

Book Reviews

FOLKLORE OF CORRUPTION IN THE EYES OF ANTHROPOLOGISTS. By Amitabha Sarkar and Samira Dasgupta. pp. ix + 155, tables, plates, index. 2022. Maya Publications: New Delhi. Price ₹ 1500/-.

This hard bound slim volume is the contribution of two retired social anthropologists, Dr Amitabha Sarkar and Dr Samira Dasgupta, who served at the Anthropological Survey of India for many long years and had done extensive field investigations covering many aspects of anthropological interest in the States of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal. They were associated with Anthropological Survey of India from 1977 till they retired in the year 2012/2013. This volume on '*Folklore of Corruption in the Eyes of Anthropologists*' was passed on to me by Dr Amitabha Sarkar sometime in November 2022, for reviewing, and as the title attracted my attention I thought of going through the book to know more about it. I must admit that I was not familiar with the phrase, expression '*Folklore of Corruption*', so I was interested to have a look.

In the Preface (p. vii) the authors write, "The present volume try to deviate from the traditional colonial hang over but through churning of ethnographic data this book envisages in understanding the 'Folklore of Corruption' practices in our country which were gathered and generated by virtue of participant observation by the present anthropologists." So we find the authors are interested in understanding the 'Folklore of Corruption' practices in our country. That is commendable.

The 'Contents' of the volume are as follows: 1. Introduction; 2. Relevance of Anthropology in Contemporary Society; 3. Importance of Field Work in Anthropology and Methods; 4. Apathy towards Traditional Field Work and Consequences; 5. Challenges towards Burning Social Issues; and lastly, 6. Folklore of Corruption.

The titles listed in the Contents suggest that the

volume has deviated a bit from its primary focus of discussion on 'folklore of corruption', by presenting topics like 'field work in anthropology and methods' and 'burning social issues'. The authors have not reasoned why these topics have been presented. However, to a student of anthropology at the introductory level, 'relevance of anthropology in contemporary society' and 'field work in anthropology and methods' may be of much help. The authors have tried to put something of everything in a nutshell.

"This book is an attempt to portray a new horizon of anthropological study on 'Folklore of Corruption' by the authors by their intensive studies in various field situations of this country" (p. 4), thus the authors stated. The authors have discussed about 'Digital Ethnography' (pp. 35-43) in anthropology and its importance in anthropological research by presenting photographs (7 Plates) of the Dandami Maria (Bison Horn Maria) of Bastar. Thereafter in Chapter 5, 'Challenges Towards Burning Social Issues', the authors discuss about 'The Constitution of India'. The authors state (p. 45), "In this Chapter we intend to highlight the Articles in the Indian Constitution relating to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, and with the help of such privileges how it is working and impact upon."

Beginning with Part III "Fundamental Rights (p. 45) and Part IV" Directive Principles of State Policy, the authors have presented the Constitutional provisions given under Part-X, XII, XV, XVI, and some other Parts and Scheduled Areas (Part C) and Sixth Schedule etc. The authors write at the end (p. 75), "In spite of enjoying all available privileges for the last 72 years that is from 1950 the socio-economic development of each ethnic group is not equal and satisfactory. Initially the privileges were for 10 years but till date it is extended and continuing in view of perhaps vast vote bank for the political parties." The authors further writes (p.76), "To our mind, there must be some study to formulate how many more Plan Periods are required for them for their development

and (*to bring them* italics mine) at par with the main stream of population.” Sarkar and Dasgupta writes (p.80), “*Anthropological Survey of India* being a premier anthropological research organization in our country is presently lacking for inadequate leadership which creates hindrances in identifying the current, applicable social problems of the country for taking action for study through its capable and young social scientists.” (or *lacking in adequate leadership*, italics mine)

The ‘Folklore of Corruption’ has been presented in Chapter 6. “The aim of this chapter is to illustrate and understand how corruption was perceived and collectively understood in the public works sector. This chapter argues that ‘folklore’ of corruption was prevalent through civil servants perceived the criminal phenomenon”, the authors write (p. 82). The authors have used the term “folklore of corruption’ borrowed from the book titled: *Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nation*, by Dr Karl Gunnar Myrdal the Swedish economist and sociologist (1898-1987) published in 1972. The authors write (p. 82), “it is people’s belief about corruption and the emotions attached to those beliefs and public policy measures that may be loosely labeled ‘anti-corruptions campaigns’, that is, legislative, administrative and judicial institutions set up to enforce the integrity of public officials at all levels” (Myrdal, 1972).

