



Fatal Logic and the Neohumanist Response

Modernity is fatally wounded. Neohumanism is the socio-spiritual response to the fatal logic of modernity which privileges growth and the human species over the broad kinship networks of the planet. Sarkar's articulation of Neohumanism offers a subtle and powerful spiritual alternative logic to counteract the materialist worldview of the present. Drawing on deep cultural traditions of Tantra and Humanism, Sarkar finds hope in just and joyous planetary futures.

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By Dr. Marcus Bussey

WORLDVIEWS ARE NOT IMMUTABLE. They grow out of the collective experiences of people in dialogue with the world around them. Thus, they are evolving with the communities they support. Each contains a logic which sustains the world-building enterprise but which at some point ceases to be generative and becomes increasingly toxic over time. Logic and its inherent reason are both subject to the contexts which they explain. Put this way what is logical to a neoliberal economist is not so to an Amazonian shaman. The essential insight here is not new. For example, Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar in one of his lesser-known works, the *Shabda Cayaniká*, tells the Bengali folk story of a merchant who is solely intent on profit. The merchant, the Shethji, is very ill and decides that it is cheaper to die than call a doctor:

So if we call the doctor," the Shethji said, "it will cost about fifteen rupees. And if I die it will cost about ten rupees, which means a saving of five rupees. I'm a businessman. What I understand is profit, the rise and fall of prices, so Munsiji [his assistant], please arrange it so that I die! (1996, p. 102).

In classic folktale mode this illustrates how the logic of a worldview leads to the total inversion of reason in the blind commitment to a bankrupt belief system. This story of course is relevant for today as we as a planetary civilisation face the impending fatal logic of late capitalism. As always with situations like ours many are pouring their creative energies into trying to escape the 'fatal logic' trap with the logic that created it. In this they follow the logic of the Shethji in



Dr Marcus Bussey, Senior Lecturer in History and Futures, School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast, with tarragon flowers in his garden

remaining committed to a way of managing the world, its people and natural resources as though a profit and loss balance sheet and a raft of clever managerial processes designed to mitigate, regenerate, repurpose and sustain the unsustainable will succeed. So the Shethji in Sarkar's story succeeded in reducing costs but at what price? Ironically, the tools for rethinking this dilemma are all around us. They are bubbling up in creative agitation as the enormity of the planetary crisis dawns on many of the more aware of us.

Yet we have more to learn from the Shethji. His passion is perversely admirable. He expresses a sense of delight in performing his fatal logic. This delight is self-fulfilling. He thinks he can escape his situation by the ritual of the spreadsheet and the play of profit and loss. This is an important insight for those of us working to escape this logic. What we see in the Shethji is a total merger of his identity with an ideological position. His identity position is premised on a damaged reasoning. It is easier for him to die in self-righteous certainty than to admit error and thus escape from the logical straight jacket he inhabits. Rationality here betrays him. We must admit that there are those amongst us who are ready to die, even kill, rather than commit to a transformation of worldview. Yet our worldviews are transforming all the time, they are traveling with us as we head towards a set of very new conditions. We are all at the growing edge of a planetary realignment. For some of us this is terrifying and being expressed in denial, passivity, and even the violence of war, ecocide, racial and

gender tensions. For others, we can sense a refreshing sea change in worldviews.

