Sachidananda Mohanty, *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century India*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2015. xiv+174pp. ISBN 978-1-138-85933-3.

In the global village of today we are exposed to as much talks of "tolerance" as of its opposite. Instances of intolerance are in fact more pronounced now than ever before. Although the global reach of technology has enhanced communication range and speed, it has achieved very little success in bringing together people of diverse cultures and ethnicities. Ethnocentrism still exists as the central motif of modern civilisations. The divisive, and therefore restricted, socio-cultural space in which many of the contemporary intellectuals also participate, has created a bottleneck preventing easy flow of ideas. Travelling, in all senses of the term, has become a difficult proposition and sometimes a dangerous venture. The dream of a borderless world and world citizenship still remains a utopian project. It is in such a context that the vision of the "cosmopolitan modernity" foregrounded in Sachidanada Mohanty's book *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century India* assumes significance. The conflict-ridden world needs to look back and draw sustenance from the past. Retrieving the past is therefore a very important urge for proper contextualisation of today's world as well as for remedial actions. Mohanty makes an attempt to retrieve – and perhaps reclaim – a golden period in Indian history. The title of the book makes it clear that the site of the "excavation" is twentieth century India. Inside the book, however, he refers to "South Asia" as the site for the retrieval (ix). India is only a part of South Asia and equating the country with the region may not be taken kindly by the readers. The fact, however, remains that searching the roots of cosmopolitanism in India at a specific moment of its history will inevitably take us elsewhere in South Asia and to other Asian countries such as Japan and China where seeds of pan-Asianism emerged prominently.

At the core of Mohanty's book lies the concept of travel that results in dialogic, non-hierarchical relationships between persons and between cultures. It is a narrative of a journey into a specific time of colonial India, rich in accounts of trans-border movements and cross-cultural fertilisation of ideas and ideals. The narrative maps this period of intense intellectual, spiritual, political and organisational activities. It reveals the process of what Mica Nova calls "dialogic psychic formation," and unearths a rich archaeology of cosmopolitan knowledge. Mohanty clearly asserts that his search is for "alternative trajectories to the dominant versions of cosmopolitanism" which will not be "coterminous with 'globalisation'" (ix). He asserts that the cosmopolitanism that the book covers is "radically different from the global cosmopolitanism of today" (6). This claim is certainly confirmed by our reading of the book. Evidently, this

"global cosmopolitanism of today" is what Gita Rajan and Shailja Sharma calls "new cosmopolitanism" which is "a new kind of subject construction informed by globalisation" (1). This new cosmopolitanism, they feel, is the outcome of several intersectional forces like trade, migration, media, money and culture that form the "confluence" called globalisation (2). Mohanty's area of study is not this "new cosmopolitanism" – he is rather concerned with "historical" cosmopolitanism as embodied in figures like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Ananda Coomaraswamy, James and Margaret Cousins, Paul Richard, Mirra Alfassa and Dilip Kumar Roy. Their internationalism was tainted neither by narrow connotations often found in the discourses of nationalism nor by the dominating trends inherent in the imperial projects. They were, on the contrary, closer to what Timothy Brennan considers as "ethical" praxis of humanitarian internationalism. Mohanty very appropriately uses, in this context, Patrick J. Hills's expression "conversations of respect with diverse others" (qtd. in Mohanty ix).

Throughout the book Mohanty demonstrates competently how the field of the discourses of these intellectual and spiritual leaders revolved around the ideas of friendship and amity which would benefit the whole humanity. The great thinkers in the colonial India were not averse to travel abroad with an open mind and interact with their counterparts abroad. Similarly, some travellers from the Occident were not involved in the imperialist project of disseminating colonial discourses of control and subjugation. They were not in search of the exotic other nor were they enamoured of the Oriental stereotypes. It is therefore quite logical that Mohanty adopts a "post-Saidean approach" while exploring the significance of the meeting of the great minds.

