

OCCASIONAL PAPER

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In search of nationalist trends in  
Indian anthropology: opening a new  
discourse

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**September 2018**



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# In search of nationalist trends in Indian anthropology: opening a new discourse

Abhijit Guha<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

There is little research on the history of anthropology in India. The works which have been done though contained a lot of useful data on the history of anthropology during the colonial and post-colonial periods have now become dated and they also did not venture into a search for the growth of nationalist anthropological writings by the Indian anthropologists in the pre and post independence periods. The conceptual framework of the discourse developed in this paper is derived from a critical reading of the anthropological texts produced by Indian anthropologists. This reading of the history of Indian anthropology is based on two sources. One source is the reading of the original texts by pioneering anthropologists who were committed to various tasks of nation building and the other is the reading of literature by anthropologists who regarded Indian anthropology simply as a continuation of the western tradition. There also existed a view that an Indian form of anthropology could be discerned in many ancient Indian texts and scriptures before the advent of a colonial anthropology introduced by the European scholars, administrators and missionaries in the Indian subcontinent. The readings from these texts are juxtaposed to write a new and critical history of Indian anthropology, which I have designated as the 'new discourse' in the title of this occasional paper. I have argued that while criticizing Indian anthropology or sociology the critiques mostly ignored the studies done by the pioneers of the disciplines which were socially relevant and directed to the welfare and

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betterment of the underprivileged sections of our country and these studies for the betterment of the underdog were often conducted by anthropologists and sociologists who belonged to higher castes occupying elite positions in the society. The critics have only followed the smart way to criticize the pioneers instead of studying the socially committed works of the later and this was one of the reasons that Indian anthropologists failed to honour their nationalist predecessors and depended more on the wisdom of the Western scholars. The new discourse in search of a nationalist trend in Indian anthropology, therefore, is urgently needed for the construction of the historiography of the discipline.

**Key words:** Indian anthropology, Nationalist trends in Indian anthropology, History of Indian anthropology, Colonial anthropology, Hindu anthropology.

## I

There is little research on the history of anthropology in India despite the fact that courses on the growth and development of anthropology in India had been recommended at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels in the *Model Curriculum Development Report* of the University Grants Commission as early as 2001. There are few published works on the history and the development of anthropology in India which included L.P. Vidyarthi's *magnum opus* entitled *Rise of Anthropology in India: A Social Science Orientation* (Vols. I & II) published in 1978. In the first chapter of volume I of the book Vidyarthi mentioned the 'sporadic attempts to review the researches in social anthropology in India' by scholars like S.C.Roy, D.N.Majumdar, G.S.Ghurye, S.C.Dube, N.K.Bose and S.C. Sinha (Vidyarthi, 1978:1-29). Quite significantly, Vidyarthi could not find among these scholars any substantial attempt to search for a nationalist trend of social and cultural anthropology in India. Four years before the publication of Vidyarthi's book, a biographical sketch of the eminent Indian anthropologists was published by S.K.Ray, the then Librarian of the Anthropological Survey of India, which also gave us some idea about the growth of anthropology in India (Ray, 1974). In the recently published Routledge Dictionary of anthropologists there is a short description of the development of Indian anthropology based on already published Indian materials (Gaillard, 2004).

All these aforementioned works, though contained a lot of useful data on the history of anthropology during the colonial and post-colonial periods, have now become dated and they also did not venture into a search for the growth of nationalist anthropological writings by the Indian anthropologists in the pre- and post-independence periods. A recent book *Anthropology in the East: Founders of Indian Sociology and Anthropology* edited by Patricia Uberoi, Nandini. Sundar and Satish Deshpande published in 2007 contained separate biographical chapters on pioneering Indian anthropologists and sociologists by individual authors. This book

although not devoted to search for the nationalist trends in Indian anthropology and sociology, contained many interesting pieces of information on the activities and works of the pioneers of Indian anthropology and sociology in the pre and post-independence periods. There were of course a number of perceptive articles which touched on the different aspects of the history of Indian anthropology but none of them attempted to write a nationalist history of the discipline (See, for example, Sinha, 1967; 1971; 1974; 1978 & 1980; Bêteille', 1997; 2000 & 2013; Sarana & Sinha 1976; Uberoi, Sundar and Deshpande, 2000 & 2007; Srivastava, 1999 & 2000; Rao, 2012; Sahay, 1976; Joshi, 2015). In a recent period, Roma Chatterji in her brilliant article raised the question of Indianness in Indian anthropology and sociology but her point of departure was more on reflexivity of Indian anthropologists with a tangential touch on the nationalist thinking among sociologists like M.N.Srinivas and T.N.Madan in the post-independence period (Chatterji, 2005:162-176). In this context we may recall Surajit Sinha's perceptive review of Nirmal Kumar Bose's ideas about the development of an Indian tradition of anthropology through the studies on urgent problems of post-independent India and Sinha emphasized the dangers of using borrowed ideas from the West (Sinha, 1967:1707-1709). Despite his repeated insistence for Indian anthropology, Surajit Sinha, however, did not delve much deeper into a historical search for nationalist trends in Indian anthropology. Sinha seemed to have restricted himself around the thoughts of Nirmal Kumar Bose only, while looking at the nationalist tradition in Indian anthropology. N.K.Bose's research endeavours on the other hand was largely influenced by the American cultural diffusionists, like Franz Boas, A.L.Kroeber and Clark Wissler (Bose, 1953).

Given these facts and circumstances, the conceptual framework of this discourse is derived from a critical and selective reading of the anthropological texts produced by Indian anthropologists. This reading of the history of Indian anthropology is based on two sources. One source is the reading of the original texts by pioneering anthropologists who were committed to various tasks of nation building and the other is the reading of literature by anthropologists who regarded early Indian anthropology simply

following the western tradition. These two readings of the texts are juxtaposed to write a new and critical history of Indian anthropology, which I have designated as the 'new discourse' in the title of this paper.

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. So, Sarat Chandra Roy's pioneering article 'An Indian Outlook on Anthropology' (Roy, 1938) and Tarak Chandra Das's sectional presidential address at the Indian Science Congress entitled 'Cultural Anthropology in the service of the individual and the nation' delivered in 1941 and his novel paper on museum building in independent India are more important sources of data for this research rather than Roy and Das's classical ethnographic monographs on the Mundas and PurumKukis of Manipur (Das, 1941). Another example is Verrier Elwin's comprehensive essay on the 'History of Anthropological Survey of India' published in 1948 (Elwin, 1948). Elwin's classical monographs on the Muria Gonds of Bastar do not directly come under the scope of this research.

Another group of anthropological works has also come under the ambit of my investigation. These were the works which were conducted on a burning problem of the country which has had tremendous bearing on nation building. For example, the rare and unique researches of Tarak Chandra Das on Bengal Famine (1949) and on Social Tensions among the refugees (1959) by Biraja Sankar Guha come under this category (Guha, 2017; 2016a; 2010; & 2011). Quite off-beat and almost forgotten but original article written by B.R. Ambedkar on the origin of the caste system in India presented in an anthropology Seminar at Columbia University in 1916 has also been relooked in this context of nationalistic trends in anthropology, since it sharply differed with the explanations provided by Western as well as Marxist and non-Marxist Indian scholars (like N.K. Bose and M.N. Srinivas) on caste system in India (Ambedkar, 1916).

The overall planning of this paper is designed on the basis of the previous works done by the author on the history of

anthropological research in India. It is also based on the hypothesis that a nationalist tradition of anthropological research is discernible in India. Accordingly, the methodology of the research is exploratory and involved intensive reading of the literature which carried this nationalist tradition. Readings of analytical papers and critical essays rather than plain ethnographies by the pioneers became more important in this discourse.

