Chapter Four

Experiencing the Social:
The Physicality of Vernacularization

The Risk of Vernacularization

“(f.) What ground have you for saying that the University has so used its power as to bring about the wrong results? About the results there could be no question; witness the declaration of the Chancellor of the University which has already been quoted [vide (a) ante]. […]

“(j.) Do you think there are any other ways to which the University could be of help in not only not rewarding but in discouraging or discounting bookishness? Yes – by an improved system of marking answers; but still this improvement on the system of marking could come only as a necessary adjunct to an improved system of setting examination paper. […]

“(n.) Is it, then, what you suggest that the college-teacher and the paper-setter must not pull opposite ways, but that they must work in concert? Yes, and something more. In the existing system of examinations, the college-teacher is in almost all cases the paper setter; and so far the concert aforesaid is secured. But what is absolutely necessary is that there should be not only concert but co-operation of a very healthy kind.”

The conversation started with a solemn observation by Lord Curzon: “The great fault of education as pursued in this country is, as we all know, that knowledge is cultivated by the memory instead of

the mind.”2 Someone interjected, “Why is this so?” Another person started replying, “Because the Indian colleges are not true colleges as at Oxford or at Cambridge....” We take a pause here and think. Who are these two persons? Where is this conversation taking place? What is the purpose of this conversation? Is it a conversation at all? When we keep on reading, the mystery thickens. The same conversation now reads like part of the appendix of a government report where multiple evidences are collected in response to a set of questions. The conversation is taking place in 1902. In the same year, the famous Indian Universities Commission Report is being published – which has already been cited in the last chapter. Is this conversation then excerpted from that particular report, as it also specifically brings into focus issues and concerns so meticulously dealt in that report? We keep on reading and reach the end of the conversation. Suddenly we realize, it is not a conversation at all, or, at least, not a conversation in the mundane, conventional sense of the term. It is actually a short essay written by a person – one individual in the mundane, conventional sense – published in a journal edited by the same person. Now the mystery has taken a sharp twist. Why is he talking to himself? That too with the seriousness of responding to a questionnaire set by a governmental commission? Of course, he is replicating the style of an authoritative agency, but for what possible reason on earth? Is he mocking the authority of governmental commissions? Does he want to be taken so seriously by his readers that he has to imagine a situation where he is requested by the said commission to respond to its inquiries? And here comes the final twist. What if it is not at all an issue of replication? What if he is really participating in the evidence taking procedure of the commission? What if it is his strategy to find fault with the criteria of deciding the qualifications of the proper respondents? What if he can split himself between the government and its critique at the same time?

This strange essay is written by Satis Chandra Mukherjee. Born in a middleclass Bengali family with a positivist father, Mukherjee completed his post-graduation in English from the University of Calcutta in 1886.3 He had a brief career in both academics and law, and finally, after becoming a devout follower of the Brahmo religious activist Bejoy Krishna Goswami, opened a Bhagavat Chatuspathi (“a school for spiritual and moral upliftment of Bengali children”) in 1895. The Dawn magazine – where this article was published – was first started as a wing of this school in 1897, and

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2 Ibid, 282.
later emerged as one of the mouthpieces of Swadeshi nationalism and the nationalist education movement.  

Mukherjee, as it may be clear from the above quotes, was quite deeply invested in a project of educational reform in the early twentieth century Bengal. The *Dawn* magazine was used as a platform to propagate its main arguments from the very beginning. In one of its first issues, Annie Besant, the leader of the Theosophical movement in India and later to be elected as the president of the Indian National Congress, described the ideal features of comprehensive education in colonial India.  

The idea was to introduce a system where all aspects of life, including the spiritual, physical, intellectual, and communitarian aspects, should be distributed harmoniously and symmetrically, and with a special emphasis on the cultivation of reason over memory. Mukherjee himself invoked the ideal of an ancient Hindu system of education which he contrasted with the “modern ideal of Education” prevalent in India at that time.  

He also compared contemporary German universities – “very far ahead of their other continental rivals” – with the ancient *tols* or *chatuspāthis* of ancient India, and advocated for specialized knowledge to be imparted in the Indian universities under the rubric of “technical education” – an education system where the student was given a choice to follow a course of study according to his “future calling.”  

In another article, primarily based on his diagnosis of the economic problems in India, Mukherjee elaborated his scheme of technical education which would adopt a structure of “from below upwards” rather than the one of “from above downwards,” as the former instilled in young children “an insight into actual facts and phenomena derived from home surroundings.” Unfortunately, even after having so much concern about the present state of education in India and a clear perception about the possible remedies to its shortcomings, Mukherjee was not invited by the Universities Commission to give evidence in its proceedings, although his close friend Brajendra Nath Seal who was at the time the principal of

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Victoria College, Coach Behar, was called on to voice his opinions. Seal gave Mukherjee the second job in his career as a lecturer in English at the Berhampore College in the late eighteen eighties—a job which he had to leave at his father’s request to obtain a degree in law—and possibly shared most of his beliefs and arguments, but was invited by the Commission instead of him because of his position in the official structure of university education in India. Mukherjee at the time was merely an editor of an obscure monthly with certain ideas that he thought would come in help to introduce an improved system of education, but that did not stop him from continuing this conversation with the Commission, even without the assurance that his opinions would ever be heard.

It seems from the seriousness with which Mukherjee emulated the “style” of governmental report that there was an insistence even from among the nationalists to define and stabilize the rules of discursive formations as regards the questions of pedagogical interventions and colonial governmentality in the early decades of the twentieth century. At the same time the modalities of popularization of the economic discipline in vernacular was going through some interesting changes. During the Swadeshi mobilizations, a number of journals which were previously interested in literary publications and social reform shifted their attention to “economic” issues and their implications in the attainment of political and individual “autonomy.” Even a few specialist periodicals devoted singularly to discussions of economic issues began to appear. In a 1901 issue of one of these journals, Mahājanbandhu—a periodical published by the sugar merchants in Calcutta—an anonymous writer complained that most periodicals in Bengali waste their energy on publishing bad and purposeless fictional prose to deceive their readers. Quoting an “honorable man in the society,” the author declared that this resulted from the absence of “experts” among the editorial crew of the magazines. “We also say,” the author added, “—we like to hear about certain subjects only from those who are skilled in those fields.” The claim on skill or adeptness at doing something presumably better than others and the desire to hear from those who were skilled—and

10 Most of the witnesses had close connection with the structure of university education, either as the principal of a college, or as a teacher, or as the director of the Department of Public Instruction. Another of Mukherjee’s close friends, Surendra Nath Banerjee, the nationalist leader and a member of the Indian National Congress, was also invited, since he was a professor at the Ripon College, Calcutta (ibid).
11 For a list and discussion of these journals and how they campaigned for attainment of this “autonomy,” see Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908.
13 Ibid, 22.
14 Ibid.
therefore had the authority to speak about it – may not necessarily invoke the high doctrines of political economy, but the definitions of skill often took an interesting turn, situated in the domain of the everyday, finding ways to regulate its functioning. Thus, Mahājanbandhu published an essay containing instructions on how to “oil a timepiece.”\(^\text{15}\) The author, Gajendra Kumar Pal, in accordance with the policy of the magazine, was a watchmaker from Comilla.

Mahājanbandhu did not promise its readers to introduce them to the teachings of political economy, or making them aware of the goings-on in the sphere of world economy. It took almost twenty five years to come up with the idea of a vernacular journal which would bring together all the elements needed to form a comprehensive inventory of economic knowledge. In 1926, appeared the first issue of Arthik Unnati, a monthly journal edited by the prolific intellectual Benoy Kumar Sarkar which located economic knowledge at the confluence of three types of “intellect and experience”:

First, we consider the work and thinking processes of the farmers, artists, traders, bankers, engineers, chemists, etc. The second type of our raw material consists of the life stories of the workers in government and civil services, such as rail, postal services, forest, mining, health, excise, etc. The third type of material includes studies and researches by the students and teachers from the academic institutions who are in habit of browsing through the texts of economics.\(^\text{16}\)

Even the most insignificant bits of information were to be recorded with as much care and attention as deserved by the high theories making waves in the academic circles, the writer informed. Every issue of the journal was divided into five sections. The first section concentrated on the economic and financial activities and concerns of the Bengalis, mostly gathered from the information shared by the local correspondents of the regional newspapers and magazines. The second section discussed similar issues and problems in the context of the whole nation – its agriculture, industry, and commerce. The third section dealt with the news of international importance, with special emphasis on the trade relations between the Bengalis and the rest of the world. The fourth section focused on the actions and achievements of the renowned individuals and important commercial


\(^\text{16}\) Anonymous, “Arthik Unnati’r Janmakathā”, Arthik Unnati 1, no. 1 (April, 1926), 78. All the following translations, if not mentioned otherwise, are mine.
The fifth section comprised interviews, sometimes with famous people – economic theorists or entrepreneurs – and sometimes with ordinary people from the streets, the shoe menders or the attendants at the railway stations. Apart from these regular sections, three special features appeared on every issue. Articles and academic papers were chosen from prestigious journals of various languages including French, German, and Italian to be summarized and discussed critically in relation to the economic conditions of the country. There was also a separate section for announcing and reviewing the most current publications on economic matters from all over the world. But one of the most important features of the journal was the original articles on diverse issues and the translations of the canonical texts such as Ricardo’s *Principles of Political economy and Taxation*.  

Both the original articles and the translations of popular texts contained an interesting feature in *Ārthik Unnati*. In contrast with the casual mentions of “influences” in the nineteenth-century Bengali textbooks, the journal asked its contributors to report in proper order all the necessary details of the original sources of citations:

First, the name of the author will have to be mentioned. Then should be mentioned one after another the name of the book (in case of a foreign publication, the name should be reproduced in Bengali alphabets followed by a translation of the name within brackets), the names of the city and the publisher, the date of publication, page-number, and the price.  

