



SELECTED ESSAYS

In the Light of Reason

Science, Society and Rationalism

VOLUME ONE



Anabil Sengupta

Science Writer · Rationalist Activist

Civil Engineer



Edited & Fact-Checked Edition · 2026

anabilsengupta.com

In the Light of Reason

Selected Essays on Science, Society and Rationalism

Volume One

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The pieces collected in this book first appeared in various newspapers — Anandabazar Patrika, Aajkaal, Ganashakti, Uttarbanga Sambad, Purber Kalom and others — and are gathered here in edited, fact-checked form. The substance, the arguments and the author's opinions remain unchanged; only in matters of language, layout and sourcing has a limited editorial hand been applied.

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About the Author

Anabil Sengupta is a civil engineer by profession and, by vocation, a writer, science communicator and rationalist activist. His writing has grown out of the meeting of two habits of mind: the discipline of an engineer and the temperament of a reasoned inquirer. For many years he has worked with the Science and Rationalists' Association of India, taking part in public-awareness campaigns against superstition, claims of the miraculous, and cruelty committed in the name of religion.

On questions of scientific temper, humanism, public health and social justice, his pen has appeared regularly in Bengal's leading newspapers and periodicals. Through essays, campaign leaflets and press commentary he has sought to make complex scientific and social questions accessible to the general reader — sometimes by the light of facts, sometimes by the edge of hard argument.

The motto that runs through his work: "Curious by nature. Driven by purpose." More about the author and his writing can be found at his website: <https://anabilsengupta.com/>

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Editor's Note

For this edition, the author's available body of writing has been reorganized by theme and given the shape of a readable book. The core arguments, the line of reasoning and the author's voice have been carefully preserved; editorial intervention has been limited to paragraphing, headings, punctuation and visual presentation.

A distinctive feature of this edition is an added layer of fact-checking. Many of the statistics, legal claims and quotations cited in these essays have been independently verified, and where warranted, footnotes have been added in the form of "Editor's notes." These notes do not argue with the author; they simply point the reader to updated information and sources. Not a single sentence of the original writing has been altered as a result.

Author's Preface

Scientific temper, rationalism, humanism and social responsibility — these are the questions at the heart of this collection. Essays written at various times, campaign leaflets, and a documented record of appearances in the press are all brought together here.

These pieces are not the product of detached observation. Behind every one of them stands a conviction: that the dark corners of society can be seen by the light of reason and evidence, and that seeing them is where change begins. If reading these essays makes a reader pause even once to think, to question, or to re-examine a received idea, this collection will have done its work.

A Note to the Reader

The medical passages in this book, including those on snakebite, are historical documents of the original source texts — public-health journalism written at a particular moment in time. They are not current clinical guidelines and must not be used as such. In any medical emergency, always follow current official treatment guidelines and the advice of trained physicians. The drugs, dosages and procedures for snakebite treatment in particular have changed over time; no information in that chapter should be taken as a basis for actual medical decisions.

Introduction

The intellectual life of Bengal has a long and honourable tradition of rationalism and of explaining science in plain language. From the social-reform movements of the nineteenth century to the science movements of the twentieth, one conviction has been voiced again and again in this tradition: let belief rest on evidence, not on custom. This collection by Anabil Sengupta is a recent chapter in that same tradition. The pieces gathered here were, for the most part, first published in the pages of newspapers — which is to say they are not the theorizing of a secluded study, but commentary written in the public square, in the thick of everyday controversy.

The range of subjects in this first volume is wide. The clash of religion and reason surfaces in the essay on animal sacrifice, where the author sets out the rationalist movement's stand against the cruelty of killing animals in the name of faith. Public health takes the stage in the piece on snakebite, whose central plea is for trust in modern medicine over superstition and faith healers. Then come questions of political economy — the relationship between big capital and policy-making; the politics of statue-breaking as a war of ideologies; and finally an account of the author's own life in the press and his intellectual contributions. The subjects change, but a single thread runs

through them all: testing society against the measure of reason, evidence and humanity.

A new addition in this edition is the fact-checking apparatus. Wherever possible, the significant statistics, legal claims and quotations in each essay have been independently verified, and where information has become dated, has been shown to be wrong, or could not be independently confirmed, editorial footnotes have been added. The purpose of these notes is not to refute the author, but to leave the writing intact in its original form while placing current, reliable information in the reader's hands. This book is therefore two things at once: a collection of a rationalist writer's newspaper prose, and a transparent, verifiable scaffolding of fact built around it. The editors ask only that the reader take the essays in that double light.

Chapter 1 — Animal Sacrifice: Religion, Morality and Reason

“When the worshippers, smeared head to foot in the muddy blood of the sacrifice, dance in the temple courtyard with hideous shrieks of savage glee before the Goddess — is it the Mother they worship then, or the demoness of violence that lives within their own hearts?”

—Rabindranath Tagore (translated from the Bengali)¹

To all those who recoil at the sight of cruelty to animals and birds, to everyone who protests each merciless brutality in our society — I ask you: read the leaflets and articles that follow. Every year in our country, several crore — tens of millions — of innocent animals and birds are slaughtered in public, in the

¹ Editor’s note: This quotation could not be traced to any specific work of Rabindranath Tagore. A search of readily available digital editions of Tagore’s collected works and of quotation anthologies failed to locate this exact passage, though such a sentiment against empty ritualism and religious cruelty is broadly consistent with Tagore’s social thought. The quotation’s authenticity should be verified against an authoritative printed edition.

name of religion.² Against this savage custom, against killing in the name of faith, we — the Science and Rationalists' Association of India and the Humanists' Association — have been campaigning relentlessly across India since 2005. The results have come: many temples have abandoned this cruel practice, and above all, the government has been compelled to change Indian law. Under that law, animal sacrifice in the name of religion is now completely banned in India (the matter

² Editor's note: The figure of "several crore" (tens of millions of) animals and birds killed annually in the name of religion could not be independently confirmed. There is no official or survey-based count of animals killed in religious sacrifice in India as distinct from the general meat industry. Figures of this kind appear chiefly in the campaign literature of rationalist and animal-rights movements; while not implausible in order of magnitude, they could not be confirmed from authoritative sources.

is pending before the Supreme Court).³ My hope is that animal lovers like you will step forward.

*“The altar drowned in the blood of the slain — break it,
break it, this day break it utterly. Hurl your thunderbolt*

³ Editor’s note: The legal position described in this sentence does not match current reality — animal sacrifice in the name of religion is not banned at the national level in India. Section 28 of the central Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 expressly exempts the killing of animals “in a manner required by the religion of any community” from the offence of cruelty. Several state High Courts have banned sacrifice (Himachal Pradesh, 2014; Tripura, 2019; Odisha), but those rulings have limited effect or stand stayed — the Supreme Court stayed the Tripura High Court’s order in 2019 and the Odisha High Court’s in 2020, and in February 2025 issued fresh notice over the continuation of sacrifice in Himachal Pradesh. A public interest litigation seeking a nationwide ban remained pending before the Supreme Court as of March 2026. In other words, while the matter is indeed “pending before the Supreme Court,” the description “completely banned” is not an accurate account of the law as it stands. Sources: LiveLaw (March 2026), <https://www.livelaw.in/top-stories/supreme-court-issues-notice-on-pil-seeking-ban-on-killing-of-animals-in-the-name-of-religion-animal-sacrifice-temple-hindu-rituals-526187>; Law

*at the prison walls of religion, and bring the light of
knowledge to this luckless land.”*

—Rabindranath Tagore (translated from the Bengali)⁴

To learn more about the rationalist movement’s campaign against animal sacrifice, see the following links:

1. <https://blog.mukto-mona.com/2009/08/20/2170/>
2. <https://blog.mukto-mona.com/2010/08/12/9571/>
3. http://rationalistsantoshsharma.blogspot.in/2013/10/blog-post_7308.html?m=1
4. <http://english.kolkata24x7.com/west-bengal/animal-sacrifice-ban-at-two-burdwan-temples>
5. <https://www.google.co.in/amp/www.catchnews.com/amp/kolkata-news/break-with-tradition-no-more-animal-sacrifice-in-two-west-bengal-temples-1449658372.html>

Trend (February 2025), <https://lawtrend.in/supreme-court-issues-notice-to-himachal-pradesh-government-over-allegations-of-animal-sacrifice/>.

⁴ Editor’s note: These lines, too, could not be traced to a specific poem in Tagore’s collected works. In spirit and diction they are consistent with the reformist strand of Tagore’s poetry, but their authenticity should likewise be verified against an authoritative printed edition.

6. <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/aapn/conversations/messages/8678>
7. <http://www.prothom-alo.com/international/article/705295/বর্ধমান-দুই-মন্দিরে-বন্ধ-হলো-পশুবাঁলি>

This piece is compiled from the author's campaign writings and leaflets for the rationalist movement.

Chapter 2 — Snakebite: Science and Public Health

A reminder to the reader: This chapter is a document of public-health journalism written at a particular moment in time — it is not a current clinical guideline. The information here on drugs, dosages and procedures has changed over time. In any real emergency, always go to the nearest hospital, follow trained physicians, and rely on current official snakebite-treatment guidelines.

Seek the help of the government’s modern medical system without delay — and demand that the authorities take exemplary action, under Indian law (the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954; the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 (as amended in 2008); IPC 420, IPC 302 or IPC 303, and so on), against the ojhas, gunins, tantriks and janguru witch doctors — charlatans who are, in effect, premeditated killers.⁵

⁵ Editor’s note: Of the laws cited here, the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 and the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 (with its 2008 amendment) are accurately described, and IPC 420 (cheating) and IPC 302 (murder) are relevant provisions. IPC Section 303, however, was struck down as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in

The monsoon means snakes. It is in these months that most snakebites occur. The statistics tell us that roughly 50,000 people die of snakebite in our country every year; unofficial estimates put the figure at over a lakh — more than 100,000.⁶ And yet Australia, which has far more venomous snakes than we do, records a total of two or three deaths in five years.⁷ The truth is that in our country, vast numbers of people still put

Mithu v. State of Punjab (1983) and is not enforceable law. Note also that from 1 July 2024 the entire Indian Penal Code (IPC) was replaced by the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, so all IPC section numbers are now historical. Source: India Code, <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/1412>.

