

Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949): A Tryst with Destiny

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Benoy Kumar Sarkar's empathisers would be delighted to know that, far from being relegated to oblivion, his name is very much footed in the list of early founders of sociology in India, and this essay bears witness to it. This essay begins with a brief biographical sketch of Sarkar and highlights the socio-temporal and intellectual context in which his contributions became meaningful. Sarkar was essentially a sociologist of problems, and based on his axial concerns and analytical point of departure, this essay discusses his (a) concept of sociology and methodological contribution, (b) ideas of personality, society, and social progress, (c) long-time concern with Indian tradition and a comparative study of the East and the West, and (d) understanding of social reconstruction in India.

[Keywords: Bengal; the East and the West'; Indian tradition; Benoy Kumar Sarkar; social reconstruction]

A commentator on Benoy Kumar Sarkar had once lamented:

Professor Benoy Kumar Sarkar is a name very few among us today much care for. This versatile scholar and prolific writer who for forty-two years of his life wrote and lectured to develop what was known in his own time as 'Sarkarism', which was essentially an attempt to endow Indian social science with a new method and content, has been denied his due place in the history of our social and political thought. His writings which run to about thirty thousand printed pages are not available in print. Even in the recent craze of bringing out the old classic in printed form no one – not to speak of Government, ICSSR [Indian Council of Social Science Research] or any other suitable organization – has come forward to reprint the wealth of ideas Professor Sarkar has left for us. None of his books is read as a text in any of the universities of India. Even Calcutta University which happened to be his alma mater and where he taught for a long time has ousted him from its class rooms where there seems to be no end to the galore of foreign ideas. Benoy Sarkar is only remembered by a small group

of his close associates and disciples – some of whom are already dead, while some others are scattered in different professions having neither time nor the proper organizational facilities to revive interest in Professor Sarkar (A.K. Mukhopadhyay 1979: 212).

✓ Benoy Kumar Sarkar was born on 26 December 1887 in Maldah district of undivided Bengal. At the age of thirteen he stood first in the Entrance Examination of Calcutta University and entered Presidency College in 1901, where he studied till 1906. In 1905, he stood First Class First in the BA Examination of Calcutta University with double Honours in English and History and was awarded the Ishan Scholarship. In 1906, he took his MA degree in English and, just on the completion of his formal degree, he was offered the State Scholarship of the Government of India as well as the post of a Deputy Magistrate. But he rejected both these offers. The year 1905 was also the year when Swadeshi Movement was launched in Bengal and the movement had an overwhelming impact on the young scholars. Sarkar could not come to terms with the idea of either receiving an award from or directly serving an alien government. He soon joined the Swadeshi Movement and chose education as his field of activities. From 1906 to 1914, he was actively engaged with the National Education Movement of Bengal and National Council of Education of Jadavpur. During this period, he organised several national schools at Maldah, wrote five books in Bengali language furnishing guidelines for national education, and campaigned for the use of vernacular as the medium of instruction in various schools and colleges of India (*ibid.*: 213; Bhattacharya 1990: 21, 30). Young Sarkar was initially influenced by Satish Chandra Mukherjee, the founder of Dawn Society (a meeting ground for the intellectuals of Bengal Swadeshi Movement), but Vivekananda's worldview had a much deeper effect on him (H. Mukhopadhyay *et al.* 2003: 14; Chatterji 2007: 127–28).

The second phase of Sarkar's eventful life began in 1914 when he undertook his first world tour. The tour lasted till 1925 and Sarkar lectured in different parts of the world including China, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Manchuria, Italy, and the United States of America. With his command over English, French, German, and Italian, and due to his encyclopaedic knowledge in various branches of social sciences including economics, history, politics, sociology, and even literature, Sarkar established his right to be heard by an international audience. For the first time, India was placed in a comparative culture-study in the diverse perspectives of the world along with those of the Anglo-Americans (Bhattacharya 1990: 58). Gradually, the central theme of his lectures became the East-West unity based on a qualitative

parity between the two. This theme has been developed elaborately in Sarkar's *Futurism of Young Asia* (1922).

Sarkar returned to India in 1925 and was appointed as a Lecturer in the Department of Economics, University of Calcutta. In 1947, he was promoted to the post of Professor and Head of the Department, a post he held till 1949. In 1929, he made his second tour of Europe and stayed there till 1931. He lectured in various European universities and attended the International Congress of Population in Rome in 1931, as President of its Economic Wing. By this time, Sarkar's publications in English alone ran to about fifty volumes covering about ten thousand pages, and his publications in German, French, and Italian were about eighty in number (S.K. Mukhopadhyay 1979: 214–15).

