An Anthropological Perspective on Indian Society

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By

N. Sudhakar Rao

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I dedicate this work to V. Suvarnalatha (1955-2018), my beloved wife, trusted companion, and trusted friend who followed me till her last breath and shared my joy and sorrow. Without her unconditional selfless love, support and help at all times, I would never have been what I am today.

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PROLOGUE

Though I stepped into the field of social or cultural anthropology accidentally, the circumstances that came around continuously created a deep desire in me to know more about my fellow countrymen. India has a unique place in the world chronicle of having been built on an ancient civilization with a history of foreign immigrants at different periods and the British colonization at the end. Born in a South Indian village, I got educated in a world-famous Hindu temple town till post-graduation after high school in the village. Then, it so happened that I lived in several places, spending adequate time in Western India and North-Eastern India. The first-hand experiences of life gained in these parts of the country, where different cultural and linguistic populations have lived for ages, and having conducted anthropological research among them, I have published several research papers in different academic journals. At this moment, I thought of bringing some of my research and publications together as an anthology, hoping it would benefit the scholars interested in Indian society.

Indian society is unique with diverse ethnic and linguistic populations but underneath is there a common cultural thread running through all this citizenry that has given rise to a mosaic of Indian culture. In this volume, I have focused on a tribe, called Yanadi with whom I spent a little over four years (1976-81) at a stretch in my initial professional career after my post-graduation study in social anthropology, after an initial stint of a short period of a social and economic survey of slums of Hyderabad city, for less than six months in 1976. Yanadi tribe is, by and large, a semi-nomadic community found mostly in Nellore but spread over in neighbouring districts in Andhra Pradesh state, but I lived with them on an island, Sriharikota from where the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) launched its satellites; quite an ironic situation in which stone-age man and scientists of modern technology share the same physical space. Then I moved on to writing about a famous tribe, the Naga in North-East India, known for their political vibrancy and are well advanced in education and economy, having their own state, Nagaland, in the federal Indian union. Though I did not live in Nagaland, having worked with some Naga in a government office, colleagues in the universities and taught students, including Naga, for two decades, and reading monographs and research

papers about this tribe, I found them a very fascinating population. Here, I reflect on the fictional writings of Easterine Kire, who won accolades for her writings from an anthropological perspective. Though natives outside India started writing about their culture either in the form of fiction or ethnography, the Indian tribal scholars have just started writing themselves, which I have termed as 'selfi-graphy'.

India is known to the anthropology world for its large population living in villages, structured in the caste system, caught up in complex cultural and religious traditions, modernity and so on. In this regard, my next focus is on a multi-caste village which is close to my heart, for I came into this world and spent my life for sixteen years as a rural boy, but grew to adulthood in town and lived in big cities such as Hyderabad. However, some aspects of the village that are discussed here pertain to the village I did fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation on the power relations across castes and gender from an insider's perspective as well as an outsider's.

The fourteen chapters in this volume can be divided into two sections in this volume: studies of tribe and caste. The first section consists of eight chapters, and it begins with the Yanadi Action Research Project, one of the few studies ever conducted in India, an anthropological action research, where field data and application of the same for the social and economic development of the community. It has a consciously developed philosophy, research and action taken that engaged anthropologists in the lives of Yanadi for a prolonged period. They became mediators between the tribe and development agencies as change agents. From this research emerged the chapters on worldview, their dances and entertainments from a structuralist perspective, kinship and communication patterns. However, the chapter on life-world takes an existential perspective. The last chapter in this section is on Naga analyzing the fictional narratives from the perspective of practice theory for examining traditional social and gender inequality.

The second section, consisting of six chapters, discusses essentially the functioning of social and economic power in the caste society; power is generally considered in the Indian context in robust forms of brutality. The chapters demonstrate it works more often in subtle ways, and the absence of resistance does not mean the consensus of the victims to the dictates of the dominant. The silent forms of resistance are invisible and their reflection can be found even in innocuous songs, dances, stories, rituals and myths. It brings home the significance of fertility in the patriarchal society, besides the internal contradictions concerning gender and the untouchable castes.

The section points out the negative impact of modernity on the traditional weavers, which led to their suicides. An argument has been made here against the consensual model that is built on the incorporation of native tribes into the dominant Aryan ideological caste society, which ensured the economic security of lower castes and tribes. The existential perspective suggests that political and economic dominant groups not only manoeuvred ideology in their favour but also employed coercive as well as subtle strategic forms, subjugating physically weak women, and subduing numerically few non-cultivating or less intensive cultivating ethnic groups into their fold, and the latter gave in to the dominants for their survival. The subtle forms of resistance reflect this process. Following the same theoretical existential perspective, the final argument is that subjective and objective considerations are required to understand Indian society when social margins, particularly the untouchable castes, are considered.