⁶ Editor's note: The figure of "roughly 50,000" annual deaths is consistent with reliable research — the Million Death Study (Suraweera et al., *eLife*, 2020) estimated an average of about 58,000 snakebite deaths per year in India. The unofficial figure of "over a lakh" (more than 100,000) deaths, however, is not supported by any published epidemiological study; it has likely been conflated with the total number of bites or envenomations rather than deaths (India in fact records well over a million bites a year). Sources: WHO (2020), <https://www.who.int/news/item/10-07-2020-study-estimates-more-than-one-million-indians-died-from-snakebite-envenoming-over-past-two-decades>; *eLife*, <https://elifesciences.org/articles/54076>.

their faith in the ojha and his incantations rather than in a doctor after a snakebite. The result: the patient's critical first hours are squandered without treatment. According to one survey, only 22 per cent of snakebite patients ever reach a government hospital.

The Killers

India has roughly 250 species of snakes, of which 52 are venomous. More than 40 of these, moreover, are sea snakes.⁸

⁷ Editor's note: The core of the comparison is sound — Australia has more venomous snake species than India yet negligible deaths. The figure of “two or three in five years,” however, is somewhat lower than reality; on modern estimates Australia averages 1–2 snakebite deaths a year, or roughly 5–10 over five years. Source: List of fatal snake bites in Australia, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fatal_snake_bites_in_Australia.

⁸ Editor's note: The totals for Indian species and venomous species (roughly 250/52) are close to recent estimates, if slightly dated. The claim of “more than 40” marine species, however, is likely overstated — a 2019 taxonomic review (Journal of Threatened Taxa) documented a total of 26 sea-snake species in Indian waters, well short of “40+”. Source: Mongabay-India (2019), <http://india.mongabay.com/2019/03/threatened-and->

West Bengal is home to just six venomous species, and four of them account for most of the deaths.

The Cobra

Hooded, with a neurotoxic venom. On the back of the hood is a mark shaped like the letter U, sometimes called the spectacle mark. Its bite causes intense pain at the wound, and the site swells relentlessly. A single strike can deliver up to 15 milligrams of venom.⁹

The Monocled Cobra (Keute)

Hooded and neurotoxic. On the back of its hood is a lotus-like mark. The lethal dose of its venom is 15 milligrams.

undocumented-sea-snakes-of-india.

⁹ Editor's note: The figure of "up to 15 milligrams of venom in a single strike" for the cobra is probably a substantial underestimate. A recent study of venom yields in India's "Big Four" snakes (*PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*) reported an average of about 136 milligrams per milking for the cobra (with a maximum of up to 800 milligrams). An actual bite typically delivers less than a full milking; the original source has most likely confused venom yield with lethal dose (15 milligrams is, in fact, close to the estimated lethal dose of cobra venom). Source: <https://journals.plos.org/plosntds/article?id=10.1371%2Fjournal.pntd.0013676>.

Russell's Viper (Chandrabora)

This snake's venom destroys the blood cells. It is Bengal's only haemotoxic snake — and the one now claiming the most lives in Bengal. Thick-bodied, brown or wood-coloured, hoodless, with rows of sandalwood-yellow circular blotches along its body. Its bite disrupts the patient's blood clotting. If treatment is delayed, the kidneys begin to fail and blood appears in the urine.

The Common Krait (Kalach)

A fearsomely venomous, mysterious snake. Hoodless and of medium build, black in colour with thin white bands. It is almost never seen by day; at night it climbs into open beds.

First Aid

First, reassure the patient, who will be in a state of terror — and panic itself can kill. Tell the patient: many, many people bitten by snakes have survived with treatment; stay calm. The less the patient moves, the more slowly the venom spreads through the body. Telephone ahead and find out whether the nearest hospital has ASV (anti-snake venom), neostigmine, atropine and adrenaline. Remember: the complete treatment of snakebite is possible at a block primary health centre. At the hospital, ask the doctor to treat for snakebite. Watch for

slurred speech, a nasal voice, drooping eyelids — note these signs and report them to the doctor.

The Rule of 100

If 100 millilitres of ASV enter the body within 100 minutes of the bite, the patient will survive.¹⁰

What to Do

1. Stay calm.
2. Call for people nearby.
3. Remove any watch, bangles or bracelets from the arm.

¹⁰ Editor’s note: The “Rule of 100” has no basis in current WHO or Indian national snakebite-treatment protocols. Current guidelines offer no guarantee of survival tied to any fixed dose-and-time formula; instead they prescribe repeated, response-based dosing of ASV guided by the patient’s clinical condition and coagulation tests. This heuristic is historical and informal — the caution in the author’s “Note to the Reader” applies here, and it must not be used as a basis for actual medical decisions. Sources: National Snakebite Management Protocol, National Health Mission, https://nhm.gov.in/images/pdf/guidelines/nrhmguidelines/stg/snakebite_QRG.pdf; WHO/SEARO, <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/searo/india/health-topic-pdf/who-guidance-on-management-of-snakebites.pdf>.

4. Keep the bitten limb as still as possible.
5. Get to a hospital as fast as you can.

What Not to Do

1. Do not apply a tourniquet or ligature of any kind.
2. Do not apply any chemical to the bite.
3. Do not apply cold, heat or ice water to the site.
4. Do not cut or slit the wound to try to draw out the venom.
5. Remember: when a snake bites, its venom passes through the fangs straight into the body, like an injection.
6. The patient must not run or cycle to hospital on their own.
7. There is no need to catch the snake and bring it to the hospital.

How to Keep Snakes Away

1. Keep the surroundings of your house clean. Scatter lime mixed with bleaching powder — its pungent smell keeps snakes away.
2. At night, always shake out the bedding and sleep under a mosquito net. Stuff cloth into the gaps beneath doors and windows.

3. Do not walk about in the dark. Carry a stick and tap the ground as you go. Clapping is useless — snakes have no ears.
4. Always shake out your shoes before putting them on. If your mud-built house has rat holes, fill them in.

To the “ojhas, gunins, tantriks and jangurus,” the Science and Rationalists’ Association of India extends its standing “₹25 lakh challenge” (about US\$30,000) — open to anyone who can cure disease by miraculous (?) means! (For details of the challenge and other assistance, contact: www.srai.org)¹¹

Issued in the public interest by Anabil Sengupta. Associate Editor, Science and Rationalists’ Association of India.

¹¹ Editor’s note: The challenge is real — the Science and Rationalists’ Association of India (SRAI, led by Prabir Ghosh) does offer a cash prize for proof of supernatural powers. Two points, however, deserve notice. First, according to the English Wikipedia the documented prize amount is ₹50 lakh (about US\$60,000); the ₹25 lakh cited here was likely the amount at an earlier stage in the organization’s history. Second, the website www.srai.org given here does not currently belong to this organization — it is the address of an unrelated American professional body; the association’s actual online presence is at sraiofficial.blogspot.com. Source: Prabir Ghosh, Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prabir_Ghosh.

Chapter 3 — Policy-Making in the Service of Big Capital

(August 1, 2020; previously published in part in *Uttarbanga Sangbad* and *Purber Kalom*)

“Let the opposition speak... let it draw up the ledger of your mistakes. Let everyone take their own account through the opposition’s eyes as well. Let reason live... in the clear light of reason I am sharpening my sight.”

India’s Socio-Economic Distress Before Corona

In India, the world’s largest democracy, seventy-three years after independence, communalism, nationwide intolerance, question marks over the neutrality of the press, the abandonment of secularism, thirty-five farmer suicides a day, atrocities against Dalits, persecution of minorities — incidents of deprivation and discrimination had multiplied at an alarming rate. In violence against women, the country had reached a dangerous pass. In the name of “love jihad” and “cow protection,” helpless ordinary people were being lynched. The unplanned, snap decisions of demonetization and GST had driven micro, small and medium traders onto the streets. A countrywide economic slump was pushing ordinary people towards layoffs and joblessness; unemployment had been

driven to its highest point in forty-five years.¹² And at that very moment, to keep the people of the country occupied, they were being asked to prove their citizenship! Meanwhile, corporate industrialists were handed a 10% cut in corporate tax.¹³ Amid all this anarchy, quietly and without protest, the country's public-sector enterprises were being sold off to corporate companies.

¹² Editorial note: According to the NSSO's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2017-18, the country's unemployment rate stood at 6.1 percent — the highest since 1972-73, that is, in 45 years. Leaked in January 2019 and later officially released, this figure was widely reported in the Indian and international press and is confirmed on verification (source: Business Standard, Al Jazeera, 31 January 2019).

¹³ Editorial note: The actual structure of the corporate tax cut announced on 20 September 2019 was as follows: for domestic companies forgoing exemptions, the base rate fell from 30% to 22% (an effective rate of about 25.17% including surcharge and cess), with 15% for new domestic manufacturing companies. The essay's phrase "10% cut" is a simplified rendering of this structure; in percentage-point terms the reduction was roughly 8 points. By the Finance Ministry's own estimate, the annual revenue loss was about Rs 1.45 lakh crore (source: PIB press release, 20 September 2019).

Corona Arrives, Bearing a Financial Package

Into this socio-economic situation the deadly coronavirus spread across the whole world, claiming life after life. After much political and social theatre, the country's Pradhan Sevak — the self-styled “prime servant” — suddenly announced an unplanned lockdown. As a result of this abrupt lockdown, it was migrant workers, street vendors, day labourers, hawkers, contract workers — the people of the unorganized sector who make up the lion's share of the total workforce — who were struck by the tsunami of economic devastation. The sight of migrant workers walking home mile after mile, and dying in accidents on the way, will remain in history as a monument to the government's utter mismanagement. Social breakdown and economic paralysis spread across the entire country. The World Food Programme (WFP) issued a warning — if the economy continued on this course, tens of millions of people

around the world could die of starvation.¹⁴ COVID-19 has brought a terrible catastrophe down upon crores of people.