Sarkar was not just an armchair intellectual but was interested in initiating a countrywide movement, which, he thought, was possible if he could build up associations of talented researchers whose works and ideas would be the best investment for spreading this movement. To this effort, he founded seven research institutes in Calcutta, the most important being the Bangiya Dhana Vijnan Parishad and the Bangiya Samaj Vijnan Parishad. These institutes guided research scholars on various subjects and the latter also published several important books on Economics in Bengali (*ibid.*: 216; Bhattacharya 1990: 128–29).

On 28 February 1949, accompanied by his wife Mrs Ida Sarkar, Sarkar again left India for a lecture tour programme in the United States of America. He delivered about one hundred and fifty lectures in different parts of that country starting with a talk at the University of Harvard. The general theme of this tour programme was, 'The Dominion India in World Perspectives' (S.K. Mukhopadhyay: 1979: 215; Bhattacharya 1990: 131–32; H. Mukhopadhyay *et al.* 2003: 30). Like in the previous tours, he charmed the listeners with theme, style, and argument. However, before he could complete the programme, he suddenly fell ill on 27 October 1949. Sarkar was taken to the Freedman's Hospital in Washington, where, after a month's struggle, death finally came upon him in the early hours of 24 November 1949. Even during his last days when his wife enquired whether he was thinking about her and their daughters, he replied: 'no, I think of my Motherland and the work I have still to do' (Letter by Ida Sarkar to an Indian friend, cited in Bhattacharya 1990: 134).

Concept of Sociology and Methodological Contributions

The term 'sociology' was unknown until 1842 when Auguste Comte first used it in the fourth volume of his *Cours de Philosophie Positive*. Before

that the terminology used by Comte was '*Physique sociale*' or 'social physics'. Gradually, sociology became a popular social science discipline. Unfortunately, however, according to Sarkar, the discipline lacked any recognised boundary and there were as many 'types' or 'contents' of sociology as there were sociologists. Sarkar said that it is an intensely pluralistic world that we witness in the domain of sociological literature (1936: 3).

Sarkar found it difficult to align himself with the sociological system of Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Tonnies, Marx, or any other western sociologist, because they invariably emphasised on this or that aspect of the social existence of human beings. Sarkar was very critical of any kind of monistic interpretation of social phenomenon. Comte in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* wrote that three large 'mental stages' characterise the 'functional' evolution of mankind: the first is the 'theological stage', characterised by fetishism, polytheism, and monotheism; the second is the 'metaphysical' stage; and the third is the 'positive' stage, which marks the age of speciality and generality. While 'imagination' is supposed to be the characteristic of the theological stage, 'speculation' represents the metaphysical stage and 'experience' marks the positivist stage. In Comte's judgement, humanity has been marching towards the ultimate stage in which positive knowledge or scientific experience is supreme. Comte attaches more value to the positive stage 'positive' vis-à-vis the theological and the metaphysical states. He simply associates scholarly brains, exact knowledge, experience, experiment, generalisation, specialisation and science as an antithesis of religion or philosophy (Comte 1974). This kind of value-oriented unilinear evolutionary model was unacceptable to Sarkar.

Sarkar argued that it is not possible to demonstrate any stage in which reason rules to the exclusion of imagination or experience, imagination to the exclusion of experience or reason, and experience to the exclusion of the other two. Nor is it demonstrable anthropologically or even psychologically that imagination belongs to the primitive mind and precedes concrete experience which is the sole prerogative of modern mind (Sarkar 1937b/1985: 11). This kind of positivist determinism by Comte is as fallacious as the economic determinism or reductionism found in Karl Marx's theory of political economy. In fact, Sarkar has written, 'it should be observed at once that the only liaison of the Positive Background of Hindu Sociology with Comte's *Philosophie Positive* lies in the value he attaches to the category "positive"' (ibid.: 11).

In 1887, Ferdinand Tonnies published his *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Association) (Tonnies 1974). In it he put forward

✓ a theory that all human connections or relations, which act as cementing forces, inevitably fall into two groups. In the first group are those derived from the 'natural', instinctive, and allied activities of human beings. In contrast, those in the second group are due to artificial attempts to pursue or serve some ends. The 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) is based on the natural, while the 'association' or 'society' (*Gesellschaft*) is based on the artificial cementing bonds. There is privacy, personal intimacy in the community; whereas in the association or society the predominant atmosphere is that of business, law, and public life. Although Tonnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* was the starting point of Sarkar's *Villages and Towns as Social Patterns* (1941), Sarkar did not accept Tonnies mechanically. While this distinction is helpful for analytical purposes, it was arbitrary and, more often than not, there are continuities and overlaps between features of community and society (Banerjee 1979: 226).

