

Reminiscences: Loving Memories of our Beloved Teacher Dr. Tulika Sen



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At the onset, the two authors (NKD and JS) wish to affirm this manuscript is a tribute to their teacher, the late Dr. Tulika Sen of the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University who breathed her last in Kolkata on 18th October 2020 at the age of 96 years. The authors were batch mates right from their college days and they shared the same room in the hostel of Sree Chaitanya College, Habra, West Bengal during their B.Sc days and completed their M.Sc. together from the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta. For the knowledge of the present generation, during those days, only two colleges were offering B.Sc. in Anthropology (Hons) under the auspices of the University of Calcutta. One was of course, Sree Chaitanya College, Habra, and the other Bangabasi College located in the heart of Kolkata. During the days the authors spent in college, they never had any chance to visit the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta. They just heard

that there were quite a number of teachers in the department. They knew three teachers by name only. Two of them were Late Prof. Probodh Kumar Bhowmick and Late Prof. Asoke Kumar Ghosh. The third was a lady faculty, very stern and who seldom smiled and talked even less. She was the Late Dr. Tulika Sen (subsequently referred to as *Tulikadi*).

NEWS OF THE DEMISE OF DR. TULIKA SEN

Shocking news was waiting for both the authors in the early morning of the 19th October, 2020 when Prof. Barun Mukhopadhyay, Retired Professor, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata and one of her close students informed that *Tulikadi* had met her date with the Almighty the previous night i.e. on 18th October, 2020 at 8.30 p.m. She passed away peacefully in her residence at Saptarni, (Flat No. 126/F, 58/1, Ballygunge Circular Road, Kolkata- 700019), the housing complex just a stone's throw away from the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta, located in Ballygunge Circular Road, Kolkata.

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She used to live in her flat with her sister and a maid. After her sister passed away, she was living with the maid. Her old students used to visit her regularly. Sometimes they also celebrated her birthday on 25th Vaisakh at her residence. Sometimes *Tulikadi* used to invite her old students for observing *Bhaiphonta* or *Bhaiduj*, a ritual for long life of the brother

NKD and JS knew that she was ill and suffering from health issues since March, 2020. But the information about her demise was something they really did not expect. For both of them, this was the end of an era in Indian Anthropology. Both of them started remembering the memories of their old days at the Anthropology Department of Calcutta University. Lot of memories crossed their minds, and then they both thought that they pen down their views on *Tulikadi* as a tribute to her and to keep her memories alive for the next generation of Anthropologists.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL AND ACADEMIC SKETCH OF *TULIKADI*

Dr. Tulika Sen was born on 8th May, 1926 in a Bengali aristocrat and respectable family in the then undivided Bengal. Her parents were Surendra Nath Sen and Charubala Sen. She was the youngest of seven brothers and sisters, who were christened as Jyotsnamoyee (Rupu), Anupama (Anu), Kalyani (Tupu), Samarendra Nath/Samar (Tino), Sachindra Nath (Satoo) and Rathindra Nath (Neelu). She studied in Sir Ramesh Mitter Girl's High School, Calcutta. Sir Romesh Chandra Mitra (1840–13 July 1899) was the first Indian officiating Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court. Sir Romesh Mitra Girls School was founded in his honour in 1897. The school was located in Bhowanipore, Kolkata. She was married to Dr. Dilip Kumar Sen, former Director, Anthropological Survey of India (1964-1972). They did not have any children.