But in this devastated situation, what was brought forth for the nation was a package for becoming “self-reliant.” It was announced that nearly Rs 20 lakh crore (about USD 265 billion) would be spent in the country — a full 10% of GDP! Yet by financial analysts’ reckoning, the government’s actual outlay would be a mere Rs 2,17,095 crore — no more than 1.1 percent of GDP.¹⁵ Most of the package consisted of bank credit, or of

¹⁴ Editorial note: David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme, warned the UN Security Council in April 2020 that without action the number of people facing acute food insecurity could rise from 135 million to about 265 million by the end of 2020, and spoke of the danger of famines of “biblical proportions.” The WFP’s own projection, in other words, concerned the number of people suffering acute hunger and food insecurity — not a specific forecast of tens of millions of deaths by starvation (source: WFP statement to the UN Security Council, April 2020).

¹⁵ Editorial note: The analysts’ figure of Rs 2,17,095 crore (about 1.1% of GDP) could not be traced to a report by any named institution or economist; it is retained here as it stood in the original publication. Directionally, however, it is consistent with mainstream contemporary analysis — several analysts estimated the package’s genuine new fiscal outlay at roughly 1-

allocations already provided for in the budget. Most significant of all: it was in this very moment of crisis that the doors of every sector were declared open to private capital. All public-sector enterprises are to be handed over to private companies; the sole exception is the strategically important sectors, each of which will retain a minimum of one and a maximum of four public-sector undertakings — in every other sector, no public enterprise will remain at all. The doors were thrown open to foreign investment across the board; even in the defence sector, foreign investment of up to 74% was permitted.¹⁶ The country's mineral and forest wealth — all of it — is to be auctioned off to private companies. And the corporate companies will be provided with financial assistance.

1.5 percent of GDP (see the analysis by PRS Legislative Research). Likewise, the figure of “42 public-sector enterprises” in the following section could not be matched to any primary source; contemporary reporting mentions clearance for the strategic disinvestment of 23 enterprises and privatization plans concerning about 30.

¹⁶ Editorial note: The decision to raise the ceiling on foreign direct investment in defence production via the automatic route from 49% to 74% is confirmed on verification; it was announced in May 2020 and given effect by a DPIIT press note in September, subject to national-security review.

The expectation had been that, to help the corona-battered economy and the devastated poor back onto their feet, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman would put cash into the relief programme — deposit money directly into their accounts. Instead of taking that path, arrangements were made to hand the public-sector enterprises over to private corporates. Many economists hold that it is not the government's business to do business; if so, where is the harm in disinvestment or privatization of public-sector undertakings? But why that announcement now? Many are asking — why was the plan to privatize public enterprises given a place in a relief package? It is not as though the Centre is selling off a clutch of enterprises right now and pouring the proceeds into reviving the economy! At a time when many private companies are gasping for breath and workers are being laid off in droves, why this wholesale privatization? The government did not even attempt to make good the enormous losses of hand-to-mouth working people in the corona crisis — instead it spoke of privatization! What is the reason for taking such policy decisions during a lockdown, without any debate, without any discussion? It is the nation's public-sector enterprises, built up grain by grain, that made the country strong and self-reliant; now, in the name of a "self-reliant India," that very property is being sold off. Most trade unions have opposed this decision of the government. And this is precisely where the question arises — why is it that even in a moment of dire crisis for the country's ordinary

people, the government's compassion overflows for a handful of capitalists and corporate companies?

Whatever NITI Aayog Wishes

Opportunists will seize any opportunity! In the moment of the coronavirus's global crisis, exploiting the unprotesting helplessness of the country's ordinary people, this interval of unobstructed licence has come as a blessing to the courtiers of big capital. NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar had said in an interview as early as 2019: "Foreign investors have ample reason to be pleased. I say with certainty, there will be multiple major economic reforms. To get the wheels rolling, we will hit the ground very hard indeed." In the days ahead the Centre is considering the complete privatization or closure of at least 42 public-sector enterprises, including Air India. A proposal for the disinvestment of four public-sector undertakings, including Bharat Petroleum (BPCL), had already been placed before the Union Cabinet. Only days ago, final Cabinet clearance was given for the disinvestment of 23 public-sector companies. Among the public enterprises already green-lit for disinvestment by the Union Cabinet are Air India and its five subsidiaries, Bridge and Roof, Pawan Hans, Hindustan Newsprint Limited, Bharat Earth Movers, Ferro Scrap Nigam, Cement Corporation of India, the Alloy Steel Plant at Durgapur, Hindustan Fluorocarbons, Scooters India Limited, and others.

The central government has now moved to bring in “skilled professionals” from private companies and instal them in senior government posts; it has even issued a notification inviting applications at the level of joint secretary. They will be appointed on three-year contracts; if they perform well, the term may be extended by another two years. Yet under the country’s Constitution, it is those who pass the examination of the supreme recruiting authority, the UPSC, and typically become IAS officers, who later rise through promotion to the rank of secretary. NITI Aayog had announced that it wished to introduce such “reforms” in recruitment between 2017 and 2020. Revenue, economic services, financial services, environment, agriculture, commerce, aviation, roads — appointments are to be made this way in a whole range of departments. Bypassing the Constitution, with a compliant, corporate-friendly cadre of officials, the road to privatization will be paved smooth. And the dream of the country’s highly educated young people of rising to high office — has that, too, been quietly “bypassed”?

Expert Advice That Sticks in the Throat

Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee, the Bengali economist from Kolkata and Nobel laureate in economics, advised the government to put cash directly into the hands of ordinary people to counter the country’s economic and social catastrophe. If money

reaches the country's poor, their spending will bring them some relief — and set the wheels of the economy turning again. But from the country's Pradhan Sevak down to the so-called devotees at the grassroots, he has had to endure everything from sneers to outright abuse.

Around fifty officers of the Indian Revenue Service Association (IRS) had offered the Centre a similar range of suggestions for reviving the economy left gasping by the coronavirus. They sent those recommendations, under the title 'FORCE' (Fiscal Options and Response to COVID-19 Epidemic), to the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).¹⁷ In the officers' view, to confront the crisis created by the pandemic in the short and medium term, the government would have to focus on raising additional revenue. The officers also held that at such a time a special obligation falls upon the "super rich." Since their

¹⁷ Editorial note: The report titled 'FORCE' (Fiscal Options & Response to COVID-19 Epidemic) by about 50 officers of the IRS Association, and its recommendations — a minimum 40% tax on incomes above one crore rupees, the return of the wealth tax, a higher surcharge on foreign companies — are confirmed on verification (April 2020). The Finance Ministry disowned the report as unauthorized; but according to contemporary reporting, the CBDT's specific disciplinary action was taken chiefly against three named officers — not against the entire group of signatories.

incomes far exceed others', so does their capacity to spend; they possess the means to absorb a temporary shock; and most high earners also have the option of working from home. The officers therefore recommended taxing them, for a fixed period, in one of two alternative ways: raise the minimum tax to 40 percent for those earning above one crore rupees; or, for those holding assets worth five crore rupees or more, bring back the wealth tax. Alongside this, they recommended raising the surcharge on high-earning foreign companies with branches or permanent establishments in India — a surcharge that had not been revised in years. The officers' reasoning: since these companies draw their profits from here, and India's ever-growing market lies open before them, they too ought to give some thought to their customers. But keeping itself in power by antagonizing corporate industrialists is not a habit this government possesses. And so it was the recommending officers — well-wishers of the country's ordinary people — who were served show-cause notices for breach of rules; the message being sent is plain: keep your mouths shut and toe the line.

Big Capital's Stake in the Nation's Elections

An election in the world's largest democracy is no small thing. A report published by the Centre for Media Studies (CMS) in New Delhi estimates that the probable expenditure in the just-

concluded 2019 Lok Sabha election was around Rs 60,000 crore — surpassing the cost of every election ever held in any country, and setting a world record.¹⁸ The 2016 United States presidential election that brought Donald Trump to power cost a little over Rs 45,000 crore. This spending was double that of the 2014 Lok Sabha election; across the 542 Lok Sabha constituencies the average outlay exceeded Rs 100 crore per seat, roughly Rs 700 per vote — whereas in the first election of 1952 the cost per voter had been 60 paise. Fully 45 percent of the total election spending was poured in by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) — nearly Rs 27,000 crore. Simple common sense tells you that money like this does not come from party workers' subscriptions. Without corporate capitalist friends at your side, elections can no longer be fought in this country — that is the reality, and that is where the settling of accounts begins.

¹⁸ Editorial note: The Centre for Media Studies report 'Poll Expenditure: The 2019 Elections' is real and widely cited. Its key figures — total expenditure estimated at Rs 55,000-60,000 crore, an average of Rs 100 crore per constituency, about Rs 700 per vote, and roughly 45% of total spending (an estimated Rs 27,000 crore) by the BJP — match the report and its contemporary coverage. However, the two comparative figures — the cost of the 2016 US presidential election and the 60 paise per voter of 1952 — do not appear in the CMS report and could not be independently verified.

Who Owns the Nation's Wealth?