## II

There is a standard critique of Indian anthropology advanced by some of the Indian anthropologists. The critics say that Indian anthropology is the product of a colonial tradition and the Indian anthropologists for various reasons followed their colonial masters in one way or the other. Let me try to arrange the history of this critique of Indian anthropology in a chronological manner.

### ***A chronological description of Critiques***

1. As early as 1971 the famous Indian anthropologist Surajit Sinha in his insightful article published in the *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* (hereafter *JIAS*) observed that despite considerable growth in research publications and professional human power in social and cultural anthropology during the last 100 years, the Indian anthropologists largely remained dependent on western and colonial traditions (Sinha, 1971: 1-14). In continuation of his pertinent examination of the colonial dependence of Indian anthropology, Sinha contributed a full chapter entitled 'India: A Western Apprentice' in a book, *Anthropology: Ancestors and Heirs*, edited by the Marxist anthropologist Stanley Diamond in 1980 published by Mouton. In that article Sinha discussed 'the process of naturalization of the different strands of Western anthropological traditions' and finally ended with a pessimistic note

For some time, the proliferation of trained manpower, random efforts at catching up with the latest developments in the West and a general increase in the number of publications will characterize the development of Indian anthropology (Sinha, 1980: 281).

Trained by both Nirmal Kumar Bose and Tarak Chandra Das and



also at a later stage by Robert Redfield, Sinha was exposed to a wide arena of global and national anthropology. He completed his major works on the relationship between tribe and caste in the context of Indian civilization as well as state formation by mid 1960s. A closer view of his published works revealed that he first presented the critical idea on Indian anthropology in a Wenner-Gren Foundation conference held in New York in 1968 (Sinha 1968). In fact, Sinha's self-critical views on the growth of Indian social science in general and anthropology and sociology in particular could be traced back to his article entitled 'Involvement in social change: a plea for own ideas' published in *Economic and Political Weekly* as early as 1967 (Sinha 1967:1707-1709). In this article Sinha stated quite categorically

A scholarly tradition of leaning heavily, if not abjectly, on ideas borrowed from the West is growing in this country. This is clear from the post-independence writings of a large number of Indian social scientists and the research policies of some of our modern research institutions.

The borrowed ideas and concepts, when accepted uncritically, obscure the major issues involved in planned social change and stand in the way of posing the right kind of questions in the study of social change (Ibid 1707).

Sinha pursued with this critique of Indian social science by converging his attack on Indian Anthropology in the subsequent articles.

Taking note of his earlier article in the *JIAS*, Sinha in his 'Foreword' of the precious book *Bibliographies of Eminent Indian Anthropologists* (1974) written by Shyamal Kumar Ray, made a remark

.... there was a general reluctance among Indian scholars to take due note of the research publications of Indian pioneers and contemporaries. As a result, research endeavours of Indian scholars tend to be derivative, leaving the responsibilities of breaking new grounds exclusively to western scholars (Sinha, 1974: iii).

Although Sinha praised N.K.Bose and T.C.Das at the individual levels for their insight and ethnography respectively the critiques

advanced by Sinha in his 1967, 1971 and 1980 articles on the overall achievement of Indian anthropology was quite pessimistic and distressing. For him there was hardly any sign of an independent, let alone nationalist Indian anthropology. In his article entitled 'Urgent Problems for Research in Social and Cultural Anthropology in India: Perspectives and Suggestions' published in *Sociological Bulletin* in 1968 Sinha identified three distinct social anthropological 'vantage points' to approach the urgent problems in India, which were: (i) study of 'Primitive Groups' of tribes, (ii) study of human groups for the theoretical understanding of Indian society and (iii) anthropological study of problems urgently needed for national reconstruction and development. But quite interestingly Sinha left the third area untouched for the purpose of the paper (Sinha, 1968:123-131). It was not clear why he had done so and what purpose prevented him from undertaking discussion on this vital area. More interestingly, few years later Sinha wrote in the Foreword of a book entitled *Bibliographies of eminent Indian Anthropologists*

We are also impressed by the fact that these pioneering scholars, often working under severe limitations of resources, were engaged in life-long endeavour in their particular areas of academic interest. Each of them demonstrated a rare quality of mental independence while living most of their lives under colonial rule (Sinha 1974: iii).

But quite strangely, Surajit Sinha never came up with a comprehensive and overall review of the results of the 'mental independence' of his predecessors who lived their 'lives under colonial rule'. Sinha seemed to satisfy himself only with the praise of N.K. Bose and occasionally T.C. Das.

2. Next to Sinha came the critique of Amitabha Basu and Suhas Biswas who held professorial positions at the prestigious Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata. In their article, '*Is Indian Anthropology Dead/Dying*' published in the *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*, they raised the question of social relevance of Indian anthropology squarely and concluded that the subject was either dead or dying in the post-colonial period (Basu and Biswas, 1980:1-4). More interestingly, some commentators (e.g. V.Balakrishnan, P.P. Majumder and D.Piplai, 1980, pp. 4-5,

9-10 & 11-12) on the paper disagreed with Basu and Biswas and argued that Anthropology in India was very much useful for the ruling and privileged classes and might not be useful for the masses!

3. Celebrated Social Anthropologist and Sociologist André Béteille in one of his articles published in the *Sociological Bulletin* in 1997 wrote:

In India, each generation of sociologists seems eager to start its work on a clean slate, with little or no attention to the work done before. This amnesia about the work of their predecessors is no less distinctive of Indian sociologists than their failure to innovate (Béteille, 1997:98).

Béteille's observation on Indian sociologists, however, was not novel. About twenty five years before his pronouncement, Surajit Sinha critiqued Indian anthropologists almost in the same manner which I have already mentioned.

4. After about two decades of Sinha, another anthropologist, Biswanath Debnath in his article published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, castigated Indian anthropologists for failing to evolve their own tradition and blindly following the footsteps of the colonial masters by studying small, isolated and marginal tribal communities and their process of integration in the mainstream Indian civilization (Debnath, 1999:3110-3114). Almost the same kind of shrill voice on the purported neo-colonial bias in Indian anthropology was heard in the writings of J.J. Roy-Burman in 2011 (Roy-Burman, 2011).

5. In a recent article published in *Economic and Political Weekly* Vivek Kumar, a professor of Sociology at Jawaharlal Nehru University in his article 'How Egalitarian Is Indian Sociology?' observed a higher caste bias in Indian Sociology and Social Anthropology (Kumar, 2017:). Interestingly, none of these critiques were forwarded by any western anthropologist or sociologist and all the critiques were put forward by professionals who earned or are earning their livelihood by practicing Sociology and/ or Anthropology in India.

6. In a more academic vein, R.Srivatsan argued in his *Economic and Political Weekly* article that the dominant discourse among the anthropologists and sociologists on tribal policy in India had changed little from the colonial times to the emergence of nationalism in the early post-independent years (Srivatsan, 1986, pp.1986-1999).

Against the above scenario, I will argue that while criticizing Indian anthropology or sociology the critiques mostly ignored the studies done by the pioneers of the disciplines which were socially relevant and directed to the welfare and betterment of the underprivileged sections of our country and these studies were often conducted by anthropologists and sociologists who belonged to higher castes occupying elite positions in the society. I will make a list of some of the remarkable scholars of the early Indian anthropology who though worked during the colonial period tried to build up a nationalist tradition of anthropology. All of the following anthropologists were born in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and applied their knowledge in anthropology and sociology for the cause of the marginalized and exploited tribals and other underprivileged and deprived sections of the Indian population. Although, these anthropologists were influenced by the theory and methodology of the western anthropologists but they used the western knowledge for the cause of the exploited tribals and marginalized communities of India. But before we move into the domain of nationalist anthropology, I will move into another interesting story in the development of anthropology in India, which was Hindu anthropology.

