

# A NEW SOCIOLOGY



Indian Modernity and The Need for a  
New Revolutionary Social Science

Benoy Kumar Sarkar: The Futurism of an  
Emerging Asia

The Heroism of Mulk Raj Anand

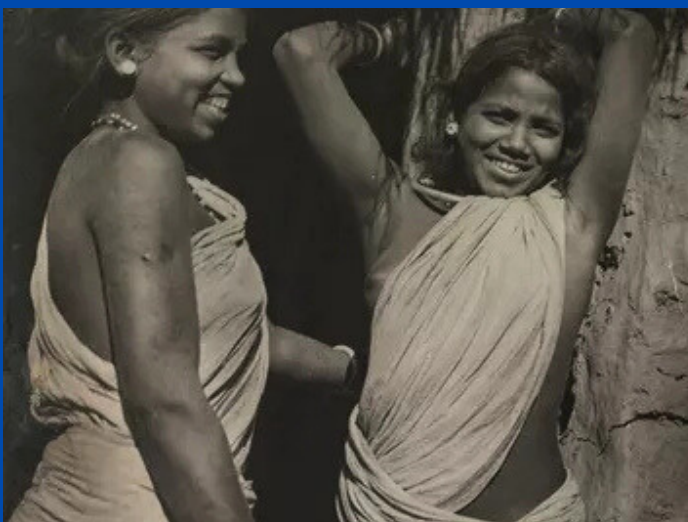
Transcript of Interview with Dr. Anthony  
Monteiro

D. D. Kosambi: Insights for a  
Revolutionary Indian Future

Archives: Brajendranath Seal and the True  
Philosophy of History

*for the Indian People, to Respond to*

# A NEW DEMOCRACY



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*Photos on Cover by Sunil Janah*

# Indian Democracy and The Need for a New Revolutionary Social Science

**Archishman Raju**



“One meets Death and confesses Life,  
Wise and free,  
Self dead, self risen as World-soul!”

Brajendranath Seal, *The Quest Eternal*

The great diversity of human language, religion, dress and culture that has always been a feature of the Indian setting is now coming into a modern democratic era. The ability of our people to express themselves in a new and higher stage of Indian unity and taking part in our present world transformation will require a scientific understanding of Indian society. Indian modernity requires a new revolutionary social science. This social science will have its basis not in the various posturing creations of academic fashion, which continue to be completely dominated by the West, but in a new democratic effort based in the people.



We are discussing this effort 75 years after India has gained independence. In those 75 years, the biggest transformation has been the freeing of Asian and African nations. Furthermore, the economic rise of Asia, most prominently China, has shown the possibility of modernization without war and colonialism. It has come alongside the democratic transformation of the people of Asia. This time, therefore, requires, as Mulk Raj Anand said, the theorizing of a modern Indian civilization.

This theorizing takes place in the midst of a difficult ideological atmosphere. The past 40 years in India have seen a shift away from the ideological consensus built around the Indian freedom struggle. Instead, sectarian politics has come to dominate and history has become a tool of opportunistic politics. Indian history requires scientific study furnishing us with a renewal of our consciousness and providing us with a weapon of struggle for the freedom of the masses of Indians.

Furthermore, the economic rise of India has come alongside a growing disparity and the erosion of cultural values, particularly among the middle-classes of Indian society. This has created the conditions for the presence of a westernized elite class of intellectuals, that now looks to America rather than Britain and is totally consumed by the post-modernist philosophical outlook of American academia. This elite class is increasingly becoming narcissistic with little moral direction and little to no connection with the masses of people.

Nevertheless, the modernization of Indian society, the increasing democratic possibilities, the rising alliance and understanding between the darker nations, the political crisis in the West, the receding nature of American hegemonic control, and the rise of alternatives to the dollar-dominated international economic system creates the conditions for a new revolutionary social science in India.

This new revolutionary social science must return to the source, and be accountable to the people. In a time when Truth has been attacked, it must make the concept of Truth and the discovery of Truth as central. It must deal with ideas that can liberate the masses of people, and these ideas must be taken among the masses of people. .

One part of this effort is to revive and understand the theoretical understanding and philosophical frameworks of the founders of modern Indian social science.

### **Historical antecedents**

One central figure is the founder of Indian sociology, Brajendranath Seal. A contemporary of Rabindranath Tagore, Seal was influenced by the Brahma Samaj and the general landscape of Bengali society in the second half of the 19th century. In his early years, Seal looked to “fuse into one, three essential elements, the pure monism of the Vedanta, the dialectics of the Absolute idea of Hegel and the Gospel of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity of the French Revolution”.

Later, Seal critiqued the Hegelian view of history with a view to expand it, "Hegel's view of historic development as a unilinear series, a position to which his dialectic of the categories commits him, can no longer be maintained...At the same time, the recognition of the diverse origins and independent developments of the separate culture-histories is not inconsistent with the assertion of an immanent world-movement, in which they all participate, each in its own degree and extent; and it is the business of Dialectic to trace the outlines of this cosmic movement."

Seal attempted to formulate this new philosophy of history with the comparative method. He did a comparative investigation of civilizations from a stand-point of equality rather than hierarchy. Seal argued that there was need for "a true Philosophy of Universal History" so as to "not give us mere European side-views of Humanity for the world's panorama". He believed that, properly formulated, the new historic and comparative method would set the basis of a new sociology. At the first Universal Races Congress of 1911, Seal argued for a scientific view of race away from the unscientific claims of white supremacy. He argued that Science must be lifted from the physical and biological plane to the sociological and historical platform. He argued against biological definitions of racial types. He was joined on this platform by W.E.B Du Bois who not only conducted a scientific study of American society—paying particular attention to the central contradiction of race in American society but, in doing so, set the foundations for modern sociology.

Therefore, Seal was part of a world effort on the part of darker humanity for the scientific study of human civilizations, and so is a predecessor of a revolutionary social science in India today. He argued for the idea of humanity coming together in an organic whole passing through stages of history with each civilization making its distinctive contribution. Brajendranath Seal had several students and three particularly stand out: Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Radhakamal Mukherjee and P. C. Mahalanobis. All three made immense contributions to the development of sociology which must be studied.

Sarkar, influenced by Seal, argued for a *positive* approach to Indian society, by which he meant a scientific approach; an approach that rejected a narrow view of India as a spiritual society little concerned with problems of material existence and properly appreciated the materialist and scientific dimensions of Indian history and society.

Further Sarkar realized that the coming together of humanity required a critique of European social philosophy. The darker peoples, he argued, were in a process of formulating a "Critique of Occidental Reason". Said another way, Sarkar formulated a critique of white-supremacist logic as it operated in European social science. "The futurists of Young Asia", he wrote, "are looking forward to that spiritual re-birth of the world." which would require a moral and psychological revolution in Western Society.

Radhakamal Mukherjee was a close friend and compatriot of Sarkar who worked on history, economics and sociology. His early "Democracies of the East" applied Seal's comparative approach to the question of democracy. Mukherjee believed that Indian and Asian traditions

held a political tradition which could be the basis of a new form of democracy and rescue democracy. It would carry the state “on the wings of the Individual’s desires and feelings to those humanistic ideals which the world associates with the East, and which will more and more govern the politics of the future.”

It is important to understand that this intellectual renaissance in social sciences was part of an epistemological break with European social science and was made possible by the Indian freedom struggle. As Mukherjee wrote, it was the ideas of 1905 and contact with the common masses of people as well as the expectation of political struggle that shaped his thinking and practice.

The articulation of these sociological ideas entered into the early Indian state after independence particularly through P. C. Mahalanobis, the youngest of the three, who contributed to the empirical study of Indian society by working out the proper statistical techniques to study Indian society. He headed the most ambitious program to conduct large scale sample surveys of Indian society, and inspired survey techniques around the world. His surveys allowed for the planning and democratic programs of the Indian state in its early years.

Finally, the scientific study of Indian society with its complexity required the formulation of a new methodology. The thinker who most contributed to this methodology is D. D. Kosambi. Kosambi stressed the need of “combined methods” for a study of Indian society, pointed out the long survivals in Indian society and the phenomena of mutual acculturation that allowed the existence of pre-modern forms in modern society. He particularly stressed the need for a democratic social science that would be based in the Indian poor. The concepts he developed in his study of Indian history provide a methodology for making sense of seemingly incoherent phenomena.

### **Future Visions**

This brief survey of Indian social science is part of a larger project for a new revolutionary social science of Indian society. The ultimate test of this social science will be in practice but the need for theoretical foundations must not be underestimated. The social sciences in the West are now either in the camp of neo-positivism or post-modernism. The associated practice is either that of technocracy or identity politics. The influence of both these trends is starkly visible in Indian intellectual circles.

Instead, a new revolutionary social science in India must join itself in the efforts of the people of the world to fight for Truth and ideological clarity. As its antecedents, it must base itself in a scientific approach and have a vision for the future.

While this approach will recognize the contributions of the radical wing of the European enlightenment, it will not be limited by them. It must not fall into the trap of economic determinism or the importation of concepts that do not fit the reality of the Indian situation. It

must move beyond the idea of liberal individualism to a more complete understanding of the human being.

It must recognize the Indian freedom struggle as a revolutionary struggle with its associated artistic, literary, spiritual and intellectual renaissance. However, while it must be uniquely Indian in its approach, it must seek to join with the world and fight for a higher stage of human existence. Doing this will require a critique of the West and an appreciation of the sociological tradition founded by darker humanity led by W.E.B. Du Bois.

Finally, this new revolutionary social science must be accountable to the people. It must set a basis for a practice and a democratic program for the people. Its test will be Gandhi's talisman: the face of the poorest of the poor in Indian society.

*Archishman Raju is editor and contributor to this journal.*

# The Heroism of Mulk Raj Anand

## Purba Chatterjee

*“If it is not a simplification I may say, generally, that the youth of India during the last quarter of a century had been going through kind of heroic age. All our gestures, all our thoughts, all our talk—everything that we did—had been inspired by the belief that we must create a new India build a new world.”* – Mulk Raj Anand, Apology for heroism, 1942.

It is important for our generation to know Mulk Raj Anand, not just as a writer, but as a product as well as an interpreter of the Indian freedom struggle and the ideological revolution it brought forth. This revolutionary period is yet to be understood in the fullness of its world historic



significance, and its consequences for a modern Asian future. The intellectual and philosophical work required for such an assessment is more urgent today than ever before. The crisis of liberal democracy on one hand, and the genocide in Gaza on the other, has led to a rejection by the world’s people of the ideological and moral supremacy claimed by the U.S. led Western world order. At the same time, the political and ideological realignments of Afro-Asia signal the birth of a new, more just world centred on humanity instead of the interests of a miniscule western ruling elite.

This dangerous, yet hopeful pre-revolutionary moment calls for a reassessment of the ideological forces that have shaped human thought and action for much of modern history. What ideas will win the people and the future? What philosophy of life will define the modern man and woman? And what role must the artist and intellectual play to bring forth this new world peacefully?

The generation that produced Mulk Raj Anand was faced with concerns as pressing as these. His worldview was forged in the great moral and political ferment of the world anticolonial movement—the assertion by dark humanity of the freedom to determine their own political, economic and social destinies. The modern, industrial world could be harnessed to free the potential of the downtrodden millions from the shackles of poverty and illiteracy. The newly independent nations did not reject the project of modernity, rather, they sought its completion in alignment with the material and spiritual needs of the people.

Mulk Raj Anand was a witness for this zeitgeist, his art imbued with the spirit of rebellion against the failed categories of old; seeking new meaning for human life in the modern world. He was a pioneer of the English Novel in Indian literature, giving it a revolutionary function by wielding it to tell the tragic, yet human story of the poor and disinherited. A founding member of the



progressive writers' movement in India, and founder of the art quarterly MARG, he saw himself as part of an intellectual vanguard, dedicated to the project of nation building through a synthesis of tradition and modernity.

Mulk Raj proceeded from the conviction that human beings can know the world, and through struggle, change the world. He believed that through ideas in action, the human being can transform not just his own fate, but by his example, the fate of all mankind. His heroism lay in meeting head-on the challenges that accompany the birth of anything new, never shirking from his revolutionary responsibility to extend knowledge in service of humanity. A study of his life and ideas can arm us with the courage and moral stamina to struggle for the future, and seek revolutionary answers to the urgent ideological questions we are confronted with.

