# SOCIAL ROLES OF INDIA'S REFORMERS: THE MENTORS OF BENGAL

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## Abstract

*During India's critical century of the struggle for freedom between 1850 and 1950, no single social role prevailed. With the support of a middle-range theory, co-authored earlier (Lipset and Basu 1975), I demonstrate the way four archetypal roles might have played out in the context of Bengal reformers' national aspiration. I analyse the respective records, roles and activities of Sir Jagadis Chandra Bose (1858-1937) as the Gatekeeper, Nandalal Bose (1882-1966) as the Moralist, Abala Bose (1864-1951) as the Preserver and Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-1971) as the Caretaker. In as much as the principle "reality" of the Freedom Movement for the four reformers and mentors rested upon the principle of Sarvodaya, "the Welfare of All," I find that in practice the creed of common good was far more nuanced and complex than previously acknowledged.*

## Introduction

I apply the theory of social realism to explain the way four of India's humanists and scientists authored and applied reforms during the critical freedom movement century between 1850 and 1950. The theory of social realism is a pragmatic approach to human beings' perennial inquiry, which is, that the way to comprehend how the universal becomes part of the individual is to perceive things and objects not only as they are but also as they are not.[1] Such an idea of the foundational basis of "reality" admits a coterminous connection between continuity (permanence) and change (impermanence), rather than an outright opposition between them.

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My test case of the theory will be four individuals, three men and one woman, all lived in Calcutta (now Kolkata). I call them "mentors" to emphasise how they had an intellectual influence on Indian society at large.

Thousands of years ago, Indian philosophers postulated that true knowledge comes to fruition in four stages: in the first, we learn from our teachers; in the second, we study on our own; in the third, we teach others; and in the fourth, we share our knowledge and skills with the greater community.

My sociological analysis will focus on the process by which the mentors explicated their implicit beliefs and knowledge for the society at large. I plan to achieve this by examining their life histories, which unfolded in a norm-oriented National Movement, or *Swaraj*. My aim in this narrative is to peel away layers of identity and emotion to discover the truth of their respective enigmas of arrival. I expect to show that the mentors' narrative ordering functioned as an organising tool that reconciled the seeming paradox between the universal and the particular. The "reality" of freedom for these mentors rested upon the cardinal principle of *Sarvodaya*, "the Welfare of All." As M. K. Gandhi (1954) said, "the good of the individual is contained in the good of all."

In methodological terms, I verify the theory and premise of the social reality of the mentors by applying a middle-range paradigm.[2] I plan to analyse four archetypal social roles of the mentors: Gatekeeper (Sir Jagadis Chandra Bose, 1858-1937), Moralist (Nandalal Bose, 1882-1966), Preserver (Abala Bose, 1864-1951), and Caretaker (Nirmal Kumar Bose, 1901-1971). In all, I will be looking for how the four leaders aligned the universal ethic of intellect and then acted it out in the public arena.

First, I will try to connect the common threads of institutional norms—the appeals and actions—that were collectively actualised by the reform events of the time between 1850 and 1950. Second, I will scrutinise the ways that the four reformers reacted to those events, accounting for how they framed their individual goals of reform. Third, I will establish the critical basis of their moral authority and institutional legitimacy, analysing how each realised the truth of freedom by explicating the implicit norms of their society—in other words, how they rationalised the Golden Rule of *Sarvodaya*.

**The Social Roles of India's Reformers**

My study in progress, *The Coming of Civil Society in Bengal: A Sociology of Faith and Reason* (Basu 2009) underscores an often-misunderstood claim in the humanities and social sciences. The social dialectics between continuity and change, tradition and modernity, as already mentioned, occur in a coterminous manner, rather than in opposition to each other. By *dialectic*, I mean a system of argument and exposition in which conflict and tension between seemingly contradictory ideas and facts are counteracted and balanced.  The dialectical concept in Indian philosophy signifies social realism, which in practice identifies ideas and objects not only as they are but also as they are not. From this calibrating attitude, three distinctive functional characteristics to grasping the social dimension of reality can be inferred—namely, that realities are multiple, that social variations are given and inevitable, and that the ideas and objects are heterogeneous by definition (Basu 2003: 14-35).

India's institutional interdependency evolved in the context and manner by which the town *mofussil* reformers endeavoured to construct a self-governing civic society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Those reformers came from three institutional systems: education (*bhasa*), religion (*bhakti*), and commerce (*vanijya*). The idea of reform combined India's universal ethics of pluralism with the material recipes for constitutional democracy and socioeconomic mobility. Although my study focused on the north-eastern region of India, what is now Bihar; Jharkhand; West Bengal; and Bangladesh, my study hypothesis and findings apply to other regions as well (Basu 2009).

