

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

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Indian Anthropology, A Department, and History: An Article of Contestation

(A review article on Social-Cultural Anthropology in the Oldest Department of Anthropology in India: Writing History or the Suppression of Records?)

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Abstract

This article reviews the article written by the author Prof. Abhijit Guha, contrasting the remarks made by the world-renowned social scientist Partha Chatterjee about the lack of practice of social-cultural anthropology in the Department of Anthropology during its inception at the University of Calcutta (CU). While doing so, the article also provides a rich history of social-cultural anthropology at the Department of Anthropology, Calcutta University, and pre- and post-colonial India in general.

Keywords: Social-Cultural Anthropology, History of Anthropology, Calcutta University, Abhijit Guha

Review

The article begins with contesting the claim (as mentioned by the author) of the world-renowned sociologist and social scientist Partha Chatterjee that in the beginning, the department of anthropology at the University of Calcutta (now onwards CU) had little or no social-cultural anthropology and the primary focus of the then professors and researchers of the department was on the physical anthropology and prehistory archeology. In Chatterjee's words (from the article), *"When they began to carry out their own research, the early members of the department became involved in debates over the racial classification of the Indian population."*

The author (Prof. Abhijit Guha) refutes these sentiments by providing the rich history of social-cultural anthropology at CU's Department of Anthropology. The author uses this premise and provides a rich paper on the history of social-cultural anthropology that came out of the department and, while doing so, presents a brief history of pre- and post-colonial

practice and scholarship around social-cultural anthropology in India.

The paper cites renowned anthropologists like Andre Beteille, and Surajit Sinha to enhance his argument further. Both recall their training and times at Calcutta University during their early days as scholars and how the training provided in social-cultural anthropology helped them improve as scholars. Sinha remembers his teacher, T.C. Das, who was a prominent anthropologist and sociologist. In pre-independent India, Das's anthropological work on Bengal Feminine of 1943 was even cited by Jawahar Lal Nehru (who later became India's first Prime Minister) in his important book 'The Discovery of India.' The paper cites another prominent anthropologist, Prof. Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyay, whose work during the colonial era in India and his tenure (1937-1962) as the head of the Department of the Anthropology CU contributed immensely towards the growth of social-cultural anthropology in India. Adding to it, the author also mentions the contributions of Nirmal Kumar Bose towards social-cultural anthropology in India.

In the section '*Kolkata Anthropology viewed from outside*', the author provides some details on how other campuses and new departments of anthropology in India, for instance, the Delhi Anthropology Department in its initial years, considered the Department of Anthropology CU as the guiding light.

Towards the end of the paper, the author further enlists the fine social scientists and anthropologists like Sarat Chandra Mitra, Ramaprasad Chanda etc., and their work and contributions who were associated with the Department of Anthropology CU.

Conclusion

Prof. Abhijit Guha, in his paper, provides enough evidence and arguments to establish his argument and refute Prof. Partha Chatterjee's argument that the Department of Anthropology at Calcutta University focused very little on social-cultural anthropology and paid attention primarily to physical anthropology and prehistoric archeology. Paper, to an extent, limits itself in scope as it revolves around Kolkata Anthropology, and that is because of its premise, but even while doing so, it provides an important history of the development of anthropology in India. The paper mentions prominent social-cultural anthropologists of pre- and post-independent India, adding further value. While going through the paper, the reader also gets glimpses of the process of Indian anthropology coming out of the shadow of Orientalism and colonialism.