

Book Review

**“Hindu Sociology” By Benoy Kumar Sarkar,
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It has usually been a predominant understanding that Hindus are inferior in grappling with the positivistic and secular worldly elements because ancient Indian thought as apprehended by most of the Occidentals and Orientals is inherently prone to metaphysical and unpractical speculations. Benoy Kumar Sarkar regarded these presumptions as half-truths, which are whole errors, and attempted to rectify the false notions about Hindu scientific intellect through this book. Sarkar embraced the study of *Sukraniti* as an ancient text that represents chief landmarks and prominent developments in the cultural history of Hindus. *Sukraniti* for Sarkar was the preeminent ancient text of India that precisely represents non-transcendental and non-spiritual i.e., the secular worldly and ‘positive’ elements through the political and non-political aspects of ancient Hindu society. The book presents an astounding notion that it is through the positive, secular and materialistic understanding that transcendental and the metaphysical elements foregrounded the life scheme of Indian cultural history. It is argued by the author himself that Hindu transcendental literature of *Upanishads*, *Darsana*, *Gita* cannot be truly recognised and interpreted in true light unless the pursuit of socio-political, economic realities of the given time of the literature were emphasised and how these realities further governed and influenced the life-scheme of Hindus is encapsulated. In this regard Benoy Kumar Sarkar analytically traced the ideas of authors of *Sukra* cycle present in the *Sukraniti* and accentuated the socio-political development of the given time. The author adopted an historico-comparative methodology in studying the Indian facts and phenomenon to question the authenticity of the misapprehension of academicians with the sociology of Hindu society.

Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* discovered in early 20th century probed the interests amidst the academicians from diverse fields to understand the long-forgotten tradition of statecraft in ancient India more coherently. This discovery made a significant break by stipulating the role of ‘*artha*’ and the ‘secular laws’ in the

governing and functioning of ancient Indian polity. But before this significant work of Kautilya, was the text of Sukra. The '*Sukraniti*' bore such stature in ancient India that even Kautilya was influenced by the same. The *Sukraniti* is a study in the non-*moksha* or non-transcendental domains i.e., the positive elements of ancient India. "*Hindu Sociology*" of Benoy Kumar Sarkar is a part of extended series of '*The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology*' which is an analytical study of *Sukracharya's* code initiated by his English translation of *Sukraniti* published as Volume XIII of the '*Sacred Books of the Hindus*' series. *Sukraniti* is both the manual of guidance to the king/statesman; as well as regarded as the 'Bible of the demos' and a handbook of economic and ethico-political regulations. Sarkar traced the positive background and foundations of Hindu Sociology through the *Sukraniti* by analysing the nature of secular and worldly elements in constitution of Hindu national and cultural life. Benoy Kumar Sarkar's name is much footed in the list of early founders of Sociology in India. He initiated the social construction of India via positivistic background implicit in Indian tradition. Through his prolific writings, Sarkar offered an alternative reading to the dominant apprehension of Indian tradition. The present volume of '*Hindu Sociology*' is divided into two parts namely, non-political and political.

The first theme of the book, i.e., non-political, investigates the social and physical factors of the time of the *Sukraniti* and is based upon the study of the data furnished by the text itself. In doing so, the author primarily attempted to locate the relativity of the text. The first chapter traces the landmarks and milestones in the history of Hindu polity in lieu of the magnificent kingdoms and empires from 4th to 18th century A.D. in order to highlight the nature of political codes that king/statesman used to follow to meet the requirements of people living in the diverse geographical and topographical conditions. In next chapter, the author attempted to contextualise the study by exploring the geographical dimension of ancient India in which the text would have been written. An interesting depiction occurs in this chapter when the author assessed the varied atmospherical and climatological conditions of the country through the duties followed by both king and subjects and from the description of customs and rites during different periods of the year.

In the third chapter, Sarkar elucidated the sociological constitution of the ancient society by exploring and identifying the traditions of varying races or tribes mentioned in the text. It is not to lose the sight that Sarkar's analysis of variants of races assist the readers to comprehend how the caste or even race

was determined not just by the birth but also through virtues and functions. The fourth chapter depicts *Sukraniti* as the science of all sciences or dominant science as an epitome of perfect guide to king/statesmen in reference to the whole universe. Sarkar highlighted that authors of *Sukra* cycle followed the method of synthetic art of physical and human sciences in order to prescribe the duties to mankind. Consequently, Sarkar investigated the gems, metals, infrastructure, weaponry and their usage with findings of botanical, zoological, veterinary and agricultural sources in the *Nitisastra*. In the same chapter, Sarkar regarded the text as the work of moderners and compared it with Montesquieu's "Spirit of Laws" as both texts stand paramount in the study of physical forces and energies influencing mankind. Chapter Fifth and Sixth presents a determinant analysis of botanical and zoological history of India. The text regarded both flora and fauna as substances having direct implications upon the socio-political and economic aspects of mankind. The analysis of data on ancient Indian botany and zoology highlights the knowledge of Hindus in several branches of economic or applied botany. Therefore, part I of the book is a kind of historical assessment and reflects the achievements and limitations of Hindus in varying domains.

