

Anthropology in India: Colonial? Hindu? Or Nationalist? Which way has it gone so far? An Historical Exploration

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ABSTRACT

Researches on the history of Anthropology in India unlike western countries have not yet become a formidable tradition 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. Under this scenario, the conceptual framework of my discourse was derived from a critical and selective reading of the anthropological texts produced by the Indian anthropologists.

This reading of the history of Indian anthropology was based on two sources. One source was the reading of the original texts by pioneering anthropologists which were committed to various tasks of nation building and the other was the reading of literature by anthropologists who critiqued early Indian anthropology as simply following the western/colonial tradition. These two readings of the texts were juxtaposed to write a new and critical history of the discipline, which emphasized the nationalist tradition of Indian Anthropology.

On the reverse side of the colonial critique 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. I have designated this view as 'Hindu Anthropology'.

Finally, I have argued that anthropologists did make attempts to tackle some of the major challenges (viz. famine, rehabilitation of refugees and development caused displacement) encountered by the country in the early periods of nation building, which I would narrate in some detail in this lecture.. Under the changing times and circumstances, the future of nationalist anthropology in India lies in carrying forward this remarkable tradition of anthropology developed by some of the pioneers and this justified the historical exploration of the nationalist trends in Indian anthropology having present and future implications.

KEYWORDS: History of Anthropology, Indian Anthropology, Colonial Anthropology, Hindu Anthropology, Nationalist Anthropology, Nation building.

INTRODUCTION

I am really honoured for being invited by the Indian National Confederation and Academy of Anthropologists (INCAA) to deliver the valedictory address on the occasion of the 17th Indian Anthropology Congress, here at the Department of Anthropology & Tribal Studies, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, West Bengal. I thank the organisers for allowing me to talk before you for some time. The topic, which I have chosen for my lecture is not only very close to my heart but also the theme of the Congress, “*Anthropology in Nation Building in the Post-Independence Era and the Road Ahead*”. Frankly speaking, I will not be able to predict the future of anthropology in India but through my researches on the history of Indian anthropology, I will make an humble attempt to narrate in some details about how Indian anthropologists viewed Indian anthropology and nation building in the pre and post-independence periods. I have written a more detailed account of the history of Indian anthropology in the context of nation building in my recent book *Nation Building in Indian Anthropology: Beyond the Colonial Encounter*.

THE BEGINNING

Anthropology in India began under the colonial rule. Both European scholars and British administrators contributed to the establishment of Anthropology in India. The first anthropological publications started with the Asiatic Society, which was established on 15th January 1784 in Kolkata by Sir William Jones, a philologist although, anthropology was not separately studied in this pioneering center of learning in India, the scholars in Asiatic Society studied language, history, arts and the sciences.

The next impetus for Anthropology in India came with the Census operations by the British administration in 1881. Indian census data and its publications included huge amount of anthropological information and the first Census Commissioner Sir H.H. Risley constructed the first racial classification of the Indian population. Censuses yielded massive biological and cultural information on the tribes and castes of India, which formed a major source of anthropological data. The first Department of Anthropology was established at Calcutta University in 1920 by the famous Indian Vice-Chancellor, Sir Asutosh Mukhopadhyay and Ananthakrishna Ayer (a pioneering Indian anthropologist) was its Head of the Department. Famous Indian Anthropologists, mostly trained outside India was the founder teachers in the Department. Ramaprasad Chanda, Panchanan Mitra,

B.S.Guha, K.P. Chattopadhyaya, T.C.Das, N.K.Bose, D.Sen, S.S.Sarkar and many others developed a strong empirical tradition of Anthropology in India characterized by fieldwork in social-cultural anthropology and anthropometry in physical anthropology. The thrust on a holistic approach was the cardinal feature of anthropology in India. In contrast to Europe, Indian anthropologists paid more importance to the collection of data from the field rather than on building theories.

