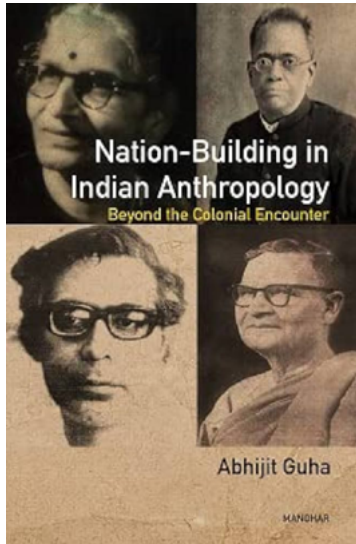




## Reviews/Recensioni



Abhijit Guha

### **Nation Building in Indian Anthropology: Beyond the Colonial Encounter**

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A Review by Dr. Ravinder Singh

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This is a valuable contribution, a concise history of Indian anthropology that informs about the Indian explorers and their anthropological studies even before the British, the colonizers, as the title suggests “...beyond colonial encounters”. This work is the result of his constant serious engagement with the history of Indian anthropology, as a professor of anthropology, as a prolific writer on social and cultural anthropological aspects of Indian anthropology. Asad (1973), in his work *Anthropology and Colonial Encounters*, sheds analytical light on the influences of British colonialism on anthropology. Here Guha moves on to examine other Indian anthropologists and their work on, for example, famine, refugee resettlement and forced displacement, etc., to highlight their most important work and place anthropology in the context of Indian reality before and after independence (p. 13).

This book consists of six chapters - *first*, introduction, history of Indian anthropology as early makers as the author mentions their historical accounts from the articles in Asiatic Society (1784) e.g. first anthropological paper by William Jones, through this society had published on various aspects of human languages, morphology, art and cultural aspects of human beings. He mentions Sir Herbert H. Risely and his work on various socio-cultural, biological, ethnic aspects etc. of Indian people which later led him to create a racial classification of Indian people on the basis of morphological features. Moreover, Guha Sinha (2021) mentions that the purpose of this census was a colonial interest (page 12).

The ‘*holistic*’ approach to the study of people most commonly used by researchers in anthropology – who are the people being studied? Who is studying them? But why do we prefer to study remote or marginalised groups of people? Are not they better off studying themselves? I often remember my own fieldwork as an anthropology student, when we go to do fieldwork? Just to collect data, data as if it was there in the field. We are dealing with people in their natural habitat. To get the information we want from these people, we have to do fieldwork with them, not on them in their daily lives. This holistic approach has been used in most of the studies conducted in Indian anthropology on all aspects of

human beings - anthropometrics and socio-cultural aspects of society - as primary data collection or for data collection. In 1920, the teaching of anthropology began first at the University of Calcutta, followed by the universities of Lucknow, Delhi, Madras and Pune, which subsequently shaped the teaching and research in anthropology. Guha mentions the *Model Curriculum Development Report* (2001 and 2019?) for the teaching of anthropology, which is still not uniformly implemented at Indian universities.

Guha has meticulously analyzed all the published works of Indian anthropologists in chronological order, especially the contribution of anthropology in India. He begins with the rise of anthropology in India (Vidhyarthi, Vol. I/II, 1978) and goes on to highlight the relevant works of various Indian and British authors or/and administrators of Indian anthropology - Verrier Elwin, B. S. Guha, N. K. Bose, T. N. Madan, D. N. Mujumdar etc. In addition, he listed the recently published works - *Architects of Anthropology* in India (Sengupta, 2021) and *Fifty Indian Anthropologists* (Joshi, 2019) and cites most of the works published in or on Indian anthropology in the following sub-sections of this introductory chapter.

In the last sub-section, he examines Indian anthropology through the Indian angst literature, writings and texts that were prevalent in the cognition of the human mind. Here the author mentions Hindu anthropology, a concept by J. C. Ghose (1938) that sheds light on body measurements - anthropometry (p. 25), and he continues with various medical treatises mentioned in the sacred texts of Hinduism. N. K. Bose further developed this ideology as '*Hindu Anthropology*' (1929) and put forward a theory of Hindu methods of tribal recording. Here Guha discussed further critical views of T. C. Das, a brilliant anthropologist whose views and outstanding works in Indian anthropology were either poorly understood or not emphasized at all in the mainstream of the teaching of Indian anthropology; he held different views from N. K. Bose and M. N. Srinivas. Guha also mentions A. K. Danda, who seems to appreciate Indian anthropology as presented in Hindu literature and scriptures. Finally, he concludes the first chapter with a quote from T. C. Das and his ethnographic work on non-Hindu tribes retaining their own ethical identity and thus being marginalized in Hindu society.

