

How Surajit Sinha Viewed Indian Anthropology? An Anti-critique

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Abstract

The major objective of this article is to make a critical assessment of Surajit Chandra Sinha's view on Indian anthropology by using secondary sources in the libraries and internet. Surajit Sinha's (1926-2002) vision of Indian anthropology, particularly in post-colonial times is one of the least discussed themes among the anthropologists in India. Sinha held interesting but pessimistic views on Indian anthropology in his articles published during 1970-80. According to him Indian anthropology even after the independence of the country largely remained a 'Western apprentice'. He sharply pointed out the imitative nature of Indian anthropology and was not afraid to raise doubts about the theory of the 'Hindu method of Tribal absorption' propounded by his guru N.K. Bose. But Sinha too had his limitations in the same field. He not only emphasised Indian anthropology as a kind of colonial project like many Marxist and radical scholars, but also failed to discern the secular and nationalist trends in Indian anthropology ingrained in the works of his predecessors and teachers.

Keywords: Surajit Sinha, Indian anthropology, colonial anthropology, nationalist anthropology, history of Indian anthropology

Introduction

Surajit Sinha belonged to a period of Indian anthropology when the influence of British and American anthropology on the Indian anthropologists was direct and operated at personal levels of Indian anthropologists and sociologists.¹ At the same time Sinha was also a witness to the endeavours by Indian social scientists to build up their own course of development in the context of nation building after the independence of the country. Trained by both Nirmal Kumar Bose and Tarak Chandra Das and also at a later stage by Robert Redfield, Sinha was exposed to a wide arena of global and national anthropology. He completed his major works on the relationship between tribe and caste in the context of Indian civilization as well as state formation by mid 1960s. Sinha's wide-ranging interests in the application of anthropological methodology to Indian problems

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