Gradually, universities in Lucknow, Delhi, Madras and Pune also developed strong traditions of anthropological research and teaching and the largest governmental organization, the Anthropological Survey of India was established by Dr.B.S.Guha, which also began its journey with a holistic framework of anthropology and added interdisciplinary collaborations with other biological and social sciences, like biochemistry, geography and linguistics.

Critiques of Indian Anthropology

Much later, and particularly after the independence of the country, Indian anthropologists felt that anthropology in India still remained a western imitation save some brilliant exceptional studies done by some of the pioneers. The crisis of Indian anthropology was also perceived at the level of application of anthropology for human welfare, national planning and national integration. Some of the anthropologists also ventured into the future of Indian anthropology.

Indian anthropology, unlike British, American and French anthropologies grew under a colonial rule and it was a challenge for the Indian anthropologists to develop an anthropological tradition in a truly nationalist and indigenous framework. Furthermore, Indian anthropology lacks studies on its own history and more interestingly, the foreign/western anthropologists who made remarkable contributions on the different aspects of Indian society and culture showed very little interest to write a history of Indian anthropology.

On the other hand, the Indian anthropologists on their part have only made sporadic attempts to write a comprehensive history of the discipline by taking into consideration the question of nation building in post-independent India, and quite interestingly, there developed a standard critique of Indian anthropology, which was advanced by some of the leading Indian anthropologists. The critics opined that Indian anthropology was the product of a colonial tradition and the Indian anthropologists for various reasons followed their colonial and neo-colonial masters in one way or the other. Let me try to arrange the critiques of Indian anthropology in a chronological manner.

A chronological description of the critiques of Indian Anthropology

1. As early as 1952 Nirmal Kumar Bose in a significant article entitled 'Current research projects in Indian anthropology' published in *Man in India* enumerated the research projects undertaken by the Department of Anthropology, Govt. of India (the former name of the Anthropological Survey of

India) and the anthropology departments at Calcutta, Madras, Lucknow, Delhi, Gauhati and Osmania Universities. Bose's investigation was exhaustive and based on written replies from the Heads of the aforementioned institutions. After reviewing the overall scenario he concluded:

There does not seem to be any problem which Indian anthropologists have made peculiarly their own. Anthropology in our country has, on the whole, followed the tracks beaten by anthropologists in the more powerful countries of the West. What they do, we generally try to repeat on the Indian soil (Bose 1952:133).

Bose however ended with the positive note that there were exceptions to the above generalization and if Indian anthropologists could work independently on Indian problems, there was still sign of hope. Just after 10 years N.K.Bose published another article 'Researches in Indian anthropology' in the same journal in which he turned the attention of the readers from applied to 'certain fundamental problems in anthropology' and mentioned about the researches done by the social anthropologists on the persistence of the caste system. Along with this Bose mentioned the anthropometric surveys carried out by the physical anthropologists at the all-India level as another type of fundamental research and he found young anthropologists at the Anthropological Survey of India as 'first-class workers' (Bose 1962a:179).

2. After Bose, his famous student Surajit Sinha in his insightful article published in the *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* (hereafter *JIAS*) in 1971 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 the radical social science journal *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 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. Curiously, 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 to undertake discussion on this vital area. More interestingly, few years later Sinha wrote in the Foreword of the book *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).

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’. He seemed to satisfy himself only with the praise of N.K.Bose and occasionally T.C.Das.

3. Next to Sinha came the critique of Amitabha Basu and Suhas Biswas who held professorial positions at the prestigious Indian Statistical Institute at 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!

4. One of the most sarcastic critiques of Indian social anthropology was written by A.C.Sinha in his article ‘Indian social anthropology and its Cambridge connections’ published in 1991 in *The Eastern Anthropologist*. In this article Sinha argued, and with archival evidence that many of the Indian doyens of social anthropology and sociology depended largely on British anthropologists for the improvement in their personal careers. In Sinha’s list there were names of B.S.Guha, M.N.Srinivas, Ramkrishna Mukherjee, D.N.Majumdar, S.C.Dube, and N.Prasad. I quote him below. One finds pompous Guha, the recently appointed academic bureaucrat, looking for approval to his uncertain blue-prints. One also notes that Srinivas, Mukherjee, Majumdar, Dube, Narmadeshwar Prasad--- all aspiring sociologists and social anthropologists--- the would be Mandarins--- who were destined to steer through the Indian sociological establishment for at least three decades in post-1950 period--- behaving in the same “comical and pathetic ways” for securing an approving nod from their Cambridge establishment (Sinha, 1991:351-352). A.C. Sinha however did not explore further to see how this dependence on Cambridge establishment influenced the academic contributions of the Indian social anthropologists.