The richest 1 percent own more than four times the wealth of 95.3 crore people — 70 percent of the country's population. This appalling picture of India's economic inequality comes from the international organization Oxfam.¹⁹ According to its published survey, the upper crust — a mere 1% of the total population — owns 58.4% of the country's wealth. The wealth of the country's richest man, Mukesh Ambani, stands at Rs 2.8

¹⁹ Editorial note: The statistics in this paragraph are in fact compiled from at least four separate Oxfam reports published between 2017 and 2020, though the original essay presents them as if from a single survey. In detail: (a) “four times the wealth of 95.3 crore people (70% of the population)” — from Oxfam India's January 2020 report ‘Time to Care’, accurately cited; (b) Mukesh Ambani's wealth of Rs 2.8 lakh crore compared with government health, sanitation and water budgets, and “top 9 richest = poorest 50%” — from the January 2019 report, accurate; (c) “58.4%” of wealth held by the top 1% — this figure does not exactly match any single Oxfam India report: the 2017 Davos report said 58%, and the January 2019 report 51.53%; (d) the ranking of “147th out of 157 countries” comes from the separate ‘Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index’ of Oxfam and Development Finance International (October 2018). Every figure, in other words, is real and traceable — but to different reports from different years.

lakh crore — more than the combined revenue and allocations of the Centre and the states for medical care, public health, sanitation and water supply! The wealth of the country's nine richest men equals that of the "poor" 50 percent of the population! In terms of commitment to reducing economic inequality, India ranks 147th out of 157 countries! In a country where, even at a moment of dire crisis, the nation's assets are being transferred into the hands of corporate companies, closing the gap is a distant dream — will this inequality ever stop anywhere at all? Will the people of this country be marched back into the "Company Raj" of a privileged few?

Lightening the Corporates' Future Burden

The Modi government has already decided to hand over the running of 151 trains on 109 routes to private hands. Subject to conditions, the private operators will set ticket prices; there will be no concessions on fares. A proposal to hand 50 stations over to private companies had been adopted even earlier. Indian Railways has now issued orders to cut staff strength by 15 percent of total sanctioned posts — not only in the mechanical, electrical and accounts departments of its various divisions, but in safety, operations and maintenance as well. From Eastern Railway has come a directive to cut 1,875 staff in the safety department too, along with word that recruitment to all posts in that department is suspended indefinitely. In other

words, Indian Railways — the institution called the lifeline of India — is not merely being transferred into the hands of big corporate capital; the workforce is being slashed in advance so that the corporates are spared the burden. At a time of the highest unemployment in forty-five years, two crore jobs a year were promised for the sake of the ballot box — and yet the job dreams of the educated younger generation have been whittled away. With this comes the prospect of joblessness for the families of several crore workers in the country's largest unorganized sector, whose livelihoods are bound up with the lifeline; their future will be spent at the mercy of the corporate companies. From the Railways to BSNL — the government has applied the same treatment to every public-sector enterprise. Thus, at Bharat Petroleum, the country's second-largest oil company, a voluntary retirement scheme was introduced for employees; on the management's terms, roughly 60 percent of the company's workforce falls within its scope. After which the government wants to sell off the whole of its 53.3 percent stake in this public undertaking.²⁰ The Modi government is determined to throw India's oil market open to the

²⁰ Editorial note: Both the plan to sell the government's entire stake in BPCL (put at 52.98%-53.29% in various reports) and the voluntary retirement scheme covering about 60% of employees are confirmed by contemporary reporting. For the reader's information: for want of suitable bidders, the Centre withdrew the sale offer in mid-2022.

multinationals. The government has recklessly declared as much — privatization will happen, and if you don't like it, leave the company. To the corporate companies, this must sound like holy writ.

Making Us Forget the Price of Labour

Even as the whole of India remained under lockdown to fight COVID-19, one BJP-ruled state after another was pushing through ordinances making sweeping changes to labour law in the interests of industrialists — in Uttar Pradesh, nearly every labour law was suspended for three years.²¹ There, as a result, workers can be sacked at will; employers will not even be obliged to pay the minimum wage. Working hours can be extended, with no overtime payable. For the post-corona era the government wants these changes to labour law made permanent — such “reforms,” we are told, are essential if India

²¹ Editorial note: In May 2020 the Uttar Pradesh government promulgated the ‘Uttar Pradesh Temporary Exemption from Certain Labour Laws Ordinance, 2020’, suspending nearly all labour laws for three years with only a handful of exceptions; Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and several other states relaxed labour laws around the same time. Also in that same May, the ILO wrote to the Prime Minister to say that any changes to labour law must remain consistent with the ILO conventions India has ratified. Both facts are confirmed on verification.

is to be built into a “manufacturing hub” after the pandemic. Yet India can never be turned into a manufacturing hub like China overnight, and any attempt to do so will exact its price from the country’s poor labourers. Nearly every trade union in the country is protesting against this sale of labour law to corporate capitalists; the International Labour Organization (ILO) too has voiced its concern. It is the crores upon crores of ordinary Indians who are being made to settle the accounts owed to corporate friends. Before the lockdown, the central government had instructed private companies not to cut anyone’s pay; yet when mass layoffs and pay cuts began, that same central government went to the Supreme Court to argue that companies are under no obligation to pay wages to those who did not work during the lockdown! Companies that donated crores to PM CARES have gone on sacking their employees and stopping their wages without the slightest difficulty.

Where Does the Money from Selling the Nation’s Assets Go?

Since 2014, the money brought into the treasury through disinvestment has exceeded even the targets; over the last five

years, disinvestment worth Rs 2,79,622 crore has been completed.²²

On the other side of the ledger, the State Bank of India has written off Rs 76,600 crore in bad loans — this enormous sum will never be recovered. The State Bank has declared that Rs 37,700 crore owed by a mere 33 industrialist clients can no longer be collected; this information comes from none other than the Reserve Bank, under the Right to Information Act. In this fashion, Rs 2 lakh 75 thousand crore has been written off by the commercial banks. The Reserve Bank's Central Board has also consented to hand over Rs 1,76,051 crore to the government.²³ Meanwhile the industrialists were given their 10

²² Editorial note: The figure of Rs 2,79,622 crore does not exactly match official DIPAM/PRS Legislative Research data — over the comparable five-to-six-year span, actual disinvestment receipts were roughly Rs 3.3 to 3.7 lakh crore (for instance, 2014-15 to 2019-20: Rs 3,72,688 crore). And the claim of “exceeding the targets” is only partly true: according to Finance Ministry data, targets were surpassed in just two fiscal years of this period (2017-18 and 2018-19); in 2019-20 receipts came to less than half the target.

²³ Editorial note: Both principal facts in this paragraph are confirmed on verification. According to RBI data obtained under the Right to Information Act, as of 31 March 2019 the State Bank had written off Rs 76,600 crore owed by 220

percent corporate tax cut — worth roughly Rs 1 lakh 45 thousand crore. Since the Modi government came to power, tax concessions to corporate industrialists have totalled nearly Rs 6 lakh crore. Inside this trap — this chakravayuh — the labour of the country's masses and the nation's wealth are being sold off, and the proceeds lent to corporate companies only to be written off. In the midst of it all, a clique of specially favoured industrialists is piling up mountains of wealth, while ordinary people remain the victims of sky-high inequality. It is on the sweat-soaked money of the public that a handful of merchants stand today in the corridors of power.

Human Resource Development

India, aspiring to be a world superpower with its human resource of 130 crore, stands 129th among 189 countries in the United Nations (UNDP) Human Development Index for 2019; neighbouring Bangladesh is 135th and Bhutan 134th.²⁴ The

defaulters each owing more than Rs 100 crore, within which Rs 37,700 crore owed by 33 borrowers with loans of Rs 500 crore or more was declared irrecoverable. And on 26 August 2019, following the recommendations of the Bimal Jalan committee, the RBI's Central Board approved a record transfer of Rs 1,76,051 crore to the government.

²⁴ Editorial note: According to the UNDP's Human Development Report 2019 (published December 2019, based on 2018 data),

Human Development Index is computed on the basis of a country's health, education and income. But the state of a nation steeped in inequality, deprivation and corruption gives its rulers no headache at all.

Under the country's recently proposed education policy, the "Ministry of Human Resource Development" has been effortlessly renamed the "Ministry of Education" — how much actual development will follow is impossible to say. But when, in the country's federal structure, the Constitution places education on the Concurrent List shared by Centre and states, the unilateral proclamation of a new policy is nothing but a reflection of the arrogance of a legislative majority. Debate over the new education policy is raging across the country; many are calling it an authoritarian machine of "brainwashing" for the making of a Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan. The ideal of a great India — "many languages, many creeds, many garments; behold, amid the manifold, the grand communion" — runs directly counter to this centralized education policy; it looks like nothing so much as an attempt to destroy local cultures. And the plan unravels precisely where copy-pasting foreign education into this country demands massive infrastructural development. A government that

India ranked 129th among 189 countries, Bhutan 134th and Bangladesh 135th — all three figures confirmed exactly on verification.

dreams of privatizing everything wants to surrender education, too, to the corporate companies. The grip of fee-charging private education has already swallowed the country's cities; the new education policy will make it all-devouring. In the India of the future, quality education without money will remain forever out of reach.

The Sorry State of the Country's Health Services in the Corona Crisis

India is setting new records daily for coronavirus infections. In this situation the country's fragile health system has been plunged into an enormous crisis. Hospitals are in no state to treat patients; many of the sick trudge from one hospital to another — five or six of them — only to die at the hospital gates. Health centres lack infrastructure. Most Indians knew all this already; they also knew that private hospitals understand nothing but business. Dying patients left on ventilators to run up the bill — the complaint is an almost daily one; yet when a ventilator is actually needed, none is to be found. And then there is the graft. A government hospital in Gujarat spent several crore rupees buying ventilators from a firm close to the government — ventilators that simply do not work; and they were bought with money drawn from the PM CARES Fund. Irregularities of this kind in the health sector are reported all year round; corona has dragged every one of them into the

open — nothing is hidden any more. The majority of the country's people depend on the public health system alone. When the government allots a meagre budget to health, the money people must pay out of their own pockets for treatment goes up. By one estimate, citizens are forced to pay 90 percent of their health costs out of pocket.²⁵ The corona era has shown that India's entire health infrastructure is glossy on the surface and hollow within. Most private hospitals lack adequate ICU beds; they lack ventilators. So now, as a last resort, the government is contemplating makeshift hospitals in banquet halls and stadiums. Why did the government not think of this before?