Dr. Dilip Kumar Sen was associated with the Anthropological Survey of India from 1947 till 1950 when he was appointed a lecturer in Physical Anthropology in Lucknow University. Subsequently, he joined the Anthropological Survey of India on 29 January, 1964. After the death of Professor D. N. Majumder in 1960 he held the charge of the Anthropology Department till the latter part of 1962 when he was appointed the Deputy Director of the

Anthropological Survey of India. During these years he was also the Honorary Secretary of the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society, Uttar Pradesh and the Editor of the *Eastern Anthropologist*. He left for U.K. in 1956 and stayed there for 3 years, carrying out researches on blood groups and hemoglobin variants of the Bengali-speaking people living there. He was awarded Ph.D. degree by the London University in 1961. As the Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India he proposed new research projects and arranged for systematic surveys. After the retirement of Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose in 1964, Sen succeeded him as the Director and continued in the position till his death. He laid the basis for creation of a National Museum of Man. Dr. D. K. Sen consistently emphasized the integrative nature of Anthropology as a science which combines both biological and cultural aspects of man. He was closely associated with the Indian Anthropological Society since 1962 and actively participated in all its affairs as its President from 1965 to 1967. He was responsible to a great extent in publishing the *Journal of Society* of which he was the first Editor. Dr. D. K. Sen sudden and untimely demise on 29th March, 1972 was just a day before he was to return from Susunia in Bankura District where he was exploring the region to find human fossil remains.

Tulikadi completed her B.Sc. Honours in Anthropology in 1946 from University of Calcutta (Palit Building, now called Ballygunge Science College) and her Master's with a specialization in Physical Anthropology from the same university in 1948. She also completed her M.A. in Anthropology from Harvard University, USA in 1955. She was the second Indian Master's degree holder in Anthropology from Harvard University after late Dr. B.S. Guha, a great name in Indian Anthropology. After completing his Ph. D. from Harvard University, Dr. Guha had returned to India and joined the Zoological Survey of India as an Anthropologist in its anthropological section in 1927. In 1946, he succeeded in implementing his long cherished dreams by establishing the Anthropological Survey of India.

Tulikadi completed her Ph.D. in Anthropology from Calcutta University in 1971. The title of her thesis was "*Growth and Development of Bengali Girls*". Her Ph.D. supervisor was another luminary in

Anthropology, late Prof. M.N. Basu. Later on she went to USA for higher studies and to UK, France, Switzerland and Italy for visiting Anthropological Museums.

Initially *Tulikadi* joined the Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta as a Junior Technical Assistant (Physical) and served there from 1949-1951. She was also a Lecturer in Anthropology from 1958-1963 in Loreto Convent College, Lucknow. Subsequently she joined as a temporary lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta in 1972. Later, she became a permanent faculty member of this Department. In fact she was the first lady faculty member of this Department. She retired as "Reader in Anthropology" in May, 1991.

She trained in physical anthropology and human anatomy under Dr. Guha and Dr. Ernst C. Buchi, a Swiss scholar of the Zurich University. She worked also on ancient skulls of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. She left the Anthropological Survey of India and took the decision to get married. Dr. B. S. Guha attended their marriage function and blessed her with a gift (*Sanchayeta* by Rabindranath Tagore).

In the long voyage as an Anthropologist, *Tulikadi* developed very close academic associations with many stalwarts such as B. S. Guha, K. P. Chattopadhyay, Nirmal Kumar Bose, Tarak Chandra Das, Sasanka Sekhar Sarkar, Minendra Nath Basu, Jyotsna Kanta Bose and Dharani Sen. She has the privilege of having luminaries like Gautam Sankar Ray, Sabita Ranjan Sarkar, Prabodh Kumar Bhowmick, Debiprasad Mukherjee, Shyamal Kanti Sengupta, Biswanath Banerjee, Manibrata Bhattacharya, Asoke Kumar Ghosh, Amulya Ratan Banerjee, Asit Baran Das Choudhuri and Ranjana Roy as her colleagues during her stint in the Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta.

Tulikadi gathered a wide range of field experience particularly in the field of growth and development of girls and children belonging to different population groups of the country. She was involved in a research project titled "*Growth Study Scheme*" in Lucknow University from 1956-1958. She was associated as an Anthropologist from 1956-1958 in the Council of Medical Research, Lucknow Centre and worked in a project titled "*Growth and Development of Children in India*". She was equally

well versed in the field of demography, fertility and physiology.

