

BOOK REVIEW

NATION-BUILDING IN INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY – BEYOND THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER by **Abhijit Guha**, Manohar, New Delhi, 2022, Pp.154. ISBN 978-93-91928-73-5, Hard Cover, Price: Rs.1050.

The role of Anthropology in the Nation-building in India has largely remained beyond the academic attention in this country. In the book *Nation-Building in Indian Anthropology – Beyond the Colonial Encounter* (2022), Professor Abhijit Guha intended to fill that gap. Guha attempted to see how the Indian Anthropologists took up the challenges like famine, resettlement of refugees, development-caused-displacement which independent India faced at its nascent stage. Moreover, Guha tried to take an account of the anthropological methods employed by the scholars to study the above mentioned issues and came up with some concrete results useful for the nation. His approach, as claimed by him, is different from that of Talal Asad (1973) who would like to find the influence of colonialism on anthropology. Contrary to this, Guha wanted to analyse how anthropologists shackled under colonial rule devised their own ways to address the burning problems of a developing country immediately after gaining the political freedom.

The book has six chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. The introductory chapter provides a discussion on the writings of the history of Indian Anthropology starting from B.S. Guha (1938) to Uberoi and others (2007). The author has also offered an enviable list of works on the history of Anthropology in India done by Guha, Bose, Beteille, Danda, Srivastava, Bera, Mehta, Rao, Joshi, Das among others. At the wake of the commemoration of 100 years of teaching of anthropology in India, there have been a plethora of publications on the history of anthropology in the country. Guha (2022) has rightly mentioned the collection edited by Sarthak Sengupta (2021), but there are some more works edited by Amitabha Sarkar and Samira Dasgupta (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). We also do not find the mention of Joardar's book (2001) on the history of anthropology in India. But these apparent omissions do not dilute the basic point which the author intended to emphasize that the history of anthropology in India evaded the question of the role of anthropology in nation building. Here, he sets out to fill this gap with his own work based on the select readings of the writings of five Indian anthropologists – Bhupendranath Datta (1880), Biraja Sankar Guha (1894), Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyay (1897), Tarak Chandra Das (1898), Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901) about whom he discussed at length in chapter four. The book opens up with a hypothesis that a nationalist tradition of anthropological research could be discernable in India (p.24). Here he criticized Bose for his theorization of Hindu method tribal absorption that infused the anthropology in India a dominant higher-

caste Hindu ideology. His critique is also due to Danda who has put forward the idea of anthropology as a 'body of knowledge' based on ancient Hindu scriptures. Two very brief chapters – two and three – deal with the conceptual frameworks explicated in the book and the question whether the early Indian Anthropologists followed their colonial masters. In the later chapter, the author has summarized chronologically the critique of anthropological historiography in India.

Chapter four happens to be the lengthiest chapter of the book. After giving a brief note on ten nationalist anthropologists namely Sarat Chandra Mitra, Sarat Chandra Roy, Haran Chandra Chakladar, B.R. Ambedkar, and Panchanan Mitra, he proceeded to discuss in detail the contributions of five stalwarts whose names have been mentioned above.

The credit is largely due to Professor Guha for exposing before us the corpus of contributions made by scholars like T.C. Das and B.N. Datta who remained pathetically unsung in the history of anthropology in India. Datta made significant contributions to both physical and social anthropology. His studies on castes, social polity, religion and inheritance were full of original ideas. Similarly, T.C. Das's *Bengal Famine* (1943) is another epoch making contribution. In addition to this, his papers on the importance of cultural anthropology in the service of nation and on the improvements of museums are mention-worthy.

Guha (2022) has identified five pioneering studies which have great importance in nation-building. Besides the study of T.C. Das, the other four works included Surajit Chandra Sinha's survey on the resettlement of the East Pakistan refugees in Andaman Islands (1955), B.S. Guha's study on the social tension among the refugees from East Pakistan (1959), B.K. Roy Burman's study on the social processes involved in industrialization of Rourkela with special reference to the displacement and rehabilitation of the tribal and other backward sections of the people (1961) and finally Irawati Karve and Jai Nimbkar's work on the people displaced by Koyna dam project (1969). According to Guha, these works were commissioned by the state and were not focused on any single community. Rather the focus was on the resettlement and rehabilitation of the people subjected to large-scale displacement. The author of the book considers that all these studies were sincere efforts on the part of the anthropologists to help the country to overcome the problems it was facing at that time to build the nation.

The author came to the conclusion that although there was a colonial tradition, a nationalist trend was quite manifest during the pre- and post- independence period in the works of some of the anthropologists who had employed their disciplinary knowledge and training in solving the problems particular to land and people of the country. It is unfortunate that this legacy was not carried to a more fruitful extent by the successors, barring a few. Guha's present study is an eye-opener for the future generations to take up socially more meaningful research which has a glorious past and a potential future.

The book has been no doubt a significant contribution to our understanding of the history of anthropology in India. Only some minor contradictions appear disquieting. For example, both Panchanan Mitra (p.48) and S.C. Mitra (p.49) have been mentioned as the first professor of anthropology in India. But, to the best of my knowledge both did not hold the designation as ‘professor’ and ‘first’. The Syndicate report (1920) of the University of Calcutta would make it amply clear (Bandyopadhyay, 2023). The Anthropological Survey of India was set up in December of 1945, not in 1946 as mentioned in the book (p.12). There are some references which are cited in the main text, but not given in the ‘References’ section at the end of the book (e.g. B.K. Roy Burman [1968], p.34; J.J. Roy Burman[2011], p.43).

The book is timely and will surely make a lasting impact on the study of the history of anthropology in India.

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