

A freethinking cultural nationalist: a life history of Rahul Sankrityayan

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Abstrak

Vaishnava sadhu. Arya Samajist. Buddhist monk. Hindi nationalist. Communist. These are the identities Rahul Sankrityayan (1893-1963), born a sanatani Brahmin, donned during the early 20th century. Widely known in the field of Buddhist studies and Hindi literature, Sankrityayan was also a prolific writer whose varied ideological stances have baffled his critics and admirers alike. While several works have tried to analyse Sankrityayan's life through the lens of these identities, few have delved deep into the ambivalence that marked his thoughts and writings as he shifted his allegiance between these identities. *A Freethinking Cultural Nationalist* takes, as its starting point, the insight that Sankrityayan's personality was a product of the Indian renaissance period, and situates his life and work critically within the wider framework of his times. By exploring the thread that held together the different aspects of his personality, it presents a multifaceted picture not just of the man, but of India itself. Alaka Atreya Chudal focuses attention on Sankrityayan's affiliation to the Arya Samaj, his contributions to Buddhist studies, his efforts to enrich Hindi literature and support Hindi nationalism, and his adaptation of Marxism to the Indian context, in other words, a whole life's work, in which each of the elements fructifies the others. A separate concern is to delineate how Sankrityayan made his influence felt beyond India's borders, in neighbouring Nepal.