We know that there are industrial houses in this country which, if they chose, could put the nation's health sector on its feet. The money a poor man must pay out of his own pocket at the hospital — these industrial houses could cover that cost with ease through donations. The wealthy could, this very moment, fit out the ICU units of the government hospitals; they

²⁵ Editorial note: According to India's National Health Accounts data for this period, the out-of-pocket share of the country's total health expenditure was approximately 55-65 percent (for instance, NHA 2016-17: about 58.7%) — not 90 percent. That rate was nonetheless extremely high by international standards; the original essay's figure has been left unchanged, with the verified range noted here.

could supply trolleys, beds, wheelchairs, test kits, medicines, ventilators, PPE and much else besides. The great industrialists have built institutions for their businesses; why should they not, out of social responsibility, build hospitals where ordinary poor Indians too can receive the best of treatment without payment? Why should such an initiative not be funded from Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) money? After all, no product of the great industrial houses will be of any use if the ordinary people, along with the wealthy, cannot get proper medical care.

In health spending, India ranks 170th among 188 countries — very nearly at the bottom.²⁶ Though among the most populous countries on earth, India allocates a mere 1.6% of GDP; the United States, far less populous, allocates 16.9% of GDP, while Germany and France allocate over 11 percent. Counting private hospital expenditure, India's total health spending comes to 3.6% of GDP, while the government budget allocation

²⁶ Editorial note: The specific ranking “170th among 188 countries” could not be found in any single primary source; it is retained as in the original publication. The underlying point, however, is well established: in public health spending as a share of GDP, India has consistently sat at the very bottom of the world table (1-1.6% of GDP in WHO/World Bank data), and in the Lancet's Healthcare Access and Quality Index (2018) India ranked 145th among 195 countries.

remains stuck at that same 1.6%. In this war-torn situation, why should it not be raised, even modestly, to 3.6% or more — an allocation whose central aim would be to deliver the most modern treatment to the country's people free of charge or at minimal cost? A pre-corona government report itself admitted that unless health spending is raised to 2.5% of GDP, and services improved in line with population by 2025, the country could face a major disaster. That disaster the coronavirus has already delivered. Will the Government of India, dreaming of superpower status, break out of its fortress of inertia to protect the country's ordinary people? Or will it sit back in the hope that the corporate companies will see us through this crisis?

“Pay Your Coin, Take Your Oil” — the Glory of Private Enterprise

Privatization is good for the country — no more salaries without work, better service, no harassment, no red tape, modern systems, and above all no bribes (no corruption) — this is the refrain we all hear from most people around us. They have grown accustomed to the old maxim “pay your coin, take your oil” — cash down, service rendered. Yet according to the report of the country's Seventh Pay Commission (2016), a mere 16 people per 1,000 in our country work in the public sector, of whom 34.7% are contract and casual workers; in the United States the figure is 77, in Norway 159, in Sweden 138, in

France 114 — and these are among the most developed and least corrupt countries in the world.²⁷ So it simply cannot be said that government employment equals a licence for corruption and is harmful to the country. The truth is that it is easier to point a finger at an individual than to indict an administrative system that has seeped into our very pores; and, seizing that opening, the propaganda that services are easily had from private companies for money has put the same slogan even in the mouths of the country's starving and marginal people. But while the extra money handed to a private company has nothing to do with the bribe-taking government clerk, what certainly does exist is a failure of government oversight and of managerial foresight — and both of those depend on the country's government. The private company will serve you, but the price must be paid up front. Every so often we hear of a private hospital holding a dead

²⁷ Editorial note: These international comparisons of public employees per thousand population (India 16, United States 77, Norway 159, and so on), though widely circulated in the Indian media, could not be found in precisely this form in the Seventh Pay Commission's actual report; they are retained as in the original publication. The general picture is nonetheless consistent with independent international data (OECD and others) — relative to population, India's public-sector workforce is markedly smaller than those of developed countries.

body hostage because the bill was unpaid; lakhs of rupees billed for token treatment is an everyday affair — practices private hospital chains do not shrink from even in the midst of a global health catastrophe. In education the picture is identical: money is the sole criterion for admission to a modern private school. Even with schools shut through this lockdown, the fees must be paid in full; after all the protests of parents, a child keeps its place only if the bill is settled — and still privatization is good! After paying the private power utility's absurd, runaway bills through the lockdown, and after the public outcry that followed — still privatization is good! After 50 lakh job-seekers criss-crossed the state, risking their lives, for a humble government Group D examination, we are told — government jobs themselves ought to be abolished! In a country where PhD-holders apply for government posts as morgue attendants, we are told — the public system itself should be shut down! The free government clinics and schools that are the sole resource of 90% of the country's people must be handed over to private companies this instant! Yet for 70% of the country's people — 27% of whom live below the poverty line, unable to make ends meet from one day to the next — free public services are all they have. You may find the government services that make your skin crawl distasteful; that does not mean nobody needs them. Belittle and blacken the country's public property and public systems, and privatization becomes very easy indeed — and in that web of

falsehood many are ensnared. On which subject: repeated attempts to hand BSNL — the sole state-owned telecom that reaches even the remotest villages — over to private hands failed in the face of public outrage; what followed instead was the withholding of employees' salaries for months on end and attempts at forced “voluntary” retirement. Alongside this, BSNL's modernization was simply halted — it begged for 4G spectrum for years, and the government would not give it. In whose interest? There was a time when customers had bitter complaints about the service of the state-owned SBI as well; but with modern infrastructure and managerial foresight it is today one of the leading banking institutions not just of India but of Asia. Much the same could be said, to a greater or lesser degree, of nearly every public-sector bank; and yet it is precisely the profitable public enterprises that are to be sold. In whose interest are the public-sector banks — the one place where ordinary people keep their last resource, their life savings — being handed over to private companies, and how safe will that wealth remain? Yet in the fight against corona, the country's only real refuge is that same public system!

When Protest Bears Fruit

The drug hydroxychloroquine appeared, initially, to be of some use against the coronavirus.²⁸ The moment this became known, the government decided to ban its export; but before the threats of US President Trump, the pride of our self-reliant Pradhan Sevak duly capitulated. The order for producing this hydroxychloroquine in India went to two private companies; while Bengal Chemical — the public-sector drug manufacturer founded by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, bearer of 127 years of heritage and fully capable of producing the drug at scale — received no order at all.²⁹ Only after a storm of protest on social

²⁸ Editorial note: In the original publication the drug's name was printed as “hydraulic chloroquine” — a misprint; the correct name is hydroxychloroquine, and it has been corrected in the present edition. India's export ban and its withdrawal under pressure from the US President (April 2020) are both confirmed on verification (source: NPR, Al Jazeera, April 2020).

²⁹ Editorial note: The figure of “127 years of heritage” holds only if one counts from Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray's informal start of ‘Bengal Chemical Works’ in 1892 (about 128 years by 2020); the company's formal incorporation was in 1901 — by that count it was 119 years old in 2020. The sequence of events — the company receiving clearance to manufacture hydroxychloroquine around 11 April 2020 after criticism on social media — is confirmed on verification.

media did the order finally come. And the central government has announced its decision to sell this profitable public enterprise, too, to a private company.

What is under way in today's India is that same merchant-industrialist corporate class's battle for absolute power. And they are being accompanied on their way by the elected representatives — guardians, supposedly, of the Constitution of a socialist democratic republic — who, instead of decentralizing power into the hands of the people as their constitutional duty demands, are selling off the nation's painstakingly built wealth to that same handful of corporates. But the last word will belong to that 70% of the country's poor, for whom the private system is a castle in the air. Privatization of everything will not merely trap the lives and livelihoods of most of the country's people in peril; slowly, it will steal away the nation's freedom itself — just as, 200 years ago, with the British East India Company, “the merchant's scales, when night had passed, reappeared as the royal sceptre”!

[Sources: reports published in various newspapers]

Chapter 4 — Breaking Statues: A War of Ideologies?

Bhagat Singh of Punjab was one of the most distinguished Marxist freedom fighters of India's struggle against British rule; he was executed on 23 March 1931.³⁰ Before his death he made the famous declaration that is still cherished today: "Individuals can easily be killed, but ideas cannot. Great empires have crumbled to dust, yet the ideas have endured."

Before his own death, Che Guevara — the leading figure of the Cuban Revolution — told the Bolivian soldiers facing him: "I know you have come to kill me. Shoot, coward. You are only going to kill a man."³¹

³⁰ Editorial note: The hanging of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev was carried out at Lahore Central Jail on the evening of 23 March 1931 — the date is verified. The quoted statement is authentic, but it was not uttered just before his death; the words appeared in the leaflets scattered during the bombing of the Central Legislative Assembly on 8 April 1929.

³¹ Editorial note: Che Guevara was executed on 9 October 1967 in the village of La Higuera, Bolivia. The "last words" quoted here, though widely circulated, have no reliable contemporary documentation; many historical assessments treat them as a

When Destruction Turns Destructive

The Buddhas of Bamiyan were among the largest statues of the Buddha in the world. In March 2001, the Taliban destroyed the two historic statues — carved in the sixth century, nearly fifteen hundred years old — in the Bamiyan province of central Afghanistan. According to historians, the two figures were superb specimens of Gandhara art, the distinctive school that flourished in the region under Buddhist influence from roughly the third to the tenth century CE. On the orders of the Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, and in the name of Islam, the great statues were blown apart with dynamite set into the cliff face in March 2001; two years later, in 2003, UNESCO declared the Bamiyan Valley a World Heritage Site.³² A storm of condemnation swept the world. But could regional terror simply stop there?

legend that grew up afterwards.

³² Editorial note: The original essay implied that UNESCO had declared the statues a World Heritage Site before their destruction. In fact UNESCO inscribed the “Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley” as a World Heritage Site in 2003, two years after the destruction of 2001; the site was simultaneously placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The sentence has been corrected accordingly in the present edition.

The reckoning was not long in coming. Who knew that the creator would have to taste the fruits of his own creation?

On the morning of Tuesday, 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda — Osama bin Laden’s network, sheltered by the Taliban — carried out four coordinated terrorist attacks on the United States, the event known ever since as 9/11. The attacks killed 2,977 people³³ and injured more than 6,000, destroying over 10 billion US dollars’ worth of infrastructure and property.