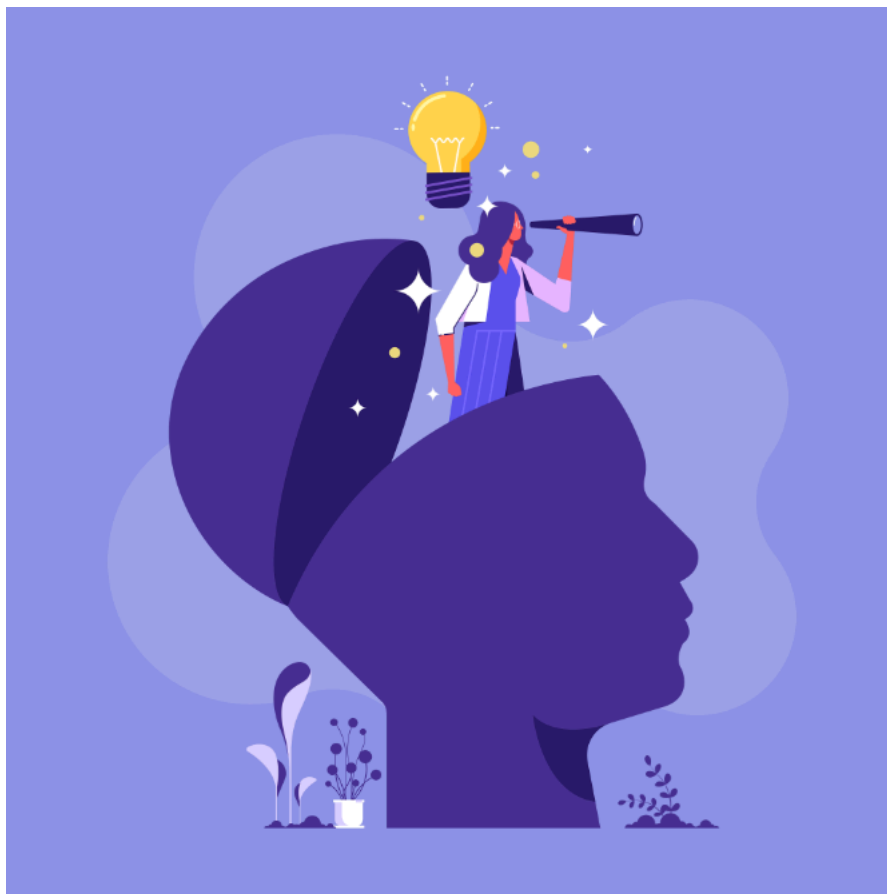
Crimson Dawn

Expressed poetically this sea change can be framed as a 'crimson dawn'. This is the term Sarkar (1982) uses when he described *Neohumanism* in 1982 through his corpus of songs known collectively as *Prabhat Samgita*: 'songs of the new dawn'. Neohumanism is Sarkar's response to this fatal logic. It is a confluence of devotion, the love for all aspects of creation mixed with a sense of intimacy in relationship to the Divine, with the growing sense that our transformation, the transformation of worldview, calls for social and ecological justice, not however 'justice' as understood within our dominant logic, but a justice informed by the heart, by love and a deep sense of what it truly means to be kin in a world that refuses separation and calls for partnership. This is a world where spirituality is vibrating consciousness and alerting us to our deep embeddedness in planetary and cosmic flows of Being. There are layers to this shift, and it is finding expression in so many ways across the planet (Fremeaux, 2021; Hawken, 2007; Inayatullah, 2017). But for Sarkar this shift begins deep within the human heart as a yearning to return to the fountainhead of Being. A yearning to fall in love again with creation and to return 'home'. In his words, offered as a gloss to one of his first Prabhat Samgita, this is a deeply inspiring moment:

Darkness has come to an end, crossing the threshold at the edge of light. Now is the proper time to call all and announce that the crimson dawn has come. The beautiful sky is studded with so many stars, the air is sweetly scented. The atmosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, everything is closely related to me. All the flora and fauna I must preserve; I must save them from premature extinction, because I love everything of this earth. I am a Neohumanist. I call one and all to come and create a new rhythm.¹

In this way we are given a mytho-poetic map for the transition in worldview. This devotional expression of course may seem out of step with the grim realities of climate change and the

¹The text for this song can be found here: https://xn--prabhata-sagiita-rjb5298j.net/lyrics/ps_3.htm



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socio-economic, ethnic, gendered and ecological violence and disparity which characterise the current moment. Not so for Sarkar, who is arguing for the creation of a ‘new rhythm’. This rhythm must begin in the human heart, it must express our longing to transform, to throw off the constraints of the fatal logic of modernity. The logic of modernity limits our human potential. The Neohumanist call Sarkar is describing is giving voice to the evolutionary logic which has inspired human transitions in the past. For him,

evolution is about overcoming limits. We meet an obstacle, and we evolve to overcome it. When we fail to do so, we fail. Ultimately this is a spiritual process, but for Sarkar the spiritual is never separate from the material world which provides us with so many opportunities to evolve and so many rewards.

