

The Gita and Sen's Idea of Justice

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In his recent book *The Idea of Justice*, Amartya Sen discusses the main message of the Bhagavadgita, as he understands it. He writes: "On the eve of the battle that is the central episode of the epic [the Mahabharata], the invincible warrior, Arjuna, expresses his profound doubts about leading the fight which will result in so much killing. He is told by his adviser, Krishna, that he, Arjuna, must give priority to his duty, that is, to fight, irrespective of the consequences."¹ Sen goes on to say "that famous debate is often interpreted as one about deontology versus consequentialism, with Krishna, the deontologist, urging Arjuna to do his duty, while Arjuna, the alleged consequentialist, worries about the terrible consequences of the war."² To unpack this quotation, let us begin with the meaning of the words 'deontology' and 'consequentialism'. The former refers to the philosophical study of duty; by contrast, the word 'ontology' refers to the metaphysical study of the nature of being. Consequentialism means the doctrine that the morality of an action is to be judged solely by its consequences. Sen continues: "Krishna's hallowing of the demands of duty is meant to win the argument, at least as seen in the religious perspective. Indeed, the Bhagavadgita has become a treatise of great theological importance in Hindu philosophy, focusing particularly on the 'removal' of Arjuna's doubts. Krishna's moral position has also been eloquently endorsed by many philosophical and literary commentators across the world."³

In this paper, we will argue that Sen's interpretation of the Gita is narrow in focus and misses the Gita's central thesis, namely, a masterly synthesis of all philosophical views through the concept of yoga, interpreted in the widest possible way. It may begin with deontology in chapter 2 but quickly moves into ontology from then onwards until the end of the text. The Gita is a psychological and spiritual treatise and is universal in its message. Though in the context of the epic, it is addressed to Arjuna, in reality, it is addressed to every human being. Sen's essays fail to do justice to the Gita's essential message about how to deal with the battle between our good and bad impulses — the battle within — and how to transcend this duality and harness our energies to attain enlightenment. Given Sen's celebrity status⁴, it is likely that many Western readers (and some Eastern ones too) are being introduced to the Gita through his writings. Thus, it is all the more urgent that we address his apparently narrow and potentially contentious views.

To begin, the Bhagavadgita is set on the battlefield and addresses Arjuna's hesitation and despondency, which overwhelm him at the eleventh hour. This is the content of the opening chapter. To lift Arjuna out of his despondency, Krishna initially tries to snap him out of it, as it were. "Cast off this petty faintheartedness and arise, O oppressor of the foes!"⁵ This admonition seemingly has no effect since Arjuna replies that "it is better to live the life of a mendicant than to slay these honoured teachers,"⁶ thus rationalising his position. Confused, he submits: "I am thy pupil, please teach me."⁷ Then Krishna moves into a philosophical view of life highlighting the immortality of the soul. Summa-



Sketch of Krishna by the artist Nandalal Bose.

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rising the quintessence of Samkhya philosophy, he says to Arjuna:

You grieve for those for whom you should not grieve. The wise do not grieve either for the dead or the living. Never was there a time when I was not, nor you, nor these people here. Never will there be a time when we shall all cease to be. The drama of life is a process of growth. Just as one grows in this body from childhood, youth and old age, even so, one moves from death to birth, by taking on another body. The sage is not perplexed by this.⁸

To understand Krishna's immediate reference to Samkhya, we must understand the origins and central tenets of this philosophy, attributed to Kapila. It is perhaps the oldest system of philosophy.

Vivekananda writes that Samkhya “is the basis of the philosophy of the whole world.”⁹ He adds,

There is no philosophy in the world that is not indebted to Kapila. Pythagoras came to India and studied this philosophy and that was the beginning of the philosophy of the Greeks. Later, it formed the Alexandrian school, and still later, the Gnostic. It became divided into two, one part went to Europe and Alexandria, and the other remained in India and out of this, the system of Vyasa was developed. The Samkhya philosophy of Kapila was the first rational system the world ever saw. Every metaphysician in the world must pay homage to him. I want to impress on your mind that we are bound to listen to him as the great father of philosophy. This wonderful man, the most ancient of philosophers, is mentioned even in the Shruti, ‘O Lord, Thou who produced the sage Kapila in the beginning.’ How wonderful his perceptions were, and if there is any proof required of the extraordinary power of the perception of the Yogis, such men are the proof. They had no microscopes or telescopes. Yet, how fine their perception was, how perfect and wonderful their analysis of things.¹⁰

