

## **NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE (1901-1972)**

NK Bose was born in Calcutta on January 22, 1901. His involvement in the freedom struggle as well as his following of Gandhian principles drew him closer to Anthropology. Nationalistic events often interfered with his academic career. He left the Government College to participate in Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. He participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement in 1922, the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930-32 and the Quit India Movement in 1942. He went as Gandhi's Private Secretary in his walking tour of Noakhali (now in Bangladesh), Bihar and Bengal between 1946-47.

He was attracted by the works of the diffusionists and the functionalist Bronislaw Malinowski, he was influenced greatly by the works of M. K. Gandhi, Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. He then saw himself as a 'social historian,' a school of thought of which he became the founder member.

He has held several post in various colleges in India and abroad in department of Anthropology. He has also served Director of Anthropological Survey of India from 1959 – 1964. During this period, he also worked as an advisor to the government on tribal affairs. He also worked as commissioner of NSCST, 1967-69. He was also editor of the first anthropological journal Man in India since 1951.

### **BOSE AS A DIFFUSIONIST**

Bose was fascinated by Kroeber and Wissler's trait distribution studies. He applied this approach in the study of diffusion of spring festival culture complex (1927), Elements of Temple Architecture (1949) and Basic Material Traits in Rural India (1961).

### **BOSE AS A FUNCTIONALIST**

Bose was influenced by the Malinowski's functional approach to anthropology. In his book on Cultural Anthropology he has taken a functional approach in defining the nature of culture as an adaptive device.

According to Bose, beneath the outer frame of culture, there lies a body of beliefs and sentiments which are responsible for the particular manifestation of culture. Such a body of ideas and sentiments grow out of life's philosophy and is consequently conditioned by the needs and aspirations of each particular age. Historical developments bring in number of unresolved problems and if the culture does not serve those needs, it is sure to undergo modifications by those who inherit it. Thus, culture is at perpetually unstable equilibrium with the experiences of men.

Bose has suggested that Hindu textual categories such as Satva, Raja, Tamas and Dharma, Artha may be utilised in the classification of cultures. According to Bose, 4 distinct categories of behaviour may be identified in any culture. They are:

- i) Vastu (Material Object)
- ii) Kriya (Habitual Action)
- iii) Samhati (Social Grouping)
- iv) Tattwa (Knowledge)

### **BOSE CONTRIBUTION IN STUDY OF CASTE SYSTEM**

Bose's interest in study of caste system in India developed when he was working in the slums among the 'untouchables' of Bolpur town under Gandhian Reconstruction programme. He rejected the myth of divine origin, and notion of purity and pollution.

In a series of brilliant articles- '**Hindu Mode of Tribal absorption**' (1941), **Caste in India** (1951), '**Some Aspect of Caste in Bengal** (1958) Bose proposed that root of persistence of caste system is to be found in the economic and cultural security provided by the non-competitive, hereditary, vocation based productive organisation, which operated in isolated village communities and were guided by a general norm of inter-ethnic cultural tolerance. Further, the institution of Sanyas provided atleast a limited avenue of freedom and prestige to the individuals, who were, otherwise bound to the rigid hierarchy of the system. Bose has been quick to point out that such an ideal pattern of caste based rural society could thrive adequately, only when there was adequate ecological and demographic space to set up new villages.

On the basis of above logic, Bose proposed that **fundamental structural change and even breakdown of caste system would be possible only when the economic base of the system was qualitatively transformed**. On the basis of this proposition, he started research on change in traditional occupation in different regions of India, particularly West Bengal.

His general proposition has been that caste, as an economic system and as a regulator in social life, is disintegrating at different rate in different regions of India. Bose was curious about Calcutta, which has been exposed to nearly 200 years modern, commercial, industrial and urban development.

On the basis of a rapid survey during 1962-63, he has arrived at a conclusion that the diverse ethnic groups, in the population of city, have come to bear the same relation to one another as do the castes in India as a whole. Actually, the superstructure that coheres the caste under the old order seems instead to be re-establishing itself in a new form.

In Calcutta, the economy is an economy of scarcity. Because, there are not enough jobs to go around, everyone clings, as closely as possible, to the occupation with which his ethnic group is identified and relies for economic support on those who speak his language, or his co-religionists, or members of his own caste and or fellow migrants from the village or district from which he has come. Reliance on earlier modes of group identification reinforce and perpetuate differences between ethnic groups.

### **CONTRIBUTION ON TRIBAL STUDIES**

Bose after short fieldwork on Juang in Odisha published 3 insightful papers. In this various insightful papers on tribals, he attempted to highlight the similarity in tribal and peasant economy, absorption of the tribes into Hindu caste system, and the root of tribal separatist movement.

Bose has observed that the difference between our rural folk and urban classes is undoubtedly greater than that between peasants and the tribal communities, so far as their occupation is concerned.

### **CULTURAL ZONES AND PATTERN ON UNITY**

Bose's special interest was to indicate how regions or state of India, which are separated by differences of language, share many elements of material culture in common.

**In his book, Peasant Life in India:** A study in Indian Unity and Diversity, Bose proposes a pyramidal imagery of the unity of Indian civilization. According to him, if the regionalisation is in evidence to a certain extent in relation to materials arts of life, it is apparent already that the degree of differentiation is less in respect of the country's social organization. The structures of Indian unity can be compared to a pyramid. There is more differentiation at the material base of life and progressively less as one mounts higher and higher.

In a lecture, Bose stated that Indian civilization was in contrast to civilization of Europe. The civilization of Europe was essentially based on repeated experience of war leading to the spirit of nationalism. The civilization of India, on the other hand, developed a pattern of cultural pluralism under relatively peaceful conditions sheltered by the geographical barriers along its frontiers. According to him, Indian civilization encouraged diversity of culture, but in its economic organization, it tried to weave all communities into a network of independent, but distinct entities.