To remain satisfied with the minimum achievement is contrary to human wants. That is why, since the dawn of creation, human beings have been

worshipping the Supreme Entity. They longed for supreme knowledge, for indirect and direct spiritual realisation. The fundamental human yearning for supreme expansion led them to discover the practical cult of spirituality. Moreover, it created in the human mind the sense of inquisitiveness, the spirit of dedication, and the thirst for knowledge. It is because of these noble qualities that human beings have become what they are today (Sarkar, 1988, p. 649).

For Sarkar, this spiritual yearning is what is missing from the dominant worldview promoted by Western economics, science and philosophy. Yet it can be understood through these lenses as sublimated to a materialist paradigm. The energy is still there. The desire to overcome limits materially as resulted in amazing achievements in city building, economic prosperity, technological innovation and even life expectancy. The yearning of Modernity however is fatally flawed as it is blind to aspects of growth that have had incredibly harmful effects on generations of humanity and the natural world. What we gained in terms of material achievements we lost relationally. We have become spiritually anorexic. We have trashed our home, harmed innumerable species and created vast numbers of impoverished peoples whose impoverishment was the price for our affluence.

Getting Curious

Neohumanism invites curiosity. It offers as many pathways into richer futures as there are human beings on the planet. It also invites pathways beyond the species that we are towards species that we can become. It does so because it offers visions of rich relational networks for us to co-create futures truly worthy of the title 'crimson dawn' with the more than human. Neohumanism is relational. We are in relationship with soil, microbes and mycelium. We are in relation with quarks and atoms and cosmic vibrations. We are in relation with cephalopods, algae and star fish. We are in relation with reptiles, mammals, fish and amphibians, trees and herbs and moulds and lichens. We are in relation to the weather, the lithosphere, the hydrosphere and the atmosphere. The stars and moon, and the sun are our relations too. Not only that but the Tantric vision offered by Sarkar as a dimension

of Neohumanism (see, Bussey, 1998) introduces a subtle spiritual ontology that includes *devas* and vibrational entities he calls Microvita (Sarkar, 1991). Linear time is also up for grabs (see, Inayatullah, 2017) as we have multiple temporalities working across and between cosmic time, eternal time, biological time, human time and even, because I am writing in Australia, Dream Time.

We need to get curious about these emergent aspects of transformation. It is happening, has been happening and will continue to happen. Worldviews and the cultures they sustain hold the seeds of transformation within them, traditions rise and fall and leave messages for future generations to revisit, refresh and reframe experience and the choices we make collectively and individually (Bussey, 2015). They also contain their own fatal logics that will challenge us to be selective in what we chose to engage with for positive futures. This is very evident in Sarkar's creative traditionalism as he approached his own Tantric tradition which he re-invented in many ways to meet the challenges of colonialism, caste, globalisation, nationalism and capitalism. In Sarkar's treatment Tantra offers a critique of power (Sarkar, 1993). Tantra aims at liberating individuals from the bondage of cultural convention. It recognises that much we take as culture actually is pseudo-culture that supports elites who place self-interest before collective welfare.

