevance'. Objects of inquiry (human or non-human) are no longer passive but active 'objectors' to the question of relevance. This can help in the reconceptualization of objectivity which some social scientists have come to suspect. In savransky's words, 'Objectivity is reclaimed by conceiving objects of inquiry as vectors of risk' (p. 97).

A concrete encounter of the above mentioned kind is discussed by the author in chapter 3 where the obligation posed to the anthropologist K. Hetherington (2013) by his informants to take note of how 'beans' matter. The anthropologist had to 'invent a manner of responding to the situation' (p. 118) that was (were) encountered. Instead of assimilating the informants' concerns about killer beans as representations, Hetherington invented how beans matter in that milieu.

To sum up, though at times the author appears to be downplaying human agency and sometimes the logic of arguments seem circular, this book is a carefully argued one which is worth persisting with. I would recommend it to all students of social inquiry, the STS (Science and Technology Studies) and Anthropological theory colleagues particularly so.



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A. G. Bandagi Theja
Ph.D. Research Scholar
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Impactful Research

Obeyesekere, G. (1981). *Medusa's hair: An essay on personal symbols and religious experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Obeyesekere admits that the seed for *Medusa's Hair* comes from an unusual surge of revulsion and fear that he feels at the sight of the matted hair of an ecstatic priestess at the temple of Kataragama in Southern Sri Lanka. It evokes in him the image of Medusa's serpentine hair, which in psychoanalytic theory symbolizes castration anxiety. It is from this germ of thought that Obeyesekere develops his thesis, although the matted hair is only the departing point for the enquiry. The author relies on extended case studies of nine Sinhala Buddhist ascetics associated with the temple—seven women and two men. The arena culture related to the Kataragama temple—a curious, often battling mixture of Tamil Hinduism and Sinhala Buddhism such as fire-walking, hook hanging, trance and possession and prophesying—is not just the backdrop to the analysis but one aspect of the symbols themselves. The book deals with the transformation of these ascetics from patients suffering spirit attacks to ecstatic priests who utter prophecies under trance.

Medusa's Hair is an intellectual exercise, first and foremost—a bid to push the line of enquiry. Its aims are twofold—to “articulate the symbol to the cultural, social and psychological dimensions of the existence of [the] informants” as well as “integrate Max Weber's view of culture with Freud's theory of personality” (p.2). The anthropological enquiry of the time viewed public symbols as having no unconscious, motivational significance for the individual or the group, which was at the opposite pole of psychoanalytic theory that considered all symbols to be motivated by unconscious drives. Using the matted hair of three female ascetics as the point of departure, Obeyesekere illustrates how certain symbols can act both at personal and cultural level and are renewed each time an individual manipulates them to “objectify” their inner states. The author succeeds in illustrating that while all symbols arise out of the psyche (psychogenetic), personal symbols, due to the element of choice and flexibility inherent in them, are more readily available for manipulation by the individual experiencing conflict. *Medusa's Hair* succeeds in illustrating how the individual, culture, and society draw from each other in the creation and maintenance of certain class of symbols. The individual and her inner conflict are at the centre of this drama, which is transformed into a cultural idiom that is mutually intelligible at the level of culture and society, which legitimates the experience of the individual. Obeyesekere provokes a line of enquiry which sees beyond the textual or conventional meaning or divorcing the symbol from the social and institutional context and the actors.

Yet, while the book makes a convincing case for how symbols operate within the nexus of individual, culture and society, the same unfortunately cannot be said about the aim to reconcile Weberian view of culture and Freudian personality theory. The author sets out by expressing his displeasure at certain anthropologists portraying culture “as if they were all one piece”—the dogmatic assumption that Western notions and categories of culture are universally and singularly valid. It is therefore ironic that a similar dogmatic fallacy arises as Obeyesekere moves on to the psychoanalytic study of the deep motivation of the ascetics, particularly in the second half of the book. Even if one were to willingly suspend the entire concept of falsifiability regarding the existence of universal drives, it remains that the author relies heavily on psychoanalytical categories and assumption such as regression to infantile states and oedipal conflicts and desires to explain individual religious behaviour. So, while the book brilliantly showcases how theory can link personal, cultural and social aspects of a symbol, its thesis on the psychological dimension is restricted by the reliance on Freudian categories. Ultimately, *Medusa's Hair* accomplished what the author sets out to do—offering rich, compelling ethnography and provoking the reader to see beyond the readily available theoretical frameworks.



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