Undoubtedly, Sarkar and his colleagues wanted to introduce the protocols of academic formalism in the domain of vernacular economic writing. The formalization of the vernacular assumed a more serious tone in the cautionary reminder that not a single foreign alphabet should be printed in the pages of the journal. Although translation of some of the technical terms seemed unmanageable at the moment, and the editor decided to leave them to the discretion of the concerned authors, a
series of articles dwelling on the standard Bengali counterparts of important terms such as value, profit, and capital were published in the following years. At the same time, the serialized translation of Ricardo’s *Principles* by Sarkar’s two lieutenants, Shachindranath Sen and Sudhakanta De, offered a new model of impersonal translation that would relay the original without any modification according to *deśācār*. Once again in contrast to the nineteenth-century textbooks, the illustrations from the original English text were kept in place and even the units of measurement and currency were not altered to suit the Bengali readers’ experience.\(^{21}\)

This does not indicate that *Ārthik Unnati*’s mode of vernacularization was trying to adopt a modality of linguistic equivalence. The drive was not to universalize Ricardo, but indeed to underscore its national specificity, its Englishness. Sarkar and his colleagues at *Ārthik Unnati* did not want to devalue the notion of experience in the final analysis of economic conditions – the insistence on recording in detail how the narratives of experience of people from various sections of the society in the interviews and some of the articles indicate an entirely opposite trend. However, the relationships between various modalities of translation, the interactions between different registers of reality, and the connections between manifold networks of intervention led to a reconceptualization of experience in a way that was unavailable in the nineteenth-century textbooks. The emphasis had shifted from the theme of familiarity to that of an organic reconfiguration of the social. The concept of experience, consequently, was associated with the governmental category of population in terms of reinterpretation of the idea of economic data.

It was a “risky” project. Michel Foucault has suggested that the emergence of population as a datum – a specific object of governance with its own regularities and aggregate effects – in sixteenth-century Europe was the moment of the beginning of governmentalization of the state.\(^{22}\) At the same time, it released and expanded the idea of “economy” from management of the household to governance of an autonomous domain of commercial transactions. Foucault in *The Birth of Biopolitics* locates the centrality of a notion of “risk” in this shift: “A government is never sufficiently aware that it always risks governing too much, or, a government never knows too well how to govern just enough.”\(^{23}\) As a result, the government implicates itself in an ideology of self-limitation in relation to


\(^{23}\) Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 17.
the economy. This dichotomy of “maxima/minima” arising from the uncertain encounters required to manage a population, according to Foucault, resides at the heart of liberalism where “freedom” is assumed to be an essence of the being of the subject, and liberal governmentality conceived in connection to this postulate is “management of freedom” by ensuring the conditions of production and sustenance of freedom. As we shall see in the ensuing sections, the technologies of mediation between economic knowledge and the conditions of freedom in the first half of the twentieth century took an exceptional turn in the various economic discourses in Ārthik Unnati. In the post-Swadeshi environment of sociopolitical mobilization, where the autonomy of the self was already theorized in terms of a proximate relationship with the autonomy of the economic domain, the novelty of Ārthik Unnati was to foreground and establish experience as an essential condition of these autonomies.

However, this “experience” did not originate from the notion of “familiarity” with the familial space – the economic management of which could be ensured by the modality of equivalence of illustrations – but from direct “physical” contact with the population as a proxy of the governmental state. The insistence on collection of data from the margins of a field potent with possibilities of expert intervention and social reconfiguration, thus, engendered a notion of body and physiological justice that risk the transgression of the liberal principles of freedom as well. In other words, the novelty of Ārthik Unnati in relation to the earlier modes of vernacularization is that it aspired to become a proxy of the state to engender social reform and inherited the essential dichotomy of liberal governmentality and the associated risks of transgressing the fundamental condition of its existence – freedom. In the next sections, I shall describe a history of another double movement of socialization in the vernacular domain of popularizing the economic discipline, arising from the duality of the aspirations of social reform and the inheritance of risks therein. This duality presumes a different modality of translation – a modality of experiential equivalence where the technologies of mediation set to resolve the questions of difference not only by translating experience into data, but also initiating an inversion of this process – translation of data into experience – in the course of making of a social body.

24 Ibid, 63.
The Experience of Research – Researching Experience

Benoy Kumar Sarkar’s intellectual career was spread over almost all the branches of social science. Like many of his contemporaries who wrote on economic issues, he was trained in history, philosophy, and literature in his university days. It was not a rare practice, as the recognition of economics (or political economy) as a separate discipline at the level of higher education came much later. Usually it was taught as a part of the history course in the Indian universities. In 1909, the University of Calcutta was the first university in India to start an honors course in the subject, which was followed by an MA course in the next year. But Sarkar had always distanced himself from the mainstream of university education. After completing his masters from the Calcutta University, he declined a state scholarship for studying abroad and joined the National Education Movement under the influence of Satis Mukherjee. Under Mukherjee’s tutelage, Sarkar read Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Carlyle in the meetings of the Dawn Society, which Mukherjee had founded five years after launching his magazine. Soon Sarkar was part of the National Council of Education movement which, as an organ of the Swadeshi-Boycott mobilization, encouraged young students to leave the government schools and colleges and join the privately funded institutions with alternative academic structures. The national institutions had two distinctly original features that separated them from the ones run by the government. First, the Council embraced the idea of technical education and made it compulsory in school syllabus. Second, up to the highest level of college education, all courses were designed and taught in Bengali. Along with Radhakamal Mukerjee, another contemporary intellectual actively participating in the education movement, Sarkar made arrangements for young scholars of the Council to study abroad in various foreign universities. His own first tryst with the international academic scene occurred in 1914, when he left for England with Lala Lajpat Rai on a mission perhaps to raise awareness about “the Indian problem [of the colonial rule] and, at the same time, to explore the chance of co-ordination with the so-called Indian

25 Datta, Indian Economic Thought, 4.
26 Ibid, 5.
28 Ibid, 212.
29 Bholanath Bandyopadhyay, The Political Ideas of Benoy Kumar Sarkar (Kolkata: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1984), 3. This was one of the main agenda of the national education movement, to send Indian students abroad so that they could “encounter” foreign conditions. Regularly institutions like the NCE and its rival Society for the Promotion of Technical Education funded students to undertake a educational trip to Germany, America, Italy or France. For example, in the year of 1904 alone, a similar nationalist institution, Association for the Advancement of Science and Industrial Education of Indians, sent a total of 82 students- most of them were students of engineering-abroad on scholarships. J. G. Cunning, Technical and Industrial Instruction in Bengal, 1888-1908, part I of the Special Report (Calcutta: Bengal Secretarial Book Depot, 1908), 28.
revolutionaries abroad.”

He travelled a lot of places including Germany, Italy, and Japan. Eleven years, a marriage, and a couple of books later, he came back to Calcutta and started publishing *Ārthik Unnati*.31

*Ārthik Unnati* took off in 1926. One year later Benoy Sarkar was felicitated by the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad for his contributions in Bengali scholarship. There he stated with candor that only a society for literature was not enough for the sustenance and improvement of the Bengali community. “Sahitya Parishad may busy itself with literature and grammar,” Sarkar concluded. “Economics, politics, anthropology, sociology and other disciplines should have their own societies.”32 In fact, as early as in 1924, when he was living in Italy, Sarkar prepared a draft of a society exclusively devoted to economic research in Bengali and published it in the influential magazine *Prabhāśi*. Sudhakanta De, the future translator of Ricardo, felt the need to revive the proposal and worked on a similar draft three years later in *Ārthik Unnati*.33 In 1928, the society started its journey with Benoy Sarkar as its director.34 It was renamed as Bangiya Dhanabijñan Parishad. Apart from the usual topics covered by the economic discipline, it claimed to have initiated a forum for discussing other various subjects, especially those that were formally a part of the broader canvas of social sciences, such as population, public health and efficiency, urban and rural development, etc. The yearly subscription for membership was fixed at six rupees per annum. The members of the Parishad were promised a free copy of *Ārthik Unnati* every month, as the journal was made into its official newsletter.35


31 While staying in Europe, he published an article in the *International Journal of Ethics* titled “Futurism of Young Asia” [Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “Futurism of Young Asia”, *International Journal of Ethics* 28, no. 4 (July, 1918), 521-541]. In it he tried to develop a critique of colonialism and orientalism, especially in science. He extended this essay into a monograph in 1922 with the same name: Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Futurism of Young Asia and Other Essays on the Relationship between the East and the West* (Berlin: Springer, 1922). In this book and another, published four years earlier, titled *Hindu Achievements in Exact Science*, Sarkar countered the “orientalist” view that the Hindus of ancient time were not quite advanced in scientific innovations with a narrative that likened the “story of scientific investigation among the Hindus” with that of other advanced nations [Benoy Kumar Sarkar, *Hindu Achievements in Exact Science* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1918), 78].

32 Sudhakanta De, “Baṅgīya Arthaśāstra Parishad”, *Ārthik Unnati* 2, no. 6 (September, 1927), 436.

33 *Ibid*, 436-39. The chief objectives of the society – or the “Bangiya Arthashastra Parishad,” as De wanted to call it – were to establish a culture of economic research in Bengali and to explore the histories of economic progress in Bengal, India, and the whole world in respective order. The Parishad was proposed to work for the improvement and spread of economics as a discipline in schools and colleges, to discuss and analyze the economic problems of the country, to organize symposiums, festival, and exhibitions to popularize basic economic principles, and to establish schools, libraries, and seminar halls for disseminating exclusive economic education. It was also tasked with attending enquiries coming from the marginal interior of the Bengal suburbs.

34 Anonymous, “Baṅgīya Dhanabijñan Parishad Pratishthār Brittāntā”, *Ārthik Unnati* 3, no. 7 (November, 1928), 549.

Sarkar’s leadership, the researchers at the Bangiya Dhanabijnan Parishad presented papers on as diverse subjects as the “future of seed oil industry in India,” “the reforms of the post office bank law,” and “the economic views of Mahatma Gandhi.” Diversity of research interests was encouraged as an institutional policy.\(^{36}\) “The purpose of the Parishad is not to produce experts on particular subjects,” Sarkar clarified at a session in 1929. “The time for becoming experts will arrive only after everyone gets to be jack of all trades.”\(^{37}\)

Three interconnected themes characterized the research program of Dhanabijnan Parishad during this period—adda, experience, and outside. In a lecture to a group of boarders in the Hindu Hostel, Presidency College, Calcutta, Sarkar’s alma-mater, he emphasized the centrality of adda in the life force of young Bengal. There he introduced a philosophy of youthful obstinacy which was to pose a challenge to any accepted argument—or even the solid reality of world geography like the position of the Indian Ocean on a particular side of the Pacific—as, the obstinate would say, “My flesh and blood tell me that they are born to change my bone structure.”\(^{38}\) This way, the obstinate interlocutors, Sarkar argued, could contest every assumption that the orthodox studies in India’s economic conditions would make. Not only would they question the truth in India’s degeneration into a dire state of poverty, they would also re-interpret the statistical data in terms of their own estimate of the worth of every individual. The final point in this theory of obstinacy would encourage the youth to go beyond Bengal, or even better, India, and launch an adda there.\(^{39}\) The aim was to build a “greater India”—not by colonizing the space beyond its territory, but by going out and assimilating every bit of “experience” [abhijñata] that this outside was ready to offer.\(^{40}\)

This idea of going out and reaching the hinterland of experience was markedly different from a spiritual understanding of soulful experience, but there was a strong metaphorical implication as well. By “going out,” Sarkar did not urge his followers to leave for a foreign university for higher education, but to visit the interiors of the social space of the working population and get acquainted with their work processes and by contrasting them with the received wisdom of archaic theories. Shib Chandra Dutt, a former student of the same Presidency College, was bored of studying the “dry” principles of political economy at the college and focused more on that section of the science

\(^{36}\) See for a yearly account of the activities by the Dhanabijnan Parishad, Sudhakanta De, Baṅgīya Dhanabijñān Parishader Sāltāmāmi (Calcutta: Ārthik Unnati Karjalay, 1931).