Emile Durkheim's prominence in sociology was duly recognised by Sarkar, in *Villages and Towns as Social Patterns*. Durkheim's concept of professional groups and associations were well taken by Sarkar and he also used the concept in his discussion of *samahas* (corporate bodies) and *srenis* (corporations) in ancient and medieval India (Bhattacharya 1990: 213-14). However, he was in disagreement with Durkheim's views on the importance of collective life. In his works, Durkheim dismissed individualist and psychological explanation of social facts. For instance, both suicide and religion, according to Durkheim, were 'social facts' and social fact has been defined by Durkheim as 'every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again any way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations' (Durkheim 1966/1895: 13). Sarkar was critical of the overemphasis which Durkheim put on social determination of individual behaviour and, according to Sarkar, this also created a kind of absolutist 'society-cult' (Bhattacharya 1990: 219).

Max Weber was, in Sarkar's opinion, the only great sociologist who represented a 'transition' from the old to the new viewpoints of sociology. Weber shared the characteristics of encyclopaedic culture-historians like Spencer and Comte and, at the same time, also had a slant towards social psychology. Weber brought new methodological insights into sociology mainly in the form of 'interpretative understanding' or *Verstehen* (Sarkar 1949: 408). However, Sarkar criticised Weber's essays on the relation between religion and economic life. He wrote that Weber's viewpoints on Hinduism and Buddhism were conventional and one-sided and not based on the Indian data of 'positive' sociology.

(Bhattacharya 1990: 233). Excepting Weber's view on Hindu religion, however, Sarkar appreciated his work on social action and types of authority (*ibid.*: 240).

Sarkar defined sociology as the study of any and every phenomenon that may be described as social or that has bearing on social relationships (Sarkar 1936: 8). In his scheme for the Bengali Institute of Sociology, Sarkar divided the subject into two broad categories with sub-branches:

A. Theoretical Sociology:

1. Institutional sociology (family, property, state, myths, arts, languages)
 - (a) Anthropology, history and sociography
 - (b) Social philosophy and philosophical history
2. Psychological sociology, sociology
 - (a) Social Psychology
 - (b) Social process and social forms

B. Applied Sociology:

Study of man, societal planning, transformation of the world by promoting 'Social metabolism' along diverse fronts (Sarkar 1936: 8–9).

In the early 1920s, Sarkar pointed out that the need of the hour was a purely objective methodology with realistic and unsentimental approach to the facts and phenomena of the physical and social world (Bhattacharya 1990: 198). His commitment to the positivist method in social sciences is clear from the following excerpt:

In order to achieve this viewpoint the preliminary procedure should be to acquire altogether new angles of vision, and this would be feasible only if a good few of the scholars got interested in studies and investigations that have absolutely no Indian bearing. In other words, we have to proceed to the historical, philosophical, economic and political studies exactly in the spirit in which the archaeologist or rather the students of positive science have been attacking their problems (Sarkar 1922: 330).

Sarkar further opined that, while a social scientist investigates into a great variety of facts and phenomena, the ultimate object would be to systematise and methodise the results of these individual investigations and find out the unity in the diversity and the general principle underlying the varied instances (Sarkar 1913: 81–82). Following the inductive method of ascending from the individual to the general, the particular to the common, one shall advance from simple to complex truths, and from

concrete facts to abstract generalisations (*ibid.*: 82, 84). While Sarkar was in full praise for scientific and inductive method, he was also aware of the difficulties presented by the special nature of the subject matter of the human sciences. In fact, his prescription of comparative method in understanding human social realities also came with a warning: social comparisons should be instituted only under definitely known conditions and the items to be compared should be brought under a common denominator. Unless the basis of comparison be categorically stated and the conditions of comparison well defined, comparative method, like statistics, could be used to prove anything one wishes to prove.

Another distinctive feature of Sarkar's methodology was his use of pluralism in the scientific analysis and interpretation of all individual reactions, inter-personal responses, group attitudes, institutions etc. (Sarkar 1941: 25). Interpretation of social phenomena, Sarkar stressed, could not be offered in a monistic manner. In almost every instance, a 'plurality of causes' has to be admitted and can be circumstantially proved. As a method of analysis, pluralism observes simultaneous operation of multiple factors behind events and process. According to Sarkar, while monism is grounded in idealistic philosophical theory, which leads to absolutism, pluralism is grounded in an opposed philosophical theory, which leads to relativism (Sarkar 1942: 318).