N. Sudhakar Rao

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It gives me immense pleasure and honour to gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the Editors of the following reputed academic journals or their institutional frameworks that permitted or allowed the reproduction of my research articles already published in their esteemed journals. These are Human Organization, The Eastern Anthropologist, Indian Anthropologist, Contributions to Indian Sociology, Sociological Bulletin and Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences. The Editors are kind enough to convey their written permissions, for which I remain indebted to them. Without their act of munificence, this volume would not have seen the light of day.

In the same vein, I would like to place on record the largeness of Cambridge Scholars Publishing for patiently waiting for the manuscript for months after the deadline; I am grateful to them.

FOREWORD

THOMAS GIBSON
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The essays collected in this volume constitute over forty years of anthropological research and practice conducted by Sudhakar Rao. They chart the evolution of Rao's theoretical and methodological approach over the years. A bit of background concerning Rao's training in anthropology will help put these writings in perspective. The graduate program in social and cultural anthropology at the University of Rochester was established in 1963 and produced seventy doctoral degrees before the last ones were granted in 1998. It was an unusual program in that the core faculty were all Americans who had been trained in England. Alfred Harris and Grace Harris earned their undergraduate degrees in cultural anthropology at the University of Chicago in the early 1940s under the mentorship of professors who had been trained by the British social anthropologist A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, who taught there from 1931-1937.

The Harrises married in 1948 and then went to Oxford to pursue doctoral work financed by a Fellowship from the Colonial Social Science Research Council. Radcliffe-Brown was appointed professor of anthropology at Oxford in 1937, but had retired in 1946. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, and Max Gluckman were all still teaching at Oxford in 1949. Gluckman left Oxford in that year to take up a professorship at the University of Manchester, and Fortes left the following year to take up a professorship at Cambridge University. In 1950, the Harrises embarked on two years of fieldwork among the Taita of Kenya and, upon their return, went to Cambridge to write up their dissertations under Fortes. They returned to the U.S. in 1956 and taught at a number of institutions in the Boston area before Al Harris was hired as an assistant professor at the University of Rochester in 1961. Grace Harris was hired as a full-time professor in 1968. They helped design the new graduate program in 1963.

Among their first students was Anthony Carter, who, after receiving an MA degree in 1964 on Fortes at the University of Rochester, was sent by the

Harrises to pursue his PhD on rural politics in India under Fortes at Cambridge. He returned to the University of Rochester in 1970 as a visiting assistant professor and then stayed on until he retired in 2007. The writings of Fortes played a central role in graduate teaching in the department for virtually the entire history of the program from 1963 to 1994.

There was an infusion of new developments in British social anthropology when I was hired in 1985 after completing my PhD in social anthropology under Maurice Bloch and James Woodburn at the London School of Economics. They, too, had studied under Fortes at Cambridge, but Bloch was also much influenced by French structuralism, neo-Marxian theory, and American cognitive anthropology. The year after Rao arrived in Rochester, I began offering a new graduate seminar in Social Theory that broadened the program's theoretical framework to include the recent theoretical approaches in both England and France that I had learned at the LSE. But despite these new theoretical developments, the emphasis on the detailed ethnographic description and analysis developed by Malinowski, Fortes, and Leach persisted in the graduate program at the University of Rochester. The usefulness of a new theory was always to be measured by whether it generated new insights into a body of ethnography, which should always be rich enough to allow for reinterpretation by alternative theoretical frameworks.

The essays collected in this volume demonstrate an ethnographic master at work. In them, Rao explores the relevance of a series of new theoretical approaches to the materials he collected among the Yanadi tribe in 1976-1981, in a multi-caste village in 1990-1991, and in a mining village later on. The first theoretical approach Rao was exposed to while studying for a Master's degree in anthropology in 1973-1975 was the method of "action anthropology" developed by Sol Tax and his students at the University of Chicago in the 1940s.[1] He went on to apply it in 1976-1981 as a member of the Yanadi Action Research Project directed by Dr. Binod C. Agrawal. Agrawal, who had received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, encouraged Rao to pursue doctoral studies in the U.S. After working for a few years in the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Rao joined the Ph.D. program at the University of Hyderabad. His supervisor, Professor M. Kodanda Rao, again encouraged him to apply abroad. Rao applied to the doctoral program at the University

[1] It so happens that Grace Harris participated in Sol Tax's Fox Project during the summer of 1948 while studying for her Master's degree at the University of Chicago. https://magazine.uchicago.edu/0404/features/action-print.shtml

of Rochester and was accepted to begin in the 1986-1987 academic year under the supervision of Anthony Carter. Rao returned for a second round of fieldwork in a multi-caste village in 1990-1991. In 1994, he completed his dissertation, *The Feeble Voices: A Study of Dominance and Resistance in a South Indian Village*. After his return to India, he has served as Associate Professor in the TALEEM Research Foundation, Ahmedabad; as Professor of Sociology and Dean, School of Social Sciences, Assam (Central) University, Silchar; and as Professor of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad.