### III

On the reverse side of the critiques there also existed a view that an Indian form of Anthropology could be discerned in many ancient Indian texts and scriptures before the advent of a colonial anthropology introduced by the European scholars, administrators and missionaries in the Indian subcontinent. As early as 1938 Jogendra Chandra Ghosh in his interesting article *Hindu Anthropology* published in the Anthropological Papers (New series) no. 5 of the University of Calcutta tried to show that before 6<sup>th</sup>

Century B.C. the Hindus innovated various measurements on human body and its parts, which in European terms may be called Anthropometry, an important branch of Physical Anthropology. Ghosh began his article by saying

Anthropology is one of the modern progressive Sciences. Anthropometry and Ethnology are the two important branches of this Science. We shall here give some facts to show that the Hindus had their Anthropometry and Ethnology from a very early period (Ghosh, 1938, p.27).

Mr Ghosh further pointed out that the earliest record of those anthropometric measurements was found in *Susruta-Samhita*, a medical treatise written by the ancient Hindus. Ghosh also held that the ancient Hindus had their own notion of Ethnology and its first expression was found in *Rgveda* in which 'races' were classified on the basis of their skin colour. Suffice it to say that Ghosh was hinting at the fact that 'racial theory' became a major theme in later day western anthropology.

Another later proponent of Hindu Anthropology was the famous anthropologist Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-1972) who was a onetime secretary of Mahatma Gandhi and himself a committed nationalist. Bose in his earliest textbook entitled *Cultural Anthropology* published in 1929 made a novel attempt to show that the ancient Hindus in their scriptures classified the desires or needs of human beings into *artha* (economic), *kama* (sexual) and *moksha* (spiritual) almost in the fashion of later-day functional anthropologists of the west. Bose probably held that the Hindus like the western anthropologists had their own scheme of understanding human nature and behavior which existed since long. Bose later proposed a theory in Indian anthropology entitled 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' which helped to induce the tenets of Hindu Anthropology more effectively among the successive generation of anthropologists in India. The idea was first proposed in a paper in the Indian Science Congress in 1941. Bose's proposal was based on his short field trips among the Juang tribal community of the Pal Lahara region of Orissa.

The essence of the theory was the tribals, who had come into contact with their powerful caste Hindu neighbours, gradually lost

their own tribal identity and were given a low caste status within the Hindu fold. This idea became very popular and acceptable among the mainstream Indian anthropologists and Bose's paper turned into a compulsory text in the curriculum of Indian Anthropology. There was hardly any question or restudy in the Juang area to recheck Bose's proposition and the idea took deep roots in the minds of Indian anthropologists for generations. The university and college students of India who studied anthropology were taught the theory of 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' as an established sociological fact. Bose's nationalist ideas, therefore, was based on his anthropological views of vertical integration of society in which the Brahminical ideals were at the topmost position. Sociologist Pradip Bose neatly summarized the essence of Nirmal Kumar Bose's Hindu nationalism in a brilliant manner

....Bose's depiction of Hinduism describes a process which vertically integrates various groups into a social structure administered and guided by Brahminical ideals and values. The same vision of the absorptive power of Hinduism explains his argument that tribals were successfully assimilated into the Hindu fold. In a way, Bose like early Orientalist writers, projected Indian social history as essentially the history of Hinduism, or of the assimilation of non-Hindu groups into Hindu society (Bose, 2007:326).

Hinduisation of the tribals was accepted as an obvious and inevitable process which also helped to overlook any possibility of protest by the tribals against the Brahminical imposition in any form. It also helped to hide the exploitation and subjugation of the tribals by the Hindus. Later, another theory proposed by M.N. Srinivas, one of the doyens of Indian Sociology and Social Anthropology reinforced the superiority of the Brahmins by showing that the lower castes always tried to imitate and emulate the life-style of the twice-born castes. This theory came to be known as 'Sanskritization' and also became an essential part of the college and university curriculum in Indian Anthropology and Sociology. A lone Indian sociologist Surendra Munshi criticized both N.K.Bose and M.N.Srinivas in his brilliant article 'Tribal absorption and Sanskritisation in Hindu society' published in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* in unequivocal terms

My more serious criticism against Bose and Srinivas is that, lacking a general sociological theory of society and social change within the framework of which empirical data are to be collected, interpreted and transcended, they end up with the transformation of the object of study into a theory that has conditioned the study itself. In other words, in their concern with the ideal sphere, they are compelled to accept the ruling ideas of the society, past and present, for providing them with the interpretation of the corresponding empirical reality studied by them. In sum, their analysis is ideological (Munshi, 1979: 304).

Munshi, however, did not deal with the inconsistencies and lack of fit between the data collected by N.K.Bose and the theoretical generalizations made by him in his Hindu method of tribal absorption paper.

Since the publication of the twin ideas, Indian Anthropology and Sociology revolved around 'Hindu method of Tribal absorption' and 'Sanskritization' and under the strong influence of Bose and Srinivas Anthropology and Sociology in India became oriented towards the study of Hindu religious and higher caste superiority. The path set by the doyens left little scope for a secular and materialist Indian Anthropology. The search for the counter movements against Hinduisation and ethnographies of anti-aculturative processes in Indian Anthropology and Sociology was marginalized to a large extent.

The Western scholars who came to India in the post-Independence period too mainly studied caste and village level dynamics as well as Indian civilization under the framework of a high caste Hindu order which again added force to the models generated by Bose and Srinivas. The growth of a secular and national Anthropology in India was nipped in the bud. Indian anthropology became Hinduised, religious and at the same time westernized. Indian anthropologists forgot that the development of a national Anthropology also required a secular and indigenous approach to the problems of nation building. There were of course notable exceptions like Mckim Marriott's study on technological change and problems of overdevelopment in a village in Uttar Pradesh and F.G. Bailey's excellent paper on the peasant view of bad life in Orissa wherein the authors discussed the problems of

Indian peasantry from a purely secular perspective (Marriott, 1952: 261-272; Bailey, 1971: 299-321).

The tenets of Hindu Anthropology are still haunting some of the Indian anthropologists. Thus Ajit Kumar Danda, former Director of the Anthropological Survey of India and currently the Chairman of the Indian National Confederation and Academy of Anthropologists (INCAA) claimed in one of the professional journals of the subject, *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* in 2017

One of the earliest *Smritis: Manava Dharmashashtra* (literally, *The Sacred Science of Man*), dates approximately 1350B.C....., is perhaps the most ancient text in Anthropology ever produced anywhere on the earth. It is claimed to be more than 1000 years older than the first application of the word Anthropology as such, which is believed to have been used for the first time by Aristotle(384-322 B.C.) (Danda 2017, p. 6).

Nowhere in his article entitled 'Anthropology in Contemporary India' could Danda discern a secular and nationalist stream of thought in the history of Indian Anthropology. He had only seen anthropology as an 'academic discipline' (the westernized tradition) and a 'body of knowledge' (the ancient Hindu tradition) and thus failed to appreciate the secular, materialist and nationalist tradition of anthropological thought in India. Suffice it to say that in his 'body of knowledge' type of Anthropology, there was hardly any place for *the adivasis*, *the dalits* and *the lokayata* traditions of thought. I just give an example. The monumental work entitled *Lokayata: A Study of Ancient Indian Materialism* (1959, New Delhi: People's Publishing House), written by the famous Marxist philosopher Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya did not find a mention in Danda's long text on Indian philosophy. Danda, however, unlike his predecessor Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, did not use the term 'Hindu Anthropology' but his intention was clear, which was to push an upper caste and Sanskritic tradition of thought in the academia under the cover of Anthropology as a 'body of knowledge'!



