

IN SEARCH OF THE PLACE OF BIRTH OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

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Abstract: It is more or less known to all concerned that Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) was set up first in 1945 in Benaras or Varanasi, from where the headquarters was shifted later to Kolkata. But what was the actual place where this coveted institution started its journey? This query haunted me time and again until 31st July 2022 when I succeeded to visit the 'Birthplace of Anthropological Survey of India' at Varanasi. One hundred years of teaching of anthropology in India opened up scope and possibilities for many new researches and retrospectives, but none of these studies, so far, I have seen in print, has addressed this vital point in the history of anthropology in India. Here, I present the result of my quest for the birth place of AnSI along with description of its present situation, owners and entangled histories. The study has significance in preserving the heritage of our country. It is hoped that this article would throw some light on an untrodden field of history of anthropology in India.

Keywords: Anthropological Survey of India, Place of Birth, Varanasi, History, Heritage.

The year 2019 was marked as centenary year of teaching of anthropology in India. Various Anthropological research organizations celebrated the year by organising seminars to commemorate the memorable occasion. Very few academic discourses have ever showed interest in the history of Anthropological Survey of India. Even, the scholars from An.S.I ever tried to locate the place from where Anthropological Survey of India actually originated and got a separate identity after coming out from Zoological Survey of India. In literature, it is mentioned that birthplace of the

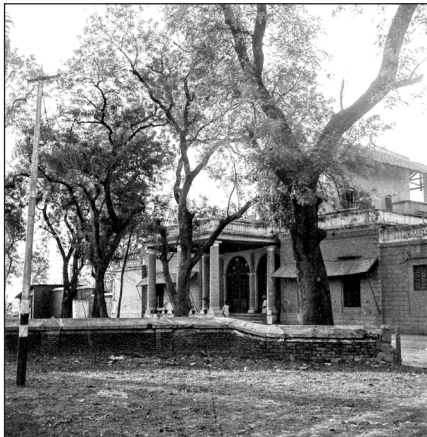


Figure-1: Kaizer Cassel, Varanasi-Birth place of the Anthropological Survey of India

(Author's own archive.)

Anthropological Survey of India was at 64 Cantonment, Kaiser Cassel at the south bank of river Varuna, a branch of river Ganges at Varanasi. There was a long initiative by the then Directors Dr. Nelson Annandale, Dr. Seymour Sewell and Dr. B.S. Guha (Anthropologist) of Zoological Survey of India to establish Anthropological Survey.

B.S. GUHA: THE FOUNDER, MEMORIES, HISTORIES

Dr. Biraja Sankar Guha (hence, B.S. Guha) was the first person in India to receive a training course in physical anthropology from the Harvard University. On return to India, he became a Lecturer in Physical Anthropology at University of Calcutta in 1926. Afterward, in June, 1927, he joined as an Anthropologist and as sectional In-Charge in 'Anthropology Section' of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta. Dr. Guha visualized the need of an independent anthropological institution that would try to understand the 'People of India', from diverse academic angles to help the administrators in nation building.

In the meantime, Zoological Survey of India was shifted from Indian Museum building, Calcutta to Varanasi on 11th May 1942 to protect the valuable ancient human skeletal remains from the ravages of carpet bombing during the Second World War. In the meantime, Dr. Guha had submitted a proposal to the Government on the 30th December, 1944 for the establishment of an independent Anthropology department. This proposal was supported by the then Director Dr. Seymour Sewell and Dr. Nelson Annandale, retired Director of Zoological Survey of India. Anthropological Survey of India was established on 1st December 1945 as a separate entity from Zoological Survey of India in the same building with only six employees. Dr. B. S. Guha was appointed Officer-in-Charge on Special duty in the newly created Anthropological Survey of India. Later, Dr. Guha became the Director on 1st August, 1946 and Dr. Verrier Elwin was appointed Deputy Director on 17th October, 1946 in the Survey. In January 1948, Anthropological Survey of India was renamed Department of Anthropology. At the end of May 1948, the Department moved from Varanasi to Indian Museum building, Kolkata (then Calcutta). Verrier Elwin (Nov.1951) wrote that 'the Department of Anthropology was housed in the great, rather gloomy, buildings of the Indian Museum which tower above Chowranghee in Calcutta. But there was nothing gloomy about the busy offices and laboratories occupied by the anthropologists. There were some very good men here; aged people with high foreign degrees and vast experiences and learning, and some of most brilliant of the younger men and women came from the Universities in recent years. There were artists, photographers, technicians, librarian, and even the *chaprasis* were also keen amateur anthropologists as a result of their lengthy sojourns among tribal people when on tour. The Head Office of the Survey was shifted from Indian Museum building to Spirit Building in Indian Museum Campus in late Sixties. The Survey celebrated 75th foundation Day on 1st December, 2019

at its own new building at Salt Lake, Kolkata. On that day Dr. Guha's daughter Alta Ahmed and her family members were also invited on the occasion.