5. 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. long before his pronouncement, N.K. Bose and Surajit Sinha critiqued Indian anthropologists almost in the same manner, which I have already mentioned.

6. 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 can be found in the writings of J.J.Roy-Burman in 2011 (Roy-Burman, 2011).

7. 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, 2017:33-39). 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.

8. 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, 1986:1986-1999).

Hindu Anthropology

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 6th 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, 1938:27).

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. He 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 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 behaviour which existed since long (Bose, 1929). 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 the then 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(Bose,1953). 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 summarised 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 tribes 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).

Therefore, under Bose's scheme, Hinduisation of the tribes was accepted as an obvious and inevitable process which also helped to overlook any possibility of protest by the tribes against the Brahminical imposition in any form. It also helped to hide the exploitation and subjugation of the tribes 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 the prestigious journal *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 round '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**.¹ For example, Tarak Chandra Das's view on Indian anthropology and the tribal society was completely different to that of Bose and Srinivas although the former's work did not receive due attention by the anthropologists in India.² Ironically, despite being an excellent fieldworker and ethnographer, Das's ideas did not receive due attention even from his

famous students, like Surajit Sinha, B K Roy Burman, and André Béteille.³

The path set by the doyens left little scope for a secular and materialist Indian anthropology (Guha, 2018:105-110). The search for the counter movements against Hinduisation and ethnographies of anti-acculturative 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. 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 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 Dharmasharstra* (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 (384-322B.C.) (Danda, 2017: 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' (Guha, 2019:154-168).

I would conclude this section with the following statement. The dominant discourse in Indian anthropology was saturated with a higher caste Hindu ideology by the idea of the Hindu method of tribal absorption proposed by Bose in the 1940s in such a way that nobody questioned the nature of the data collected by Bose himself, which by any standard stood on methodologically unsound foundations. The then ethnographic discourse generated by Das that recorded the counter processes of de-Hinduisation and maintenance of ethnic identity by the economically and socially subjugated and marginalized tribes, was largely put into oblivion and overlooked by anthropologists in India. The critics of Indian Anthropology (Bose, Sinha, Basu, Bêteille and Debnath) and the proponents of Hindu Anthropology (Ghosh, Bose and Danda) ignored the materialistic, socially committed, secular and nationalist trends of Indian anthropology which was growing in the hands of some remarkable anthropologists before and after independence of the country (Guha, 2018; 2019; 2021:59-75. & 2022). 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. At best the critics have only paid lip- service to those nationalist pioneers of the discipline.

Nationalist Anthropology

One of the important areas in which anthropologists have consistently contributed was the bio-cultural study of ethnic minorities, variously labeled as *tribes*, *aboriginals*, *autochthones*, *indigenous communities* and *adivasis*. A related area of focus of the anthropologists was the marginalized condition of these communities and also about how to ameliorate the condition of these communities and integrate them in the mainstream of the Indian nation in the post-independence period of the country. It is important to note that the contributions of the anthropologists towards nation building in the post-independence period of India were hardly considered to be important by the planners and policy makers partly because of the nature of the discipline and in part owing to the avoidance of the anthropologists in situating their micro-level studies in the wider macro context of the nation.⁴ Therefore, the detailed empirical studies on particular tribes, castes and villages made little sense to the planners of mega five year plans of the country. Anthropologists were definitely regarded as experts on tribal policy at the national level but compared to economists their presence in nation building or national planning was marginal. Even when the value of anthropological methodology of conducting in-depth field based studies were understood, it was practically not feasible for the government to engage sufficient number of trained anthropologists to make plans for displaced persons affected by famine, partition, industrialization or dam building in the country by properly

assessing the micro-level social impacts of these mega events occurring in post-colonial India.⁵ Anthropologists also were largely satisfied with their position as experts on tribes, pursuing their professional and technical research on particular communities across the length and breadth of the country long after independence.