Personality, Society, and Social Progress

Sarkar believed in the fundamental unity of man. He rejected social theories which trace difference among human beings on the basis of race, region, climate, religion, etc. According to him, humanity is the same everywhere and is expressed by the same types of institutions and ideals. This unity of human, he argued, is derived from the struggling nature of human being. Human being by nature is the re-maker of the world and since ancient times the human being has shown eternal yearning after fire, energy, and life. This he termed as the 'Shakti-Yoga' or the energetic cult of human beings, a power that helps them fight all sorts of social obscurantism (Banerjee 1984: 12). It is this world-conquering creative personality of the human being that Sarkar had in mind when he addressed the Convention of Religions in connection with the Ramkrishna Centenary at Rangoon in April 1936:

Man as an individual or in groups has had but one function, and this is to transform the gifts of the world into which he is born, namely, Nature and Society, into the instruments of human and social welfare. 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 spiritualises 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 (Sarkar 1939c: 352).

Humanhood, according to Sarkar, consists of dynamism, power and creativity. Human personality is essentially a dynamic entity which goes on and on, and by nature it is a differentiating organism, carrying within itself the mechanism of a transformer and re-creator (*ibid.*).

Since the individual contains within herself/himself the potentials of transformer, s/he can also doubt everything and challenge the existing order. This is what Sarkar called 'the spirit of the naughty' (Banerjee 1984: 13). In his presidential address at the annual ceremony of the Eden Hindu Hostel on 29 September 1926, Sarkar elaborated on the spirit of the naughty:

The naughty differs from the goody, the traditionalist, mainly in the standpoint that while the latter looks upon the present world as perhaps the ideally best conceivable and is ever ready to find justification for all that is happening in it, the former believes that there might be another world better than what he has today, and that human beings are meant to be higher than what they find themselves. The naughty begins his life with a doubt, with a question, with a challenge (Sarkar 1938: 119-20).

The individual, as portrayed by Sarkar, is, therefore, not totally dominated by her/his environment. S/he can equally dominate, shape, determine, and even change her/his circumstances. Here, Sarkar radically departs from Durkheim's 'over-societisation' of man and Marx's economic determination of history (Sarkar 1941: 127). The individual is not perpetually at the mercy of the economic forces, as Marx would assert. Instead, the human can control, combat, influence and even transcend economic forces. Similarly, contrary to Durkheim suggestion, individuals cannot be invariably dominated by the society. Society itself gets shaped, re-shaped and transformed by the individual. There is mutual determinism between the two. As against Marx and Durkheim, Sarkar felt more at home with Immanuel Kant's idea of a 'moral person' - a category which claims independent status for individual intelligence and initiative (Banerjee 1984: 14).

An individual carries with her/him a dual or, rather, a plural personality. S/he is neither wholly good, nor wholly bad. On one hand,

s/he is reasonable compassionate, scientific, secular; on the other hand, s/he is irrational, selfish, superstitious, religious. Hence, different typologies of human beings as developed by the western sociologists did not appear to Sarkar as scientific enough. Comte's projection of development of human mind from the theological through metaphysical to the positive stage, Levy Bruhl's distinction between primitive and modern people on the basis of pre-logical and rational mind, and Tonnie's differentiation between Wesenwille (Natural Will) and Kurwille (Artificial Will) as dominant patterns of will in community and association or society respectively, are unscientific, according to Sarkar (1942: 1-3). The main problem with such categorisation, according to him, is that they emphasise on this or that aspect of human mind to the exclusion of others. The structure of human personality cannot be understood in terms of exclusive types because it is neither wholly rational, logical, or intellectual, nor wholly irrational, illogical, or intuitive. Human personality is rather a mixture of opposite elements, it is a function of reason multiplied by unreason. As Sarkar wrote:

Man is generally taken to be a rational, reasonable or logical animal. But it should be untrue to reality to believe that the rational, the reasonable or the logical in man has crushed the irrational, the unreasonable or the illogical in himself out of existence. The unreasonable, illogical and irrational features of his personality are co-existing in the Gestalt with the opposites as his physical fact. Very often, maybe, even normally, those are more powerful than the others (Sarkar 1941: 25).

Man is the centre of all types of sociation, all social processes and social institutions. And relations between individuals, groups, castes, classes, races, tribes, and nations are marked by both associative and dissociative social processes. Sarkar, therefore, did not arrive at any general conclusion about the sociality of human beings. Human beings are not inherently friendly, sympathetic, or co-operative; they are also competitive and conflict oriented. Sarkar wrote:

The inter-human reactions are not always those of fellow-feeling, attachment, concord, amity or attraction. They may as well be marked by rivalry, jealousy, envy, malice, enmity, hatred and repulsion.... The processes that connect man with man are antipathy no less than sympathy. Even the collectives like the group, class, nation or state are by nature capable of mercy as of violence (*ibid.*: 82).