In this Foreword, I will provide a brief overview of each of the chapters to guide the reader through a long and profound career of research and advocacy on behalf of the marginalized peoples of India.

Part I: The Yanadi of Sriharikota Island

The first essay, "An Experiment in Action Anthropology: Yanadi Action Research Project in India", documents an early attempt in the 1970s to employ an action research program to assist the Yanadi people to respond to the acquisition of Sriharikota island in 1970 by the Indian Space Research Organisation to conduct the Sriharikota High Altitude Range (SHAR) project. The Yanadi were removed from the island, but began to filter back onto it. The researchers had some success in getting the ISRO to hire Yanadi to work on the base, for better wages, to provide education and health care, and to introduce animal husbandry and garden farming. But they also found themselves frequently frustrated by indifferent administrators, caught between loyalty to the Yanadi and their role as employees of the ISRO, and suspicion about their activities on the part of the police.

The second essay, "Rangam of the Yanadi of Sriharikota", documents the ongoing interaction of the Yanadi with male and female deities and with their ancestors through a male spirit medium in a ritual called *rangam.* This can take place on any day except Friday, when the most powerful female deity is menstruating. The purpose of the ritual is to divine the cause of an illness or other difficulty. Singing in tandem with his wife, the diviner and his wife go into a light trance as the spirit that resides in the head leaves and goes to the residence of the gods and ancestors to discover whether the gods have been offended of whether devils have seized their head spirit or their invisible shadow. On occasion, the high god, Brahma, must be asked to intervene. He must be approached through a cosmic bureaucracy and

requested to write out a stronger destiny for the ill person. Rao notes that there is a parallel between the spiritual realm and the earthly realm, in that Yanadi are subject to more powerful human groups, some of whom are benign and others of whom are hostile.

The third essay, "A Structural Perspective of the Yanadi's Two Forms of Entertainment – Melam and Keelugurralu", demonstrates the growing sophistication of Rao's theoretical framework. He frames his discussion primarily in terms of the concepts of rituals, communitas, structure and anti-structure, which Victor Turner proposed in his 1966 Morgan Lectures at the University of Rochester.

The fourth essay, "An Anthropological Approach to Folk Dances", proposes an analysis of Yanadi dance that suggests that the Yanadi understand that sexuality can never be completely controlled by social norms, that gender hierarchies are artificial, and that social hierarchies are arbitrary. He then compares Yanadi dances to folk dances among various hierarchical Hindu castes in Banaras. He concludes that there too dance provides a vehicle for a similar critique of male dominance and the control of female sexuality by upper caste males. Finally, he compares Yanadi dances to those of the highly Mbuti hunter-gatherers of Central Africa described by Colin Turnbull, who, in most respects, highly value egalitarian social relations, including those between men and women. In the performance of certain ritual dances, however, men do assert their dominance over women through their exclusive control of sacred objects called *molimo.* Nevertheless, at the end of the dance, an elder woman places a cord around each man's neck and makes them accept their defeat. The Mbuti live alongside more hierarchical farming peoples who view them as inferior in much the same way as Indian villagers view the Yanadi. In his analysis of Turnbull's material, Rao argues that the dances performed by the Mbuti indicate in the end that they do value men and women equally; that while men may have superior strength they cannot dominate women in the end; and that the Mbuti do not recognize the superiority of their farming neighbors.

The fifth essay, "Yanadi kinship terminology and the expression of affinity", is a reanalysis of material collected many years before. It takes up a particularly complex technical debate over the nature of so-called Dravidian kinship terminologies and their relationship to marriage practices. Anthony Carter made a notable contribution to this debate in 1975, combining insights from Meyer Fortes' general view that kinship systems are primarily based on descent groups linked together by cross-

cutting webs of consanguineal kinship with Scheffler's componential analysis of kinship terminologies. This position was hotly contested by the followers of Claude Levi-Strauss and Edmund Leach, who argued that while the Fortesian approach might work well for African kinship systems, in much of Asia systematic marriage alliances between descent groups were an equally important structural feature of kinship systems, and this was reflected in the kinship terminologies. In India, this view of the Dravidian kinship system was advanced by Louis Dumont and many others. In his contribution to the debate, concludes that Yanadi kinship terminology is best analyzed through a modified version of Dumont's model, one that takes account of the argument made by Carter and Trautmann that local ideas about acknowledging the sharing of bodily substances with some affines but not others.

The next two essays are also examples of the reanalysis of field materials collected many years earlier for a different purpose. "Cultural Patterning of Communication in the Marriage of Yanadis of Sriharikota" shows how the close reading of a high-stakes speech event, such as the tentative proposal of a marriage, reveals a great deal about a culture. "The Life World of Yanadi Tribe" was inspired by anthropologists who advocate the exploration of life worlds using the framework of existential phenomenology derived from the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger. He concludes that the Yanadi "life world is constituted of extreme poverty and experiences of birth, death, marriage, divorce, unstable family life and perpetual anxiety. Their real world corresponds with the divine world in several ways. The latter also depends on their gods while they are tormented by ghosts and other evil spirits."