She guided three students for their Ph. D. degree from Calcutta University. They are a) Rumjhum Ray Choudhuri, b) Juthika Basak and c) Baby Das. The titles of their theses were '*A Demographic study on two culturally diverse communities in Calcutta*', '*Some biological and demographical studies on Oraons and Mundas in two different settings*' and '*The effective of birth control programmes on rural and urban communities in West Bengal*' respectively.

Tulikadi attended a number of conferences and seminars in national and international levels. These included the Xth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held at Delhi, from 10th to 21st December, 1978. She also attended the inaugural function and exhibition on the Centenary Birth Celebrations of B. S. Guha, held at Asutosh Birth Centenary Hall, Indian Museum on 8th August, 1994. She was closely associated with the Asiatic Society, Kolkata and elected as a council member and Anthropological Secretary of the Society from April, 2000 to March, 2006. She was a Life member of the Indian Anthropological Society, Kolkata, Life member of Genealogical Society and Life member of the Institute of Bio-Social Research and Applied Anthropology, Kolkata. She was awarded 'Senior Anthropologist Award' by the Indian Anthropological Society on 25th May, 2015 on the occasion of 45th Annual Conference at Calcutta. She was a regular at the meetings of the Indian Anthropological Society. She was the President as well as Editor (1966 to 1968) of the Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society

Her publications covered a wide range of issues in Physical Anthropology. Some of her pioneering works are mentioned below:

1. Reproductive life of some Indian women, *Man in India*, Vol.36, No.1, 1953
2. A demographic study of South East Asia, *Man in India*, Vol.36, No. 4, 1956
3. The grown and interrelations of skinfold and brachial tissue in man, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, Vol.16, No.1, 1958 (co-authors: D.P. Baker and E.E. Hunt).
4. Subcutaneous fat of the Bengalee school and college girls, *Journal of the Indian*

- Anthropological Society*, Vol.4, No.1&2, 1969.
5. A Study on the age at menarche of the urban Bengalee girls: a search for its secular trend, *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*, Vol.10, No.2, 1975.
 6. *Growth and Development of Bengalee Girls*, Anthropological Survey of India, 1988.
 7. A Guide to Anthropometry, The World Press Private Limited, Calcutta. 1994

Her paper on growth and development of Bengali girls was a masterpiece and has been referred by almost all researchers who have subsequently worked on menarche in India. Her book on anthropometry has been well-written, keeping in mind the interest of the students. As far as the knowledge of both the authors goes, the pictures for the book were drawn by two of their batch mates, Gopal Chandra Mandal and Dipti Talukdar. She was one of the rare breed of teachers in Anthropology who had written books for the benefit of the students. Her book, even today finds a place in the syllabus reading list of many Universities of our country. But, ironically she could never become a “Professor” in the University of Calcutta, and retired as a “Reader” in Anthropology.

One aspect of *Tulikadi* that needs to be touched upon is that she always kept herself away from controversies. The main reason she could do so was because she had a circle of her own, away from Anthropology. JS shares one incident that took place in the Department and he was an eye witness. He cannot recollect that exact date, but on that day, *Tulikadi*'s room was emptied, all her belongings and almirah were thrown in the corridor and she was literally shooed away from the Department. She left with tears in her eyes. Not one faculty member came forward to support or for that matter console her.

SOME PERSONAL GLIMPSES ON THE LIFE OF TULIKADI

During the M.Sc. course days of NKD and JS in the University of Calcutta, *Tulikadi* was perhaps the senior most faculty in the Department. Their first interaction with her was sometime in August, 1987, when she entered their M.Sc. Part I classroom, which is now the Lecture Theatre of the Department. She

taught primatology, human growth, craniometry and somatometry. NKD and JS suddenly saw a tall, slim, smart and well dressed lady faculty wearing a light coloured saree entering the classroom. She wore minimum gold ornaments, sported metal frame spectacles, wrist watch and leather slippers and appeared to be in her sixties. She had a stern look on her face and seldom put on a smile during those first 45 minutes of her class. The authors were overwhelmingly impressed by her simple English accent and good hand writing on the black board. She was called *Madam* then later *Tulikadi*. As the days turned into months, both the authors observed that she was very punctual in her classes, in fact even coming to the Department. She used to walk down from her residence at *Saptaparni*, to Ballygunge Science College. Sometimes the authors used to meet her at the main gate of the University and after wishing her, she always used to say in Bengali “*Tumi/Tomra kemon acho*”? (How are you?).