As a consequence, the Indian anthropologists remained on the margins of nation building, pursuing their micro-level studies on tribes and some caste populations sometime almost in the fashion of their colonial masters either from the Anthropological Survey of India or from various university departments. In a calendric account on 'Some Landmarks of Indian Anthropology' published in 1986 in *Human Science*, the official journal of the Anthropological Survey of India only three events were recorded under 1951 which have a direct bearing on national level planning, viz., (i) application of anthropological research findings in the implementation of Community Development Project, (ii) application of anthropology in the formation of Panchayati Raj System and (iii) creation of separate departments and agencies in the governments for the study of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Communities (Bose, 1986). In 1986 a national seminar titled 'Anthropology in the Service of Nation' was organized jointly by the Indian Anthropological Association and Anthropological Survey of India and 22 papers presented in the seminar was published in the form of a book under the title *Anthropology Development and Nation Building* in 1987 edited by A.K. Kalla and K.S. Singh. In the preface the editors after explaining the importance of Anthropology in planning and development mentioned their objective in the following manner-

...the Indian Anthropological Association and the Anthropological Survey of India decided to explore together the latest trends of research which have significant implications for the urgent task of nation building in all its aspects (Kalla & Singh 1987: v).

The papers in the book covered health, nutrition, population structure, problems of women, development of backward areas, displacement and resettlement, environment, ethnicity, communal harmony and national integration. None of the chapters in the volume made any attempt to search and assess the pioneering works done by the Indian anthropologists which were part of the nation building process in its early phase.⁶ There was no effort by the anthropologists who contributed in the aforementioned book to look into the past records as regards the pioneering contributions in the discipline towards the study of the three major challenges (*famine, partition,*

industrialization and dam building) encountered by the policy makers of the then new nation.⁷ The foregoing narrative, however should not lead one to conclude that Indian anthropologists did not think about situating their subject and findings in the context of nation building.

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 characterized by the works of the anthropologists who were socially committed and contributed to nation building through their analytical writings and research (Guha, 2018:8). 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 Jogendrachandra 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, 1938:150).

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 was the first Indian who founded the second professional journal of anthropology in India named *Man in India* in 1921.⁸ 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: 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, 2007:144).

Roy's nationalism, despite his professed Hindu background was basically Indian. In this connection one may recall a 1933 article written by Panchanan Mitra who was Roy's contemporary and the first professor of anthropology in India. The article was published under the editorship of Roy in *Man in*

India under the title ‘Research leads in anthropology in India’. In this article Mitra justified not only the importance of in India in cultural studies but also pointed out to the relevance of Indian philosophical thinking in developing modern anthropological theory. I quote him. It is a far cry yet from the India of the day when it would not merely echo the modern West but would try its own methods to interpret anew the laws of nature and the predominant culture pattern of India would lead it to its time old probing of all the secrets of creation through the introspection and scientific investigation of microcosmic man (Mitra, 1933:12). One may find a similarity in the thoughts of P. Mitra and S.C. Roy in their hopes to synthesize Indian philosophy with Western anthropology. What was ‘introspection’ for Mitra was ‘sympathetic immersion’ for Roy and none of them invoked the idea of a ‘Hindu anthropology’ or seemed to believe that modern anthropological concepts were already present in the ancient Hindu period in India.