Furthermore, Sarkar's imaginative grasp on culture and spirituality was such that he looked beyond his own cultural roots to that of the West, and he found in the aspirations and philosophy of Humanism the seeds of universalism that resonated with the universalism of the Vedas and Tantra (Bussey, 2023). Yet he also identified Humanism's fatal logic, which was its specist identification that put human needs, values and agency at the centre of the Western cultural project. His rethinking of Humanism as Neohumanism removes that impediment making way for an expanded culture based on spiritual connection, love and a kincentric ecology. This shift in focus brings to Neohumanism a new logic of relationship. Such a logic is at the heart of cutting-edge systems and kincentric thinking. In such work we often find the challenging and dynamic tension of a materialist ontology grappling with the ineffable. Nora Bateson (2016) does a great job of handling this blurring of

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categories with her work on warm data. Others such as Niklas Luhmann (1998) and Humberto Maturana (1980) struggle to manage this tension between materiality and spirit but the eco-logic at the heart of their work is affirming. The co-creative messiness of it all is what matters and indeed, there is a sense of awe, wonder, possibility, even the sacred in much work being produced today (Harjo, 2019; Krawec, 2022; Simard, 2021; Yunkaporta, 2019).

A Neohumanist Moment

So as modernity moves towards the climax of its fatal logic, we are living in a world that is becoming increasingly strange to itself (Bussey, 2021). We do not know where we are headed beyond this historic moment, but we have choice. We have enabling narratives pulling us towards transformation and we have disabling narratives cutting us off from agency and from futures that promise more-than-human possibility. This is a Neohumanist moment for sure (Bussey, 2006, 2023). One where with a set of transitional logics, those that formulate wonderful ‘what-ifs?’, we have the choice to move towards a culture of kincentric co-creation. John O’Donoghue spoke to this power of openness when he observed:

We all live in a pathway in the middle of time, so there are lots of events, peoples, places, thoughts, experiences still ahead of us that have not actually arrived at the door of our hearts at all. This is the world of the unknown. Questions and thinking are ways of reaching into the unknown to find out what kind of treasures it actually holds. The question is the place where the unknown becomes articulate to us. A good question is something that has incredible grace and light and depth to it (2018, pp. 80-81).

Neohumanism asks good questions of us: Who am I? Where is my home? Who are my relations? What is my purpose? What is Consciousness? As Sarkar developed responses to these questions, he drew upon his own

traditions of Tantra but focused on issues of social justice, leadership, inclusive economics, governance, resilient spirituality and spiritual practice. He summed these principles up as “Self-realisation and service to humanity.” Beginning with spiritual practice he asserted that each one of us work towards self-realisation as a personal and collective sine qua non for transformation. Such work for him begins with meditative practices, a system of yogic ethics and practices but is shaped in response to the world we inhabit. Such personal practices however must engage with the world. Neohumanism is world affirming. Its relational ethics requires that we work towards collective wellbeing. The collective here is not anthropo-centric but Gaia-centric.

‘Humanity’ in this sense is an expanded concept that holds consciousness at its centre and devotion as its key expression. This is summed up in the phrase ‘Love is all there is’, which is the meaning at the heart of the cosmic mantra: *Baba nam kevalam*. Sarkar offered this mantra as chant, or kiirtan, promoting it as an individual and collective world affirming and embodied practice for generating Neohumanist consciousness. Kiirtan, like many of the practices Sarkar promoted, is a tool in fostering inner transformation and a sense of alignment with the world. The subjective is always in dialogue with the objective, and vice versa. The spiritual imagination takes flight and ignites a world affirming commitment to collective evolution.

PROUT

In the collective movement of Neohumanism we have an ecological revisioning of the concept of Hindu concept of *samaj*. Samaj affirms the social in all things. It also implies movement. From Sarkar’s perspective it calls on us to engage in social progress for all. This is at the heart of his concept of PROUT: *Progressive Utilisation Theory*. Futurist Sohail Inayatullah says of PROUT that it:



...is not only a theory of social change and transformed leadership, but an alternative political economy; an emergent alternative to Capitalism, a vision and comprehensive model of a new future for humanity and the planet (2017, p. ii).