Part II: Assam

The next essay, "'Selfie-Graphy': An Interrogation with Inequality in Naga Society", is equally innovative. It is an exploration of a set of works by Easterine Kire, an acclaimed Naga author who has written a series of novels about life among the Naga as well as a narrative account of the history of the Naga drawn from oral traditions, as well as an account of Naga contemporary culture, society, political organization, their relation to the nonhuman world, and the impact of British colonialism, Christian missions, and the struggle for self-determination within the Republic of India. Rao terms the latter narrative a "selfie-ethnography" as it constitutes a self-portrait of the author taken against the background of her own culture. Rao argues that this sort of writing is an essential resource for outsiders who are

attempting to apply a theory of practice to cultures that are in a state of constant movement from their past to a future they are struggling to define for themselves.

Part III: Caste in Thalupuru, Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh

In this part of the book, Rao draws on the fieldwork he conducted for his doctoral dissertation in 1990-1991 in the village of Thalupuru, Nellore District, Andhra Pradesh. About one-third of the people in this village belonged to Dalit castes.

In the first essay, "Ideology, Power and Resistance in A South Indian Village", Rao draws on the arguments of James Scott and others to argue that the members of these castes do not now and have probably never accepted the Brahmin hierarchical interpretation of the Hindu tradition, noting that they are all aware of the teachings of an ascetic saint who lived in the seventeenth century who denied the superiority of those born into Brahmin lineages and asserted the equality of all castes. Today, they are all quite conscious of their exploitation and conform to a degree to the expectations of the dominant castes for pragmatic reasons such as economic need and the fear of violent retribution. They increasingly express their resentment at the demands of the upper castes openly. The dominant castes that controlled access to local land and mica mines have declined in wealth, and the Dalits have found alternative employment, and many have set up businesses with government support. The dominant castes have also lost ground politically as the sanctions they once imposed on Dalits have been outlawed by the national government, and they have come to depend on Dalits for electoral support. Despite all this, a good deal of Dalit resistance remains covert in nature. Rao provides a detailed inventory of the ways they are able to thwart the wishes of the upper castes. The Dalits do not object to certain aspects of the caste system, such as the division of labour or the practice of caste endogamy. But they do strongly object to other aspects, such as the ranking of castes according to the purity of their occupation, the legitimacy of economic exploitation by the dominant castes, and the enforcement of deference to higher-ranking castes.

In the second essay, "Transformative rituals among Hindu women in the Telugu region," Rao applies Louis Dumont's conception of hierarchy as the encompassment of contraries to analyze the way the status of women is elevated to the level of deities in life cycle rituals relating to puberty,

pregnancy, and death despite the fact that in everyday life women are subordinate to men. He concludes that this ritual reversal of their status is an acknowledgement of the essential role that female fertility plays in the perpetuation of the patrilineage, a fertility that must nevertheless always remain under tight control by men.

The third essay, "Caste and Gender Issues in the Myths of South Indian Untouchable Castes", is a structural analysis of myths relating to the origin of untouchable castes. Rao contests the views of those who see the myths as representing Dalit acceptance of their low status (Moffatt) and of those who see them as indicating their rejection of their low status (Mosse). He opts instead to follow Levi-Strauss and Needham in interpreting myths as standing in a dialectical relationship to social and political facts. In the Rigveda version of the myth, a male deity, Purusha, is sacrificed by the gods and parts of his body become the origin of the four Varna castes. Rao shows that the Dalit versions of the origin myths assign the central role in the origin of the cosmos to the uncontrolled sexuality and fertility of a female deity, Adi-Sakti. This female sexuality must be brought under control by men to become productive, but it is still acknowledged as a superior power. By shifting the origin of the cosmos from a male to a female deity, Dalits implicitly assert the indispensable role played by all castes in the perpetuation of the social order.

Part IV: Caste and Gender in a Mica Mining Village and others

In the first essay in this section, "Weaver's Family Organization and Suicides in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana: A Sociological Analysis", Rao compares the impact of new technologies on a community of Dalit and a community of non-Dalit weavers in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in 2009 and 2015. Power looms began to compete with handlooms in the Karimnagar District of Telangana after 1987. Many of the men went to work in textile mills while the women took up the making of beedis. The division of labor between men and women, adults and children, within the joint family in the handloom industry broke down. This has had a greater impact on the non-Dalit Padmasale weavers than on the Dalit Malas. The former derived their place in the caste system from their occupation as weavers, and have been reluctant to take up other occupations as the power looms have undercut the hand loom market. In order to maintain their social status, they continue to hold elaborate weddings for their daughters, borrowing heavily from their kin to do so. When they

cannot repay these loans, social relations break down within the wider kin group. The result is a high rate of what Durkheim called anomic suicide among the Padmasales. The Malas, by contrast, had little in the way of caste status to protect, and have used the increased autonomy they have gained since independence to pursue a variety of occupations. When they borrow, they do so from financial institutions, and they are more likely to spend the loans to construct houses than to finance rituals. There have been no suicides within this group.

