

## Indian Anthropology: Critique of Diverse Ideas and Exploration of the Swadeshi Anthropology

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**Abstract:** Anthropology in India is divided into various phases, such as colonial ethnology/ethnography and postcolonial anthropology. The classical evolutionism, diffusionism and Orientalism, which had dominated colonial ethnology/ethnography, had also influenced the earlier phase of anthropology in postcolonial India. In fact, postcolonial anthropology is itself an incoherent lot with diverse forms and ideas. In the long history of Indian anthropology, there appeared some works carrying theoretical bearing and applied relevance, yet many chroniclers have undervalued such works. This author has earlier appraised some evaluations of Indian anthropology provided by Debnath (1999), Berger, (2012) and Guha (2017), among others. This article takes clues from such earlier appraisal and locates within a larger historical canvas an encyclopaedia entry contributed by S. Deshpande and edited by Hilary Callan (2018), which has ignored many foundational works of Indian anthropology. Placing this critique in a larger historical context of colonial/postcolonial anthropology, this author aims to focus attention on major signposts of social anthropology. Second objective is to dispel many myths and misconceptions about the anthropological survey of India, mainly its People of India study. Ultimately, by citing some ethnographic illustrations, this article endeavours to ascertain a trend of 'indigenouness' and demonstrate thereby the Swadeshi stance of Indian anthropology.

**Keywords:** Colonial Ethnography, Social Anthropology, Racial Theory of Caste, Orientalism, Indigeneity and Swadeshi Anthropology.

### INTRODUCTION

Anthropology in India is divided into various phases, such as colonial ethnology/ethnography and postcolonial anthropology. The classical evolutionism, diffusionism and Orientalism, which had dominated colonial ethnology/ethnography, had also influenced the earlier phase of social anthropology in postcolonial India. In fact, postcolonial anthropology is itself an incoherent lot with diverse forms and ideas. In the long history of Indian anthropology, there appeared some works carrying theoretical bearing and applied relevance, yet many chroniclers have undervalued them. This author has earlier appraised some evaluations of Indian anthropology provided by Debnath (1999), Berger, (2012) and Guha (2017), among others. This article takes clues from such earlier appraisal and locates within a larger historical canvas an encyclopaedia entry contributed by S. Deshpande and edited by Hilary Callan (2018), which has ignored many foundational works of Indian anthropology. Placing the argument in a larger historical context of colonial/postcolonial anthropology, author aims to focus attention on important landmarks social

anthropology of India. Second objective is to dispel many myths and misconceptions about the anthropological survey of India, mainly its People of India study. Ultimately, by citing some ethnographic illustrations, this article endeavours to ascertain a trend of 'indigenouness' and demonstrate thereby the Swadeshi stance of Indian anthropology.

The encyclopaedia mentions that anthropology in India is a small discipline. The fact remain however that there are 33 university departments of anthropology and numerous departments of 'tribal studies' that employ anthropologists (Srivastava, 2000). In this encyclopaedia, Deshpande (2018) says that, both anthropology and sociology deal with social anthropological issues and what is known in the West as "the anthropology of India" is mostly associated with departments of sociology in India. It may be argued unequivocally that "sociology" with its diverse curriculum exists throughout India and it will be odd to relate sociology departments exclusively with social anthropology (with the exception of one department in Delhi University probably). As regards western

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universities, Beteille has lucidly clarified that the “established opinion in American and to large extent European, universities is that the study of Indian society and of other Asian societies is the province of anthropology and not sociology” (1993: 301). Deshpande (2018) says that the educated Indians in mid-twentieth century disliked anthropology because it portrayed “natives” as backward. He says this by using a quotation of M. N. Srinivas. Elsewhere indeed, Srinivas had lamented that “Sociology was not regarded as respectable by Indian intellectuals who looked up to Oxford and Cambridge, for standards and ideals. It was only after Independence and the launching of the programme of planned development that a need was felt for sociological research (Srinivas, 1966). Srinivas is referred intermittently as the sociologist in the said write up. Anyway it is well-known that Srinivas identified himself as a social anthropologist, who derived his structural-functional perspective from notion of structure as developed by Radcliffe-Brown, who was his teacher at Oxford.

At the outset, the encyclopedia write-up states that since the distinction between “primitive” and “advanced” societies is no longer tenable so it is expedient to rename anthropology in India as “sociology.” In the subsequent paragraph it is proclaimed that, much of social anthropology is practiced under the disciplinary label of sociology in India. How it is so is not explained. Nevertheless, in this essay, a major objective will be to demonstrate how the contributions of social anthropology have enriched what is called ‘sociology’ in India and not the other way round.

The encyclopedia entry has placed the narrative under numerous themes /subthemes. Following those themes /subthemes broadly, this review will successively focus attention on colonial ethnology, institutional contexts (Asiatic Society, Census, and Anthropological Survey of India), Elwin-Ghurye debate, shift from ‘colonial anthropology’ to ‘postcolonial social anthropology’, village and caste study, post-Dumontian studies, tribe, and religion.

### **Colonial ‘Ethnographic Surveys’, Nationalism and ‘Institutional Contexts’**

#### **Colonial ‘Ethnographic Surveys’ and Monographs**

It is a known fact that the so-called ‘rebellion’ of 1857 led to India’s direct control by the British Crown in 1858. The new Imperial policy of least interference in customs of the ‘natives’ led to the first census conducted in 1865, followed by ethnological/ethnographic surveys successively undertaken by William Crooke, G. A. Grierson, H. H. Risley, J. H. Hutton, Edgar Thurston and numerous others. Regrettably, Deshpande (2018) does not narrate the rich tradition of colonial ethnography/anthropology. Colonial ethnographic works are denied sufficient space, and many early works are overly

underrated and early writers are designated as ‘amateur’ ethnologists. There is a brief mention of L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and Sarat Chandra Roy who had voluntarily produced a series of monographs.

The systematic anthropology of India developed alongside the decennial censuses, which had started in 1871-72. ‘Tribes and Castes Handbooks’ by Risley and Crooke, despite their flaws and biases, were inclusive ethnographic studies of people living in India. These were used by Max Weber to elucidate the ‘Hindu social system’ (1967 [1917]: 3-133) and a French Indologist Émile Senart had used them to explain the caste system in 1896 (1930 [1896]). It is argued that the colonial era ethnography was valuable contribution to knowledge about Indian society, though Risley’s racial theory of caste came to be extensively criticized (Fuller 2016: 229-32).