As early as 1941 Tarak Chandra Das in his Presidential address in the Anthropology section of the Indian Science Congress 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. 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 (Das, 1941). The message concerning the role of anthropologists in nation building delivered by T.C. Das was carried forward by S.S.Sarkar, another doyen of Indian Anthropology again from the University of Calcutta, and he was a biological anthropologist. His presidential address in Anthropology section was entitled ‘The Place of Human Biology in Anthropology and its utility in the Service of the Nation’. It was delivered in 1951 in the Indian Science Congress and later published in *Man in India*. In the lecture Sarkar mentioned Das’s strong recommendation towards turning the Widow Remarriage Act from a ‘permissive’ to a ‘coercive’ one in the interest of ‘national welfare’. Throughout his lecture Sarkar cited example after example from various studies conducted by the Physical Anthropologists and Human Biologists all over the world which have had enormous policy implications towards nation building in India (Sarkar, 1951).

At this juncture, let me quickly digress a little and point out some of the interesting and crucial contributions of B.S.Guha, who is still known to the students of Indian anthropology as one, who made the classification of the Indian population into several ‘races’ after H.H. Risley. Guha’s vision on the role of social sciences in nation building has so far been largely overlooked by both the critics of Indian anthropology and the admirers of B.S.Guha. I will just take one writing of Guha now. This

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. 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,1958:149). 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 (Guha1958:150).

In a much later period the human biology approach of S.S.Sarkar was carried forward by his student Amitabha Basu at the Indian Statistical Institute Kolkata during the 1960s and 70s. In 1987 Basu wrote a comprehensive historical article entitled 'Human biology in India: Its possible role in a third world society under rapid transformation' in a prestigious international journal named *Collegium Anthropologicum* by following Sarkar's basic guideline of building a healthy nation through the making of individuals healthy in body and mind (Sarkar 1951). In this unique article Basu narrated how colonial 'Physical Anthropology' (represented by H.H.Risley and his classification of the Indian population into 'Races') gradually transformed into much wider 'Human Biology', which devoted itself to the task of building a healthy nation. According to Basu the role of human biology towards the service of the independent nation is not simply like a biological science:

The most important and special role of human biology, following from the tradition of its precursor discipline, physical anthropology, is to consider at the micro-level, and on the basis of detailed, intensive and first-hand information collection, a multitude of human biological traits (not merely disease traits) and the totality of their environmental and genetic backgrounds, in order to detect and measure the intricacies of their interrelations and

interactions. This role we presume is most advantageous in view of the immense variability of the human physiological functioning and social behaviour in predicting the course of biological, social and biosocial changes in Third World societies and directing the course, if even to a limited extent, in a meaningful direction (Basu 1987:248).⁹ It is important here to note that this 'biosocial' dimension of human existence is the unique thrust area of anthropology, which distinguished the discipline from sociology and this integrated approach was also discernible in the pioneering works of T.C.Das, B.S.Guha, Surajit Sinha and Irawati Karve, which I will soon mention briefly in the following section.

Practicing nationalist anthropology: some remarkable early examples

Under this general scenario of anthropological discourse around nation building a specific focus could also be discerned in the works of the anthropologists in India. This focus was centered towards the (i) displacement and resettlement of populations caused by famine, (ii) partition of the country on religious grounds during independence and (iii) industrialization and dam building by the State in the initial years of mega-planning under the first and second five years plans. All the three events, i.e. *famine, partition* and *mega-development efforts* (industrialization and dam building) were inseparable from nation building, and policy makers needed anthropological advocacy and insight to deal with the problems arising out of displacement caused by partition and mega-development efforts. Definitely, the anthropological interventions in these mega events of nation building were miniscule in proportion to the nationwide magnitude of those episodes. But in terms of the intensive nature and quality of the micro-level findings, the anthropological studies on refugee resettlement and rehabilitation of development caused displaced persons offer a new area around the discourse on nationalism, so far untouched by historians, economists and political scientists. How the suggestions and recommendations of the anthropologists were adopted by the policy makers in these cases is a different issue, which is not within the ambit of this lecture.

In order to explore the anthropological discourses around resettlement and rehabilitation of famine affected destitutes, refugees of partition and development project affected populations, I have selected five pioneering studies conducted by eminent anthropologists who made important contributions in solving the aforementioned problems encountered by independent India. All the studies were published after the independence of the country and except the study on Bengal famine by Tarak Chandra Das the rest of the studies were conducted within the span of the first four five year plans of India during 1951-1974. I enumerate the studies below in their chronological order.