\(^{38}\) Benoy Kumar Sarkar, Ārthik Unnattir Juktiśāstra (Calcutta: Ārthik Unnati Karjalay, 1927), 9.

\(^{39}\) Ibid, 37.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
which had more association with political science and sociology.\footnote{Shib Chandra Dutt, \textit{Dhanabijñaner Sākreti} (Calcutta: New Oriental Library, 1338 B.S. [1931]), i.} He saw a copy of \textit{Ārthik Unnati} at a friend’s place and became interested in meeting its editor. After meeting Sarkar, he got initiated into the “adda” of Benoy Sarkar and started the second phase of his career in economic research.\footnote{Ibid, ii.} He did not have to study the university textbooks or canonical texts, but spent a couple of hours at the Commercial Library, Calcutta, everyday, to read academic and trade journals from all over the world. “But my job was not restricted to the boundary of reading only,” Dutt added immediately, “I used every chance I got to visit the factories.”\footnote{Ibid, iv.} He saw the machinery and met the people who could operate them. He discussed with them about the nitty-gritty of cost of production and transportation, etc. He met with other members of Sarkar’s posse, like Sudhakanta De or Narendranath Ray, and exchanged his finding with them.\footnote{Five researchers with academic accomplishments were admitted as resident fellows in Bangiya Dhanabijnan Parishad – Sudhakanta De, a graduate in Economics from the University of Calcutta; Narendranath Roy, the author of a couple of books on detecting counterfeit currency and translation of economic terms in Bengali; Rabindranath Ghosh, a historian of the economic discipline; Jitendranath Sengupta, a worker at the Bengal National Chamber of Commerce, who was interested in recording the weekly exchange reports of national and international banks; and Shib Chandra Dutt [Anonymous, “Gabeshakder kārīya-pranāli”, \textit{Ārthik Unnati} 3, no. 10 (February, 1929), 757-65].} He left his job at a Calcutta college of teaching economics and became a \textit{munsif}, but rather than putting a stop at his energy, this change only enhanced his curiosity at the happenings in contemporary rural Bengal:

> New information is accumulating in my brain everyday on the roads and transportation, the earnings and expenditures of the farmers and factory workers, the school teachers, the clerks, doctors, and lawyers, the structure, work processed and efficiency of the \textit{Zilla} Boards, Local Boards, and Union Boards. The thoughts and understandings of co-operative banking, market price of rice-pulse-milk etc., the rise and fall of the rate of interest and the differences between them in different locales, the relationship between the zamindar and his subjects, the merits and demerits of the land laws of Bengal are going on constantly. New information is coming within the boundary of my experience all the time on what exactly it means by rural life of Bengal, the health and family condition of the Bengali artisans, the influence of rail, steamer, telegraph on Bengali rural life. Moreover, my brain is also processing how the lower castes of Bengal are transforming into upper castes, how, perhaps, non-Bengalis are turning into Bengalis. A stream of economic and social revolution is flowing in front of my eyes. This is the beginning of a strange experience.\footnote{Ibid, viii.}
This description quite pointedly teases out the main features of the economic discourse that Sarkar and his followers were trying to introduce. First of all, the rural space of sociality was projected as the space of economic interpretation. Secondly, this mode of interpretation anticipated a social and economic reconfiguration. Thirdly, this reconfiguration was to be understood in terms of an interaction between new information and experience. The notion of experience was centrally located in the sphere of building expertise. The expert had to reach out to the domains of experience, and the domain of experience was characterized by social transformation of a massive scale. The element of transformation in Sarkar’s vision adopted the metaphor of a laboratory where the translation of experience into information was giving birth to a concept of data.

When planning the course of research for the Dhanabijnan Parishad, Sarkar had a specific form of economic enquiry in mind. It was the world of practical knowledge – the sites of everyday business transactions and public welfare, along with critical estimates of government policies – that appealed to him as the most wanting area for research. He also came up with a methodology that, he believed, was more akin to the form of investigations preferred by the government agencies in preparing their reports. “The books alone will not make anybody expert in economics,” he said in interview to his associate Shib Chandra Dutt, “the encounters with different economic problems like banking, insurance, international trade, technology, labor problem, etc. have to be direct.” He felt that travels into the interiors of the land, first hand observations, and discussions with people in various trades were the real sources of scientific knowledge. “The Royal Commission on Agriculture [of 1928] followed the same path,” he observed,

They traveled to different parts of the country and collected opinions of hundreds of people. Then they discussed those opinions among themselves and reached a few definite conclusions. Then they supported those conclusions with various logics. Thus was prepared a knowledgeable report on a particular subject. I also want to adopt the “commission method” in economic research.

The government reports were quite useful in providing information required to conduct the form of research that Sarkar was interested in, but they could not offer data relevant to the present time, as they were often delayed in publishing their findings. They also focused on the whole of the country, and naturally were quite averse to explore the progress and social dynamics of particular regions or

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46 Shib Chandra Dutt, “Nayā Bānglār Ārthik Unnati o Arthaśāstra”, Ārthik Unnati 4, no. 6 (October, 1929), 436.
47 Ibid.
communities. It was wise, therefore, to look for other sources. The provincial newspapers emerged as one of these sources. It was a vision of Sarkar to hire people with some knowledge in economics to report on changes in the economic life of Bengal over a period of time. In the absence of that option, the local newspapers became the “laboratory of Ārthik Unnati,” which would present all the information needed to proceed with in the theoretical experiments. 48 “I want to pour the water of Dalhousie Square [lāl dīghi] into College Square [gol dīghi],” he jokingly told Dutta. “One of my biggest ambitions is to inject the experiences of agriculture, industry, and business into the brains of the academics.” 49 The metaphor of mixing lāl dīghi water with that of gol dīghi’s was a potent one. It concretized in a colloquial manner the “laboratory space” of a mixed program of economic research. In fact, the chemical metaphor of “mixing” to denote research was a favorite of his. In another account of the research program of the Dhanabijnan Parishad, Sarkar denounced the study of textbooks in economics and asserted that, like the chemists who fidgeted with the gas, poisons, and medicine in the laboratory, the economists too had to etch out a laboratory space where the raw materials of analysis would be the thoughts and experiences of those directly involved in the economic activities, those who were doing the farming or running the banks themselves. 50 Sarkar suggested that the studies of their “life” should be the focus of research at Dhanabijnan Parishad. 51

The suggestion was implemented quite seriously in the pages of Ārthik Unnati. Sudhakanta De took an interview of a municipality janitor in 1927. 52 The questions focused on his salary, working hours, savings, and education of his children. These data were treated with equal importance as those found in another interview with Lady Abala Basu, the wife of the famous scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose and a patron of women’s education, on women’s handicraft and its exhibition in industrial fares. 53

This was one of the processes how experience became information – a great equalizer in the domain of social reconfiguration, although the play of rhetoric might be a little skewed according to the already established markers of cultural, intellectual, and social position of the interviewed. Thus, the pronoun used for the janitor was a slightly derogatory tumī in comparison with the respectful āpni for Lady Abala. This mode of hierarchical repositioning of the interviewed was also the specialty of the vernacular domain where certain signs of difference might appear due to the problematic of

48 Ibid, 435.
49 Ibid, 435-36. Dalhousie Square is one of the busiest business centers of Calcutta, and many of the colleges and the University of Calcutta are still situated around the College Square in the other part of the city.
51 Ibid, 3.
52 Sudhakanta De, “Methorer Jiban-jātrā”, Ārthik Unnati 1, no. 11 (February, 1927), 824-27.
53 Anonymous, Lady Abala Basur Matāmat, Ārthik Unnati 1, no. 11 (April, 1926), 21-24.
untranslatability. If the interviews were taken in English – where a democratic “you” would hide the intent of differentiation at least at the visceral level – the argument of equality of experience would have been stronger and harder to contest. The same problematic of untranslatability was also part of the mode of translation of experience into information by the governmental agencies. In case of the Universities Commission, for example, the evidences were selected on the basis of certain parameters of expertise and social standing. The relation between expertise and social status, however, was not one of experiential equivalence. Hence, a smooth translation of experience was hampered, giving birth to resentments and altercations. These resentments, on the other hand, could not and did not exist outside to the operating logic of the colonial government. Thus, even if he was deeply hurt by the Commission’s unwillingness to call him as a witness, Satis Mukherjee could not help but participate in the procedure of evidence-collection anyway. This happened precisely because he subscribed to the same parameters of selection and, hence, became a victim of the problem of untranslatability.

The novelty of the new mode of socialization of experience-data was that it could overcome this problem of untranslatability by initiating another process at the same time: how information itself became experience, operating at the level of an organicist sociality, inscribing “life” on the “body” through various mechanisms of calculation practices. Sarkar, in many of his essays, emphasized the importance of systemic interactions between experience and calculability. In his demand for a meeting place of different registers of economic experience, he located “statistics” as an organizing principle – almost like a linguistic equivalent mediating between “real experiences” and “theory.”

What he did not mention in this essay, but the sense was palpable, that the mediations themselves were to be made part of the inventory of experience. In the next section, we shall look into how information became experience in a particular context of the theme of “social insurance” in Ārthik Unnati. This discourse of social insurance will invoke, once again, the questions of translatability and experiential equivalence and locate the social interwoven in the networks of governmental power and its limit in the conceptual framework of experience.