Unlike what popular studies of Indian history depict—for example, Shamita Basu's (2002), which attributes social change to "religious revivalism as national discourse"—the sociological basis for the reform plans were both complex and nuanced. The popular critique of Hindu hagiographic nationalism misreads India's reform logic for five critical reasons.

Primarily, Shamita Basu's (2002) central assumption is that had it not been for the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement, the "black hole" of Hindu culture would have swallowed the fireball of nationalism. Furthermore, she premises this thesis by contending that the Movement's *material* interest superseded its essential value that each of us is divine and has the potential to perceive and know truth. Vivekananda applied and enlarged the premise in both theory and practice through the four Yogas: *Jnana*, knowledge; *Karma* duty and work; *Bhakti,* devotion; and *Raja,* body and mind (Basu 2004).

Second, physical matter cannot be the sole reality, and moreover thought and emotion succumb to sensory conflagration. When examined under the empirical light of day, Shamita Basu's (2002) claim is a grossly one-sided account of late nineteenth-century India. Her redaction subsumes the region's human thoughts and actions under a single instrumental form, thus reducing human inter-subjectivity to the status of material relations. Such solipsism pays short shrift to the complex human relationships that many faiths and institutions blended with the Indian soil and soul at various rates across regions for a very long time.

Third, a materialistic interpretation of culture, religion, or history is only one part of the human story. In any rigorous study of civilisation, there is a broader canvas that cannot be ignored, on which populations have painted in many hues over time and space. Since all knowledge is comparative, we must consider both the universal and the particular when we attempt to understand human experience. Concepts, values, materials, and tools arise out of a co-dependent institutional matrix of culture and society. In this sense, meaning arises from a particular historical context. Far from imposing imaginary restrictions, culture offers freedom. My suggested method of comparison is a way to decode abstract concepts in order to understand both concrete and complex social realities. By analysing the structure and character of a movement, we can notice how the participants constructed *sui generis* institutional themes and histories.

Fourth, the claim that India's national agenda was shaped by a handful of revisionist Hindus conveniently leaves out the social "fact" of India's religious-cultural roots in the building of coalitions and alliances across many tribes, sects, and races. The educators, philanthropists, and merchants steadily cooperated, not always agreeably, in enlarging India's multicultural space. In my study of the Town of Bally in the District of Howrah, I noticed how steadily the town elders built and secured a public infrastructure that was committed to the common good (Basu 2007).

Fifth, for the most part, the reformers combined their efforts to promote self-governance. From 1700 to 1900, they joined the classical ethics of

tolerance with the modern social rights of the common man and woman. Their success depended on the art and science of melding tradition with modernity, faith with reason.

## Social Realism

If we discard the materialistic view of history, we can link the social sciences with literature and the humanities to interpret other peoples for us, and thus enlarge and deepen our sense of community. We will not see anthropologists, historians, and sociologists operating independently as "exotic specimens," but rather joining collectively in an effort to interpret social categories of knowledge—that is, hermeneutics—whose domain of interest is referenced by cultural and social frameworks (Rorty 1994: 46-64). I call this the theory of social realism.

This theory takes for granted that human experience arises from the knowledge of many cultures and places. In order to function, institutions require consensus, but not necessarily uniformity. Nevertheless, in time, when a society is changing, its cultural choices can often be problematic. Rather than celebrating or condemning values, both material and nonmaterial, institutions can be the starting point for understanding the production as well as the transmission of knowledge. With this sociology of knowledge approach, we can examine the cultural elements, both old and new, that socialise the members of a local society.

Realists such as Hirst (1998:77) claim that "universals have a real objective existence…and that material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience." A social realist maintains that there are, or could be, in Craig's words, "recognisable-transcendent facts" that "lie beyond our cognitive powers" (1998: 116-117). For sociologists, then, the task is to locate specific roles that operate in the production and distribution of ideas. In considering the proximity between culture and history, Max Weber (1949) accepted the proposition that social structure is influenced by cultural norms in a definite way. According to Weber (in Shils and Finch 1949: 138–139), "value-analysis"—as an interpretive form—signifies the process by which cultural meanings are elaborated via "historically effective factors." In an unfinished manuscript—*Wirtschaft und Gesselschaft*—Weber (in Bendix 1962) was considering how social values were manifested in a legitimate manner authorised by learned scholars, whom he called "status groups."

This present discussion rests on the premise that any one-sided theory of society is reductive if it subsumes all humanity under a single instrumental soteriology. Unlike the revivalist interpretation of social movement, I maintain that universals have a real objective existence. The essential truth of humanity is that *autonomy* and *solidarity* are not antipodal terms. The sphere of autonomy guides individual desires to be free through interpersonal understandings and mutual arrangements. To quote Kenneth Burke (1945: 98-122): "The grammar of motives means not the simple geographical location of some thing, person, or act, but rather the qualitative and qualifying context. In the hands of the expert, the "scene" thus contains the act or the character…. The action has to do with the discovery of time as a metaphor."