The essay, "Caste and Gender in Indian Society – Existential Anthropological Turn", is a series of reflections on the relationship between castes and genders in everyday life and in ritual based on fieldwork in a mica mining village in Andhra Pradesh he calls Anthatipuram. Everyday life is dominated by the effort of the upper castes to keep the lower castes in their place, and by men to keep women in their place, by force if necessary. Everyday life is thus tinged with anxiety on the part of the lower castes and women that they may encounter humiliation or worse at the hands of upper caste men. Rao offers several examples from his own experience of the way that he encountered unwelcome curiosity about his own caste origin among Indian classmates at the University of Rochester. He employs insights from existential phenomenology to capture this aspect of social life. And yet everyone is also aware that social superiors rely on the labor of lower castes and of women, who are in intimate contact with the fertility of the female earth and the female body. This awareness is expressed through certain myths and rituals in which female deities, women, and lower caste members in general play a central role and are even allowed to abuse their superiors. This is in contrast to the Vedic myths and rituals in which all creation, maintenance and destruction are ascribed to male deities alone, and from which lower castes and women are excluded. Rao pushes the argument further, ascribing the coexistence of the two sets of rituals to the long-term interaction and mutual adjustment of Aryan and Dravidian symbolic systems, with the woman-centric rituals appearing in their most vibrant form among indigenous Adivasi peoples.

Part V: Ex-Untouchable Caste

The last chapter, "Life on the Village Margins," focuses exclusively on the Mala caste along similar lines to The Lifeworld of Yanadi. However, there is a significant difference in that it draws ethnographic material from the fictional narratives of two prominent Telugu writers. Some personal experiences of Rao in the village where he grew up are included to confirm

the insights gained from these fictional narratives. The theoretical argument in this chapter is that an account of the subjective experience of caste is just as necessary as the objective description of caste for gaining a full insight into Indian society.

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September 10, 2024

AN EXPERIMENT IN ACTION ANTHROPOLOGY: YANADI ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT IN INDIA[1]

BINOD C. AGRAWAL, P. C. GURIVI REDDY, AND N. SUDHAKAR RAO

Binod C. Agrawal is an anthropologist at the Space Applications Centre, Indian Space Research Organisation, Ahmedabad. P. C. Gurivi Reddy and N. Sudhakar Rao are also anthropologists. Agrawal is project leader and Gurivi Reddy and Sudhakar Rao are research assistants for the Yanadi Action Research Project. The field research on which the paper is based has been conducted since July, 1976. The project was sanctioned by the Indian Space Research Organisation.

INITIAL COMMENTS. Since July, 1976, we have been working on the Yanadi Action Research Project (YARP). The aim of the initial project was to study the Yanadi culture and suggest long-term and short-term measures to bring about desirable changes among the Yanadi. We think that understanding the historical background of the project and the changes that have taken place in its aims, emphases, and direction, should be recorded for future use in similar projects. Ideally, the theoretical and methodological considerations of action research of this kind need to be specified before the project starts. But it took quite a while for us to come to grips with the methodology. Only when we decided to act as "change agents," instead of mere advisers or consultants, were we able to evolve an action research paradigm for this project. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent this paradigm would be applicable to other parts of India. We leave this burden on the shoulders of other anthropologists.

A review of the literature indicates clearly that there have not been many models evolved by Indian anthropologists to conduct action research. There

[1]Originally published in HUMAN ORGANIZATION. VOL. 40. NO. 1 Spring 1981.

are even fewer cases of anthropologists participating full-time as change agents. Initially, we did not know how to conduct ourselves in the role of change agents. So, in the implementation section of this paper, we will try to bring out the gap that seems to exist between theory and practice in the roles of change agents.