Two theoretical ideas dominating earlier phase of colonial anthropology were classical evolutionism and diffusionism. Thus, Dalton projected two kinds of races, Aryan and non-Aryan. Dalton projected Aryans and Hindus as civilized people and non-Aryans as uncivilized (Dalton 1872:276). Dalton referred only Hindus as Aryans, and sometimes only the Brahmins were referred as true Aryans (Dalton 1872: 275). This was the colonial stereotyping of the natives deployed in order to justify the colonial rule. A critique of colonial ethnography of the 19th-century suggests rootedness of Orientalism into ethnology whereby racialization of caste was planted. The colonial ethnographic materials were part of colonial governmentality (Dirks 2001:199).

Herbert Risley and William Crooke published the earliest handbooks of tribes and castes in the 1890s, providing ethnographic glossary with entries for individual tribes and castes. Alongside Risley and William Crooke, Denzil Ibbetson contributed towards Indian ethnography and anthropology in the late Victorian period (Fuller, 2017). This ethnography portrayed separate religious communities and separate castes, with a tribal periphery (Fuller, 2017). To a great extent these works remained evolutionist of sort and were condemned for being Orientalist.

Broadly taking the postcolonialist position, Cohn (1996), Dirks (2001), Inden (1990), Metcalf (1995), and others have argued that British official anthropologists had heavily relied on ethnographic facts gathered from Indians, but organized them through reifying classifications and applying own theory about the origins of caste within a evolutionist paradigm (Fuller, 2017). Thus, the official anthropologists, were widely accused of portraying India as timeless, for whom caste was ‘the unitary, unchanging subject of India’s history’ (Inden 1990: 74), and its people ‘were defined by unchanging racial and cultural identities’, of which the most important was caste (Metcalf 1995: 117).

The Ethnographic Survey of India, launched in 1901, was directed by Risley, whose task was also to continue with the series of 'Tribes and Castes' handbooks. The handbook for Madras came out in 1909, but Punjab, Central Provinces, and Bombay – took longer (Enthoven 1920-2; Rose 1911-19; Russell and Hira Lal 1916; Thurston (Assisted by K. Rangachari) 1909). Thurston wrote the seven volumes of Castes and Tribes of Southern India in 1909. The September 1910 edition of *Nature* described this work as a monumental record of the manners and customs of south Indian people. Thurston also authored the four-volume series "Provincial Geographies of India" which was published during 1913–23 by the Cambridge University Press under the editorship of T H Holland. Not all colonial anthropologists were just amateur scholars, as the encyclopedia entry (2018) has claimed. Rather, some among them were praised and recognized for their anthropological credentials, which were ratified when Risley became the RAI's president and Crooke the section president of British Association of anthropology (Haddon 1903: 19; Read 1901: 11-13; Ridgeway 1910: 22; Tylor 1892: 401).

#### **Colonial 'People of India': Multiple 'Versions'**

In 1908 Risley published his book, *The People of India*. A memorial edition of this book was published in 1915, which was edited by William Crooke. It contained additional illustrations and an ethnological map. In reality, Risley's 1915 'People of India' was a rehash of the census report of 1901, in which the chapter 'Caste, Tribe and Race', was actually written by Risley and Edward Gait. Included therein were other chapters most of which written by Gait. The language chapter was written by George Grierson. Risley's *People of India* highlighted the classification of the races of India, the race basis of Indian society, and physical characters of Indian people with focus on anthropometry. Risley began to hypothesize and construct an idealized 'Aryan race' based on reading of Indian scriptures. He adopted the popular Race Science measurement methods of French experts to document physical traits, size of the nose and skin colour (Fuller, 2016, 2017, Das 2018).

A summarized version of *People of India* was also published by Anderson, in 1913, which included original chapter on Race and Caste written by H. H. Risley and E. A. Gait (Anderson, 1913). John Forbes Watson and John William Kaye compiled an eight-volume 'photographic' *People of India* between 1868 and 1875. The books contained 468 annotated photographs of the native castes and tribes of India. The collection was an attempt at a visual documentation of "typical" physical attributes, dress and other aspects of native life. According to historian Thomas Metcalf, 'numerous ethnographic information and other works of colonial era, - - although imperfect, marked out a stage in the transformation of 'ethnological curiosity' (Metcalf, 1995).

#### **Anthropology on the Eve of Indian Independence and 'Postcolonial' Social Anthropology**

It is argued that on the eve of Indian independence in 1947, there was an overall antipathy towards anthropology (Deshpande, 2018). It further argued that study of villages undertaken by Western and Indian scholars in 1950s did very well and became the 'defining genre' of Indian sociology for nearly three decades. Anthropological contributions of 'village studies' are simply camouflaged. In this section of encyclopedia, the vast field of kinship study is scantily mentioned. Kinship studies of Madan, Mayer, Burling, Chie Nakane, T. C. Das and Needham are all ignored. Kinship is dismally ignored but "sociologically oriented works" of 1970s and 1980s are discussed in many details, including studies of modernization (such as by Yogendra Singh).

For Deshpande (2018), Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) continued to research tribal communities but in 1985 it inaugurated a mammoth "ethnological project" called *People of India*, which provoked controversies, for using classificatory model based on "caste, religion and region". These are incorrect inferences, hence the actuality of *People of India* will be explained below.

During 1920s and 1930s several British officials had contributed articles reflecting a growing professionalization within colonial ethnography. After Gait's 1911 census, several hill and forest tribes were studied comprehensively in central India and northeast / Assam. The monographs of Archer, Fürer-Haimendorf, Hutton, Mills, Stevenson, and a few others were exhaustive ethnographic studies. This genre was the ultimate link between imperial ethnography and academic anthropology growing briskly in India.

The culture-historical approach of colonial ethnology had not vanished. Thus, D N Majumdar combined anthropometric, demographic and growth studies and Irawati Karve conceived India as a Cultural Region and developed her narrative around culture-historical approach of early ethnology, which was prominent in Indian anthropology until 1950s (Gough, 1964).