Tulikadi was always very punctual in the class, delivering her lecture in a very attractive manner by showing photographs, drawing charts. She always brought small note pages and fully engaged in teaching as this was her passion. Sometimes she gave a number of examples from known quadrupedal animals and sometimes she demonstrated the primate behavior very lively. In the practical classes in somatometry, the authors had to take measurements of their classmates. Before taking the measurements, *Tulikadi* always used to remind all the students to wash their hands. She used to check the nails particularly of the girls. Despite her apparent sternness, both of authors liked to attend all her classes regularly and very attentively. She always spoke in low and sweet voice and her simplicity was reflected through her signature as ‘T.S’.

All the then faculty members of the Department used to call her *Tulikadi*. She had been allotted a small room. No laboratory room was assigned to her for her research work. She used to sit on the chair with her legs folded... a style typical to her. Another typical pose of *Tulikadi* was standing with her hands on her hips. She was extremely fond of tea, coffee and *pan* or betel-leaf. She used to gossip with the late Biswanath Banerjee (BNB) during her leisure time in the Department. Every day at around 2.00 pm she

used to come to the room of BNB for tea or coffee. Sometimes she was joined in this *adda* by her former colleagues Dr. Gautam Sankar Roy and Ramen Ghosh. JS recalls that during this *adda* time, all the research scholars of BNB (e.g., now whom we know as Dr. Shakti Pada Haldar and Dr. Abhijit Das) used to go to the canteen. JS as a research scholar used to sit in the room of ABSC, which was just opposite to that of BNB. He could hear the witty talk and squeals of laughter of *Tulikadi* in course of the *adda*.

Once in the class of NKD and JS she was teaching primate dentition. She remarked that the lower jaws of apes protruded over the upper jaw, and in humans it was the opposite. Then one of the students, Abdul Hannan remarked that ‘Madam, my lower jaw protrudes over the upper jaw’. She was taken aback for a few seconds. She quickly regained her composure and said “Tumi human na” and started laughing.

The authors also recollect that *Tulikadi* always used to say that the teachers in the colleges were more busy imparting tuition to the students, rather than taking classes. As a result, the students as a whole were having shaky foundations. She was quite candid about this in numerous occasions. She used to tell the present authors “Tomra kichu college e shekonei”. During the days of the authors, the B.Sc degree (Honours) was of three years (two years: Part I and one year: Part II). The Part II Practical examinations were held in the Department, University of Calcutta and not in the respective colleges. JS over the years as a student and a UGC-NE research fellow has seen *Tulikadi* performing her duties as an invigilator and examiner to perfection. She hardly compromised with others during these practical examinations.

NKD shares a story about her addiction of *pan*. In late seventies in the last century she went to a foreign tour with her sister and she carried a large amount of betel leaves and betel nuts. After a certain period of her stay in the foreign country, all the betel leaves were consumed. She then began hunting around for betel leaves, which she could not subsequently procure. One day she made a plan to visit the local forest with her sister. There she found a green creeper which apparently resembled a betel plant. She was so excited that collected a leaf. Then

she rubbing a small part of it with her finger and tried to get the aroma. She became convinced that it was not a betel leaf. However, she collected a large amount of the leaves. There she chewed one leaf and came back to her relative house and observed herself whether any reaction would take place on her body or not. After a few hours when she felt normal, she started to take that unknown leaf as substitute for betel leaf during her entire stay in that country.

