

BOOK REVIEW

HUMAN EVOLUTION – AN INTRODUCTION TO PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY by **P. Das Sharma and Prodyot Gangopadhyay**, Serial Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2021. Pp.251 + X, preface, tables, charts, bibliography, ISBN: 978-81-950760-1-7, Hard Cover, Price: Rs. 1295.

This hard-bound textbook is the result of the continuing efforts of the authors to enrich the readers about a core area in Physical Anthropology, which is Human Evolution. The authors have done a commendable work in this regard. Under the 'Preface' section, it has been correctly stated that although there are excellent textbooks on evolution written by American and British scholars, few Indian students have access to them because of poor library facilities and inadequate infrastructure in the educational institutions. The first edition of the book was published in the year 1987 as the present authors had correctly felt the need for a suitable textbook dealing with human evolution for students in our country. The present edition is revised and an enlarged one, as compared to the earlier edition. It has a total of twelve chapters, with two new chapters titled 'Narmada Valley Hominid Fossils' and 'Human Variation at Molecular Level' being added. The book has been very lucidly written, with a lot of graphical images, yet very informative to the readers.

The first chapter leads the readers to the concepts of evolution. Definitions of evolution have been aptly given. The section on organic evolution and the different theories of evolution have been very concisely, yet very systematically discussed. Very interesting is the part where the authors have tried to link Darwinism with Neo-Darwinism. This will be very informative to the readers and the students.

The chapter on animal kingdom (Chapter 2) introduces the concept of taxonomy. A very detailed taxonomic classification of the animal kingdom has been provided for the benefit of the readers. This chapter bears great significance as humans belong to the Order Primates. The authors have wonderfully classified the kingdom upto the primate level which is the form from which one can move on so as to understand the evolution of humans.

Very appropriately, the third chapter deals with the Primates, the order where we belong. The characteristic features of primates are well presented. A classification of the order has also been presented. The characters of the infra-orders and families have also been properly depicted. A very significant section is the anatomical changes that have occurred in the human skeleton due to the assumption of erect posture.

The fourth chapter introduces primate phylogenies and hominid origins. The theories of hominid origins have included all the major theories that are in vogue today, such as Tarsoid hypothesis, Pithecooid hypothesis, and knuckle-walking

ape ancestry. The authors have also discussed the immunological approaches to hominid evolution and the discussion on Vincent Sarich and the molecular clock is very well represented.

Two very important aspects are knowledge about the geological eras and the methods of dating. The authors rightfully considered these two aspects in the next chapter before moving on to portray a short description of the fossil primates on the Eocene, Oligocene, Miocene and Pliocene. The *Dryopithecus* has been very well documented. A section on the Siwaliks is also included. The controversies on the Miocene finds have been summarized.

It is a well known fact that human evolution occurred in Africa and then moved to other parts of the world. The authors have given a vivid description of australopithecine evolution in Africa in chapter six. The fossil finds of Taung, Sterkfontein, Makapansgat and other significant finds have been well portrayed. The new find *Australopithecus garhi* has also been included.

The authors have presented the evolution of the genus *Homo* in the next chapter. The fossil finds from Java and China have been very well depicted. The sites, anatomical features of the fossils and the phylogenetic positions have been presented in a very lucid, yet very informative fashion. We cannot understand human evolution without knowing the culture. The authors have so also included a section on the culture of these finds. The authors then moved on to illustrate the fossil finds in Europe and Africa. Fossil finds such as the Heidelberg man, Steinheim, Swanscombe, Krapina and Saccopastore have been very well written. The readers will get a vivid description of the evolution of our genus once they read this chapter.

There has been a lot of debate on the Narmada Man from India. The Narmada man was excavated by Sonakia in the mid-1980s. The next chapter (Chapter eight) is one that is fully devoted to this fossil find from our country. The authors have given a vivid description of the discovery, nomenclature of the Pleistocene formations. The characteristic features of the skull cap have been very well documented. The post-cranial remains and the phylogenetic position have also been discussed. As far as my knowledge goes, this is the only text book on human evolution that has a separate chapter dedicated to this important fossil find from India.

The next chapter deals with a fossil find that has always been an enigma in human evolution. It is the Neanderthal man. The type find La-Chapelle-aux-Saints has been very well summarized. A brief account is also there about the associated finds. The other important fossil finds from sites such as Skhul, and Tabun from Europe have also been covered. The authors then moved on to cover the important Neanderthal finds from Asia and Africa. A brief account of the culture of the Neanderthals is also included. The authors have also pertinently included a section on the Neanderthal problem in the context of human evolution. This is why this find is called an enigma in the context of our evolution.