The emergence of professional social anthropology in India is traceable to 1950s, when a transition from 'ethnology' to social/cultural anthropology in India was noticed.

At this stage Indian anthropology was also witnessing a shift from tribal societies to caste and village communities by focusing on social dynamics. Study of tribes was not abandoned nonetheless. By early 1960s Dube, Bailey, and Mayer had pursued study of the dynamics of social systems. Dube had described both 'tribe' and 'village' as essential arenas of social anthropology. Mayer studied the political process in

Dewas, a town. Bailey concentrated on larger society, stressing the functional relatedness of institutions. Major trends of 1950s and 1960s were made visible in the compiled book titled 'Indian Anthropology: Essays in Memory of D. N. Majumdar' (Madan and Sarana, 1962).

It is widely acknowledged that the Indian anthropology had been born and brought up under the dominant influence of British anthropology (Vidyarthi, 1977: 70f.). The universities in early phase pursued social anthropology and many Indian anthropologists were trained in England. Before Independence, few professional Western anthropologists chose India as their field of research and many of those who did, such as Rivers, Fürer-Haimendorf, and Mandelbaum studied tribal societies, though Aiyappan was an exception (Cohn 1968: 23). Peter Berger edited a book in 2013 with a pushy title 'The modern anthropology of India'. Sadly the contributors, mostly Europeans, viewed the Indian 'state' scenarios mostly from the prism of their own stances. In his overview of the theoretical currents of Indian social anthropology, Peter Berger (2012) has chosen to discuss only a few selected themes such as "village study," "transactionalist" and "structuralist" perspectives of the 1960s and "ethnology" of the 1970s. As a matter of fact, various reviews sporadically published by ICSSR in India are best source to gain a realistic assessment of social anthropology/sociology in India.

#### **Village Study & Post-Village-Study**

Unlike the postulation of the encyclopedia entry (Deshpande, 2018), village study has a unique anthropological distinctiveness in India. 'Village India' edited by Marriott (1955) was a landmark volume which exemplified the shift in anthropology. 'Village India' and its twin 'India's Villages' by Srinivas (1955) represented a new ethnographic advancement. Representing structural-functionalist social anthropology, Srinivas was the founding figure of Indian anthropology who inaugurated village study. This book by Srinivas contained studies conducted by Srinivas, Mandelbaum, Gough, Marriott, Dube and others. The concept of "dominant caste" appeared for the first time in this book. Village studies were seen as anthropological engagement with villages developed as a reaction to Indological- and colonial-inspired representations of villages as mythicised 'little republics' (Atal et al., 2005) and to counter Dumont's and Pocock's (1957) dismissal of villages as lacking social reality. Moving beyond conceptualization of Indian villages as timeless entities, anthropologists unraveled how caste intertwined with class, kinship and political factions to organise social relations (Marriott, 1955; Srinivas, 1955, Bailey, 1957). Village studies eventually constituted the 'bedrock of modern South Asian anthropology' (Fuller and Spencer, 1990: 85). With village study, according to Stein, anthropology of India had entered a "critical phase" (Stein 1969: 453).

There was a virtual explosion of village studies in the sixties and seventies. Specializing on India meant studying 'village' and 'caste', which represented "India in microcosm" (Hiebert, 1971:vii).

Dumont and Pocock argued that the caste ties went much beyond the village and therefore to explain the structure of Indian society, focus should be on the caste system (Dumont and Pocock, 1957; Pocock, 1960). Dumont's *Homo hierarchicus* was one of two books that ultimately signalled the end of the village study era, the other being Mandelbaum's 'Society in India'. Unlike Mandelbaum's descriptive volumes, Dumont's book is analytic, theoretical, and at times difficult (Berger, 2012). Many scholars reject Dumont's notion of power (and kingship) as completely separate from the religious sphere and they share a focus on gift giving from the viewpoint of a politico-religious centre. L. K. Mahapatra (1976), showed that distinction between the king and the religious sphere cannot be maintained when looking at the Jagannatha cult in Odisha, where the God is a ruler and the king is a deity. Dumont's dualism and 'religious' hierarchy of caste is challenged by anthropologist Gloria Raheja (1990) who surveyed Pahansu, a village dominated by landowning Gujars (Raheja 1990: 3).

#### **Question of Tribal Isolation- Assimilation - Integration & Elwin-Ghurye Debate**

India being a new nation witnessed the debates pertaining to tribal governance and tribal assimilation - integration. A few years prior to independence, the tribal issue was debated resolutely between those who advocated their 'assimilation' (Ghurye) and the others who argued for special protected space for the tribes (Verrier Elwin). G.S. Ghurye had attacked Elwin as an isolationist and a no-changer based on two books Elwin wrote in colonial era (*The Baiga* published in 1939 and *The Aborigines*, first edition 1943, revised edition 1944). Elwin had advocated isolation for tribes so that they lived with the 'utmost possible happiness and freedom'. No missionaries of any religion would be permitted to break up their tribal life (Verrier Elwin, 1960a).

G.S. Ghurye, the father of Indian sociology, upheld the nationalist perspective and disagreed with Elwin's isolationist approach. According to him, the strict distinction between tribes and the mainstream/caste society is not applicable in India (Ghurye, 1959). Ghurye placed tribes near the lower rung of caste system and termed them as "backward Hindus". Tribes had similar features to those found in lower forms of Hinduism (Ghurye, 1959). Nationalists had pleaded that tribes need to become "part of the civilized communities" on an equal footing with others (Thakkar 1941: 26). According to Ghurye, colonial tribal policy of exclusion and introduction of an alien system of land tenure and revenue collection had economically undermined the tribespeople (Paidipaty, 2010). S.C.

Roy had also championed the demand for tribal autonomy in Chotanagpur and drafted a number of memoranda submitted to government bodies through tribal organisations (Singh 1985:2-3).