1. *Bengal Famine (1943): As Revealed in a Survey of the Destitutes of Calcutta* (1949) by Tarak Chandra Das. The University of Calcutta.
2. *Resettlement of East Pakistan Refugees in Andaman Islands: Report on Survey of Further Possibilities of Resettlement* (1955) by Surajit Chandra Sinha. Govt. of West Bengal.
3. *Studies in Social Tensions Among the Refugees From Eastern Pakistan* (1959) by B.S.Guha. Department of Anthropology. Govt. of India.
4. *Social Processes in the Industrialization of Rourkela (With Reference to Displacement and Rehabilitation of Tribal and Other Backward People)* (1961) by B.K. Roy Burman. Office of the Registrar General, India.
5. *A Survey of the People Displaced Through the Koyna Dam* (1969), by Irawati Karve and Jai Nimbkar. Deccan College: Poona.

The common denominators of the anthropological studies around nation building

The **first** common feature of these anthropological studies was that except the study done by T.C.Das on Bengal Famine, all of them were commissioned and sponsored either by the central or the state government of independent India which engaged anthropologists on matters related to displacement and resettlement.¹⁰ Das's study was funded partly in its later stage by the University of Calcutta. The **second** feature of these studies was that they were not specifically directed to any particular ethnic minority or community, as had been done by the anthropologists by following the colonial tradition, but to the populations affected by partition and development processes. The **third** common denominator of these studies was their focus on the collection of both social and biological data (read demographic) and the creation of a solid empirical database. In all these studies the main objective of the authors was to collect, organize and analyze quantitative and qualitative data on the problem, which they wanted to investigate. **Fourth**, the analyses of the data were also done not to test or generate any theory or hypothesis as regards the human populations, societies and cultures involved in the processes but to collect concrete factual materials on the ground realities of displacement of human populations in the newly independent nation. **Fifth**, in all the studies we find that the anthropologists innovatively employed their traditional methods (participant observation, genealogy, case study etc.) to large populations. **Finally**, these studies were done not for seeking pure knowledge but to generate policies around the major challenges encountered by the planners of the newly independent country in the post-colonial period. In short, these studies can be viewed as sincere attempts by the anthropologists towards the making of a new nation and that still remains outside the mainstream debates and discussion around nation building by the social scientists and even by the anthropologists themselves.

Ergo

My exploration revealed that anthropologists did make attempts to grapple with some of the major problems (viz. famine, rehabilitation of refugees and development caused displacement) encountered by the country in the early periods of nation building through their painstaking research, which I viewed as their contributions towards nation building in the post-independence period. Under the changing times and circumstances, the future of nationalist anthropology in India probably lies in carrying forward this remarkable nationalist trend of anthropology developed by the pioneers and this justified the historical exploration of nation building in Indian anthropology beyond the colonial legacy.

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ENDNOTES

¹ It is interesting to note in this connection that in a more recent period the idea of an Islamic Anthropology has also been proposed by some anthropologists. In an article entitled 'Defining Islamic Anthropology' published in the prestigious Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter(RAIN) Akbar S. Ahmed noted that the "issue of Islamic Anthropology has been raised by Muslim anthropologists' and it also posed 'serious questions of a philosophic as well as an anthropological nature'(Ahmed 1984:2-4+1).

² 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* 1964:88).Even a meticulous author like S.K.Ray also missed this obituary of Das in his valuable book(see Ray, 1974:60).

³ In a more recent period, Bêteille, however, corrected himself about his lesser-known teacher Tarak Chandra Das. In his autobiographical memoir entitled “Ourselves and Others” published in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*, he recalled his experiences of studying anthropology at the University of Calcutta in the following manner. I quote Bêteille (2013): “Things in the Department of Anthropology were organized on a small scale, and they moved at a slow pace. The teachers were easily accessible to their students. One of those who taught us about society and culture, T C Das, was meticulous and conscientious, and had a vast store of detailed ethnographic knowledge.”