### **Critique of the Western Intellectual Tradition**

Mulk Raj believed that in order to make sense of the modern world, it was important to understand the West and its traditions of thought. He had occasion to study the European tradition closely in the two decades he spent in England as a student of philosophy. He saw the European Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the centrality of the rational individual to the history, as a revolutionary step forward for humanity. He was impressed by the achievements of Western science in bettering the condition of man, and was attracted to the scientific attitude in the study of history and philosophy because of its implicit forward outlook.

However, the loneliness and isolation he experienced as an Indian student in England, caught him up to the fierce individualism and selfishness of Western society, which made community and camaraderie difficult to achieve. He saw that the moral and spiritual growth of the Western man lagged behind his material progress. The pursuit of a narrow personal freedom and material satisfaction had evolved a civilization of superficiality that gave no sustenance to the human soul.

Appalled at the humiliating conditions of the coolies in India, Mulk Raj had admired the dignity afforded to work and workers in the West. This illusion was shattered by the bloody violence with which the British government put down the general strike of 1926. It became clear to him that just like his countrymen, the poor and working people of England were yet to be liberated. The ideas of the liberal and industrial revolution of the 19th century, which held such promise for the world, had failed to lead to true democracy. Instead of raising the human being, western science and technology was invested in strengthening the mechanisms of war and colonial exploitation at the heart of Empire.

Mulk Raj believed that the western scientific and intellectual tradition had been rendered sterile by the 'pernicious specialism' encouraged by liberalism, which kept the various disciplines of natural and social scientific activity divorced from one another, and deliberately agnostic to politics and ideology. He was deeply disappointed by the betrayal of European intellectuals of their own inheritance—the values of the Enlightenment—by abdicating their responsibility to engage with pressing moral and philosophical questions of the time. In light of this 'trahison des

clerks', Mulk Raj noted that 'The wise man who in the East still had a sanction in the minds of men, had here become an inessential fool.'

For Mulk Raj, the hypocrisy of the European intelligentsia was exposed most starkly by their cowardly and guilt-ridden stance on the question of Indian independence. The same people who paid lip-service to the high ideals of freedom and democracy, suggested that British rule was ultimately good for India. They claimed that by relegating the business of governance to the more capable hands of the British, Indians could pursue 'their ancient genius in the arts and the humanities'. They made excuses for the British Empire's policies to keep education, and the fruits of science and industry, out of the reach of the Indian masses by extolling 'the merits of an idyllic peasant existence'.

Mulk Raj rejected the dishonest distinction made by European intellectuals between the 'materialistic West' and the 'spiritual East', as an attempt to justify the sub-human condition to which his countrymen had been reduced. He concluded that a purely academic pursuit of knowledge and philosophy was not worthy of him, he owed it to the people who produced him to join the struggle for India's freedom. And he stood in solidarity with the liberation struggles of the oppressed everywhere, traveling to Spain in 1937 to contribute to the fight against fascism. Mulk Raj believed that the intellectuals of Afro-Asia had far surpassed their European counterparts in developing a broader, more human and forward looking outlook for the modern world. They had rejected the myth of the 'White man's burden' and were challenging the West to live up to the claims of its own civilization by acknowledging the right of the colonized to be free. He writes, 'Here in England I had found that there was prevalent a profound distrust of heroism or belief, a kind of polite skepticism, a tiredness and a boredom and hopelessness about the future.' In Asia and Africa however, the faith in the capacity of man to achieve a future free of poverty, exploitation and war was an assertion of faith in life itself.

### **Humanism and a View of The Whole Man**

*'I believe, first and foremost, in human beings, in Man...Man, the maker and the breaker of worlds, the entity in whose constant attempts at renewal and adaptation lies all the poetry and grandeur of life.'*

Mulk Raj accepted the Hegelian view of history as the unfolding expression of the human spirit, ever marching forward towards a higher freedom. The human being then is both the subject and object of history, and indispensable to any theory that claims to explain the modern, ever-changing world. Importantly he saw that Empire, inconsistent as it was with human freedom, could hardly be a historic necessity. He asserted that the task of forging a new world order from the ruins of colonialism and the world wars, called for a new humanistic philosophy rooted in love for the human being, and faith in his capacity to bend the arc of history towards a higher moral order.

The question of whether man's material well-being superseded his need for spiritual fulfilment, Mulk Raj dismissed as a disingenuous oversimplification. Just as the mad materialistic reach of

Western civilization had distorted the human personality and made it cynical and individualistic, so had religious dogmatism reduced man to a servile acceptance of his suffering, by exalting the spiritual over the human. Man needed both bread and soul, the important question being 'the mere fact of life, whether it was not more valuable than a living death.'

The humanism professed by Mulk Raj called for a view of the whole man that embraced both reason and emotion; the knowledge of facts combined with the imaginative and intuitive. It held that the human being—through knowledge of himself and the world; through creative work with the hand, the heart and the brain—could both transform his material reality, as well as achieve a higher consciousness. And it saw the greatest achievements in art and culture as a manifestation of the human being's reach for truth, goodness and beauty.

At the heart of Mulk Raj's humanism was the idea of Love as the creative center of human life; the dominant urge behind every human endeavor. He saw Love, not as a personal or sentimental striving, but in its revolutionary essence—as the force which binds all human beings together. A recognition of man's universal striving for love and community makes it impossible to justify the worldview that war is an expression of man's animal tendencies, and therefore inevitable. In fact, he viewed the investment of Western civilization in domination and war as an inherently anti-love and anti-human impulse.

In light of the degradation of the human being in the modern capitalist society, Mulk Raj believed that socialism alone held the promise of restoring dignity and freedom to every man. He saw the Soviet Union, with its emphasis on uplifting the worker, and its call for planned scientific and industrial development of society, as a revolutionary experiment in extending human freedom and democracy. However, he had no use for dogmatic Marxism, having arrived at socialism through Tolstoy and Gandhi—as an ethical creed rather than a mere economic reorganization of society. While he never lost faith in socialism, he believed that planned progress must be reconciled with the freedom of the individual, for a truly democratic society to prevail.

### **A Witness for The Indian Freedom Struggle**

Ultimately, it was the Indian tradition that Mulk Raj turned to for answers. The ancient civilizational values of compassion, tolerance and sacrifice—implicit in the teachings of the Buddha, of Kabir and Tukaram—lent themselves naturally to a more complete humanistic philosophy. These values, organic to the Indian masses, were given a modern interpretation by the architects of the freedom struggle, which formed the lifeblood of the great non-violent revolution that turned the tide on two centuries of colonial humiliation. Mulk Raj was a witness for the Indian freedom struggle, and interpreted it for his generation and for the future. He studied its leaders and their thought, convinced that they belonged not merely in the pages of books, but as a living, breathing part of the modern Indian consciousness.

Mulk Raj was particularly influenced by Iqbal and Tagore, who he saw not just as poets, but as revolutionary thinkers whose ideas held in them the makings of a new human being. Iqbal too was educated in philosophy in the west, and it was he who encouraged Mulk Raj to pursue

studying in London. Confronted with the material and spiritual enslavement of his people under colonialism, Iqbal wrote *Asrar-e-Khudi*, urging his countrymen to stop being servile and struggle to reclaim their manhood. He put forward the idea that man was a co-creator of the world with God, and could achieve Godlike perfection by becoming increasingly more unique as an individual. This proclamation of human agency and dignity came as a tonic for young writers like Mulk Raj. The effect of Iqbal's message of hope on them was to 'release them from the formalistic literary poetry of tradition and to ally them with freedom itself in all its purpose and meaning for human life.'

Like Iqbal, Tagore too was foundational to Mulk Raj's thinking. He agreed with Tagore's criticism of western modernity, and was a proponent of his attempt to synthesize the best of western thought with the humanism of the east. Mulk Raj was deeply moved by Tagore's emphasis on harmony with the natural world, his identification with the folk traditions of Bengal, and his sensitive perception of the inner resilience and beauty of the poor Bengali peasants. The human being was central to Tagore's thinking, and he saw education as the indispensable path to the full flowering of human potential. He established Viswa-Bharati university in shantiniketan as a revolutionary experiment in a humanistic education bringing together scholars and artists from all over the world to teach, to learn by doing, to participate in rural reconstruction—to become, ultimately, fully integrated and whole as human beings.

In the end however, it was Gandhi whose philosophy of ahimsa (nonviolence) and satyagraha (insistence of truth) transformed the Indian people, and made freedom fighters of ordinary men, women and children. Gandhi's genius, Mulk Raj saw, lay in 'the uncanny manner in which he could feel the pulse of the masses' and achieve complete identification with them. The degradation under colonialism of the Indian peasant, who Mulk Raj called 'the most important man in India', was at the center of Gandhi's concern. He lived among the poor, like the poor, and put forward the vision of 'a new peasant civilization, in accord with the life of India's seven hundred thousand villages.' To Mulk Raj, Gandhi was the living embodiment of the moral values he professed, proving incontrovertibly that man can lead by the example of his own life. His time spent living with Gandhi in his ashram at Sabarmati left a deep impression on him, and he would forever hold on to the talisman Gandhi gave him then —'If you are in despair, think of the poorest man you can help and go to him and your despair will vanish.'

### **The Artist as A Revolutionary**

Mulk Raj's wrote his first novel, *The Untouchable*, in Gandhi's ashram. His European colleagues had scoffed at the idea of a novel about the poor, and considered descriptions of their humiliating material conditions to be distasteful and unworthy of high art. However, deeply moved by Gandhi's love for the castaways of Indian society, Mulk Raj had begun 'to dream of writing only about the poorest of the poor human beings'. He was particularly invested in the novel as an artform, because of the space it created for a sociological study of human behaviour; to probe the human condition in the concrete.

His search for a humanism which regards the human being in his totality, led him to insist equally on a truly humanistic view of art. He believed that art had a revolutionary role to fulfil in society-it could not be a purely contemplative and disinterested pursuit. The artist, by virtue of his ability to plumb the depths of human experience, is uniquely capable of achieving a view of the whole Man. Mulk Raj rejected the view engendered by the modern capitalist society that the artistic impulse, although influenced by life, was driven by a self-contained internal logic that did not necessarily reflect life. This view, in his opinion, had led to an esoteric subjectivism that led to distorted ideals of beauty and truth, and to the artist being completely divorced from the lives of ordinary men.

At the same time, he stood for 'art against literary photography' and advocated a 'poetic realism' in art that stressed the importance of the 'desire image'-not just what is, but what can be. He was convinced that the artist had a higher calling than simply reproducing, often cynically, the reality of the human experience. Instead, the revolutionary artist, through the lens of his imagination and morality, could transform sight into vision, and a knowledge of the world into the will to seek its renewal.

For Mulk Raj, all great art sprang from the wellspring of love for the human being, and an investment in human destiny. He believed that the artist, as an 'interpreter of one human soul to another', could reveal the essential unity of all human beings. And by exalting love for humanity through the desire image, he could inspire men to seek freedom not in an escape from society, but in their ability to change society through a more complete integration with the people. In this way, the artist could contribute to the formation of a new human being, not beholden to superficial or imposed standards, but driven by the moral imperative to struggle for a better, more human reality for all men alike.

The Indian freedom struggle, and particularly the leadership of Nehru and Gandhi, had created conditions for a great artistic and cultural renaissance in India. Mulk Raj saw the progressive writers' movement in India as the 'spontaneous emergence of a natural brotherhood of writers', confronted with the task of making their hard-won freedom real in every sense for the Indian masses. It brought forth an upsurge of literature and poetry in the many regional languages of India, with an emphasis on the lives of the poor, the working class and the peasantry. Mulk Raj saw himself as part of a growing unity of writers all over the world who were breaking out of the framework of isolated intellectual activity, to dive headfirst into the real struggles-moral and political- that confronted the world's people. He represented India at the International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture in Paris (1935) and the World Conference of Intellectuals in Madrid (1937). With Nehru's support, Mulk Raj was instrumental in organizing the first Asian Writers Conference in New Delhi (1956). This new creed among artists and intellectuals, of struggling for the defense of human freedom and peace, and standing with the world's oppressed and dispossessed, filled Mulk Raj with great optimism about the future. He proclaimed faith that the enlightened artist and intellectual, by furnishing knowledge and values commensurate with the needs of the time, would serve as the ideological vanguard of the new world being born.