PROUT is the logic of Neohumanism expressed through socio-political praxis (Bussey, 2010). Because Neohumanism has relationship at its heart, it requires each of us to develop a relational consciousness. Such a consciousness is spiritual and grows out of personal meditation and yogic practices. The ancient science of Aśtānga yoga with its eight limbs, has at its heart practices that seek to reunite the practitioner with Cosmic consciousness. Tantra brings energy to this process by tackling elements of society that constrain the yogi within conventions that do not serve this goal of union. Union with the source of consciousness needs to be understood as the ultimate goal of Neohumanism's relational logic.

Yoga, as conventionally understood, is an individual practice aimed at liberating the individual from the cycles of birth and death. Sarkar (1961) reframes this, as noted above, and links self-transcendence with service to and in, the world. In this way his reimagining of Tantra can be understood as spiritual pragmatics working in the world and fomenting a radical consciousness that critiques social situations through the lens of relational logic. Critique is the struggle to free the mind from the bondages of time, place and person (Foucault, 2002). Critical spirituality moves the focus from the traditional social and political realms to the Cosmic (Bussey, 2000). It asks not simply who benefits and who is marginalised but what is the quality of our relationship and what can we do to deepen our relational consciousness? In this it directly acknowledges the affective domain and the power of devotion and an open heart in achieving more inclusive, just and joyful futures.

Neohumanism as cultural hack

Sarkar offers us a world of wonder and paradox. He is not looking for answers but for transformation. He works across traditions, synthesising new formulations of past wisdom traditions, and through engagement with the massive struggles that characterise our world offers new pathways, new strategies and new spiritual techniques for hacking the cultures we inhabit and for challenging the fatal logics that hold us in this limited present. The fatal logic of modernity will run its course. We cannot trust to technology and the politics of the present. We need to imagine alternative futures and work towards these. Neohumanism provides us with tools to do just this.

To hack is to see alternatives to the present that allow for new expressions and experiences. All working with consciousness can be understood as ‘hacking’ in this way. To devise new stories, imagine alternative futures, sing new songs with new melodies and rhythms are all hacks. Culture is alive and open, and can be understood as an algorithm that is always in revision; always open to the hack (Bussey, 2017).

Neohumanism is a philosophical and aesthetic hack that works its way into our hearts because it is in the heart, not the head, that we find the resources to shift worldviews. The heart of course needs a compass. So the head has a role to play. Love and attachment can lead us astray, so the head can supply new forms of logic. Sarkar understood this. His earthy roots in the soil of Bengal come to the fore here as he offers song after song to weld together heart and head. For instance, in Prabhat Samgiita 2192 he gives voice to the Neohumanist call to overcome geo and social attachments and see ‘one human family’ as the foundations for a flourishing future. Thus, he sings:

*Mánusa jeno mánuser tare, sab kichu kare jáy
E katháo jeno mane rákhe pashu, pákhi tár par nay
Taruo báncite cáy, sab kichu kare jáy*¹

¹ Let human beings do everything for the sake of other human beings, and let them also remember that animals and birds are not distant from them, and that the trees also want to survive.

Listen here: <https://www.prabhatasamgiita.net/2000-2999/2192%20MA%27NUS%27%20JENO%20MA%27NUS%27ER%20TARE.mp3>

What is happening on the planet at the moment is significant. Humanity is struggling to find a new story, a new song. One that fits with the knowledge that what we are doing currently is unsustainable. The complexities before us, the inherent uncertainty of life, and the yearning to realise both our personal and planetary potential all conspire to foment in us as a species, and as individuals, realizations worthy of such a moment. We live at a turning point in history, a Neohumanist moment. We are turning away from compulsive consumption and a desperate need to control and finding stories worthy of our deeper aspirations. Such stories bear in them the relational logic to energise our transition to a world where we experience a deep sense of kinship with planet and people. This of course is not a comfortable moment, and many are not yet ready to accept this new historical trajectory, however what we want and what we get are rarely the same thing. That is the paradox of being human.

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