⁴ It should be noted here that pioneering Indian anthropologists unequivocally expressed their views on the role and importance of anthropology towards nation building and national integration in a diverse country like India. D.N.Majumdar and B.S. Guha in their articles published in 1947 and 1949 respectively emphasized the potential role of anthropology not only in administration but also in combating the divisive forces inimical to nation building. Guha for example in his 1949 article on the progress of anthropology in India stated: “The importance of acquiring correct and adequate knowledge of the social and religious institutions of the people in a country of so diverse races and tribes is not only of scientific but also of utmost practical value in administration, as well as for ensuring fellowship and understanding among the population. Racial prejudice and communal animosities breed on ignorance and the surest method of stopping it is by appreciating each other's habits of life and modes of thought. Such knowledge leads to the development of harmony and a centrifugal outlook which is the great cementing force in a nation of many races” (Guha 1949: 610-611). We find a similar view in Verrier Elwin's article in *Man* on Anthropological Survey of India (see Elwin 1948:68-69 & 80-81).

⁵ Here it would be relevant to note that K.S.Singh, who was the Director General of the Anthropological Survey of India (1984-1993) consistently studied famines in India in the post-independence period and wrote a book and a number of articles on famine. In one of his articles entitled ‘Human response to famine: an anthropological perspective’ published in the *Human Science* in 1989, Singh noted that famines in India has a relationship with the rise of nationalist feelings and political awakening cutting across caste and religion leading to voluntary welfare measures by non-state organizations (Singh 1989: 267-273; see also Singh 1987-88: 186-205).

⁶ In this connection, I will mention an article by S.B.Chakrabarti published in the official journal (then named *Human Science*) of the Anthropological Survey of India in 1986 a year before the book by Kalla and Singh was published. The author in the article entitled ‘Role of

human sciences in national development: a critical appraisal' proposed 'an assertive stand on the role of human scientists in the development of a nation'. By seeking an 'assertive stand' the author criticized so called 'basic' and 'value free' research by the 'privileged elite in the corridor of big power' but he himself made no little effort to discover the applied researches done by his predecessor anthropologists on famine, partition and development caused displacement which affected millions of people in newly independent India (Chakrabarti 1986: 88-93).

⁷ Interestingly, in their edited book Kalla lamented In spite of the notable usefulness of physical anthropology in India, with its given and much improvable standards, it has so far not found its due place in nation building;(Kalla 1987:7). He blamed some 'well-connected anthropologists' for practicing a 'cold war' against physical anthropology and the social anthropologists in particular for their domination in the national scene (Ibid 7-8)!

⁸The first professional journal of anthropology in India was *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* which was founded in 1886. Its first editor was Edward Tyrrell Leith, a British national and professor of Law at the Government Law College, Bombay (now Mumbai). This journal continued up to 1973(Shah 2014:363).

⁹ Amitabha Basu was one of the most sensitive physical anthropologists in post-independence India who always looked for social purpose and relevance of anthropology in India (Basu 1974:17-23; 1987:2004:1-20 & 2009:290-306).In his 1974 article Basu viewed the inner conflicts of the loyalty of a post-independence anthropologist being 'torn between two cultures: the culture of colonial anthropology in which the life-style and physique of remote people were studied for the esoteric pleasure of the standard-bearers of the colonial *Raj* or for the convenience of the colonial administration, and the culture of a new generation of unquiet youth whose sense of belonging to the wider social scene demands a pragmatic approach(Basu 1974:17).

¹⁰ T.C. Das's two articles published in the *Sociological Bulletin* dealt with unconventional and new topics of sociological research even by today's standards. In one article, Das described and analyzed his empirical findings on the impact of industrialization on the Hindu and Muslim populations in nine villages in the vicinity of Calcutta city (Das 1960:46-59). The other paper was on the nature and extent of social change among the tribals of eastern India (Das 1962: 221-238).