The main ideas, methodology and planning of this work, i.e. *Anthropology in Nation Building*, were set out in the second chapter, which highlights the nationalist tendencies in Indian anthropology before and after independence as the main findings of the work. He emphasised that the field studies must be oriented towards the social problems and other important contemporary issues prevalent in the country should be linked with the university teaching of anthropology.

How did the colonial masters influence the early Indian anthropologists? Guha explores this aspect in the third chapter. While tracing Indian anthropology, Guha mentions Asad's *Anthropology and Colonial Encounters* (1973) and *Imperialism, Anthropology and Thirds world* (1981) by Jagan Nath Pathy, in which he analytically states that neither Asad nor Pathy could show that anthropology in the past colonial years addressed the plight of oppressed people in the countries (p. 38). Indian anthropology was advanced by a product of colonial and neo-colonial masters. He goes on to trace this account of Indian anthropology in a chronological manner after 1950 with N. K. Bose and his work and views on Indian anthropology. The author highlights his views at length as ... we have followed the path taken by anthropologists in the powerful countries of the West. And what do they do? We are repeating or generally adopting them on Indian soil (p. 39). It is evident from this writing that new Indian scholars followed the western researchers in studying Indian anthropology and the study of its people. Guha also highlights his work on the social problems of India, such as the caste system and evils, and scientific research in the field of anthropometric surveys. He also analysed the book *India: A Western Apprentices*, the magnum opus of Surajit Sinha and also the relationship between tribes and castes, social change, the findings of ethnography, the pressing problems of the primitive groups, the people groups, the issues of national reconstruction and development. He summarises: "... mentally dependent upon his predecessors-lives of under colonials rules" (pp. 40-41).

Similarly, he throws light on the work of Amitabha Basu, Suhas Biswas, A. C. Sinha and his critical views on the connections or influences of Cambridge on the Indian doyens - B. S. Guha, M. N. Srinivas, R. K. Mukerjee, D. N. Mujumdar, S. C. Dube and N. Prasad, Andre Beteille followed by Biswanath Dennath, J. J. Roy-Burman, Vivek Kumar, R. Srinivasan etc. The critical views of Indian anthropology highlighted by N. K. Bose, Sinha, Basu, Andre Betellie and the proponents of Hindu anthropology - J C Ghose, N K Bose, Danda etc. The *third* chapter ends with the author's observation that Indian anthropologists have failed to build on their nationalist predecessors and rely entirely on contemporary Western discourse in anthropology (p. 44).

In the *fourth* chapter, the author has examined the trend of nationalist anthropology and introduced some of the early anthropologists and their important works. Here he expresses that these anthropologists followed the colonial traditions, which is evident in their writings and research on nation-building. However, many of them were neither blind followers nor interested in deriving Indian anthropology from religious scriptures, such as the Hindu anthropology of J. C. Ghosh as opposed to the 'sympathetic immersion' of S. C. Roy. Other works of various anthropologists are critically analyzed in the next section - S. C. Mitra (1863-1938), S. C. Roy (1871-1942), Haran Chandra Chalandar (1874-1958), Bupendra Dutta (1880-1961), B. R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), Pancham Mitra (1892-1936), Biraja Shnakar Guha (1994-1961), K. P. Chattapadhaya (1897-1963), Tarak Chandra Das (1898-1964) and Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-1972). He has highlighted their published works chronologically (p. 52).

Needless to say, the author provides the readers with a detailed description of Tarak Chandra Das and his contribution to nation building, followed by a description of B. R. Ambedkar in a separate sub-section (p. 84). His account of these two, especially the two prominent anthropologists, left me wanting to read more about both, which was very beneficial. One of the interesting facts that attracted me the most is the fact that in a separate section of seven pages, he gives a detailed account of B. R. Ambedkar's work on caste and its emergence as a contribution to nation building in Indian anthropology, assessing the basic premises of anthropology to understand Indian society, chairez-Garaza cited Ambedkar as a doyen of Indian anthropology who was not noticed by other Indian doyens. Ambedkar also advocated the concept of nationalism as "the *feeling of a common sense of unity*" (p. 84). A similar essence of this expression can also be found in Clifford Greetz's "Interpretation of Culture". In addition to Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*, caste as a state of mind is also mentioned, which is the main idea of Ambedkar's work. Neither Clifford Greetz nor Louis Dumont mentioned or acknowledged Ambedkar's contribution (p-85). Ambedkar did not blindly follow Boas's anthropology and had well explained the intrinsic process of caste formation based on the endogamy/exogamy pattern of marriage prevalent in the society. This seminal work, *Caste and its genesis* (1916), written by Ambedkar in 1916, was not even mentioned or consulted by the prominent writers on Indian casteism (p. 89). For example, Guha mentioned G. S. Ghurey, N. K. Bose, both Indian anthropologists, and a Western anthropologist, Gerald Berremen (1930-2013), also ignored Ambedkar's ideas on caste and its origins (Ibid). It seems that Ambedkar and his scholarship have been systematically ignored by both Indian and Western scholars on Indian caste. This part of Guha's writing on Ambedkar and his critical evaluation of Indian caste is dealt with in a separate subsection, which is a very valuable contribution to the fourth chapter (pp. 84-90).

