

Book Review

Sinha's Writing: An Alternative Vision of Socialism

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The aim of consumerism, which the rulers of these [socialist] economies had promoted, when they aspired to surpass the United States in the standard of life, conceived in terms of capitalist West, forced them to abandon their socialist objective. The consumerist standards of the Western world could be achieved only by providing very high incomes to a few in highly competitive industries. So, inequalities in income, reduction of employment, and finally the abandonment of other socialist objectives - all forced their way in to the so-called socialist societies. The economies were in total disarray. The "market socialist economy" could get in steam now only by streamlining itself into a full-fledged market economy, i. e. a modern capitalist economy.

Sachchidanand Sinha, 'Socialism: a manifesto for survival', P. 21, Maral Prakashan, Muzaffarpur, 1999.

The collective works of socialist thinker Sachchidanand Sinha, an astute thinker-critic of modern industrial civilization and, simultaneously, a serious scholar of art and culture, has been published in the form of 'Sachchidanand Sinha Rachnavali'. Senior journalist, translator and researcher Arvind Mohan has edited this eight-volume seminal anthology. The publication is done by Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi. Sachchidanand Sinha wrote extensively in English and Hindi. (Though he also knows French and German.) Only a few English writings of Sinha were translated into Hindi. The editor of the Rachnavali himself had translated 'Caste System: Myths, Reality, Challenge' in Hindi, which was published by Rajkamal Prakashan itself.

'Caste System: Myths, Reality, Challenge' by Sinha is a unique work on the much debated and researched subject of caste system in India. The book, at the time of its publication was reviewed prominently in Times Literary Supplement. Sinha's other major works in English such as 'The Internal Colony', 'Socialism and Power', 'The Bitter harvest', Emergency in Perspective: Reprieve and Challenge', 'Adventures of Liberty', 'The Permanent Crisis in India: After Janata, What?' 'The Unarmed Prophet', 'Chaos and Creation', 'Socialism: a manifesto for survival' – are made available in Hindi in the Rachnavali along with the major Hindi works such as 'Zindagi Sabhyata Ke Hashiye Par', Bharatiya Rashtriyata Aur Sampradayikata', 'Manav Sabhyata Aur Rashtra-Rajya', Samajwad Ke Badhate

Kadam', 'Upbhokta Sanskriti', Marxvad Ko Kaise Samajhen', 'Poonji Ka Antim Adhyaya', Naxali Andolan Ka Vaicharik Sankat', Sanskriti Aur Samajwad', Sanskriti Vimars' Poonjiwad Ka Patjhad', Loktantr Ki Chunautiyan' etc. Sinha has said that the inspiration for the writing of these books came from the various problems that emerged during the socialist movement and the efforts made to solve them.

The writing of a 94-year-old Sinha spanned a period of about sixty years along with his political activities as a socialist worker. His life, as he himself once said, "has been like a wandering cloud in the sky". The editor and his associates have done the arduous task of collecting the entire material of such a person's writings. The compilation of the Rachnavali is thematical and not chronological. This method has made it convenient for the readers to purchase a particular volume of the topic of their interest.

The preface of the first volume of the Rachnavali has been written by Sinha himself. In the preface, he has described about his stay in Bombay, Delhi and Bihar, giving a brief account of his political activism starting with the Quit India Movement of 1942. The material collected in all eight volumes has also been introduced by the author for the benefit of readers. The editor has compiled the material under following themes : In the first volume 'art, culture and socialism', in the second 'freedom, nationality, peasant problems and urban poverty', in the third 'Gandhi, Lohia, JP and Naxalism', in the fourth 'emergency, the experiment of the Janata Party, the Punjab crisis and political coalition', in the fifth 'caste, casteism and communalism', in the sixth 'new socialism, old socialism', in the seventh 'liberalisation, globalization and future' and 'internal colonialism and Bihar-centred exploitation' in the last eighth volume.

A detailed analysis of this vast material is not possible in this introductory review of Rachnavali. However, some features of Sinha's thoughts and his philosopher persona can be outlined in brief. Sinha's writing is simultaneously conceptual-theoretic and critical. He is not an expert-scholar. From art to science, he perceives the endeavour of human-being in totality. That is why he has studied almost all the disciplines of modern scholarship/research such as political science, economics, sociology, history, theology, psychology, anthropology, aesthetics etc. His vast and deep study of various subjects is reflected in his theoretical as well as critical writing. A reading of the Rachnavali reveals that the author has deeply delved into the intellectual debates, movements, crisis and solutions inherent in the making of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries of the modern era. Sinha, in his intellectual venture, stands as a thinker

of the entire humanity on a global scale who challenges the much debated and desired concept of 'globalization with a human face'. Not only the friendly critics of liberalisation-globalization advocate possibility of such an idea, even staunch opponents of globalisation feel enchanted/delighted by that. In this debate Sinha propounds a doctrine of "Socialism with a new face" vis-à-vis 'globalization with a human face' as the only future for survival of mankind.