## IV

Let me now make an inventory of some of the remarkable scholars of the early Indian Anthropology who though worked during the colonial period tried to build up a nationalist tradition of anthropology. All of the following anthropologists were born in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and applied their knowledge in Anthropology and Sociology for the cause of the marginalized and exploited tribals and other underprivileged and deprived sections of the Indian population. Although, these anthropologists were influenced by the theory and methodology of the western anthropologists but they used the western knowledge for the cause of the exploited tribals and marginalized communities of India.

I present below a list of seven nationalist anthropologists who neither blindly imitated the colonial masters nor were they besieged by a 'Hindu Anthropology'. All of the following anthropologists were born in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and applied their knowledge in anthropology and sociology for the cause of the marginalized and exploited tribals and other underprivileged and deprived sections of the Indian population. Although, these anthropologists were influenced by the theory and methodology of the western anthropologists but they used the western knowledge for the cause of the exploited tribals and marginalized communities of India and also towards the materialist exposition of Indian social reality.

**Sarat Chandra Roy** (1871–1942) is regarded as the father of Indian Anthropology who was a practicing lawyer at Ranchi and began to do research on the society and culture of the tribes of the region not out of ethnological curiosity, administrative need or evangelical mission like the Europeans, but driven by his humanitarian passion to deliver justice to the exploited tribals. He was deeply moved by the plight of the *Munda*, *Oraon* and other tribal groups, who were subjected to the continued oppression by an apathetic colonial administration and by a general contempt towards them in courts of law, as "upper-caste" Hindu lawyers had little knowledge of their customs, religions, customary laws and languages. His keen interest and sympathy for the oppressed tribals inspired him to study their culture, and Roy always stood

for their cause. His house at Ranchi had a set of rooms prepared for his tribal clients so that those who came from far-off villages could stay on while his case was being fought in court (Ghosh, 2008).

**Bhupendranath Datta** (1880–1961), who was the younger brother of the famous Hindu revivalist social reformer Swami Vivekananda, joined the anti-British struggle and sent to prison by the colonial government in India. He later earned an M.A. in Sociology from Brown University, USA and a Ph.D. degree from the University of Hamburg in 1923. His books *Dialectics of Hindu Ritualism* (1950) and *Studies in Indian Social Polity* (1963), although published much later, can be regarded as pioneering works on Indian society and culture from a Marxist perspective (See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhupendranath\\_Datta](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhupendranath_Datta)). Datta presented his research paper on the political condition of colonial India to V.I. Lenin. Lenin gave a reply to Bhupendranath and requested him to collect data on the peasant organizations in India, which was very much appreciated by Datta (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/aug/26c.htm>). His contributions have not yet been included in the curriculum in Indian Anthropology nor the critics of Indian Anthropology mentioned Datta's name in their critiques of the subject.

**B.R. Ambedkar** (1891-1956), whose views on caste were also neglected in the Anthropology and Sociology curricula in the Indian universities and colleges. Ambedkar is still nobody in the syllabi of Anthropology in India. As early as 1916, B.R. Ambedkar made a novel attempt to explain the caste system in India in a paper read before the Anthropology Seminar of Alexander Goldenweizer (1880-1940) at Columbia University. Ambedkar was then 25 years old and a doctoral student in Anthropology. The full title of his paper was 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development'. Starting from a fundamental anthropological finding of tribal clan exogamy Ambedkar had been able to show how caste endogamy was superimposed on the former. Secondly, his exposition of caste as an extreme form of class system as early as 1917 was also exemplary, yet this work of Ambedkar was never mentioned or referred to by the world renowned scholars on caste in India (Ambedkar, 2016). Take for example, G. S. Ghurye. In his

famous book *Caste and Class in India* (1957) Ghurye mentioned the name of Ambedkar only once on page 226 and that too as 'the leader of the Scheduled Caste' although Ghurye discussed at length the importance of endogamy in characterizing the caste society in India (Guha, 2017).

**Panchanan Mitra** (1892–1936) was the first professor of anthropology in India. He was among the first Indians to study at Yale University and conducted several anthropological expeditions in India and abroad. He was the head of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Calcutta and is most known for his pioneering book *Prehistoric India* (1923). This book, which was the first of its kind by any Indian scholar, showed the antiquity, richness and diversity of the culture of humankind long before the advent of scripts. He is still the lone Indian anthropologist who wrote a book on the history of American Anthropology in 1930 (Bose, 2006, p.1439).

**Biraja Sankar Guha** (1894-1961) was the founder of the Anthropological Survey of India and was known to the students of Anthropology as a Physical Anthropologist who made a classification of the Indian population on the basis of their physical features. Very few people know that he first undertook a thoroughgoing field survey on the social tensions among the refugees of the then East Pakistan for suggesting to the government about how to understand their problems and improve their living conditions.

**K.P. Chattopadhyay**, (1897-1963) was not only the Head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Calcutta but was also a life-long fighter for civil liberties movement in West Bengal before and after the Independence of India. His researches on the jute mill workers and the workers of the then Calcutta Corporation were pioneering in anthropology which broke away from the colonial anthropological tradition (Roy-Burman, 2000).

**Tarak Chandra Das** (1898-1964) made a marvelous empirical study, still unparalleled in global and Indian Anthropology on the devastations caused by the Bengal famine of 1943 during the colonial period. Das was such a courageous academic that he in his Presidential address of the Anthropology section of the Indian

Science Congress in 1941 criticized the colonial government and the Christian missionaries for doing a lot of harm to the tribals of north east India. He had a vision for the application of Anthropology for human welfare but that was forgotten by the Indian anthropologists. The critics of Indian Anthropology also did not care to look at the socially relevant and responsible studies of T.C.Das (Guha, 2011).<sup>2</sup>

This list is not exhaustive. It seeks to highlight the missing strips of research in the history of Indian Anthropology, which have not yet become a tradition in the pedagogy of Indian Anthropology.

## V

In an important book entitled *Anthropology in the East*, Patricia Uberoi, Nandini Sundar and Satish Deshpande in the subsection 'Nationalism and the Nation-State' of the 'Introduction' commented

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.... (Uberoi, Sundar & Deshpande, 2007, p38).

In the discussion that followed the above quoted opening statement, the authors admitted two important points, viz., the question of nationalism occupied a 'very wide spectrum' and second no Indian anthropologist or sociologist could oppose nationalism. I do not claim that I have been able to cover the whole range of the nationalist spectrum of Indian Anthropology but I could only discover some of the notable nationalist anthropologists and highlight their works in some detail just as a beginning.

Along with the colonial tradition, a nationalist trend in Indian Anthropology could also be discerned which was growing during the pre and post-Independence periods in India and this trend was

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<sup>2</sup>. Interestingly, T.C.Das's obituary was not published in any journal of Anthropology in India. Only *Sociological Bulletin* published the obituary of this great nationalist anthropologist (*Sociological Bulletin*, 1964)

characterized by the works of the anthropologists who were socially committed and contributed to nation building through their analytical writings and research (Guha, 2018, p.8). These anthropologists learned the methodology of the discipline from the west but did not become blind followers of Europe and America and they also did not want to derive their anthropology from the religious scriptures of the ancient Hindus. Instead, they visualized an Indian character of anthropology which according to them could be used in nation building, a task which finally could not develop into full maturity by their own successors. Let me exemplify.

