

BIKASH RAYCHAUDHURI

1st November, 1933 – 18th February, 2021

It pains a lot when a junior academic is to write an obituary of his senior colleague like Dr. Bikash Raychaudhuri with whom a relationship spanning more than two decades exists. Dr. Bikash Raychaudhuri is a well-known cultural anthropologist and earned huge fame for his book *The Moon and Net: Study of Transient Community of Fisherman of Jambudwip* (1980). The book was an outcome of his Doctoral work under Professor Surajit Chandra Sinha. Dr. Raychadhuri joined in the Anthropological Survey of India in 1954 as Senior Technical Assistant (Cultural) at headquarters, Kolkata. He took volunteer retirement in 1985 as Anthropologist due to declining eye sight from which he had been suffering from his boyhood. He was single and was living in his parental house at 99/5/2A, Ballygunge Place, Kolkat. Dr. Raychaudhuri passed away on 18th February, 2021 at an age of 87 years after a brief illness at a private hospital in Kolkata.

Dr. Raychaudhuri was born on 1st November, 1933 in a rented house at Ahiritola area in north Kolkata. He was the second child among five children of Tarakchandra Raychaudhuri and Nanibala (Roy). The ancestral house of Dr. Raychaudhuri was in Aamgram village in Faridpur district of Bangladesh when it was part of undivided India. He belonged to an aristocrat, educated and economically well-to-do Brahmin family. Tarakchandra Raychaudhuri came to Kolkata for his education. He was admitted in newly opened post graduate department of Anthropology (estd.1920) in the University of Calcutta by his maternal uncle Surendranath Ganguly, advised by the then Vice Chancellor Sir Ashutosh Mookerjee. Later Tarakchandra became a faculty in the same department.

Bikash Raychadhuri was admitted to Chakraberia H. E. School, Kolkata in class three and passed sixth class from there. Then during Second World War all family members shifted from Kolkata to the native village in Bangladesh. There they stayed about two years and Bikash studied class seven and eight there. Then all members again returned to Kolkata. Bikash again studied in the same school which he left and passed Matriculation. He studied I.A in Ashutosh College in

Kolkata. Bikash went for fieldwork with his father two times, one at Sonarpur, in undivided 24 Parganas and then at Nadia districts of West Bengal. He assisted his father in taking somatometric measurements. From that time, he had developed an interest in Anthropology. He had his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) from Ashutosh College. During those days, Anthropology class was held in Palit Building at Ballygunge Circular Road. His classmates in masters' degree in Anthropology in the Calcutta University were Professor Gouranga Prasad Chattopadhyay, Professor Amulya Ratan Bandopadhyay, late Professor Biswanath Bandopadhyay, Dr. Arabinda Basu and Dr. Biman Kumar Dasgupta, Dr. Pabitra Gupta, Parul Chandra Dutta, Shri Suhas Kumar Biswas, Bibhutibhusan Mukhopadhyay, Sanaknath Phukan, Hariprasad Mishra and Binayendra Narayan Bhattacharyya. Their teachers were Professor Tarak Chandra Das, Professor Kshitish Prasad Chattopadhyay, Dr. Rabindranath Bose, Professor SasankaSekhar Sarkar, Tarakchandra Raychaudhuri, Dr. Dharani Sen, and Dr. Gautam Sankar Ray. One-day Professor Sasanka Sekhar Sarkar suggested to Bikash to take specialization in physical anthropology. But his interest was different. He passed masters with specialization in social-cultural anthropology in 1954 and got Ph. D. in 1972. The title of his thesis was *The Marine Fisherfolk of Jammudwip: A socio-cultural Study*. One of the foreign examiners of his thesis was Fredrik Barth who praised this painstaking detailed work, particularly calculation of low tide and high tide and availability of catch. One day Fredrik Barth came to Anthropological Survey of India office, Kolkata, when Dr. Bikash Raychaudhuri met him who proposed Dr. Raychaudhuri to publish his thesis from his country. But as per the advice of Professor Sinha Dr. Raychaudhuri published his doctoral thesis from the Anthropological Survey of India in 1980. Dr. Raychaudhuri had long association with some stalwarts of anthropology like former Directors of the Survey, Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose, Dr. Dilip Kumar Sen, Shri Hiren Kumar Rakshit, Professor Surajit Chandra Sinha. He was recognized as one of the best fieldworkers by Nirmal kumar Bose in his letter that read: *You have proved to be one of the best field workers in the Anthropological Survey of India.....* (D.O. No. 3/67-CMR-Misc, dated 31 October, 1967).

Dr. Raychadhuri published five books altogether - three books were co-authored) and he himself authored two books on Fishermen in Jambudwip and on the Rabhas in North Bengal. However, he wrote a number of field based articles in various subjects in reputed anthropology journals, bulletin and edited books on the topics of material culture, fisherman in different ecological set up, folk and rural technology, social mobility, ethnography of the Brahmins of Bengal, Chero, Purum (Chote), Rabha, tribal women, folk and village deity, rituals, festivals, pottery techniques, social mobility, demography, socio-economic stratification, occupational drift. It is also known that a review article was done by Raymond Firth on his book on fisherman under the title Asian Fisheries in *Royal Anthropological Institute* journal, December, 1981, No.47, pp.3-5. The same book is also reviewed

in *Man in India* and *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society* in 1981. In all the cases the book was spotted as a praiseworthy contribution in anthropology.

The book entitle *The Moon and Net: Study of Transient Community of Fisherman of Jambudwip* drew attention not only of the academicians but also of the administrators, environmentalists, ethno-scientists of India and abroad for its rich empirical data as well as rich theoretical understanding of transient community of marine fishermen. Fisheries Department of Government of West Bengal and this department presented him a Silver Rose and *uttariyo* as a memento for eminent friend of Fishers on 5 April, 2003. He received Sarat Chandra Roy Memorial Medal for the Year 2007 from the then Governor of West Bengal Sri Gopal Krishna Gandhi on 5th May, 2008 in recognition of his contribution to cultural anthropology. Dr. Raychaudhuri was felicitated by the Indian Anthropological Society on 30 July, 2016 at Brahmananda Hall, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata for his great service for growth and development of the Society as an academic body devoted to the cause of the development of the discipline of Anthropology in India. One documentary film *Under the Sun* produced by International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF) was done in 2003 based on his research findings on Fisherman of Jambudwip.

Dr. Raychoudhuri was founder Council Member and General Secretary of The Indian Anthropological Society, Kolkata. He donated a money to the Society for creating an endowment fund for memory of his father late T.C. Raychaudhuri for giving Gold and Silver Medals to senior anthropologist and young scholar in anthropology in India to praise his or her contribution to anthropology. He overcame his visual problem by strong self-confidence and determination in spite of his remaining blind for about three decades and used to actively attend Annual Conferences and other activities in the Society.

In his death the Indian anthropological fraternity lost a cultural anthropologist and many of us lost a good human being and would continue to miss the frequent afternoon *addas* at his residence, which were refreshing, entertaining and informative at the same time.

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