The central theme of this book, the future of nationalist anthropology in India, is explored in fourteen sub-chapters, the fifth of which deals particularly with the historical account of nationalist anthropology in post-independent India. It begins with N. K. Bose and his work *Problems of National Integration* (1967) and *Problems of Indian Nationalism* (1969), which highlights his thoughts on national integration and issues of Indian nationalism. Bose liked the ideas of M. K. Gandhi - the 'Gandhi formula' i.e. decentralisation of power to local governments to achieve national integration (p. 92). Another doyen is M. N. Srinivas, who points out the importance of political complexity and social stability in his work *Nation-Building in Independent India* (1976). Even in "Rise of Anthropology in India" Volumes I and

II (L. P. Vidyarthi, 1978), the programme of anthropology for nation-building is not mentioned, and in “Study of Nation-Building Process” (Gopal Sarana, 1974), the utility of anthropology is explained. Guha sticks to his main question - whether anthropological studies were conducted to address the crucial problems faced by policy makers regarding famine, partition and settlement of refugees, socio-economic impact of industrialization and construction of dams. Moreover, these issues are the biggest challenges in post-independent India. Another work *Anthropology, Development and Nation Building* (Kalla and Singh, 1987) is the outcome of a national seminar which contains 22 papers on the relevance of anthropology to planning and development and seeks to examine the trend of research and its implications for the urgent task of nation building in the areas of health, population structure and planning, women and children, communal harmony and national integration. None of these chapters address the three great challenges: Famines, Partitions, Industrialization and Dam Building, as the author has already pointed out (p. 96). Moreover, Kalla (1987) commented on other well-connected anthropologists waging a “cold war” against social and physical anthropology (see note 6, p. 130).

In addition, Abhijit Guha again highlights the seminal works of two prominent anthropologists, one by T. C. Das and the other by Amitabha Basu, a biological anthropologist. Cultural Anthropology in the Service of the Individual and the Nation, in which Das expressed the immense potential as an applied science for the development of the Indian nation, and *Human Biology in Anthropology and its Utility in the Service of the Nation* (Sarkar 1951), which uses several examples from physical anthropology and human biology to illuminate their potential for nation-building (pp. 96-97). Amitabha Basu extends the perspective of S.S. Sarkar, who in *Human Biology in India: its possible role in third world societies passing through rapid transformation* (Basu, 1987) argues for the thesis of a healthy mind and body for a healthy nation.

In the remaining sub-chapters vi–ivx, Abhijit Guha explains the role of Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI) since its inception, construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam on Narmada and Koyna Dam, displacement of people and ethnic groups, famine in Bengal and Bengali refugees and their resettlement in A&N islands, Negrito element in ethnic groups in A&N islands have been discussed in detail. In the last section of the chapter, he summarizes the fifth chapter with Vinay K Srivastava and his perspective on the future of anthropology, the ‘*practice in*’ and the ‘*practice of*’, National Tribal Policy- a blueprint for a policy for ethnic groups in the A&N Islands and *Indian Anthropology Today*. Finally, Guha concludes the chapter *Anthropology in Nation Building: Beyond the Colonial Encounter* by summarizing all the previous chapters on anthropology in nation building with special reference to Pranab Ganguly and Vinay Kumar Srivastava in the historical study of nation building in Indian anthropology beyond the colonial legacy.

Now I feel most favoured by reading this work of Abhijit Guha between the lines. As mentioned earlier, my interest in reading this book has been piqued i.e. Guha has given a detailed account of B. R. Ambedkar’s anthropological discourse on caste and its genesis in a separate section, calling him an unappreciated doyen of Indian anthropology of the earliest times. This book is very clearly written on the contribution of anthropology to nation building. It must be included as a textbook in the postgraduate teaching of history and sociology as well as anthropology in Indian universities.