The Samkhya philosophy is a philosophy of evolutionary dualism. It begins with the axiom that there are two universal and indestructible principles whose inter-relation is the cause of the universe. These are *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, or Pure Awareness and Creative Energy. The Sanskrit word *prakriti* and the English ‘procreate’ are cognates. In Indian mythology and Tantra philosophy, these two principles are often represented as *Shiva* and *Shakti*, and their inter-relation, represented as *Ardhanarisvara*. *Prakriti* is said to consist of three modes of energy, called *gunas*. These are *tamas* (or inertia), *rajas* (activity), and *sattva* (equilibrium). These concepts are essential for an understanding of the Gita.

The idea of reincarnation and the immortality of the soul is central to the Samkhya view. Kapila viewed reincarnation as the immediate consequence of the principle of causation (or the law of *karma*). It is thus natural that Krishna gives this as his next argument for Arjuna to engage in the battle. When this does not work, he reminds him of his duty and how his reputation will be damaged and that it is his responsibility to engage in battle. After having spoken thus, he gives a brief exposition of Karma Yoga. “To action alone you have the right, but not to the fruits thereof.”¹¹ This is not a lesson in “doing one’s duty irrespective of consequences.”¹² In fact, the concept of karma is all about cause and effect. Krishna’s teaching has to be taken in the context of the Yoga philosophy he is expounding. The core teaching of this philosophy relates to how to train the mind in concentration. When the mind is distracted by concerns of selfish gain, it is unable to perform its duty. Thus Krishna teaches: “Fixed in yoga, do thy work, abandoning attachment, with an even mind in success and failure, for evenness of mind is called

yoga.”¹³ With a focused mind, one must do one’s best, without worrying about the outcome, since worry only saps the individual of energy that is better used in the performance of the task at hand. Moreover, there are other factors that determine the outcome.

Vivekananda gives his personal view on this matter:

I have been asked many times how we can work if we do not have the passion which we generally feel for work. I also thought in that way years ago, but as I am growing older, getting more experience, I find it is not true. The less passion there is, the better we work. The calmer we are, the better for us, and the more the amount of work we can do. When we let loose our feelings, we waste so much energy, shatter our nerves, disturb our minds, and accomplish very little work. The energy which ought to have gone out as work is spent as mere feeling, which counts for nothing. It is only when the mind is very calm and collected that the whole of its energy is spent in doing good work ... The man who gives way to anger, or hatred, or any other passion, cannot work; he only breaks himself to pieces, and does nothing practical. It is the calm, forgiving, equable, well-balanced mind that does the greatest amount of work.¹⁴

Such a teaching is all the more relevant in this modern society in which many people are driven by success. We strive for success and measure others by this metric, and alas, we measure ourselves by it too. Krishna’s philosophy is pure pragmatism: do your work with a concentrated mind, free of distractions and attachments. It is this notion of attachment that many do not understand. The astute reader will observe that after expounding the view of Samkhya, Krishna gives the view of Yoga (or more precisely raja yoga, the yoga of psychic control). In the practice of raja yoga, the problem is one of *samskaras*, or subconscious impressions. It is very much tied to causation, or *karma*. With every action, with every thought, with every breath, we are creating karma, a never-ending process of creating more and more impressions. We thus become automatons trapped in the mechanical maze of subconscious impressions and tendencies. Just as a caterpillar spins its own cocoon and becomes trapped in it, so also the human being spins the web of karma and becomes trapped in the cycle of birth and rebirth. The traditional yogic response to this problem is to renounce the world and

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its works and retreat, if only figuratively, to the solitude of a Himalayan cave or a forest retreat. But Krishna shatters this approach and introduces the revolutionary idea of the science of work, or *karma yoga*. “Do thou thy allotted work ... with the mind fixed in the Higher Self, free from selfish desire, egotism and mental fever.”¹⁵

In his book on karma yoga, Swami Vivekananda amplifies this message. He writes:

The world's wheel within wheel is a terrible mechanism; if we put our hands in it, as soon as we are caught we are gone. We all think that when we have done a certain duty, we shall be at rest; but before we have done a part of that duty, another is already in waiting. We are all being dragged by this mighty, complex world machine. There are only two ways out of it; one is to give up all concerns with the machine, to let it go and stand aside, to give up our desires. That is very easy to say, but it is almost impossible to do. I do not know whether in twenty millions of men one can do that. The other way is to plunge into work and learn the secret of work. Through proper work done inside, it is also possible to come out. Through the machinery itself is the way out.¹⁶

This is one of the remarkable contributions of the Bhagavadgita to the history of human thought.

The Sankhya philosophy is a philosophy of evolutionary dualism.

Sen sees this teaching differently. He writes:

Krishna argues that Arjuna must do his duty, come what may, and in this case, he has a duty to fight, no matter what results from it. It is a just cause, and as a warrior and a general on whom his side must rely, he cannot waver from his obligations. Krishna's high deontology, including his duty-centered and consequence independent reasoning, has been deeply influential in moral debates in subsequent millennia.¹⁷

This is a hasty and superficial view of the grand philosophical discourse on the battlefield. Sen adds: "It is, I suppose, a tribute to the power of pure theory that even the great apostle of non-violence, Mohandas Gandhi, felt deeply inspired by Krishna's words on doing one's duty irrespective of consequences (and quoted Krishna from the Gita quite frequently), even though the duty in this case was for Arjuna to fight a violent war and not to shrink from killing others, a cause to which Gandhi would not normally be expected to warm."¹⁸ It does not seem to have occurred to Sen that Gandhi's example casts doubt on Sen's own interpretation of the Gita. Why would Gandhi write, "When disappointment stares me in the face, and all alone I see not one ray of light, I go back to the Bhagavadgita. I find a verse here and a verse there and I immediately begin to smile in the middle of overwhelming tragedies — and my life has been full of external tragedies — and if they have left no visible scar on me, I owe it all to the teachings of the Bhagavadgita."¹⁹ Why would Gandhi bestow such praise on the Gita if Sen's view were right? Not only Gandhi, but a vast succession of first-rate scholars and sages has analysed and commented upon the Gita, and it has withstood the test of time.

Several things about Sen's view are objectionable. For one thing, he fails to see that Krishna is not advocating a "consequence independent reasoning." Rather, he is addressing the fundamental problem of

the human psyche, namely the *samskaras*, or latent tendencies. It is often said that history repeats itself, i.e., that the world makes the same mistakes again and again, and the reason is that the human psyche is stuck in the quagmire of habit. The way to free the mind from this rut is to become "detached". This does not mean refraining from work, since inaction too is a kind of action that leads to the creation of *samskara*. Rather, we must engage in work but be detached at the same time. That is, the mind must not be preoccupied with the expectation of results while it is engaged in work since that expectation distracts it from doing its work well. Meanwhile the mind creates new psychic impressions that only perpetuate the problem. Thus, what Krishna is offering is a means to eliminate the root of the problem so that it does not sprout again. It is a profound metaphysical discourse. Sen's trouble is that he sees the problem in rigid categories of 'black' and 'white' or 'good' and 'evil' or 'violence' and 'non-violence', all of which is suggestive of an Abrahamic perspective.

Sen writes that "Krishna's moral position has also received eloquent endorsements from many philosophical and

literary commentators across the world; and admiration for the Gita and for Krishna's arguments in particular, has been a lasting phenomenon in parts of European intellectual culture."²⁰ In a footnote, he refers in particular to the nineteenth-century naturalist Wilhelm von Humboldt who wrote that the Gita was "the most beautiful, perhaps the only true philosophical song existing in any known tongue."²¹ Then he writes, "Christopher Isherwood translated the Bhagavadgita into English and T.S. Eliot explicated Krishna's reasoning and encapsulated his main message in poetry."²² Oddly, Sen puts a footnote after Isherwood to indicate in a miniscule part at the end of his book that Isherwood had "co-authored" the book with Swami Prabhavananda.²³ The fact is that Swami Prabhavananda gave lectures on the Gita and these were transcribed and edited by Isherwood. In such a case, no scholar would attribute the authorship to the scribe. But Sen's omission of Swami Prabhavananda and his highlighting Isherwood as the lead author is curious to say the least. Perhaps he is looking for "English" commentators of the Gita since he refers also to T.S. Eliot's poem "The Dry Salvages", which encapsulates the message of the Gita in the verse 'And do not think of the fruit of action./ Fare forward. Not fare well,/ But fare forward, voyagers.' The error here is that Sen superimposes Eliot's poetic versification of parts of the Gita as its main message. This type of superimposition is a common error in academic circles.