In 1938, the same year in which Jogendra chandra Ghosh wrote the article 'Hindu Anthropology' in a Calcutta University journal, one of the founding fathers of Indian Anthropology, Sarat Chandra Roy wrote an article entitled 'An Indian Outlook on Anthropology' in *Man*, the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. This article can be regarded as one of the pioneering ones in the nationalist tradition of Indian Anthropology. Because, in this article Roy not only critically evaluated the major theories developed in the then western Anthropology, like evolutionism, diffusionism and functionalism with much skepticism but he also made a novel attempt to synthesize the ideas of ancient Indian philosophers with western anthropological concepts. According to Roy, the essence of Indian thought lay in the subjective process of 'sympathetic immersion' with other cultures and societies and this could be combined with the objective approach of western Anthropology. I quote Roy

Thus the objective methods of investigation of cultural data have to be helped out, not only by historical imagination and a background of historical and geographical facts, but also by a subjective process of self-forgetting absorption or meditation (*dhyana*) and *intuition* born of sympathetic immersion in, and self-identification with, the society under investigation.

The spread of this attitude by means of anthropological study can surely be a factor helping forward the large *unity-in-diversity-through-sympathy* that seems to an Indian mind to be the inner meaning of the process of human evolution, and the hope of a

world perplexed by a multitude of *new* and violent contacts, notably between Eastern and Western civilizations (Roy, 1938, p150).

One may note that Roy did not bring in any Hindu religious connotation to this method. For him, the Indian way of reaching the Universal through a sympathetic understanding of particular cultures through tolerance and love could build up a national character which would not try to shape the different peoples and cultures in a uniform pattern. In Roy's words

The better minds of India are now harking back to the old ideal of culture as a means of the progressive realization of the one Universal Self in all individual- and group-selves, and the consequent elevation or transformation of individual and 'national' character and conduct, through a spirit of universal love. The anthropological attitude while duly appreciating and fostering the varied self-expression of the Universal Spirit in different communities and countries, and not by any means seeking to mould them all in one universal racial or cultural pattern, is expected to help forward a synthesis of the past and the present, the old and the new, the East and the West. (Ibid).

Sarat Chandra Roy's approach to develop a nationalist Anthropology in India was not a simple theoretical exercise. One should remember that he founded the first journal of Anthropology in India named *Man in India* in 1921. Roy's aim was to develop an Indian School of Anthropology. In an editorial of *Man in India* published in 1985 the then editor Surajit Chandra Sinha commented

Sarat Chandra Roy's enterprise in *Man in India* was motivated by the national needs of his times and his personal pride in nationalism. As for lines of scientific enquiry he also wanted Indian scholars to seek suggestions from Western scholars and so was adopted a policy.... It also transpires that practically all the Western and Indian path – finders in the anthropology of India have contributed to this journal (Sinha, 1985, pp iv-v).

Suffice it to say that Roy was not a blind nationalist. He was open to suggestions and contributions from western experts in the pages of *Man in India* and quite a good number of western anthropologists had contributed their original research findings on

India in this pioneering journal. Sangeeta Dasgupta's perceptive comment in this regard is useful

Roy's long and varied career witnessed the rise of Victorian evolutionism, then diffusionism, and the eventual displacement of these by functionalism: at different points in time he applied all these concepts to the Indian context. At the same time, as a professed Hindu and nationalist Indian, particularly in the later phases of his career, Roy sought to methodologically establish an 'Indian view-point' for anthropology, believing that anthropology would help in the integration of national life (Dasgupta, 2007, p144).

Roy's nationalism, despite his professed Hindu background was basically Indian.

## VI

In this section I would narrate two cases of the practice of nationalist anthropology by two professional Indian anthropologists. Our first anthropologist is T.C.Das of the University of Calcutta and the second is B.S.Guha, the founder Director of the Anthropological Survey of India.

### ***Tarak Chandra Das***

In 1941, T.C.Das delivered the presidential address in the Anthropology section of the Indian Science Congress. The lecture was a 28 page full-length paper entitled 'Cultural Anthropology in the Service of the Individual and the Nation'. In this lecture Das's major objective was to convince his readers about the immense potential of social-cultural anthropology as applied science for the overall development of the Indian population. In the five subsections of the lecture, Das dealt with the application of anthropology in almost all the important sectors of a modern nation, viz. trade, industry, agriculture, legislation, education, social service and administration. With the help of concrete empirical findings either from his own field experiences or from the ethnographic accounts of world renowned social anthropologists (e.g. Lucy Mair, Felix Keesing, Issac Schepera, H.I. Hogbin, B. Malinowski) Das justified the inclusion of anthropologists in policy

making bodies and application of anthropological knowledge in every sphere of nation building (Das, 1941, pp1-29). In order to substantiate his arguments, Das had used rather unconventional sources of data, like Mahatma Gandhi's 1937 article published in *Harijan* about the adverse effects of the methods adopted by the Christian missionaries to convert the economically poorer classes of the Hindu population in different parts of India (Ibid, pp17-23).<sup>3</sup>

One of the most vital sections in the Presidential Address of Das was on the role of anthropologists in building up a proper type of educational system suitable for the real needs of a particular community in the Indian context. The great anthropologist had the courage to write strong words regarding the colossal wastage of public money by the then colonial government for the establishment of schools among the tribal people. Let us hear in his words:

Education is perhaps rightly claimed as the panacea of all evils that befall mankind. But people differ in its definition, and naturally it has different types. There is one kind of education which uplifts the individual morally and intellectually and makes him fit for the struggle for existence. There is another kind of education which is intended for the exploitation of the so-called educated. There is a third type of education which the enthusiasts in their zeal for ameliorating the condition of the poor and the ill-fated impose upon them without considering their necessity or capacity. We have neither time nor inclination to discuss this point here but suffice it to say that much labour and more public money have been squandered and are still being squandered in imparting education which does neither suit the people nor help them to put a morsel of food into their mouth (Ibid, 1941, pp. 13-14).

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3. N.K. Bose's paper entitled 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' was presented as a lecture in the same Science Congress of 1941 in which T.C. Das delivered the presidential Address. Bose's lecture was later published in the journal *Science and Culture* and in course of time, became famous in Indian Anthropology while Das's lecture dealing with the role of anthropology in solving the burning and practical problems of nation building went into oblivion among the anthropologists in India.



Had he stopped here the above words would at best have been regarded as a fine piece of journalistic remark on our educational system. But Das then narrated from his own rich field experiences in Manipur valley of North Eastern India about the adverse social impact of the establishment of a network of primary schools and a few high English schools. I quote Das again

The two schools I saw used to teach their students how to read and write Mehei besides a little arithmetic, which they managed to forget within a few months after their departure from the school. .... it is difficult to understand how high school education will help Manipuri agriculture or textile industry. The employments at the disposal of the State are very limited and the students who pass out of these schools every year will increase the number of unemployed as they no longer think of going back to their fields. During the first few years they will be idolized by the community but this will soon pass away when they will be looked upon as parasites and it is not impossible that they will be a source of trouble to the State (Ibid 1941, pp15-16).

Consider this insightful observation of Das in connection with the active participation of the English educated youth in the ethnic and secessionist movements that developed in this region of India after Independence. Das strongly advocated that in this type of situation the advice of the experienced and trained anthropologists is required in the Herculeantask of educating the tribal and other underprivileged communities in a diverse country like India. Das probably was the first Indian anthropologist to advocate the indispensable role of social-cultural anthropology in nation building by combining micro-level field observations within a macro framework which is still lacking among the majority of Indian anthropologists. We have a lot to learn from Das even today (Guha, 2011, pp 245-265).