## Looking forward

The ideological revolution started by the anticolonial struggles, and taken up by Mulk Raj's generation, has unfortunately been left unfinished. In the rush towards globalization in the aftermath of the cold war, the political and ideological guardrails against an uncritical acceptance of the West were lowered. Contrary to what Mulk Raj hoped for, the philosophical and intellectual work required to define what modernity will mean for the dark billions of Asia and Africa has not been embraced by contemporary intellectuals. Equating modernity with the standards of Western civilization, they seek to remake the world in the image of the west. And when this transplanted worldview is inevitably rejected by the people, they lament the backwardness of the masses, and retreat from struggle into the bubble of academia. Most damaging perhaps was the ideological move made by intellectuals towards postmodernism, and the denial of the existence of an objective truth for all men to aspire to. Postmodern theory and rhetoric has trapped the human being in abstractions and narrow categories of identity, obstructing the view of the whole man. It has reduced Love to a narcissist obsession with sexual preference and gender, blunting its revolutionary edge as the path to human fulfilment through community. Ultimately, postmodernism must be seen as an attempt to obscure the unresolved contradictions of western modernity by attacking the human being's capacity to know themselves and the world.

These contradictions have come to a head in our times, in the shape of a profound crisis of the Western world order. The political and economic decline of its primary guardian, the American state, is calling into question the thesis of liberal democracy as humanity's best hope for progress and freedom. The resounding defeat handed to the liberal consensus with the election of Donald Trump, must be seen as a rejection, by the American people themselves, of the western ruling elite and their world view. It is equally a moral repudiation of the American State's investment in war and human immiseration, and importantly, its unabashed support for the Israeli state in its genocide of the Palestinian people.

This crisis of legitimacy of the American state is a crisis of Western civilization. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Western liberal elite triumphantly declared the 'end of history'. Today, we can interpret this as a reflection of their own limited intellectual and moral capacity to contribute to the forward movement of history and knowledge. It is clear that western and west-facing academics—the self-proclaimed gatekeepers of knowledge and discourse—do not have answers for the moral and philosophical questions that humanity needs answered. The world's people have never been less concerned with the authority of 'experts' who have nothing but contempt for them; who claim to speak on their behalf, but are not compelled by any need to know them, their lifeworlds and their aspirations.

Everywhere we look, there are signs that humanity is moving forward, despite the attempts of the west to keep it grounded. The spectacular rise of China and the growing world significance of BRICS, foreshadows the undoing of the unipolar world, the only world our generation has ever known. This is what Mulk Raj prophesied, that the future was Afro-Asiatic. The young populations of Asia and Africa are more educated, materially secure, and articulate than ever

before. Owing to the gift of technology, they have a knowledge of the world at their fingertips. And they are ready to assume their rightful place in history and take creative part in the struggle for a shared human future.

It remains to be seen whether the West will join hands with the world's people, or whether, unable to accept the loss of its dominance, it will drag us to the brink of nuclear war. The peaceful transition to a new world order, and the working out of a new, coloured modernity is the revolutionary task of our times. Only today it is possible to say that impetus for this transition will come, not from a vanguard of intellectuals and artists as Mulk Raj imagined, but from a democratic struggle of the masses, who are coming into their own.

In view of the ways in which the world is changing, the questions that Mulk Raj grappled with take on a new importance and urgency. His critique of Western civilization and modernity is particularly invaluable for our generation, whose understanding of the world is overwhelmingly shaped by the west. He reminds us that it is the human being who makes history, and the world can be what we are willing to struggle for. This is again a time for heroism, for there are great challenges to overcome, but also great hope of completing the anticolonial struggle and making freedom and democracy real for all men.

*Purba Chatterjee is a researcher at the University of Pennsylvania and a member of the Saturday Free School, Philadelphia.*

# D. D. Kosambi: Insights for a Revolutionary Indian Future

**Nandita Chaturvedi**

When you look at Indian society with the aim of understanding it, at first sight you are confronted with intimidating complexity. There seems to be no way to systematically understand the emergence of a society with hundreds of languages, an ever more complex web of caste



relations, religious practices and varied production under a single framework. It is easy then, to collapse into postmodern thinking, where rather than struggling to find the underlying rhythm and logic to societal phenomena, the particular becomes the focus. The only thing one can do then is to cite particular and special cases, as is often the case in Indian intellectual discourse and middle class dinner table talk alike. The Indian people, in this view of things, then become passive and docile, primitive, happy to live millenia in unchanging ways. Yet, there is a logic to the development of Indian history, and indeed, India does have a history.

This was the assertion behind D.D. Kosambi's life's work. Kosambi's work on ancient Indian history is full of concepts and new patterns of thought that make the variations in Indian society fall into place, and there emerges an illustration of a people and society that has continued to have certain special characteristics and features since antiquity. Kosambi had written, "*In modern science it has been recognized that the variation is a very important characteristic of the material, particularly when dealing with living organisms.(..)But I have yet to see any recognition of the philosophical principle, let alone use of delicate statistical tests, in Indology.*" These features can be taken to be hallmarks of Indian Civilization.

## **Caste, Acculturation, and Synthesis**

Kosambi studied Indian society without the prejudices of the colonial framework. Thus, he sought to understand scientifically the emergence and evolution of caste as an organizational form in Indian society. He rejected the claim that caste had been a static and oppressive form for 5000 years. Instead, he tied it to the process of *acculturation*, the introduction of new tribes into the mainstream of Hindu society. Through anthropology and sociology, he sought to recreate the ancient history of the inclusion of different tribes into a more advanced agricultural society. Thus, at its inception, caste was a progressive form of the synthesis of alien peoples and cultures into a societal structure defined by a more advanced means of production, with minimal use of violence. The basis of caste was, then, tribal. Further, as society moved forward

to more advanced stages, different castes would resemble classes as society became more economically stratified. He formulated, thus, that caste was class in its nascent form.

He contrasted the Indian institution of caste to the Greek and Roman forms of slavery which also accompanied the subjugation of alien peoples to the mainstream of ancient society. India, he claimed, had no ancient history of slavery. Instead, ideas and mythology played a more emphasized role. Thus, gods of different tribes would marry Hindu gods, or find other relationships with them. This is why Hindu mythology did not have a consistent narrative throughout the subcontinent. Further, not only was acculturation a way for new peoples to be included in society, but that the tribes also in turn affected the beliefs, culture and traditions of the mainstream. Thus, Indian civilization came into being through a process of *mutual acculturation*.

This repetitive process of synthesis was encoded into the logic, ideology and thought of the Indian people. Thus, non-violence had a basis even in ancient Indian society before its articulation in philosophy by Buddhism, Jainism and other religious traditions. Kosambi saw that this was in part because of the richness of Indian land, where ancient societies could exist and subsist even through foraging off the land, making violent conflict over resources unnecessary. Of course, this abundance did not guarantee the evolution of a non-violent stream in civilization, it is human action and thought that made that eventually possible.

Kosambi's analysis of caste should inspire us to investigate the logic of Indian thought and societal movement. Instead, it has become fashionable in intellectual circles of our time to deem the people backwards, communalist, and ignorant for their political and social choices. How were caste groupings and institutions changed by colonial distortions, the freedom struggle and by the progress after independence? Further, how do the Indian people self conceptualize their caste relations in this time?

### **State and Civilization**

In attempting to understand the past and the present, Kosambi discovered aspects of the continuity of Indian civilization. He asserted that India was a civilization of *long survivals* where older modes of production and thought existed alongside new innovations. Civilizational continuity has also been maintained through the process of acculturation, which led to the absorption of alien forms into the main body of Indian thought and identity.

Kosambi's study of the Magadhan state takes on renewed importance in our time. The nations of Asia and Africa are witnessing the collapse of American liberal democracy and the European welfare state. The last decade has seen an acute crisis in the American political machine, fractures in the EU and NATO, and widespread popular protests in Europe. On the other hand, the Chinese state, which enjoys 90% approval ratings among the Chinese people, has demonstrated that different paths to democracy are possible. The time is ripe for India to re-examine the foundations of its own state, its continuity from ancient times, as well as its re-establishment under Nehru after the freedom movement. The question naturally arises, what

will be our path to democracy? Is India suited to be a nation state, or a civilizational state, with characteristics emerging from its history?

Kosambi wrote about the beginnings of the Magadhan state, the ruthless statecraft, written about by Chanakya, that was geared towards primitive accumulation and the cultivation of virgin lands. He framed the Magadhan state as a state outside of the Marxist conceptualization, in that it was not the instrument of a particular class. Rather, the state preceded rigid classes in society and so the employees of the state became, after its formation, a class in themselves. Yet, it was with the emergence of Ashok, he asserted, that the Magadhan state reached its full flowering. With the reign of Ashok, the religious and philosophical ferment of the previous century, which had so far been kept separate from the workings of the state, penetrated state ideology. Further, Ashok's conversion to Buddhism did not result in the formation of a Buddhist state or a formalized Buddhist church. Rather, Ashok patronized and supported a variety of religious thinkers. Kosambi saw this marriage of morality, Buddhist morality in the case of Ashok, and politics as a hallmark of Indian statecraft and civilization. Kosambi says, "it can even be said that the Indian national character received the stamp of Dhamma from the time of Ashok."

With the benefit of hindsight, we can extend Kosambi's analysis to understand what had emerged from the Indian freedom struggle in the state under Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru himself argued that there was no break between the freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi, and the running of the Indian state post independence. Although weighed down by mechanisms and bureaucracy of the British imperial government, Nehru's government sought to bring about the 'authentic Gandhian era'. This is perhaps seen most clearly in the spearheading role of the Indian government in the non aligned and world peace movement. Thus, the analysis of independence as a 'transfer of power' from British to Indian hands is hollow and superficial. Nehru thought deeply of the example of Ashok and others in Indian history, and sought to inject back the life of morality into the veins of governance.

The question for this time is what form this continuity will take in a new emerging multipolar and BRICS driven world order? The answer cannot be a narrow cultural nationalism that adopts Indianization in language and form for Western ideas and paths to development. Rather, Indian civilization, and the forms in which it exists among the Indian people must be taken seriously, and its implications for our path to democracy, development and foreign policy thought about creatively. The adoption of 'realpolitik' and 'self interest' as the basis of foreign policy, for example, while claiming 'vasudeva kutumbakam' is too shallow a treatment of our tradition.

As Nehru says, we are a country which produces atomic energy as well as our villages use cow dung. Development has to be thought of in terms of civilization. When the methods have a civilizational basis, ordinary people can take up these methods and ideas, making these methods democratic. For future development, understanding the Indian thought would allow us to think of ways rooted in our civilization, distinct from the Western ideas.



## Methodology

What allowed Kosambi to arrive at the concepts outlined above was a revolutionary scientific methodology. Kosambi would talk about *combined methods* to study Indian history, which included sociology, statistics, anthropology and archaeology. He asserted that since India had a *living prehistory*, i.e. the coexistence of ancient and medieval forms alongside modern ones, the people of India, their ways of being and rituals were material for the study of ancient Indian society. We may even assert the opposite, that in order to understand the people of modern India, one needs to understand the civilizational currents and foundation that has shaped them. In other words, liberal theory is not sufficient, we need an understanding of the trajectory of Indian civilization as a whole.

Thus Kosambi went to the people. He studied them with compassion and understanding, seeking to determine the modes and logics of their thought. He studied Indian religion, seeking to determine the material foundations that had shaped and guided it, as well as its role as a motive force in shaping material reality. Several historians would dismiss Indian religious beliefs as superstitious mythology. Others argued that Indian history was nothing *but* these myths, the Indian people were not interested in the real material world, but solely in otherworldly, spiritual matters. Kosambi went against both these colonial attitudes, connecting Indian mythology in a dialectic with the mode of production in Indian history. In all of his work, Kosambi never moved away from the foundational principle that the people made their own history, by acting upon material conditions, and by being shaped by them. He was ahead of his time, and indeed ahead of ours in understanding that the people are themselves also shaped by ideology and belief.