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54 Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “Ārthik Abhiñatār Milan Kshetra”, Nayā Bāṅglār Gorā Pattan. Vol. 2: “Karmakaushal” (Calcutta: Chakrabarti, Chatterjee and Co., 1932), 215. In Bangiya Dhanabijñan Parishad, Sarkar severely criticized the general apathy among the Bengalis towards mathematics; as a result, most people read the government reports overlooking the mathematical figures and could not comprehend their importance [Sarkar, Baṅgīya Dhanabijñan Parishad, 5-6].
Two Histories of Life

Since the beginning, Ārthik Unnati showed interest in publishing writings on the insurance business. One reason of this enthusiasm was the growing popularity of the sector among middle-class Bengalis. The contributors of Ārthik Unnati appreciated the rate of its growth in the period after the First World War, and saw an opportunity for concentration of capital in the hands of the Indian business classes. Shib Chandra Dutt informed in 1934:

The value of the business at present done by Indian Insurance Companies is Rs. 10 crores, which is three and a half times what it was before the War, and the amount of the premium collected is Rs. 3 ½ crores, which is three times what it was in the pre-War period. At present, the number of Indian Insurance Companies is 60, while that of the foreign ones is 20. A few years back the Indian Companies held 20 per cent of the total premium fund in India, at present they hold 57 per cent, the remaining 43 per cent being held by the foreign concerns.55

In 1929, in a conversation with a reporter from The Englishman, Benoy Sarkar conjectured that after the War, Indians had become more concerned about their future; they had gradually learnt to imbibe a culture of future investments.56 He identified the change as an outcome of a larger project of social transition that could be observed among the employees of various service sector enterprises. With a steady growth in education and a continued expansion of industrialization, he hoped, the extent of insurance would escalate beyond the moderate level. People’s perception about the workers in the industry also seemed to have gone through a transformation. “Before the war,” Sarkar noticed, “the insurance agents were hated by people. Now they regard them as friends and respect them as saviors of the widows. The insurance agents are the real albeit silent workers of social reform.”57

It is not surprising, therefore, that the first full length article published in Ārthik Unnati on insurance was written by one of these silent social workers, an insurance agent named Harendrachandra Pal.58 Pal’s article was titled ‘Jīban Bīmā Bijñān’ – the science of life insurance – and it was indeed driven by a desire to enlighten the common readers on the scientific nature of the operation. “Very few people in our country are aware,” he wrote regretfully, “that like engineering, astronomy, naval science, etc.,

55 Shib Chandra Dutt, Conflicting Tendencies in Indian Economic Thought (Calcutta: N. M. Ray-Chowdhury & Co., 1934), 162.
57 Ibid.
58 Harendrachandra Pal, “Jīban Bīmā Bijñān”, Ārthik Unnati 1, no. 1 (April, 1926), 42-44.
life insurance is also based on science and high mathematics.”  

A common mistake was to associate insurance with the vice of gambling, as they both deployed the same principle of uncertainty. The contract between an insurance company and its policy holder specified the amount of money her family would receive at the event of her death. But who can foretell death? It might just happen that the person under insurance would live on forever and pay her premium well beyond the amount that her family was promised to be compensated with. On the other hand, if everybody died too soon, the companies would be left with nothing and would have to close their operation. But some people were born with more longevity than others, and the profit of the insurance company depended on getting these people to insure more than those who had less life left in them. Pal took great care to explain that the real source of uncertainty was the predicament of lack of knowledge, which could be overcome by the law of large numbers: “even those incidents, which are thought to be affected by uncertainty, when performed multiple times, show no influence of it as such.” Following the same statistical law, the insurance companies calculated a rate of death over a large number of people – a population, so to speak – and deducted the rate of periodic payment or premium that the clients had to pay for holding their policies.

In Pal’s account, the scientificity of life insurance was authenticated by the calculability of the death rate of a population. The calculations should not be performed by amateurs; it required special skills to deduce the premium in correspondence with the death rate prevailing in a country at a particular time. The experts, who specialized exclusively in these calculations, were called actuaries. Pal’s article was published in the very first issue of Ārthik Unnati in 1926. The same year, he published another article, this time on the importance of actuaries in the insurance business. To deduce the premium, an actuary had to keep in mind three concerns, namely, the rate of death in a country, the rate of interest at which the money collected as premium could be invested, so that it could be returned to the family of the policy holders with some portion of it retained as profit, and the office expenses. Every five years, Pal informed, the actuaries would review the papers and check whether there was any change in the stipulated rate of death or the earnings expected from investments. The success in insurance business depended on the motivation to excel in these three areas. The applicants for insurance must be examined properly by medical experts; the money collected as premium should

59 Ibid, 42.
60 Ibid, 44.
62 Ibid, 531-32.
not be wasted in risky speculations; and the office expenses should be kept minimum. “As we can see, if we wish, we can also run the business of insurance in our country like England,” an optimistic Harendrachandra Pal wrote in conclusion.

A more detailed account of the business is available in an interview with Surendranath Thakur of the Hindustan Co-operative Insurance Company, published earlier in the same year. Thakur’s concern, it was revealed in the interview, was the only insurance company in owned entirely by the Bengalis – quite explicitly a matter of pride for them. They had a premium fund of something between five and six hundred thousands of rupees, with a yearly payment of “claims” (payment made after maturation of a policy) of two or three hundred thousands. In that respect, they were marginally behind the bigger concerns like Oriental Insurance and Empire of India Life Assurance Company of Bombay. Thakur confirmed that they had fixed the premium as low as possible considering the poverty ridden state of this country. When he was asked about the reason of not having prepared a “life table” – a list containing probabilities for people of different age groups of dying before their next birthday – on their own, he blamed the lack of mutual cooperation among the Indian companies. Also, there was almost none who could work as an actuary in India. They had to send all the data to the experts in England, who evaluated the information and stocked them in the cards for individual policies. “I had a dream once,” Thakur added at the end:

If all the Indian insurance companies come together to collaborate on preparing a life-table by comparing their policies and sharing their experiences, the country will make unending progress. But sadly, we are yet to be inspired by the ideal of unity.

These accounts are important for many reasons. Thakur’s account was published in the section on life stories with the pronounced objective of introducing the readers to a description of the business from a perspective of experience. Publishing Harendrachandra Pal’s articles was also motivated by the same impetus, as it was emphasized that he was an insurance agent himself and, thus, had a first-hand experience with the actual world of insurance policies and calculations of premiums. The accounts, however, followed two different registers of experience. Pal’s articles focused on the sciences of insurance, replete with details as to how a fixed and stable regime of calculability

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63 Ibid, 533.
64 Anonymous, “Jibanbimar Byabsa: Srijukta Surendranath Thakurer Matam”, Arthik Unnati 1, no. 3 (June, 1926), 181-84.
65 Ibid, 182.
66 Ibid, 184.
including disciplinary mechanisms of medical surveillance informed the decisions regarding the premium.\(^{67}\) On the other hand, Thakur connected the same regime of calculability to a discourse of national capitalist aspirations. As it seems, there was a social in making which could bring together both impetuses – the drive to found a rationalized system of insurance and the aspiration to locate it in a network of “national” capital by producing an integrated and standardized “national” life-table through sharing and comparing “experiences” of different companies operating in India. What was this experience? Obviously, Thakur was talking about a complete set of data defined, determined, and authenticated by the actuarial experts – whose absence was also a concern for Thakur – in a national context. This was the moment when information became experience by assuming a form that was primarily conceptualized in terms of population as a statistical category.

I shall argue that this moment of translation from experience to data was an element specific to the formation of the vernacular around an organicist reconfiguration of the social. The use of the “organic” metaphor for delineating sociality had a long history in the discourse of Indian nationalism.\(^{68}\) Satis Mukherjee too invoked the notions of organicity and “social evolution” in his theories of pedagogy: his idea of technical education was premised on the assumption of “higher culture” for all workers in the society leading to a critique of the “materialistic” worldview of the western civilizations.\(^{69}\) He was also conscious about the organization of the caste system in the depths of the Indian villages as an integral part of the “social economy” of the country.\(^{70}\) This social economy was different from political economy in its spirit of “conjoined action” leading to harmony in action and interest, as told by Mukherjee.\(^{71}\) Moreover, Satis informed, to emerge as a “source of strength” to the “entire social structure,” these caste organizations “must conform to the law of

\(^{67}\) The suspicions about the unscientific character of the insurance business and the issues of morality associated with it in connection with gambling practices was also a feature in England at the beginning of the industrial revolution. See Marieke De Goede, *Virtue, Fortune, and Faith: A Genealogy of Finance* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); especially Chapter 3.

\(^{68}\) Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 136-75.


\(^{71}\) *Ibid*, 181.
life”: “That each such organization must know itself to be and act as an organ of the whole body politic.”72 Influenced by his ideas, Benoy Sarkar also made a distinction between eastern and western pedagogies in terms of the “view of the Man” where, compared to the “very narrow and limited” materialist notion prevalent in the west, the eastern spiritualism could “conceive the greater entity, the higher synthesis of human life.”73 At that time, he was quite influenced by a theory of social organism which was the motor of the history of human civilizations and individual life-histories: “[The] action and relation between the living organism and the environment regulate all the condition of its life-history.”74 It is crucial to emphasize here that this concept of “life-history” was different from the one used in Ārthik Unnati with specific references to experience and its role in economic pedagogy. The shift could be traced back to Sarkar’s translation of Sukraniti, “an anonymous text, written in the form of Smriti,” supposedly authored by the mythical guru of the Asuras, Shukracharya.75

Sarkar’s translation was published in 1913. The next year, he wrote a huge introduction to the text, which was published as a separate book titled The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology. In this book, apparently in dissonance with his earlier position, he started to talk about “materialistic” thought in ancient India, most candidly expressed in the concept of “Artha”: “To deal with Hindu philosophical categories without touching upon Artha, i.e., the conception of property, law, state, citizenship etc. would be as incomplete, partial and therefore misleading as to write on the history of Greek philosophy without touching upon the Republic of Plato or the Politics of Aristotle.”76 “The reading of Sukraniti is not merely a study of the discipline of economics in ancient India or the history of its economic conditions,” Sarkar pointed out much later in Ārthik Unnati. “It has provided resources in repairing the present world or reconstructing it by turning it upside down and setting the foundation of the young Bengal.”77 The realization of a tradition of economic thinking and the need to link the contemporary practices with it was shared even when the Dhanabijnan Parishad was

72 Ibid, 184.
75 Flora, Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Italy, 17.
77 Benoy Sarkar, “Ekāler Dhandaulat o Arthaśāstrer Bhūmikā”, Ārthik Unnati 5, no 7 (November, 1930), 547.
established. Two verses from the text implying the importance of wealth in human life were indeed cited to explain the Parishad’s philosophical orientation.\textsuperscript{78}

Although Sarkar retained the term “positive” in the title of his introduction, his main battle was with the conservatism of the positivist school dominating sociology both in India and abroad. His notion of Hindu sociology – a study of the social doused in materialistic considerations – appeared as a critical response to the “overtly rationalistic” viewpoint of Comtean positivism which had a small but influential following in Bengal.\textsuperscript{79} Even though he was in favor of downplaying the role of non-secular or other-worldly aspect of Hindu life – the religious aspirations of the community – he did not want to disavow it entirely; rather, he argued for adopting a dualistic or pluralistic approach to understand the social character of ancient India. He chose to incorporate the theoretical position of Vilfredo Pareto, the Italian sociologist, who opposed economic determinism in social studies and emphasized the synthetic character of “practice”: “Extra-economic actions cannot be ignored in the examination of the complete personality. In regard to scientific purposes, again says Pareto, it is possible to be “analytical.” But \textit{la practica è essenzialmente sintetica} (practice is essentially synthetic).\textsuperscript{80} “It is the synthetic view that the present author stands for,” Sarkar added, “and, as he claims, is the factual reality of Indian history and Hindu culture.”\textsuperscript{81}