While memorizing many childhood incidents happened in Kaiser Cassel, Alta Ahmed, daughter of Dr. Guha shared her experiences to the author on 7th April 2022 in an evening *adda* at her residence in Kolkata. She said that there was a big office building with a huge premises. They were staying at first floor like a big bungalow with her parents, Dr. B. S. Guha and Uma Guha (Bose), and three elder brothers Alope Sankar, Bhaskar Sankar and Rupal Sankar. She called Elwin as *meso* (maternal uncle) and called his wife Kosi as *masi* (maternal aunt). They had a son named Jawahar/Kumar. They were staying on top floor of the said office building. The Anthropological Survey of India office was in the ground floor along with laboratories, different sections, and ancient human skeleton repository.

MEMORY OF FIRST INDEPENDENCE DAY

As Dr. Guha was filled with patriotic emotions, An.S.I. office celebrated the first Independence Day on 15th August 1947 in that glorious building campus. On that day Dr. Guha was invited to Delhi for some official works. Before proceeding to Delhi, he had requested Verrier Elwin and Dr. Bajra Kumar Chatterjee to organise the function. All staff members were very excited regarding the function. On that day, all staff members participated in this glorious occasion spontaneously and generously. Dr. Guha and Elwin's family members participated in that function. The male members wore white trouser and white shirt and the female members wore white *saree* with red border. Children also wore white half pant, white shirt and Gandhi *topi*. The national flag was hoisted by Dr. Braja Kumar Chatterjee and Verrier Elwin in front of the then Anthropological Survey of India building at Kaiser Cassel. They offered the ovation in the name of *Bharat Mata* i.e., Mother India and in the name of *Pratham Swadhinata Divas* i.e., first Independence Day of India. Then started the *prabhatferi* (i.e. morning procession) at the office premises. All people took part in this procession. A sense of happiness of independence from the bondage of British Authorities reflected to everybody's face. The first one of the processions was holding a national flag and walk all in a row. All participants given the ovation in the name of our mother India and in the name of first Independence Day. Children also took part in this procession. After that Srimati Uma Guha played number of patriotic songs and chorus songs sung by all females at the courtyard of the office. All children of the office staff enjoyed this event since morning with great fervour. The sweet memories of the occasion in the words of Alta Ahmed run as follows:

I was 5 or 6 years of old. When hoisted the national flag, the rose petals fallen from the tri colour Indian Flag. It was obviously rapped of all together and I did not know that. I was thrilled to see the rose petals fallen from flag at the moment of hoisting national flag. During the *prabhatpherry*, we sought ovation as *Bandematam*,

jhanda uncha rahe hamara, uncha roheya triranga hamara. My mother had a beautiful voice. She played musical instrument and sang with us. It was very exciting moment. It was very good introduction in patriotism’.



Figure-2: Celebration of the First Independence Day at Kaizer Cassel premises.
(Source: Author's own archive)



Figure-3: Dr.Verrier Elwin with Alta(on left daughter of Dr. B.S.Guha) and Dr. Bajra Kumar Chatterjee hoisting the tri-colour flag on the occasion of the celebration of the First Independence Day at Kaizer Cassel premises of An.S.I on 15th August,1947.
(Source: Author's own archive)

THE GROUND ZERO: SEARCH AND FINDINGS

The author reached at Varanasi of Uttar Pradesh on 30th July 2022, Saturday at 10 p.m. by an express train and stayed in the Hotel Kanu Babu at Jangamwardi Road. Next day after taking breakfast author started journey from hotel at 10 a.m. by an auto rickshaw to find out the address and location of the birthplace of the Anthropological Survey of India. He carried with printed black and white photographs along with him and address of earlier office of the Survey. Reached Cantonment area, the vehicle slowly moved in several roads, eyes on boundary wall of old and heritage building to find out the address like private houses, hospital, hotel (Hotel de Paris, Estd. 1895) and branch of State Bank of India one after another, asked people and have been shown printed photographs of the building of Kaiser Cassel. Each and every respondent said that there are many changes in cantonment area and emerged new constructions, changed the name of road and changed the house number. Even they said it is very difficult to trace the building/ location after seven decades. But did not yet losing his interest and with confidence tried to find out the birthplace in cantonment area. Last of all, a gentleman minutely observed the photographs of the building and discussed about my intension. Then he was realised my emotion and moto, suggested to go to Mall Road. There is a heritage restaurant named *Hotel Surya*, which is located near Varuna Bridge. This man only first time gave the suggestion to go to the exact location. Immediately author moved towards Mall Road with his searching eyes. Author reached there at 1:15 p.m. and entered hotel premises seeing the address mentioned in the board S20/51, A-5, the Mall Road, Varuna Bridge, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh-221002.