The authors further quotes Myrdal (1972) (*without citing the page from where taken*), “The folklore of corruption itself embodies important social facts worth intensive research in their own right. This folklore has a crucial bearing on how people conduct their private lives and how they view their government’s effort to consolidate the nation and direct and spur development. It easily leads people to think that anybody in a position of power is likely to exploit this in the interest of himself, his family or other social groups to which he feels loyal. If corruption becomes taken for granted, resentment amounts essentially to envy of those who have opportunities for private gain by dishonest dealings The prevalence of corruption raises strong obstacles and inhibitions to development. The corruption that is spurred by fragmentations of loyalties acts against efforts to consolidate the nation” (Myrdal, 1972). It would have been excellent

if the authors had devoted a few more pages elaborating the concept of ‘folklore of corruption’ as identified and exemplified by Dr Gunnar Myrdal.

The authors have cited some examples to elucidate ‘folklore of corruption’ which are the products of their empirical study in various rural and tribal areas of India. They report their study at Junglemahal in 2014 (pp.83-99) about the Netai violence, and of the deprived people of the villages of Lalgah area, Jhitka and Bhumij Dhansola, there are much irregularities in the payment of the wages for 100 days for the poor workers. The authors have cited ten case studies from the rural areas of West Bengal supporting their studies of corruption and exploitation by the middle men and the officials at the block level.

The authors find that the empirical data which they collected in the form of Case studies highlight the economic, social and political conditions of the villages. Everywhere a picture of polarization emerges from these cases (p. 98). In economic sphere it is seen that there is yawning gap between the two groups, the landlords and the tenants. These two groups belong to two extreme ends of social ladder, one economically powerful people and the other the underprivileged. In social sphere similar picture is observed but slightly in different form the authors say. The authors have found that the villagers live integrated in one identity that they are the people of Netai or Jhitka or Bhumij Dhansola and by this identity they are recognized by the outsiders. However, in the village they have an identity related to their economic status, that is, who is *manib* and who is *munish*, or who goes for service in other’s house outside the village known as *bagal* (p. 98). Beside this in social sphere they have another identity, the identify of themselves as Hindu or Adivasi, and further sub-groups among them as Brahman, Vaishnav, Sadgope, Mahishya, Mal, Santal, Lodha etc. Thus it brings polarization in social sphere.

The authors have observed that in political sphere, economic and social status play important role. The authors have discussed the situation in Netai and other rural areas elaborately (pp. 89-111). The tussle between CPIM and TMC for grabbing power to rule over the people and the area have been discussed by the authors. Apart from the tussle

among political parties the authors have also discussed about the administrative irregularities done by government offices where execution of development works for the benefit of the people, like supply of drinking water and other welfare oriented schemes have been stopped or slowed down, and the irregularities highlighted by the media in the appointment of school teachers by the School Service Commission which greatly indicates the deep-rooted corruption that has grown in our present society. Under these circumstances the authors find that “....wealth are accumulated by a section of people, mostly who are under the umbrella of blessings of ruling party, while others are deprived even having all the educational qualifications...” (p. 118).

The reviewer finds a mishmash in the volume under the heading ‘Policy-Making Thought’ (p.118) wherein the authors have discussed about ‘Socio-Cultural Profile of Ethnic Groups of North-east’ (pp. 121- 150), with sub-headings: Ethno-historical Background, Social Audit of Policy Decision, Annexation of Lushai Hills (Mizoram) of North-east, Role of Ghotul in Imparting Ethical Value, and lastly Ethnic Situation in North-east India. The reviewer has failed to identify the relationship of these topics listed under ‘Policy-Making Thought’, with the focus of the study ‘folklore of corruption’. The cases of ‘corruption’ as discussed by the authors that has happened in West Bengal, which occupied greater part of their book is missing in their discussion of the North-east. The authors have not been able to show convincingly the ‘folklore of corruption’ in ‘Role of Ghotul’.

SOCIAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN INDIA: LEARNING FROM THE FIELD. By A. K. Sinha, Ratika Thakur and Avanee Khatri (Edited). pp. xxvi + 367, abbreviations used, figures, tables, index, 2023. SAGE spectrum, Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi. Price ₹ 895/-.

The editors of this hard bound volume states that this book is the outcome of an idea that “emanated in March 2019, during a ‘National Workshop on Social Impact Assessment’, over a conversation with promising and eminent scholars from across the country. The list of authors and the topics presented

However, Dr Amitabha and Dr Samira have stressed the point that that before the implementation of any development programme empirical information should be collected and its social impact on the tribals should be assessed through cultural anthropologists by the government or /the planners of the project. In the case of Muria Ghotul and the tribes of North-East India, situations like opposition and social unrest in the area could have been avoided if social anthropologists were involved in development programmes.

The reviewer wonders on the role of Anthropological Survey of India in development programmes in India, particularly in tribal dominated areas. It appears that the Survey is still clinging on to theoretical and descriptive studies on the tribes and other communities and not eager to involve in development studies where large scale projects are under way presently, though being a government organization.

In spite of some critical observations, the reviewer feels that the authors deserve much appreciation for their present study as they have shown a new direction of research to the students of anthropology who are involved in development studies through intensive field work. This book may be particularly helpful to those government officials who are involved in the execution of development programmes at the block and district level.

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in the volume greatly indicates the ‘cumulative effort of authors, researchers and fieldwork practioners on the method and application of social impact assessment (SIA)’. The editors acknowledge that the National Workshop at Chandigarh have been made possible largely due to the sponsorship favoured by Greater Mohali Development Authority (GMADA), S.A.S. Nagar, Punjab, and Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI), Kolkata. The National Workshop on Social Impact Assessment was held at the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, which is UGC Centre of Advanced Studies in

Anthropology. In the year 2017 the Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh, was selected by the Punjab State Government and Chandigarh (Union Territory) Administration as the nodal centre to conduct SIA studies across Chandigarh, Punjab and Haryana (p. xxiii).

The editors state, “The objective of the book is to understand impacts of a development project on a community, while also focusing on developing skills and knowledge of researchers, students, academicians and practitioners interested in development studies, by bringing forth different field-based evidences across India” (p. xxiv). The volume has been sectioned into the following three parts: Part I – Anthropology in Social Impact Assessment: Methodological and Theoretical Perspectives; contains 8 articles. Part II – Anthropology in Social Impact Assessment: Legal Aspect; contains 3 articles, and Part III – Anthropology in Social Impact Assessment: Case Studies; contain 10 articles. In all 21 articles have been presented by 27 scholar participants in this volume though there were many more scholars participated in the National Workshop that was held in 2019 on the 8th and 9th March.

The authors in their ‘Introduction’ writes (pp. xxi-xxii), “The term ‘social impact’ was first introduced at Yale University, to understand social and environmental aspects of investment projects and to highlight ethical responsibilities of investors in infrastructural development. A year later, in 1969, the US environmental policy Act, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), introduced SIA as a legal requirement to capture positive and negative impacts of development, shifting its focus from financial concerns to environmental challenges. While developed countries (e.g., Canada, New Zealand, Australia and European nations) swiftly accepted SIA legally in their administrative ruling, developing countries followed the suit in the 1990s. Since then, it has not only emerged as an important research tool to analyse the impact of a development project on the lives of people, but it is also viewed as a social method that attempts to reduce conflicts by analysing concerns of affected population. Legally, SIA is a mandate for various developmental sectors that deal with the acquisition of land which includes

hydropower plants, mining and highways. It safeguards the rights of the project affected people and ensures equal representation from all, from government to landowners to farmers and villagers, and minimal rifts during land acquisition.

The basic intention of the introduction of SIA was to protect the environment in association with the community. SIA is used when any State wants to take over the land of the people for the purposes of mining, construction of dams, starting industries, hydroelectric power stations, etc., in the name of development and economic growth. These activities require land to be acquired, often involuntarily, from people who are largely tribal and other marginal communities. From 1990s onwards social impact assessment studies have been conducted in many Indian States where large scale development projects have been initiated by the government.

With these aspects in mind the editors have presented 21 articles in this volume where social impact assessments studies have been conducted by researchers in some states of India citing some case studies. However, the methodological aspects of the study have been presented by the scholars in the Part I, before dealing with the case studies.