The first part of this paper was written by Agrawal, who went to SHAR initially and developed the project proposal (see Agrawal 1975). The second part was jointly written, as it involved first Singh (1976), and then Sudhakar Rao and Gurivi Reddy. It may be mentioned that all four of us who have worked on the project are still actively associated with it. Agrawal helps as project leader; Singh provides occasional advice; and Sudhakar Rao and Gurivi Reddy act as change agents and researchers in the field. In the last part of the paper, we indicate some of the advantages and difficulties of action anthropologists when they work as employees of the change-sponsoring agency. In this case, all of us are employees of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

BACKGROUND. It all started at a dinner party during the first week of August, 1975. Agrawal casually asked Professor Satish Dhawan about the future plans for space research.' Professor Dhawan mentioned the activities in the Sriharikota High Altitude Range (SHAR) and the problems of the tribal people who were returning to SHAR at the time, in spite of tight security and the disapproval of the SHAR administration. The lands and the forests of the Yanadi (who had been there since time immemorial) had now become the property of the Indian Space Research Organisation. The Yanadi were no longer entitled to live in the forest or eat the fruits and roots. Professor Dhawan asked Agrawal if anthropological knowledge could help in solving the tribe's problem. Agrawal said yes, but that he would first have to visit SHAR. This brief discussion culminated with an abrupt remark by Professor Dhawan: "Please do something about the Yanadi." After dinner, Agrawal asked another scientist from SHAR the name of the tribe living in SHAR. It was only the next day that Agrawal was able to finally pin down the name of the tribe and to collect references on the Yanadi.

A few months later, Agrawal went to SHAR (also known as Sriharikota island), located about 100 km north of Madras City and 17 km east of Sullurpeta, in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh. It was a unique experience to meet a tribe that was still producing fire by the friction technique, only a few kilometers away from a center of high technology. The drive from Sullurpeta to the SHAR Centre added some excitement. The closer one gets to SHAR, the more impressive are the burgeoning colonies

and the water tank, which had become a visible symbol of SHAR many kilometers earlier. Driving on the road to SHAR did not give any clue about the Yanadi and their existence on the island. A few kilometers inside the jungle there was a cluster of inverted-betel-nut-shaped huts called *gudiselu*. They were located on sandy ground, made of dried palmyrah leaves. Here were tall, thin Yanadi men in their loincloths, women with pieces of cloth wrapped around their torsos, and children playing in sand and chasing insects in the jungle. All of them seemed unconcerned about the high technology nearby and the new proprietors of their land.

In SHAR, everyone was keen to know about Agrawal's mission. Almost everyone was amused to know that he was going to help the Yanadi, and they thought it was some kind of social work. The closest that they could come to understanding Agrawal's mission was that he was there to help improve the lives of the "poor," "honest," and "simple" Yanadi who were living on ISRO property without permission. Such ideas were quite close to their own thinking, as many strongly believed that if the Yanadi were forcibly thrown off the island, they would soon die. The majority of these officials acknowledged that the Yanadi were good at planting and cutting casuarina and eucalyptus trees. For these officials, it was a strong justification for permitting the Yanadi to stay on the island. No one, including the project officer, fully comprehended the reason for Agrawal's visit from Ahmedabad to SHAR. However, most officials clearly understood that it was an important project because the chairman of ISRO was personally interested in it.

Thus, without much scrutiny and checking, Agrawal moved about on the island accompanied by the assistant public relations officer, an ex-defence person who acted as guide and liaison. Agrawal's interpreter was an aged Forest Department employee and a former ex-serviceman, now working as an attendant. The interpreter knew Hindi and Telugu and understood the Yanadi language fairly well. He was knowledgeable about the island and the Yanadi.

After a one-week visit to SHAR, it was possible to identify some of the problems of the Yanadi. The SHAR officials' views were incorporated into the list of problems of the Yanadi. Based on the preliminary investigations, Agrawal identified problems of unemployment, indebtedness, housing, and medical facilities as major areas of action research. Agrawal submitted an action research proposal directed toward these areas (see Agrawal 1975). A few months later, the YARP was sanctioned, and included the appointment of two anthropologists.

These details have been related as background information to recapitulate the situation into which the action research was ushered. From the preliminary investigation, it became evident that the future of the Yanadi was linked with ISRO, and the question was how to integrate the Yanadi into the technical plans and objectives of ISRO. At that time, Agrawal strongly believed that the Yanadi would not leave SHAR voluntarily. Furthermore, their existence in SHAR was precarious; they could be forced to leave at any time by ISRO. Given these circumstances, Agrawal believed that the Yanadi would not be able to escape from perpetual poverty and indebtedness, and that their future would be bleak. Agrawal thought that ISRO would help them emerge from this grim future.

ACTION ANTHROPOLOGY. Now the story of our intervention begins, and we describe what we have titled "an experiment in action anthropology".

Action anthropology, in the contemporary professional arena, has been enjoying the dubious distinction of being (sometimes second-rate) *research* on the one hand, and (sometimes unethical) *intervention* in the lives of others on the other hand. The former activity (i.e., research) stems from a "value-free" notion of anthropology, which we argue does not exist. We argue that anthropologists study humanity; who could better help in bringing about desirable changes than those whose research gives them a deep understanding of human culture, problems, and needs? We have taken the position that, if the need arises, anthropologists *must* help to bring about desirable changes by using their knowledge and applying it. This was the position we adopted when we initiated our program.