The maternal sister of JS stays at Saptaparni, in the same block as *Tulikadi*. NKD may recollect that he had also visited her house with JS. JS learnt from his sister (Didibhai to JS) that *Tulikadi* had a keen interest in playing lawn tennis. She also used to visit the Calcutta Club. Once when JS told Didibhai that he was quite afraid of *Tulikadi*, she started laughing. She confided that *Tulikadi* was one of the most talkative and jovial members of the society. Her sons told JS that no one was afraid of *Tulikadi* there. Every year, the residents of *Saptaparni* organize *Durga Puja*. Among other things, a drama/theatre is performed by the residents every year. *Tulikadi* was an active member in the *puja* celebration and used to take part in the drama. Once Didibhai asked JS to come to see a drama during the *Durga Puja* celebrations. JS went to see it and there was *Tulikadi* playing the role of a maid to the hilt. Didibhai went on to say that *Tulikadi* used to regularly ask updates on JS from her, and that continued even when JS joined the Department as a UGC-NET Research fellow. When Didibhai told her that JS joined the Department of Anthropology as a Lecturer in 1996, she was elated. In the year 2008, JS met *Tulikadi* in a seminar organized by the Asiatic Society, Kolkata. She took his *pronam* and smiled and said that she was proud that he had joined the University of North Bengal.

JS lost his father in the year 1990. On that fateful day he was in Cochin, attending the Indian Science Congress. During those days, there was no mobile phones and no internet. His family desperately wanted to get the confirmation of his return to Kolkata. *Tulikadi* stepped in, being informed by Didibhai. She through her sources managed to get the information that JS was reaching Kolkata the next day. When JS went to the Department the first time after his father’s death, *Tulikadi* and Asoke Kumar Ghosh were the only two faculty members who comforted him. In

fact, *Tulikadi* used to regularly enquire whether JS got the notes, books and the like. She even followed it up with Didibhai.

Tulikadi had always encouraged the students to take part in inter-departmental indoor games and cultural competitions in the Annual Day in the Campus of Ballygunge Science College or any departmental cultural programmes. It is remembered that once a small exhibition was organized in the department under her supervision on the occasion of Platinum Jubilee Celebrations (1914-1989) of College of Science Technology and Agriculture of the University of Calcutta.

Even though *Tulikadi* was strict in mannerism, she remained very affectionate to her students. NKD recalls an incident from a senior student of her, who went for a field study in the rural areas of Howrah district of West Bengal. There an informant asked *Tulikadi* that “Madam, is she your daughter?” Such was her affection to her students.

In course of the M.Sc. days, JS had come across a paper by Richard Leakey and Alan Walker in the American Journal of Anthropology, 1989 on the famed fossil find KNM-WT-17000 from Koobi Fora. He wrote a letter to Leakey. He remembers that an aerogramme was sent. Some days back, a reply from Leakey arrived. When *Tulikadi* heard this, she told JS “Tumi Richard ke chiti likheso?” and smiled. She went on to say that she visited the Kenyan national Museums in Nairobi and personally met Richard. JS still cherishes the letters from Leakey to this day. When JS joined the Department as a UGC-NET JRF under the supervision of Prof. Asit Baran Das Chaudhuri, *Tulikadi* was elated. She told him “Bhalo korecho”. She never asked him, ‘Why ABDC, not me’. Others would have thought otherwise.

JS had worked in the field of trace elements in human hair. It was quite a job for him to make people understand that the work fell in the domain of Anthropology. He remembers that in his Ph.D. pre-submission seminar, *Tulikadi* came up with some very constructive comments and supported the work saying that such young researchers should be encouraged.

Another side of *Tulikadi* is shared by NKD. In an incident the middle finger of NKD got heavily

injured during a train journey from Kolkata to New Jalpaiguri for attending Annual Conference of The Indian Anthropological Society at North Bengal University in the month of December, 1992. A large number of delegates were in same compartment including *Tulikadi*. She immediately came to him and advised to her all students (delegates) to arrange for proper medical treatment. After reaching at New Jalpaiguri railway station she instructed her student Prof. Sk. Rahim Mandal of the Department of Social Anthropology to arrange for the treatment. All of them stayed for four days in Loyla Hostel and she always used to ask NKD about medicines and dressings of the injury. Every evening after the seminar sessions, she used to share some stories about her teachers M. N. Basu and T. C. Das amongst others.

