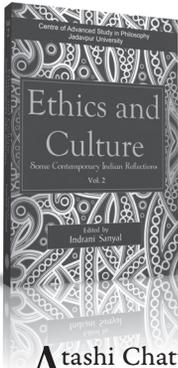


# REVIEWS

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## **Ethics and Culture: Some Contemporary Indian Reflections Vol. 2** Edited by Indrani Sanyal

DK Printworld (P) Ltd, F-395, Sudarshan Park, Near ESI Hospital New Delhi 110 015. [www.dkprintworld.com](http://www.dkprintworld.com). 2016. 265 pp. HB. ₹ 750. ISBN 9788170174530.

Atashi Chatterjee Sinha's essay (60–89) in this collection is one of the best essays on not merely Benoy Kumar Sarkar's hermeneutics of Asian cosmopolitanism but also on Hinduism and the Vedas: 'Rta is the rhythm of Being. It is Being ... Hindu metaphysics presupposes that behind what we experience as the world there is a fundamental order, unity, design, rhythm, rule, system, harmony or organization. There is a profound mingling, of Rta, the concept of *eka* (one), this (*idam*) and *atman-Brahman* (self-Being) which originated in the early Hindu scriptures' (73–4).

Chatterjee Sinha discusses the Rigveda in the quoted lines and she does her cultural work by connecting *Rita* with both 'the Chinese notion of *tao*' and 'the Greek notion of *logos*' (74). Chatterjee Sinha shines as a historian of ideas. She traces the history of the term 'logos'. Scholars and students of philosophy, the humanities, and even biblical studies will do well to read her on logos than scour the Internet or refer to obscure tomes for understanding the meaning of logos. Without understanding the meaning of logos one would hardly understand the humanities and the social sciences today, leave alone philosophy.

To understand ethics and culture, it is important to understand logos since it is the Thomist 'unmovable mover'. It is logos which has defined till date all philosophy, both Western and Eastern, with the exceptions of Buddhist and Jain metaphysics. Yet Buddhist and Jain polemicists

attack logos as do those who have not carefully read Western epistemologies and ontologies. If one sits through seminars in the humanities and philosophy then one understands why Chatterjee Sinha has effected the impossible in her brilliant essay. This reviewer has not found a clearer definition of logos anywhere else. While Christian thinkers and Swami Swahananda of the Ramakrishna Mission had connected the logos with Om and the Word that was made Flesh—see the first verse of *The Gospel of John*—in both writing and in speeches, none before Chatterjee Sinha had connected logos with *tao* and *maat*. This is original, non-speculative philosophising. The logos, according to Jacques Derrida who has been misunderstood and misread, never slips. The meaning of logos slips and that is understandable since logos is the Hegelian 'Man-Nature or Mind-Matter unity' (74).

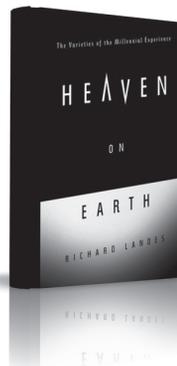
The book under review has other thought-provoking essays by scholars and Ratna Dutta Sharma's essay (137–66) on the relationship of Rabindranath Tagore's father, Devendranath Tagore with the *Upanishads* will be of importance to Tagore scholars. Appendices I and II of this book are helpful since they list eminent Indian philosophers, both living and dead. Indrani Sanyal has done a good job in editing this book.

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## **Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience**

Richard Landes

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DPDK, UK. [www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com). 2011. 520 pp. HB. \$38.95. ISBN 9780199753598.

White supremacists including the historian Niall Ferguson (b.1964), the singer Steve Hofmeyr (b.1964) want the African continent to be a failed democracy. Afrikaners are readying for the day when whites in South Africa's metropolises will run to the hinterlands of South Africa for shelter. Many Afrikaners are convinced that doomsday is at hand, albeit, to be brought about by South Africa's black majority. (See Benjamin Zand, 'Afrikaners on the Edge', *Our World*, BBC, 17 September 2016).

In early 2016 Turkey witnessed one of its goriest coup attempts fuelled by Fethullah Gülen (b.1941). And India is reeling from suicide as explained in 'Suicide Terrorism' in the book under review (462–3) and other terrorist attacks including the one in Uri, Kashmir in September 2016. The ISIS shows no signs of letting up. All of these extremist movements are fuelled by millennialist ideologies. From the paranoid Afrikaner in his hinterland hideout to Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the present leader of Boko Haram, now incorporated into the ISIS, to the ISIS lone-wolves throughout the globe as discussed in 'Internet Jihad' (464), the popularity of 'execution videos' and to Pakistan's ISI handlers controlling suicide bombers in India; each of them believes that their actions will finally win them heaven (430–7). This desire for 'heaven on earth' needs to be studied to understand and end genocides. There are two ways to understand this deadly phenomenon of millennialism—one through literature and the other through meticulous historiography.

Haruki Murakami in his *Underground* (2000) and *1Q84* (2011) and Stephen King in his *The Stand* (1978) and *Revival* (2014) show the disastrous consequences of millennial or fundamentalist movements. Both know that neuroses and the need for certainties—Kantian categorical imperatives—lead to disasters.

Haruki Murakami's texts provide us with the literary perspective required for comprehending millennial frenzy. Murakami has recorded the religious cult Aum Shinrikyo's 1995 Tokyo subway gas attack in his *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche* (2000). The gassing was fuelled by millennialism. Later Murakami studies the millennial, cultic mindset in

his *1Q84*. Richard Landes's book is the historical counterpart of Murakami's literary oeuvre. Landes constructs a historical matrix needed to understand our desire for utopias on earth from the ancient Egyptians till date in 'Imperial Millennialism' (149–84). Landes's study of millennial longings is matched only by Richard Slotkin's work on American exceptionalism. If one studies Murakami, Slotkin, and Landes synoptically then one understands how all utopias have as their inevitable telos, dystopic Orwellian worlds. Landes's book under review performs its cultural work by making explicit the *raison d'être* for the existence of all sorts of cults and fanatics who believe that our/their time of reckoning is very near.