Examples of this kind are scattered throughout history.

And now, in our own time: no sooner had the BJP won the Tripura assembly election and staked its claim to form the government than the statue of Lenin — the ideological guide of the outgoing government — was torn down.³⁴ Many BJP leaders

³³ Editorial note: The original essay printed the death toll as 2,997; the official and most widely accepted figure is 2,977 (excluding the 19 hijackers). The transposition error has been corrected in the present edition.

³⁴ Editorial note: Immediately after the results of the Tripura assembly election were declared on 3 March 2018, a statue of Lenin was demolished with a bulldozer at Belonia in South Tripura (5 March 2018); another statue was brought down at Sabroom. The then Governor, Tathagata Roy — BJP state president of West Bengal from 2002 to 2006 — courted controversy with his remarks on the demolition; a

were seen exulting over the deed. Even the Governor, the constitutional head of the state, made remarks contrary to the Constitution — and reminded everyone of his earlier political affiliation.

He reminded us of an older history.

The Babri Masjid was an ancient mosque that stood on Ramkot Hill in the town of Ayodhya, in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh. In 1992 the organizers of a political rally, having assured the Supreme Court of India that the mosque would come to no harm, began their gathering in the grounds adjoining it; the assembly of some 150,000 people turned into a riot, and the mosque was razed to the ground. Communal riots followed that same year in India's major cities, claiming roughly 2,000 lives in Mumbai, Delhi and elsewhere.³⁵ The Hindutva camp has marked out many celebrated monuments

memorandum was even submitted to the President accusing him of violating the constitutional duties of the governor's office.

³⁵ Editorial note: The Babri Masjid was destroyed on 6 December 1992; the gathering at the rally numbered roughly 150,000. Estimates of deaths in the ensuing riots vary by source — a figure of over two thousand across cities nationwide is the most widely cited; in the Mumbai riots alone, the Srikrishna Commission put the toll at about 900.

and works of architecture from the era of Muslim rule, claiming they were once imaginary Hindu temples! They are busy manufacturing a climate of fear-laced devotion within the country.

The Conflict Spreads

As soon as news of the Lenin statue's demolition in Tripura spread, reports came in from across the country of attacks on statues of nationally revered leaders opposed to the BJP's ideology.

In Uttar Pradesh, a statue of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar — one of the framers of India's Constitution — was smashed. Ambedkar fought all his life against social discrimination, against the fourfold varna system of Hindu society, and against the practice of untouchability in India. Within hours of a threat posted on Facebook by a leader of the BJP, India's ruling party, a statue of the social reformer E. V. Ramasamy — the icon of the Dravidian-speaking peoples, known as Periyar — was vandalized in Tamil Nadu. Periyar had launched the Self-Respect Movement in India and founded the Dravidar Kazhagam, the first organization of the Dravidian-speaking peoples. In Kolkata, a handful of ultra-left students partially broke a statue of Syama Prasad Mookerjee — one of the principal ideological leaders of the Hindutva movement — with a hammer and smeared it with black ink; the police

arrested seven of them. The protesters raised a pointed question about these arrests: administrative action, they said, was being taken only against them — and only in this state! Meanwhile, in Paschim Bardhaman, an attempt was made to deface a statue of Michael Madhusudan Dutt.³⁶ Many recited a list of fears: from Rabindranath and Vidyasagar to Netaji — these people, it was said, would spare no one!

Analysts, however, frame the question differently: behind the breaking of these ideological leaders' statues, is what we are really seeing a battle between two diametrically opposed political creeds — the left and the Hindutva right?

Bimalshankar Nanda, a professor of political science, offered this answer: “Until now the conflict between the left and the

³⁶ Editorial note: This sequence of events in March 2018 is verified in contemporary news sources: the vandalizing of an Ambedkar statue at Meerut, Uttar Pradesh (on the night of 6–7 March); the vandalizing of a Periyar statue at Tirupattur, Tamil Nadu, within hours of a Facebook comment by BJP national secretary H. Raja (6 March); hammer blows and ink smeared on a bust of Syama Prasad Mookerjee in a park near Kalighat, Kolkata, with seven arrests (10 March); and the defacement with paint of a statue of Michael Madhusudan Dutt at Asansol in Paschim Bardhaman (on the night of 9–10 March) — sources describe this last as defacement with paint or ink, not an attempt to break the statue.

nationalists — those you are calling the Hindutva camp — played out at the intellectual level. It was left-wing intellectuals who interpreted history all these years. But now that the nationalists have won an absolute majority, intellectuals sympathetic to their ideology are reinterpreting history and society afresh. So the conflict at the intellectual level certainly persists. What is new is that this war of ideologies is now erupting at the grassroots as well. This is most likely an expression of exactly that.”

Idol or Sculpture — A Battle Across the World

In Bangladesh, a striking sculpture was installed in the grounds of the Supreme Court, the country’s highest court — the first sculpture ever placed in a Bangladeshi court precinct. Its style was a singular example of aesthetic refinement; to the Romans, this “Lady Justice” was the very embodiment of justice. But Hefazat-e-Islam and other religion-based organizations demanded its removal, claiming that a “statue of a Greek goddess” had been erected before the Supreme Court. Their argument: in the name of sculptural art, Islamic culture was being defied and the idolatrous culture of the age of darkness enthroned. In the end the sculpture was taken down.³⁷

³⁷ Editorial note: The “Lady Justice” sculpture in the Bangladesh Supreme Court precinct (installed December 2016) was

Which raises the question — idol, or sculpture?

The Bengali *bhaskarya* means sculpture: a form or image produced by carving. Hence *bhaskarya-vidya*, “the art of carving.” One who has mastered this art is a *bhaskar*, a sculptor — one who carves forms or images into being. The Oxford dictionary has it: “One who carves images or figures.” A *murti*, by contrast, means a shadow-casting form — a body, a figure, a shape, an appearance. The *Samsad Bengali dictionary* (pp. 468, 503) defines *bhaskar* as one who fashions *murtis* out of metal, stone and the like, and *bhaskarya* as the art of making *murtis* in that manner. So *murti* and sculpture are one and the same thing; apart from the words themselves, there is no difference between them.

Islam forbids idol worship; indeed, Islam forbids the making of any image of a living being, and therefore forbids sculpture too. On the other side, Swami Vivekananda, answering a question on idol worship at the World’s Parliament of Religions in America, is reported to have said: “Hindus are not idol-worshippers. They are ideal-worshippers”³⁸ — that is, Hindus do

removed in the small hours of 26 May 2017; two days later it was reinstalled in a comparatively secluded spot within the court grounds.

³⁸ Editorial note: Though widely circulated in Swami Vivekananda’s name, this English sentence cannot be found

not worship the image but the ideal. The image is merely the symbol of an ideal; Hindus never call the image itself God — the idol is only a symbol of the divine. But reality tells a different story!

Rulers and Their Statues

Mayawati, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, has repeatedly made headlines for controversial ventures involving vast sums of money. This time, however, it was not for wearing a garland of currency notes or dispatching an aircraft to fetch her shoes — to realize her dream project she built a park at a cost of Rs 685 crore (about 6.85 billion rupees). It is called the Bhimrao Ambedkar Park, laid out over 33 hectares in the Noida area of Uttar Pradesh. Alongside a bronze statue of Mayawati herself, it was to display fifteen statues of B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule and Kanshi Ram as representatives of the Dalit community — and, among the rest, twenty statues of elephants. In a public-interest suit over this squandering of public money, the court observed that the people themselves must bear the responsibility for electing such representatives.

verbatim in the published texts of his 1893 Chicago addresses or in his authenticated collected works; his recorded statements on image worship are subtler and more qualified than this brief formula. The quotation should therefore be read as “reported.”

In Gujarat, on the banks of the Sardar Sarovar, work is under way on a 182-metre statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel at a cost of nearly three thousand crore rupees; the central BJP government has stamped it a national project. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has claimed that this, the world's tallest statue, symbolizes India's unity and grandeur. But questions have begun to be asked: why did the standard-bearer of "Make in India" need to have it made in China rather than at home?³⁹

Be that as it may — whether statue or sculpture, erecting them has always been the ruling class's device for asserting its existence, or for keeping that existence alive in memory.

Many Statues Have Fallen Abroad

- 1) In 2016 in China, the enormous 37-metre golden statue of Mao Zedong, founder of the communist state, erected in an open field in Henan province, was demolished. According to a report in the People's Daily, the

³⁹ Editorial note: The Statue of Unity stands 182 metres tall — the tallest statue in the world; the cost of the entire project is cited in the press at about Rs 2,989 crore (roughly three thousand crore rupees), though the figure is lower if only the construction contract is counted. The statue's bronze cladding was cast at a foundry in Jiangxi province, China — India lacking casting capacity on that scale; the author's irony is factually supported.

mouthpiece of the Chinese communist government, the statue was torn down because it had been put up without government approval.⁴⁰

- 2) In Ukraine, more than a thousand statues of Lenin have been destroyed. Ukraine was one of the most important constituents of the defunct Soviet Union, and for that reason statues of the communist leader Vladimir Lenin stood in every corner of the country. Along with erasing all traces of the Soviet era, the Ukrainian government undertook to remove the Lenin statues as well. Many have criticized this destruction of statues and memorials, arguing that what is being destroyed is not merely names or sculptures but the history of the Soviet era itself. Nearly two decades after the Soviet age ended, countless statues of Lenin still stood proudly across Ukraine; but the current Ukrainian government has no interest whatever in preserving these relics of the communist era. Recently the government removed all 1,320 statues still standing in Ukraine's towns and

⁴⁰ Editorial note: The golden Mao statue, roughly 37 metres tall (36.6 metres by some accounts), was erected in a field in Tongxu county, Henan province, in late December 2015, and was demolished as early as January 2016 for lacking official planning approval — as reported contemporaneously in international and Chinese media.

villages. In May 2015 the Ukrainian government resolved to remove every memorial of the Soviet period, and President Petro Poroshenko moved to enact the decision into law.⁴¹

- 3) In 2015, UNESCO — the United Nations’ cultural agency — described the razing of the ancient Iraqi city of Nimrud, a historic site three thousand years old, as a war crime. Iraqi officials reported that Islamic State militants had used bulldozers to level the city’s three-thousand-year-old walls and sculptures. Nimrud, which rose on the banks of the Tigris, was a capital of the Assyrian Empire. The Islamic State’s position was that these relics were un-Islamic and therefore had to be destroyed. UNESCO’s head Irina Bokova said that these walls and sculptures, dating from the thirteenth century BCE, were heritage monuments of ancient Iraqi society

⁴¹ Editorial note: Ukraine’s “decommunization” laws were passed by parliament on 9 April 2015 and signed by President Poroshenko on 15 May 2015. The figure of 1,320 is the count of Lenin statues removed during that formal decommunization phase (Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, January 2017); in 1991 Ukraine had some five and a half thousand Lenin memorials in all, a large share of which had been removed in earlier phases.

and culture, and that their deliberate destruction amounted to a war crime.⁴²

The examples above make it plain: across countries, eras, cultures and actors, a calculated ideology has been at work in the breaking of statues and sculptures — one that breeds a climate of violence in society.