Krishna emphasizes that the work we do is determined by our nature and functioning as well as our psychological disposition. From street cleaning to scholasticism, all works are important and equally valid in the spiritual journey of the individual. Even from Sen's perspective, one can foresee greater horrors if Arjuna were not to fight, because a soldier is one who is appointed to defend the weak and the helpless, who have no other recourse to defend themselves against tyranny. Aurobindo elaborates on this aspect of the Gita's message. He writes:

The Gita is ... addressed to a fighter, a man of action, one

whose duty in life is that of war and protection, war as a part of government for the protection of those who are excused from that duty, debarred from protecting themselves and therefore at the mercy of the strong and violent ... Although the more general and universal ideas of the Gita are those which are important to us, we ought not to leave out of consideration altogether the coloring and trend they take from the peculiar Indian culture and social system in the midst of which they arose. ... To the modern mind, man is a thinker, worker, or producer, and a fighter all in one and the tendency of the social system is to lump all these activities and to demand from each individual his contribution to the intellectual, economical and military life and needs of the community without paying any heed to the demands of his individual nature and temperament. The ancient Indian civilization laid peculiar stress on the individual nature, tendency, temperament, and sought to determine by it the ethical type, function and place in the society. Nor did it consider man primarily a social being ... but rather as a spiritual being in process of formation and development and his social life, ethical life ... as means and stages of spiritual formation.

There are other excellent commentaries in English on the Gita that predate the Isherwood-Prabhavananda edition. For instance, in 1785 Charles Wilkins, who helped William Jones establish the Asiatic Society to conduct research of Indian antiquity, did the first English translation. But the famous "Minute on Indian Education" of T.B. Macaulay in 1835 made English the medium of education in all Indian schools and colleges and put Protestant missionaries in charge of all philosophical education, thus putting an end to any positive reception of the Wilkins translation.²⁴ Furthermore, the intellectual elite headed by James Stuart Mill (father of the more famous John Stuart Mill) extinguished any English admiration of Gita or Indian philosophy, largely through Mill's shoddily written *History of British India*. But there are other reliable translations of the Gita with excellent commentaries in the period between Wilkins and Isherwood/Prabhavananda, the most notable being the one by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Sen does not seem to be aware of these translations.

The difficulty with Sen's exposition is two-fold. On the one hand, his understanding of the discourse is myopic in that it fails to include chapters 3 to 18 in the discussion. Instead, Sen focuses only on the initial three arguments Krishna offers to Arjuna in the immediacy of the moment. He fails to understand the deep metaphysical discourse. The second difficulty is that many who have not studied the Gita, are first learning about it through Sen's book, motivated, as they are, by his celebrity status. All this leads to a great deal of confusion. To add more mist to the fog of confusion, Sen writes that "Arjuna ultimately concedes defeat, but not before Krishna backs up the intellectual force of his argument with some supernatural demonstration of his divinity."²⁵ Sen is evidently referring to the 11th chapter on the *Visvarupadarsana*, the vision of Krishna's universal form. The Gita does not end with chapter 11 but moves into bhakti yoga and higher yogas for another seven more chapters. So it is misleading to say that Arjuna "concedes defeat" after Krishna shows his universal form.