Thus, Kosambi extended the Marxist method of dialectical materialism by studying India in the concrete. He extended the theoretical foundations of Marxism not by abstract machinations of an armchair intellectual, but by engaging with the Indian people and seeking out ways in which their life worlds were defined. He broke from several Indian communist intellectuals of the time who relied perhaps too much on the Soviet intellectuals for theoretical advances, lapsing into intellectual stagnation. Indeed, we can understand Marxism as a powerful method that had been at the vanguard of revolutionary thought in its time, and a new time (and society) requires new innovations.

Lastly, Kosambi was scientific. His methods in studying Indian history are perhaps unparalleled by any other Indian historian. Kosambi understood that Indian history could not be written or explained simply with a list of successive rulers, communities, castes or races. In order to cut through the complexity that the material presented, one had to struggle to find the underlying trends and processes that gave rise to the complexity in the first place. By studying the changes in means, modes and relations of production in society, alongside innovations in religion and ideology, Kosambi was able to hit upon the foundational processes that have made Indian history.

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# Benoy Kumar Sarkar: The Futurism of an Emerging Asia

**Sambarta Chatterjee**



We are witnessing a period of profound transformation of the world, from a Western-led order to what must be called the age of humanity. Faced with the inevitability of this realignment, the loss of its empire, the Western world is unraveling from not only a political crisis of legitimacy, but also a crisis of meaning. As liberalism, from its political theory to its philosophy of man, proves itself inadequate to meet the strivings of the modern human being, the Western intellectual seems incapable of philosophical renewal. The result is chaos and confusion, with ordinary people categorically rejecting the outdated thinking of the elite. This crisis is civilizational, with all touchstones of Western civilization, from the authority of the Church, to the outlook on life and human freedom in white culture, to the unquestioned dominance of the world, in great turmoil. This is an existential moment, not just for the West but for world humanity, because the transformation of the world necessarily implies a transformation of the human being. This is a time ripe with new possibilities, the advent of a new stage in the history of humanity. It is also ripe with the possibility of our own renewal, if we can face our time.

It is clear that the future will be shaped by a rising Asia, home to over half the world's population and the overwhelming majority of the world's youth. The emerging Asia will undoubtedly interact with the West, but for the first time in the modern world, *on its own terms*. The future of humanity will rest on the modern Asian man and woman's conception of him/herself, of their civilizational basis of modernity, and their place in the world as an agent of history. This will require a serious study of Asia, its social philosophies, systems of thought, and its people, who have leaped from the premodern to the modern through two hundred years of colonial rule and the anticolonial movements. Therefore, a sociology of modern Asia, a study of human potential, acquires a new urgency. It is with this aim that we must study the thought and life of the revolutionary Indian sociologist, Benoy Kumar Sarkar.

Born in 1887, the arc of Sarkar's life traversed the Japanese defeat of czarist Russia, the World Wars, the Russian revolution, and the Indian and Chinese anticolonial struggles. He was a freedom fighter and a scientist, who held the firm conviction that the hope of mankind lay in a scientific study of history, which must be informed by the study of man, sociology. Sarkar revolutionized modern sociology by reconstructing the field as the scientific investigation of the *whole* of man as a social, psychological, political, and historically constituted being, and centered its scope on the human striving for freedom. As such, he broke epistemically with Europe in the throes of positivist, determinist philosophies of man and science. He not only championed the demands of Young Asia, but theorized a Critical Philosophy necessary for a colonized Asia to understand itself and chart its future. Finally, he studied the sociological content of the Indian revolution, the revolutionary remaking of society through the transformation of the ordinary human being, whose path toward, and vision of, modernity is distinctly different from that of Europe.

### **An epistemic break in modern sociology**

Sociology in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is generally associated with the thoughts of British and French empiricists Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and others. The essential aspect of Comte's scientific framework was that: the real, external world of natural and human phenomena, can be known, *in its entirety*, by our internal sensations, feelings, theories, in short, by our *attitudes*. He proceeded from the general attitude of Europe of his time – shaped on the one hand by the brief period of the liberal revolution that began with the Renaissance and culminated in the French revolution of the last century, and the experience of slavery and colonialism on the other. The unprecedented success in establishing the largest empire on Earth, the industrial revolution, the trans Atlantic slave trade, and colonialism, demanded the attitude that the hard-earned liberal principle, the inherent worth of the individual human being, was compatible with Empire and degradation of dark humanity. Therefore, the general attitude of Europe, white supremacy, could not afford to study the human being, because it would reveal the humanity of darker races. Comte, thereby, sought to study Society as an abstraction of human life and action, determined entirely by 'laws of nature' akin to classical physics, laws of social institutions. His scientific framework insisted that the general *attitude*, that human beings are unworthy of study, *implied* that human beings are *impossible* to study, systematically, coherently, scientifically. This epistemology, Comte's positivism, established the first scientific white supremacist sociology. He claimed, without studying human beings of his own or other

civilizations, that the history of human civilization was neatly categorized into ‘theological’, ‘metaphysical’ and ‘positive’ stages. He based his claim on the history of empire in Europe, from the Holy Roman Empire to the White Supremacist Empire, when Europe had reached the epitome of human development characterized by the supremacy of ‘scientific’ experience.

A relatively young civilization, Europe had still been figuring out basic civilizational questions of unity of human beings in spite of differences in colors of hair and eyes and such. White supremacy theorized this primitive attitude into the modern concept of race, and produced a Spencer, who went on to posit ‘social Darwinism’ – the biology-informed white supremacist sociology. His science further inspired natural sciences in phrenology and eugenics. Finally, Durkheim canonized his precursors’ methodology into a distinct sanitized field of scientific enquiry after collective ‘social facts’, with no place for, or theory of, the individual human being who constitutes society.

Sarkar was a revolutionary who found this affront on humanity unacceptable. As a science, he saw it as woefully inadequate to comprehend the complexity of the time - colonized Asia breaking into modernity. The anticolonial movement demanded, and produced, a new type of human being who must believe in his own individual worth. That belief must be based on knowledge, on scientific study of Asian human beings, and their capacity for revolutionary change. Asserting that sociology must begin with a correct understanding of the human personality, he wrote:

*It is not nature, region or geography that in the last analysis determines man’s destiny. It is the human will, man’s energy, that recreates the topography and natural forces, humanizes the earth and spiritualizes the geography. Then, again, it is not the group, the clan, the nation or the society that ultimately forces the individual to submit to the social milieu, the group moves, the tradition, and the status quo. It is rather the individual personality that compels the moves to change and the milieu to break, that subverts status quo and reforms tradition.<sup>1</sup>*

Sarkar was an organic intellectual. He saw intellectual activity as the lifeworld of all human beings, and especially the poor whose daily life involves the scientific assessment of his conditions, and informs his aspirations. He radically recenters science and scientific thought on the human potential of ordinary lives. In a series of conversations with his students, he said:

*To be human is to think. Therefore, every human being is a philosopher, a scientist...Literacy is not a precondition for political franchise, because every human being is a political scientist. The illiterate reasons daily between right and wrong, in the workings of one’s locale or health or one’s livelihood. Therefore, I see no difference between the so-called educated and the illiterate...The only measure of man lies in experience, in work. The intellectual writes, the ironworker works iron, the potter works clay, the weaver weaves cloth, so on. Work builds the mind of man, therefore it is the worker who is educated.<sup>2</sup>*

It is this innate conviction in the worth of the human being, that Sarkar’s sociology proceeds from. In his methodological development and ideological maturity, he was influenced by the German continental school, especially Kant, Fichte and Hegel. Kant’s revolutionary idea was

that the external world of natural and human reality could only be *partially* known by our attitudes (phenomena), but there are aspects of the world whose knowledge may be incomprehensible to our current attitudes (noumena). This was the starting point of Hegel's dialectical science, which learned from the scientific experience of the liberal revolution, that human knowledge perpetually advances human attitudes. Therefore our sense of the world interacts with, and is informed by, the world in-itself. Sarkar further found Kant's conception of Man as a moral agent, not overdetermined by natural, scientific laws, as a step forward in human knowledge, a 'transvaluation of values'. Sarkar's sociology thus involves the scientific search for principles of social organization, a search that must be informed by the study of the individual human personality. The human personality can be known, partly, and our sense, our attitude toward human personality, ever approaches fuller knowledge.

### **A Critical philosophy of Emerging Asia**

For Asia, colonialism ushered in a unique period in her long history, when military, political, and economic domination was sustained by an entire system of philosophy and science. The white supremacist sociology of Europe paved the way for the Oriental school of social philosophy, whose principal task was to scientifically theorize non-white civilizations in their entirety – their religions, social systems, culture, philosophy, science – so as to justify their subjugation. The Oriental school concluded, in simple terms, that Asia was a civilization of retreat from life and struggle, in Comte's 'metaphysical' stage, whose only path to modernity lay in a rejection of their civilizational achievements, and aspiring instead to the standards of Europe. Sarkar proudly asserted that the futurists of Young Asia must discard this 'entire scientific machinery', and free themselves from the delusion that the standards of Europe were anything but a testament to Asia's degradation. His theorizing of a Critical Philosophy for Young Asia must be seen as part of the revolutionary consciousness of the Indian people of his time, whose fight for freedom involved a cultural renaissance, a re-evaluation of their civilization on their own terms, and the creation of modern revolutionary art and science rooted in civilizational achievements. His Critical Philosophy proclaims that:

*If it is possible to generalize the diverse intellectual currents among the Turks, Egyptians, Persians, Hindus, Chinese, and Japanese of the twentieth century into any suitable formula, probably it should be called the "critique of Occidental Reason".<sup>3</sup>*

Sarkar believed in the fundamental unity of all humanity - therefore a science, 'Occidental Reason', which "proves" the opposite, must be discarded. He identified the principal contradictions of empiricist sociology and the Oriental school in its comparative, interpretive, and chronological methodology, which must give way for new theory. First, the scientific method must compare the same *class* of facts, whereas Europe's empiricists "compare the superstitions of the Orient with the rationalism of the Occident, while they ignore the rationalism of the Orient and suppress the superstitions of the Occident." Second, he rejected the psychological interpretation of the same class of social facts in Europe, which in Asia were interpreted as civilizational characteristics. He saw that the epistemology of empiricist sociology was being deployed for an anthropological purpose - to theorize Asian civilization in a way such that colonialism was compatible with the liberal doctrine of man. Therefore, Asian civilization was



'proved' to be passive, mystical, 'spiritual' and unconcerned with Freedom in this life. Finally, Sarkar found the final fundamental flaw of 'Occidental Reason' in its inability to properly conceptualize *Time* - Europe's inability to assess the nature of change in its society before and after the industrial revolution, a period that saw the revolutionary transformation of all its social institutions, mores and attitudes. The Critical Philosophy of Young Asia must study the development of societies, social institutions and ideas in movement, as they change with time, in response to the changing world. It cannot afford to doubt the fallibility of Europe and empire, because it is informed by history, before geography was invented.