The controversy about assimilation versus isolation of tribes dominated the debate on tribal policy in the Constituent Assembly. Jawaharlal Nehru had sympathized with Elwin's views. He advocated later the "Pancha sheel", five principles, as a mechanism for suitable governance in tribal areas. Elwin said if what Nehru laid down in five principles is observed, we may look forward to progress in the tribal areas with confidence and hope (Elwin, 1960a). In 1944, Elwin had suggested that until the social sciences have come to more definite conclusions about the safeguards necessary for primitive people advancing into civilized life, aboriginals should be 'temporarily' left alone and should be given the strictest protection that governments can afford (Elwin, 1960a). Clarifying his position in 1960, Elwin said that 'Today in Independent India no one would advocate a policy of isolation, although it is as important as ever to give some protection to the tribal people' (Elwin, 1960a).

The tribal policy and its intent in independent India was to avoid a policy of assimilation. India adopted a middle path of 'integration', avoiding the colonial era extremes of isolationism and assimilationism (Singh 1982). Independent India's first two major reports on tribal policy (Elwin 1960b; Dhebar 1961) favored overall policy of integration rather than assimilation, requiring an educational policy safeguarding tribal culture and language. The Dhebar report is particularly strong on tribal culture in the schools (Dhebar 1961: 225). It also stressed the requirement for textbooks to be produced in 'the major tribal languages' (Dhebar 1961:226).

#### **Asiatic Society, Indian Census and Anthropological Survey of India (ASI)**

When referring to the institutional contributions, Deshpande (2018) clubs together Asiatic Society, Indian Census and Anthropological Survey of India (ASI), even though they grew as dissimilar organisations. Deshpande (2018) refers but does not elaborate 'activities' of Asiatic Society of Bengal. Incidentally what he refers to as the Asiatic Society of Bengal is incorrect as its name underwent several changes: Asiatic Society of Bengal (1832-1935), the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal (1936-1951) and since July 1952 it is simply the 'Asiatic Society'.

Huge contributions of the Census, particularly in ethnographic/anthropological arena, are undermined in the encyclopedia. Mention should have been made of the Census of 1901 which had made the first organized attempt to provide 'anthropological and ethnological data' on some of the most 'primitive tribes' living in the interior areas like Lushai Hills, NEFA (Arunachal

Pradesh), Naga Hills (Nagaland) and the Andaman Islands. The 1901 Census had brought to light a tribe hitherto unknown, the Tabo of North Andaman Island (P. Padmanabha, 1978, Indian Census and Anthropological Investigations).

Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) was a small organisation where B. S. Guha and Verrier Elwin were appointed as the first Director and Deputy Director respectively to begin with. Unlike Deshpande's assertion, ASI had not launched any 'ethnological' project in 1985, reminiscent of colonial ethnographic survey (1905-8), in order to "classify" people based on "caste, religion and region". Rather, the People of India (PoI) project pursued the discourse of postcolonial ethnography by expanding the conceptual and ideational parameters. Unlike the colonial ethnography which aimed to depict dichotomous representations of 'non-European others' as the mutually exclusive and disjointed 'racialised' groups; ASI's PoI study aimed to explore linkages and affinities among the people of India.

#### **ASI and 'People of India' Study**

ASI's People of India study has been evaluated by numerous scholars, including Asghar Ali Engineer who had called it 'an eye opening' study'. Sadly, some commentators like Jenkins (2003) as also Deshpande (2018) have misunderstood its academic worth. Walter Hauser (2006) refers to Christopher Pinney who has made a comparative scrutiny of two People of India studies. According to Pinney, H.H. Risley, the colonial ethnographer, was obsessed with the racial typology of people, ignoring occupational classifications; not least because of his unwavering faith in the classification of "castes and tribes" by the "nasal index" (Pinney 1990: 265). About ASI study Pinney says, "These volumes are assembled by an extraordinary man as part of a remarkable project. The circumstances of the project's inception help make sense of these volumes' peculiar qualities- social idealism mixed with an uneasy legacy of Victorian social science against the background of statistical gigantism' (Pinney, 1994). Walter Hauser (2006) deplores Pinney's erroneous observation and refutes Pinney's claim that ASI "relied too heavily on colonial categories of Victorian social science". Earlier Jenkins and now Deshpande have similarly been carried away by this major misconception. Fact remains that the PoI project used the term 'community' to describe the castes, tribes and minorities (Singh, 1992, 1996, 1998, Hauser, 2006, Das 2018). Ethnonyms and historical growth of identities are critically investigated and reports are prepared accordingly, without adhering to caste-tribe categories. Since 'administrative' listing of tribes was not followed, investigators used local ethnographic situation as yardstick. Thus, this author ventured to take up an unknown Naga group, Pochuri, for ethnographic coverage, as it displayed basic ingredients of a distinct 'community'. Later this ethnographic validation had helped the Pochuri segment

to 'claim' and be declared as a distinct Naga 'tribe' (Das, 1994). Use of the term 'community' also helped to study the groupings based on language and religion. Such communities in different states were studied mainly to justifiably portray the statuses of speakers of minority languages and adherents of minority religions. Ultimately, therefore, the colonial ethnography and postcolonial ethnography of India need to be distinguished, from theoretical-methodological and moral perspectives.

ASI had collaborated with the National Informatics Centre and Centre for Ecological Science, Bangalore, where a team headed by Madhav Gadgil examined the demographic history of India on the basis of fresh insights into linguistic and anthropological patterns based on the People of India data of the ASI (Gadgil et al, 1997). The PoI project had identified mainly '2753 communities'. These communities made up for 4653 elements when a community population came to be counted in each state/union territory as a separate element. Using PoI data, Joshi has provided numerical and statistical variation index of diversity that maps homogeneity and heterogeneity between various communities by means of the ecological and geographical spread of the populations across the country (Joshi et al. 1993a: 363–364; 1993b). Thus, Deshpande's assertion that ASI study had supported the creation of politically potent identities based on caste, religion and region seems unfounded.

### **First Anthropology Department, Journals, Caste and Contemporary Concerns**

In the colonial era, only four universities offered teaching in anthropology/ sociology. Anthropology began to be taught at the University of Calcutta in 1918, but anthropology department was established only in 1921, with L. K. Ananthakrishna Iyer as the first head. Irawati Karve began teaching anthropology at the Deccan College in Pune in 1939, which was integrated with the University of Poona in 1948. Both Kolkata and Pune began with an emphasis on integrated anthropology. In Lucknow, a separate anthropology department was set up under D. N. Majumdar in 1951. Such details of India's anthropology departments are ignored in the Encyclopedia entry but history of sociology departments is widely covered.