Again, Sen misses the point. Arjuna does not "concede defeat"

since there was no argument. At the opening of the Gita, Arjuna says "I am thy pupil, please teach me."²⁶ It is a philosophical discourse that is taking place on the battlefield, not an argument or debate. After having learned the elaborate and subtle teachings of Raja Yoga, Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga, as well as of the spiritual goal of raising one's level of awareness, Arjuna asks if he can have this universal vision, a perspective that Krishna evidently has. It is not to convince Arjuna of the correctness of his position or even to reveal his divinity that Krishna bestows on Arjuna a vision of his universal form. Rather, the dialogue makes a nice transition into Bhakti yoga, or the yoga of devotion. Human beings are unable to think abstractly, however hard we may try. As long as we are embodied beings, we are apt to think in terms of name and form. Vivekananda humorously writes: "If the buffaloes desire to worship God, they, in keeping with their own nature, will see Him as a huge buffalo; if a fish wishes to worship God, its concept of Him would inevitably be a big fish; and man must think of Him as a man." Thus it is in the nature of human beings to worship through forms and images. The Gita does not end at chapter 11, after Krishna shows to Arjuna his universal form; it continues for another seven more chapters, expounding a multi-layered philosophy moving from non-dualism to dualism in the twelfth chapter, and then to pluralism. The thirteenth chapter is an exposition of Samkhya's worldview with two eternal principles called *Purusa* and *Prakriti*. Simply put, this is Pure Awareness and Creative Energy, or as Krishna explains it, the Knower of the Field (*ksetrajna*) and the field (*kstera*). This then merges into the three-fold view of nature, with the operation of the three modes (or *gunas*) elaborately explained till the eighteenth chapter. Finally, Krishna says to Arjuna that the philosophy he has explained is the highest philosophy — his philosophy — and that he may now do as he wishes, thus giving Arjuna free choice. *Yatha icchasi tatha kuru*, Krishna says.

But there is a larger dimension to the message. It is true that war leads to destruction and death, but Arjuna's argument that if the Kauravas had their way, there would be less destruction or persecution is doubtful. In life, we are always confronted with choices, few of which are black or white. Often we find ourselves choosing the lesser of two evils. In this context, let me highlight another objectionable aspect of Sen's essay. He quotes the famous episode of J. Robert Oppenheimer, who was in charge of the Manhattan project, which developed the first atomic bomb. When the bomb was first tested in the Los Alamos desert, Oppenheimer reportedly quoted the Gita, especially the description of the universal form. "If the light of a thousand suns were to blaze forth all at once in the sky, that might resemble the splendour of that exalted Being."²⁷ Oppenheimer then quotes incorrectly a later verse as "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." This last quotation is repeated every year in newspapers around the world to mark the anniversary of the first atomic test on July 16, 1945. I have pointed out in my book *Indian Philosophy* that the correct translation is "I am Time, the devourer of worlds." It is unfortunate that Oppenheimer's erroneous translation is repeated *ad infinitum* and goes uncorrected. Referring to this episode in Oppenheimer's life, Sen writes:

Just like the advice that Arjuna, the 'warrior', had received from Krishna about his duty to fight for a just cause, Oppenheimer, the 'physicist', found justification, at that time, in his technical commitment to develop a bomb for what was

clearly the right side. Later on, deeply questioning his own contribution to the development of the bomb, Oppenheimer would reconsider the situation with hindsight: 'When you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success.'²⁹

Sen's suggestion is that Oppenheimer, in hindsight, would not have carried out the atomic bomb project and that he was drawn to it because it was 'technically sweet'.

In my view, this analysis is erroneous and over-simplified. The ethical dilemma of Arjuna is in many ways similar to the ethical dilemmas faced by the nuclear physicists involved in the research to build the bomb. Teachers, students and researchers who had earlier worked together found themselves on opposite sides during the Second World War. This is amplified in several notable personalities, most specifically Werner Heisenberg, Niels Bohr and Robert Oppenheimer. Niels Bohr was very much the teacher figure, and his relation to Heisenberg is well-documented. During the war, Heisenberg seemed to sympathize with the Third Reich. The play titled *Copenhagen* dramatizes this dilemma. It depicts the volatile meeting between Heisenberg and Bohr in 1941 and the conflicts that emerged in Denmark, which was then occupied by the Nazis. Apparently, Heisenberg was troubled until the end of his life about this strange circumstance and position. He tried to explain it this way: "Under a dictatorship active resistance can only be practised by those who pretend to collaborate with the regime. Anyone speaking out openly against the system ... deprives himself of any chance of active resistance."³⁰ Heisenberg insisted, till the end of his life, that the world community had misunderstood him. His position seemed similar to that of Karma in the Mahabharata.