Sarkar saw in Occidental Reason, a narrow 'rational' empiricism upheld by an imperial world order, the ultimate justification of liberalism as the most advanced system of thought. The ideological history of the West had reached a peculiar point where an entire philosophical system, over a hundred years old, was no longer critically examined – instead it was bolstered by the largest empire in the world. Instead of facing the contradiction between the liberal philosophy of man and slavery and colonialism, the doctrine of white supremacy was invented and sustained by new theory and science. The only logical outcome therefore was the rationalization that the ends of empire *must* be that of liberalism. At the turn of World War I, with the defeat of Germany and czarist Russia as imperial competitors to England, he wrote:

*Nay, democracy has thus been granted a safe asylum among the children of men! For, in sooth, is not the expansion of Britain in naval power, commerce, colonies, and protectorates, or those new-fangled mandatories tantamount to the conquest of liberalism, liberty and law on earth?...When therefore the bullion power of the United States determined to enter the lists of the Armageddon as the St. John the Baptist of world democracy, on what other political psychology could the quixotic adventure be based except on the postulate that the world is safe for democracy, civilization and humanity as long as it is safe for the British Empire?<sup>4</sup>*

Today, the unraveling of the world order is the West crumbling under the weight of this contradiction, with humanity asserting itself on the threshold of a new stage. As Western imperialism seeks to destabilize and control Asia in a desperate attempt to delay its demise, it still does so as the bastion of liberalism and liberal democracy. The war-weary world however looks toward Asia to show the way forward toward Peace and genuine democracy. This calls for the working out of a new philosophical system, a new theory of Man, which is not only incompatible with war but which can create new values, new aspirations, new meaning for Man. Sarkar's demand for Young Asia rings truer than ever today:

*Humanity is in the sorest need of an emancipated Asia, independent of foreign control, unhampered in any legitimate line of activity. Every inch of Asian soil has to be placed under a sovereign state of the Asian race, no matter whether sovietic-communal, republican, monarchial, democratic or autocratic.<sup>4</sup>*

*Only then, in the event of Asia recovering its natural rights from the temporary aggressors and illegitimate usurpers, will sanity prevail in the deliberations of the great Peace Council convened by the Parliament of Man.<sup>3</sup>*

## The Double Quest for Modernity

Sarkar's lifework was an indispensable part of the Indian revolution because he studied the Indian mind in development from ancient to modern times. He theorized its essence as an 'eternal double quest' – of self-expression and assertion of its civilizational contributions, in a dialectical relationship with *vishwa-shakti*, world forces. His historical and scientific investigation of Indian civilization, its religions, social systems, philosophy and science, was matched only by his tireless efforts to introduce and critique modern philosophical systems, science, sociology, economic theories and political philosophies. A career begun with the National Council of Education during the *Swadeshi* movement, his study of and travels to China, Europe and America led him to establish the Bengali Institute of Sociology, the Bengali Asia Academy, and the Bengali Institute of American Culture. The task he set for himself and the future was the emancipation of the Indian mind, rising from colonialism, to finally examine its own civilization and the modern world on its own terms, free from the ideological assault of the West.

If the high task of Asia is to answer humanity's call for renewal today, what is the contribution of the Indian mind, the high duty of its eternal 'double quest'? It is in the working out of its unique civilizational contribution to the modern revolutionary process, the unique sociological content of the Indian revolution in a transforming world. Sarkar identified in Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent non-cooperation "nothing but the eternal double quest of modern India." By this he did not simply mean that Gandhian categories were uniquely Indian, but rather that Gandhi's method was uniquely Indian, in its scientific synthesis of civilizational touchstones with ideas of modernity.

Gandhi's revolutionary interpretation of the Gita as the civilizational call for selfless action, his revival of the traditional spinning-wheel, *charkha*, and his complete identification with the masses, brought the Indian people in contact with modern ideas of non-cooperation with the State, dignity of work, and the inherent worth of the individual human being. The ancient philosophical concept of *ahimsa* was brought into modernity, by squarely facing modern Man under slavery, and forged the non-violent method in the crucible of apartheid South Africa. Similarly, *satyagraha*, acceptance of Truth as the highest law, was transformed into a modern political method through its revolutionary demand for non-cooperation with unjust laws. It was this 'double quest' in Gandhi's method, a philosophy in action which was India's civilizational answer to imperialism, that accords Gandhi a unique place among revolutionary leaders the world over. Sarkar wrote:

*Most political leaders of the world have their day and cease to be. But one of the few that have a claim to rank as a leader of mankind for all ages is Gandhi.*<sup>5</sup>

Gandhi's eternal contribution to modern revolutionary science is the complete identification of the revolutionary transformation of society with the transformation of the individual. The non-violent method was a uniquely modern scientific contribution because the most degraded, and disarmed, human being, for the first time, had a direct role in the revolutionary process. Sarkar saw this in Gandhi's "place as a maker of character." The courage to rely on one's own convictions, to look at violence in the eye and to see in it the moral undoing of white civilization,

which were exemplified in Gandhi, was infectious because he revealed the possibility of moral transformation for every individual. Sarkar notes:

*Nothing, again, can be more heartening and reassuring than for a young man to be told that “true morality consists not in following the beaten track, but in finding out the true path for ourselves and in fearlessly following it.” Individuality is the keynote of Gandhian ethics and it is on this basis that men and women are taught to obey the call of duty.<sup>5</sup>*

### **The Futurism of Rising Asia**

While political freedom has been achieved in most of Asia, the anticolonial movements of Asia are unfinished, because its futuristic questions demand our answers today. What political philosophies will shape tomorrow's world in the broadest vision of genuine freedom and democracy? What will be the emerging civilizational touchstones of Asia, that are worthy of modern Asian men and women? On what terms will Asia see itself, and the rest of the world?

Let us deal with these questions, with the hindsight of history and in light of the 'double quest'. First, even though Sarkar was a dialectical thinker and a fighter for the dignity of the working poor, he saw Marxian historical materialism, the overdetermination of human nature by the laws of political economy, to suffer from Europe's positivism. Moreover, he could not accept the unscientific application of Marxian categories to the revolutionary demands of Asia. Even though he championed the Russian Revolution as the herald of a new stage of human freedom, he wrote:

*The class struggle of the West thus becomes anti-alienism or race struggle in the East: because for all practical purposes capitalism is there embodied in the foreign rulers and foreign captains of industry. Until foreign domination is overthrown, the socialists and labor leaders of Asia must have to advocate the tenets of nationalism, backed by indigenous capitalism if need be. Asia's struggle with her own capitalists is of course not in abeyance for the present, but will be accelerated as soon as the foreign incubus is subverted.<sup>4</sup>*

Inconvenient as it may be, we are not in a post-white supremacist world, and 'foreign incubus' has not been subverted. The political philosophy shaping the world transformation of tomorrow cannot afford to be a dogmatic application of Marxian categories, because conditions of the modern world have progressed beyond 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

What is more, ideological incubus runs high where theories, systems of thought and philosophies manufactured within the Empire, by its ideological vanguard produced by the western University, carry remarkable currency among parts of the Indian intelligentsia. Sarkar himself has been a victim of such onslaught, where his critique of European thought is seen as an ideological justification of post-colonial theories. Post-colonial thought, and its close cousin postmodernism, claims to reject the 'entire scientific machinery' of white supremacy, but instead rejects everything but. It naturally and politely rejects white supremacist thought of the past, and in turn propounds white supremacist assumptions of today. Like Comte's epistemology, postmodernism asserts that human beings are mutually fundamentally unknowable, and

therefore incapable of arriving at new theory and Truth. Instead of simply white and darker races, post modern theories abstract human beings into mutually exclusive categories of identity – gender, sexual, racial, ethnic and combinations thereof – whose paths to liberation are distinct and a matter of great academic debate. It further, in practice, does great violence to the idea of the individual human being, by insisting that these categories of identity overdetermine human nature. Of course, its objective is to incapacitate the individual from renewing himself, to see himself as part of humanity and fight for its freedom. It does so by obscuring white supremacy in its *current* forms, which sees the white poor as uncultured, self-asserting Asia as the greatest threat to democracy and human rights, and the African American poor as an incorrigible mass, ungrateful for the 'progress' that has been gifted to them. While Sarkar noted the "alleged pessimism of the East" of the Orientalists, postmodernism alleges pessimism concerning human nature *in toto*, by insisting that further human knowledge, and hence human freedom, is impossible. The futurists of modern Asia will have to discard post-colonial theories, and squarely shoulder the problems of modernity in the last stages of neocolonial domination, by engaging with their civilizational contributions to modernity.

Finally, rising Asia will have to rediscover its civilizational friendships and renew them for modern times. The historic ties between India and China were modernized through Tagore's visits to China last century, and the efforts of a generation of Chinese scholars such as Tan Yun-Shan rekindled the spirit of civilizational brotherhood during the anticolonial movement. The Bandung spirit and the Non-Aligned Movement similarly answered the call for civilizational unity during the Cold War period. Today, BRICS is the first step for Asia to come together in assessing the transition from the unipolar moment. However, this moment calls for Asia to understand and assess the white mind, its attitudes and assumptions concerning human nature, and its assessment of itself. In this, Asia will have to see Black America, the only dark civilization that has lived with white civilization for four hundred years, and watched their ways, and whose struggle for freedom created a new kind of human being and fundamentally transformed American society. James Baldwin, the great revolutionary thinker, wrote:

*My days are not their days.*

*My ways are not their ways.*

*I would not think of them,*

*one way or the other,*

*did not they so grotesquely*

*block the view*

*between me and my brother.<sup>6</sup>*

In order to see in world humanity its brother, Asia will have to learn from Black America, and be able to see its peninsular civilization, Europe, as her young, misguided, brother who may finally be forced to come into his own.

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# Interview with Dr. Anthony Monteiro on the American Elections



*We are publishing a transcript of an interview with Dr. Anthony Monteiro, Du Boisian scholar and founder of the Saturday Free School, Philadelphia on the recent American presidential elections and the re-election of Donald Trump.*

**Raju:** Okay, so, hello everyone. I am Raju from the Intercivilizational Dialogue Project and today we are going to interview Dr. Tony Monteiro who is based in Philadelphia. Dr Monteiro is a Du Boisian scholar and founder of the Saturday Free School for Philosophy and Black Liberation, based in Philadelphia. I wanted to mention at the outset that, this year, the Saturday Free School is doing The Year of James Baldwin to commemorate the centenary of the great writer and philosopher, James Baldwin. The purpose of this interview is to try and understand the American situation which the whole world is watching but not fully understanding and we want to get into the understanding of the situation with some depth. The other day I was thinking that there's so much commentary now on the internet, particularly with all these people commenting on geopolitics and everybody has an opinion on what's going on, but I think very little of it references the American people. Particularly, I think what we want to do today is also understand the nature of what's happening in America from the standpoint of the American people. So I want to begin by asking you, Dr. Monteiro, about the American elections. As we know, last month, Donald Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States and in many ways it was an unprecedented election. And partly, the narrative coming out of the American Media has been so at odds with the actual facts about the election, that it's a little

hard for people to understand how this happened. So we will get into the specifics but to begin with I just wanted to ask you how, broadly, you saw the result of this election, and what it says about American society in this time.

**Dr. Monteiro:** Yes, well, thank you very much, Raju and your colleagues, for having me. Even though the election was over a month ago, it is still very current because, from the standpoint of the elites and from the standpoint of the American people, we are all trying to understand what it all meant, what this portends for the future, and we're even still trying to get a deeper understanding of precisely what happened at the level of various classes and social groups in the United States. By that I mean: Was there a vast and profound political realignment? One where the working class, which had been since the 1930s, and the Great Depression, and Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency had been securely in the camp of the Democratic Party; and now the majority of working people and lower middle class people are in the Donald Trump camp. I hesitate to say the Republican party, because this election while, at the level of appearances, seems to be the old "two-party system", "lesser of two evils" scenario, in fact, in a deeper sense, what Donald Trump represented, and he acknowledged this, was a movement against the elites, including the elites who he fought to take control of the Republican party. This is unprecedented and so we would have to call it a political realignment. But I very much agree with you in your emphasis upon how the people and the working people and the lower middle classes— young people— of course black people— saw this and what was their political behavior and how are they seeing things since the election. These are the pregnant questions for us to answer and too often, or most times, the mainstream media which emphasizes elite discourse and elite opinion does not get to this very granular, very grassroots level and certainly wishes not to look at class and class division in this election. Now, they, the elites, speak cryptically most times. In other words, whether it is intentional or not, whether it's a consequence of their world view, which predisposes them to be turned off by any kind of vast changes. Frankly they're turned off to the working class itself and so they look at things from that angle. Somehow they're shocked on the one side but they're also, the elites that is, very very angry at the working people and the working class of this country for having rejected them— the elites. People who are not familiar with the United States, or the mainstream media, will say— well look, Dr Monteiro, you're exaggerating, it's not that bad, the elites of the Democratic Party are for democracy, they're liberals, they're progressives, and what you're talking about is a populist movement that is leaning towards the right and towards fascism and authoritarianism and they happened to win this time because the liberal elites did not communicate well to the working class. Well, if you believe that, I have a bridge I will sell you in Brooklyn or I will buy the Taj Mahal. That's not hardly the case. This was a rebellion against a ruling class that had abandoned the nation. But in abandoning the nation it abandoned the working class. For most Americans and I know for an Indian audience a South Asian or Asian audience this is hard to understand. For most Americans, especially for most working Americans, this society is a dark and tragic landscape. So much so that what most people would assume about American society— a racially divided society— most white people being deeply anchored in white supremacy and most black people being marginalized and so on. Well that may have been what defined American society 50 or 60 years ago, but when we look at behavior, collective behavior, political behavior of groups and you look at their racial identities, what you see is at the level of



the working class, the political behavior and even political consciousness of black and white working people and poor is almost identical even when they don't know each other personally. You get people who live in a de-industrialized small city somewhere in Western Pennsylvania, that is majority white, and where industry has left that city or that town years ago, and then you get black urban dwellers who were poor and unemployed because of the same processes of de-industrialization and on and on and on. They don't know each other personally but they do know each other because their conditions are so similar and I would argue that they behave politically the same.