In India, the *Man in India* and *Eastern Anthropologist* were the early anthropological journals. The colonial anthropologists also used to contribute articles on tribal themes in these journals. Deshpande does not mention that prior to these journals, colonial ethnographers used to publish their accounts in the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1784), *Indian Antiquary* (1872), and *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society* (1915). *Man in India* was founded by S. C. Roy in Ranchi in 1921. D. N. Majumdar had laid the foundation of 'Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society' (EFCS) in Lucknow by 1945, from where the

*journal Eastern Anthropologist* came out. EFCS later brought out *Manav* (in Hindi) and the *Indian Journal of Physical Anthropology*.

### **Caste**

Caste study also remains an anthropological forte, yet such a decisive field of anthropological study is portrayed dismally and inadequately by Deshpande (2018). It was expected that a survey of basic conceptions, contributions made right from colonial era, and changing trends will be presented in a sequential manner. What is mentioned are some studies of political mobilization of the lower castes, Dalits and "less studied other backward classes", starting with 1970s and 1980s. New works of André Béteille and M. N. Srinivas are indeed mentioned which show the withering away of caste in the face of modernity and its revival through electoral politics. Works of some young Dalit scholars are mentioned which is appreciable. In view of above lopsided coverage of caste a brief appraisal of caste studies is presented below.

Scholars are unanimous that research on caste had begun right from late 1890s and according to Crispin Bates it had added to 'colonial "scientific" anthropology of India' (1995). Visualizing India through the census was part of an effort to rectify an epistemological problem concerning caste in the late nineteenth century. Risley as director of Ethnography for India from 1901 to 1909 had introduced the anthropometric measures and employed a seven-part racial typology of caste. Caste, as implemented in the census in ethnological and anthropometric terms, came to be naturalized and racialized (Bates, 1995). Risley's 1891 publication *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* made him celebrity, and he was "the Empire's leading proponent of ethnology from the 1890s until his death in 1911" (Bayly, 1999: 129). Over time, the census helped to naturalize racialized understanding of caste (Nobles 2002); yet there was no "uniform 'colonial' consensus on caste" (Bayly, 1999: 205). Among colonial ethnographers it was J.C. Nesfield's conception of caste as summarized in 1885 publication, which came to be widely admired. Around this time Denzil Ibbetson defined caste as an institution of the Hindu religion, consisting of fourfold classification of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra and that caste is perpetual and irreversible (1883). Ibbetson had highlighted the functional and occupational categorisation of castes which surfaced in the 1881 census. In later years, Risley's racial theory of caste, along with anthropometry, was generally discredited. Crooke concluded that the origins of caste 'can only be found in community of function or occupation', and largely endorsed Ibbetson's and Nesfield's occupational theories (1897). Ibbetson's ideas were enlarged upon in particular by the Cambridge anthropologists J. H. Hutton and Edmund Leach (from 1940's till the 1960's and '70's). They have been cherished by successive generations of non-Marxist, non-Dumontian social

anthropologists working in the classical British tradition of structural-functionalism, first established by Radcliffe Brown (Hutton, 1963; Leach, 1960). Leach suggests that caste might be regarded essentially as a benign division of labour designed to guarantee security of employment to the artisans and labouring class of the population. This was indeed contrary to Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* which argued that caste is marked by a primordial drive towards hierarchy based on separation of pollution from purity (Dumont, 1980).

### **Caste: The Post-Dumontian Views**

McKim Marriott (1976) advocated an interpretative framework based upon 'coded bodily substance' concepts to analyze the Hindu caste system, slightly different from the one proposed by Dumont. He saw caste as built on a series of notions concerning bodily substances and inter-personal exchanges - - - focusing on who is willing to accept food, water, etc., from whom as a sign of relative status. Srinivas (2003, p. 459) took the view that while the caste system is dying, individual castes are flourishing. The caste system eroded at the ritual level, but emerged at the political and economic levels. This summation nevertheless is debatable at all-India level.

The works of Dumont and Pocock, McKim Marriott, Inden, and Leach generally stressed that caste is to be defined in terms of its Hindu rationale, and therefore, is unique to Hindu India and South Asia (Berreman 1968: 333). Bailey and Barth generally stressed that the caste system is to be defined in terms of structural features that are found not only in Hindu India but in a number of other societies as well. These two scholars had separated the social structure from 'cultural patterns and value systems' (Sinha 1967: 93). The 'caste' is relevant in India and within adjacent Hindu and related populations in Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka (Leach 1967; Hutton, 1946 (1969); Dumont 1980) and which have survived to the present day. Among various theoretical approaches, one approach regards caste as a form of social stratification, comparable with other forms of inequality (Berreman 1972, Bailey 1957, Beteille 1965,) and another approach regards "caste as a hierarchy of endogamous groups, organized in a characteristic hereditary division of labour" (Sinha, 1967:94).

### **'Castes' among the Dalit and Weaker Sections**

In post-Dumontian era a major trend was ethnography of the lowest-ranked castes (also called Dalits). The village study did not disintegrate, nonetheless a trend of Dalit studies, following ethnographic approach had embarked on. Questions were raised about earlier knowledge depicting the system as singular cultural essence. R. S. Khare made a systematic study of India's Dalits, through the eighties, and found it personally eye-opening and professionally challenging. Dalit activism and political caste alliance

countering upper-caste prejudice showed some blind spots of the erstwhile Dumont-Marriott style of 'caste ethnography'. Publication of 'Anthropology of Weaker Sections' edited by Surajit Sinha with an introduction by K.S. Singh in 1993 was a landmark contribution to nascent Dalit ethnography. This book depicted specially the perspective of 'other backward classes' (Deshpande calls it 'less-studied' category). It depicted the economic and cultural 'weaknesses' based on observations during 4-6 months of intensive fieldwork in 24 villages located in 16 states of India. Topics covered included relationship amongst castes, position of Dalit caste vis-à-vis dominant caste, weak resource bases, and low position in social hierarchy and relative lack of access to facilities provided by developmental programmes (Sinha et al. 1993b).

