



Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses

A. R. Radcliffe-Brown

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Excerpt from Structure and Function in Primitive Society: Essays and Addresses

Professor Radcliffe-Brown has never had much regard for what he calls 'the odd things that I have written from time to time'; his major interest has been in conveying ideas directly to students and colleagues by personal contacts. In this he has been eminently successful. He has taught social anthropology at Cambridge, London, Birmingham, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Sydney, Yenching, Oxford, Sao Paulo, Alexandria and Grahamstown, and in each of these places he is remembered with affection and respect. The indebtedness of his students has been shown in two collections of essays - one American and one English - written in his honour. And there has hardly been a book or article on social anthropology published during the last quarter of a century which does not illustrate, directly or indirectly, his teaching.

An examination of the essays in this volume will suggest that his writings have been just as influential as his personal contacts. He has not, considering that he has been engaged in teaching and research in social anthropology for almost fifty years, written as much as most persons of his academic eminence. What he has written, however, has been faultless. We do not mean by this that we necessarily accept his methods or conclusions in detail, but rather that the point of view he expresses could not have been better expressed. Each of the essays is perfect in conception and in expression, and they are tied together by a consistency and direction which is rare in modern anthropology.

We believe that the publication of these essays will be of value for several reasons. In the first place, they show the development of the thought of a distinguished anthropologist for the last twenty-five years, and at the same time illustrate some of the more important changes in the orientation of social anthropology, with which Professor Radcliffe-Brown was so intimately associated during this period. These essays have also demonstrated their value in the training of graduate students in our major centres for social anthropology.

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