The dual role that we carved out for ourselves was as (1) researchers to observe, study, and analyze Yanadi culture, including their needs and problems; and (2) change agents to suggest ways and means to introduce innovations and improvements among the Yanadi to bring about change. At a later stage, the scope of our role as change agents was broadened. As change agents, we also acted as implementers of ideas, as consciousness-raisers of the Yanadi, and as a link between them and the SHAR administration and other agencies. The philosophy of our project was to introduce change without a loss of Yanadi identity, and to increase their self-reliance.

Foster's book, *Applied Anthropology* (1969), was quite helpful in defining the role of an action anthropologist. But it could not give us context-specific information for initiating the project. Naik's report (1972: 240—81) revealed that the majority of action research in India envisaged the

anthropologist's role as that of consultant and adviser. But none of the anthropologists had participated as change agents in any program. Vidyarthi (1978) made a similar observation.

In mid-1976, Singh consulted a number of anthropologists about our project. They took the view that unless there were economic changes, other changes were not possible. The most important problem area observed by Singh (1977: 27) during his fieldwork was "economic backwardness much more than any other squalor". Singh indicated that 'they are poor beyond description, they survive more with instinct rather than much to live upon" (ibid.). The Yanadi, in a time of change, were unable to cope with the new migrants (scientists, engineers, and technicians) in the area. At the same time, lack of education and utter poverty made them vulnerable to exploitation by non-Yanadis.

Therefore, help with the economic situation, coupled with "education", was thought to be the important starting point of the action anthropology program. The Yanadi Experimental School (YES) was begun in August, 1976, to inculcate among the Yanadi the habit of sending their children to school, and to propagate the need and utility of education. With the help of the state government, a Yanadi was appointed to run the school. It was an unconventional school: every non-working Yanadi was welcome to participate in the school activities regardless of age. As the majority of able-bodied Yanadi do work, the school attracted younger children of both sexes and a few older children who were left behind to take care of the younger children or persons who were too physically handicapped to work. Midday meals were provided for the children. Simultaneously, minor facilities, such as a hand pump, were installed in the Yanadi settlements. We made serious efforts to persuade the administrators to increase the daily wages of the Yanadi working in SHAR. This was essentially an incremental approach to bringing about desirable but gradual changes.

By the end of December, 1976, Gurivi Reddy and Sudhakar Rao became residents of two Yanadi settlements: SHAR administrators had provided them with thatched huts. At precisely this juncture, we started to re-examine our assumptions and our approaches to action research. The presence of Gurivi Reddy and Sudhakar Rao in the field enhanced our capability for close observation and study. At the same time, much of the language barrier that Agrawal and Singh had faced was minimized for Gurivi Reddy and Sudhakar Rao because they spoke Telugu. Collectively, we were also in a better position to implement our recommendations and suggestions.

ACTION RESEARCH PARADIGM. The action research paradigm that emerged in the process of the project is shown in Figure 1. The paradigm has a philosophy that explicitly states that the introduction of any change must not lead to loss of identity, and the change should lead to increased self-reliance. It assumes dual roles for anthropologists as researchers and as change agents. The researcher's role is close to what most anthropologists do—the study of culture and the evaluation of needs and problems. However, two subsequent steps are close to applied anthropologists' roles: setting priorities of needs and problems, and suggesting changes. Up to this point, anthropologists in most parts of the world, we think, would accept our paradigm.

In the role of change agents, however, anthropologists are confronted with a different kind of problem. They are expected to examine the solutions suggested by the researchers. This step is crucial, as it involves evaluation of the change agencies, their existing financial resources, and their ideological positions. At the same time, it involves developing a strategy for introducing change, and this requires careful analysis of the local situation, the readiness of the community to change, and the persuasive ability to influence others to accept the new ideas. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and restudy of the culture is an accepted passive role of the researcher. Directing change, on the other hand, is the accepted role of the change agent. Supposedly, anthropologists go through the process of study to find the effects of induced changes. This, in turn, is supposed to help change agents in modifying, redesigning, and terminating undesirable elements of change as far as possible. Although it is essential to separate these roles for conceptual clarity, in reality, we find the roles inseparable.

ACTION IMPLEMENTATION. We followed the steps indicated in Figure-1 while implementing the action plans. The SHAR administrators did not accept the suggested solutions in every case. We had to wait for many months whenever we needed financial approval (e.g., giving fishing nets to interested Yanadi). In other cases, new innovations were introduced quickly (e.g., street lights and hand pumps). The majority of the suggested solutions were not capital-intensive, but they required administrative will and high-level efficiency by administrators. Any lack of these sometimes delayed implementation of action plans. These delays were frustrating and humiliating. At one point, Singh (1976) argued that the first job of an anthropologist should be to study the administration or agency responsible for the implementation of any action plan—even before launching any project of this kind.