### **Tribe**

Deshpande (2018) has referred to 'turbulence' Indian anthropology encountered and mentions a dormant phase of official studies framed as exotic and backward. He should have been candid enough to spell out who represents 'exotic' and explicate which 'official studies' had encountered turbulence. Anyway, Deshpande (2018) seems somewhat disorientated while writing about 'tribes'. He says Indian tribes are different from other countries, because they were "neither primitive nor isolated from an advanced civilization" (Deshpande 2018). What about 'tribes' of Andaman islands and upland tribes in northeast. What Deshpande says may be broadly true in some parts of peninsular India, but not beyond. Deshpande (2018) next moves to 1980s when new 'tribal' questions were faced by Indian sociologists who studied them. He finds no anthropologist dealing with 'tribal' issues (around and after 1980s). A passing reference is made to 'displacement by development'. Sadly the important works of anthropologists such as B.D. Sharma, B. K. Roy Burman, Hari Mohan Mathur, Bhupinder Singh, L. K Mahapatra, Felix Padel, and others are ignored who have dealt with such issues. Felix Padel, a social anthropologist has been an activist -supporter of the tribal struggles for conservation and livelihood in the Niyamgiri hills, Odisha. Felix Padel echoes Avatar's call for 'reverse anthropology': learning 'how to see ourselves' afresh by understanding how those 'others' subject to our 'science' see us. The struggles of tribal populations, in the face of mindless pursuit of corporate driven developmental concepts, are a phenomenon discussed by Padel (2010). Deshpande does not discuss such crucial 'tribal' governance/development issues. The laws enacted to tackle tribal displacement menace may not have succeeded entirely but some positive results are reported in anthropological studies. Likewise, the impact of PESA and FRA 2006 in tribal areas has altered the power balance between state and the tribes reasonably and there is greater awareness today. There is positive impact of decentralization programs in some areas, such as the success of village development boards in Nagaland (Das 2013).

The themes of 'secessionism' in northeast and 'Maoism' are mentioned but not elaborated or articulated sincerely. In fact by 2018, when the encyclopedia was reporting, the 'secessionism' in Northeast had been hugely reduced. But this fact is not reported. 'Maoism' is mentioned but not 'defined' (particularly for global readers). Maoist revolutionaries aim to overthrow the Indian state. They operate in tribal areas but have never offered any solution. Anthropologist Alpa Shah has pointed to the contradictions that riddle the Maoism. Maoists attempt to create an egalitarian society but end up in 'raising funds'. Many are fake Maoists with no 'ideology', yet some sociologists and 'liberals' glorify them. Arundhati Roy has allegedly referred to these Maoists as "Gandhians with a Gun".

Study of tribal movements has been traditionally pioneered by social anthropologists, yet the encyclopedia ignores this fact. In 1980s, the ASI had identified 36 tribal movements, which led to two-volume publication of *Tribal Movements in India* (Singh, 1982). Scholars such as Crispin Bates, Ghanshyam Shah and K. L. Sharma and others have acknowledged the merit of this work. In his review, K L Sharma asserted that, "these volumes have positively enriched our information and understanding of the tribal movements, which have been discussed in terms of historicity, ideology, structure, leadership and sub-regional identity. Issues of exploitation of the Adivasis by 'outsiders', non-advaitis and dominant elements among the tribes are duly attended. The authors have not entangled themselves in conceptual jargon and hence have eschewed the corrupting influence of Western social sciences. A couple of contributors have given lucid accounts of class relations, agrarian issues, exploitation and cultural revivalism. These two volumes will prove a landmark in studies on social change among the tribes of India (K L Sharma, *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 12, 1985). There is hardly any Indian university today which has not listed these volumes in its core curriculum. Kamal Misra and N.K.Das had brought out an edited book on tribal dispossession and tribal movements in 2014.

### **Anthropology of Religion**

No encyclopedia entry on Indian anthropology can ignore Srinivas's 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs' (1952) which stands out as a major anthropological study of religion. This book gave Indian anthropology the concept of Sanskritisation. Writing about this book, Milton Singer says that Srinivas 'goes considerably beyond Radcliffe-Brown's redefinition of the "sacred" in terms of "ritual value" and an analysis of rituals and myths in terms of "symbolic action" and "symbolic" thought' (Singer 1996: 49-50). Regrettably, Deshpande (2018) completely ignores all major works belonging to 'anthropology of religion', such as Srinivas's work on the Coorgs' (1952) and books of Elwin and Vidyarthi.

He refers rather to numerous sociological studies dealing with themes such as religious identities, Shiv Sena, and communal violence. Details of sociological works are listed but not a single anthropological work is mentioned. The second major anthropological work ignored is Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* which dealt with Hindu religious beliefs and practices by characterizing the caste system through the principles of purity and impurity.

The concept of sacred complex was studied by L. P. Vidyarthi in his book, "The sacred complex in Hindu Gaya", wherein he analyzed the contribution of traditional centers of Indian civilization (1961). Study of civilization was envisaged by Robert Redfield and Milton Singer and McKim Marriott and Surajit Sinha had provided theoretical and methodological leads in understanding the folk-peasant and tribal religiosity as dimensions of Indian civilization (Sinha, 1958). The 'Religion of an Indian Tribe' by Verrier Elwin (1955) is a classic ethnography and a rich contribution to comparative religion. The tribe described is hill Saora of Odisha. The book covers the whole gamut of religious beliefs and practices, with focus on soul and its destiny; priests and shamans; cause and cure of disease; rites of fertility and dead. Of special interest are the relation between religion and morality and description of hereditary priests, shamans and shamanins (female shamans), and family religious specialists (Lewis 1956). There are numerous studies published by ASI which find no mention. Also ignored are numerous works by Baidyanath Saraswati, Makhan Jha, Lawrence Babb and others.