### ***Biraja Sankar Guha***

I will just take up two writings of B.S. Guha. The first is a short essay entitled 'The Role of Social Sciences in Nation Building' published in *Sociological Bulletin* in 1958 The second piece is a book titled 'Studies in Social Tensions among the Refugees from Eastern Pakistan' first published in 1954 and then in 1959 by the Government of India. The article on the role of social sciences in

India is remarkable for its contemporary relevance. In this article Guha's major emphasis was on how to understand the nature of intergroup tension (he called it 'social tension') with the help of the social sciences. He proposed quite cogently that if one cannot understand the mechanisms and anatomy of conflicts between groups having different morals, values and religious practices, then just a superficial approach towards nation building in the name of 'melting pot theory' (as in USA) or the epithet of 'Unity in Diversity' (as in case of India) will simply fail. The role of social sciences, not the physical or biological sciences, was thought to be crucial at this point. Both R. K. Bhattacharya and D.P. Mukherjee missed this point of Guha while evaluating his contributions. I quote Guha

In the United States of America where the population is extremely heterogeneous and derived from many sources, with different ethnic and cultural traditions, such tensions and conflict have become very persistent in spite of the so called melting-pot theory and the ideal of inter-group tolerance, not merely as an ethical virtue but as a political necessity (Guha, 1958, p149).

In the same article Guha expressed his displeasure in giving 'undue weightage' to the superficial differences in dress, hairstyle and food habits among Indian populations. According to him, the 'process of Indianization based on the underlying unifying forces of history, traditions and common values' should have been adopted (Guha, 1958, p150). Guha viewed the study of group relationships, conflict as well as tension among the human groups as the most important area in nation building and social sciences according to him had a great role to play in this mighty task. For Guha, the importance of social sciences was the greatest in solving the problems arising out of conflict and tension and he urged that the Governments should keep substantial budgetary allocation for the social sciences towards this end.

The second sociological research of Guha, which I would discuss now, is a book which was the result of team work. In this book Guha had taken up the issues he outlined in his article on the role of the social sciences in nation building. This book titled *Studies in Social Tensions among the Refugees from Eastern Pakistan* (1959) was based on intensive fieldwork done by an interdisciplinary team of researchers. Most surprisingly, virtually no

discussion, let alone evaluation of this book had been done neither by the critics of Indian Anthropology nor by the admirers of Guha. Complete absence and/or inadequate treatment and even improper referencing of B.S.Guha's book on social tension characterized the literature of Indian anthropology and sociology. I will now discuss Guha's arguments and analysis of the findings depicted by the authors in the different chapters of the book.

The book is basically a solid factual report and analyses of socio-economic, cultural and psychological data collected by a team of trained anthropologists and psychologists on the refugees who came from the then East Pakistan to West Bengal under the overall supervision of B.S.Guha. In his 'General Introduction' Guha first justified his selection of two sample areas of refugee resettlement colonies which he finalized in consultation with Gardener Murphy who was selected by the UNESCO as Consultant to Govt. of India in the project to understand the underlying causes of social tension in India. After this Guha put the survey in the wider political scenario of the country and mentioned in unequivocal terms the evil effects of the earlier 'divide and rule' policy of the British Government as well as the sectarian approach of the Muslim League Government of the then Bengal, which paved the way towards 'engineered' communal riots that led to large scale displacement of the Hindus from the then East Pakistan (Guha, 1959: viii). While searching the reasons behind the evacuation of the Hindus Guha based his arguments not on any sociological theory but on the empirical findings of his multidisciplinary team of fieldworkers. Therefore, according to him

The loss of prestige and social status which the Hindu community previously enjoyed, and the realisation of the futility of regaining it now or in the near future was a far more potent factor in creating the feeling of frustration than the loss in the economic sphere.(Ibid).

In the subsequent pages of the 'Introduction' Guha went on to analyse the data on the 'areas of tension' among the Hindu refugees which were collected by his research team members through the use of social anthropological and psychological methods. Guha here made an excellent sociological analysis by putting the areas of social tension in a hierarchical and dynamic

form. For Guha his data led him to show how the areas of tension played their respective roles and how the affected members of the community shifted their grievance and aggression from one area of tension to another. Like a true social anthropologist Guha also ventured into the variation in the social tension at the level of age, sex and socio-political situation. Another interesting explanation of B.S.Guha was on changing authority structure of the traditional Hindu joint family and the worsening of the intra-family relationships among the refugees but here also he made a comparative interpretation of the two refugee settlements which were selected by him for the study. In one place where people depended on the governmental aid and assistance the traditional authority structure of the family was found to be stronger than in the refugee colony where the uprooted people had to struggle harder to get them resettled (Ibid, 1959, ppxi-xii). What was most interesting to observe was Guha's technique of explaining such a complex thing like social tension. Like a seasoned sociologist or social anthropologist he attacked the problem from a relational and dynamic angle without falling in the trap of a static view of society. While providing economic or psychological explanations he also did not take recourse to either Freudian or Marxian models. Finally, and what was really several steps ahead in his time Guha recommended a participatory and nationalist model for the resettlement of the refugees. For him, the social tension between the refugees and the government mainly arose owing to the fact that they were treated as 'outsiders' from the governmental side. The refugees should be given the responsibility of managing their own resettlement camps so that they could regain their self-respect. This was the view of Biraja Sankar Guha whom I would like to regard a one of the pioneering social scientists of the post-Independence India.

I will end by quoting the last line from the Guha's 'Introduction' from the book on Social Tensions

Once their displaced energies are canalised into well-directed productive sources, there is every reason to hope, that instead of a burden and a clog, the refugees will turn out to be useful participants in the march of progress of this country (Ibid. 1959, p xiii).

It is an irony that both the critics and admirers of Indian Anthropology during the post-colonial period became more westernized and missed the emerging spirit of a nationalist anthropology in the writings of B.S.Guha.

## VII

In this section I will narrate the contributions of B.R.Ambedkar which not only differed markedly from the views of the Hindu anthropologist like N.K.Bose but also may be viewed from a nationalist perspective. As early as in 1916 B.R.Ambedkar made a novel attempt to explain the caste system in India in a paper read before the Anthropology Seminar of Alexander Goldenweizer (1880-1940) at Columbia University. Ambedkar was then 25 years old and a doctoral student in Anthropology. The full title of his paper was 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development'. It was an 18 page paper which contained a pure and detached academic exercise on the nature of the caste system in India and nowhere in the paper have we found any comment or observation from the personal experiences of the author. It was full of critical scholarship on the then existing anthropological and sociological literature on caste in a lucid and argumentative fashion. In the first part of the paper Ambedkar dealt with the works of four famous scholars like Emile Senart (1847-1928), John Nesfield (1836-1919), S.V.Ketkar (1884 –1937) and H.H.Risley (1851-1911) and without being biased towards these well-known authorities, he pointed out the shortcomings of all these scholars in understanding the essential feature of the caste system. But his method of criticism was quite interesting. While criticizing the authorities Ambedkar did not fail to observe the positive aspects of their contributions. In his own words

To review these definitions is of great importance for our purpose. It will be noticed that taken individually the definitions of three of the writers include too much or too little: none is complete or correct by itself and all have missed the central point in the mechanism of the Caste system. Their mistake lies in trying to define caste as an isolated unit by itself, and not as a group within, and with definite relations to, the system of caste as a whole. Yet collectively all of them are complementary to one

another, each one emphasising what has been obscured in the other (Ambedkar (1917): 1979:7).

