

ANTHROPOLOGY AS ANANTHROPOLOGY'**L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer (1861-1937), Colonial Anthropology, and the 'Native Anthropologist as Pioneer**

When Ananthakrishna entered the field of anthropology in the first decade of this century, anthropology was undeveloped in India, and the facilities, resources and prospects which exist for anthropologists nowadays were non-existent then. It must have required singular courage and devotion to have started on a career of anthropology in those days. That is why Ananthakrishna became a legend to subsequent generations of anthropologists. In fact, anthropology was jokingly referred to as 'Ananthropology'. It can be said with justice that the work and example of Ananthakrishna contributed substantially to the building up of a scientific tradition in modern India.

—M.N. Srinivas, *Anthropology exhibition souvenir, Madras, 1962*,

Ananthakrishna Iyer graduated with a BA from Christian College, Madras, in 1883, and first worked as a clerk in the land settlement office at Wayanad. He became a teacher at Victoria College, Palghat, teaching science. He became headmaster of a school run by a Christian mission at Changanacherry.

At this point, the sub-collector of Palghat became Dewan of Cochin and embarked on a wide-ranging educational programme in the state which required trained teachers. The Dewan offered Iyer appointment as **Science Assistant in Maharaja's College**, Ernakulam.

In 1902, the secretary to the Dewan asked Iyer to take up, as a purely honorary job, **an ethnographic survey of the state of Cochin**—a task required of all provincial governments and states by the colonial state. Iyer worked during the week as a teacher at the Ernakulam college, and on weekends as Superintendent of Ethnography for the Dewan. Government of Cochin had appointed him to investigate the cultural and racial problems of the different communities inhabiting that state through an ethnographic survey. He was appointed as a superintendent of ethnography of the Cochin princely state and this resulted in the publication of twelve monographs between 1904-1906, which were later compiled and published as **Tribes and Castes of Cochin** in two volumes. The work on Cochin tribes and castes is a rich collection of data on numerous tribes and castes of former princely state of Cochin. First volume gives a descriptive account of all the hill and jungle tribes and other low castes in the ascending order of the social status while the second volume deals with other groups of people higher in social grade such as Nambudris, Kashtriyas and then Brahmins. His works got appreciation from the leading anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor, W. H. R. Rivers, Frazer, and A. C. Haddon and so on.

Iyer was chosen President of the Ethnology Section at the first meeting of the Indian Science Congress in Calcutta and there met the vice chancellor of Calcutta University.

In 1914 he was appointed by the Dewan as Curator of the State Museum and Superintendent of Zoological Gardens at Trichur. In 1916 he delivered a series of special lectures on ethnology in India at the University of Madras, the first of its kind within Indian universities. He was now appointed Lecturer in Anthropology and Ancient Indian History and Culture at Calcutta University; in 1920, he became University Reader at this university. The same year, the university introduced the first anthropology postgraduate course and Iyer was appointed Senior Lecturer in order to set up a new anthropology department. He held the position till 1932-33.

In 1924 the Maharaja of Mysore invited him to undertake an ethnographic survey of Mysore, resulting in four volumes, the last three completing information initially collected by H.V. Nanjundayya, Superintendent of Ethnography. (In 1903, **The Ethnographic Survey of Mysore was started under Dewan Bahadur Nanjundeyya as Superintendent of Ethnography. The Superintendent died in the middle of this work and thus Iyer was handed this work on 7 August 1924.**)

In India, he was conferred the honours of Rai Bahadur in 1921 and Dewan Bahadur in 1935. In his last years, he had embarked on an ethnological study of Coorg.

After his retirement in 1933, he delivered lectures on Indian Ethnology in Florence, Rome, Paris, Munich, Berlin, Cambridge, Vienna and other places in Europe. In London, at the International Congress of Anthropology, he presented a paper on '**Agricultural Basis of Religion in South India.**' At the Institute of Anthropology in Florence he presented a paper on '**Primitive Culture of South India.**' He was given an honorary membership of the institute with a special university medal for his recognition as an outstanding contributor to Indian Ethnology. The President of France also gave him the title Officer d'Academic. The British Government gave him the title Dewan Bahadur. Due to his legendary status, He died in 1937.

Study of Indian society: the Tribals and the Caste groups

Ananthakrishna had keen interest in exploring the development of human society. **He was keen to record the changes occurring in the various aspects of life of the tribals while documenting facts about tribal customs and institutions.** But he could not ignore the exploitative changes that occur to the tribe. As in case of **Kadars who, he stated that, their frequent contact** with the people of the plains has deprived them of their simple habits and brought them to a modified condition of life. He stated that their encounter with modernity resulted in their dilapidated cultural condition. At a time when anthropologists restricted themselves to the study of preliterate communities, he attempted to study literate communities such as Nambudiris, Nayars, and the Syrian Christians.

Ananthakrishna modified the earlier format (twenty-seven-point format developed H. H. Risley) opted for the census operations of ethnographic survey of India into 14 point one, which suited to the Indian population. In his Book, Cochin Tribes and Castes, he described each tribe and caste in a 14-point format which included the introduction, their origin and tradition, habitation, marriage and customs, pregnancy and child birth, inheritance, tribal organization, religion, magic and sorcery, funeral ceremonies, occupation, physical and mental characteristics, food, social status and a conclusion.

He both adopted and adapted the ethnographic tradition of his times. He rejected the administrative way of collecting information about the people. During his field studies, he used to interact with the people in their natural environment. Ananthakrishna gave much importance to the description of lifecycle ceremonies. **Ananthakrishna arranged tribes and castes of Cochin in the order of their social status, instead of following the western rule of alphabetical arrangement.** In case of fieldwork, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of participant observation.

Iyer, is 'the great predecessor' and the pioneer of Indian Anthropology whose work became the guiding light for the subsequent generations of Anthropologists in India.