

# Review of: "Social-Cultural Anthropology in the Oldest Department of Anthropology in India: Writing History or the Suppression of Records?"

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The article starts by asking two questions as part of methodology, the first being the email as a personal communication and second using an abstract as a starting point of the write-up. Any kind of communication is very much part of a methodology so an email as a reference point is perfectly valid. However, it would have been substantial, had the author shared some portions of the email for the readers to have a closer view of the context. As far as the abstract being posted on Twitter is concerned, since the article is a comment on the lecture delivered by Prof. Partha, the content of the lecture was oral, so recording and posting or typing it holds the same sentiment given the ephemeral nature of the speech, the source of the abstract remains unchanged.

Moving on to the remark, 'somewhat minor stream of cultural anthropology' seems to have been made in the light of the curriculum taught at the university. The author himself corroborates this fact when he quotes from the autobiographical account of André Béteille, that some of the professors were 'interested' in other disciplines like museology and were 'self-taught'. This is not to undermine the knowledge of the renowned scholar, instead the remark was about the prescribed curriculum which majorly had subjects related to archeology and human evolution as opposed to socio-cultural anthropology. It is also evident from the article itself that for many, the Department of Anthropology in the Delhi University is the extension of the department in Calcutta University, where as Delhi University till date does not have B.A. and M.A. programmes in the department and do not offer any courses on social and cultural anthropology in B.Sc Programme. The M.Sc programme offers taught courses in Fundamental of Social Anthropology and Tribal Cultures in India whereas majority of the courses are on demographics, biocultural diversities and nutrition. Nevertheless, Delhi University hosts students who study purely social and cultural studies every year.

If I extrapolate the situation from Calcutta University to the rest of India, seldom is there a university in India which offers courses in purely social or cultural anthropology, let alone specializations in cultural elements like art, food, fabric, textiles, shelter, folk cultures to name a few. By no means, it can be implied that the scholars have ever been restricted to study social, cultural or socio-cultural anthropology. Scholars have always dared to study what they had to but by aligning themselves with allied departments in the institutes. Folk is taught as part of literary studies, the perception of art in Fine art institutes, lifestyle and living conditions in disciplines like urban spaces, ethnography of technology in the Social

Sciences departments of premier technology institutes like Indian Institute of Technology and almost all studies of anthropology can be studied as special cases of history by providing a timeline.

The opinion also comes from a personal experience when I hunted for applying for a formal educational degree in the anthropology of food in India owing to me personal interest. With a background in computer science, I could not secure an admission. One of the premier institutes convinced me to study anthropology of technology and not food, while other institute could not admit me because of my educational background in technology, I was not meeting the eligibility criteria or for unavailability of courses in pure cultural studies.

I also agree with the focus of Indian anthropologists on cardinal features of anthropology and collection of data rather than building theories. The dearth of studies in classic ethnographies and documented cultural records stand testimony to the fact.

Lastly, towards the end of the article, a timescale of studies has been provided, out of which some of the works focus on religion in totality or partial aspects of it. Religion, on the other hand, has always been standing on a two-pronged road where some anthropologists like Geertz consider religion as part of culture whereas others like Bonney (2004) oppose it.

The reason that the author felt that the work and contribution of several scholars is ignored or suppressed could be because of the nature of the curriculum and the formal course of education delivered. Since, the Department of Anthropology of Calcutta University is the oldest in the country, studies on cultural and social strata could not have come into being without the studies on history and evolution of human existence and it is now that an esteemed institute like Calcutta University offers courses on social and cultural studies.