
NEWS OBITUARY



Dr. REBATI MOHAN SARKAR (1937-2018)

Dr. R. M. Sarkar, Ph.D., D.Litt., the eminent Indian anthropologist, the Editor of *Man In India*, left his earthly life on 19 June, 2018 at *Mayurakshi*, his residence at Bagha Jatin, Kolkata. Born on 4 May, 1937, he was brought up in a farming family of an economically backward village of Birbhum district, West Bengal, far from modern educational facilities. However, his personal passion, confidence and enthusiasm and continuous patronage from his judicious father made him pass I.S.C. from Suri College, Birbhum and graduation from University of Calcutta. Subsequently, he did his Masters in Anthropology and Ph.D. from Ranchi University. Finally, he had earned the highest university degree of D.Lit. from Patna University. He joined Bangabasi College, Kolkata, in 1961 as a lecturer in Anthropology and continued his relentless effort to create a romantic passion among students for looking at myriads of facets of human life and analyse their interrelated functional meaning through anthropological eyes till retirement in 1997 as Reader and Head of Department.

He was a distinguished scholar with extraordinary qualities of an ideal anthropologist. Although he was specially trend in social anthropology, his earliest academic prominence was noticed by the publication of the first ever Indian text book on physical anthropology, entitled *Fundamentals of Physical Anthropology, With Practical Methods and Illustrations*, in 1965 (Kolkata, Post Graduate Book Mart). Being a young scholar of social anthropology, he astonished the Indian anthropological community by this publication at a time when no such basic text book of physical anthropology was available in India. Even after 53 years of its first appearance, this book is still in place with its modernized 4th edition by untiring effort of Dr. Sarkar. However, he perhaps became globally known for his more than 30 years' effort since 1987 of editing *Man In India*, the first Indian and one of the oldest anthropology journals in the world founded by Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy in 1921. With an extreme emotional attachment, he carried out this giant responsibility almost single handedly till death. Dr. Sarkar also acted as the member of the advisory committees and boards of UGC, Anthropological Survey of India and Cultural Research Institute, etc.

Armed with an enormous writing ability, he authored about 20 books and more than 250 articles, both in English and vernacular, published in a wide range of academic journals of repute. Some of his most important studies and subsequent publications are worth mentioning. His early research was immensely influenced by Robert Redfield's school of studying 'little communities' and L. P. Vidyarthi's studies on 'sacred complexes'. His *Study of sacred complex and the Bakreswar temple in Indian Anthropologist* (1976) had reflected it. Later, Dr. Sarkar's unparalleled field investigations on the folk religious traditions produced the monograph named *Regional Cults and Rural Traditions* (1986) in which he portrayed the intricate relationship of religious traditions with folk life ways and mores. His path breaking empirical research on the *Bouls* and related sects also brought him special distinction as a social scientist. The resulting monograph, *Bouls of Bengal: in the quest of man of the heart* in 1990, perhaps, for the first time dig out the anthropological aspects of the *Bouls* as human beings and a distinct cultural group. Later, this work had led to a documentary film entitled *In Search of the Man of Heart* produced by the Indira Gandhi national Center for the Arts, New Delhi in 2000. A number of articles on folk traditions and books e.g., *Through the vistas of life and lore: folkloric reflections of traditional India* (Calcutta : Punthi Pustak, 2000) or *Indigenous Knowledge in Traditional Folk Panorama* (New Delhi, Serials Pub., 2011) revealed his keen interest and expertise to explore the cultural pluralism in integrated traditional social contexts. During 1990s he undertook extensive field investigations on several rural and forest communities that resulted in a number of articles and monographs on the 'hunger and struggles' in primitive forest tribe, *Birhor*, on one hand and the eco-cultural dimensions of the life of the fishermen in the Sunderbans, on the other. Another rare dimension of his scholarship was the anthropological approaches and interpretations to literary works of eminent writers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay. His lifelong interest in applied-, action-, and developmental anthropology culminated into his last book, *Anthropology of Development – An Integrated Appraisal*, published in 2018. Apart from these scholarly pieces, he was the author of several best selling text books for undergraduate courses as well as for administrative jobs. He believed that the practice of anthropology was meaningless without experience of direct field investigations. Through direct teaching and writing he shared his priceless experience of intensive field works and inculcated the unique approaches of anthropological research into his disciples. His inimitable quality of teaching and academic supervision made several young minds to develop keen interest and find careers in anthropology as in case of the present author.

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