



BOOK REVIEW

Biraja Sankar Guha by Nabakumar Duary, Aayu Publications, New Delhi, 2023. pp. 207

Nabakumar Duary, in *Biraja Sankar Guha*, uses a visual depiction of Prof. B.S.Guha, visiting different places and institutions and collecting numerous photographs linked with Guha's life and works. The book is an example of visual anthropology which happens to be of utmost interest to the author. Basically, the author deals with the life and events associated with the great anthropologist. The book has been published by Aayu Publications, New Delhi in 2023 (with 207 pages in total).

The book begins with messages from Prof. Guha's son, Bhaskar Sankar Guha and his daughter, Alta Ahmad. In the Introductory part, the author mentions how he developed interest for Visual Anthropology after joining Anthropological Survey of India and developed an interest to work on this great man's life. He collected many visual documents even from Guha's family and intends to illustrate the life and anthropological journey of the founder Director of The Anthropological Survey of India through this book.

The book is divided into eleven chapters. The first chapter gives a detailed account on the birth and family background of Guha. The various photographs of Guha with his family, his father, mother, with his brothers, Guha Lodge (family home) and even letters from Guha to his mother one easily reflect on the background of this great personality. The Genealogy of Guha provided in this chapter is a clear depiction of Guha's family, their migration from East Pakistan and finally settling down in Assam.

The second chapter is a journey one takes to unravel Guha's educational training. Starting his education at Cotton Collegiate School, Guwahati and then moving to Calcutta for higher education are so clearly portrayed through the photographs that one can easily understand even without going through the texts. The photographs of the different luminaries with whom he came into contact like Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Dr Brajendranath Seal and others are so clear and distinct that credit must be given to the author for his meticulous work. Even the signed page of Ph.D. thesis examiners, including his supervisor, R.B. Dixon is a rare collection. The professional life of Guha which began in Bangabasi College, Calcutta, then Cotton College and his tenure at the University

of Calcutta (1926) teaching Physical Anthropology finds expression through the vivid photographs of the institutes.

The author has done an incredible job which finds expression in the third chapter on Guha's Family life. The family photograph of Guha with his wife, two sons and his sister-in-law at Munich, Germany, 1935, photo of numerous letters written to his mother (1931), photograph of his residence at Kaiser Cassel, Varanasi, U.P, with Verrier Elwin at Varanasi gives a picture of his family life at a glance.

The fourth chapter vividly portrays his various field experiences in the Naga Hills (1926-27), his excavations at Mohenjodaro, Harappa, Maski and other prehistoric sites of India, and his photographic albums on different racial faces in India (collected by Guha). These are real treasures from visual anthropological perspective also.

Chapter five present many important glimpses of Guha's anthropological journey starting with the foundation of Anthropological Survey of India, his engagement with research personnel, his extensive work in establishing laboratories in specialized fields like morphology, Radiology, Human Biology, osteology, psychology and so on. Guha's far sightedness is evident from the fact that he started the photography unit in 1946. The author's portrayal of Guha's mission to expand the research activities of the Survey with first sub-station at Port Blair and second at Shillong proves that he was a true visionary.

The various field work experiences of Guha conducted among indigenous tribes of India have been beautifully captured by the camera and portrayed by the author. The collection of photos of Guha among these tribes and some in tribal costume gives an idea of the phenomenal experience of Guha in the field. Chapter six is a huge collection of some of the rare and exclusive field photographs and the author deserves a real appreciation for his efforts to collect and present them systematically. The association of Guha with various academic institutions like The Asiatic Society, National Institute of Science in India, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland and so on speaks about his world wide popularity. He was instrumental in setting up a department of Anthropology both in Delhi University (1947) and Gauhati University (1948) and these episodes are vividly narrated in this chapter. This chapter has a very important photograph of Sir Maurice Linford Gwyer, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

Chapter eight is a visual narrative of Guha's post retirement activities. His tenure as Director of Bihar Tribal Research Institute, Ranchi and establishment of tribal museum, library and publication of the first bulletin of the institute are some of his activities after retirement . This chapter also narrates the sad and sudden demise of Guha in a rail accident on 20th October 1961. The photographs of the smashed bogies of the train, newspaper clippings related to his demise and

the numerous obituaries publishes in several reputed national and international anthropological journals give an idea of the meticulous care the author undertook in collecting the rare visuals.

Chapter nine presents a visual glimpse of his numerous publications and the various honours and awards received including the Annandale Gold Medal in Anthropology in 1942. Chapter ten is a visual documentation of the numerous commemorative programmes undertaken in memory of Prof. B.S. Guha. Chapter eleven is a very interesting account of a Lithuanian motorbike traveler and physical anthropologist who worked under Prof. B.S. Guha and submitted his Ph.D thesis in 1936 in the University of Calcutta. But unfortunately he was awarded the degree (honorary D.Litt.) posthumously 2014. These rare photographs tell a story by itself.

The whole book is a pictorial biography of one of the greatest luminaries in the field of anthropology in India. The visual portrayal of such a brilliant academician with every minute details of his life is not a very easy task. The author has taken all possible endeavor to collect such rare treasures and present them in a book form. Other than some minor printing errors here and there the book will be an addition to the anthropological and more specifically to the visual anthropological storehouse.

Chandana Sarma

Associate Professor in Anthropology

Cotton University

Assam