

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**BIRAJA SANKAR GUHA: CENTENARY YEAR OF TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY IN INDIA** by Nabakumar Duary, Aayu Publications, New Delhi, 2023, Pp.207. ISBN: 978-93-91685-33-1, Hardbound, Price: Rs. 3200/-

In the discipline of anthropology and the history of its pursuance in India in a formal sense, contributions of its architects matter enormously. They were the pillars who had sown the seeds of existence and growth of this discipline in this country by their academic brilliance, wisdom, and passion. It is very difficult even today to surpass their caliber and therefore it should be our humble effort to imbibe their philosophy and make sense of our discipline so that its goal is achieved. In a way, it will be our tribute to them.

Biraja Sankar Guha (popularly, B.S. Guha) was one of these illustrious pillars of Indian anthropology who made Indian anthropology famous in the global scene by his academics in one hand and his commitment to successfully build anthropological institutions, on the other.

Nabakumar Duary's book which, I believe, is a befitting tribute of the author to B.S. Guha during the time of celebration of the centenary year of teaching anthropology in India, as well as to commemorate the 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of B.S. Guha. The author deserves a special thanks, too, for directing a film titled "*Untiring Mind*" for this occasion to celebrate. In so doing, the author has provided us the opportunity, through the narratives and the photographs that find room in the pages of the book, as well as through the film that he made, to be apprised of Dr. B.S. Guha's life in a multi-dimensional perspective. The book tells us many things of him in the form of a pictorial biography. It becomes lively, when you see the well-preserved photographs and get materials to think of that time when Dr. Guha existed and excelled. To my knowledge, this is the first one of its kind that tells the story of an Indian anthropologist with photograph covering comprehensively the man, his life and works.

Dr. Duary dedicates the book in the memory of his grandparents, as he mentions their love and vision of Indian culture. And it appears, for this particular painstaking work, Dr. Duary received help from many people including the heads of several academic institutions located in many places in the country which he gratefully acknowledges. The book contains a very touching message from Bhaskar Sankar Guha, son of Dr. Guha, while foreword of the book is proudly written by Alta Ahmad, his daughter.

Introduction of this book makes the reader informed on its genesis, and how material presented in the book was available. The book has 11 chapters aided with

473 black and white very relevant captioned photographs and associated text that portrayed in the words of the author 'almost every sphere of his (Dr. Guha's) life and beyond'.

Chapter 1 is on the event of birth on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1894, and family background of Dr. Guha, aided by 14 photographs. With the help of a genealogical chart, the author presents the family of Dr. Guha and introduces his family members with the readers in this chapter. It provides also an hint to the social position of his family.

Chapter 2 is on education and anthropological training, aided by 41 photographs. This chapter provides a detailed information in respect of Dr. Guha's formal educational achievements from school level to the highest level of University in India and abroad. This chapter also depicts most of his scholarly achievements that made him an anthropologist of repute.

Chapter 3 is on family life, aided by 28 photographs. This chapter tells us the event of his both marriages and evidences of his relationship with family members, especially with his mother.

Chapter 4 is on the professional life, aided by 46 photographs. This chapter describes the phases of the professional life of Dr. Guha. His teaching assignments as well as his professional career in the Zoological Survey of India found mention here. Furthermore, this chapter tells us about his scientific expeditions and excavations in one hand and his famous pioneering research on racial types in India, on the other.

Chapter 5 is on vision and mission of Dr. Guha, aided with 98 photographs. Considering the importance of this aspect in the life of a great scientist of his caliber, the author spent much effort, it appears, to tell readers in a greater detail his achievements in fulfilling the vision and mission. This chapter narrates the interesting story of birth, growth and nurturing of the Anthropological Survey of India, the largest anthropological institution in India as a center for excellence in anthropological research and the pivotal role played by its founder Director, Dr. Guha, and contributions of Dr. Verrier Elwin and others.

Chapter 6 is on fieldwork and collaborative research, aided with 135 photographs. In this chapter the author has very efficiently collated information on Dr. Guha's fieldwork endeavours with several tribal populations and others located in different places in India and his collaborative researches. Dr. Guha's mastery over the arts and crafts of fieldwork became evident through the photographs and narrations.

Chapter 7 is on association and related activities, aided with 27 photographs. This chapter mentions about his associations in various capacities with academic institutions, professional bodies, management of academic journals in one hand and with the intellectual luminaries of various vocations of the then Bengali society, on the other.

Chapter 8 is on post retirement endeavour, aided with 22 photographs. This chapter tells us about the continuation of academic activities after his superannuation from the erstwhile Department of Anthropology, Government of India [presently, Anthropological Survey of India, Government of India]. It was but natural that a person of Dr. Guha's stature will not stop academic activities in the mundane event of retirement from a government service. Very sadly, however, the anthropology fraternity lost him when he met with a train accident on 20<sup>th</sup> October, 1961. And thus the mortal life of the stalwart came to an end but his achievements stayed on. Condolence meetings were organized thereafter and obituaries in various journals appeared.

Chapter 9 is on publications and honour, aided with 11 photographs. This chapter provides a profile of his publications in a wide variety of topics crosscutting sub-disciplinary boundaries of anthropology that appeared in different journals of repute and books.

Chapter 10 is on commemorating programmes, aided with 45 photographs. This chapter narrates about the commemorative programmes organized by Anthropological Survey of India and others in the form of conferences, memorial lectures, and so on in the memory of Dr. Guha. Notable among them was his birth centenary programme and that on the celebration of his 125<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary.

Chapter 11 is on an unexplored tale in Indian anthropology, aided with 6 photos. This chapter briefly narrates the story of a Lithuanian anthropologist, namely, Antanas Paskevicious-Poska who travelled and engaged himself in anthropological work in India. He wrote his Ph. D. thesis under the supervision of Dr. Guha and submitted to the University of Calcutta. However, many unfortunate incidents occurred meanwhile which led ultimately to confer Ph.D. degree to him, posthumously.

The book does have a references section that serves as the sources of description of textual material, though they were not specifically mentioned in the relevant portion of the text. Some typos appear, as well.

Appendix I contains the publications of Dr. B. S. Guha, while Appendix II includes a couple of notes of appreciation for Dr. Guha from a variety of individuals and institutions. Appendix III, however, presented 4 captioned photographs of fieldwork with tribal people by Dr. Verrier Elwin, a good friend of Dr. Guha.

The author is reasonably successful in presenting the life and works of Dr. B. S. Guha, the visionary anthropologist. This painstaking work of Dr. Duary is certainly praiseworthy and will remain a valuable resource for students and researchers of the discipline of anthropology.

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