

Beyond Cosmopolitanism

Ananta Kumar Giri
Editor

Beyond Cosmopolitanism

Towards Planetary Transformations

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For Margaret Chatterjee, Bhikhu Parekh and Pratibha Roy

FOREWORD

Globalization is a catchword of our time. Taken by itself, the term only refers to a process of spatial expansion—while leaving the ethical and political dimensions of the process in the dark. The real question, however, is, what kind of people will inhabit this expanded space, and in which manner will they do so? It is in reference to this issue that the term “cosmopolitanism” is commonly employed. Implicit in this word is the notion that people live somehow as “citizens of the world” and that their manner of living transforms the world into a precious shared habitat or “cosmos.” What is conjured up by the latter term is not a soulless uniformity or bland monotony but rather the sense of a “*coincidentia oppositorum*”: of a harmony in disharmony, of concord in discord, or a unity in the midst of staggering diversity.

Taken in this sense, cosmopolitanism is far removed from some prominent trends of our time. Almost everywhere we find a disturbing tendency to embrace discord and disharmony, a hankering for exclusive identity completely aloof of shared ways of life. In opposition to an earlier celebration of multiculturalism, we find in many places an upsurge of xenophobia, of national or ethnic chauvinism, of the desire to erect dividing walls and barriers between peoples. This is what the poet Heine described as the descent into a “shabby and coarse” kind of backwardness. To be sure, what is wrong here is not a certain attachment to “roots,” a moderate and unassuming cultivation of local traditions and customs. Perversion enters when attachment becomes a source of ill will, hatred and unilateral aggression.

Recognition of the darker sides of our time provides no dispensation from struggle. Precisely in view of the rising tide of xenophobia it is imperative to uphold the vision of cosmopolitanism. The present volume tries to do exactly this. The book does not only talk about cosmopolitanism but exemplifies in its own structure and content the meaning of the term. The chapters have been contributed by distinguished writers hailing from different corners of the world and approaching the topic from diverse angles or perspectives. The editor, Ananta Kumar Giri, is himself the epitome of a cosmopolitan scholar, having visited the majority of the world's countries and having acquired an enviable reputation as a multicultural, multilingual, and multifaceted intellectual. One can only wish this book the greatest possible circulation.

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PREFACE

Being with our home and the world with creative openness which facilitates co-learning and self, social, cultural and world transformations is a perennial challenge with us since the dawn of humanity. The discourse of cosmopolitanism embodies this yearning and challenge of humanity to be with the world not only as citizens of the world but also as children of Mother Earth. *Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Towards Planetary Transformations* explores these multiple yearnings and contestations over the discourse and practice of cosmopolitanism.

The book began with my participation in a symposium with Martha Nussbaum on her book, *Frontiers of Justice*, held at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, in March 2006 which was organized by my dear friend Professor Des Gasper, who is also a contributor to this volume. I had composed my essay, “Cosmopolitanism and Beyond: Towards a Multiverse of Transformations,” for this symposium, which then had come out in *Development and Change* in 2006. After this I had organized workshops on this at the Institute of Sociology, the University of Freiburg, Germany, in February 2007 and at Indus Business Academy, Bangalore and Greater Noida, in which some of the contributors of this volume had taken part. The book draws upon contributions in these workshops and then has other invited contributions.

It is a joy for us to dedicate this book to Margaret Chatterjee, Bhikhu Parekh and Pratibha Roy—three inspiring seekers, scholars and writers of our present-day world. Margaret Chatterjee is a philosopher but her philosophical works and meditations are truly cosmopolitan as they move across religious and philosophical traditions. She is also a poetess, and her work

in philosophy embodies a deep participation with the pain of humanity as she writes in her essay on life world about problems of malnutrition:

On this side of the wall children have milk to drink at least once a day. On the other side, one *pawa* of milk has to stretch for glasses of tea for five adults plus children. A six year old girl told me this. Near the milk shop there are three *mithai* shops. This is where the bulk of the milk goes. Consciousness cries out for transformation, a consciousness imbued with conscience. Such a consciousness would grow laterally, horizontally, turning the search light of attention on the endless anomalies around us, the endless injustices and lack of any sense of priorities. (Chatterjee 2005a: 16; also see Chatterjee 2005b)

Cosmopolitan realization depends upon such horizontal crying consciousness.

Bhikhu Parekh has also explored work of such consciousness across traditions especially as he has creatively elaborated pathways of Gandhi (Parekh 2016). Pratibha Roy has explored life, letters and the world with passion, sympathy and understanding and she has also explored women's struggles for liberation across myths, society and histories. Her novel in Odia about Draupadi entitled *Yajaseni*, which has been translated into English as *Draupadi*, has touched many people's heart. For her work she has been awarded *Gyanapeetha*, a high literary award from India. Her work raises new challenges for cosmopolitan realizations of justice, especially gender justice, across borders and traditions.

This book has been long in the making and I am grateful to the contributors for their kindness, patience and support. I am grateful to Sarah Crowley and Connie, Li in Palgrave for their support of this project. I thank Mr. Aswhin V for his help. Finally, I hope this book enkindles our imagination and engagement for a new cosmopolitan engagement as explored in the following two poems:

*An Evening of Breaking Boxes
Towards a New Cosmopoetics of World Citizenship*

It has been an evening of breaking boxes
not of breaking news
Your lectures on cosmopolitanism
and world citizenship
have broken our many boundaries
between states and faiths

rivers and the sky
 I now rush to touch the river
 beyond the trap of my social security number
 Each breaking
 is a moment of awakening
 You say citizenship is work and meditation
 With beauty, dignity and dialogues
 I now pause
 have patience and realize
 I can start my work and meditations
 right at this moment
 My work and meditation
 is part of an *ecology of hope*
 Hope not only falls from the sky
 It is born out of our strivings
 Bio-aesthetic strivings and spiritual strivings
 Hope work
 With and beyond the landscape
 of despair
 a new self-making
 Foundations for a new community
 A new science and spirituality
 A new cosmopolitanism as part of a new cosmology of being
 A new *cosmopoesis* of citizenship
 A new *cosmopoesis* of our world
 Kissing grandeur in each other
 In our sour sweet lips. (Giri 2017)

I hope that one day all
 Nations great and small
 Will be able to stand up and say
 We lived in the pursuit of peace for all
 May be then there will come a day
 When instead of saying “God bless America,”
 Or “God bless some other country,”
 Every one everywhere will say,
 “God Bless the World”. (Ali with Ali 2004: xxi)

Holi, Festival of Colors, March 2017,
 Madras Institute of Development Studies,
 Chennai, India

Ananta Kumar Giri

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Fig. 4.1 Spheres of belonging

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