One gets an insight into the overall writing of Sinha that invokes a vision for the future of humanity. This vision has been informed by the basic values like equality, democracy, decentralization, individual freedom, non-violence, dignity of labour, renunciation, co-existence and, of course, morality. All these values are central to his writing, on the basis of which he presents a socialist alternative to the capitalist model of development and way of life. It is a special feature about Sinha that he has imbibed these values in his life as well. He has not been associated with any university or research institute. Due to his participation in the freedom movement, he left studies after schooling. Always depending on public libraries, he never maintained a personal library to facilitate his studies. He never accepts awards for his works. Once, making observation on growing demand for facilities/comforts by scholars in India, he stated that during the British period, British officers doing academic and research work used to travel to far-flung areas during their vacations without special facilities. Sinha seems to believe, like Gandhi, that man's life is not for consumerist enjoyment, but primarily for thoughts, the capacity of which nature has given only to human-beings.

Not only in capitalism, but also in the prevailing models of socialism, the consumerist tendency is at the core of the concept of development. The phenomenon of globalization has brought this trend to its climax. Sinha opposes the blind consumerist thrust of modern civilization, plagued by wars, civil wars, conspiracies, inequalities, displacements, environmental destruction, natural disasters and an acute lack of morality, with a suitable alternative. Sinha, thus, does not entrap into the idea of "sustainability" generally appreciated by scholars/activists while professing the capitalist-consumerist model of development with a full thrust. Sinha, at the end of his book 'Socialism: a manifesto for survival' remembers Gandhi: "In the context [of consumerist thrust of modern civilization] we may remember Gandhi's words, 'the world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed'".

Obviously, the central theme of Sinha's writing is socialism. From the concept of utopian/Fabian socialism to the scientific doctrine of Marxist socialism, he has thoroughly analysed the various models of socialism experimented and practiced in different parts of the world. Sinha believes that no genius is epoch-neutral, nor are the knowledge, science and technology. Thereby he refutes pertinacity of scholars and leaders towards eternality and universality of any thinker or doctrine. He categorically negates Marxism's deterministic notion of socialism/communism. He makes a careful review of certain reciprocal points of communism and capitalism such as industrialism, inventionism, technologyism, productionism, consumerism etc. According to Sinha the reason for the defeat of socialism in the face of capitalism was not only its obsession with power and authoritarianism, but also due to these mutually agreed factors. Like Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, Sinha accepts democracy, decentralisation, moderate consumption and civil/individual liberties as the inherent qualities of socialism, and not as a distant goal. Here he seems to accept the theory of immediacy as propounded by Dr. Lohia in the line of Gandhi.

Sinha also grapples with the morality question in Marxism. He accepts that in Marx the moral element is not lacking. Sinha states that one "would be struck by the underlying note of moral indignation" in the Capital when Marx elaborately explains the inhuman conditions of workers under the factory system. However, according to Sinha, Marx "does not put this moral view at the center of his socialist theory".

One aspect of Sinha's scholarship attracts attention i.e. his writing has taken place outside academic/research institutions. Needless to say, during the neoliberal era, there has been a huge devaluation of authentic knowledge and research undertaken in institutions. In the name of new education and knowledge of a 'new India', skilled labourers are being prepared to serve the high capitalist system and economy. That facility too is available for a limited population. An entire industry of publishing books and research papers in exchange of money for promotions has been established in the country. The officials of universities and research institutes themselves extend their tenures and fix the perquisites, appoint themselves as senior professors and professor emeritus. Apart from trivialization, commercialisation and communalization of education and knowledge is being done irresponsibly by rulers of the day. The scholars at the helm of universities/institutions readily and happily co-operate with the neoliberal-communal agenda of governments. All of Sinha's writing has happened outside institutions. As institutional system of knowledge/research is

on fast decline, Sinha's writing opens up a window of possibilities for the genuine knowledge/research outside the institutionalized framework.

I would like to mention a reminiscence here. I was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS), Shimla, from 1991-1994. Prof. JS Grewal, a historian of repute, was the Director. I requested him to invite Sinha as a National Fellow at the Institute. Sinha's two books 'Caste System' and 'Socialism and Power' were available in the library of the Institute which I showed to Prof. Grewal. Prof. Randhir Singh, Prof. JD Sethi and Prof. GS Bhalla were working as national fellows at that time. Prof. Grewal asked me which university or institute Sinha was associated with. He was quite surprised when I told him that he was just a political worker. Prof. Grewal agreed and asked me to inquire with Sinha ji when he could come Shimla as a National Fellow initially for two years. I wrote a letter to him in this regard. He replied promptly as he does always, if he had been living in Delhi, he would definitely have come. In 1987, Sinha had returned from Delhi to village Manika in Bihar. I thought it was good in a way. It would have pained him to witness the overwhelming facilities/comforts the Institute had to offer.

Sinha is a widely read writer in Hindi. Especially the researchers of Hindi medium of various subjects will be immensely benefited by the Rachnavali. If the entire Rachnavali or part of it would be published in other Indian languages, the scope of the benefit will increase. The English version should also be published. I wish some good publisher would undertake this important task. It would have been better if the index was maintained in the end of every volume of the Rachnavali.

Sachchidanand Sinha Rachnavali
(Collected Works of Sachchidanand Sinha)
Editor Arvind Mohan
Volumes: 8
Rajkamal Prakashan, Delhi
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