## Social Movement in Bengal

The historians who study Bengal's reform movements during the nineteenth century have failed to distinguish between "value-oriented movement" and "norm-oriented movement." According to Smelser (1963:313): "A value-oriented movement is a collective attempt to restore, protect, modify or create values in the name of a generalised belief. Such a belief necessarily involves all the components of action; that is, it envisions a reconstitution of values, a redefinition of norms, a reorganisation of the motivation of individuals, and a redefinition of situational authorities."

On the other hand, Smelser (1963:109-270) also wrote: "A norm-oriented movement is an attempt to restore, protect, modify or create norms in the name of a generalised belief…. Most particularly, it demands a change in rule, a law or regulatory agency, designed to control the inadequate, ineffective or irresponsible [by inducing change] in constituted authority."

During periods of social flux, the "collective" dynamic of a movement is exhibited by the way legitimacy is sought by native agents who are in positions of authority. In India's case, most national leaders in the nineteenth century did not call for a complete rearrangement of institutional values and customs prior to political freedom from the British. In other words, political freedom did not mean accepting an altogether new set of value frame of reference to freedom. Bengal's leaders did not follow a "value-oriented movement," in which the overall belief system calls for a *complete* "reconstitution of values." Instead, they attempted to engage their fellow men and women within the modified "bundle of norms and expectations"

that would *independently* free the society. Their claim to social legitimacy was to articulate and apply common norms of understanding that transcended specific colonial structures. Their exhortations to independence rested on drawing up a national political plan that fit India's hermeneutic framework of experience. In terms of Smelser's "collective behaviour" typology, I classify the Bengal national movement where the traditional value was "reconstituted" as a "norm-oriented movement."

Nath (1982:2-5) pursues this confusion by arguing that the *raison d'être* of India's freedom movement was to have resurrected a "new Hindu," which I interpret as an ideological value movement. He offers three factors that contributed to the collective ideology: (1) imported "rational" philosophy coupled with the Christian evangelism that "shocked" educated Indian men and women; (2) the philosophies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, which drew upon the Vedantic "doctrine" of "personal impetus" toward "spiritual enlightenment"; and (3) a "telescoping" vision of Indian "civility" by the prominent reformers, which helped to "recapture" values.

During the century between 1850 and 1950, Bengal's reformers—educators, religious teachers, and nationalists—did not distinguish between personal and public, character and collective. India's core sociology of knowledge informed them that when one hitches the bullock cart to an idea that is larger than life, a person realises her or his true potential and in the process discovers the role one plays in the next great chapter of history.

This sober realism found its clearest expression in their contact with a spiritual authority in the life of Shri Ramakrishna (1836–1886), and later through one of his apostles, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). In Ramakrishna, the spiritualist, the humanist, and the realist merged in pure perfection. He grew up in a semi-feudal village in a family that was of the highest caste family but of meagre economic means. As a young man, he advocated openly that each individual, irrespective of caste, creed and class, had the internal call and divine capacity to know truth. For those of us who grew up reading headmaster Mr. M's diary, *Kathamrita* (1986), one cannot help reflecting on the mystery of Ramakrishna. Notwithstanding the cast of characters, seasons and settings, Ramakrishna's words carried an eternal message. It was seamless inclusiveness, like a shirt without noticeable stitching. By his attitude of tolerance, he symbolised Bengal's social fabric, which wrapped its institutions and customs in a seamless cloth.

His disciple, Vivekananda spread his ideas of spiritual realism, both in India and abroad. Principally, Vivekananda appealed to the masses by referring to the universal humanism found in India's major sacred faiths and texts. This monk believed strongly that social asymmetry grew out of the narrow sectarianism that divided humanity. In his many public lectures and private conversations, he preached that human liberty should be located not in the material artifacts of history, but in the pristine self-realisation of the soul's immortality. To him, birth and death were mere events in time and space. In this infinite realism, Vivekananda nurtured the primary seed of the eternal religion. Thus, universal faith in the Self is humanity's primary ethics.

Vivekananda exhorted his fellow citizens to reform moribund religious mores by modernising legal codes and extending basic social rights to everyone, especially the Untouchables and the Muslims. The Ramakrishna Movement called for national harmony among all religious faiths in India: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism. Prominent patriots drew inspiration from the humanism contained in Vivekananda's message. Living through the oppressive centuries of the British occupation, these free thinkers urged Indians to remember always the commonness of their origins. As one of the key patriots, Nehru (1942:272) wrote in his autobiography: "Behind and within her [India's] battered body, one could still glimpse majesty of soul. Through long ages, she had travelled and gathered much wisdom on the way, and trafficked with strangers and added them to her own big family.… [However] throughout her long journey she had clung to her immemorial culture, drawn strength and vitality from it, and shared with other lands."

