

Asia after Europe: Imagining a Continent in the Long Twentieth Century

Sugata Bose, *Asia after Europe: Imagining a Continent in the Long Twentieth Century*, (USA: Press of Harvard University Press, 2024), 275

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Sugata Bose is a distinguished Indian historian and scholar who has worked extensively on Asian history and its relations with the West. His works have various areas of focus. Among them are status of Asia, colonisation, and Asia's intellectual development. His most recent book, *Asia after Europe: Imagining a Continent in the Long Twentieth Century*, challenges conventional Eurocentric narratives and pushes for a more nuanced understanding of Asia's place in the world. He has examined the complex identities and histories of Asian countries.

There are seven chapters in the book, discussing Asian identity and its relationships with the rest of the world. The main argument of the book revolves around Asian unity, exploring how Asian states have struggled collectively by avoiding internal conflicts to achieve the goal of Asian universalism. It is a concept that has been a part of their history. The book delves into Asian transformation, offering a distinctive perspective on the historical, political, and cultural developments of Asia in the 20th century. The intricate dynamics of post-colonial identity, economic advancements, political shifts, art, cultural renaissance, and the continent's interconnectedness are aptly highlighted. The role of youth in shaping a new vision for the

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continent is also well articulated. The book is a significant account of Asian universalism while rejecting Western imperialism.

The author skillfully analyses how colonialism affected Asia and suggests that Asian countries reconsider their ideologies and identities, which were shattered by colonial powers, given emerging opportunities.

The first chapter is a succinct, intellectually rich, examination of Asian critiques of Eurocentric values, narratives, and vibrant colonial discourse throughout its history. The concepts of solidarity and universalism are recommended as a counter narrative for the Asians by the author.

In chapters two and three, Bose connects the Asian universalism and the aspirations of youth during the interwar period. Both chapters align with the book's central theme. He has interpreted their vision as a manifestation of cosmopolitan goals rather than just a response to Western imperialism. Fostering solidarity among diverse cultures through Asian intellectuals remains an impact of the globalisation on the continent. The ideas, values, norms, art, and politics thus spread throughout, emphasises a shift towards young Asia while uniting people behind a common goal.

The pan-Asian cooperation and its active engagements, which honoured ancient values and accepted modernity, are significant in the process. These chapters elucidate a concise yet comprehensive notion: until Asia breaks free from the boundaries set by European colonial maps, the world's power balance will not shift towards Asia. Therefore, an urgent need to explore both the rich and complex history of the continent is very pertinent.

The theme of the fourth chapter is that Asians welcomed a wave of cosmopolitanism on a larger scale. It primarily submerged regional customs as a defensive strategy to combat colonialism. A complex interaction between the existing Universalist ideologies, including Buddhist, Islamic, and Asian universalism, is also ably discussed.

The author interprets viewpoints that influenced anti-colonial movements and promoted a feeling of common identity across various cultural groups. The diversity and fluidity of the Asian identities are discussed with a more nuanced comprehension of how this intersection of universalism has influenced the past and continue to influence the present as well.

The comprehensive coverage of the 1930s economic difficulties in chapters five and six is notable for linking the global economic crisis to major political upheavals. It provides a profound picture of economic and financial complexities marginalising people and consequently encouraging nationalist movements.

In the subsequent chapter, the author delves deeper into this theme, highlighting the impact of World War II on Asia. Bose has highlighted the economic friction that eventually transformed the region's political landscape and led to the formation of new nations. His poignant reflection on the human cost of conflict, including famine and displacement is worthwhile. He has reiterated his appreciation of the resilience and enduring spirit of Asian societies in their fight for freedom and justice.

Lastly, aligning with the previous chapters, the author explores the details of connections among China, Japan, India, and other Asian nations due to a shared history of colonial subjugation. Bose contends that despite the tremendous desire for pan-Asian unity and collaboration, past animosities frequently reemerge, making it

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difficult for solidarity attempts. He looks at several case studies to substantiate the dynamics of the history of conflicts among them.

Bose discusses the pivotal contributions of Rabindranath Tagore, Okakura Tenshin, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, and Liang Qichao for their roles in rekindling the concept of Asia as a unique civilisational entity. Through their visionary efforts to challenge Western hegemony and champion Asian unity, they ushered in a new era of intellectual, cultural, and economic exchange.

By delving into the interwoven realms of spirituality, art, poetry, and literature, the thinkers laid the groundwork for a revitalised Asian consciousness. While artfully unraveling the complex tapestry of Asian identity, Bose has underscored steadfast Asian resilience to the forces of nationalism and colonialism as well.

The book is a significant contribution to the fields of Asian studies and global history. Sugata Bose offers a compelling vision of Asia as a dynamic and evolving entity, rich in diversity and potential. Throughout the long run of history, the author pinpoints every aspect of Asian history, but has an unclear approach towards the period of Cold War.

His masterful precise writing style, weaving numerous references into a single line, enriches the narrative with depth and scholarly rigour. However, at times, this dense intertextuality distracts the author from the main theme. It sometimes confuses the readers by overloading them with references. Despite this occasional digression, Bose's insightful analysis not only illuminates the past framework but also the future trajectories of the continent.

This book is an essential read for anyone interested in the complexities of Asian identity in a globalised world, challenging us

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to rethink our understanding of history, culture, and international relations.■