As indicated earlier, Gurivi Reddy and Sudhakar Rao continued to live among the Yanadi in their two new settlements. These settlements were planned in consultation with, and cooperation, among the SHAR administration, the Yanadi, and ourselves, the anthropologists. Of course, we were responsible for the execution of the plan. The new Yanadi settlements, to a large extent, reflect our "space utilization plan," with living conditions somewhat more crowded than we would have preferred. But, in the Yanadis' opinion, it is much better than the one they had been living with since the evacuation from SHAR in 1970. The location and settlement were planned keeping in mind the technical restrictions and future interests of SHAR. Although we ordered the needs and problems by priority, we had realized that psychological problems among the Yanadi were the key to success or failure in introducing any economic changes. Our strategy for breaking these psychological barriers has been dealt with elsewhere (Gurivi Reddy, 1980), but our administrative and personal involvement played a crucial role in breaking the barriers in this case. After considerable discussion, high-level decisions, and our continuous persuasion, permanent passes were issued to the Yanadi. This symbolic but important administrative measure allowed the Yanadi, for the first time, to live on the island without fear of the Central Industrial Security Force. It generated a sense of security and gave a new sense of belonging in a place that had been lost to them.

Educational and physical facilities such as YES, visits of a weekly mobile medical van, a provision shop, and hospitalization (including medicine and food) were among the major welfare efforts we introduced, in cooperation with the SHAR administration.

In the economic arena, we demanded higher and equal wages for males and females. We also made serious efforts to ensure that the Yanadi got preference over others in any employment opportunities. After a sustained effort, to a great extent, we achieved our goal in providing equal wages. We encouraged the Yanadi to raise poultry and goats, and we introduced ducks to supplement the Yanadis' income. After a three-year period, each household, on average, possesses at least two birds and one goat (in a population of 518, with an average household size of 3.8). We are mounting efforts to secure loans from the state government for milch-cattle raising. We have also been experimenting in taming the stray cattle roaming in SHAR, which were left by the previous non-Yanadi occupants of the island. We hope that this will help in providing experience to the Yanadi for raising domesticated milch-cattle. The Yanadi have started to grow millet, vegetables, and chillies on small plots of land close to their settlements, on an experimental basis, by courtesy of the SHAR administration.

Today, the Yanadi household has more rice to eat per person; their diet consists of fish, some vegetables, and often eggs. The nutritional standards of the Yanadi have improved. Each rupee of the Yanadi that is earned brings equal amounts of grain in the mobile provision stores. Since the Yanadi have accepted modern medicine, the chances of death due to lack of medical facilities have been minimized.

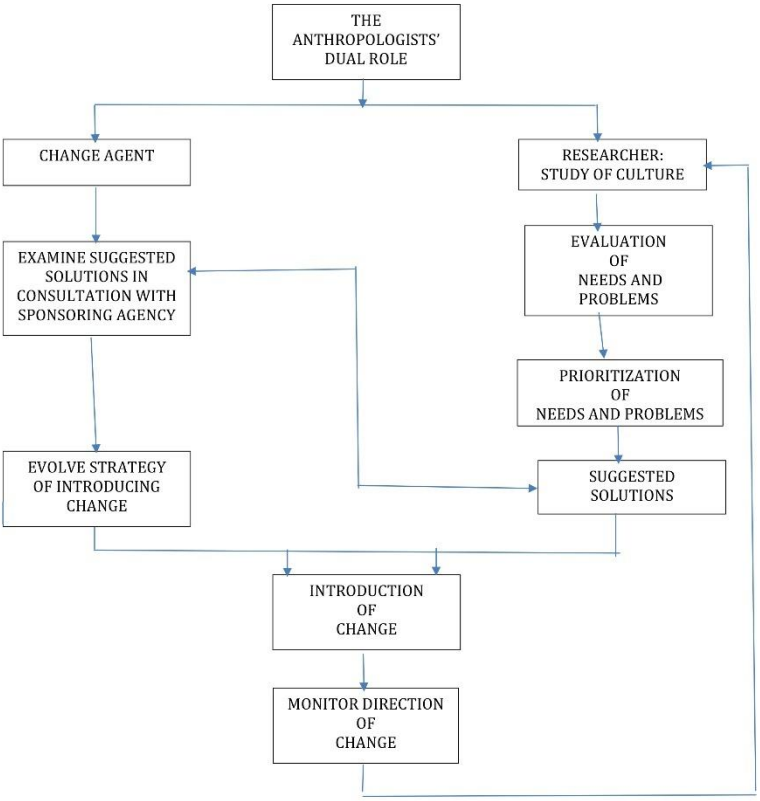

Figure 1: Action Research Paradigm

Our experiment in action anthropology provided many insights and experiences. We feel that we are now wiser in understanding the Yanadi problems. The most difficult aspect of our continuing efforts is the gap that we have experienced between theory and practice. None of the ideas that were introduced among the Yanadi were accepted without some reluctance,