

457. For some historical background, see Scott Nearing and Joseph Freeman, *Dollar Diplomacy* (New York, 1966 reprint), pp. 151-172; Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America* (New York, 1973), pp. 59, 109, 121-124; Richard R. Fagen, *The Nicaraguan Revolution* (Washington, DC, 1981).

³Ernst Bloch, "Discussing Expressionism," *Aesthetics and Politics* (London, 1977), pp. 22-23.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 238. For the theory of the Third World novel as "national allegory," see Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986), pp. 65-88.



REVIEW

Kothari's Unfinished Visions

ALEXANDER R. MAGNO

RAJNI KOTHARI IS DEEPLY DISENCHANTED with close to everything most other people associate with "modernity": the centralized state apparatus, economic interdependence, representative democracy, large military establishments, the exploitation of nature, the internationalized culture purveyed by advanced mass communication technology, and even "normal" gender relations. He takes serious issue with current conceptions of democracy, security, economic development, and technology.

In Kothari's case, disenchantment provokes not despair but a vision of an alternative social, political, and international order that cures inequality in wealth and power, resolves the problem of basic needs, and exalts what is ethically humane. It is a vision argued competently and coherently, befitting the writer who, over the last quarter of a century, has become a leading voice

of dissent against authoritarianism and anti-people development politics in India.

In 1963, Rajni Kothari founded the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. He was, for ten years, editor of the journal *Alternatives*. Since 1980, he has been associated with "Lokayan," a forum of intellectuals, non-party activists, and citizens involved in various movements in India.

He wrote, in 1970, *Politics in India* which has subsequently become a standard reference. He later published *Footsteps into the Future* which introduced an alternative theoretical perspective on the human condition from the point of view of Third World societies. He also edited *State and Nation-Building: A Third World Perspective*.

Over the last two decades, the alternative theoretical perspective on the human condition introduced earlier continued to per-

colate in Kothari's mind. The details of that perspective were elaborated and refined in a number of papers addressed to a wide range of audiences. These papers have been collected into two volumes and published this year by Ajanta Books.

State Against Democracy and Transformation and Survival in fact constitute a single collection. The papers collected in the entire breadth of issues raised by progressive activists and intellectuals the world over tackle such critical points as: decentralized democracy, disarmament, collective self-reliance, technologies that enhance autonomy, and a new lifestyle that is built on the ethics of harmony between man and the rest of the natural world.

Even while these issues have been heard and echoed elsewhere, there is something distinct in the way Kothari raises these issues on the basis of survival no less. There is definitely great despair over the extent to which the past burdens our search for a new future. But there is also great hope in the restlessness of the masses in the Third World, in the resiliency of social structures injured by underdevelopment, in the great imaginative energy spawned by the contradictions and crisis of this age.

The themes associated with the New Left recur in Kothari's thoughts: the dispersal instead of seizure of state power; the larger autonomy of individuals and collectivities in place of the centralization of production; the emphasis on a new ethics of social life in

place of the tired cliches of economism; the reintroduction of the notion of totality; the marriage of ecology and seminism; the return to the "grassroots"; the distrust of enlarging bureaucracies and mammoth technologies; and the plea for a pluralism of cultures in place of the uniformizing trajectory of transnationalized developments.

These themes and issues are masterly woven together into a compelling tapestry, a broad vision of an alternative global order. It is a long view, long enough to avert despair over the illogic that governs the present. It is a vision so elegantly argued. It, in fact, appears possible.

But the two books leave the reader with a sense of incompleteness. There is something in this grand image of a new global society that makes its vision seem unfinished, its magnificent tapestry loose at the seams.

There is a bridge every dreamer must cross — after which he ceases to be merely a conjurer of images and becomes a revolutionary. It is the bridge of political strategy.

The longest of journeys begins with a single step. Kothari's long vision appears to be lacking a strategy. In discarding the old models of revolution, he appears to have also discarded the mundane political calculations, the often irritating nuances of programmes and organizations, and the messy business of organized struggle that makes vision a possibility and conscious intervention a necessity.

KASARINLAN

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