



BOOK REVIEW

Anthropological Thought: From Evolutionism to Postmodernism and Beyond, by Vijoy S. Sahay, Rawat Publications, New Delhi (2024), 316 pages, ISBN 978-81-316-1338-2

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"History of Anthropological Thought is the history of Anthropology itself."
— Author

The book, '*Anthropological Thought: From Evolutionism to Postmodernism and Beyond*' by Prof. Vijoy S. Sahay, is an exemplary work offering an exhaustive exploration of theories and concepts tracing their origin from the mid-19th century till date. This seminal work meticulously covers the theories and contributions of individual anthropologists beginning from the foundations of Evolutionism to Post-Modernism also including the latest discourses on human materialism and Public Anthropology.

A masterwork imbued with simplicity and clarity of language, this book is a very well-written resource for students, teachers, and all those interested in diving into fundamental concepts of anthropological theories in their contemporary form as well as their historical context. In Prof. Sahay's own words, "It is especially intended for the students, research scholars and teachers who do not get the opportunity to and access to consult the original books, owing to very high prices of original texts." As anticipated in a work of such profound knowledge, the description has been intentionally kept simple and comprehensible explaining demanding concepts with precise examples and clarifications. In a nutshell, this book is an invaluable asset not only for sociologists and anthropologists but also for all those who require a foundation in anthropological theories to meet their study or research objectives.

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Divided into thirteen well-structured chapters, the book begins with an Introduction acquainting one with some novel perspectives on the age-old theories and concludes with an exhaustive bibliography and index. The foreword by Dr S.B. Chakrabarti (General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata) provides the impetus for the theoretical analysis that follows. The concluding chapter, "Postscript," delves into Indigenous roots exploring our classical resource base which is replete with intellectual heritage.

Prof. Sahay's discourse on the nature of theories—describing them as "*discovering the laws governing the phenomena under study*"—differentiates between the controlled environment of natural scientists and the broader, variable-rich environment of social scientists. He mentions that for a social scientist, the entire society is the laboratory where there are a multitude of variables which definitely cannot be controlled at the same time. He adeptly illustrates how the limitations of one theoretical framework often pave the way for the development of another, thus, explaining the origins of different schools of thought.

Addressing the present world situation of chaos and tension, Prof. Sahay insightfully discusses the '*clash of values*', elucidating how societal norms or standards influence our judgments of correct and incorrect—"*Values are, in fact, the yardsticks by the members of the society to make judgements that what is right and what is wrong? What is desirable and what is not desirable?*" (2024, p. 7). He traces the journey from individual *egocentrism* in childhood to *ethnocentrism*, where one believes in the superiority of one's norms, rituals, and cultural values, identifying this as the root of '*all clash of values in human history*'. He advocates that all problems will have an amicable solution when humans become '*homocentric*'. *Homocentrism*, a universal human-centred perspective presents a persuasive solution for global harmony. He beckons anthropologists to create curricula that foster these inclusive values.

In the last chapter, "Postscript", he asserts the indispensability of Indology in completing the study of socio-cultural anthropology in India. He believes that "*in terms of cultural variety, India is perhaps second only to Africa, and in terms of antiquity, she is second to none*" (Sahay, 2008, 2015). Drawing on J. J. Honigman's (1976) perspective, Prof. Sahay posits that Indian society and culture are more ancient and fertile than even the Greek and Roman traditions. He suggests that a thorough exploration of ancient Indian scriptures could yield '*new anthropological light*' and urges his peers to integrate '*Indian-ness*' into their research perspective. He describes the unique coexistence of diverse and often contradictory cultures in India as "*co-existentialism in Indian society and culture.*"

The emphasis on Indian perspectives and Indology, while extremely valuable, might be misinterpreted by some as an introduction of an element of regional bias that could partially overshadow global anthropological contributions. For a complete interpretation, readers are advised to consider the book within a global context, complementing Prof. Sahay's perspectives with other works that highlight anthropological contributions from diverse cultures worldwide. This approach will certainly warrant a balanced understanding of anthropology's global landscape.

Anthropological Thought: From Evolutionism to Postmodernism and Beyond is an outstanding contribution to the field of anthropological theory, offering a broad, rich, nuanced, and accessible account of the development of anthropological thought. Prof. Sahay's work is not just a book but a valuable intellectual asset that will serve as a foundational text for students, scholars, and practitioners of anthropology.