The idea of practice in Pareto, as James Vander Zanden points out, was conceptualized in terms of “irrationality of human behavior” and the overwhelming predominance of “non-logical actions” driven “simply by some impulse.”\textsuperscript{82} This view was in direct accord with the Fascist movement of “anti-intellectualism” and “natural sentiments” governing every aspect of national life.\textsuperscript{83} Sarkar absorbed ideas like “scholarly brains, exact knowledge, experience or experiment, generalization, specialization, science as antithesis of religion” from Comte’s philosophical positivism and left

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid}. Translations of the two verses were published in the account of the Parishad’s establishment. The first verse says, “I shall live hundred years and make my life content with wealth.” The second verse states, “Man is the slave of wealth, not otherwise. Therefore, you should always look for it. Performance of rituals and pleasures of life are only possible by wealth. Human salvation also depends on it.” (Anonymous, “Baṅgiya Dhanabijñan Parishad Pratishtār Brittānta”, 549).
\textsuperscript{79} For a detailed account of the reception of positivism in Bengal, see Geraldine H. Forbes, \textit{Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology} (Kolkata: Minerva Associates, 1975).
\textsuperscript{80} Sarkar, \textit{The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology}, 24; author’s emphasis.
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{82} James Vander Zanden, “Pareto and Fascism Reconsidered”, \textit{American Journal of Economics and Sociology} 19, no. 4 (1960), 400, 399.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid}, 400.
behind the evolutionary analysis of “mental stages.”

“It is not possible to demonstrate any stage,” he declared emphatically, “in which reason rules to the exclusion of imagination or experience, imagination to the exclusion of experience or reason, and experience to exclusion of the other two.”

A synthesis of economic reason, religious imagination, and everyday experience contributed to the making of Sarkar’s own theory of “positive sociology” which, by allowing equal importance to each aspect of social life, attempted to foreground “practice” as the most legitimate category of analysis both in the old nītīśāstras and modern social sciences inspired by Pareto.

The desire to find a “materialist” past of India would have to be supplemented by a drive to historicize the social. In Satis Mukherjee’s urgency to rescue Indian nationality from the “bad influence” of western values – the “revolutionary” tendencies of “sudden, disturbing, abnormal” change – could be explained as indicative of a time when the idea of the social was relatively unstable. Once it was manifestly distinguished from the rest of the world, the rest of the world started to look less suspicious. Now the task at hand was to stabilize this social from a different angle, giving it the concreteness of an orderly chronology conducive to a comparative framework of progressive transformation. In accordance with his project to historicize ancient “sociology,” Sarkar also wrote “histories” of the ancient scientific discourses and the forms of statehood and political institutions; but these histories were also stably and confidently Hindu, containing all the “spiritual” resolutions that would lead to only one chronological order, obliterating all traces of anything otherwise. If the evidence of Muslim rule could not be overwritten, it, at least, had to be plotted within the same chronological order. Thus, Radhakumud Mukherjee wrote in his introduction to a translation of Arthaśāstra in 1923, “That there is a continuity in the evolutionary process of the

85 Sarkar, The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology, 11.
87 Mukherjee, “The Indian Economic Problem. – II”, 236.
Indian administrative system through the Hindu age, the Muslim age, and the modern era will appear from this [text].”

There is little doubt about the possibility of a link between this evolutionary version of history and fascism in its organicist conception. Pheng Cheah in his *Spectral Nationality* has blamed the historicist logic of “human self-actualization” as “freedom” in the liberal political discourses for the “contamination of political organicism” and complained that the “the organismic metaphor’s significance” is “predetermined and limited by the material conditions of its existence.”

My claim in this chapter is that, in the vernacular domain, the issues of an organicist reconfiguration of the social were resolved also by imagining modalities of translation which would establish equivalence between experience and data in a two-way process – through juxtaposition of the life history of an individual and that of the nation. The concept of “economic life” was already becoming prominent by the end of the nineteenth century.

In two consecutive issues of *The Dawn* in 1898, an anonymous writer composed an article in two parts titled “Aspects of Economic Life in England and in India: Past and Present.”

In an introduction to the first installment of the article, another author – presumably the editor – wrote:

> The subject is of the greatest possible interest and importance to us at the present moment; but the way to a solution lies, it appears to us, to a wider and firmer appreciation of economic laws and phenomena affecting the life of a nation; and the mere laying down of a remedy, as an answer, would not be of much avail unless educated India has probed into the depths of economic life of India in the past and in the present, and of English economic and industrial life for the last seven or eight centuries with a view to a proper understanding not

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merely of economic phenomena generally, but also of the peculiarities of economic evolution due to peculiarities of national civilizations.93

This critique of textbook principles and their “mere laying down” to solve an economic problem of the nation in accordance with the “peculiarities of economic evolution” was different from the earlier debates which attempted to estimate the effectiveness of the economic discipline in conditions foreign to its history of origin. This time, it was already determined that the economic laws applicable in England were not of much use in India, but a comparative analysis of them could be obtained by bringing them together in the same framework of historical evolution.

The specificity of Benoy Sarkar and his Ārthik Unnati lay in the juxtaposition of the evolutionary history of the nation – its life history – with that of the individual. The stage was already set. Sarkar had already developed his science of history in terms of evolutionary metaphors and the relationship between individual and social organisms.94 The “rediscovery” of a Hindu past of India allowed him to articulate this framework more potently and confidently in the realm of economic practices and to imagine a separate identity of the Indian economy historically grounded in its organicist biography. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the responsibility of writing this biography fell only on the shoulders of the nationalists. J. C. Clark of the Indian Civil Service went to collect information from Bengal villages to aid the government to prepare a record of land rights.95 When obtaining the “statistics” was complete, he wished to publish the data publicly. He wrote in the foreword to the published version of the data – almost in the form of an ethnography – that a need was felt to give “meaning” to these data; otherwise, they would seem “unintelligible” to anybody who was not familiar with the area from where these statistics were collected.96 The “economic life” of a Bengal village, thus, came to exist through a translation of raw, unintelligible data into a familiar language of experience, proving that the modality of experiential equivalence was not monopolized by the critiques of the state. A simple enumeration and classification was not enough; one had to “narrativize” it.

The negotiations between the state and its detractors continued along this aspect of socialization. In emphasizing the significance of women’s economic independence in national economic

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96 Clark, “Foreword” in ibid, 9.
improvement, Shib Chandra Dutt introduced the term “the economics of widowhood.”\textsuperscript{97} Saddened by the “deplorable condition” of “destitute widows” in the country, Dutt brought a proposal into the readers’ attention: “bringing all widows under the care of the state and maintaining them with State funds.”\textsuperscript{98} Other than providing economic sustenance to these poor women, Dutt realized, there was another advantage of the widow’s pension fund: “it will add tremendously to the sense of security of the workers by relieving them of all anxiety on the score of their wives’ fortunes in the case of their earlier demise.”\textsuperscript{99} We may remember that Sarkar also made the same point when he described the insurance agent as a “silent social reformer” always eager to help the widows of the country. This was almost a citation of the mid-nineteenth-century reformist campaign for legalizing widow remarriage where also the state was called in to intervene within a legal framework of rights.\textsuperscript{100} But, in this case, there was a fundamental break with the earlier conception of the social itself: even if the state was re-invoked to facilitate the reformist agenda, the framework of its intervention was presumed to follow the logic of experiential equivalence. Earlier, both the call for intervention and the criticisms that it engendered were premised on a concept of essential difference – the former to assuage it and the latter struggling to sustain it. The sustenance of this difference, as Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, an intellectual contemporary to Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the champion of the widow-remarriage movement, explained, could be achieved by “internal government”: “Hence, the chief men within the society were made the heads of the society and their rule was followed.”\textsuperscript{101} Now this need for “internal government” was dissolved by introducing a conceptual framework of equivalence where the state was entrusted with the “security” of its population. By conceptualizing the widows as a population category, and by implicating the issue of government in a framework of insurance mechanisms that could absolve the “uncertainty” inherent in this very conception, Shib Chandra Dutta and Benoy Sarkar inaugurated the possibility of a new social where the dual operation of the translational modalities would delimit and ensure the conditions of social

\textsuperscript{97} Dutt, \textit{Conflicting Tendencies in Indian Economic Thought}, 184.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, “Bibidha Prabandha” in \textit{Prabandha Samagra} (Calcutta: Charchapad, 2010), 524.
reform. This required re-articulation of a vernacular domain where the norms of socialization could be operative and an itinerary of the modalities of translation could be prepared.

THE SOCIALIZATION OF RISK

The problematic of translation and the insistence on vernacular insurance practices were two major themes of Arthik Unnati. Apart from Thakur’s dream to construct an Indian life table, there were demands for useful statistics to study the condition of this business. In 1928, in an excerpt taken from a journal published from Dhaka, Manmohan Ghosh complained of dearth of reliable statistical accounts of the foreign insurance companies doing business in India. “There are 23 foreign (British) and colonial insurance companies doing business in the life insurance sector of India,” he informed. “As the Indian Life Assurance Companies Act of 1912 is not applicable to these companies, they are not bound to show their accounts to the Indian authorities.” He appealed to the local clients of these companies for demanding an amendment in the Act to make them more accountable to their policy holders. In the same article, he called attention to the difficulties, which the insurance agents faced in the rural areas due to language barrier. “All the policies and the forms describing them must be in Bengali,” he demanded. “There will be some problems initially. But if we can overcome them, the insurance business will flourish quite easily.”