What is also interesting, and what Mohanty maintains all along, is that these people were deeply attached to the traditional cultural and spiritual values, yet they ventured out to discover riches hidden in other cultures. In fact, there is no contradiction between the local where one is rooted and the global with which one wants to enter into a dialogue. Timothy Brennan rightly observes, "Cosmopolitanism is *local* while denying its local character. This denial is an intrinsic feature of cosmopolitanism and inherent to its appeal" (659). This denial occurs because the local wants to expand itself by interacting with the global. He further claims that "cosmopolitanism makes sense only in the context of a specific national-cultural mood…. But what they do not quite express is the process by which one – benevolently, of course – expands his or her sensitivities toward the world while exporting a self-confident locality for consumption *as* the world" (659). Mohanty in effect accepts this principle when he quotes Saranindranath Tagore who asserts that "understanding of universality is not of an abstract Kantian sort but assumes that particular traditions can provide the base for understanding and morally relating to

others" (qtd. in Mohanty 6). The cosmopolitanism that Mohanty speaks of is in conformity with modernity; in fact, it is part of modernity itself:

> The modernity they sought to usher in embraced the residue of tradition and was manifestly different from that of the European Enlightenment. This modernity rejected the primacy of the West and sought a cross-cultural understanding based on mutual respect. It saw no contradiction between the local and the global, and indeed combined both with effortless ease. (23)

One may cite the example of James Cousins who was initially influenced, like W.B. Yeats, by the idea of an Irish national culture and yet looked forward to a meaningful interaction with the global. Mohanty quotes him:

> But the art that embodies the creative impulse of the universe, with high vision and deep emotion, in its own time and place and way, will by the force of its authenticity pass beyond these limits into universal appreciation. (qtd. in Mohanty 34)

In fact, the British couple James and Margaret Cousins and their French counterpart Paul Richard and Mirra Alfassa (who later became "The Mother" of Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry) were the most prominent exponents of the concept of world citizenship. Mohanty brilliantly illustrates this in two separate chapters. All of them were cosmopolitan travellers whose contributions to cross-cultural understanding were enormous but are not remembered as much as they should have been. Mohanty retrieves their tales and analyses how they contributed to the discourses of cosmopolitan modernity. Cousins worked as a sub-editor in Annie Besant's journal *The New India.* He met both Sri Aurobindo and Tagore and collaborated with them in intellectual projects. Cousins and Sri Aurobindo had close affinities and wrote on similar subjects. Sri Aurobindo's *The Future Poetry* (published in the journal *Arya* from 1917 to 1920, later published in book form in 1953) was greatly influenced by Cousins' book *New Ways in English Literature* (year of publication mentioned as 1918 on page nos. 40 and 163 but on page 38 the year given is 1917). They had similar opinions about Shelley. Similarly, Cousins' book mentioned above was dedicated to Tagore in the form of a poem. Cousins visited Santiniketan and Tagore visited the former in Madanapalle, Madras which was home to Cousins. Cousins' visit to Japan resulted in his friendship with the pan-Asian figures like Nuguchi, Tamikoume, Okakura, and Paul and Mirra Richard. He also established the Tokyo International Lodge which began initially with eleven members from different nations like Japan, America, Korea, Greece and India.

Paul Richard too forged several "literary friendships" with people spread all over the world such as Sri Aurobindo, Madame Simon, Abdul Baha and Charles de Fontenay. Mohanty dwells in some detail on his literary and intellectual collaboration with Sri Aurobindo. They founded the bi-lingual journal *Arya* financed by Richards. The French version was, however, discontinued with the outbreak of the First World War. Both of them contributed articles there. Both of them believed that the materially oriented Western civilisation would be replaced by a spiritual civilisation in which Asia, particularly India, will play a significant role. Sri Aurobindo translated into English Paul Richard's lectures in Japan where the latter placed great emphasis on the rise of Asia and published them under the title *Dawn over Asia* (1920). Cousins also played some role in this publication. In Japan, Richard and his wife Mira met Rabindranath Tagore, James Cousins and several others. Tagore wrote the Preface to his book, *To the Nations*. In his address to the "Students' Asiatic Union" on 3 May, 1919, Richard spoke of Asian unity and Asia of the future, and hailed Sri Aurobindo as "a symbol, a rallying cry, a program" (qtd. in Mohanty 68).

The book delves into several such relationships and collaborations on the axes of literature, art, music – in short, in the field of culture – and spirituality. The relationship between Sri Aurobindo and "Mother" on the one hand and Dilip Kumar Roy on the other, is discussed in detail and Roy's involvement in the Yogic experience finds a special place. Mohanty speaks of Roy as "a critical modernist who was drawn to the philosophy of 'creative evolution' and the Integral Yoga envisioned by Sri Aurobindo" (94). It was, as he maintains, "a spiritual cosmopolitanism that was futuristic" (102). He travelled widely both inside and outside the country and was in touch with figures like Bertrand Russel. While cosmopolitanism of Roy was manifested through his spiritualism and music, that of Ananda Coomaraswamy was manifested through art and art criticism. In Chapter 5 Mohanty shows how the art criticism of both Coomaraswamy and Sri Aurobindo was rooted in the traditions of the nation. Both of them, however, rejected the possibility of a return to the past and felt that we "must make our home in the future" (130) on the basis of a rejection of all insularities. Coomaraswamy's art and art criticism harped on the "unity of all life," liberation from *Avidya* or ignorance and abhorrence of commercialism. Mohanty refers to Tagore's observation that true cosmopolitanism is based on proper understanding of national cultures. This reviewer, however, feels that the intimate connection between the two must also be properly established. In the chapter on Coomaraswamy this link is rather weak. Very rich in content, the penultimate chapter elaborates the many sidedness of the cosmopolitan figure of Taraknath Das. He was an Indian revolutionary in the United States, who fought for the rights of the immigrants in the nation of immigrants. Das himself visualised a strong pan-Asian movement under the leadership of Japan.

