

Nirmal Kumar Bose and Nation Building in Indian Anthropology

Abhijit Guha

Abstract

The contributions of Nirmal Kumar Bose as an anthropologist should be understood by placing him in the context of his predecessors and contemporaries. Bose as an anthropologist and a nationalist freedom fighter present a contradiction. He was a nationalist as observed by the renowned scholars but his nationalism was limited by a Hindu bias in his anthropology. Bose remained a Hindu nationalist unlike his predecessor Sarat Chandra Roy and contemporary Tarak Chandra Das. The challenges like famine, partition and development caused displacement encountered by the people and the policy makers of the new nation in the post-colonial period did not figure in the anthropology of N.K. Bose, but his contribution as an anthropologist in the light of nation building needs re-evaluation. I have made this humble assessment to place Bose within his anthropological milieu without making any attempt to dwarf this towering personality in Indian anthropology.

Keywords: Nirmal Kumar Bose, Nation building, History of Indian anthropology, Hindu anthropology, Nationalist anthropology

Introduction

Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-1972) was a versatile personality in Indian anthropology. His multifaceted interest ranged from temple architecture and prehistory to transformations in tribal life under the impact of Hinduism and modernization. Bose was a professor at the University of Calcutta, Director of the Anthropological Survey of India and Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Government of India, and he was also a dedicated social worker, a Gandhian political activist, and above all a prolific writer in Bengali and English on diverse topics in professional journals (he was the editor of *Man in India*) and wrote in popular magazines and newspapers (Ray 1974:61-120). Baidyanath Saraswati viewed Nirmal Kumar Bose as the 'Gandhian anthropologist' (Saraswati 2003:1-26) while R.S. Negi in his 7th N.K. Bose memorial lecture at Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (hereafter

ABHIJIT GUHA, Former Professor in Anthropology, Vidyasagar University & Senior Fellow, ICSSR, Institute of Development Studies Kolkata. Email: abhijitguhavuanthro@rediffmail.com