Under the ‘Methodological and Theoretical Perspective’, Dr P. Venkata Rao of University of Hyderabad in his article ‘*The Practice in Social Impact Assessment: An Anthropological Appraisal*’ (Chapter 2), writes “...anthropological works on development in India have been carried out more following the approach of ‘Development Anthropology’. Not many studies could be found following the approach of ‘Anthropology of Development’. He further writes, “Though Social Impact Assessment (SIA) has been an important part of the subdiscipline of Development Anthropology, the present chapter looks at SIA from the perspective of Anthropology of Development of Escobar (1991) who pointed out that anthropological research on developmental aspects is shaped up according to governmental needs and official demands, at the expense of academic rigour and self-critical awareness. In the context of SIA, identity, dignity and status of people become essential considerations from an anthropological perspective” (p. 22). Rao concludes (p.34) that “Applied and development anthropologists played a

significant role in understanding the social impact of developmental programmes in tribal areas.”

Dr Abhik Ghosh of Panjab University in his article titled, ‘*An Anthropological Critique of Social Impact Assessment: Moving Beyond Current Models of Development*’ (Chapter 3) writes under a subheading – ‘A Critique of SIA In India’ (p.43): “SIA is a tricky kind of a study. It creates problems about adapting methodological and theoretical models from social sciences. The language used in such social sciences are often seen to be very different from that used in bureaucratic reporting. Often, social sciences do not predict or even explain. They explicate social events, show some connections with other ‘social facts’ (after Durkheim) and give some possibilities rather than clear one-to-one explanations. They do more discussion and provide description. So interrelationships between variables are often not clearly delineated in such studies.” Dr Ghosh concludes with the comment that SIA has a much larger ambit than just assessing potential harm from a development programme.

Dr Prasanna K. Nayak of Labanya Institute of Indian Studies, Bhubaneswar, in his article on ‘*Social Impact Assessment of Development Projects in Odisha*’ (Chapter 4), emphasizes on the importance of “Assessment of the social, cultural, economic and environmental situations in the project area is essential prior to undertaking development programmes” (p.72). He has discussed about some projects undertaken by the government of Odisha and the SIA studies.

Drs Avane Khatri, Ratika Thakur and A. K. Sinha of Panjab University, writes on ‘*Situating Anthropology in Social Impact Assessment: Methodological Considerations*’ (Chapter 5). They write, “Anthropology of development informally emerged in the 1960s with Clifford Geertz’s work on understanding changes in agriculture in relation to technical challenges and land use in Indonesia. Later, anthropology of development was applied and expanded to the areas of ‘social development’ such as impact evaluation and impact assessment.” The authors state, “This chapter discusses SIA, its academic position in applied anthropology and defines the role of anthropologists in SIA. The chapter discusses the need of the anthropological forum and its unique methodology in conducting SIA projects

with holistic perspective, community participation, involvement with practical issues, social and cultural context. The authors emphasize that in the policy formulation and development planning programmes earlier there was lack of utilization of anthropologists. The technocratic nature of earlier development programmes more often ‘dominated by economists, engineers, agriculturalists and others who base their success on the attainment of quantitative targets. They showed little interest in ‘the social or welfare ramifications and the ethical questions associated with promoting socio-economic change’. And further there was legacy of academic tradition among early anthropologists and other social researchers, which they handed down to their successors, and this resulted in non-involvement with practical issues and thus resulted ‘leading to the rejection of any activity which involves social engineering towards pre-determined ends’. This aspect has been greatly elaborated by Hall (1987). Situation have changed now, today, however, there is an increasing realisation of the relevance of social investigation in project development.

The authors conclude, “The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, Section 4 clearly defines steps to prepare SIA study and vigilantly defines the procedure to conduct it. It includes and ensures maximum involvement of stakeholders, importantly the gram panchayat and community for consultation and consent. These steps intend to provide cost effectiveness in the implementation of the project or, to put in other words, benefit both sides of the coin, the community as well as the project developmental authorities (p. 90).