However, he was later disillusioned with the role Japan played in the world politics.

Rabindranath Tagore was a significant figure who spoke of pan-Asianism as a way of fighting against the mechanical, anti-spiritualistic approach of the West. He did not support the anti-colonial movements based on Western ideals, and spoke highly of Gandhiji who "has made of this meekness, or ahimsa, the highest form of bravery, a perpetual challenge to the insolence of the strong" (qtd. in Mohanty 111). Tagore's real and "imaginary voyages of the mind" transcended the restrictive boundaries of the nation. Mohanty shows that "Tagore, Gandhi, and Sri Aurobindo constitute a trinity; along with figures such as Richard, Cousins and Mirra they give us examples of 'affective communities', comprising individuals who surmounted political and cultural barriers and forged cross-cultural understanding" (Mohanty 117).

The most significant fact is that there were a host of such figures (the Cousins, the Richards, Okakura, Rabindranath Tagore, Annie Bessant, Sri Aurobindo, for example) who kept in touch with one another, contributed mutually to ideas which were then translated in the forms of books, lectures, organisational activities, spiritual kinship and so on. Some of them even founded institutions of educational, spiritual and cultural interactions. These later turned out to be the sites where cosmopolitan intellectuals met. Rabindranath Tagore founded the Visva-Bharati. Sri Aurobindo founded the Ashram at Pondicherry ("a planetary city" which attracted people like Mirra Alfassa or Dilip Kumar Roy). James Cousins established the Tokyo International Lodge which has been mentioned earlier. Cousins who considered a civilisation as "aesthetic phenomenon" was thus instrumental in the flowering of civilisational aesthetics. His interest in Asia as a civilisation is borne by the titles and contents of his books like *The Renaissance in India* (1918) and *The Cultural Unity of Asia* (1922).

Mohanty further points out that "travels across several countries or residence abroad does not, *ipso facto*, create cosmopolitanism" (3). This reviewer fully agrees with this view, and therefore feels uneasy about the inclusion, within the purview of cosmopolitanism, of Dhan Gopal Mukherjee's Indian jungle tales purportedly written for the American children, or of Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman who were great sympathisers of the Russian Revolution. While Mukherjee's writing from the USA does not necessarily establish him as a cosmopolitan traveller, the disillusionment of Kropotkin and Goldman with the Soviet Government after the Revolution does not also necessarily prove their cosmopolitan credential. To establish this credential, some more discussion, effectively underlying their intellectually interactive role, should have been provided.

It is a bit surprising how the manuscript of such an important book has been carelessly proofread. While the use of "pride oneself in" (in the very first

line of the Preface [vii] and also in the third line of the third paragraph on page 5) is grammatically incorrect (the recommended use being "pride oneself on/upon") and is an eyesore, there are at least twenty-five mistakes of various kinds that the present reviewer has detected.

Despite these lapses, mostly of technical nature, this book is a valuable contribution to the scholarship in the field of cosmopolitanism in early twentieth century India. Mohanty has retrieved valuable nuggets of information and discovered interesting political, social, intellectual and spiritual aspects of the personalities he has dealt with. For projecting the much ignored aspects of the interface between the home and the world at particular moments of the national history of India, we should remain indebted to the author of *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century India.*

Works Cited

Brennan, Timothy. "Cosmo-theory." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (Summer 2001): 659-91.

Mica, Nava. "Cosmopolitan Modernity: Everyday Imaginaries and the Register of Difference." *Theory Culture Society* 19.1-2: 81-99. http://tcs.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/19/1-2/81. 12 November 2015.

Mohanty, Sachidananda. *Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century India.* New Delhi: Routledge, 2015.

Rajan, Gita and Shailja Sharma, eds. *New Cosmopolitanism: South Asians in the US*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2006.

Himadri Lahiri
University of Burdwan, India