The wish to see the insurance business flourish was no less motivated by the possibility of its playing a significant role in indigenous capital formation in general. “Like banks, insurance companies also enhance the productivity of money by centralizing and controlling public savings,” wrote Jitendranath Sengupta in 1928. Sengupta was one of the researchers at the Bangiya Dhanabijnan Parishad. His analysis of the relation between insurance and the economic progress of India was more formal and academic in nature than the earlier narratives of experience by Pal and Thakur, but still, some elements of the same tendency to translate data into experience could be located here as well. He gave a much fuller and less enthusiastic account of the growth of insurance business in the country. His essay did not only cover the life insurance institutions, but also chronicled the advent of pension funds for the government employees and the provident societies. From his account we

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid, 361.
get to know that, in 1927, apart from the sixty life insurance companies, forty-six provident fund societies including the Post Office Insurance Fund (initiated by the government of India in 1883) and thirteen other societies were operating in India. One of these societies was the G. I. P. Railway Employees Death Benefit Fund, which offered insurance and pension facilities to the employees of the said railway company. Sengupta, however, found the situation rather bleak from the point of view of per capita policy holding. Whereas the amount of per capita policy holding in the United States was Rs. 2000, it was a depressingly minuscule Rs. 2 in India. “One may say in this context,” he wrote, “that it is futile for a poor country to expect more than this.” But, at the same time, he asserted confidently, even the eradication of poverty depended heavily on the expansion of the insurance business. As a rationale of his statement, he explained the “social value” of the insurance companies:

They lend almost all the money they collect as premium to the factories, railways, municipality etc. Because of these investments, a country’s trades and industries continue to grow, and the wealth of the countrymen increase.

However, it was not always safe to invest in trades and industries, he reminded the readers, for when the businesses went through crisis, the money might not be recovered and the company would have to close down. To prevent a calamity like that, the insurance companies in India were required to buy government security bonds of Rs. two hundred thousand before starting their business. Most of them, in any case, invested primarily in government securities. As a result, 78% of the premium fund in India was invested with the government, Sengupta informed. Investments in government securities, he wrote, also helped economic progress, as the money was usually spent in building infrastructure like digging canals or laying down railway tracks.

In this article, for the first time, the term “social insurance” was mentioned in connection with the evaluation of insurance as a means of social reform. “In many countries,” Sengupta remarked quite casually, “the government, the workers, and the entrepreneurs together protect themselves from the problem of unemployment by introducing “social insurance.” Even though there was a legislation of the Workman Compensation Act (1923) by the government, it was suggested to be

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid, 317.
111 Ibid.
implemented as a permanent scheme for the workers’ welfare. Soon Benoy Sarkar wrote an article in *Arthik Unnati* to introduce the readers with the history of social insurance in the European countries. He conferred the honor of inventing it on Bismarck, to whom, in 1883, occurred the idea that by creating partially state-sponsored funds for sickness, old age, and death, he could make the German population less concerned about the obstacles in life and more efficient at work.\(^{112}\) “If we do not introduce [social insurance],” he argued, “we will never get to know what efficiency is.”\(^{113}\) The most elaborate account of social insurance came from Manmathanath Sarkar, who wrote a two-part article in 1929 to explain its importance in economic progress. His definition of the term seemed quite simple but effective:

> There are incidents, which reduce a person’s ability to earn, and increase his expenditures extremely. There are insurances done against these unexpected accidents. Generally, these insurances are defined as social insurance.\(^{114}\)

Social insurance was applicable against three types of events: (a) temporary incapacity for working; (b) permanent incapacity; and (c) death. There could be several reasons for each one of them, with several consequences as well. Unemployment or accidents might turn a person incapacitated for a brief period of time; on the other hand, old age or chronic diseases might debilitate someone forever. Most of these reasons were considered insurable, although some enjoyed more popularity than others. In some cases, the state took the responsibility to sponsor the fund from where the pensions or the compensations would be distributed; in other cases, the private enterprises themselves had to initiate their workers into the program.

Manmathanath discussed different forms of social insurance, but his favorite remained the “unemployment benefits,” of whose merits and demerits he wrote in great detail. He identified this particular form of insurance as the model of all other forms of social insurance including health insurance and pension funds.\(^{115}\) He recalled that once the unemployment benefits were subject to disparagement from many quarters, who found it unethical and prone to corruption and fraud. The strongest criticism came as the allegation that insurance against unemployment involved spending a lot of money, portions of which did not even belong to the state. When unemployment benefits were introduced in England according to the National Insurance Act of 1911, the owners and the

\(^{112}\) Benoy Kumar Sarkar, “Duniyāy Samāj Bīmār Sūtrapāṭ”, *Arthik Unnati* 3, no. 6 (September, 1928), 461.

\(^{113}\) Ibid, 468.

\(^{114}\) Manmathanath Sarkar, “Samāj Bīmā”, *Arthik Unnati* 4, no. 6 (September, 1929), 469.

\(^{115}\) Ibid, 470.
workers of the selected mills each had to contribute two and a half pence for the unemployment fund. One-third of the collected fund was sponsored by the state. Some writers were particularly opposed to the idea of the workers having to contribute in the fund. Manmathanath informed:

They argue that all the spending for eliminating the problem of unemployment should be considered national expenditure. It is unreasonable to expect contributions from the workers for providing livelihood during unemployment; because they are not really responsible for this crisis.116

The critics of unemployment benefits cited bank savings as a possible alternative to social insurance. People should save fractions of their incomes for future inconveniences, so that they did not have to take alms from the government or other authorities. Manmathanath himself found this argument pointless, as most of the beneficiaries of unemployment insurance received minimum wage and were not in the position to keep parts of their earnings aside for future use. As there was very little awareness among the poor of the troubles that might befall them in future, no concern could hold them back from full consumption of their incomes. “There is another point,” he added at the end. “If we have to depend solely on saved money during the crisis of unemployment, the total burden falls on the shoulders of only one person.”117 He went on to argue that most of the causes of unemployment were beyond the control of the workers, and the authorities including the state must not avoid their responsibilities. “Therefore,” he concluded, “if there is anything that can be done about the crisis of unemployment, it is to be done by the society, not by any individual.”118 These opinions and mobilizations suggest a complex of aspirations, incentives, and strategies of negotiation with the government based on a notion of risk and its relation to rationales and mechanisms of capitalization of life. We shall see that the technologies of risk management also presume a conceptual framework where the possibilities of a merger between individual life and the life of the nation could be realized, or at least, attempted to be realized. In the vernacular discourses on life, organicity, and capital formation, this framework may take an exceptional turn and propose alternatives that can only be described as the logical extension of a nationalist theory of social organism.

116 Ibid, 473.
117 Ibid, 471.
118 Ibid.
François Ewald, in one of his essays on the concept of insurance and its relation with technologies of governmentality discusses institutions of insurance and its conception as an abstract technology “combining various elements of economic and social reality according to a set of specific rules.”

All forms of insurance deploy an abstract technology of risk which can be defined as “a specific mode of treatment of certain events capable of happening to a group of individuals – or, more exactly, to values or capitals possessed or represented by a collectivity of individuals: that is to say a population.” Ewald associates the notion of risk with “chance, hazard, probability, eventuality, or randomness on the one hand,” and with “loss or damage on the other,” and defined “accident” as an outcome of their combination. An accident is a loss or a damage, which is governed by the laws of probabilistic reasoning. Insurance, hence, as a technology of risk is supposed to be a technology of intervention – a schema of rationalizing and ordering the disorderly state of random events known as accidents, of taming of chance. In any form of insurance, the notion of risk demonstrates three characteristics. It presents itself as calculable, collective, and as a form of capital. The first two features were discussed by Harendrachandra Pal, when he attempted to highlight the scientific nature of life insurance. As he had explained, it is the assumed calculability of risk, which distinguishes insurance from the practices of gambling. At the same time, risk “only becomes calculable when it is spread over a population.” Insurance, Ewald argues, cannot operate without “socializing risk.” The very idea of socialized risk also incorporates a principle of equality, which renders every individual member of any social group exposed to its effects with equal probability. The capital form of risk, on the other hand, appeals to a contradiction inherent in the idea of insurance. Any damage caused to the body (or its extinction) is thought to be irreparable; but it is a prerogative of insurance to fix a price on the damage in form of a compensation. The contradiction between the impossibility of pricing and the actual calculations that make pricing possible does not affect its form, because what “is insured is not the injury that is actually lived, suffered and resented

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by the person it happens to, but a capital against whose loss the insurer offers a guarantee.” In other words, insurance capitalizes life itself.

The capitalization of life has a history of its own. In Daniel Defert’s view, the emergence of human longevity “as a factor in economic calculation” dates back to an old practice of public borrowing in France called “life annuity” with an organized technology of risk involving a regime of expert calculations that socialized risk by evenly distributing it among a population; and which envisioned “a measurable capital of life.” Defert observes that, with the innovation of life annuity, the earlier speculations on death were replaced by a practice of rationalization based on human capital – a capital “understood however as a patrimony of life, not a life as labor power.” Life was, in this context, transformed from a “non-negotiable asset” to a “movable capital.” Looking back at the insurance discourse in Ārthik Unnati, we can sense that the urge to spread the practice of rationalizing futuristic randomness was informed by the same impetus of capitalization of life. In absorbing calculability, collectivity, and the capital form of risk, they started to focus on the other crucial elements of the financial arrangement that insurance was. “The form of financial rationality,” Defert argues, “scientifically incorporates into itself the question of chances of mortality, and puts surveillance of those chances under the joint control of a banker and of a medical adviser who functions in this situation as an economic expert.”

One may extend this argument to its logical limit by saying that the notion of public health itself is a consequence of the complex of calculation, collectivization, and capital known as insurance technology. However, the idea of a relationship between public health and financial activities, and

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124 Ewald, “Insurance and Risk”, 204.
125 Daniel Defert, “Popular Life” and Insurance Technology” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality (London: Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1991), 216, 218. Defert believes it to be an inverted precursor of life insurance, where the state could borrow from the citizens with a promise to pay a specific amount of money to the lender throughout the lifespan of another person, “whose life was taken as its term of reference” [ibid, 216]. The debt was liquidated with the death of the person on whom the annuity was drawn. During the years between 1750 and 1780, Genevan bankers designed a novel form of “life annuity, in which one can identify all the basic elements of the life assurance” of today (ibid, 217). The bankers chose a group of people “from among the Genevan population as having the highest probable life expectancy, assessed on the basis of genealogical data, current health, the differential mortality of age groups, sex and material situation – all this having been established by Tronchin, the most famous doctor in Geneva, and his students” (ibid) The bankers then prepared lists of people with similar life expectancy, who were taken care of with regular health examination and vaccinations. They organized the annuities among different sets of identical contracts to spread the risks evenly over all the annuities. Then the “homogeneous mass of annuities” were distributed into “fractions available to private investors” (ibid). Life annuity, in this sense, ceased to be a speculative convention of public borrowing.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
the identification of medical experts as potential economic thinkers were welcomed by Benoy Sarkar and his associates at the Bangiya Dhanabijnan Parishad. In its second session in 1928, Amulya Charan Ukil, a professor at the Calcutta Medical College, a co-operative activist, and a member of the Parishad’s board of directors, was asked to give a lecture on the economics of public health (sārbajanik swāsthya). In his speech, Ukil asserted that the health of the nation was its invaluable property, and the only way to preserve it was by eating food items that increased productivity.129

