

Book Review

Guha Abhijit. *Nation-Building in Indian Anthropology: Beyond the Colonial Encounter (first edition)*

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Guha's (2022) book *Nation-Building in Indian Anthropology: Beyond the Colonial Encounter* is a remarkable ensemble of his previously published articles, carefully compiled and elaborated to provide its readers a chronological and theoretical repertoire of the journey of Anthropology in India. In his previous and separate articles, he has brilliantly discussed the contributions of eminent and marginalized Anthropologists in India. In specific articles he looked through the lens of industrialization, development, displacement and Globalization, with its impact on Indian Anthropology. In this particular book, he tried to locate Anthropology through the register of Nation-building enterprise in India. The book has six chapters including an Introduction and a Conclusion. This slim book of 151 pages, published by Manohar Publications, is the outcome of ICSSR senior research fellowship awarded to the author in 2018-2020. Compiling three centuries of Anthropological disciplinary establishment, in a span of 2 years is a pretty accomplished task. Guha's previous research in this domain had been the guiding light for a successful completion of the book. However, Guha's minute reading of very many anthropologists in India, is worth every praise. This book is the fruit of the loom of his academic specialization in disciplinary Anthropology only.

Guha emphasized the neglected areas in Indian Anthropology, which includes History of nation-building approach in Anthropology only confined to the post-Independence period and the relative lack of bio-social or bio-cultural research in Anthropology, particularly in relation to nation-building. Guha has elucidated the crux of major Anthropological texts and contributions to the discipline, in Chapter 1, Introduction of

this book. Further discussing the major lacuna in such studies, he used the comparative method to compare and analyze the trends in Anthropology. In an attempt to write a 'new and critical history' of Indian Anthropology, he preferred to designate the term 'new discourse'. Perhaps a patient reading of the text would allow questioning, "what is new in this new discourse?" Any subject matter, when evolving through several stages in history, would depict socio-economical parlances of that time period. While any minute reader would highlight such elements, which were previously not named under 'Nation Building in Indian Anthropology'. In a similar attempt, Guha has outdone himself in pointing out such Lack of 'nationalistic' elements like, the emergence and prevalence of Hindu anthropology as opposed to Nationalist Anthropology; the little scope for a secular and materialist anthropology; etc.

In Chapter Two, the conceptual framework and methodology of the text is discussed. It is a secondary analytical text, developed out of reading and interpreting original texts by pioneering anthropologists of the past and present. The aims and objectives of the book are quite repetitive, with major focus on investigating nationalist trends, developing nationalist tradition in Indian anthropology by collecting historical data on social commitments and humanistic roles of Indian anthropologists. Further, several subsections of the chapter over and again discussed the same objective under different subheadings like 'relevance, significance, anticipated outcomes, proposed outputs, scopes, etc.'

In Chapter Three titled 'Did the early Indian Anthropologists follow their colonial masters?' Guha fundamentally discussed the paradigm shift within the discipline. He provided a chronological description of scholars starting from N.K. Bose to Surajit Sinha, Beteille, Ghosh, Dinda, so on. He finally pointed out the apathy of Indian anthropologists to credit and acknowledge the commitment, contributions and relevance of its pioneering predecessors, which makes them more so dependent on the wisdom of western scholars.

In Chapter Four titled, 'Nationalist Anthropology in India: origin and Growth' Guha draws the trajectory of Sarat Chandra Roy's ethnographic attitude of 'sympathetic immersion' to Panchanan Mitra's 'introspection'. Although, Guha pointed out, that both hoped for a syncretic discipline comprising of Indian philosophy with western anthropology. Perhaps, this is the most promising chapter of this book, where individual scholars' contributions in nationalist discourse is meticulously discussed, compared with similar and opposing ideologies and briefly quoted the originals; to grasp the essence of the reading. Marginalised

scholars like T.C Das, Ambedkar, K.P. Chattopadhyay (to name a few) whose works hold relevance and importance, but hardly acknowledged in mainstream academic discourse, are also elucidated with due references.

In Chapter Five titled, 'Future of Nationalist anthropology in India' Guha goes on to discuss recent scholarly works ranging from Iravati Karve to V.K. Srivastava. In a narrative style, he analyzed their contributions in building a nationalistic approach of anthropology. The chapter suddenly comes to an end after XIV sub-sections each dealing with the contributions of significant anthropologists/ethnographers/sociologists. However, his focus had been mostly on social/cultural anthropologists only. Very few instances or analysis of Physical Anthropologists were mentioned across the book. The following Chapter, Conclusion provides a better analysis and take away points of Chapter Five. Guha's key findings suggest that most critics have overlooked policy-oriented and welfare studies of underprivileged sections of the society. Further, scholars in Indian Anthropology have learned methods and techniques from the West, but incorporated in a unique style that suits their cultural setting. Post-independence, the country was suffering from Famine, Partition (refugee problem) and industrialization (dams and displacement problems), thus the task of anthropologists was to provide policy level framework to eliminate the problems. Thus, the discourse not only generated pure knowledge, but also provided reasonable solution towards building a new nation. He concludes, the future of Nationalist anthropology in India, is carrying forward the legacy of pioneering anthropologist and looking beyond a colonial legacy.

This book is a must read for young scholars and anyone new to the discipline. The book is similar to a reader in anthropology with a wide range of scholarly coverage, mostly Cultural Anthropologists. If Guha would have incorporated more contributions of Physical Anthropology and Archeological Anthropology, it would have enriched the book. However, such attempt might dismantle the very idea of flagging 'Nationalist anthropology' since, any intention to call science (Physical/Biological Anthropology) nationalistic would be erroneous. Over and all, lucidly written, well-structured and analytically rigorous; Guha had brilliantly pointed out the subtle shift in Anthropology, from 'studying a community' towards 'studying problems in that community' in the search of developing nationalist Anthropology with its humane and practical approach.

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