

## RUSSELL'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Chandrakala. *Liberty and Social Transformation (a Study in Bertrand Russell's Political Thought)*. New Delhi, India: Heritage Publishers, 1992. Pp. xii, 151. Rs 195; US\$10.00.

Paul Goodman, the great American anarchist, once complained that whenever he revealed his designs for a free, decentralized society, where government would be reduced to the administration of as little as possible, someone in his audience would shout, "What about India?" He would then confess that he didn't know what to do about India. Chandrakala's *Liberty and Social Transformation*, though making little mention of her native land, is a defence of Russell's political philosophy written by a scholar from India. It can be read as a reply to Goodman's interlocutor and is a reminder that the cause of freedom is still alive in India and that India—not, as Russell once supposed, China—may be the crucial testing-ground for the future of freedom.

Chandrakala's book is concise but wide ranging. In the course of 151 pages she covers topics such as Russell on the state, on socialism and on political psychology, as well as rebuttals to a large number of critics. But while casting a wide net the book remains well focused and closely argued. Chandrakala wishes to show that Russell offers more than a collection of scattered works in political journalism. His political works, she argues, can be understood as the working out of the implications of one central idea, which, expressed in many places and in different formulations, is a series of variations of the proposition that "The main purpose and inspiration of any reconstruction which is to make a better world must be the liberation of creative impulses."<sup>1</sup>

Chandrakala develops Russell's concept of impulse in such a way as to

<sup>1</sup> Quoted on p. 35, from Bertrand and Dora Russell, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, introduction by L. Greenspan (London: Routledge, 1996; 1st ed., 1923), p. 160.

demonstrate its relevance to India and other complex, contemporary societies. Throughout the volume Chandrakala presents arguments to show that Russell treats this concept as the foundation of a sophisticated political philosophy that can address problems of freedom, order and development in the modern world. Just as Hobbes derived a view of political order from the reality of aggressive individuals suffering from the insecurity of a war of every man against every man in the state of nature, Russell derives his view of a political order from the war within each individual between creative and possessive impulse. The good society, Russell maintains, is one that nourishes the former. In one section Chandrakala contrasts Russell's philosophy with contemporary "isms"—anarchism, socialism, capitalism—showing in each case that Russell is more sensitive to the complexity of given political reality than are his competitors.

She also calls attention to the complexity of the concept of liberty in Russell's writings. Critics who call him a Victorian liberal who ignores the social dimension of human existence, one who assumes a society of atomized individuals—of Robinson Crusoes—misread Russell on this point.

Regarding the second theme she argues that Russell calls for freedom from avoidable interference, which implies that he recognizes the legitimacy of avoidable interference. She also points out that Russell's concept of creative impulse recognizes that individuals exercise their creative capacities as participants of societies that are complex, in which the arts flourish, that support an educational system and scientific endeavour, and that above all are just. Such societies make the world safe for creativity. This is not a vision of hostile individuals but one that calls for the "breaking down the walls of the ego, of the hard, separate individuality typical of persons in modern society".<sup>2</sup>

Readers will not agree with every point in Chandrakala's argument, but most will agree that Chandrakala's vitality, and the urgency of her concerns, will bring Russell's thought and his wider aims into a sharp and clear focus.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted on p. 50, from K. Blackwell, *The Spinozistic Ethics of Bertrand Russell* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), p. 153.