Book II, the political aspect of *Sukraniti* is divided into four major chapters. In the very first chapter, the author presented a preface to the idea of Hindu politics. Author interrogated the speculative scholasticism of academicians based upon the misapprehensions about traditional idea of India and asserted that recent development in Oriental archaeology and literary sources particularly *Arthasastra* of Kautilya laid down the foundations of realistic sociological research. By tracing the distinguished nature of *Vidyas* and *Kalas*, Sarkar highlighted that political learning as a theoretical branch of knowledge acquired an independent status in Hindu tradition. The author further discussed the fundamentals of *Niti* and highlighted that *Sukra* implicitly used the term '*Nitisastra*' for his text as the text aims to lead, govern, guide king and further investigates the idea of duty. The author assessed the idea of *Danda* and *Dharma* and their coalitional understanding with sovereignty in ancient India through comparative analysis between the *Nitisastra* of *Sukra* and work of Plato and Aristotle. Chapter one is a brief sketch of fundamental ideals of *Niti* entangled with the discussion about Hindu achievements in democracy by tracing the history of republics (*gana*), collectivism in form of guild and corporations. Chapter two encapsulates the two prominent elements of *Saptanga* theory of state i.e., *Rastra* (territory and people), *Kosa* (finance)

and their bearing upon man's corporate relations. The author argued that the Indian concept of state as a political association evolved from the idea of *desa*-country and not in terms of race-tribe. In this chapter, author highlighted that *Nitisastra* does not comprehend the idea of "One language, One State", rather it is harmonious in nature and endorses the heterogeneous nature of society. In the subsequent discussion about wealth and property, the author highlighted the importance of property, wealth, utilities and values through *Sukra's* social philosophy as implicated in two propositions i.e., importance of wealth because it is through wealth that duties, worldly enjoyments and salvation is assured and, emphasis on the economically self-sufficient state. In chapter three, the author traced the philosophical arrangements of times of authors of *Sukra* cycle and argued that given time was guided by the ideal of social services, *lokahita* or utilitarianism. Sarkar assessed that philosophical milieu of *Sukra* authors through tracing their affiliations to ideals of realists, orientations to *Nastika-matam*. Chapter four is a brief sketch of foreign policy in *Niti* philosophy. Author emphasised upon the organic theory of state and its bearing upon the international functions of *Rajya* with the further discussion about nature of public international law of Hindus and international jurists of *Sukra* cycle.

In both the themes of political and non-political, the author has prominently analysed the significant ideas and characteristics that appeared in the text of *Sukraniti*. It was this attempt of Benoy Kumar Sarkar that has significantly enriched the understanding of ancient India through the imperative assessment of non-political and political aspects amidst the times of authors of *Sukra* cycle. It is to signify here that the author has made a prominent attempt to analyse these key ideas of *Nitisastra* with deeper study of context or circumstantial understanding of given literature followed by the comparative assessment with the literature drawn from distant cultures. This historico-comparative methodology has been of great help in assessing and analysing the ideals of literature given with a comparative framework leading to a more enriched understanding of *Sukraniti*. Such detailed analysis of the text of '*Sankranti*' has indubitably renewed the understanding of ancient India and has presented a framework against the presumptions that have regarded ancient India and its ideals as primitive, inferior and mere spiritual in nature. The book promisingly highlights the positive background of the primitive and spiritualist India. Also, the methodology and analysis of the author of *Sukraniti* accorded that any visualisation or investigation of text must situate the text in the context in which the text was written and it further elevates that one must visualise

objectively both the eastern and western civilisations as they are to encapsulate the parallelism, analogies or synchronisms amidst both the cultures.

Each chapter of both the themes considerably analyses key ideals of the *Sukraniti* in length. But the comparative framework drawn by the author in most of the chapters without comprehending the meeting or common ground between the concepts or ideas of two cultures has affected the clarity of the book. Nonetheless, the work of Benoy Kumar Sarkar is of much significance for the understanding of the India of times of authors of *Sukra* cycle. The author has promisingly analysed the theoretical and positive background of ancient India from varying standpoints. The book stands paramount in the domains of both Sociology and Political Science in general and Indian Political Thought in particular and is significant for academicians, scholars and students interested in the field.

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