Looking at caste as a system in which each *jati* is part of the whole was definitely a step forward in social and cultural anthropology as early as 1917 and Ambedkar was not ready to accept caste system as a system of 'division of labour' which minimized competition among occupational groups. For him caste system is a division among the laboring classes rather than division of labour. A closer reading of this article reveals that although in the milieu of Boasians at Columbia Ambedkar used the Morganian social evolutionary methodology to approach the basic principle behind the caste system. He observed that marriage outside one's own immediate kin-group represented through clan exogamy was the fundamental and universal feature of human society and in India the state of 'tribal exogamy' survived even in the stages of civilization whereas in the modern world this is no more the rule. Let me quote from the original

With the growth of history, however, exogamy has lost its efficacy, and excepting the nearest blood-kins, there is usually no social bar restricting the field of marriage. But regarding the peoples of India the law of exogamy is a positive injunction even today. Indian society still savours of the clan system, even though there are no clans; and this can be easily seen from the law of matrimony which centres round the principle of exogamy, for it is not that Sapindas (blood-kins) cannot marry, but a marriage even between Sagotras (of the same class) is regarded as a sacrilege (Ibid (1917): 1979:9).

This is the logical foundation based on which Ambedkar advanced his arguments to elucidate the caste system. Because he cogently argued that since in India exogamy was the stronger rule so endogamy must have been foreign to the country. But then how could caste system, which had to survive on endogamy, come into place in India? The way Ambedkar answered this anomaly is the most interesting part of this original paper. Before going into the details let me quote again

Nothing is therefore more important for you to remember than the fact that endogamy is foreign to the people of India. The various Gotras of India are and have been exogamous: so are

the other groups with totemic organization. It is no exaggeration to say that with the people of India exogamy is a creed and none dare infringe it, so much so that, in spite of the endogamy of the Castes within them, exogamy is strictly observed and that there are more rigorous penalties for violating exogamy than there are for violating endogamy. .... Consequently in the final analysis creation of Castes, so far as India is concerned, means the superposition of endogamy on exogamy (Ibid (1917): 1979:9).

Next to this analysis Ambedkar went on to explain how some of the social groups in ancient India which were classes turned into enclosed endogamous groups probably to ensure the privileges which they accrued out of the ancient class system. According to Ambedkar, since the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas were the most privileged classes it was these classes who began to enclose themselves to secure their privileges by becoming endogamous. Later other groups also emulated the higher classes and the system spread over wider regions. So classes in India were forerunner to castes, and castes according to Ambedkar were enclosed classes characterized by endogamy. I quote Ambedkar

We shall be well advised to recall at the outset that the Hindu society, in common with other societies, was composed of classes and the earliest known are (1) the Brahmins or the priestly class; (2) the Kshatriya, or the military class; (3) the Vaishya, or the merchant class; and (4) the Shudra, or the artisan and menial class. Particular attention has to be paid to the fact that this was essentially a class system, in which individuals, when qualified, could change their class, and therefore classes did change their personnel. At some time in the history of the Hindus, the priestly class socially detached itself from the rest of the body of people and through a closed-door policy became a caste by itself. The other classes being subject to the law of social division of labour underwent differentiation, some into large, others into very minute groups.....The question we have to answer in this connection is: Why did these subdivisions or classes, if you please, industrial, religious or otherwise, become self-enclosed or endogamous? My answer is because the Brahmins were so. Endogamy or the closed-door system was a fashion in the Hindu society, and as it had originated from the Brahmin caste it was whole-heartedly imitated by all the non-Brahmin sub-divisions or classes, who, in their turn, became endogamous castes. It is "the infection of

imitation" that caught all these sub-divisions on their onward march of differentiation and has turned them into castes (Ibid: 17-18).

Starting from a fundamental anthropological finding of tribal clan exogamy Ambedkar was able to show how caste endogamy was superimposed on the former. Secondly, his exposition of caste as an extreme form of class system in as early as 1917 was also exemplary and this work of Ambedkar was never mentioned or referred to by the world renowned scholars on caste in India. Take for example, G. S. Ghurye. In his famous book *Caste and Class in India* (1957) Ghurye mentioned the name of Ambedkar only once in page 226 and that too as 'the leader of the Scheduled Caste' although Ghurye discussed at length the importance of endogamy in characterizing the caste society in India. The same kind of omission of the anthropological contributions of B.R.Ambedkar could also be observed in the writings of Nirmal Kumar Bose. I would now take up Nirmal Kumar Bose in the following section.

## VIII

I will use two articles of N.K.Bose to discuss about his ideas on caste system. These are his articles on 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' and 'Class and Caste'. First I will take up his *Economic Weekly* article 'Class and Caste' published in 1965 (Vol.17, Issue 35). In this article Nirmal Kumar Bose admitted that caste can be regarded as a form of class in which the Brahminical classes tried to reserve their privileges in society. Bose did not mention that Ambedkar in his seminal paper in the Anthropology seminar had already observed this fact nearly 50 years ago. Bose also missed the point that the reservation of privileges was ensured through endogamy, a fact observed perceptively by Ambedkar. Bose in fact was highly biased towards the hegemony of the caste system which he tried to profess through his articles on 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' (1941) and 'Caste in India' (1951). Bose's idea was first proposed in a paper in the Indian Science Congress in 1941. His theory was based on his short field trips among the Juang tribal community of the Pal Lahara region of Orissa.



The essence of the theory was the tribals who had come into contact with their powerful caste Hindu neighbours gradually lost their own tribal identity and were given a low caste status within the Hindu fold. This idea became very popular and acceptable among the mainstream Indian anthropologists and Bose's paper turned into a compulsory text in the curriculum of Indian Anthropology. There was hardly any question or restudy in the Juang area to recheck Bose's proposition and the idea took deep roots in the minds of Indian anthropologists for generations. The university and college students of India who studied Anthropology were taught the theory of 'Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption' as an established sociological fact.

N.K.Bose published three consecutive papers in 1928, 1929 and 1930 on Juangs in *Man in India* which were later reprinted in his book *Cultural Anthropology and other essays* based on his short fieldwork done in Orissa. Unlike the 1941 paper, all the three articles contained some hard ethnographic data and no theoretical formulation was attempted by Bose. After twelve years, Bose brought back his Juang field data in the famous paper on Hindu method of tribal absorption with a fresh vigour but his exposition in the 1941 paper seemed to lack logical consistency. I will first quote from Bose's own account and then point out the inconsistencies.

The significant fact is this, that the Juangs had started worshipping a Hindu goddess, although it was done in their own way. The bath in the morning, the offerings of sun-dried rice, the terms *satya, devata, dharma*, all prove how strongly Juang religious ceremonies have been influenced by those of the neighbouring Brahminical people. In nearly all respects, the Juangs are a tribe living outside the pale of Hinduism. They have their own language, which belongs to the Mundari group. No Brahmin or Vaishnava priest serves them; and they perform their marriage and funeral customs all by themselves. They eat beef and carrion, and are not considered by the Hindus to be one of the Hindu castes. Yet there is clear indication that Hindu religious ideas have penetrated into their culture. The Juang seem to be losing pride in their own culture and are adopting Hindu culture with a certain amount of avidity. (Bose 1953:157).