This is highly important from the standpoint of what we would call radical theory or communist theory of class struggle. Well, what is the high point of class consciousness in Marx's Theory? It is when workers recognize that they are in the same class, hence, in the same situation, and have the same struggle, to conduct and to wage, and therefore move in all kinds of ways, that we don't often see, towards class unity. We saw that demonstrated in this election. It was extraordinary, and it was more than, and went beyond Donald Trump. And it was not as, you know, most mainstream commentators would have it— well, people voted on the economy and inflation and the border. That was just the smallest, most obvious part of it. Working people voted in essence to reject the ruling elite and once you take the results of this election, which I'm still trying to study— all the data is not in, especially in Philadelphia, we're trying to understand it better— but once you account for everything, the vote, but then the polling data leading up to the vote, where 70% of people who were polled in what we call credible, or A+ polls— polls that are generally reliable and so on— 70% of the people polled said the American government must be fundamentally reformed; 15% of them, which in the American population is about 45 million people, said that the existing government must be torn down and a new social and economic system built up. We have never seen that in American polling data. Never. So when you use that kind of as a backdrop, and then you look at the vote, that backdrop of the government must be changed, fundamentally reformed or torn down and then you correlate that to the vote- it makes all the sense in the world. So there's more I could say but I'll let you...

**Raju:** Yeah, there are many things to follow up on there and kind of bring out. Well, to begin with, maybe I'll just start by asking you about what you were saying about the emerging class consciousness among the people. I think that maybe you could clarify a couple of things a bit more: one is the nature of the American ruling elite, because a lot of people see it as the Democratic party and the Republican Party and I think when you're speaking about the revolt or this emerging class consciousness as a revolt against the elite, maybe you could sort of bring that out more— what the revolt is against? The other thing in particular was the question of the African-American people, because so much of the media narrative paints Donald Trump as a racist, a fascist, and all of these kinds of things. That's the way he's described. So I think a lot of people are unable to understand why then would you have significant proportions of African-Americans either voting for him or not showing up to vote.

**Dr. Monteiro:** This is one of the most profound outcomes of this election. The US ruling elite are defined not by whether they got money but they are defined by their relationship to State power. The Democratic Party had increasingly become the party of the State and all of those forces

within American society, within the US ruling elite, who have an investment in upholding the State and the State power of the ruling elite were in the Democratic Party and were anti-Trump. What is extraordinary is that given their particular concern and I don't know how this would play out in India, but here control of the propaganda, information, and ideological universes is an essential part of State power. In other words the American State is not merely, and I would even argue, solely, a blunt instrument of class control. I think if you study the American State and American political processes, the ruling class of the United States which is probably the most sophisticated in the world recognizes that to govern and rule a nation like the United States in a complicated world situation, they have to win and control the commanding heights of information, ideology philosophy, art, entertainment and so on. And they do. But what is so deep about this election is that with all they said about Trump, working people rejected their line, their narrative. In other words, this huge investment in the ideological control of society— and it is huge, it is almost airtight, I mean it's sometimes frustrating that alternative ideas and art and culture and so on are rarely heard through this tight control. However, and this is what research will have to explain, working people did not accept the ruling elites' branding and labeling of Trump and that is part of the Great frustration and anxiety of the ruling class. They asked— What? The working people have rejected our view of the world? Our view of Trump? Better yet, our best experts in political science and sociology and economics have said that Trump would be a disaster for the country and the working people rejected that? I mean, the consequences of this are enormous. That is not to say, and I want to be clear, I don't want anybody to get it mistaken, I'm not saying that we're looking at a revolutionary situation. I would argue maybe a pre-revolutionary situation. What will happen as we go forward depends upon a lot of things. And we'll have to see. But in this election the ruling class, its political framing of the election, and so on, as a struggle against fascism and “Trump is the closest thing to Hitler that we've ever seen”, that he is a white supremacist etc— well, look at the results of the election.

Now, the African-American people. And I still believe— and this is not based upon what happened last year or 10 years ago or even 50 years ago— we're looking at a long history of the formation of the American proletariat and the central role of the black worker in this. So, any analysis that does not include a specific understanding of their consciousness and where black people stand will be limited and superficial. I can speak about Philadelphia because I'm more familiar with the data here. But I'm certain too in big cities where black people constitute either a majority or a major part of the population— such as Detroit, such as Cleveland, such as Kansas City, Missouri, St Louis, Missouri— these formerly industrial cities. If you look at Philadelphia and here we have to, you know, break the data down to specific groups— black men, the poorest demographic in American society, except for black children— black children are the poorest demographic, the second poorest demographic are black males, especially young black men, that is under 45, so to speak. In Philadelphia, 20 to 25% of them who voted, voted for Trump. Now, Philadelphia is a city that is controlled by a very strong political machine, the Democratic machine. They can get out the vote, can determine the vote etc. and it's done this over a long period of time, many decades. So in this city, everything was done to keep the Trump vote down. They knew, the Democrats knew, some months ago that they were losing the black male vote. This in itself was historic and if we study it properly can tell us a lot about consciousness.

But then another 20% of registered black male voters did not vote, which in effect was a vote for Trump. One could extrapolate from this that 45% of black male voters— because you got a big part of the population that does not even register to vote, put those aside— of the registered voters 45% of black males either did not vote or voted for Trump and the “did not votes” were a vote for Trump, in effect. Well, if the Democratic Party loses the black vote, or more specifically, the black male vote, that party has become a spent force. It is a party that does not have a mandate from the people to govern. The Democratic party had built itself up as the party that has inherited and is the banner-holder of the Civil Rights Movement, and they created all these myths, all this propaganda— that, for example, Barack Obama was the new Martin Luther King Jr., well that's a joke— so this idea that the Democratic party is the Civil Rights Movement in a political form. Well, we're seeing that large numbers of black people, especially black males, didn't accept that, and they were prepared to vote against the Democratic Party. And they, in effect, decided that the state of Pennsylvania— which turned out to be a key state, a central, deciding state— was lost to the Democratic Party because of the black vote, and the black male vote in Philadelphia. This trend will not be reversed.

**Raju:** I think one of the things that you have said in the past is the nature of the crisis in American society. I think maybe it would also help if you could speak to what you're describing— this pre-revolutionary situation, this rejection of the working class, of the ruling elite— just what the nature of this crisis in American society is, what has gotten people to this point, where they can no longer stand this, that we have to have to reject this ruling elite— so if you could just speak a little bit about that.

**Dr. Monteiro:** Well, Raju, I think, you know, your emphasis upon crisis is the proper emphasis. You cannot come to the United States, you cannot talk about American society without talking about the crisis writ large. This is a society convulsed by crisis on every level, and these are crises that have to be put at the doorstep of a ruling elite who so structured the economy of the United States as to make it objectively an anti-working class. In other words, the 40 or 50 years of deindustrialization, the 40 or 50 years of neoliberal financial policy— in other words, policies especially after the 2008 economic financial crisis— that favor the largest banks, hedge funds, money markets— anything that is connected to the financial oligarchs— is prioritized in this economy. In 2008, you bailed out the banks, you bailed out the large mortgage companies, but the people who lost their homes because of what the big banks and mortgage companies and others did; the people who lost their homes never got them back. If there was a downward cycle of impoverishment and distress for the working class before 2008, it accelerated afterwards. In a certain sense, it is the downward pressure, the downward spiraling of the conditions of life of the working class, in general, that explains the anger and outrage, the new levels of consciousness of the working people— and in fact, as I said before, over 50% of working people live either in or near poverty. I think this might exceed India's rate of poverty, or come close to it. I mean, you know, often people see the United States through the lens of Hollywood movies, of celebrities, of pop culture, of advertisement, of the most recent Apple iPhone, and all of this type of thing, but they don't see it through the lens of the people. Cities have been hollowed out and gentrified, where the poor and working class cannot live in neighborhoods they once occupied, and they've been redesigned for the elite, for the educated, for universities, and so on. That has

angered people. People can't afford to buy a house, a home, they cannot afford to send their children to University, or college. This is a society beset by crisis on every side— a general crisis of a system as it were. This cannot be overemphasized. That's why, you know, we could talk about the growing class unity, or class behavior, by working people— which is the positive— but then on the other side, this society has every potential to break off into a civil war, provoked by the ruling elite. And they would love nothing more than to have a race war break out in the United States. Although in this time and this is very important. If you went back 50 or so years ago, right after the assassination of Martin Luther King, there was talk of race war all over the place. Many young people, including myself, said we have to prepare for urban Guerilla warfare, we have to train ourselves to fight a race war in the cities. Today you don't even hear a mention of anything such as a race war, but we do hear talk of a civil war, and a civil war that looks a lot like a class war. This is where the question of the US State has to be brought into the discussion. Who has a right to command state power? Whose definition of democracy should be actualized? Should we have a new democracy, a people's democracy, a state of the people rather than a state of the elites? These questions are not remote from the situation and are on the table and in the minds of millions of Americans, as we speak.

You know, I try to follow European politics and, you know, the political crisis in France— it's almost like a tiptoe through the tulips compared to the depth of this crisis in the United States. The political crisis in Germany— you know, oh my God, the Schulz government will have to step down— we had always thought of Europe as a center of class consciousness. No one ever thought the United States would be at the forefront of this. But the political crisis of the United States makes France and Germany and other European countries— Great Britain— look very shallow compared to what we are experiencing. Because in the United States, and I'll end this part here, in the United States, in ways that have not yet been fully articulated, the question of state power and what form of democracy will rule in the United States is definitely on the minds of people.

**Raju:** I think that's a good point to you know because I wanted to ask you a little bit about how you see things going forward, and I wanted to ask you on two sides— on one, you know, there's been a lot of discussion about Trump's cabinet appointments and how you see what he's trying to do given his experience with his past presidency and the kind of people he is appointing, like Tulsi Gabbard or this Department of Governmental Efficiency he started with Vivek Ramaswami and Elon Musk and so on and so forth— that's on one side, and on the other side this question that you've raised about the possibility of civil war in society— do you also see the possibility of a peaceful transition to a new kind of democracy and if you could in that context speak about the role of the American left, whatever it is today.

**Dr. Monteiro:** It's a lot of questions! Too much! First of all, Donald Trump's cabinet appointments. The most discouraging part of them are all of these Zionist neocons who, in many ways, will not have much power. Donald Trump will make his own foreign policy, I think. So Marco Rubio will not have much to do. Maybe as an advisor, maybe as an administrator of the Department of State but I don't expect him to be there long by the way. You take his appointment for the Department of Defense— obviously a person without experience— and almost Donald Trump's way of saying, you know, the hell with this vast bureaucracy of War.

