

## Book Review

NATION-BUILDING IN INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY: BEYOND THE COLONIAL ENCOUNTER. By Abhijit Guha. pp. 154, bibliography, index, 2022. Manohar Publishers & Distributors: New Delhi. Hardcover. Price ₹ 1050/-.

This slim book on 'Nation Building in Indian Anthropology' by Professor Abhijit Guha is the outcome of his research conducted during 2018-20, under a senior fellowship awarded by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi. The front hardcover of the book carries photographs of four eminent anthropologists namely, Irawati Karve, Ramaprasad Chanda, Tarak Chandra Das and Surajit Sinha. The book carries a line of dedication and the author writes, "Dedicated to Raghavendra Guha my uncle (*Chotokaku*) whose invaluable collection of old books in Anthropology was my first inspiration".

This volume contains six chapters which are as follows: 1) Introduction: History of Indian Anthropology as Depicted by the Founders; 2) Conceptual Framework of the Study and Methodology; 3) Did the Early Indian Anthropologists Follow their Colonial Masters?; 4) Nationalist Anthropology in India: Origin and Growth; 5) The Future of Nationalist Anthropology in India; and lastly, 6) Conclusion. The book also contains a lengthy Bibliography and Index.

The author begins his 'Introduction' with the line (p. 11), "Anthropology in India began under colonial rule. .... "The first anthropological publications started with the Asiatic Society, which was established on 15 January 1784 in Kolkata by Sir William Jones (1746-1794), a philologist. [should have been Calcutta (*now 'Kolkata'*)] The author further writes, "Although anthropology was not separately studied in this pioneering centre of learning in India, scholars in Asiatic Society studied language, history, arts and sciences" .... "The next impetus for anthropology in India came with the census operations by the British administration in 1881" (p.

11). The author then discusses at length about the first department of anthropology which was established at Calcutta University in 1920 with the initiative of Sir Asutosh Mukhopadhyay (1864-1924), and under the headship of a pioneering Indian anthropologist Ananthakrishna Iyer (1861-1937). The author then discusses about the development of anthropology gradually in other universities of India and about the establishment of Anthropological Survey of India in 1946 under the leadership of Dr B. S. Guha. About the situation after the independence of the country the author writes, "Indian anthropologists felt that anthropology in India still remained a Western imitation, save some brilliant exceptional studies done by some of the pioneers. The crisis of Indian anthropology was also perceived at the level of application of anthropology for human welfare, national planning and national integration. Some of the anthropologists also ventured into the future of Indian anthropology. It is with the help of this background that I have written this book based on my research on the nationalist trends in Indian anthropology" (p. 12).

The author writes (p. 13), "...my aim is to search how the Indian anthropologists have undertaken serious researches on some of the major macro-level challenges (namely, famine, resettlement of refugees and development-caused displacement) encountered by people of the newly independent nation by utilizing the methods and techniques of anthropology in the context of Indian reality". Dr Abhijit also talks about 'Hindu anthropology', and states, "But before I move into the domain of nationalist anthropology, I narrate another interesting story in the development of anthropology in India, which is 'Hindu anthropology'. He cites the paper by Jogesh Chandra Ghosh (1938) published by University of Calcutta in the *Anthropological Papers (New Series)*, no. 5. Ghosh pointed out that the earliest of anthropometric measurement found in *Susruta Samhita*. The author also cites the work of Nirmal Kumar Bose on 'Hindu

anthropology' (pp. 25-27). The author is also aware of a publication in 1984 by Akhbar S. Ahmed titled 'Defining Islamic Anthropology', which Akbar S. Ahmed has noted "posed serious questions of a philosophical as well as an anthropological nature" (p. 30).

In Chapter 2 Dr Abhijit Guha discusses 'the conceptual framework the aims and objectives of the study'. The author writes specifically, "My hypothesis in this research is that a nationalist trend in anthropology along with the colonial tradition was also growing during the pre- and post-independence periods in India and this trend was characterized by the works of anthropologist who were socially committed and contributed to nation-building through their analytical writings and research."

Professor Abhijit Guha has extensively cited the scholarly works of eminent anthropologist of India and writes under 'scope', "Analytical essays or parts of ethnographic monographs, rather than descriptive and/or simple ethnographic treatises, devoted to the role of anthropology in nation-building have come under the purview of this research'. Regarding 'methodology', the author writes. "The overall planning of this research is designed on the basis of the previous works done by the scholars on the history of anthropological research in India. It is also based on a hypothesis that a nationalist tradition of anthropological research is discernable in India."