“Due to our negligence of food, there is a grave wastage of our national energy (jātiya śakti),” he announced with some concern.130 He went on to explain that the natural forces were not to be blamed for the weakness of the Bengalis, as the Punjabis lived in the same country, but they seemed much stronger because of the food they ate. “From experiments on mice, we have come to know,” Ukil revealed, “that they have been healthy and growing the most by the food from Punjab, and have been the most upset by the food from Bengal and Madras.”131 The same experiments on human beings were being performed in Bolepur and at some “mess houses” in Calcutta, he informed.132

The preservation of “national energy” was no less a concern for Sarkar as well. It was an important element in his positivism of synthetic practice, which brought into focus the notion of Śakti-Yoga as a the central thesis of his philosophy of action. Sarkar, Giuseppe Flora observes, as always, had tried to “match his theory to the social conditions of Bengal”133 It was the “energism” of the youth of his time, which transformed the “spirit of modern India” into a spirit of protest and resistance.134 Flora explains, “In Benoy Sarkar’s acceptance, Energism means nothing else than Śakti-Yoga, the creative power of the deity, referred to the man as the creator of his own destiny.”135 The concept of energism that Flora discusses was characteristic of a gamut of literature produced during the Swadeshi movement. Andrew Sartori traces the origin of the concept in the Swadeshi leader Bipin Chandra Pal’s accounts where Pal defined śakti as that uniform substance which was present in all the particulars of the phenomenal world.136 The phenomenal world was, therefore, an expression of the divine unity. Sartori calls this concept “immanent monism” and explicates how Pal was

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130 Ibid.
131 Ibid, 692.
132 Ibid.
133 Flora, Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Italy, 24.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Sartori, Bengal in Global Concept History, 136-40.
influenced by the religious leader Bejoy Krishna Goswami who was also the guru of Satis Mukherjee.\textsuperscript{137} Like Flora, he also relates this concept to the notion of Hindu sociology of which Sarkar was one of the chief campaigners. However, in the later career of Sarkar, the concept of “energy” was deduced from his theory of “mistrification” which indicated a huge movement of social reconfiguration in terms of abolition of the earlier “social” markers of difference. In this movement, even the well-clad middleclass gentlemen would have to get their hands “dirty” by working with shoulder to shoulder the lowest order of the population.\textsuperscript{138} In opposition to gentrification of the lower classes and castes, Sarkar identified this reverse movement as the sign of vitality in a society. He also redefined his notion of pedagogy in terms of absorbing the world-energy (“bīṣwa-śakti”) consolidated in the form of foreign magazines.\textsuperscript{139} We can sense how though Ārthik Unnati Sarkar tried to connect these two movements in the same plane of pedagogical intervention. The discourse of national energy, therefore, called for integration with world-energy, and both were ideated in the same framework of physical action – going to the field and collecting data of this continuing social transformation and translating the same data into “experience” in the life history of the nation. Sarkar’s “energy” was shared by many among whom the most interesting and original was his close friend Radhakamal Mukerjee whose theory of “physiological justice” in terms of “redistribution of energy” as a precondition of socioeconomic development bore close resemblance to some of the theorists of anti-liberalism in pre-Second-World-War Europe. In the final section, we shall explore some of his ideas in detail and see how they could be placed in the negotiations between life, capital and sociality around the time when Ārthik Unnati was starting its adventure.

**THE ENERGETICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

Radhakamal Mukerjee was also one of the passionate organizers of the education movement started by Satis Mukherjee. In 1906, almost singlehandedly, he ran an adult school in the slums of Calcutta.\textsuperscript{140} As the editor of a Bengali journal called Upāsana, he tried his hand at fiction writing and wrote a couple of novels with the wish to address the “social and ethical problems and conflicts of

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, 142-49.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 93.
Starting in 1910, he taught at the Kashinath College, Behrampur for five years. He got involved in organizing the “Co-operative societies for the District and started a network of village banks with an agricultural demonstration plot and evening schools at the head quarters of the Co-operative Union.”\footnote{Radhakamal Mukerjee cited in \textit{ibid}.} In 1915, he went to Lahore to join as the principal of a college and a couple of years later, at the University of Punjab, delivered a course of ten lectures:

in which he stressed that “the postulates of Western economics were entirely different from those that could be deduced from a realistic study of the Indian economic patterns”. He characterised this pattern as “Rural Communalism”.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.}

In another lecture on the disparities between Western economics and the one he thought suitable for India at the University of Calcutta, he proposed to bridge the gap “between theory and practice, between one region and type of culture and another and between biology and the humanistic and sociological sciences.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 1458.} In 1921, Mukerjee joined the Lucknow University as the founder Head of the department of Economics and Sociology, and published his book on the ideas he was working on for the last few years – \textit{Principles of Comparative Economics}.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.}

He wrote the book with the objective of recasting the discipline of economics:

in the light of those scientific methods of analysis which are being applied with rich promise of fruitfulness to all other sociological sciences (including law and jurisprudence) under the ruling concept of Evolution as applied to the phenomena of life and mind.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 2.}

Consequently, he argued, the economic principles would no longer have to be restricted to the rigid categories introduced by the classical economists like Ricardo and John Stuart Mill. They would also appear as “physical and biological.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.} As promised, he reinterpreted most of the essential economic categories, and installed an alternate structure of economic reasoning based on the biological theory of Energetics. For example, according his theory, production should be considered as “the liberation of energy by certain processes and its storing up in a certain collection, i.e. in a certain arrangement

\footnote{Radhakamal Mukerjee, \textit{Principles of Comparative Economics}, vol. 1 (London: P. S. King & Son, 1921).}
of matter.” The sum total of energy in nature, he explained, was fixed and it was the prerogative of any productive activity to transform and redistribute it in potential and kinetic energy to the effect of people’s satisfaction. “In both cases [of transformation and redistribution],” Mukerjee asserted, “the test of productiveness is the surplus or excess of energy in what is gained or rendered available over what is spent.”

The theory of surplus in energy – replacing that in labor hours in classical political economy – must corroborate a theory of value accordingly. “With advances in applied science,” the mutual convertibility of various forms of energy would be more easily achievable, and then all the productive activities like agriculture and industry would be reducible to a “common denominator in the all-embracing science of energetics.”

Mukerjee believed that it would be a more scientific and definite measure of value than utility or labor power:

We should take our stand upon the equivalence and mutual convertibility of energies, a living reality, and not upon its rule-of-thumb substitute, the equivalence and substitution of satisfactions adopted by orthodox economists.

In spite of disowning both the classical theory of value and the neoclassical theory of utility in favor of a theory of surplus in terms of the common denominator of energy, he did not hesitate to retain the law of diminishing returns, which was assumed to be more operational in agriculture or mining than industry because of the former activities’ dependence on finite natural resources.

The theory of production as transformation of energy had a corresponding theory of consumption, which invoked the idea of a “social arrangement” “for the ever fuller return and restoration of the energy” spent in productive actions. The idea was explained in greater detail in a biological analysis of the complementary relationship between production and consumption. The discussion assumed the human organism itself as a “living machine of energy-transformer,” which was different from its lifeless cousins in its requirement for the “recoupment of the store.” Mukerjee saw an element of “physiological justice” in how every act of “legitimate production” induced repairing “of the tissue waste involved in work.” In his words:

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148 Ibid.
149 Ibid, 3.
150 Ibid, 3, 4.
151 Ibid, 4.
152 Ibid, 5, 6.
153 Ibid, 9.
154 Ibid.
This repair and restoration are secured by the process of consumption, which accordingly in economics must be regarded as complementary to work and production being mutually dependent in the maintenance and evolution of life.\textsuperscript{155}

He then elaborated his theory of physiological justice by defining a “margin of efficient subsistence” in human body and cautioned that the return to the energy spent in productive activities should not drop below that level. Although the classical theorists came up with a similar notion of subsistence wage, but they “failed to recognize sufficiently its foundation in physiological justice.”\textsuperscript{156} In the same way, he denounced the neoclassical calculus of pleasure and pain and stated to have offered a more scientific theory of consumption in terms of vital energy and physiological justice of redistribution. In Mukerjee’s conception of biological economics, distributive justice was linked to consumption as an act of physiological necessity, which gave it an aura of a natural element in evolution The chain of “natural justice” would be disrupted only when the “just balance of expenditure and recoupment” was upset by systemic and non-systemic irregularities like unproductive consumption, which did not fully restore the energy spent in production, or exploitation by middlemen, traders, and capitalists, who could deprive the poor of their right to “efficient subsistence.”

“The economic phenomenon of distribution,” Mukerjee however explained:

which have their rise in the biological principle of recoupment and restoration of expended energy are governed by the law of equivalence of energies in higher moral plane, involving not merely mathematical proportions as in production, but also the proportions of moral and social justice which work themselves out through laws of physical and biological equivalence.\textsuperscript{157}

The “laws of physical and biological equivalence,” Mukerjee informed, helped ensure “differential remuneration for specialized work of different grades and qualities of labour,” most importantly the contributions of the intellectuals, artists, and social workers, who were forced to degrade themselves to the “vulgar, conventional level of the market” governed by the principle of competition.\textsuperscript{158} In the schema of physiological justice, the dynamics of expenditure and restoration of vital energy would determine the proper, morally justified remuneration for people with higher intellectual ability. This way, Mukerjee proposed a critique of the principle of competition revered in classical as well as neo-

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid, 12.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
classical theories, which equated the naturalized interpretation of physiological justice with the moral justification of differential remuneration. At the centre of his critique against competition, Mukerjee situated his protagonist of economic reasoning – the psycho-social man, “whose wants, interests and desires arise not only from his narrow self, his individual reason and interest, but also from the group-life and consciousness.”\(^ {159}\) The protagonist of earlier economics – the economic man with the “rational” urge act upon nothing but his self-interest was discarded in favor of an individual, who, in spite of being aware of his rights and interests, would rise above the pettiness of self-indulgence and focus on the wholesome satisfaction of the group or social organism that he was a part of. He was a bundle of “indefinite number of instincts and impulses” other than self-interest, among which the most important were:

- the instinct of gregariousness, parental and domestic instincts, migratory instinct, instincts of self-assertion as well as subordination, revulsion against inferiority and against confinement, the instincts of workmanship and constructiveness, etc.\(^ {160}\)

The same instincts were observable, Mukerjee wrote, among other multi-celled organisms, and they played the same role of inspiring collective or co-operative activities. The most original observation, however, was that of “far-reaching importance” – the formation and employment of capital among organisms other than human beings.\(^ {161}\) “All living organisms,” Mukerjee pointed out, “store up food and energy.”\(^ {162}\) In that respect, he wrote, “these are the incipient forms of capitalistic structures, not exploitative and parasitic, but creative and distributive in their functions in animal and plant life and constructions.”\(^ {163}\)