This history of absurdity is Landes's subject. Landes's magisterial history of the ideas of millennialism is indispensable to understand. For example, the ideological framework which helps ISIS gnaw away at Kantian categorical imperatives and thus casually annihilate ethnic groups like the Yazidis. World leaders, international studies' experts, and even fundamentalists will benefit from reading the fourteenth chapter, 'Enraged Millennialism' (421–66). Landes identifies seven themes (433–5) which 'now play a central role in this current round of Muslim apocalyptic discourse' (433). This discourse is not different from the Nazi discourse about the Jews. Whereas the Nazis thought that Jews 'secretly controlled the world', Muslim apocalyptic writers think that Jews 'openly control the world' (455). Footnotes are not redundant if they are properly inserted within the main text. Richard Slotkin's trilogy on American exceptionalism has copious and relevant footnotes that lead to other avenues of scholarship. They also prevent the need to constantly turn pages to look for endnotes. Every single footnote of Landes's book is an eye-opener. See Landes's footnote 136 on page 449 for understanding how contemporary Islam dreamt of ruling the world after the US and the erstwhile USSR's demise.

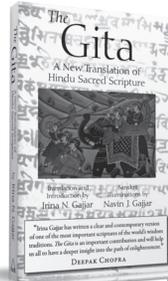
The French Revolution (1789–99) is the Western world's classic example where a utopia turned into a dystopia. The French Revolution is taught with a lot of gusto. Landes's threadbare study of it in the ninth chapter, 'Democratic

Millennialism' (250–87) is historiography at its best. The French Revolution is what Landes calls 'a *progressive demotic millennial movement*'; dangerous since it was 'inspired by a desire to *perfect the world through egalitarian ideals*', which sought to '*legislate the just society*' (250). Instead of a just society, we had butchery matched only by the English Puritan Interregnum's determination to silence all dissent. This period in English history was another millennialist and disastrous *phantasy*.

That Hitler's genocide is unique has been proven by Susan Neiman (b.1955) in *Evil in Modern Thought* (New Jersey: Princeton University, 2002) and by Sir Ian Kershaw (b.1943) in his research on the Nazis. The collusion between Christianity and the Nazis too have been documented, but not Hitler's own religiosity. Landes breaks new ground when he speaks of 'Hitler's religiosity', which 'continues to constitute a major problem for historians' since most 'tend to view Hitler through a secular prism' (365). Landes has contextualised Hitler's rise and reign within the discourse of millennialist religious bigotry. Landes rightly questions among other issues Hannah Arendt's (1906–75) 'a priori' dismissal of 'any link between Nazism and Christianity' (366). Landes's 'Ariosophy and the Occult Origins of Nazism' (367–9) is an original contribution to Holocaust Studies. 'Genocidal Millennialism: Nazi Paranoia' (353–88) should be read alongside the works of Susan Neiman. Neiman's understanding of Nazi genocide from her Kantian, neo-Enlightenment position is found to be empirically robust by Landes's research. Within genocide and Holocaust studies, both Neiman's and Landes's works along with the work of Bashabi Fraser (1954–) are cautionary and we ignore them at the cost of letting 'Post-modern Millennialism' (391–466) once again produce another Hitler, a cruel parody of Nietzsche's 'Übermensch'.

Landes's book will be remembered as a cautionary work since millennial frenzies are not disappearing anytime soon. As Slotkin makes explicit Cormac McCarthy and Larry McMurtry, Landes makes explicit Murakami and King.

*Subhashis Chattopadhyay*



### **The Gita: A New Translation of Hindu Sacred Scripture**

Translated and Introduced by  
Irina N Gajjar

Axios Press, PO Box 118, Mount Jackson, VA 22842, USA. 2007. xviii + 313 pp. PB. \$12. ISBN 9780975366288.

One more translation of the Gita is not unwelcome, and Dr Stefan Thomke's adulatory foreword is understandable as he has known the translator since he was fifteen. And what does the preface by Dr Irina N Gajjar say? 'Like the Sanskrit original, *The Gita* is written in blank verse' (xiv). While her translation is more a free verse rendering, the original Sanskrit is in classic *anush-tup* metre with four verses of eight syllables each. Further on, Gajjar's feminist pen tends to confuse the reader no end.

'Feminine and masculine pronouns have been used interchangeably as have the words man and woman. In the Sanskrit, the term "man" and the masculine are used generically to represent the human race. The mission of this work has been to reincarnate the Gita as an English work using English structure. Only in this way can the beauty, depth and logic of the Sanskrit original survive translation. (ibid.)'

Well, I never! I have scores of English translations before me including Swami Swarupananda's which was first published by the Advaita Ashrama in 1909. Very famous translators, whose knowledge of the source and target languages was impeccable, like B G Tilak and Sri Aurobindo did not find the work male-centric. Again, Gajjar's own translation is far from being accurate. *Tapah* becomes 'suffering', not austerity! (253). And the Lord's *rupa* is always conveyed as 'four armed form' (205). The same unease clouds us when we seek the original in the translation. Uncalled for additions and disturbing deletions leave a sour taste. With her firm adherence to the Aryan Invasion Theory that stands rejected, she makes herself suspect as a researcher as well.

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