As already mentioned, the discussion here will focus on the reform leaders who lived in Calcutta (now Kolkata). Throughout the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, they made their implicit private experience explicit in public by calling for institutional change. These changes centred on their private attitude toward liberalism in faith, scientific learning and experimentation, and community service and welfare for the common good of all. They were not stodgy intellectuals confronting the contradictions of their society and eager to commit their fate to ranked religious orthodoxy. To the contrary, their openness to inquiry struck at the heart of India's medieval exegesis.

## Locating Social Reality in Baghbazar, Calcutta

The neighbours of north Calcutta, Baghbazar, Rajabazar and the vicinity, challenged the narrow ideology of sectarian revivalism, thereby supporting my hypothesis of change and realism. If one were to locate Bengal's epicentric realism, which outweighed material revivalism, I suggest that the northernmost corner of Perin's Garden in Sutanuti, later in Kalikata, Baghbazar area, would be one of the key case examples.

Long before the British settled in Sutanuti, Sri Nidhuram Bose migrated from Hooghly (near Tamluk) to this vicinity (Nair 1978: also see Cotton 1909/1980). During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna visited Baghbazar and its adjacent neighbourhood. The home of Balaram Bose, often called the "Calcutta Citadel," was his main venue. The home of the celebrated thespian Girishchandra Ghosh (1844-1912) is located just northeast of Balaram Bose's house (Datta 1954). A short distance to the north, Sri Ramakrishna's wife, Saradamani Devi, lived in Udbodhan (Atmaprana 1961). Around 1877, when Sri Ramakrishna visited the ancestral home of Kalinath Bose at 40 Bose Para Lane (now 47 B, Ma Saradamani Sarani), he met Harinath Chattopadhyaya (monastic name, Swami Turiyananda), Gangadhar Ghatak Gangopadhya (Swami Akhandananda), and the noted theatre celebrity Girishchandra Ghosh.[3]

Sister Nivedita (1867–1911), of Irish descent, whose pre-monastic name was Margaret Elizabeth Noble, settled in this neighbourhood. On November 13, 1898 she started a girls' primary school (now Sister Nivedita Girls' School) at 16 Bose Para Lane (now 5 Nivedita Lane). Ms. Sudhira Bose, a resident of Bose Para Lane, was affiliated with the school. The present paper focuses on four key neighbours of Baghbazar and Rajabazar locality.

## The Social Roles of the Four Mentors

Who is a mentor? According to Roberts (1999), the word comes from Greek mythology, in which mentor was the counsellor to whom Odysseus entrusted his house and the education of his son, Telemachus, before setting out to fight at Troy. A mentor, then, is a master teacher who lights the lamp of knowledge in each individual's capacity to know truth. In the deepest sense, education is their vocation.

Mentors are not cultural elites or political pundits who snare privilege or wield disproportionate authority and power. In *The Power Elite*, the Marxist sociologist C. Wright Mills (1957:22) took another view of mentors. By "elite," he meant a class "composed of political, economic, and military men," who controlled "the major means of production…[along with]…the newly enlarged means of violence." In 1975, the neo-conservative Irving Kristol described the elite, or "the new class," as "a confederacy of like-minded liberals in a range of professions—from journalism to law—who were suspicious of, and hostile to, markets precisely because they were so vulgarly democratic" (as quoted in Buimiller 2008: 103).

Mentors are distinguished from elites by the ways that they communicate content and context within the aphoristic and allusive language of meaning. They not only preach what they practise, but also speak in the moral language of realism, which at once is both universal in scope and particular in practice. Their narrative of knowledge, which combines values and institutions, is not spurious, designed to fit the claims of the day, but is transcendent and unwavering in reality.

Unfolding the correlation between thought with action, and the dialectics of continuity and change, morality and materialism, and universality and instrumentality, the men and women of Calcutta's Bagh Bazar locality made their own contributions to the coming truth of India's modernity.

## An Interpretive Paradigm

Theory and methodology acknowledge that the functionality of the process of the mentors' interpretive paradigm is set in two complementary axes: (1) cultural production of knowledge and thought; and (2) practical representations of this knowledge and thought.

The first axis—the way that knowledge is organised and produced—extends from intellect to intelligence; that is, from pure creativity to cognitive application. In the other axis, the mentors represented knowledge in practice. This axis forms the action part of their knowledge. Specifically, at one end, "innovation" represents the institutional function of the newly emerging ideas. At the other end, "integration" signifies how these ideas, which promised political citizenship to millions, were practised by the mentors in real life.

Through the application of the life-world matrix as a research tool, I am not searching for the "Great Person" theory of history to explain Bengal's and India's modernity. Rather, I am looking for complex interrelated aspects of the roles of the key reformers and mentors of a society, who acted in the midst of rapid social transformation. My purpose, then, is heuristic, in the original Greek sense of "discovering." That is, I want to search through "lived" life histories in order to see how the four leaders aligned the universal ethic of intellect and then acted it out in the public arena.

