

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 history of anthropology in India is not only interesting *sui generis* but also for the manner in which the discipline's founding and continuation connects with various metropolises. These connections render more complex, perhaps impossible, the notion of "decolonization" of anthropology both in the so-called periphery as well as in the so-called metropole. The cases of B.S. Guha and P. Mitra, for example, destabilize the notion of an so-called Indian anthropology, eschewing methodological nationalism. Moreover, the idea of a single school of thought at one department or institution also fractures under the pressure of international moves for scholarly training. More relevant to the article at hand, though, are the issues of histories of anthropology. Also under consideration are the dynamics of any given program or department of anthropology, the former mainly related to the training and credentialization of students and the latter related to the personnel and functioning of the unit.

As a scholar interested in the histories of anthropology rather than a single canonized and triumphalist approach to a discipline's history, this article held my interest. The fact that it was written by someone whose existing work in the history of anthropology in India I have read and referenced made me even more excited to read and review this work. I appreciated the engagement the existing historical surveys of the discipline in India. I also enjoyed the use of biographical works by and about prominent Indian anthropologists. It seems clear that the University of Calcutta had a tradition of something that might be called "cultural anthropology," particularly in light of N.K. Bose's 1929 book by that name.

While I enjoyed the work, I have some suggestions that might strengthen it if incorporated into a subsequent version. First, I think the entire framing of taking down Chatterjee's analysis should be reduced to a brief mention and footnote. The strength of this work is in developing an understanding of a history of scholarly knowledge production in India at a particular institution, not in the author's engagement with Chatterjee. In fact, as the piece is written, one could see how both Chatterjee's claims about physical anthropology dwarfing cultural anthropology at the University of Calcutta in the 1920s and the author's fairly detailed claims to the University's engagement with cultural anthropology could be true. To wit, Chatterjee's abstract seems to focus on the first few years of the Department, whereas the author's counterpoints mainly invoke dates from 1930-1960. If read as such, then the overall point is obscured by this debatable point. Beyond that, I am not convinced of the author's rebuttal to Chatterjee's comments on the abstract. Though the author is correct that a "tweet" can be cited as relevant in many cases, in the scholarly setting, it would require a singular

situation when that would be considered a reliable citation. Rather, one should cite the lecture and/or paper presented. Furthermore, what an author submits as an abstract may vary in part or wholly from the paper they subsequently present. I have seen others complete and even completed myself such acts of mismatch. The author is correct that abstracts *ideally* parallel the larger work, but it does not always happen. Second, the “Methodology” section, if it appears in a later version at all, would be stronger if the author stated the sources from which he drew and the manner of analysis. Third, I would like to see more engagement with debates in the field of the history of anthropology (not just of India). How is knowledge constructed? What are the sources? What approach are we using to frame history? This would transform the work from simply gap-filling of a version of history to a robust contribution to both contemporary debates about disciplinary histories and to the histories of Indian anthropology.

The author’s most promising work appears in the “Going Further Back...” section. To me, this section does the work of countering Chatterjee’s thesis (as the author presents it). Earlier, Bose’ contribution was marked by the date 1929, but how does Bose figure into the existing teaching and scholarship of the Department at that moment? In fact, that seems to be where a revised version of this one could focus. I encourage the author to go farther with the presentation of the “Going Further...” section. What are the arguments made? What concepts are introduced or used? In addition, I would like to see more of contextual presentation of the Department. How many instructors were at the Department at a particular point in time? What were their ranks? Their teaching responsibilities? What courses were offered from the Department’s founding until Independence? All of this would buttress the author’s argument.

Lastly, I feel compelled to make a minor point about references and use of existing writing. First, unless there is an overwhelmingly clear reason, citation of Wikipedia should never happen. For reference to a scholars biography, particularly contemporary ones with institutional affiliation, pointing to that person’s presence on the institution’s website is a stronger case. Second, P. Mitra earned his Ph.D. in philosophy, if I am not mistaken. The question of what it takes for someone to be identified or to identify as an anthropologist is important, but to lump people formally trained in anthropology (e.g., B.S. Guha, Harvard) with those otherwise experienced and educated seems to elide scholars that requires disambiguation. Second, I believe that some of this writing has been used in other places. As someone who was the Editor-in-Chief of a major journal, I had to consider such issues. My elders told me that they used a 20% rule, whereby only up to a fifth of the material could have appeared elsewhere. That seems arbitrary, but the author may consider citing the earlier work, or if it was not in a formal scholarly context, at least referring to it in a footnote.