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Thinking the Future in Colonial Bengal: Benoy Sarkar's Global Sociology

**By Prof. Manu Goswami
New York University, NY**

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Although internationalism is routinely heralded as a constitutive political form of the twentieth century, the story of its genesis and trajectory has been chronicled largely in nationalist terms. Scholars, within and beyond the field of South Asian studies, have tended to tell the story of internationalism as a subplot within the larger triumphal narrative of anti-colonial nationalism. Dominant accounts construe the relationship between nationalism and internationalism as that of a logical hierarchy rather than of coeval competing formations within a constellation of anti-imperial politics. Against the background of these concerns, the talk explores the work of Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887-1949), a former student activist of the swadeshi movement (1905-08) more commonly known as the founder of "Indian Sociology" and as the first non-European intellectual to critically respond to Max Weber's project of comparative historical sociology shortly after its initial publication. Goswami argues that his work represents the first and most sustained elaboration of a distinctive methodological internationalism in the post-swadeshi context. At the core of this schema were three interlocking themes: an emphasis on the historical category of the possible; the explicitly global scaling of such categories as society, economy, culture; and an insistence that equality, unlike the prior swadeshi fixation on autonomy, was the central epistemological and political struggle. Central to Sarkar's project was the effort to think the future of what he saw as insurgent groups, races, and classes in a way that departed from both nationalist and imperial frameworks. Revisiting Sarkar's work underlines both the promise and the limits of internationalist frameworks and the attempt to 'think the future' in the inter-war era.

Manu Goswami is currently an Associate Professor in the Department of History at New York University. Her book *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* was published by the University of Chicago in 2004. She has also published articles in *Comparative Studies of Society and History*, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, and *Diacritics*.