The essential basis of their moral authority and institutional legitimacy consisted in the fact that each realised the political truth of freedom by explicating the implicit norms of their society — in other words, they rationalised the Golden Rule of *Sarvodaya*. This held the essential keys to Bengal's approach to modernisation. However, while "intellect" tends to be "innovative" and "intelligence" tends to be "integrative," these correlations are far from perfect. If each axis is perceived in a continuous series, not in polar dichotomy, in practice, thoughts and actions move across the cultural grid independently and naturally.

The paradigmatic functional roles of India's modernity emerged between the normative ethics of knowledge and the material capital of rationality in four modal types: Gatekeeper; Moralist; Preserver; and Caretaker. The table below indicates the fourfold typology of the mentors (Lipset and Basu 1975).

### Table: Types of Social Mentor

| Structure | Function | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Intellect* | *Intelligence* |
| *Innovation* | Gatekeeper | Moralist |
| *Integration* | Preserver | Caretaker |

Above all, in their respective roles of nation-building, the mentors did not guess the future, nor did they anchor their views in the dusty orthodoxy of the past. They constructed their own worldviews and put them into practice. Their part as reformers reflected the complex depths of social realities—structures, functions, and interpretations that the mentors of ideas put into effect when they were considering the birth of a sovereign nation.

I firmly believe that the mentors' arrival on the Bengal stage paralleled that of other notable reformers throughout the other regions of India. Our four mentors were neither enigmatic nor quixotic. Their thoughts and actions did not subsist in cultural elitism, which is little more than riddle, romance or outright nostalgia for an intoxicated whiff of celebrity. In short, their respective social backgrounds were drawn from a sustainable and enduring ethics that transcended a short-term cultivation of the retro-Brahmannical mood of superiority or individual ambition.

### The Four Archetypes of Social Mentors

Each of the four individuals studied here represents a different type of social mentor. Jagadis Chandra Bose is the Gatekeeper; Nandalal Bose is the Moralist; Abala Bose is the Preserver; and Nirmal Kumar Bose is the Caretaker.

### *The Gatekeeper: Jagadis Chandra Bose*

I define "gatekeepers" as men and women of ideas who keep gates open to change without undermining the essential values of society. In this sense, their biographies are studies of experiments in human continuity. They are mentors who steady the societal helm, often in the swirls of chaos and fear.[4]

Jagadis Chandra Bose was such a mentor, whose scholarship spread to science, literature, and religion. He was an "opinion" leader, but not in today's sense. Jagadis Chandra was inspired by the aphoristic language of human beings' search for the liberation of truth, which Indian sages had heralded for centuries. After graduating with honours in Physics from Cambridge University in 1884, he taught at Presidency College in Calcutta. In a tiny cubicle, he performed experiments on the electromagnetic properties of plants. In 1917, the knighthood was conferred on him. During the same year, he was elected to Britain's Royal Society.

Jagadis Chandra anchored his nationalism and patriotism in the deepest core of India's culture and civilisation, much of which he expressed through science as well as through art and literature. His search for truth found expression in a combination of faith and reason. He befriended Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi, and he presided over the main body of Bengal's literary council, the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*. Whenever he travelled in Europe, he regularly met with George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, and Romain Rolland, and kept up a lively correspondence with them.

Jagadis Chandra's social mentoring role allows us to resolve an important debate that started to percolate first among the educated families in India and Bengal, and later among the masses. The question was how India should embrace secular modernity. In short, could a secular and material approach, much of it imported from Europe, liberate India's masses?

All through the sharp institutional transformation and toil in nineteenth century India, especially in Bengal, this question was being debated by three distinctive groups of educated leaders: the Classicists, the Materialists and the Realists. The Classicists, who found themselves abandoned by secularisation, were reminiscent of the aristocratic educators in the aftermath of the French Revolution (Clark 1973). With the end of patronage, and shorn of their caste privilege, which for generations had given them a monopoly over the educational system, they now found themselves dependent on a class-based urbanised economy.

The Materialists rejected outright the classical locus of authority. They resolved the question of liberation and authority in a roundabout way. First, they partitioned, however arbitrarily, the private self from the public persona. These secular Materialists, then, built a moral language by presenting conclusions as facts without offering any firm evidence. The secular liberationists argued that because the conscience—the ethical sense of right or wrong—is private and personal, its moral conclusions must be subjective. Concomitantly, because the conscience should be free from coercion, its moral vocabulary must also be free from public concern. With this dubious tautological reasoning, the secularists, like dogs chasing their tails, asserted that political authority supplanted substantive authority.