This plural character of human personality led Sarkar to agree with Vilfredo Pareto that the human psyche is the arena for the tug-of-war between the Devil and the Divinity. The *dandvas* or conflicts constitute

the eternal make-up of the mental and moral personality. The role of the irrational is no less constructive than that of reason (Sarkar 1942: 29).

The human being, according to Sarkar, 'is perfectible, that is, capable of improvement but not capable of perfection' (1941: 521). The dual or plural character of human personality makes it possible for the human being to overcome all hazards of life. It is the eternal destiny of human beings to struggle against adversities of life - *asat* (unreality), *tamas* (darkness, death), *avidya* (ignorance), etc. - for winning over *sat* (reality), *jyoti* (light), *amrita* (immortality), and *vidya* (knowledge). Human beings cannot simply avoid this struggle if they are to remain truly human (*ibid.*: 498).

While Sarkar rejected the exclusively monistic and deterministic explanation of human behaviour, he nevertheless recognised the universality of human being's urge to live and flourish. In conformity with this basic urge, the human being is also endowed with four basic instincts. These are *Kama*, the sex instinct; *Kanchana*, which stands for professional, acquisitive, or proprietary instincts; *Kirti*, the instinct for power, conquest, and domination; and *Karma*, the creational or creative instinct. The four instincts, ambitions, urges, or drives, wrote Sarkar,

Lead to four different spheres of creation. These spheres of creation constitute culture in the most generic sense... '*Kama*' leads to family (and society or social organization). The results of '*Kanchana*' instinct are economic (as well as social) activities and institutions. The state, law, politics, society and allied forms and relations of human life and derived from the '*Kirti*' urges. And the instinct of '*Karma*' is responsible for the arts and crafts... etc., items that generally go by the name of culture (*ibid.*: 80-81).

(Every human attitude or behaviour is the result of conjoint working of more than one of the above four instincts, though each one of them may not invariably and to the same intensity be present in each and every case. Each instinct leads to a related set of ideas, ideals, institutions, and activities of human beings (*ibid.*: 82). //

Progress
(Society, according to Sarkar, is the arena where the two processes of co-operation and conflict are constantly in operation.) Relations between individuals, groups, associations, or any other unit of society are marked by both the associative and the dis-associative social processes. Conflict occupies an important position in Sarkar's understanding of social reality. Looking at conflict from a philosophical standpoint, Sarkar viewed conflict as the most creative agency in society. There is no social progress without conflict. In Sarkar's conception, progress is indefinite and indeterminate in the sense that there is nothing like the ultimate goal

Progress

of progress. Sarkar, therefore, rejected all theories of progress which posit social change as the overcoming of one sort of evil by any kind of good as the final objective. Unlike Marxian thought, the dialectic of Sarkar did not envisage any qualitative or revolutionary transformation of society. Social change, according to him, is a mere quantitative change. It is a ceaseless process of thesis-antithesis conflict. Sarkar did not speak of any qualitatively better synthesis (*ibid.*: 522).

Deep
Sarkar developed the concept of creative disequilibrium into a comprehensive, secular, and pragmatic theory of progress. It is a theory which, based upon the fundamental consideration about human psychology, projects individual, social, and world progress as a series of good-evil complexes without there being any ultimate stage in which the good totally overcomes the evil. In Sarkar's theory of progress, the concept of creative disequilibrium has no finality or end. One position of disequilibrium changes for another position. But it is disequilibrium all the time. It is the different position, stage, or form of disequilibrium in motion that constitutes progress (*ibid.*: 521). The dialectic of creative disequilibrium was presented by Sarkar in the following formula: (1) A1, Not-A1 — (2) A2, Not-A2 — (3) A3, Not-A3 — (4) A4., Not-A4 — etc. Here 'A' represents thesis and 'Not-A' represents its anti-thesis. However, they do not give rise to a qualitative new synthesis like 'B' or 'C'. They simply change their forms and degrees. Even changes in their substance and content are merely change of form. They do not necessitate any qualitative break in the chain. The process goes on *ad infinitum*. Progress, in this sense, is indefinite and indeterminate (*ibid.*: 523).

Sarkar further clarified,

Progress consists in the fact that at every stage there is a deliberate and conscious conflict between what for the time being is supposed to be good and what is supposed to be bad and that it is a result of this conflict that the next stage make its appearance. There is the play of the creative intelligence and will of man at every stage (*ibid.*: 525).

Progress is, therefore, a relative phenomenon which is different for different regions and is determined by the objective conditions and subjective capability of the people concerned.