Part II, deals with ‘Anthropology in Social Impact Assessment: Legal Aspect’. Dr Abhijit Guha in this section writes on ‘*Anthropological Survey of India and Social Impact Assessment: A Review*’ (Chapter 9). The author concludes “A critical reading of the RFCTLARR, 2013 Act reveals its serious shortcomings as regards the urgency clause and failure to include the Constitutional local self-governments in decision-making on land acquisition. It is high time that the anthropologists and sociologists of the country come out of their academic shells of ‘pure and theoretical research’ and converge their research inputs in unison

to convince the government to revise and redraft this law, which is no less important than space and atomic research for the greater interest of those citizens of our country.”

The designated Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India Mr Colin Gonsalves, the founder of Human Rights Law Network (HRLN), writes in Chapter 10 ‘*Judicial Failure on Land Acquisition for Corporations*’, (p. 153-154) that “No statute in colonial India or independent India has been used against the interests of the poor in such a systematic and widespread manner, causing misery, as the Land Acquisition Act, 1894. From independence up to 1995, millions of persons were displaced from land due to a variety of reasons, including forcible displacement for public projects. The judiciary has played a significant role in executing this statute without care for the effects of land acquisition on small and medium landholders and on agricultural labourers.” Mr Gonsalves continues (p. 154), “In this chapter, we tell one part of the legal story as to how the judiciary remained oblivious to the suffering of the rural people.” At the end of his long history, a long legal battle, he concludes at the end (p. 172) “The judiciary must understand that there is grave unrest in rural India, and if it is to relate to the rural poor at all, it cannot go by the Constitutional Bench’s decision of the earlier period. Times have changed. ... We cannot allow the dead hand of the past to stifle the growth of the living present. Law cannot stand still; it must change with the changing social concepts and values.”

Assistant District Attorney of Government of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla, Ms Ruchika Khitta in her article (Chapter 11) ‘*Land Acquisition in India: The Present Scenario*’ discusses about the ‘The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (LARR Act) which was enacted in September 2013. The Act enhances the compensation payable in cases of forcible acquisition of land and also provides for rehabilitation and resettlement awards in cases of displacement (p. 178). She critically examines the law citing some cases. The LARR Act has legislatively strengthened the requirements of public purpose and compensation that were weakened by the dilution of the right to property in the Constitution.

In Part III, four authors have discussed about —

the standard of living (Amlan J. Biswas), anthropological complexity in social impact assessment (Vineetha Menon), methodology of assessment of extreme events (P.C. Joshi and Prashant Khattri). Project related five case studies in relation to social impact assessment conducted in Punjab and Achanakmar-Amarkantak Biosphere Reserve have been presented by Mehar Singh, Sukhvinder Singh, Umesh Kumar and Ramesh Sahani, scholars who have had been engaged with SIA projects run by governments. Dr Premananda Panda of Odisha and Dr R. P. Mitra of Delhi discuss about the social impact assessment and poverty among vulnerable tribal communities of Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. Both the authors look at SIA as a method to evaluate the process as well as the objective of any development programme in tribal areas particularly among the PVTGs.

The book under review discusses on the social impact assessment methodology and the contributing scholars have attempted to understand the impacts of a development project on a community, citing case studies, particularly after the new land acquisition law (RFCT-LARR, 2013), that came into force on 1 January 2014. The field anthropologists conducting the impact assessment studies have highlighted in this volume the delaying process of rehabilitation and compensation that is to be given as per law to the troubled people, who have to move far away from the area. There are cases that neither the government nor the corporate have kept proper records of the displaced person who had to migrate to another place for survival. There is no specific article suggesting a case study of a village where a project has been conducted, discussing on ‘fair compensation’ which is one of the aspects of the bill. How many received ‘fair compensation’ within the promised specified time? There are articles on rehabilitation and resettlements mostly. Through 21 articles in this volume most authors present the view that — the gap between the commitments made by corporate and the governments for the well-being of the displaced rural people gets widened with the passage of time. The executives of the programmes try to forget the promises they made to the people in most cases.

This volume presents multiple SIA case studies on rehabilitation and resettlement of tribals and others,

SIA studies on health and nutrition in biosphere reserves, and social impact assessment of land acquisition by the authorities for development programmes. The reviewer feels, this volume will be much helpful to the administrators in particular, who are at the helm of the development projects in tribal

and rural areas of India, and to those researchers who are working on environment and development studies.

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