Jagadis Chandra belonged to the third group of Realists. He avoided the confusion between directive and functional knowledge by uniting faith

(which is structural and directive) with scientific logic and reason (which is functional and cognitive). He believed and taught that people learn much more easily when they are excited by the content. This didactic approach requires the mentor to build curricula by reasoning through the nature of consciousness, from plants to human beings. Jagadis Chandra thought that conceptual concerns about the truth of existence should not be dried up in the "dreary desert sand of dead habit." He mentored students to see the overreaching beauty that can be found in both science and religion.

Jagadis Chandra's belief in evidence and the process of reasoning help the Indian people to experience feelings and emotions without reaching for outside authorities. He understood that, in India, science and faith were ready to join hands because ultimately both are means of exploring and analysing the ethics of self and sensibility. One of his friends, Rabindranath Tagore (1914:27), expressed the mix between mystery and matter in this way:

> Where mind is without fear and
> the head is held high;
> Where knowledge is free;
> Where the world has not been broken
> up into fragments by narrow domestic
> walls.

In the frenzied rise of nationalism and politics toward the end of the nineteenth century, Jagadis Chandra taught his students at Presidency College the ethic of care. As an experimenter of Botany, he cultivated minds like a gardener. His students learned through scientific experimentations and dialogues the broad dimensions of philosophical lessons. They learned that care, supervision, and diligence were crucial to maintaining the precarious balance between the forces of order and disorder within them. From Buddha and other ancient sages, Jagadis Chandra had learned that the virtue of self-gardening involved both the soil and the soul. He primed the minds of his students by planting in them seeds of ideas, truth, and virtue.

Several of his students became famous in their own right, including Meghnad Saha, J. C. Ghosh, S. N. Bose, and N. C. Nag. For example, the research in particle physics by S. N. Bose (who was not related to J. C. Bose) drew the attention of Albert Einstein, which eventually led to the Bose-Einstein Condensate theory (Narlikar 2003).

### The Moralist: Nandalal Bose

In civil human interactions, there must be agreement on standards of conduct and moral principles. Ethics are reflections on the intentions and the consequences of acts, which are themselves the outcomes of interactions. Starting around the middle of the nineteenth century, European philosophy influencing India's intellectuals was divided into two schools of thought: the Empiricists and the Intuitionists. The Empiricists (inspired most of all by August Comte) denied the innateness of the conscience, maintaining instead that it is human experience that allows people to discriminate between right and wrong. The Intuitionists (inspired most of all by Jean Jacques Rousseau) believed that human conscience is guided by man's innate sense of value (Russell 1945).

The difficulty with the two antipodal European theories is that by remaining silent on whether human "goodness" is absolute or relative, each school left unaddressed the transcendent function of truth. The Indian sages and ascetics addressed this matter very long ago by going beyond logic, although some of them took an absolutist position and others took a pluralist position. On the absolutist side were, among others, Buddha and Shankaracharya. Buddha totally repudiated the individual self as a "permanent entity." Shankaracharya bridged the individual self to the Universal Self (Brahman). On the pluralistic side were Patanjali and Ramanuja, who believed that people could not simply repudiate their egos in order to be liberated, but must accommodate faith, emotion, and reason for self-liberation (Hiriyanna 1993).

The life of Nandalal Bose fits the archetypical role of a creative genius who was also an evaluator of his society. His transformational romance with India's art, culture, and community is a perfect manifestation of Dostoyevsky's (1917) belief that "beauty will save the world." Nandalal's life and work fulfilled the solemn promise to join aesthetics and practice, which learned men and women had made long before the British arrived on India's shores. Nevertheless, his art was derivative, in that he blended classicism with expressionism.

The jaunty silhouettes of people and animals in lively but radically simplified compositions were natural images of the "new" Bengal moralist. By repositioning the proportions of time and space, Nandalal reintegrated tradition into the sociological narrative of change. For example, he reintroduced

the gouache method of painting with opaque pigments ground in water and thickened with a glue-like substance, a method that had a long history in Indian rituals and celebrations.[5] Nandalal shied away from the "symbolist aesthetics" of the "evocative images" by his teacher, Abanindranath Tagore. Instead, his drawings and designs remained far more literal. Nandalal rejected the modernist approach of the Bengal school of art and painting. Much of it was led by the first principal of the Calcutta Government Art School in 1896. In company with Rabindranath Tagore, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, Okakura Kakuzo, and other artists, Nandalal eschewed self-aggrandizement.[6]

Nandalal's moral realism can be seen in his design of the temple sanctuary in Sri Ramakrishna's birthplace in the village of Kamarpukur in Hooghly District. The sanctuary was clearly influenced by the classical Ajanta style. As a didactic moralist, Nandalal lamented the loss of vernacular aesthetics under British rule. Increasingly, his painted heroes remind one of Thomas Hardy's "The Mayor of Casterbridge" (1886), who found beauty and order in simplicity without being simplistic. In simple narrative drawings and designs, Nandalal responded to the civic thoughts gained from both Tagore and Gandhi.

