Book Review

Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 288 pp., ISBN 0226734862

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Historians commonly accept that September 11 was a turning point in world history, signaling the fall of a unipolar world order led by the US. The fall of the World Trade Center marked the end of US global dominance. Right after, with the rise of the BRICS nations, and communism competing with neoliberal ideology, the world is now at the cusp of another global reordering. As the US's symbolic power waned, alternative forms of power emerged in the post-9/11 era. Alongside this, the idea of globalization has been reconfigured to suggest that nothing can be understood in isolation any longer. For this reason, original conceptual forms are reinvoked to understand them outside the anxieties of postcolonialism. Within this new framework, if we are to grasp the meaning of concepts, we have to do so by a dialectical method. Although somewhat reductive, Andrew Sartori's works may be understood through this framework as he explores South Asian history, especially the intellectual history of Bengal. Most of his works demonstrate this framework through a Marxist analysis.

Keeping this context in mind, we should read Andrew Sartori's *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, which intensively explores the history of political and intellectual life in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bengal to show how the concept can take on a life of its own in different contexts. Sartori mentions in the book's preface that his academic influences draw from Dipesh Chakrabarty and Moishe Postone. The former is a postcolonial historian and was part of the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG) along with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, et cetera. In contrast, the latter specializes in Marxist critical theory and European intellectual history. This background is important as Sartori's own argument in this monograph tries to go beyond the opposing binaries of the postcolonial debates. To this end, Sartori explores and situates culture within a more global framework, aiming to move beyond modern/premodern frameworks of postcolonial binaries. These binaries have influenced the intellectual development of both colonial and postcolonial thinkers.

The monograph consists of six chapters along with a conclusion and is a taxing 233-page read. Therefore, the length of this review precludes doing full justice to the book. Furthermore, in the introduction to the monograph, the author summarizes the focus of each chapter; therefore, paraphrasing them here would be unjust to the readers. Rather, this review attempts to locate the monograph's transnational undertaking within the broader debates of South Asian Studies, Colonial-Postcolonial Studies, Global Studies, and Intellectual History. According to Sartori, culture cannot emerge within a national framework. Even European culturalism—considered to be colonial and modern—emerged through linguistic interactions along European regions (pp. 4;5). This is why he claims that Bengali culturalism, considered to be a modern colonial imposition upon Bengali intellectuals, is also produced out of interactions with the so-called West. For this reason, Bengali culturalism is looked into not in the "ethnic particularity of regional culture" nor in the "timeless 'nature of things'," but rather the author roots it in the "complex structure of social practices that […] renders the culturalist imagination meaningful as a lens for thinking about society and self" (p. 5). By this, the author moves away from debates of Bengali culture by positioning it within "the global structures of capitalist society" (p. 5). This is to say that Bengali culturalism is not the product of

The methodological framework that Sartori utilizes in his reading of Bengali culturalism adds complexity to the text. The author draws the reader's attention to three

approaches that distinguish his work. The first approach Sartori takes is to "ground the Bengali discourse of culture in Marx's analysis of the commodity as the 'cell-form' of modern society" (pp. 18-19). As Marx identifies the commodity as the economic cell-form of capital, likewise, Sartori rethinks the discourse of Bengali culture as the Marxian commodity of modern society. Secondly, the author breaks away from the postcolonial narrative of the imposition of colonial pedagogy upon the colonized and foregrounds "the role of borrowed concepts in allowing Bengalis to make sense of a new object of thought: namely, forms of social abstractions" (p. 19). This social abstraction locates Bengali culturalism within capitalist social relations. This is a way to rethink culture as a dialectic rather than a Western intellectual imposition. Therefore, "the history of European concept's [culture] appropriation in Bengal should be analyzed in the same manner as the history of the generation of that concept in Europe in the first place" (p. 19). Lastly, Sartori rejects the European model of "historicist-developmentalist Marxism"—the idea of Europe's transition from feudalism to capitalism—that considers non-Western transition to modernity as flawed (p. 20). These complexities in Sartori's argument concretely establish his notion of Bengali culturalism within global capitalism. The readers of the text should keep these approaches in mind, as they govern Sartori's core argument of the text.

Leaving out the complexities of the text, I contend that the interesting chapters are: "Hinduism as Culture" and "The Conceptual Structure of an Indigenist Nationalism". The former is a reading of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, and the latter is the reading of the Swadeshi movement. In both of the chapters, Sartori discusses how Indian nationalism emerged out of the dialectics mentioned previously. Nevertheless, I would warn humanistic critics, especially literary critics, not to read Sartori's chapter on Bankim's submission to "neo-Hinduism" as a response to Western secularism. The answer to the question of why is answered by the author in the following chapter on the emergence of "indigenist nationalism." Although there are limitations to non-Marxist and Gramscian-Marxist turns to analyze the Indian nationalist movement, which Sartori mentions in one part of his text, his own illocutionary approach also has its drawbacks. Nevertheless, his claims on Indian nationalism do give insight into a novel form of critical-Marxist analysis. There are, of course, other chapters that elaborate more explicitly on how the notion of culture should be emancipated from the so-called Western ideology. This is more vividly illustrated in Chapter Two.

As a whole, the book will be interesting for anyone coming from the critical intellectual history of Bengal, Global history, Cultural studies, as well as literary and cultural studies. As Sartori takes a Marxist turn, this will interest Marxists and post-Marxists as well. The complexity of the monograph engages with many intellectual paradigms. However, I cannot entirely submit myself to claiming this work to be interdisciplinary. The monograph does take up the taxing project of touching upon various cultural domains, but falls short of capturing their totality. This was not the core task of the author, but something that should not be overlooked when reading this type of work. Nevertheless, the monograph's global turn opens up new avenues for debate concerning culturalism as a whole.

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