Author found there a beautiful white coloured two stories heritage building '*Kaiser Cassel*' on extreme left side of the main entrance. There is a well-maintained garden in front of the building and the place is clam and quiet. He felt an internal satisfaction and proud after touching the soil of this historical place. Then he met with Operation Manager Mr. Ajay Mishra and introduced himself and discussed about his purpose of visiting this place. Then after half an hour he met Mr. Abhai Singh, owner of this hotel at his residence in northeast corner of this premises of *Kaiser Palace*. Name of his residence is '*Akinchan*', a Sanskrit word and has a philosophical connotation. Mr. Singh welcomed author heartily, show interest to know about the intention and was surprised at author's curiosity. After offering water, sweet and tea, Mr. Singh also introduced the author to all his family members. They had no idea about the shifting of Zoological Survey of India from Calcutta to Kaiser Cassel and birthplace of the Anthropological Survey of India. Then they were listening from author about the history of birth place of such pioneer organisation. The building was given out free of rent to the Zoological Survey of India from 1942 to 1949. According to history, the owner of the building wanted back the building after the end of the Second World War, but with a special request from Government of India the owner agreed to rent the building up to 12th February,

1949 on a monthly rent of Rupees 225.

Mr. Abhai Singh narrated the story of this property. Earlier this building was famous as *Nepali Kuthi*. Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana was a field marshal in the Royal Nepalese Army. He was the third son of Maharaja Sir Chandra Shamsher Jung Bahadur Rana, the fifth Prime Minister of Nepal of the Rana dynasty. Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana owned Kaiser Cassel at Banaras Cantonment area in Banaras, Uttar Pradesh. The Offices of the Deputy Director of Education and Inspector of School, Government of Uttar Pradesh shifted to Kaiser Cassel on rent basis.



Figure-4: Field Marshal Sir Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana.

(Source: Author procured it from Internet)

Mr. Abhai's father Late Bhubaneswar Singh was a businessman at Varanasi. He purchased 30-40 old heritage ruin buildings of the *Raja, Maharaja* or *Zamindars* in Varanasi since 1968. After purchasing he demolished ruined building and made a number of plots as residential colony like his Guru's name Saint Raghunanagar in Manoharganj, Bhubaneswar Nagar in his own name in Ardoli bazar. In 1970 Bhubaneswar Singh purchased Kaiser Cassel from Queen Krishna Chandra Kumari Devi, wife of Kaiser Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana after his demise on 7 June, 1964 at the age of 72. It was a big campus bounded with brick wall with a big entrance. Bhubaneswar demolished some ruined parts of it and sold a number of plots. After death of Bhubaneswar Singh in 1982, Mr. Abhai Singh vacated the Education Department from the heritage building after 50 years. Then he decided to demolish the servant's quarter of Raja Kaiser Shaumsher Jung Bahadur Rana near the boundary and then constructed four storied building there for hotel business. As per his decision he renovated the main heritage building without any modification or alternation and used it as restaurant in heritage building. This is locally famous as *Canton Restaurant*. There are two halls like *Milap Hall* and *Kaiser Hall*. Behind the building there is a swimming pool. In front of the building there is a green grass field along with varieties of flower plants. This heritage building now turns

into attraction to many of the high-class tourists in general and foreign tourists in particular due to its historical importance, heritage ambience on the bank of river Varuna with green lawn, green plants and chirping of birds. Some tourists like to know about the history of this heritage building and to take photographs.

Author asked Mr. Singh, why do you try to maintain the heritage building. Then he replied:

‘I am not thinking money, thinking about keeping this heritage of the Palace of a king. It is not possible by the modern engineers to build this kind of heritage building. Hope my son also continue my thinking after my absence from mortal world.’

With kind permission of Mr. Singh author visited all corners of the heritage building with hotel Manager, visualised the earlier office ambience and had a horripilation. The beauty of the building still exists with glossy white marble floor, number of large rooms with big wooden windows and doors with half circle multi-colour glass on top, 13 to 15 feet heigh roof, wooden chairs and tables, hanging old lampshades, *jharbati* i.e. chandelier, framed black and white old photographs of *Raja* and *Maharaja* and Indian people on wall, three sides open wide *veranda* with bamboo curtain and wooden wide staircase; my eyes are struck by the beauty and soul is filled up with satisfaction. There is a water fountain in one corner of the green lawn.

Author also took snaps of Mr. Singh and his family members and also the inner and outer portions of the Kaiser Cassel, Hotel Surya, garden, Varuna River, etc. Family members of Mr. Singh appreciated this kind of venture and offered author to stay in his *Hotel Surya* free of cost as long as he would stay in Varanasi and invite for visit again. Author promised to send some old black and white photographs of Kaiser Cassel (1945-1948) for displaying on walls of the restaurant. Author left this place just before sun set and retuned with slow footsteps on path of green lawn with light and pleasant breeze. While returning back author turned again towards that marvellous heritage building with a deep remembrance of Dr. B. S. Guha and his emotion to this place and devotion to the anthropology. This visit was definitely a notable and unforgettable memory in personal life as well as professional life of the author.



Figure-5: One part of Kaizer Cassel in its present form.

(Author's own archive.)

It is essential to be laid down a stone plate in front of Kaiser Cassel as Birthplace of Anthropological Survey of India and to organize a seminar on birth history of the Survey in this heritage building on the eve of seventy seven foundation day of the Survey and permanently to put on display some old photographs of this heritage building show casing the initial stage of Survey at Varanasi (1945-1948).

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