As with Jagadis Chandra Bose, Nandalal Bose was primarily a teacher. He taught fine arts at R. Tagore's venerable Visva-Bharati in Santiniketan, where he chaired the Department of Art. He illustrated several of Tagore's works, including *Chayanika*, *Crescent Moon*, *Gitanjali*, and *The Fruit Gathering* (Mitra 1956).

### The Preserver: Abala Bose

Form and function can counteract social organisation. Form is a system of rank in a social position that distributes rewards. A society that allows its members to access freely its goods and resources is an open society.

Function is a resource capital, both material and non-material. Resources are the outcomes of institutional arrangements—namely, the way positions are mobilised. The balance between status and resource determines the justness or legitimacy of a society.

Periods of change often bring into sharp focus the ways in which a society has been organising its formal rules and informal customs. During

such periods, mentors are not usually revolutionaries. Instead, they tend to be modifiers rather than over throwers of institutional rules and customs that promote social mobility for many. Mentors are both conservationists and modernists. Their modifying task begins by regulating the institutional excesses of status—that is, by rearranging the normative loci of power and authority. As modernists, social mentors are agents of change who act as the consciences of society. They do this by integrating fresh sets of norms, often brought from elsewhere, into the traditional institutional matrix. Znaniecki (1968) thought that in order for such "novationist" to perform this role, they must be able to explicate clearly the knowledge of the "past to the present."

Abala Bose (née Das) was socialised in the universal mission of Brahmo Samaj. She was born in 1864 in the Das family of Telirbagh, Dhaka (now in Bangladesh). Her parents were active social reformers. She moved to Calcutta for her education, where she received her early educational training at the *Banga Mahila Vidyalaya* (Bengal Girls' School). In 1881, she graduated with high honours from Bethune School, where she earned a scholarship to study in college. Since at that time women were not admitted to Calcutta Medical College, which was her first choice, she applied to and was accepted by Madras Medical College. However, her medical training (1885-86) was interrupted because of illness. After her recuperation and return to Calcutta, she engaged herself in social work activities that involved women's education, especially those activities involving young widows. In her marriage to Jagadis Chandra Bose in 1887, Abala found an agreeable partner.

Abala's social objective to reform Bengal's educational system was functional, not ideological. She envisaged modern education, especially for girls, as a fundamental human right. In *Modern Review*, a prominent English magazine at the time, she wrote that "a woman, like a man, is first of all a mind" (quoted in Sengupta and Bose 1998: 23). In 1919, she established Nari Siksha Samity, the Girls' Education Association, whose mission was to offer primary-level education for girls, prepare appropriate books and teaching materials for them, and look after the welfare of young widows. In time, the Association established some 200 rural schools and vocational training centres: the *Vidyasagar Bani Bhavan* (1925), the *Mahila Shilpa Bhavan* (1926), Junior and Senior Training Department (1925-32), Cooperative Industrial Home (1938), and the Jhargram Headquarters of *Bani Bhavan* (1940). From 1910 to 1936, Lady Bose (after her husband received knighthood) served as the secretary of the *Brahmo Balika Shikshalyay*.

Abala Bose actively participated in the Ramakrishna Movement. Most particularly, she was a close friend of Sister Nivedita, was directly involved in her educational mission to educate girls, and donated 100,000 rupees to Nivedita's Women's Education Fund (Ray 1990).

### The Caretaker: Nirmal Kumar Bose

India's "passage" to political freedom was authorised by the generation of men and women who came to adulthood around the first quarter of the twentieth century. The life, training, and activities of Nirmal Kumar, a bachelor resident of 37A Bose Para Lane, illustrate the role of a caretaker.

In 1921, at the young age of 20, Nirmal Kumar received his B.Sc. with honours in Geology from Calcutta University. Although he was admitted to the Masters programme in Geology that year, he left the University in response to Gandhi's Non-cooperation Movement. Shortly after that, he joined the political camp led by C. F. Andrews, whose objective was to repatriate the indentured labourers of Indian descent who were working in the East and West Indies. Also in that year, he developed an academic interest in the anthropological study of the architecture of Indian temples (Bose 1929). In 1923, he completed M.Sc. in Anthropology from Calcutta University with the highest marks.

In another article, I have suggested that Nirmal Kumar's worldview can best be located in the comparative nest between pure rationality and social opportunity (Basu 2007). His reading of India's history suggested to him that social change could unleash cultural innovation. According to Nirmal Kumar, the unity between creativity and conformity "has at least released the intellect and spirit of Bengal free to experiment with new ideas, without a feeling of guilt for not being closely tied to orthodoxy. Moreover, that has been one of the features that helped later on to turn this particular corner of India into a melting pot of new ideas and of new institutions. At least, it helped to build up a receptivity in the Bengali mind of what was unorthodox, and what tended to lean towards humanism, whether that was of the mystical or of the more secular, rationalistic variety" (quoted from R.K. Dasgupta undated).