NKD got a chance twice for taking interviews at her residence for two documentaries, the first being for *An Epic Journey i.e., History of Indian Anthropological Society (1920-2014)* on 19th July, 2014 and the second for Dr. B. S. Guha on 14th May, 2017. Dr. Sumahan Bandopadhyay and Dr. Barun Mukhopadhyay were also present during both these occasions. Before the interview, *Tulikadi* was sitting on a sofa and jokingly asked her maid to do some make up on her. The maid took it seriously and returned with some cosmetics. *Tulikadi* broke into loud laughter and instructed her maid to take the items back and put them in their respective places. She informed that her husband, Dr. D. K. Sen designed the logo of the Indian Anthropological Society with her suggestions which puts emphasis on “*Amritasshya Putra*” meaning children of immortality. It has been used since 1967.

Tulikadi shared her experiences of association with Dr. B. S. Guha from her childhood to initial service life in the Anthropological Survey of India. She was staying with her parents in Guha’s young brother house as a tenant at Hindusthan Park, Calcutta after her father’s retirement. Sometimes Dr. Guha visited his brother’s residence and she first met with him when she was studying in class nine. One day he gifted to her a piece of *muga* silk of Assam. She stitched a blouse using the silk piece after doing embroidery work on the same. One day she met to her teacher Professor K.P. Chattopadhyay, Head of the Anthropology, University of Calcutta and requested

him for a departmental research scholarship. He replied that “*no, it is not possible at all.*” Then she again requested to Professor Chattopadhyay for providing one set of anthropometric instruments for her research work. He replied that we did not provide required instruments to anybody. Even he said to her that “*I do not provide the said instrument to Ramkrishna (Mukherjee).*” Then she was thinking how to get the instruments.

Then she went to office of the Anthropological Survey of India, in the premises of Indian Museum, Calcutta, and met to Dr. B. S. Guha and she requested for providing one set of anthropometric instruments and promised after finishing the work she would be return the same. Dr. Guha told her that “*it is a government office; it is not possible to provide instrument to the outsider.*” She has no idea about the government rules and formalities. Then Dr. Guha told her that “*listen it is not proper way, it is better to join in the office and then you will get all things.*” She then joined the Anthropological Survey of India. During that time, her would be husband Dr. Dilip Kumar Sen was working as a Deputy Director of the Anthropology Department, Calcutta. Dr. Sen still remembering those days and she acknowledged to Dr. Guha for his encouragement in research work and she leaned many things in Physical Anthropology from him during two years’ government service in the Survey.

In course of the interviews, *Tulikadi* had given a strong message or comments regarding the Centenary year celebrations of the Department of Anthropology; University of Calcutta. She was poignant when she remarked that the Department had not progressed much since the days of Dr. S. S. Sarkar and Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose. It was almost in a static position. She also highlighted the latest position of anthropology subject in globally and told that when she asked this

question to her teacher Professor Howells of Harvard University, he replied that its importance have lost due to its loss in application and this was a global phenomena. After the interviews, every time, she offered snacks and tea. During the last interview, she told Dr. Barun Mukhopadhyay for playing a *Rabindrasangeet*. It was raining and tea was being served, he sang *shrabono rimi jhim rimi jhim*, and TS also joined. Then he sang another song *dhayjeno morsakal bhalobas*.

CONCLUSION

We all know that ‘Man is mortal’. Death is the only truth in this earth; no one can escape this. People remembered a few of them who have some contribution for the society and they make an impression in human mind. *Tulikadi* left us at the age of ninety-four years five months ten days. She was a passionate anthropologist and we lost an ideal teacher. Her death is a great loss to the fraternity of Anthropology. Her love and affection is always impressed to all students and her colleagues. Her students were like her brothers and sisters or her offspring. Some of her students observed death pollution period and perform the death rites and rituals at their houses.

TS had drawn painting forever on good human beings by her *tuli* or brush as education, on heart of the students as paper, with love and affection as colour.

May her soul rest in peace.

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