The details of the emergence of anatomically modern human has been written keeping the Cro-Magnon, Chancelade and Grimaldi fossil finds in mind (Chapter ten). All these three fossil finds have been well illustrated. The readers can get themselves well acquainted with the nature of the finds, associated finds, characteristic features and the phylogenetic positions. Subsequently, the Upper Palaeolithic fossils from other parts of the world such as Africa and Australia have been included.

All anthropologists will agree that we humans have a lot of variations and that physical anthropology studies these variations. This is where the penultimate chapter comes in. The authors have very pertinently referred to Washburn and Howells when they discuss the concept of human races. The UNESCO concept of race has also been given. This statement bears great significance in modern day world.

The last chapter deals with human variations in the molecular level. This chapter bears significance as this is a new area of research for physical anthropologists. The concept of genetic diversity has been well explained. The population expansion in India has also been well documented in this chapter. The sections on the Human Genome Variation and Indian mtDNA Typology are well represented.

Finally the authors have also provided a list of books as suggested readings.

The book will be very useful to the students of the subject and also those who are keen to understand human evolution. It will also provide a good knowledge about this aspect to those who are appearing in various competitive examinations with anthropology as one of the subjects.

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INTO THE REALM OF MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY Edited By **Dhritiman Sharma and Milonjyoti Borgohain**, Serials Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2021. Pp.-238. ISBN: 978-81-947932-9, Hard Cover, Price: Rs.1195

The book under review is a collection of 24 articles which explore different facets of culture related to human health. The domain of medical anthropology is ever expanding and it is quite a challenging task to collect information these diversified engagements of anthropology into a volume. It is heartening to see that the editors have not only taken up this challenge but also have been squarely aware of this situation. They have written:

“Contrary to the popular beliefs, medical anthropology is not solely confined

to the study of disease, ethnomedicine, and the traditional rituals and healing, but it includes other issues and causes of diseases too, like natural disaster, which is seldom known to the people outside.”

It is a fact that medical anthropology is making new inroads into certain realms which have been either thought of as unconventional areas of anthropological research or coming up recently. Owing to the holistic approach towards health issues, anthropology intends to extend its empirical knowledge of human responses to health and disease of the simple societies to complex ones. Apart from gaining a basic theoretical perspective, it has tried to develop critical and applied approaches to health in human society. As a result of such expansionist motives, medical anthropological investigations have been carried out in the areas of organ transplantation, nursing, biopolitics, care, pharmaceuticals, complementary and indigenous medical systems, RCH, epidemiology, health narratives, delivery of health services, etc. However, anthropology has tried to maintain its characteristic methodology of study at micro level in spite of its methodological experiments with multi-sited ethnography and phenomenology. The studies collected in the present volume have at least shown allegiance to this micro level approach to the health issues.

Here we find studies on the relationship between obesity and hypertension among the Tengapaonia Deoris of Dibrugarh, religious beliefs and practices during pregnancy among the Mishings of Lakhimpur, maternal and child health care among the Mishings of Dhemaji, nutritional status of the Bhumij women working in tea gardens of Lakhimpur, modern family planning of the Mog women of upper Assam, reproductive health and diseases among the Karbi women, ethnomedicinal plants used in the treatment of fertility and menstrual disorders in Lakhimpur, practice of breast feeding of the Tantis of Lakhimpur, menstrual distress and reproductive morbidity of the Muslim women in Tinsukia, fertility differentials among the Deoris of Bahgorah village in Lakhimpur district and indigenous knowledge related to health among the Hajongs of Dhemaji.

Some of the articles in this volume have explored certain interesting areas of importance. Prasai has discussed how water-economy can contribute to the gender equality which in turn will strengthen the rural health and hygiene. The author argues for a participation based approach focused on the women. Another article by Pegu on drug discovery and role of ethnomedicine in it, is a novel attempt in extending the anthropological knowledge in medical realm. It has been reported that psychiatric morbidity is more common among the women during five years prior to the onset of menopause. Therefore, the study of mental health and its relation to the reproductive aging can be an important issue in medical anthropological research. Taid's study has dealt with this issue with reference to the Mishing women of rural Assam.

It has already been mentioned that the studies included in the present volume

have been done mostly in the micro-setting. However, we find that their geographical scope has remained mostly confined to the North East India more specifically said, to Assam. But a praiseworthy thing is that a large number of works have been directed towards investigation into the state of women's health. Despite this significance of the present collection, it is not clear how some papers included in the volume relate to medical anthropology. For example, the studies on dress and ornament of the Singpho, rites of passage of the Karbis, Ahom marriage and heritage conservation have no justification for their inclusion in the present volume. Some of the papers did not even address the medical issues or issues relevant to medical anthropology in their objectives.

However, it cannot be denied that the book will certainly enrich our knowledge and understanding in the field of medical anthropology.

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