### **Class**

From class perspective anthropologists have not done many ethnographic studies, but themes of class formation, class relations, social exclusion, discrimination and inequality are studied variously. Surajit Sinha had studied the social class formation and ethnic integration among the Bhumij for his PhD dissertation (Northwestern University, 1956). F.G. Bailey has discussed the economic competition and uneven political relations involving tribe, caste and nation (1960). K.S.Singh (1978) discussed the 'colonial transformation of tribal society' and Sinha (1962) studied the state formation and Rajput myth in tribal India. Issues of social exclusion, discrimination and inequality were studied by anthropologists of ASI in late 1990s by conducting intensive field studies in 24 villages all over India. Both tribal and ethnically mixed villages were covered. Findings revealed that tribes of India are subjected to various forms of discrimination and tribes living in the midst of castes encountered even more deeply embedded deprivation (Das 2013). Encyclopedia ignores all above works and mentions only the works of D. P. Mukerji, B. B. Misra, and André Beteille. Also mentioned are several works of sociological nature such as peasant movements,

ethnography of a factory, and works on street hawkers as also information technology sector.

### Questions of Legitimacy, Indigeneity and 'Future' of Anthropology

At the beginning the encyclopaedia entry has referred to increasing impact of numerous powerful interventions associated with the colonial discourse, politics of location, Orientalism, Writing Cultures, world anthropologies and anthropological 'fatigue'. Having shown concern about the future of university department of anthropology in Brazil, China, India, and South Africa, it also raised the question of indigeneity: How Indian is Indian anthropology? Deshpande (2018) visualises an 'imagined' future entanglement with sectarian chauvinism. He predicts that the future of liberalism is insecure and he then refers to the 'burden of uncertainty' within anthropology. Since the encyclopaedia chronicler has been unduly pessimistic and distrustful about anthropology, a brief intellectual clarification pertaining to anthropological legitimacy, robustness and its scientific primacy will be befitting and reasonable.

Anthropology developed different national traditions and schools from the early twentieth century, and today these traditions are converging and thus anthropology is shaping a transnational global research. What some practitioners interpret as symptoms of crisis, causing anxiety and pain, are necessary steps to free anthropology from its colonial legacy and its political abuses by hegemonic powers.

Anthropology is better equipped for the future than other disciplines in the social sciences (Gingrich, 2011). Godelier emphasizes that the study of cultural diversity remains anthropology's most important task, and, the need is to rehabilitate the concept of otherness, the essentialist use of which has been contested by the exponents of postmodern anthropology, but which seems to be justified if applied in a relative and not an absolute sense (Godelier, 2011).

Many anthropologists doubt whether anthropology is actually in a state of crisis or it is passing through a 'process of transition' (Kohl, 2011). Decades ago Worsley (1970) had feared postcolonial fading away of small backward societies; though it became clear that he had underestimated the agency of these societies. Edward Said's "Orientalism" had obliquely influenced anthropology and triggered a process of self-reflection that led to the 'writing culture' debate of the 1980s and early 1990s and its side-effects. Then a blurring of the boundaries led to cultural studies absorbing anthropological approaches including the culture critique. Deshpande (2018) has not mentioned, but sociology, too, found itself in a state of crisis with decline of its classical theoretical-methodological approaches; hence sociologists embraced 'ethnographic fieldwork', the central trademark of anthropology

(Kohl, 2011). By criticizing the discipline's classical monographs, as 'narrative fictions' the exponents of the 'writing culture' debate transferred the obscure theoretical positions of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man on top of ethnographic accounts (Kohl, 2011). Scientific (ethnographic) texts were never dramas or novels. Maurice Godelier argued that the deconstructive movement was a failure because; it rested on false presuppositions (Kohl, 2011).

### Indigeneity, Decolonization and Swadeshi Anthropology

In India social scientists had articulated concerns of 'indigenization' (Dube 1973), 'academic colonialism' (Singh 1984), need for 'swaraj' ('self-rule') in Indian social sciences (Uberoi 1968) as also 'decolonization' of anthropology in India (Sinha 1971). Issues of indigeneity and decolonization are variously perceived and analysed by social scientists. Let us concede that certain indigenous approaches which came to be pursued by anthropologists were rooted in premises of Orientalism and Indology. As a result, Ghurye, the father of 'indigenous' sociology, visualized 'Indian society' in terms of Indian civilization and Hindu/Brahmanical ideology. Indian society was seen as a set of rules which every Hindu followed (Cohn 1987: 143). Critical appraisal of impact of colonialism, Indology and Orientalism on Indian anthropology or sociology are not many, though some scholars have reinterpreted the variable terrain of the post-1940 era to position the burgeoning works of Ghurye, Nirmal Bose and Verrier Elwin (Sinha, 1972, 1986, 1993a, Paidipaty, 2010).

Ghurye was both a puritan and an 'improver', whose interpretation of tribe-Hindu relations flowed logically into an enthusiasm for reform (Guha 1996). Elwin was in principle opposed to both Catholic priests and Hindu counterparts. He wrote that, "all over the world, conversion of tribes by missionaries had implanted a false sense of prudery and sin. The change of religion, "destroys tribal unity, strips the people of age-old moral sanctions, separates them from the mass of their fellow-countrymen and in many cases leads to a decadence that is as pathetic as it is deplorable"(Guha 1996).

Nirmal Kumar Bose was an anthropologist, an exponent of Gandhism, and a nationalist. Bose's intellectual quest led to his transgressing the boundaries of traditional disciplines (Sinha: 1972). Bose argued that idea of a tribe/caste distinction was largely the product of British anthropology. Bose's analysis showed how tribal rituals and practices were interspersed in the Hindu traditions and customs. Bose saw culture, including tribal culture, as a complex amalgam of material practices, rituals and ideological structures (Bose 1969). The 'Hindu method of tribal absorption' emphasized the decisive factor of articulation of the backward tribal economy with the

more advanced plough based economy of the Hindu peasantry (Sinha: 1981:7). A.L Kroeber while reviewing Bose's Cultural Anthropology (1929), said "This sounds as if it is Wissler; but the work is an independent, simple reformulation, ---. The treatment is sane, moderate; intelligent; and---to an Americanist— seems free of propaganda motivation (1930: 557). A.C. Mayer, in his review of Bose's work felt that the approach adopted by Bose commands attention because of his reluctance to project his own ideology (1969:459).

