

## **SC ROY: THE FATHER OF INDIAN ETHNOGRAPHY (1871-1942)**

S.C. Roy is known as the father of Indian ethnology, the first Indian ethnographer, the first Indian anthropologist etc. He was a lawyer by profession. As a lawyer, he used to visit the interior areas of Chota Nagpur and could observe the tribals from close quarters. He was moved by oppression and hardship of Munda and other tribal communities. This deep interest in tribal led to beginning of his career as an anthropologist. His major contribution in anthropology can be understood in terms of 5 broad headings:

- i) Contribution in study of tribal culture
- ii) Study in Physical anthropology
- iii) Anthropology of caste
- iv) Study of folklore
- v) Applied anthro and tribal policy

### **STUDIES IN TRIBAL CULTURE:**

The miserable condition of tribals of Chota Nagpur attracted SC Roy to undertake studies on customs, beliefs, tradition, lifeways and culture etc. His first ethnograph was on Munda tribes of Chotanagpur (Munda and Their country 1912). Roy believed that knowledge of history of tribe would help us appreciate its culture better. Hence Roy's monograph contains only one chapter on culture and 5 chapters on history of tribe.

His next book deals with Oraon (The Oraon of Chota Nagpur). In this book he amended his earlier strategy and devotes only one chapter to history of tribes while rest devoted to detailed ethnographic description of tribes. Roy was the first to draw our attention to the existence of Dhumkuria or the youth dormitory. He detailed its function and explained its role in socio-economic life of Oraon. He also gave a detailed description of village organisation, the village panchayat and the Paraha system.

He also wrote a monograph on Birhor which was a small nomadic tribe numbering just 2000. He gave a description of Birhor life form from which 'nomadism' emerges as a style of life.

The last description was on Kharia tribe. He gave a comparative description on 3 division of kharia- The Dudh Kharia, Dhelki Kharia and Hill Kharia.

Besides monograph, he wrote papers on totemism among Asur, Ho of Singhbhum. He also published article on Lepcha Funeral, Kinship among people of Sikkim, Khasi kinship terms, the Khond human sacrifice, the Korku memorial tablets.

### **STUDIES IN PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY**

In his various tribal monographs, he tried to give, as far as possible, details about the physical characteristics of the tribe being studied.

SC Roy felt that many problem of Indian ethnology could be solved by an exploration of prehistoric evidences. He was the third person to study prehistoric sites in Ranchi district, the first two were Valentive Ball and WHP Driver.

SC Roy's main contribution in the field of Prehistoric archaeology is digging up of Asura site. The traditions about ancient Asura are still widespread in Ranchi district and the implements and ornaments of copper, bronze and iron dug up are attributed to these pre-Munda inhabitants of Chota Nagpur. He concludes that Asur belonged to the same age as that of the Indus Valley culture. On many points, he finds that the two areas resemble to a surprising degree.

Roy also came across a number of burial sites locally called Asur Khutty. The excavations of burial sites revealed earthen jars which were found placed one over the other upto a maximum of four at time.

Placed in the jars were copper ornaments and beads together with the bones of the dead. The Asur civilization in Chota Nagpur, according to Roy, continued atleast upto the Kushan period as indicated by the find of three Kushan gold coins.

### **ANTHROPOLOGY OF CASTE**

SC Roy was of the opinion that our ancient books, namely the Puranas, Samhitas, Dharmashastras and Griha Sutras as well as the great epics held a rich treasure house of data for social anthropology.

He tried to explore the origin of caste system and for this he studied Indian scriptures as well as other ethnographic reports. He began with a detailed critique of the different theories put forward by scholars for the origin of Caste system. He said that the constant interaction between people belonging to diverse ethnic elements and culture areas must have had a bearing on the making of caste system in India.

### **STUDY OF FOLKLORE**

Roy believed that folklore throws a flood of light on the early intellectual evolution of human society and for this reason he regarded folklore as “pre-history of human mind”.

Roy held that Indian students are in most advantageous position to collect and study folklore, although many folkloric traditions have already disappeared due to various reasons. He emphasized upon the need to collect and preserve folkloric traditions, because they are treasury of our past handed down from generation to generation.

### **APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AND TRIBAL POLICY**

SC Roy was a highly respected public man known for his deep scholarships, understanding and sympathy for tribal life and culture. Hence the government sought his advice whenever it was faced with any administrative problem in dealing with tribals.

He was also member of Bihar and Odisha Legislative council for 15 years. He always pushed for welfare of tribal people of Chota Nagpur.

In his various speeches Roy made a strong plea for giving anthropological training not only to administrative and judicial officers, but to forest and excise officers who were posted in tribal areas.

In order to promote anthropological research SC Roy also started the research journal Man in India in 1921.