Now I enumerate the inconsistencies. First, the above account of

Bose was highly selective because he excluded from his own data depicted in the 1930 paper all the non-Hindu customs, viz. eating of the rice balls by the two black cocks and their subsequent sacrifice and prayers made by the Juangs to their supreme indigenous gods in the 1953 paper. Second, again in the 1953 paper he reported that the Juangs were not considered by the Hindus to be 'one of the Hindu castes'. How were then the Juangs absorbed by the Hindus? Third, Bose himself admitted that the Juangs maintained their own ethnic identity but he at the same time stated that 'the Juang seem to be losing pride in their own culture and are adopting Hindu culture with a certain amount of avidity' which appeared to be contradictory. If the Juangs were worshipping the Hindu goddess 'in their own way' and retained their own customs and were not accepted by the caste Hindus to be one of the Hindu castes, then how were the Juangs being absorbed in the Hindu order? Fourth, Bose used his 1928 field data lock-stock-and-barrel after 12 years in his 1941 Science Congress lecture without any rechecking and/or cross-verification. He also did not make any update on it when the same paper was reprinted after another 12 years in his *Cultural Anthropology and other essays* book published in 1953. Bose did not care to look into the long article written by none other than Verrier Elwin in 1948 (Elwin, 1948: 1-146). Elwin's painstaking ethnography in Keonjhar and Pal Lahara did not reveal any picture of Hindu method of tribal absorption. On the contrary the ethnography revealed in detail the full-fledged custom of beef-eating and all kinds of non-Hindu culinary practices among the Juangs (Ibid:46-49). It is also interesting to note that the ethnographic discourse generated by the brilliant Indian anthropologist T.C. Das recorded the counter processes of de-Hinduaization and maintenance of ethnic identity by the economically and socially subjugated and marginalized tribals (Guha, 2016). It is really a surprising fact in the history of Indian Anthropology that sociological interpretation of a 24 year old insufficient set of field data got recognition and acceptance in Indian Anthropology and Sociology as an established theory.

The dominant discourse in Indian anthropology was saturated with a higher caste Hindu ideology by the idea of Hindu method of tribal

absorption proposed by Nirmal Kumar Bose in the 1940s in such a way that nobody questioned the nature of the data collected by Bose himself which was by any standard stood on methodologically unsound foundations. The then ethnographic discourse generated by the brilliant Indian anthropologist like T.C.Das recorded the counter processes of de-Hinduaization and maintenance of ethnic identity by the economically and socially subjugated and marginalized tribals, was largely put into oblivion and overlooked by the anthropologists in India. As a result the ideology of the privileged class dominated Indian Anthropology and it also foreclosed the possibilities of an indigenous and nationalist anthropology in India (Guha, 2018: 105-110).

## IX

The colonial critique of Indian anthropology (Sinha, Basu and Bêteille) and the proponents of Hindu Anthropology (Ghosh, Bose and Danda) ignored the materialistic, socially committed, secular and nationalist trend of Indian anthropology which was growing in the hands of some remarkable anthropologists before and after independence of the country. The critics have only followed the smart way to criticize 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 the Western scholars. SurajitSinha, for example, held a critical view on the growth of Indian anthropology in the post-independence period which was largely pessimistic. Sinha viewed Indian anthropology as 'Western apprentice' and in the process he never made any attempt to search for the nationalist trends in Indian anthropology although he found some of his teachers, for example N.K.Bose and T.C.Das, had independent ideas. But Sinha never attempted to make any comprehensive and overall review of Indian anthropology from a historical perspective. Had he done so, he would have found remarkable scholars of the early Indian anthropology who though worked during the colonial period tried to build up a nationalist tradition of anthropology. Sinha sensed their existence but missed them badly. The new discourse in search of a nationalist trend in Indian anthropology, therefore, is urgently

needed in the historiography of the discipline. The present paper is a humble attempt towards that end.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am greatly indebted to the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for supporting me with the financial grants for Senior Fellow (F.No.2-1/17-18/SF/GEN dated 14 January 2018) for 2-year period to carry out research on the nationalist trends in Indian anthropology, the bigger research theme out of which this paper grew out. I am also grateful to the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata (IDSK) for providing me academic and infrastructural facilities during the period January—July 2016 through which this research was carried out. I express my sincerest thanks to Professor Achin Chakrabarty, Director, IDSK for his intellectual inputs to write this paper. I am also indebted to my colleagues Dr. Bidhan Kanti Das, Dr. Gorky Chakrabarty and Dr. Subhanil Choudhury of IDSK for their constant support to work on the history of Indian anthropology. My thanks also go to the library staff at IDSK for their kind help to procure materials on Indian anthropology from the web and other library sources. I also express my sincerest thanks to Professor Vinay Kumar Srivastava, Director, Dr. Sasikumar Mudayat, Deputy Director and Dr. Ramu Ram, Librarian of the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) Kolkata for allowing me to use the rich stock of books and journals of Indian anthropology from the Central Library of AnSI. This paper could not have been written without the support of the aforementioned persons and organization. The shortcomings of the paper which still remain lie with me.

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## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

1. *Keynes, Kaldor and Development Economics* by Amiya Kumar Bagchi, July 2004.
2. *Epar Ganga Opar Ganga - A creative statement on displacement and violence* by Subhoranjan Dasgupta, July 2004.
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### SPECIAL LECTURES

1. *Education for Profit, Education for Freedom* by Martha C. Nussbaum, March 2008.
2. *Always Towards : Development and Nationalism in Rabindranath Tagore* by Himani Bannerji, May 2008.
3. *The Winding Road Toward Equality for Women in the United States* by Diane P. Wood, June 2008.
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5. *Three 'Returns' to Marx : Derrida, Badiou, Zizek* (Fourth Michael Sprinker Lecture) by Aijaz Ahmad, March 2012.

6. *Inequality: Reflections on a Silent Pandemic* by Ashwani Saith, December 2009.
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#### WORKING PAPERS

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5. *Transfer of Technology and Production of Steel in India*, An interview of Anil Chandra Banerjee by Amiya Kumar Bagchi, December 2013.

#### BOOKS

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- 2 *The Developmental State in History and in the Twentieth Century*, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Regency Publications , New Delhi, 2004.
- 3 *Pliable Pupils and Sufficient Self –Directors: Narratives of Female Education by Five British Women Writers, 1778-1814* Barnita Bagchi, Tulika, New Delhi, 2004.
- 4 *Webs of History: Information, Communication and Technology from Early to Post-colonial India*, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Dipankar Sinha and Barnita Bagchi (editors), New Delhi, Manohar, 2004.
- 5 *Maladies, Preventives and Curatives: Debates in public health in India*, Amiya Kumar Bagchi and Krishna Soman (editors), Tulika, New Delhi, 2005.

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- 11 *Labour, Globalization and the State: Workers, Women and Migrants Confront Neoliberalism*, Edited, Michael Goldfield and Debdas Banerjee (editors), Routledge, London and New York, 2008.
- 12 *The Scourge of Unchained Capital: Labour, Women, Migrants, and the State Confront Neoliberalism*, Debdas Banerjee and Michael Goldfield (editors), Routledge, London and New York, 2008.
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- 15 *Colonialism and Indian Economy*, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2010.
- 16 *Market Media and Democracy*, compiled, Buroshiva Dasgupta, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, 2011.



- 17 *Four Essays on Writing Economic History of Colonial India*, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata and Progressive Publishers, 2011.
- 18 *Rabindranath: Bakpati Biswamana*, Volume 2, Sudhir Chakravarti (editor), Rabindranath Tagore Centre for Human Development Studies, 2011.
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- 20 *Eastern India in the Late Nineteenth Century, Part II: 1880s-1890s*, Amiya Kumar Bagchi & Arun Bandopadhyay (editors), Manohar and Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi 2011.
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39. *Sustainable Urbanization in India: Challenges and Opportunities*, Jenia Mukherjee (editor), Springer, 2017.
40. *Water Conflicts in Northeast India*, Gorky Chakraborty, K.J. Joy, Partha Das, Chandan Mahanta, Suhas Paranjape, Shruti Vispute (editors), Routledge, 2017.
41. *Impaired Bodies, Gendered Lives: Everyday Realities of Disabled Women*, Nandini Ghosh, Primus Books, 2016.