

Ethnographies in Post-pandemic

A two-day conference sponsored by Indian Council of Social Science Research on *Ethnographies in Post-pandemic* was organised by Anindya Raychaudhuri (senior lecturer St Andrews University and guest faculty IDSK) and Supurna Banerjee, IDSK on 16-17 January 2024.

Covering a range of disciplines (health studies, political science, geography, sociology, anthropology, oral history and more) this two-day conference provided a space for researchers to think about the ways in which the pandemic has changed what kind of ethnographic research is possible, and the methodological changes that they have instituted as a response. The conference covered research conducted and devised both during the pandemic, and its aftermath, and reflected on both the immediate and longer-term effects of the pandemic. Qualitative research, especially ethnographic research, is based on the foundational logic of deep and direct engagement with research participants. But the pandemic realities and post pandemic anxieties around contact and touch necessitates a rethinking of the ways in which we do ethnography. The participants from various disciplines working in varied aspects recounted their experience of ethnography during and after the pandemic. These reflections provide important clues not just in terms of methodologies but also allows a rethink of the ways in which relations, positionalities and hierarchies are shaped through these critical events. More concretely some of the contributions to knowledge production could be summed up as the following:

1. Remote ethnography was critically examined. Various papers engaging with remote ethnography were able to provide nuanced, well-balanced propositions of not just how to do remote ethnographies but ways in which these could reaffirm/subvert hierarchies and also ways in which physical distance between participants and researcher play out in social research.
2. The relation between activism, research and knowledge production was also engaged with. At a moment of great crisis like the covid-19 pandemic many of the academics engaged in activist work. For some this was a continuation of earlier alliances while for others it was new, something done in immediate response to the crisis at hand. The proceedings of the conference showed pathways to reflect on how ethnographic learning through activist participation can build into knowledge production.
3. The ways in which marginalities need to be foregrounded to really unearth the realities of the pandemic was emphasized on. The centering of the experience of the marginal, the silenced was not only an issue of content but of methodology. Scholars spoke of how putting forward marginal viewpoints as ways to shape the very frame of ethnographic enquiries allowed for new ways of understanding continuities and discontinuities in pandemic experience.
4. The knowledge production capacity of the sensorial was also emphasized on in some of the papers. Sensory ethnography is certainly not a post pandemic intervention. But one strand of interrogation emerging from the conference juxtaposed the sensoriality of ethnographic experience with the paradoxical, at the same time heightened and muted sensoriality of the pandemic to possibly pave the way for new ways of doing sensory ethnography.