A similar form of criticism against liberal economic values and principles is found in the writings of the contemporary Italian sociologist and statistician Corrado Gini, who was also the chief architect of the economic plan adopted by the Fascist government of Italy in 1926. Benoy Sarkar was a friend of him. In 1929, they met each other in Geneva. The meeting must have been remarkable for Sarkar, because, as Flora points out, “after this encounter, Italy became the focus of Sarkar’s activity during his second stay abroad.”\(^ {164}\) Together they planned to form an Indo-Italian institute to strengthen the commercial and cultural relationship between the two countries. The plan did not take off due to

\(^{159}\) Ibid, 15.
\(^{160}\) Ibid, 60.
\(^{161}\) Ibid, 40.
\(^{162}\) Ibid.
\(^{163}\) Ibid.
\(^{164}\) Flora, Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Italy, 74-75.
undisclosed reasons, but Gini continued to influence Sarkar in his writings, especially those on the sociology of population. In 1927, however, defending of the anti-democratic regime in Italy, Gini wrote an article with the title ‘The Scientific Basis of Fascism’ which tore down the liberal theory of individual interests as detrimental to national progress:

The liberal theory assumes that society consists of an aggregate of individuals who must look after their own interests and it regards the state as an emanation of the individual wills intended to eliminate the conflicts between the interests of individuals. The nationalistic theory [of fascism], on the contrary, views society as a true and distinct organism of a rank superior to that of the individuals who compose it, an organism endowed with a life of its own and with interests of its own.165

If for Gini the nation was endowed with a life of its own, for Mukerjee, the voluntary communities in India – “the organisms and institutions” like joint families and village communities, which were performing “vital social functions” and were “woven into the very texture of society” – realized the true value of the social dynamics of “physiological justice” expressed in the mutuality of expenditure and restoration of energy.166 The conception of “energy” as a common denominator enabled Mukerjee to envisage a theory of capital, which would model itself after the “natural” and “instinctive” reality of energy conservation even among organisms other than human beings and suture production and consumption in a chain of vital regeneration.

The theory of vital regeneration, if we look closely, was another way of instigating the same modality of experiential equivalence by juxtaposing life history of the nation and that of the individual, and the critique of liberal economic thus engendered was in direct correspondence with the notion of “practice” that Sarkar developed in his positive sociology. The translation of data – vital statistics – into experience – family and village community – paved the way for a theory of human capital which offered a critique of liberal economics with a strong emphasis on the social aspect of economic actions. But, unlike Sarkar, Mukerjee was not interested in becoming a proxy of the state, or its well-intending double. He found an ideal apparatus of welfare in the idea of community itself – the custodian of selfless well-being of all and everyone. It seems, writing in 1922, he was still under Satis Mukherjee’s spell – the way Mukherjee defined the space of “social economy” against the Western evils of self-interest. But, Radhakamal’s objective was not to defend an age-old caste system against

166 Mukerjee, *Principles of Comparative Economics*, vol. 1, 72.
the materialistic world-view in the West. Satis’ social economy, in hands of Mukerjee, became the village community of the Eastern civilizations. Though still participating in the “conjoined actions,” these communities also contained the possibility of change through redistribution of social energy. Thus, Radhakamal explained in the second volume of his book how the conservative theories of a Western economics could be reinterpreted as conservational theories of communal co-operation. With an ingenious twist in the tale of labor unrest, he proclaimed that forming trade-unions in the model of the Western countries would not work for the Indian workers. “In India,” he wrote,

the industrial caste performs the functions of the trade union. It insures the members against accident and death. It is a benefit society as well as an industrial school. It educates apprentices. Like the trade unions the caste standardises conditions of work and labour.\footnote{Radhakamal Mukerjee, \textit{Principles of Comparative Economics}, vol. 2 (London: P. S. King & Son, 1921), 78.}

While Benoy Sarkar argued that a mechanism of social insurance would save the widows and relieve their husbands from tension, Radhakamal trusted the caste system to ensure the safety of the factory workers from industrial accident. While Satis defended preservation of caste, Radhakamal redefined it as a union body working in the interest of the laborers. The modality of experiential equivalence was not a monolith in the first half of the twentieth century, and the “socials” it presented were not unanimous and one-directional.

The “social economy,” however, kept on coming back to haunt the liberal principles. In an article published in \textit{Sankhya}, the first journal of statistics in India, edited by Prashanta Chandra Mahalanobis, Friedrich Zahn, a German statistician, enquired whether the “economic value of man” could be considered an object of statistical study.\footnote{Friedrich Zahn, “Economic Value of Man – Is it an Object of Statistics?”, \textit{Sankhya}: The Indian Journal of Statistics 1, no. 4 (October, 1934), 427-31.} In the article published in 1934, Zahn once again picked up the same thread from where it was left by Mukerjee. Zahn argued that the economic value of man consisted in “the value of his power of doing work,”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 427.} and it should fall under the purview of social economy. “Social economy,” he wrote:

as a whole is not the sum-total of individual economic balances. For social economy all those materials which have got a positive value for the entire people have to be taken into

consideration and those materials which are profitable to individuals but economically harmful to the multitude have to be excluded.\footnote{Ibid.}

Riding on the idea of a conflict of interests between the “social” and the “individual” in the realm of economic decision making, he announced, “Social economy is primarily concerned, not with the \textit{dead material capital but with the living human wealth, the organic human capital}.\footnote{Ibid.} Quoting the Prussian political economist, Ernst Engel, Zahn explained that the “economic preservation” of people rested on the principle of “generative foundation” – an idea that expected every generation to pay back “fully and with interest the capital spent upon it for education and vocational training.”\footnote{Ibid.} He concluded from this theory that the “natural and equitable rate of wage” could not be determined by the dynamics between supply and demand in the labor market, but by true appraisal of the cost of maintenance of an entire population. Quite expectedly now, Zahn invoked the notion of insurance, and argued that the real importance of the insurance practice lay, not in the calculations that it performed to estimate the economic value of men, but in its drawing attention to “what amount of wealth can be saved for individual and social economy by means of careful management of the human capital, and by protecting organic social capital against possible losses.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The careful management of human capital and the corresponding calculations, Zahn believed, were also helpful in designing and debating “social policies.”\footnote{Ibid.} Zahn himself was responsible for some of these “social policies” in Nazi Germany. As its chairman during the Third Reich, he was one of the chief protagonists of the drive to ouster Jews from the German Statistical Society. He was also ecstatic about Hitler’s interest in all matters statistical and their import in National Socialism. In 1941, he informed, “The Führer established as a goal for National Socialism the rigorous use of scientific knowledge. Besides physical fitness, a firm character, and a rigorous approach to science, he demands soldiers of politics, economics, and also of science.”\footnote{Ibid.} These soldiers needed the best rearing as children, as it was apparent from the Fascist planner Corrado Gini’s opinion on the same subject.\footnote{Corrado Gini, “The Theoretical Bases of Economic Policy”, \textit{Journal of Political Economy} 37, no. 6 (December, 1929), 633-60.} Writing about the economic justification of centralized planning, he referred to the idea of...
“human capital” without taking its name, and said that, although the rearing of a child might indicate “a very poor investment of capital” at present, but in future, the “yield of the adult will exceed the outlay upon him”177. Gini’s objective in the article was once again to distinguish between individual and national interests and proving the superiority of the latter. Taking a clue from the futuristic model of human capital, he indicated that, as the “life-span” of the nation-state was much longer than its citizens’, it was only the state, which was “capable of taking care, in a satisfactory way, of interests which [did] not affect the present generation.”178

It would be a mistake to assume that the analogy between the biological and the economic domains was exclusive to the illiberal discourses in the twentieth century. Catherine Gallagher points out another context in which these analogies were employed quite productively by classical political economy in the century before.179 We have also observed in Chapter Two how pointedly the same analogy was incorporated in John Bates Clark’s works on the theory of model in the late eighteenth century. Gallagher’s book throws light on the usage of the analogy between social and individual bodies in the first half of the nineteenth century. By distinguishing two strands on “life” in early-nineteenth-century economic texts – “bioeconomics” and “somaeconomics” – Gallagher shows that, along with the Victorian Romantics, the political economists of that time reconceptualized “value” in terms of human sensations like pleasure and pain and relocated it from the “realm of transcendent spiritual meanings to organic “Life” itself.”180 By “bioeconomics,” she means that side of political economy which focused on the interrelations between “population, food supply, modes of production and exchange, and their impact on life forms generally.”181 By “somaeconomics” she describes the interactions between emotional and sensual feelings which are both the cause and the consequence of bodily toil. The protagonist of bioeconomics was Thomas Malthus who formulated the relationship between individual and social organisms in a paradoxical framework of antagonism: the well-bred, healthy, vigorous, and reproductive body was detrimental to the well-being of the whole social body, as the by comparison between the law of animal reproduction and that of production and supply of food. In Malthus’ analogy, the social organism was female, denoting fertility in terms of reproductive capacity, and posited in an inverted relationship with its female

177 Ibid, 637.
178 Ibid, 639.
180 Ibid, 3.
181 Ibid.
population: if the society was populated by young women – healthy and fertile – the organism would look like an old lady – feeble and on her deathbed. A similar framework of essential opposition was invoked in case of somaéconomics where the immediate enjoyment or pleasure derived from consumption would lead to a rapid degeneration of the country’s wealth. In both cases, as Gallagher points out rightly, the interest of the individual was shown to be in reversal with that of the social body.

As we have seen in Gini’s and Zahn’s writings, and also in the works by the researchers at Bangiya Dhanabijnan Parishad and Radhakamal Mukerjee, the contradictions between the social and the individual bodies were appraised, interrogated, and, to some extent, resolved through organicist metaphors and biological interpretations of economic concepts, ideas, and categories. These metaphors and analogies often took recourse to a cosmological imaginary, conceived in distinction with the so-called “materialistic” predilections of the Western economic discourses and addressed the question of economic justice by appropriating and revising the notion of energy and physiological recoupment. The potency of the concept of human capital was that it showed a way to resolve the tension between the social and the biological by merging the life histories of the nation and the individual. In reality, these life histories did not become one and the same, but the possibility was there – so potently expressed in the term “human capital.” But, more importantly, in this framework, the relationship between statistical data and economic life came to be regarded as a central problematic in the illiberal critique of orthodox economics in the early twentieth century. In the next chapter, we shall see how this traffic between the biological and the economic was halted and subdued with the emergence of the figure of the statistical expert.