N. K. Bose conceived Indian Civilization in terms of 'culture zones' which he argued did not coincide with the linguistic zones, highlighted in colonial writings. Thus pursuing a major academic innovation in 1960s, he launched All India Material Traits Survey at the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI). Surajit Sinha had coordinated this study which proved to be a major departure within Indian ethnographic realm and it facilitated the nascent indigenization of Indian anthropology. K.S.Singh (2000) wrote that the decolonization of anthropology was speeded up in the 1960s with launch of this material traits survey. According to Singh this presented a major breakthrough not only in terms of conceptual framework but contextualised fieldwork methodology which was introduced to gather specific data on certain 'traits' in diverse locations. The summary of Material Traits survey was published by Bose in 'Peasant Life in India: A Study in Indian Unity and Diversity' (1961, This book was translated in Hindi by N.K.Das and Santanu Mitra in 2013).

In the introductory volume of People of India Study, K.S.Singh specially utilized Bose's findings to make critical comparison with PoI data set. How the postcolonial People of India study helped establish a Swadeshi anthropological enterprise may be briefly discussed below.

The People of India study launched by ASI in post-Bose era was entirely swadeshi. The POI project sought to assemble people's knowledge pertaining to culture and environment, and explored the idioms, structures, and cognitive processes reflected in the understanding and perception of people about themselves, their relationship to one another and with the environment. Gathering nomenclatures of communities, their ethnonyms, and range of synonyms, surnames, and titles and exploring their vibrant involvement in space, ethos and cultural traits was meant to capture the basic identities of the communities, which have many segments/layers, and which are tied with regional cultural/linguistic and ecological patterns. Thus, the project explored the various ways in which people interact, integrate, enmesh, share traits and space, and also discover the processes that bring them together. This view of Indian society, to use K.S. Singh's evocative metaphor, is a

'honeycomb' in which communities are engaged in vibrant interaction sharing space, ethos and cultural traits (Singh, 1992, 2002, 2012). It is this home-grown approach to visualize Indian society in terms of native paradigms which has made the PoI project an essentially Swadeshi enterprise, designed in terms of indigenous prerequisites and ethos of people. The PoI study succeeds in situating the people in diverse culture zones which are not bounded but porous. The 'People of India' study has indeed proved to be a milestone in post-colonial ethnography, with emphasis on Indian ideal of cultural pluralism (Singh, 2012, Das 2018).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

History of Indian anthropology is replete with incoherence and disjointed developments almost unvaryingly during colonial and postcolonial eras, as we discussed above. Global scholastic concepts and local intellectual conceptions have oftentimes intermingled. Yet, the wider trends of global anthropology have endured and influenced the discipline. This may be the reason why the category of 'Indian anthropology' is found to be contested (Sinha, Vineeta, 2005). In any case, by the late 1960s scholars had shown concern for redefining the character of Indian anthropology. IAS, Shimla, organized a seminar on 'urgent anthropology' calling to develop a 'model of Indian society' (Abbi and Saberwal 1969). Despite such efforts, in Indian anthropology the mainstream analysis of tribal cultures still pursued the theme of 'primitiveness' -a view established by colonial anthropology (Felix Padel 2014). In fact Indian anthropology continues to suffer from overindulgence of the legacy of the colonialism, even though some new works by Cohn (1996), Fuller (2016, 2017) and Dirks (2001) have endeavoured to provide fresh assessment of the role of colonial ethnography/ethnographers. In this critique nonetheless the author has placed the diverse ideas of various historical phases as they surfaced, without taking sides.

It is urged that there is greater urgency today to articulate a contemporary identity of Indian anthropology in terms of indigeneity. It is observed that works of some Indian anthropologists who tried to project the indigenous perspectives are hardly acknowledged. Reviews of Indian ethnographic 'scenarios' are still conducted by European scholars, who oftentimes overlay their own 'ideas' of anthropology, by ignoring some relevant native contributions made here and there. In this critique therefore certain localized conceptual perceptions and ethnographic innovativeness employed by Indian anthropologists are highlighted. It is shown how native scholars have tried to evolve the path of decolonization and how they have comprehensively tried to evolve a Swadeshi school of anthropology.

About two decades ago, in his review of 'sociology in India', Deshpande (2001) wrote that,

“Sociology seems to have inherited a profoundly ambiguous and disabling self-identity. It lacked a distinct presence in colonial India, being largely subsumed under social anthropology and 'Indology'. - - - Anthropology has dominated over sociology, at least during the last four decades. The overwhelming majority of the scholars influential in sociology, have been trained as anthropologists. It cannot be denied that Indian 'sociology' is heavily tilted towards anthropology. The most intensively studied areas have been caste, kinship, religion, village and tribe, rather than the class structure, cities, markets, industrial relations, or the media. In terms of methods, too, anthropological specialties, such as participant observation and fieldwork have been very prominent, while survey research and quantitative analysis has been rare. (Overall) the anthropological bent of Indian sociology has affected its fortunes adversely” (Deshpande, 2001).

The above citation reveals how heavily Indian 'sociology' has remained tilted towards Indian anthropology. This is the truth which this lengthy critique, which may be seen as a rejoinder to the encyclopedia entry, has tried to demonstrate. It is argued that there persists a rich heritage of Indian anthropology backed by substantial innovativeness and home-grown wisdom which deserves a better deal [1].

#### Note

1. This critique has tried to situate Indian social anthropology in a larger historical context in order to show how the social anthropological contributions have essentially shaped the sociology of India in a decisive manner. This critique has tried to be as objective as possible. To support his arguments, this reviewer has presented multiple evidences, accompanied by citations from the major sources. Social anthropology is part of anthropology which in its composite and integrated format survives only in a few university departments as well as in the ASI where some allied disciplines like human geography, linguistics, folklore and psychology are also integrated. India has witnessed a proliferation of 'cultural study' and 'tribal study' departments in Indian universities, where anthropology remains a central component. Some Indian historians, following the ethno- historical approach, have focused on tribal and Adivasi study, even though the term 'adivasi', much like the term 'tribe', remains contentious in common parlance.

I must convey my thanks to Professor Kamal Misra who had forwarded the encyclopedia chapter to me and also to Late V. K. Srivastava who had encouraged me to write a detailed 'response'. The views expressed in this review article are however those of author alone.

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