Even after going through the 'Introduction' and the 'Conceptual Framework', the reviewer has not been able to follow the concept of 'Nation-Building', though beginning words entitling the book is — '*Nation-Building in Indian Anthropology*' with subtitle '*Beyond the Colonial Encounter*'. The author should have discussed what 'nation-building' means and what role Indian anthropologists can play in nation building and in what way.

On pages 91-92, the author writes, "Even one of the doyens and visionaries of Indian anthropology ..... did not discuss the contributions and role of anthropologists in nation-building in independent India in his two important books entitled *Problems of National Integration* (1967) and *Problems of Indian Nationalism* (1969).

In general, nation-building aims at the unification

of the people with the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in long run. Nation-building is constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. Nation builders are those members of a state who take the initiative to develop the national community through government programs. In a functional understanding of nation-building, both economic and social factors are seen as influential. There are many other factors which are greatly important for nation-building like, defense, education, health, communication, media, foreign trade, etc.

So thus we find economic and social factors are also important in the functional understanding of nation-building. It is in this field where anthropologists and sociologists are contributing in nation-building.

In Chapter 3, the author tries to answer a pointed question — Did the Early Indian Anthropologists Follow their Colonial Masters? After a chronological description of critics, the author concludes with the lines, "The critics have only followed the convenient way of taking down the pioneers instead of studying the socially committed works of the latter and this was one of the reasons that Indian anthropologists failed to honour their nationalist predecessors and depended more on the wisdom of Western scholars. At best, the critics have only paid lip services to those nationalist pioneers of the discipline" (p.44).

In Chapter 4, Dr Abhijit discusses about 'Nationalist Anthropology in India: Origin and Growth'. He opens his discussion with the comments of Patricia Uberoi, Nandini Sundar and Satish Deshpande (2007:38) as follows: "We are yet to form a detailed picture of the ways in which nationalism exerted its influence in shaping Indian sociology and social anthropology. To be sure, almost every historical account of the discipline, whether it concerns an individual, an institution or the discipline at large, makes mention of this factor.....". Dr Abhijit Guha further writes, "In the above quoted opening statement, the authors admitted two important points, viz. that the question of nationalism occupied a 'very wide spectrum' and that no Indian anthropologist or sociologist could oppose nationalism" (p.45). In this chapter Dr Abhijit has covered about some of the notable national anthropologists and has highlighted

their works in some detail, particularly of Sarat Chandra Roy, Haran Chandra Chakladar, Bhupendra Nath Dutta, B. R. Ambedkar, Panchanan Mitra, among others. Dr Abhijit Guha has rightly observed and stated, “Ambedkar’s views on the origin of caste were also neglected in the anthropology and sociology curricula in the Indian universities and colleges. B. R. Ambedkar as a doctoral student in anthropology at Columbia University had presented a paper titled ‘Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development’. Dr G. S. Ghurye had only made a passing reference of Ambedkar in his famous book (of 1957) *Caste and Class in India* (p.51).

The next Chapter 5 that follows is: ‘The Future of Nationalist Anthropologists in India’. A lengthy chapter by the author wherein he discusses on the anthropological works done on the problems of resettlement of refugees, famine of Bengal, and displacement caused by industries and construction of dams which posed great challenges to nation-building in its early period. He also mentions about the article of Gopala Sarana ‘The Study of the Nation Building Process’ wherein Sarana discusses about “...some futuristic hopes on the usefulness of anthropology towards nation-building in India.” He

also discusses about the ‘skepticism regarding the contribution of social scientist’ presented by M. N. Srinivas in his essay on “Nation Building in Independent India”. This chapter elaborates the work of eminent anthropologists, particularly of Tarak Chandra Das, Surajit Chandra Sinha, Biraja Sankar Guha, B. K. Roy Burman, Irawati Karve, Pranab Ganguly and finally Vina Kumar Srivastava.

The author concludes (p.133), “The future of anthropology in India in the broader context of nation-building cannot be understood without looking into its past.”

The hard cover of the book contains photographs of only four eminent anthropologists of India, which gives a deceptive idea initially, that the author has discussed about only on these four stalwarts of the discipline of anthropology in India. No it is not so, the author has discussed about the contribution of almost all eminent anthropologists of India who were born before Independence, the only exception being Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava (1952-2020).

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