The message of the Gita is not a 'consequence independent deontology' but rather a psycho-spiritual treatise of ontology amplifying the spiritual destiny of the human being.

Many deep-thinking scientists found themselves in different camps and were confronted with existential dilemmas. Some scientists foolishly believed atomic weapons would end all wars. It was widely known that the Germans were already building an atomic bomb, with Heisenberg as their lead scientist. Oppenheimer was well aware of this. Thus, even though he may have been motivated by the desire to pursue what is "technically sweet", the fact remains that if the Americans had not built the bomb, some other nation would have. We now know that Heisenberg miscalculated and that this mathematical error prevented the Germans from building the bomb.³¹ Referring to this, Einstein later said: "If I had known that the Germans would not succeed in constructing the atom bomb, I would never have lifted a finger." Sadly, such wisdom and hindsight, lofty as it sounds, does not prevent someone else from building the bomb and using it for destructive purposes. Whenever new energies are discovered by science, our ethical responsibility is that they must be utilized for the good of the human race and not a particular nation. We

must rise above nationalities and embrace internationalism.

This message is best understood if we delve into the causes of the world wars. Several scholars suggest that the root causes of these wars were racism and colonialism. After the dominant European nations had carved up Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas, some of them decided to expand their empires into Europe and prey on each other. This, combined with the pernicious pseudo-scientific view of social Darwinism and the "survival of the fittest", enabled them to justify slavery and colonialism. And at the time of the world wars, this viewpoint seems to have degenerated into 'ethnic cleansing' of the population of the European countries. Both world wars appear to be rooted in such racist ideology. In these wars, the populace of the colonies was also recruited to take the beating in the trenches and the frontlines.³² Even today, we have not learned from such destructive ideas of world domination and supremacy. To avoid self-destruction, we must move from competition to co-operation. In the modern context, this means that 'nationalism' should be replaced by 'internationalism'. We are already seeing a movement in this direction in the global efforts to deal with ecological and health issues. From this view, the message of the Gita is universal and applies to any age. The modern ideal of the democratic process tries to approximate this universal view.

In his essay, "The World Community", Radhakrishnan writes: In World War I, of the ten million people who were killed, 95 per cent were soldiers and 5 per cent, civilians. In World War II, over 50 million were killed of whom 52 per cent were soldiers and 48 per cent civilians. In the Korean War, of the nine million killed, 84 percent were civilians and 16 per cent soldiers. In these circumstances, it is difficult to believe that war has degenerated into the mass murder of the defenceless, non-combatants, women and children, is a legitimate instrument of politics.³³

This raises the question of the ethical application of science. I don't think one can prevent scientific advances for fear that

they will be used for diabolical purposes. Humanity must learn to make ethical use of its discoveries. James Franck was the first physicist to insist to the U.S. government that the atomic bomb could be demonstrated in an unpopulated area instead of a populated one. The War Department rejected his recommendation, which in turn led many scientists to reflect on the question of ethical responsibility. Franck: "Scientists in general are cautious and therefore tolerant and disinclined to accept total solutions. Our very objectivity prevents us from taking a strong stand in political differences, in which the right is never on one side. So we took the easiest way out and hid in our ivory tower. We felt that neither the good nor the evil applications were our responsibility."³⁴

Similar views may have been held by Oppenheimer. Again, if his team had not developed the bomb, some other group of scientists would have. Sen writes that

Later on, deeply questioning his own contribution to the development of the bomb, Oppenheimer would reconsider

the situation with hindsight: 'When you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it after you have had your technical success.' Despite that compulsion to 'fare forward', there was reason enough for Oppenheimer also to reflect on Arjuna's concerns (not just to be thrilled by Krishna's words): how can good come from killing so many people? And why should I only do my duty as a physicist, ignoring all other results including miseries and deaths that would follow from my own actions?¹⁵

This dilemma uncovers the fundamental problem of discovery. Sen seems to suggest that one should not discover things for fear that evil people will make use of them. The good or evil does not reside in the discovery but rather in how human beings use that discovery. We are a long way from the collective responsibility of ensuring peaceful and constructive uses of nuclear energy rather than political or destructive uses.