Nirmal Kumar's worldview is illustrated in his understanding of the architecture of Bengali temples, which he regarded as exemplary social encounters between the classical and the ordinary. Along the banks of the

rivers of Bengal, the moral order, argued Nirmal Kumar, has been memorialised for millennia in the temples. The moral view of "unity in diversity" slowly emerged in Bengal from physical contact with scholars, soldiers, and strangers, who travelled to the Gangetic basin from other regions of India as well as from distant hemispheres.

According to Nirmal Kumar, this multiculturalism was reflected in the architecture of the temples. For example, those that were constructed under the Mallah patronage of Bankura between 1300 and 1600 were a composite of southern and eastern Indian styles (Bose 1981; also see Sanyal 2004).

Clearly, in a time of change, he was a quintessential caretaker of culture. However, he was also a pragmatist, who believed that the call for *Swaraj* ("national autonomy") would be mere rhetoric if the economic impoverishment of the rural peasants were not ameliorated (Bose 1946). As a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, he understood that the twin core beliefs of unity in diversity—the libertarian core of tolerance and pluralism—must be integrated into the socioeconomic agenda of reform (Bose 1934). His memoir, *My Days with Gandhi* (1953), records the *Brahmacharya* period in Noakhali, Bengal, where Gandhi was putting into effect *satyagraha* (literally, "the search for truth") in his attempt to quell Hindu-Muslim communal strife.

## Concluding Remarks

The key question that emerges from the discussion is this: As these mentors went about constructing a civic society, how were their worldviews informed by ideas and actions? This can be resolved by unfolding the mentors' biographies. In previous studies, the ideas and emotions of India's patriots and reformers have often been ignored as elements that are less interesting than their economic interest and political beliefs. Such an omission ignores how the mentors demonstrated that a person lives simultaneously in two worlds.

The mentors' social methodology of India's march toward freedom attempted to resolve conflicts among virtues. Nowhere was this more clearly the case than in the conflict between liberty and equality. Their civic objective was to provide social access to mobility for the common household. By embracing social realism, the Bengal mentors combined the individual ethic

of conservation with the political economy of liberation. Embedded in this embrace was the firm belief that the culture of freedom must unite both ethics and civics by infusing India's philosophy of liberal humanism with the scientific ideas and methodologies from the West.

Our mentors communicated content and context within the aphoristic and allusive language of meaning. They sought to liberate the British *raj* as well as remove superstitious beliefs that had collected over time at the local river's edge. They not only preached what they practised, but also spoke in the social language of realism, which at once was both universal in scope and particular in practice. In this important sense, their narrative of change was authentic as well as coherent.

## Notes

1. As early as Five B. C., sages of India have assiduously debated with logical precision the dialectic of realism (see S. Dasgupta 1969).

2. I consider the sociology of India's reform movement by applying a paradigm that appeared earlier in Lipset and Basu (1975: 433-470). Literature on social reform movements are often abstract and lack a real life experience. They lack the complex interrelated aspects of the different roles and the difficulties involved in any effort to unravel their overlapping interconnection in the world. In this study, I take an alternate approach. I suggest that we can reach primary roots of "social" movement if we examine the thoughts and actions of a reformer, because deeply embedded in his or her ideas and activities are historical and cultural maps to multiple realities. By considering the lives and activities of various types of reform roles, as well as reformers, we can navigate how a social movement structures ideas and simultaneously serves up a cognitive functional plan. By "structure," I signify culture of value and thought called for by a movement, namely from complete reordering of values, which is fundamentally oriented toward new ideas and integration. Ideas range from pure innovation to applied integration. In considering the counterpart "function," I mean the belief in the utility of institutional change espoused by a movement's leader. From our extensive review of literature, we concluded that functional requisites of reformer agents' belief system can be classified under two broad

categories — intellect and intelligence. Deducing from our cross-referenced paradigm of social reform, we can now identify four distinctive reformer types of most movements. They are as follows: Gatekeeper (Innovation-Intellect), Moralist (Innovation-Intelligence), Preserver (Integration-Intellect), and Caretaker (Integration-Intelligence). Later, I elaborate under the theme "An Interpretive Paradigm."

3. This text has been inscribed on a stone tablet at the outside of the house. Mr. "M (1986:430)" has recorded their visits with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. He also recorded a meeting between Harinath and Ramakrishna on May 24, 1884.

4. An exemplary literary inquiry was authored by Montaigne (1948).

5. As an example, I refer to his painting, "*Abhisarika —in gouache—* (undated).

6. I refer the readers to a current catalogue, *Art of Bengal—Past and Present, 1850-2000*, which was published in Kolkata by the Centre of International Modern Art (2001).

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