Hegseth, the guy that he's appointed for that, he's appointed to deconstruct the Department of Defense and fire a lot of four-star generals, the top generals. But beyond that, he will not have a lot to do with military policy. Again, Donald Trump will be the final word on that. In fact, if you want to understand the way Donald Trump sees himself governing, it's more Napoleonic— where Napoleon was the state and the state was him, or the government was him. Donald Trump sees himself as this huge historically transformative figure. Especially in foreign policy, he will be the decider. So I would not get immediately upset although I'm concerned. What does this mean for Donald Trump's foreign policy especially in the wake of the collapse of the Syrian State and Israel's genocide and attempt to annex all of these Arab lands? So that's a concern, a deep concern. But I could come back to that— I have some thoughts on that. But then, Tulsi Gabbard— at best, an anti-war, anti-interventionist Democrat as a congress person, who becomes a Republican or a MAGA supporter, a Donald Trump supporter— to appoint her as the head of the Department of National Intelligence? Now, for those who don't know— people probably have heard of the CIA, the FBI and a whole slew of other intelligence agencies that arose after the 9/11 attack upon the United States— all of them are housed in one department. In other words, one could think of this department as one of the commanding heights of state power because it includes all of the intelligence— military intelligence, global intelligence, the FBI and so on— to put her in charge of that rather than someone who is connected to the Deep State is literally to say that the Trump Administration intends to wage a struggle against the Deep State. I know a lot of people say— well, there is no Deep State. Yes, there is one in this country. It is the permanent government, it is the permanent military intelligence state that is so huge— at least as symbolic of the intentions and the political attitude of Trump towards the Deep State and those who command the highest positions within the state— that is breathtaking. The appointment of Matt Gates, who had to step down, replaced by this woman, Pam Bondi, who I don't know a lot about, but a trump loyalist, to head the Department of Justice— which means that Trump will attempt to carry out his election platform, to go after and prosecute and seek revenge against those forces in the state who went after him during and after his first presidency. To use the power of the state, and especially of what they call the justice department, which includes the FBI, a lot of the investigative agencies of the state, to use the leadership of that department against the state is an act of enormous courage— I find it almost breathtaking— and you put that alongside Tulsi Gabbard, who the mainstream media said is a member of an Indian yoga cult. There's a deep Indian connection in a lot of this, by the way, which should make the Indians proud! Then to get a guy named Kash Patel— connected to the Patels of India— and make him the head of the FBI. He wrote a book called *Gangster Government* where in the appendix of it, he lists all of the people that he will go after. Now it's a drama which you would almost only expect to see in a Hollywood comedy sometime. But this is what is happening. So if you set aside, for example, Marco Rubio, the Secretary of State, who won't have much power to decide foreign policy, and you look at what can only be described as an assault upon the Deep State— the permanent government, the state that has gone after democracy and after individuals who have fought for it including going back to the McCarthy period and people like Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois and the Communist Party and so on. So when Trump says that his government will seek retribution and revenge for what the ruling elite has done to the working class— these are my words, he didn't put it this way— is to call it a paradigm shift I think is to miss the depth of what is going on. It's never happened in the United States. So much so that Joe

Biden, who had said he would not pardon his son if he were found guilty, pardoned his son, because of the fear that Trump and his people are coming after him. And then preemptively pardon, or wants to pardon a whole list of other people— some of whom don't want a pardon, they said I didn't do anything wrong. Biden said just in case you did, I want to give you some protection.

**Raju:** You know the other day I was listening to, you know, one of these commentaries and first of all, a lot of people are panicking with his cabinet appointments and I heard one person describe them as revolutionary. It was interesting because she was having a back and forth with her host who was saying— well, I don't think you can call this revolutionary but she went— I forget the name of the woman, I'll have to look it up— but she said that we've never seen anything like this and these are revolutionary cabinet appointments.

**Dr. Monteiro:** Yeah I would agree with that. You know, in a lot of ways, when you think of it, let us say a Left or revolutionary government took power in the United States— would they do much different with the justice department or the department of National Intelligence? I doubt it. So in a sense, and it's according to how you define revolution and how far this will go, but even in the most classic definition of revolution— let us say Lenin's definition— you break down, you undo the old State and build a new one. I'm not saying we're on the cusp of that but we're moving very close to that. Now when you ask the question of the Left, the American left— and you know the definition of what is Left is so amorphous that it's not even a definition. You know, everybody from Hillary Clinton to the Revolutionary Communist Party, or the Communists, but whatever, you know, we're all the Left. And the way they defined it, the way the Left defined it, was we're in a united front against fascism and this is something like George Dimitrov back in the 1930s— it was really a fake narrative that influenced nothing and no one, especially the working class. But what it showed is that a lot of what is called the Left, from Social Democrats, to Communists, to Liberals and Progressives had sided with the Democratic party, in spite of Biden's funding of this genocide in Gaza, in spite of the fact— and I would propose this to your listeners— in spite of the fact that it was Biden who unleashed the dogs of war which have brought us closer to nuclear war than we've ever been. He unleashed the dogs of war and a second term or a term of Kamala Harris would have only increased that.

The war danger is greater now than ever and if you were talking of lesser two evils, one would have to say that Trump was the least danger of global war. In fact, he spoke out against it— not clearly enough, not unambiguously enough— but enough to suggest that he wanted to pull back from war, pull back from an economy reliant upon the military industrial complex and because of the profits of war would get us in war wherever we could find one to get into. But the Left, which should have known better— the Communists, the Social Dems, the Progressives— to side with Kamala Harris or the Biden Administration was an act of betrayal that went beyond what the German Social Democrats did in 1914 in supporting war bonds for Germany to conduct World War I. This betrayal of the American people, of Peace, of Democracy, of the legacy of Martin Luther King, of Paul Robinson, this betrayal can never be forgotten and I think they will never recover from it. So without a Left— and this raises a whole lot of other questions of political parties, of movements, of consciousness— without a political Left, the working class found its

way to do the right thing. The working class of the United States in their majority are anti-war. We've never known this before, Raju. This is why it's all so breathtaking. The American working class voted against war and in significant ways voted against the Israeli genocide in Gaza. Nobody asked them— well, what did you think of this or that— but if you know them, if you talk to them, it is very obvious that a part of the pro-Trump vote was an anti-war vote. That's why the majority of the youth voted for Trump. I think it was a majority or close to majority, because the youth are generally the most anti-war.

I don't think we have a "Left" in the traditional sense any longer. I think something new will have to be created out of this new moment. How that will take place I don't know. We, in the Saturday Free School, we work in Philadelphia, and to some degree in Chicago, but definitely in Philadelphia. Philadelphia is the sixth largest city in the country, the fifth largest black working class black population in the country. So we will do our part through mobilization, political education, ideological education of the people. But the people are not like sheep. The people have memories. They have consciousness more than at any time in human history. Working people know things, they find ways to get information. The working class can behave and move forward without a "revolutionary party" as previously defined. So the working class went far beyond the Left. The Left is behind the working class even though the left claims to be a vanguard. In fact, most working people overwhelmingly rejected the trade union leaders, which is another unbelievable thing, because what are the trade union leaders— the trade union leaders are connected to the ruling class. They follow that theory— that early 20th century theory of Edward Bernstein— *the more capitalism develops, the more democratic it becomes, and the less necessary is the class conflict*. That's what most trade union leaders hold to. They were rejected. The automobile workers, in their majority, rejected the United Automobile Workers Union. The Teamsters went with Trump and on and on. The black working class rejected the black political class and the black political class is panicking— what do we do? They too are a spent political force. Trade union leaders, spent political force. Black misleadership class, spent political force. The Democratic party, a spent political force. The so-called Left, a spent political force. The Democratic party is in such a crisis that they've kind of formed what we call a circular firing squad— where each side destroys the other. The Democratic party cannot find a basis of unity which means that those forces that command the state cannot find a political solution to the problem of a population that rejects their legitimacy.

**Raju:** The last question that, you know, I wanted to ask you, Dr Monteiro— and then we should wrap this interview up for today, though, you know, you've raised a lot of issues which are going to need more time to, you know, fully discuss and get through— is just how you see the consequences of all of this on the world situation. In particular if you could, you know, talk about the rise of BRICS and we're hearing every day about the situation in West Asia but, you know, whichever way you want to do it, if you could just connect the International and World situation to what's happening in the US.

**Dr. Monteiro:** It's so interesting because, you know, the United States is the major purveyor of war in the world and the European nations and the US cannot imagine a world where they are not hegemonic. They just can't imagine it. To see how this is actualized in the United States is



something to behold and I know a South Asian or Asian, even best informed people, would find it difficult to see how this all works out. Can the United States again be the single hegemonic power in a multi-polar world? In a world where new alliances like BRICS— and the last meeting I think in Kazan, the summit of BRICS which went beyond anything that it had previously done by the way, in Russia, which suggested Russia the so-called rogue regime and Putin as the authoritarian leader; this was the most significant BRICS meeting and maybe the most significant meeting since Bandung, the afroasiatic world, and it announced, this BRICS Summit announced that they would in multiple ways challenge American hegemony and European dominance. And you don't have to go far, you look at the data— BRICS, in terms of the size of the economy, is the largest part of the global economy, going beyond Europe and the EU. Of course, if you throw the United States in it, maybe the two sides become even. But when you put China, and India, and Russia, and Iran, and maybe Saudi Arabia, and Brazil, and South Africa, and maybe Nigeria, and Egypt, and Ethiopia— this is the future. It is irreversible. The future belongs to the darker races of previously colonized people and you don't need to know much more than that to know where the world is going.

However there's a man named Richard Haas, who might not be well known in India/South Asia but he's very influential. He was previously the head of the most important foreign policy think tank in the United States— the Council on Foreign Relations. He retired last year and he gave a retirement interview, where he said that the greatest threat to America's national security does not come from China or Russia or anywhere else, it comes from the American people. Now what was he saying? He says the American people do not accept the direction of foreign policy of the US state. Another way of saying it is what I previously said— the American people are anti-war, war exhausted. I think so much that will happen in the next, let us say, five years, probably less than that of course, will be decided by the American people. Never before— it's hard for me to say never before but the gravity of this cannot be underestimated— the American people who had been rejected in revolutionary theory and revolutionary politics, along with BRICS, along with China, along with all of this, could probably become a deciding factor in War and Peace, in global Democracy, and what the future future will look like. But that means people like myself, and my colleagues, and others will have to do a lot of hard work, because there's going to be an ideological assault upon the masses. Everything will be done to convince them that they need to stay out of global politics, that they don't need to get involved in these things— let the experts handle it. But I think the genie is out of the bottle. This election proved to the working class that they do have power, that they can decide the future. Now, everybody is not thinking the same way, of course. You know 150 million people voted— that's a drop in the bucket compared to the electorate of India— but 150 million people in the most powerful, most war-like nation in the world is qualitatively on a different level and that's what we're looking at. I would just say this— all of us have to be modest, we do not know how this will go forward, we do not know. W.E.B. Du Bois talked about “Law and Chance” and sometimes Chance is a more important factor than Law. I know with you and your colleagues in Bangalore and in India, we try to think about these things on multiple levels of ideology, epistemology, knowledge formation and so on and so forth and we have to continue this. But rather than knowing the future in the sense of knowing how it will come into being, we have to be prepared to fight for the future— and I'd like to make a distinction— to know the future often leads to passivity but to commit to fight for the future means that you don't know exactly how it's going to come into

being, but you have an idea, in a set of broad imaginaries of how we must fight, who and what social forces are necessary to create a future. This is why anyone who's a revolutionary has to be very modest and humble because the people will decide. The people will decide, and the people are capable of deciding and the American people have a capability that very few people ever thought they were capable of, and they are capable. So that's the way I would put it. I can't say what it will be actually, how it will come about, but I know we are on new ground. There are new possibilities— we have to think and imagine differently. There is no substitute for ideological clarity, for knowledge and for taking whatever we know to the people, to live with the people to talk to the people, to share what we know and to learn from the people, most importantly, and I would say that is the landscape that exists in the United States right now, and the challenge for revolutionaries.

**Raju:** Okay, thank you very much, Dr Monteiro. Just to add to what you said at the end, I think that, you know, no matter where you are in the world, it's pretty much impossible to conduct the fight for the future without understanding and knowing some of what you said today and what we got into. Unless we understand what's going on in the US, it's difficult— in a sense, what you were saying, the role of the American people may almost be overdetermining in the fight for the future. So, you know, thank you for coming and giving this interview and, you know, hopefully we'll have another chance to talk again. Thank you.