As mentioned, the background of both world wars is rooted in the scourge of racism. When people were being exterminated by despotic governments, the Western nations felt powerless. It is interesting to see that the virus of racism as practised in Asia and Africa through colonial expansionism did not seem to be a global injustice to the European nations. It was only when a few European nations began preying on other European nations in their expansionist objectives that it dawned on the Western nations that colonial expansionism was evil. It took the shock of two world wars, together with the mushroom cloud of nuclear armaments, to make them realize as much.

Reflecting on this modern malaise, Radhakrishnan writes:

My one supreme interest has been to try to restore a sense of spiritual values to the millions of religiously displaced persons, who have been struggling to find precarious refuges in the emergency camps of Art and Science, of Fascism and Nazism, of Humanism and Communism. The first step to recovery is to understand the nature of confusion of thought which absorbs the allegiance of millions of men. Among the major influences which foster a spirit of scepticism in regard to religious truth are the growth of the scientific spirit, the development of a technological civilization, a formal or artificial religion which finds itself in conflict with an awakened social conscience, and a comparative study of religions.¹⁶

The twentieth century has raised fundamental questions about science and ethics and the role of the scientist. The scientist should not absolve himself or herself of any responsibility on how their discoveries are used. Rather he/she should engage in ethical uses. Undoubtedly, this is a complex issue. In many ways, the ideal of democracy attempts to ensure that power does not reside in a few individuals but rather, in the people. But true democracy is when the collective wisdom of all humanity can be combined for the welfare of all. It can only be fostered in a climate of mutual respect and understanding. When new forms of energy are unleashed by science, their use must be regulated and employed in a constructive way. This means that the individual, especially the one in power, must act responsibly. Power and responsibility must

go together.

In summary, the message of the Gita is not a "consequence independent deontology", as Sen insists in his book, but rather a psycho-spiritual treatise of ontology amplifying the spiritual destiny of the human being. The earlier we come to this realization, which fosters mutual respect and co-operation rather than competition and confrontation, the greater is our chance of survival. Scientists predict that our galaxy will collide with the Andromeda galaxy in about three billion years. Can the human race survive for three billion years? Is it possible to combine the light of our collective wisdom so that it shines brighter than a thousand suns? That is the only way.

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NOTES

- 1 See page 23 of Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, Penguin Books, 2009.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 4 Sen won the Nobel Prize in economics in 1998.
- 5 See *Bhagavadgita*, Chapter 2, verse 3.
- 6 *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, verse 5.
- 7 *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, verse 7.
- 8 *Ibid.*, Chapter 2, verses 11-13.
- 9 See p. 445 of Volume 2 of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 445.
- 11 See verse 47 of Chapter 2 of the Gita.
- 12 See A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, p. 209.
- 13 See *Bhagavadgita*, Chapter 2, verse 48.
- 14 See *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, p. 293.
- 15 See verses 8 and 30 of Chapter 3 of the Gita.
- 16 Volume 1 of *Complete Works*, p. 115.
- 17 See Sen, p. 209.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- 19 See S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, p. 10.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 210, footnote.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- 23 See the endnote for Chapter 10 on page 434 of Sen's book.
- 24 See page xiv of *Indian Philosophy in English*, edited by N. Bhushan and J.L. Garfield.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 210.
- 26 See *Bhagavadgita*, verse 7, chapter 2.
- 27 See p. 273 of S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*.
- 28 See M. Ram Murty, *Indian Philosophy*, p. 93.
- 29 See Sen, p. 211.
- 30 See Robert Jungk, *Brighter than a Thousand Suns*, Victor Gollancz Ltd. and Penguin Books.
- 31 See p. 9 of P.L. Rose, *Heisenberg and the Nazi Atomic Bomb Project*, a study in German culture, 1998. University of California Press.
- 32 See p. 36 of P. Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire*, Penguin.

- 33 See S. Radhakrishnan, *The World Community*, p. 305 in *The Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan*, edited by R.A. McDermott.
- 34 See Jungk. *Brighter than a Thousand Suns*.
- 35 See p. 212 of A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*.
- 36 See p. 14 of *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, edited by P.A. Schlipp.

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