

BOOK REVIEW

ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISCOURSES - A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS ON CULTURE & HERITAGE by Atul Chandra Bhowmick, Anustup Prakashani, Kolkata, 2022, Pp. 344. ISBN 978-93-9347204-5, Hard Cover, Price - Rs. 600/-(India), \$25 (Overseas).

In general sense discourse is a way of communicating ideas. It may be a lecture, treatise or simply a conversation. However, discourse is a control, to exercise power in Foucauldian sense. One should not take the 'Anthropological Discourse' here in the way Foucault used the concept of discourse. The present work retains its common sense meaning while dealing with the anthropological issues. But it is very much true that Anthropology is discursive. Professor Bhowmick's book contributes to that discursive tradition.

The book, under review contains 30 essays which are focused on prehistory, material culture, tribal life, folk art and museum within a territorial limit of eastern India, more specifically West Bengal with little exception when it stretches up to north-east. Therefore, the studies primarily document the culture and heritage of West Bengal. The majority of the topics deals with the prehistoric archaeology of south west part of the State including the districts of Purulia, Bankura, Midnapore (now divided into Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram). The author describes the lithic industries from palaeolithic to neolithic periods on the basis of explorations in this region. Apart from discussing the typo-technology of the lithic finds, he took up two interesting topic - megalithic tradition and rock art. The author seems to have a special interest in pottery which became the subject matter of three of the essays collected in this volume. Among the tribes, the Santals absorbed the greatest attention. The ethnological description of the Santals presents their marriage custom, costumes, dance along with an introductory note on the tribe. In the article on Santal costume, we find that he discussed the custom of body decoration with tattooing. But mention of characteristic *Panji sari* and *dhuti* of the Santals, is not met with there. The author has hinted at the relationship of Chhau with Gambhira of Malda and Kalinachan of Comilla and Mymensingh. He probably tried to resolve a debate on the origin of Chhau dance which is performed in Mayurbhanj, Seraikela and Purulia. After certain reasoning, he came to conclude that it was originated in Odisha, not in Bengal. The reader could have been more benefitted if he had presented a comparative study of the stylistic variations of the regional forms of Chhau dance and their socio - historical background. The author has postulated that the use of mask can be attributed to two reasons - magical and practical. These reasons could have been understood as ritualistic and aesthetic. In this book, we also get discussions on the Hos of Jharkhand, Khamti of Arunachal

Pradesh, Mech and Mru of West Bengal. Tribal wall paintings, relationship of tribal people with forest, indigenous knowledge of the tribal communities are some of the other aspects highlighted in the book. The author taught at the Department of Museology in the University of Calcutta for about three decades. His expertise is reflected in three articles on museum, which find place in this collection. He has written: “The concept of establishing ethnography museum across the country was aimed to collect, preserve and impart knowledge about the objects of different ethnic groups to the researchers and visitors.” (P. 325).

Again, he has pointed out the importance of ethnographic museum in fostering integration of the tribal people in another article. His writings on the museum are instructive, too, because they provide guidance for museum personnel on the collection, accession, and preservation of museum objects.

The book will serve as a handy reference for the students of museology, anthropology, folklore, and cultural studies and a lucid reading for the readers interested in the field of culture and heritage.

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