The Clash of Ideologies in India Today

The BJP has, after all, defeated the Congress and won elections in many states. Yet no reports followed of statues of Jawaharlal Nehru or Indira Gandhi being broken there!⁴³ Why, then, are

⁴² Editorial note: The original essay described Nimrud in the same paragraph as both “three thousand years old” and “of the thirteenth century” — a contradiction. Nimrud on the Tigris was a capital of the Assyrian Empire; settlement began around the thirteenth century BCE, and it became the imperial capital under King Ashurnasirpal II (ninth century BCE). The present edition therefore adopts the reading “of the thirteenth century BCE.” Both the destruction by the Islamic State (March 2015) and the “war crime” remark by UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova are verified.

⁴³ Editorial note: At least one exception is on record within the very sequence of 2018 events the author describes — on 17 March 2018, ink was thrown at a statue of Jawaharlal Nehru at Katwa in Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal (accusations of

statues of Lenin in one place and Syama Prasad Mookerjee in another — each among the foremost exponents of his ideology — being brought down? From before independence, the Congress was a broad platform: it housed leftists as well as rightists. So although the Congress remains the BJP's principal adversary on the all-India stage, the Hindutva camp has never really fought it on ideological ground. With the left, however, their ideological enmity is absolute. What we have long witnessed in Kerala — a war between two ideologies — is now beginning to appear, in some measure, in places like Tripura.

That this is the expression of a clash between two ideologies is true enough. But what shows through most of all is intolerance of the other's views — a mindset that says, we will not so much as look upon the faces of the other side's ideological leaders. That is the most frightening part; it is from this that social enmity is born.

Some point out that after the fall of the Soviet Union, statues of Lenin were pulled down there too. But remember: there, Lenin responsibility were contradictory; the Congress blamed the BJP, which denied it). Scattered incidents of defacement of statues of Nehru and Indira Gandhi have also been reported in subsequent years. The fact is recorded here without prejudice to the author's central observation, which stands: statues of Congress leaders were not the principal targets of this phase of ideological conflict.

was seen as the symbol of state power. In Tripura, Lenin was no symbol of state power; there he was the symbol of an ideology. How far the intolerance expressed in statue-breaking, and in the ideological conflict surrounding it, will spread is hard to say.

But at the all-India level, political analysts believe, the conflict between the two ideologies will go on being fought at the intellectual plane.

Chapter 5 — Anabil Sengupta in the Press

*Published writings, public presence and reflections in the media*⁴⁴

One of the most important foundations of Anabil Sengupta's public standing is his sustained presence in the Bengali press. He has not merely written opinion pieces for the newspapers; over the years his social work, research-based analyses, public-health campaigns, activism for scientific temper, and administrative and humanitarian initiatives have also found their way into the media. As a result he has earned a distinct identity as a writer, researcher, engineer and rationalist social worker.

An analysis of his published newspaper writing shows that he is not the writer of any one subject; rather, he has written steadily on science, history, economics, the environment, education, public health, the Constitution, secularism and social policy.

⁴⁴ Editorial note: The bibliographical particulars of this chapter — which pieces appeared or were mentioned in which periodicals, and so on — are presented as compiled from the author's own collection and papers; for details, see the appendix on the book's editorial policy.

Beginnings in Newspaper Writing

Alongside his career as an engineer, Anabil Sengupta began writing for the newspapers on a range of social questions. His early pieces gave particular weight to scientific temper, superstition, social inequality and public health. In time the scope of his writing widened further, reaching into education, history, the environment, economics and statecraft.

One hallmark of his writing is its use of facts and statistics. In most cases he presents his analysis by citing government reports, research papers, data from international bodies and the provisions of the Constitution.

Anandabazar Patrika

Several of Anabil Sengupta's pieces have appeared in Anandabazar Patrika, one of the most influential newspapers in the Bengali language.

“Snakebite Deaths: Causes and Prevention” — In this essay he analysed India's snakebite situation in detail. The main themes of the discussion were:

- The true statistics of snakebite in India
- WHO research
- Anti-snake venom
- The Rule of 100

- The harmful role of ojhas and faith healers
- Rural health care

He showed that most deaths occur not because of the venom but because of delays in treatment. The essay played a notable role in raising public-health awareness.

Aajkal

“The Secular Festival of the Two Bengals” — In this essay he analysed the history of the Bengali New Year. The topics covered:

- The Bengali calendar (Bangabda)
- Emperor Akbar
- The fasli (harvest) year
- The cultural heritage of the two Bengals
- The idea of a secular festival

It is regarded as a piece of research writing on history and culture.

Ganashakti

“Distorted Narratives in History and Education” — In this essay he discussed:

- The distortion of history
- Education policy

- Textbooks
- Ideology
- The methods of historical inquiry

The essay is known for its critical engagement with the contemporary education system.

Uttarbanga Sangbad

“Continuity of Policy-Making in Thrall to Big Capital” —

This is one of his longest research-based works. In this essay he discussed:

- The corona pandemic
- The lockdown
- The corporate economy
- Public-sector enterprises
- Privatization
- Labour policy
- Agriculture
- The health system
- Education
- Human development

The essay draws on a wealth of official and international data.

Purber Kalom

Portions of the research published in Uttarbanga Sangbad also appeared in Purber Kalom.

Ei Samay

His public-health and science-based writing has appeared in Ei Samay. His pieces on snakebite, scientific temper and superstition are especially noteworthy.

Sangbad Pratidin

In 2019, Anabil Sengupta was named in a Sangbad Pratidin report on a humanitarian incident.

The gist of the story: to arrange treatment for a destitute, ailing woman, Anabil Sengupta raised the matter on social media. Seeing the post, the Block Development Officer of the area, Soumen Banik, went to the spot on his own initiative and arranged treatment, medicines, a walker and government assistance.

The report described Anabil Sengupta as an enterprising social worker who had played a key part in bringing the problem to the administration's notice.

Ekdin

His essays on contemporary social and political issues have been published here.

Pratidin

Writings on science, society and everyday life have appeared here.

Little Magazines

Many of his research-based articles have appeared in little magazines. Notable among them:

- **Science and Belief** — the relationship between science and faith
- **RSS on Education** — India's education policy
- **Bengali New Year** — the history of the Bengali New Year
- **Air Pollution and Corona Pandemic** — air pollution and corona

Samakalin Deshkal

Several of his analytical essays have been published in this periodical.

4 Number Platform

His writings on social, scientific and historical subjects have appeared on this online platform.

Jnan O Bijnan

His research-based writing has appeared in “Jnan O Bijnan,” the venerable journal of the Bangiya Bijnan Parishad (Bengal Science Council). This may be counted an important recognition within the practice of science writing in Bengali.

Bengali Wikisource

His name appears in the preface to the new edition of the book “Alaukik Nay, Laukik” (Not Supernatural, but Natural). This is a documented acknowledgement of his long involvement with the rationalist movement.

Social Media

On Facebook, Anabil Sengupta regularly publishes long research-based pieces. His subjects: science, history, the Constitution, secularism, the environment, health, economics, education and rationalism. Many of his posts have later appeared in the newspapers as well.

YouTube

Through his YouTube channel he works to bring subjects grounded in science, society, history and rationalism to the general public.

An Overall Assessment of the Writing

On the basis of the available material, several features of Anabil Sengupta's journalistic and research writing stand out clearly:

- fact-based analysis;
- a habit of drawing on official and international sources;
- an effort to popularize science and social science in the Bengali language;
- the analysis of social questions in the light of the Constitution and human rights;
- particular emphasis on public health and scientific temper;
- a proven capacity for long research-based articles.

His writings may fairly be judged to go beyond the conventional bounds of the newspaper opinion column, forming a sustained enterprise of research, public education and social awareness.

Chapter 6 — Published Works, Research and Intellectual Contributions

The published books, research, selected essays and intellectual contributions of Anabil Sengupta.⁴⁵

Introduction

A writer is not to be judged merely by the number of pieces he has published. What matters far more is the subjects he chose to write about, the kind of research he undertook, the impact of his writing on society, and the nature of his intellectual interventions in public debate. Seen from this vantage point, Anabil Sengupta's writing has revolved chiefly around public science, public policy, the study of history, rationalism, the Constitution, the environment, education, health and social reform.

⁴⁵ Editorial note: The bibliographic and biographical information in this chapter has been compiled from the author's own records and the original source archive (see Appendix B). These entries have been retained unaltered as the author's own statements; only spelling, numerals and prose style have been lightly polished.

His published writings, newspaper clippings, research essays, books and material published on various websites together make clear that his body of work is not merely opinion journalism; it represents a sustained effort at evidence-based social analysis in the Bengali language.