Interpretation of the Indian Tradition and a Comparative Study of the East and the West

In 1910, Sarkar was entrusted with the task of translating into English a Sanskrit work on politics, economics, and sociology, namely, Sukra-

charya's *Nivisara*, for the Sacred Books of the Hindus Series edited by himself for the Panini Office, Allahabad. This work brought a fundamental change in Sarkar and he emerged as a completely new man with a secular, mundane, and materialistic worldview. *Sukraniti* brought into light the rich repertoire of secular and mundane civilisation among the ancient Hindus and this discovery shaped Sarkar's social, economic, and political ideas in the years to come (Chatterji 2007: 110). Sarkar argued that much of the prevalent notions regarding the alleged inferiority of the Hindu genius in grappling with the problems of the mundane sphere and the extra-proneness of the Indian mind to the metaphysical and impractical speculation can vanish and it can be proved to be the results of mal-observation and non-observation, only if proper historico-comparative method can be applied when studying Indian facts and phenomena. The achievements of the western nations in science, technology, industrialisation, and so forth are, strictly speaking, more or less a century old. So while instituting a comparison between Hindu and Occidental cultures on the score of material development, if one took into consideration the triumphs and discoveries of the last few generations, the Hindu scientific intellect and materialistic genius would be found to have been more or less similar to the western (Sarkar 1937b/1985: 4–5). Sarkar goes on to add that the transcendental and otherworldly aspects of Hindu life and thought have been made too much of. It was believed that Hindu civilisation is essentially non-economic and non-political, if not pre-economic and pre-political. This sort of interpretation is utterly simplistic and biased. According to Sarkar, the Hindus, no doubt, often placed the transcendental in the foreground of life, but they did not ignore or forget the positive, the secular, and the material. In fact, Hindu literature, fine arts, political organisation, social economy, etc., have all sought to realise the synthesis and harmony between the eternal antipodes: the worldly and other-worldly (*ibid.*: 6). Through the study of *Sukraniti*, Sarkar came to closely look into Hindu positivism, the place of earthly things like *sansara*, *vasana*, and *bhoga* in the Hindu scheme of human existence (*ibid.*: 17). In a sense, *Sukraniti* thus marked an important paradigm shift in Sarkar's intellectual development (Banerjee 1984: 9).

Sarkar wrote a monumental introduction to his translated work, which was published in four volumes under the general title *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* in 1914, 1921, 1926, and 1937. In these volumes, and in his subsequent works, Sarkar refuted his own earlier thesis, influenced by the Orientalists and Indologists of the 19th century, that there was a fundamental and qualitative distinction between the institutions and ideals of the East and the West. Sarkar's new thesis

posited that humanity was same everywhere and expressed itself in the same types of institutions, ideals, and attitudes, both in the East and in the West.

The historical data about Hindu positivism were ignored by the one-sided Indologists, namely Max Müller, Emile Senart, and Max Weber. Müller, in his work *India: What Can It Teach Us?* (1883), tried to establish that Hindu literature mainly dealt with vague idealism, unpractical mysticism, and other-worldly absurdities (Banerjee 1984: 10). Senart wrote *Les Cāstes Dans l'Inde* in 1897, where he had quite unhistorically remarked that India rose neither to the idea of the state nor to the idea of the fatherland (Sarkar 1985: 17). In the 1927 edition of the same book, Senart remarks in the preface that, although thirty years have rolled away since the publication of the first edition, he did not find any reason for modifying the conclusion of his old thesis. Senart also wrote, 'the Hindu spirit is very religious and very speculative. Obstinate guardian of traditions, it is singularly insensible to the demands of materialistic progress' (quoted in Sarkar 1985: 18).

Sarkar showed that coming to more recent times, even Weber's essays on the relation between religion and economic life fall victim to Indological bias. In Weber's analysis, worldly life was despised and secular activities condemned by Indians of all ages. The Hindus and the Buddhists have been described as being alike in their aversion to material pursuits and in their predilection for meditation and other-worldly salvation (Sarkar 1985: 18). According to Sarkar, not just Euro-American scholars, even social thinkers of Asia have fallen victim to the fallacious sociological methods and messages of the modern West, to which the postulate of an alleged distinction between the Orient and the Occident is the first principle of science (*ibid.*: 19).