**Dr. Monteiro:** Thank you.

# On the True Conception of the Philosophy of History

**Brajendranath Seal**

The Subject I have chosen for my paper---Comparative studies in Vaishnavism and Christianity---suggests several important questions, which should be cleared up, before the



mutual relations of the two religions can be fruitfully discussed. In the first place, the comparative method of investigating the sciences relating to the history of the Human Mind requires elucidation and correction, for nothing has done greater mischief in this department of research than the ill conceived and blundering attempts of so many tyroes and 'prentice hands' to build ambitious theories and comprehensive systems on the shifting quicksands of loose analogy and vague generalisation in the name of scientific method. Again, historical comparison such as is here

proposed implies that the objects compared are of co-ordinate rank, and belong more or less to the same stage in the development of human culture. Very few scholars in the West will be prepared to admit that any other religion can bear this relation to Christianity. Their study of the history of Civilisation has resulted in the conviction that all other races and cultures have been a preparation for the Graeco-Romano-Gothic type, which is now the epitome of Mankind, the representative of Universal Humanity, the heir of all the ages. A comparison between Christianity and any other religion must therefore be a comparison between a rudimentary and a developed organism, as, in the investigations of a biological laboratory, the homologist may trace the mature and perfect type of certain animal organs to their abortive rudiments and tentative or experimental forms in fossil remains,---perhaps even to monster births of Nature like the Ornitho-saurus or the Ichthyo-saurus. The hardy 'oriental' who would presume to question this almost axiomatic truth is likely to provoke 'amused' incredulity, if not unmixed erosion. I may at once say that to my mind this 'axiomatic' truth seems to be a mischievous error due to an essentially wrong conception of the philosophy of history and the evolution of culture, and an essentially perverse use of the historico-comparative method, and I therefore proceed to indicate the revision and correction which is now highly necessary, if the historical sciences are to march *pari passu* with the physical group.

It has long been seen that the key to the investigation of the physical, the biological and the psychological sciences is not of much avail for the infinitely more complex and varied

phenomena of the sociological group. An organon, more fruitful than the Aristotelian or the so called Baconian one, has been devised to grapple with the problem in its complexity. Even as transcendental analysis, the calculus of infinitesimals, of variations and of quaternions, must supersede the primitive algebraical analysis, in the investigation of physical phenomena in their subtlest manifestations and as world-worming agencies, so the historic method, the comparative method, and finally the formula of evolution, must banish the primitive Analysis and Synthesis, the primitive Deduction and Induction, in the study of the sociological organism, whether in its statical or dynamical aspects.

These methods have accredited themselves in various ways in the fields of Ethnology Jurisprudence, Politics, Economy, Religion and Language. Minor generalisations and classifications, minor sequences of cause and effect, have been fairly established, and each department has been surveyed with sufficient care to determine the main sections or natural divisions of phenomena. What is more important of all, the historic method with the powerful help of evolution, has made it abundantly clear that the human sciences must be thorough 'historical in character, that every dogma, institution or tradition every code, language, myth or system, has had its history,---its origin, growth and development,---a study of which is essential to a proper understanding of its function in society, its place and meaning and worth.

But this is the utmost that can be said of the achievements of this method. The higher, more general, more fundamental problems in every one of the human sciences remain in a state of chaotic confusion, and furnish subjects for endless controversy, for the solution of which the current formulae of evolution or historic development seem to be hopelessly inept and ill equipped. No one has yet lifted the veil from the origins of the human institutions and arts. The origin and distribution of races, the structure of the primitive family, the origin of property in land and the earliest form of land tenure, the conception of customary law in relation to the Sovereign or the State, the historical relationship of the chief forms of linguistic structure, the source of religion in Animism, Naturalism, or the so called Euhemerism, and the position of the great gods in the history of religious development, the interactions of myth, able and language, and the explanation of their present geographical distribution---these are questions on which diametrically opposed views are held by the chief authorities. The main difficulty is, no doubt, the complexity and interaction of the phenomena, but a great part of the present deadlock is due to an essentially false conception of the method of investigation.

Comparison, in its earlier days, was a crude and loose device scarcely deserving to be ranked as a scientific method. Societies, institutions, creeds, dogmas, rites, laws, languages, myths, in fundamentally distinct stages of development, were recklessly compared, and generalisations framed, or unity of origin asserted, on a basis of indefinite agreement. The havoc which the method thus did in its earlier and cruder form is one from which the comparative sciences have not yet entirely recovered. The conception of society as an organism---the biological view---first showed the limits within which comparison must be applied. The historical method came next to check and correct its vagaries. It is now more or less recognised that the origin and development of a social phenomenon must be first historically studied, and organic connection or a similar stage of development, established or presumed, as a necessary precondition of

scientific comparison. The historic method itself, in the hands of Montesquieu and his school, was scarcely more worthy of credit, and had it not been for the conception of biological growth and the formula of evolution, which have given it definiteness and evidential value, it would have failed to achieve its chief triumphs in the study of social phenomena.

But the historic method, as reinforced by biology and evolution, requires one more fundamental correction to fit it as an organon for the investigation of social phenomena. As employed by Mr. Herbert Spencer and his school, the historico genetic method is vitiated by an unhistorical and unreal simplicity, a desire to reduce the variety of Life and Nature to a uniform formula. In the result, the method breaks down in its application to the higher stages in each department. In biology, reproduction and neurosis in the higher forms of organisms, --in psychology, the functions of the understanding and the reason,---in sociology the more developed institutions like the Greek State or the Poor Law system, the University and the Church;--in Ethics the conception of Personality, personal rights and duties, and the balance and adjustment of Reason and Instinct;---in politics, the principle of social co-operation which checks the *laissez faire* of individualism;-- in Religion, the spiritual experiences of the race;---in short, the higher, more advanced, more complex stages in the history of life, civilisation and culture, are altogether inexplicable on this method, and have been quietly ignored or else travestied. Mr. Spencer has no other explanation for social, ethical, political and religious codes, in widely differing environments and stages,---whether the constitution of Solon, or the Codes of Brahmana Sturakaras-- than his formula of the military and the industrial regime, in which he sums up the varied history of human civilisation!

The German schools of sociologists, following in the wake of Hegel, have a more comprehensive conception of the historico-genetic method, and a surer perception of different stages of development; but here also the different races and cults are measured and adjudged by an abstract and arbitrary standard derived from the history of European civilisation, and the ethnic varieties are given only a subsidiary and provisional place, as if they were either monstrous or defective forms of life like the monotremata or the marsupialia of a biological laboratory, or only primitive ancestral forms, the earlier steps of the series that have found their completion in European society and civilisation.

Indeed the historic method requires the same correction and extension that the doctrine of biological evolution received at the hands of Darwin. The Lamarckian speculation concerning the origin of species was vitiated by the assumption that the development series was linear, that the countless species of living organisms might be arranged in a single line of gradual and unbroken ascent from the original gelatinous bodies, which induced 'orgasm'---a series in which each later form grew by reproduction out of each prior one under the influences of wants, exercise, transmission of acquired characters, and adaptation to environments, exercise, transmission of acquired characters, and adaptation to environment (food, climate, habitat, etc.). In the same manner the Hegelians conceive the history of civilisation as a single line of progress, which, in realising the successive stages of the Absolute Idea, flows continuously from one race or nation to another, each representing a single phase of the Absolute, a single moment in the dialectic process. This punctual conception of races and epochs, and this linear

view of development, are essentially false. In biological doctrine, it is a truism to say that development is best represented, not by a line, but by a genealogical trees. The absurdity of supposing that men have been developed out of the gorilla or the chimpanzee, or animal organisms from vegetable ones, has been long exploded. Whether we begin with Lamarck's gelatinous bodies, or with Haeckel's Moneron, with the Diatomaceae or the unicellular microscopic organisms, or as Darwin himself suggests, with four or five distinct structures, it is now universally accepted that from the very first there have been ramifications or branchings along different lines of development and that existing genera and species have resulted from endless subdivision and multiplication. In the same way, in psychological evolution, the linear view of Condillace with his *une sensation transformee* has been abandoned by the genetic school; and Professor Bain, in starting with distinct primitive factors of sensation and movement, and of intellect and will, as well as in recognising Spontaneity and Self-conservation, at the sources of mental genesis, only showed how faithfully he had assimilated the new biological teaching of accidental variation and natural selection. The same correction and extension of the historical method is a crying necessity of our age., if it is to lay the foundation of a true Philosophy of Universal History, and not to give us mere European side-views of Humanity for the world's panorama.

In fact, we must provisionally start with different types of culture. It serves no scientific purpose to ignore the irresolvable typical differences of social structure, of economic, political or religious organisation, that mark the most primitive cultures hitherto accessible by us. Future generalisations may reduce all this diversity to harmony, but it is no good to bow to the one God of Fetichism, of Animism of village community, or Mutterrecht, of 'Headless' social structure, when so many other well-attested claimants are ready to contest our allegiance. The philologist has recognised this truth earlier than his congeners of the other human sciences, and now starts with six or seven primitive linguistic structures. So in economic organisation, in religious beliefs and practices, in social customs, in political institutions, it would be well, if that '*idolus tribus*,' the desire for more simplicity than the matter can bear, were signally and finally overthrown.

BUt my present concern is with the other aspect--the recognition of ramification, or progress along different lines, and the overthrow of the linear conception of the historic method. With the ethnological material at our disposal, it is a gross and stupid blunder to link on Chinese, Hindu, Semetic, Greek, Roman, Gothic Teutonic cultures, in one line of filiation, in one logical (if not chronological) series. At the present stage of sociological research, this amounts to ignorant quackery, a true anachronism, and is totally unworthy of any man of scientific pretensions. No race of civilisation with a continuous history represents a single point or moment. In fact, even Chinese civilisation like the Chinese language has had a development of its own and though in all this race history, the Chinese race=consciousness has subsisted, it has still been a differentiation of the homogeneous, a development of a coherent heterogeneity out of an incoherent homogeneity. Hindu culture, too, has passed through most of the stages observable in the growth of the hebraico-Graeco-Romano-Gothic civilisation. The same may be said of Arabic of Mohammedan culture. To conceive these statistically, to reduce each living procession to a punctual moment in a single line, is to miss their meaning and purpose. Universal Humanity

is not to be figured as the crest of an advancing wave, occupying but one place at any moment, and leaving all behind a dead level. Universal Humanity is immanent everywhere and at every moment---I will not say, a circle of which the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere,---but at any rate, generically present in each race-consciousness, though each race may not have reflected the perfect type or pattern. From the statical point of view, Universal Humanity, though present in each race, is diversely embodied, reflected in specific modes and forms. The Ideal of Humanity is not completely unfolded in any, for each race potentially contains the fulness of the idea, but actually renders a few phases only, some expressing lower or fewer, others, higher or more numerous ones. To trace the outlines of this Universal Ideal, we must collate and compare the fragmentary imperfect reflections, not at all in electric fashion, but as we seek to discover a real species or genus among individual variations and modes; and a Congress like this fulfils a glorious mission in helping to realise the Vision of Universal Humanity, a Vision no less wondrous than the manifestation of the Universal-body of the Lord in the Gita to Arjuna's wandering gaze. The moral unity of the Human Race is fast taking the place of many of the out-worn creeds of the ancient or medieval world, and the Vision of Universal Humanity, of which we get a tantalising glimpse beneath the Protean transformation of race and cult, is only the yet unrisen sSun which looms in the horizontal mists on which it has cast its image.

Speaking dynamically, the Ideal of Humanity is realising itself more and more fully in the total assemblage of the races. In spite of multiformity, in spite of the diverse ethnic developments, all very real, all very special, there has been a general history of human culture and progress, the unfolding of a single ideal plan or pattern, a universal movement toward 'one far-off divine event, to which the whole creation moves'. Human progress has one law, one direction, one movement, and the races, *if moving at all*, move towards one goal, though here also the developing Ideal is only potentially present in its fulness in each, some rendering lower or fewer aspects, others higher or more.

Universal culture, therefore, in the abstract, has had a history; and a comparison and collation of the several culture-histories, in which this has been more or less imperfectly, more or less meagrely, embodied and mirrored, is essential, if we want to lay the foundation of a true Philosophy of History, and to rise to a Vision of that Absolute Humanity, the true Logos of God, to which Universal History testifies as its only authentic Scripture and Gospel.

This is the new, corrected extended Historic Method which, in consonance with the formula of Evolution rightly understood, and in cooperation with the comparative Method properly qualified, will serve as the organon of the human or Sociological Sciences. This is the genuine Historical Method that will solve the Sphinx's riddles of COmparative Jurisprudence, Politics, Religion and Mythology, Sciences which to-day have been brought to a stand-still. And finally this is the Method that will found the science of Comparative Philosophy, most sovereign of the sciences of the sociological group.