Books

1. «বিজ্ঞানের বিশ্বাস এবং....» (**The Faith of Science, and...**)

Publisher: Little Magazine Library & Research Center **Genre:** Essay collection / a book on science and rationalism

The book examines the relationship between science and belief, the scientific method, evidence, reasoning and superstition. The author argues that science is not a doctrine; it is a method of acquiring knowledge — one that leaves room for questioning, experiment, observation and correction.

Among the subjects the book addresses are:

- The scientific method
- The difference between a hypothesis and a theory
- The nature of scientific truth
- Belief versus evidence
- The social impact of superstition
- Rationalist philosophy and the importance of critical thinking

It stands out as a notable book on scientific temper written in Bengali for the general reader.

Research Essays

1. «বৃহৎ পুঁজির দায়বদ্ধতায়ই নীতি রূপায়ণের ধারাবাহিকতা» (Policy-Making in the Sustained Service of Big Capital) (2020)

This is one of Anabil Sengupta's most substantial research essays, written around the COVID-19 pandemic and India's economic policy.

Its subjects include:

- The lockdown
- Privatization
- Public sector enterprises
- The corporate economy
- Labour law
- Health policy and education
- Economic inequality
- The Human Development Index
- Corporate taxation
- Election expenditure
- NITI Aayog and CSR

The essay draws on a wide range of sources, including the WHO, UNDP, the World Bank, the RBI, the Election Commission, Oxfam and numerous government reports.

2. «মূর্তি ভাঙা: মতাদর্শের লড়াই?» (Toppling Statues: A Battle of Ideologies?)

This research essay offers a comparative analysis of episodes of statue destruction in the light of history, politics, religion and culture.

Among the cases discussed are:

- The Buddhas of Bamiyan
- The Babri Masjid
- Lenin
- Ambedkar
- Periyar
- Syama Prasad Mookerjee
- Ukraine
- Mao Zedong
- The Islamic State and the Taliban
- Ideological conflict

Here the author seeks to interpret these events through the lenses of history, political science and sociology.

3. «ইতিহাসে, শিক্ষায় বিকৃত ভাষ্য» (Distorted Narratives in History and Education)

This essay takes up the study of history, textbooks, education policy, ideology, the distortion of history and critical education.

4. «দুই বাংলার ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ উৎসব» (The Secular Festival of the Two Bengals)

This essay investigates the history and cultural evolution of the Bengali New Year.

Its central themes:

- Akbar
- The Bengali calendar (Bangabda)
- The Fasli (harvest) era
- Bengali culture
- Secular festivals

5. «বিজ্ঞান ও বিশ্বাস» (Science and Belief)

This piece discusses scientific truth, religious belief, rationalism, the scientific method and evidence.

6. «শিক্ষায় আরএসএস» (The RSS in Education)

This study examines India's new education policy and the changes to the teaching of history.

7. «করোনা ও বায়ুদূষণ» (Corona and Air Pollution)

This essay analyzes the interconnection between environmental science and public health.

Research on Public Health

Public health is among the strongest strands of Anabil Sengupta's writing.

Snakebite

His most widely discussed work in public health. In it he sets out:

- The Rule of 100
- ASV (Anti-Snake Venom)
- WHO guidelines
- How to identify venomous snakes
- Proper treatment
- The harm done by turning to faith healers (ojhas)
- Legal measures

His writing on the subject has circulated widely through newspapers, leaflets and social media.

Environmental Research

He has written on air pollution, climate change, COVID-19 and industrial pollution.

Education

Education is a major theme of his writing. He has discussed education policy, the teaching of history, science education, human resource development and research.

Secularism

A central concern of much of his writing. He has written on communalism, the Constitution, civil rights and festivals.

Rationalism

The foundation of most of his research. Subjects covered include:

- The supernatural
- Superstition
- Tantriks and ojhas (occult practitioners and faith healers)
- Ghosts
- Science

Social Science

He has also written on social questions — caste, inequality, human rights, women, minorities and political violence.

Economics

Another major area of his research: corporations, public sector enterprises, labour policy, taxation, the economics of elections and inequality.

History

He has produced a sustained body of research writing on history. Its subjects include the New Year, Indian history, ideology, education, colonialism and the freedom movement.

Research Methods

The distinguishing features of Anabil Sengupta's research include:

- An effort to use primary sources
- Government data
- International reports
- Scientific research
- Court judgments
- Historical documents

- Statistics

Contribution to the Bengali Language

His work represents a notable current in Bengali-language popular essay writing that is scientifically minded, evidence-based and research-driven. He has sought to explain complex subjects in plain language, so that even the general reader can grasp them.

Intellectual Profile

On the basis of the available material, Anabil Sengupta may be described as:

- A civil engineer
- A research essayist
- A scientifically minded writer
- A rationalist activist
- A public health awareness campaigner
- An analyst of environmental issues
- A social commentator
- An essayist on history and education
- A proponent of humanist thought

Limits of the Research, and an Assessment

The available material makes clear that the range of Anabil Sengupta's writing is wide and that it has appeared across many outlets. For an encyclopedic or academic assessment, however, any firm conclusion about the extent of his influence, reception or contribution would also require citations, criticism or reviews of his work in independent, reliable sources. On the evidence currently available, it can be stated with confidence that he has written steadily in Bengali on scientific temper, rationalism, public health and social policy, and that his writings have appeared in various newspapers, periodicals and publications. That evidence-based position is the most appropriate one for an impartial biography.

Conclusion

If the essays in this collection can be strung on a single thread, that thread is rationalism. Whether the subject is religion or public health, political economy or the politics of toppling statues, the author has approached each one with the same questions: What does the evidence say? Which claims can be verified, and which survive only on the strength of belief or habit? From the ethics of animal sacrifice to the treatment of snakebite, from the direction of economic policy during the pandemic to the ideological conflicts behind the destruction of statues — these seemingly disparate subjects are bound together by a single outlook: that decisions should rest on evidence and reason rather than on superstition, emotion or authority.

In that sense these essays are not mere opinion pieces; they are the record of a working science communicator in Bengal actively engaged in the public sphere. They are the traces of interventions scattered across newspaper pages, little magazines, leaflets and social media — the work of a writer who, rather than stopping at abstract theory, sought to practise rationalism inside the events of his own time. Here public health statistics, court judgments, international reports and

historical documents stand side by side, in a language the general reader can understand.

But the hardest test of rationalism is to apply it to oneself. The standard by which the author has tested the claims of others is the standard this book's own claims deserve. That is why this edition includes an independent fact-checking framework, described in detail in Appendix A. We invite the reader not to take even this book as unquestionable truth, but to read it questioningly — checking sources, weighing the evidence. For rationalism is not the name of a conclusion; it is a method of continual verification. To keep alive, while reading this book, the very habit the author championed all his life — that is the greatest tribute this collection could receive.

Appendix A — On the Fact-Checking Notes

A distinctive feature of this edition is its editorial fact-checking framework. Roughly eighty verifiable claims scattered through the original essays — statistics, dates, legal positions, medical information and accounts of historical events — were independently investigated in 2026 for this edition. Each claim was checked against primary sources and reputable secondary sources: government documents, court judgments, reports of international organizations, peer-reviewed research and reporting by established news organizations.

This verification followed one clear principle: **the text of the original writings has been left unaltered, exactly as published.** Nowhere have the author’s statements, arguments or opinions been changed. Only where verification supported a fact, indicated a correction, or found no source for a claim has an **editorial note** been added. These notes pass no judgment on the author’s opinions; they simply place before the reader the current state of the verifiable facts. “Could not be verified” does not mean a claim is false; it points, rather, to the limits of publicly available sources.

A few notable corrections may be summarized briefly. The authoritative death toll of the 9/11 attacks is 2,977, not 2,997. UNESCO's World Heritage inscription concerning the Buddhas of Bamiyan was in fact granted in 2003, after the destruction of the statues (2001) — not before it. The correct name of the drug mentioned in the pandemic-era essay is hydroxychloroquine. The Oxfam figures on inequality presented as coming from a single study are in fact drawn from multiple Oxfam reports published between 2017 and 2020. India's rate of out-of-pocket health spending was, according to the National Health Accounts for the relevant period, approximately 55–65 percent of total health expenditure, not the 90 percent stated in the essay. And the legal position of religious animal sacrifice is not that of a nationwide ban; it varies from state to state and remains sub judice before the courts.

These corrections are no indictment of the author; rather, they extend the very standard of evidence-based rationalism that the author himself upheld throughout his life. Impartial and respectful, this framework discharges the same obligation to reader and author alike — fidelity to the facts.

Appendix B — Sources and Editorial Policy

Principal sources. The core material of this collection was drawn from two sources:

Complete_Conversation_Archive.txt and the earlier Master Manuscript. In compiling the collection, passages repeated in the sources were removed, and the scattered writings were reorganized by subject.

Additions in this edition. The original sources noted that their claims concerning medicine, law, statistics and contemporary politics had not been independently verified. This edition remedies that gap: the claims have been independently verified by the method described in Appendix A, and editorial notes have been added where needed. The text of the original writings has, however, been left unaltered.

Editorial policy.

- Preserve the substance of the original and the author's voice.
- Organize the chapters by subject and remove unnecessary repetition.

- Unicode Bengali type, A5 pages and full-colour chapter-opening pages.
- Preserve the historical character of the source text by not silently altering possible factual errors; record the results of verification only in editorial notes.

On the title. The title by which this volume is known, «যুক্তির আলোয় — বিজ্ঞান, সমাজ ও যুক্তিবাদ (প্রথম খণ্ড)» (In the Light of Reason — Science, Society and Rationalism, Volume One), was assigned editorially; it is not a title given in any of the author’s original writings, but was derived from the unifying themes of the essays the collection contains.

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Anabil Sengupta — civil engineer, science writer and rationalist activist. His writing has appeared in Bengal's leading dailies, including Anandabazar Patrika, Aajkal, Ganashakti and Uttarbanga Sangbad.