Sarkar asserted that it was the special objective of the *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* (1931) to rescue Hindu culture from such one-sided and monistic interpretations. He drew attention to the universal or cosmopolitan facts and tendencies in Hindu societal and ideological development. That the process and forces in Indian social life were not peculiar to the regions, climates, or races and religions of India, but thoroughly 'human, all too human' was the clear conclusion drawn by Sarkar (1937b/1985: 19). According to Sarkar, the methodology of the Indologists was fallacious on at least three grounds. First, it ignored, overlooked, or failed to give due importance to the positive, materialistic, secular institutions and theories of the Hindus. Second, such methodology was prone (even subconsciously) to compare the ancient and medieval conditions of India with those of the modern and even contemporary Euro-America. And, finally, it neglected the distinction

between institutions and ideas, that is, factual achievements and 'pious wishes' (*ibid.*: 21).

Sarkar corrected the above mistakes in comparative methodology. First, he exhibited the institutional and ideological data on Hindu culture from the positive, objective, humanistic, and worldly side. Secondly, he introduced comparison with western conditions on large scale, but took care to point out (a) it was against the ancients and medieval of the West that the ancients and medieval of the East were to be assessed, and (b) the institutions were not to be mixed up or compared with ideals whether for Asia or for Europe. Realpolitik was to be compared with Realpolitik, idealism with idealism. Some method of historical-critical interpretation to the data of the Orient and the Occident was applied by Sarkar.

Sarkar thus arrived at a fundamentally different version of the Hindu way of life. The Hindu, asserted Sarkar, had never in the past neglected the economic, political, or other secular aspects of social life. In fact, Hindu achievements in these fields could well stand in comparison to those of the West down to the period of Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. It was only after the brilliant success of the Industrial Revolution that the West went too far ahead of the Hindus. But, according to Sarkar, that was a temporary setback for the latter, who had all the potential for material advancement and, therefore, were capable of catching up with the West (Banerjee 1984: 11). Sarkar wrote,

The Hindu has no doubt always placed the transcendental in the foreground of his life's scheme, but the Positive Background he has never forgotten or ignored. Rather it is in and through the positive, the secular, and the material that transcendental, the spiritual and the metaphysical have been allowed to display themselves in Indian cultural-history... The literature, fine arts, religious consciousness, industrial life, political organization, education system, social economy, etc., of the Hindus - all have sought to realise this synthesis and harmony between the eternal antithesis and polarities of the Universe: the worldly and the other worldly, the positive and transcendental, the many and the one, the Form and Spirit, Culture and Faith, Science and Religion, Caste disunions and Vedantic oneness, Image worship and the realization of the Infinite (*Brahma*) (quoted in Banerjee 1984: 11-12).

Thus, Sarkar's fundamental thesis based on comparative study of diverse social systems establishes the fundamental unity of the human. Humanity is the same all over the world. Sarkar thereby rejected all social theories which differentiate between human beings on the basis of race, region, climate, or religion. Such theories, according to him, fail to take note of the fact that human beings are endowed with the same

faculties of mind and intellect in all parts of the globe. The personalities of men and women do not depend on the world's latitudes and longitudes. The same personality, the same idiosyncrasy, the same genius, and the same 'gift' are found to exist in individuals who live poles apart. Differences, if any, are essentially individual.

Social Reconstruction in India

The whole of Sarkar's sociology was directed to pointing out the road to India's social and economic progress. Historically, it was true that India lagged far behind the West in terms of modern industrialisation. But that, according to Sarkar, was due to lack of proper guidance and initiative. He was convinced of the universal operation of the law of progress and visualised that:

Whatever happened in the economic sphere in Euro-America during the past half century is bound also to happen in more or less on similar and identical lines in Asia, and of course in India during the next two generation or so. The problem before applied sociology and economic statesmanship, so far India is concerned, consists in envisaging and hastening the working out of the next stages in technical progress as well as socio-economic and socio-political life (Sarkar 1939c: 37).

The 'next stage' or the immediate goal for India was, according to Sarkar, a capitalist society. Sarkar stressed on the need for establishing banks in India for the growth of capital and investment, introduction of private property in land, heavy industry, and economic legislation along the Euro-American lines. Correct steps for national economic reconstruction were to him important foundations of physical, moral, political and spiritual development of India. The measures advocated by Sarkar were often in contradiction with the prevailing nationalist ideology of his times. But, he went on championing the cause of large-scale industrialisation, mechanisation of agriculture, and increase in trade and commerce for India's economic salvation (Sarkar 1932: 259).

Sarkar came out with elaborate guidelines and suggestions with respect to educational reform, economic planning, and national welfare. An idea of the educational reforms as embodied in Sarkar's *Siksa-Vinjan* Series (in Bengali) can be obtained from his *Siksanusasana* (Educational Creed), 1910 is given below:

A. General

- i. Aim and criterion of education twofold: the pupil must grow up intellectually and morally.

- ii. Moral training to be imparted not through lessons culled from moral and religious textbooks, but through arrangements by which the student is actually made to develop habits of self-sacrifice and devotion to the interests of others.
- iii. To build up character and determine the aim or mission of life.
- iv. Educational institutions and movements must not be made planks in political, industrial or religious propagandas, but be controlled and governed by the Science of Education based on the national grounds of sociology.

B. Tutorial

- i. Even the most elementary course must have a multiplicity of subject with due interrelation and coordination.
- ii. The mother-tongue must be medium of instruction in all subject and through all standards.
- iii. Inductive method of proceeding from the known to the unknown, concrete to the abstract, is to be the tutorial method in all branches of learning.
- iv. Two foreign languages besides English and at least two provincial vernaculars must be made compulsory for all higher learning.

C. Organisational

- i. Examinations must be held daily and on the basis of credit system.
- ii. The day's routine must provide opportunities for recreations, excursions etc. along with pure intellectual work. There should be no long holidays or periodical vacations except when necessitated by pedagogic interests (Sarkar 1937b/1985: Preface: 4–6).

In 1924, Sarkar issued a Comprehensive Scheme of Economic Development for Young India which was published extensively in many of the dailies, weeklies and monthlies of India during 1925. The main provisions of this 'economic planning', all-embracing as it is, are as follows:

A. Fundamental Considerations

- i. Indian poverty is in reality unemployment on a large scale.
- ii. Industrialism is a cure to poverty in so far as it can generate employment in diverse fields.
- iii. Foreign capital is to be accepted mainly in case of large schemes of industrialization.
- iv. At present Indian capital should not be considered adequate for anything but modest enterprises only.

B. The Programme: Economic Enterprise, Class by Class

- i. Peasants

- a. Larger holdings wanted.
 - b. New employments for peasants in the cottage industries.
 - c. Cooperative societies for credit, marketing and irrigation
 - d. Combines of Sale.
- ii. Artisans
 - a. Improved appliances to be introduced.
 - b. Specialised training to be imparted.
 - c. Banks to support handicrafts and cottage industries.
 - iii. Retail Traders
 - a. Training for petty merchants.
 - b. Banks to support shopkeepers.
 - iv. Industrial workers
 - a. Trade Unions to be promoted
 - b. Right to strike and other demands to be conceded when necessary.
 - c. Co-operative stores for workers selling goods at low price.
 - v. Landowners of Richer Categories
 - a. Large scale farming to be undertaken.
 - b. Modern industries to be started.
 - c. Export-import business to be organized.
 - d. Insurance companies to be established.
 - vi. Exporters and importers
 - a. Banks for foreign trade to be created.
 - b. Overseas insurance to be started.
 - c. Commercial News Bureaus to be organized.
 - d. Foreign language and commercial geography training to be given.
 - e. Indian commercial agencies to be established in foreign countries.
 - vii. Moneyed Class
 - a. Modern industries to be started by these classes.
 - b. Banks and Insurance companies to be opened by them.
 - c. Participation in export-import.
 - d. Legislation against usury, a social necessity.
 - viii. Intellectuals
 - a. New professions to be sought for members of the intelligentsia as technical or other assistant and directors in the new industries and trade.
 - b. Existing government services to be Indianised.
 - c. Cooperative stores and housing societies for them.
 - d. Handicrafts and trade schools for children of the intellectual class.
 - e. Pioneers of economic development to be trained for every district by sending competent scholars to foreign countries (*ibid.*: 25-27).]]]

Sarkar thus had an almost encyclopaedic vision about social reconstruction in India. In retrospect, we can see that, while some of his reformative ideas 'took off' well, others did not. Sarkar's lifelong ambition was to search for India's identity in the comity of nations and, to fulfil this mission, he suggested ways and means for India's all-round development, with intensive research, rigour, and seriousness of purpose.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

Sarkar's work, more commonly known as 'Sarkarism', meant for his followers, admirers, as well as his critics an unorthodox approach to the social, economic, political, and cultural problems of India. Sarkar was, at the same time, an original thinker, a prolific writer, and a nationalist with an international outlook. Sarkar's outlook is essentially rational, materialistic, realistic, historical, and scientific and he sincerely wished Indian life and society to develop and flourish on these lines. One may not always appreciate Sarkar's ideas. For example, his theory of extreme relativism and pluralism or his perspective of unity of mankind and uniformity of ideas and institutions of humanity, may easily come under serious criticism. Moreover, in spite of his encyclopaedic range of interest and volumes of writings, Sarkar failed to build a systematic theory or even a conceptual framework. However, the fact remains that, while some may appreciate Sarkar's work and some may not, no one can ignore Sarkar's universal mission of the search for an Indian sociology.

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