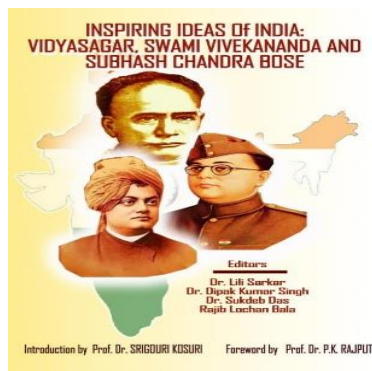


BOOK REVIEW



Dr. Lili Sarkar, Dr. Dipak Kumar Singh, Dr Sukdeb Das and Rajib Lochan Bala (Edited) *'Inspiring Ideas of India: Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda and Subhash Chandra Bose'* (Coochbehar: Academia Publications,2025; ISBN 978-93-344-1251-2 Pages: 321+ XXI , Price: Rs. 850.00/-INR)

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Dr. Lili Sarkar, Dr. Dipak Kumar Singh, Dr Sukdeb Das and Rajib Lochan Bala (Edited) 'Inspiring Ideas of India: Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda and Subhash Chandra Bose'

The edited volume under review titled “*Inspiring Ideas of India: Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda and Subhash Chandra Bose*” brings together three iconic figures of Bengal Renaissance and Indian Nationalism; Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose (1897- ?) in a single analytical frame. At first glance, the combination appears chronological and regional as three Bengali men who shaped modern India. However, the editorial rationale as articulated in the Editorial and Introduction, attempts a deeper philosophical linking as Vidyasagar represents Social Reform through Compassion and Education, Vivekananda represents Spiritual Humanism and Nation-Building, and Netaji represents Political Action and Militant Nationalism. The book has been followed by a well academic structure as it contains a Foreword, Preface, Acknowledgement, Abbreviations, Editorial, List of Contributors, Introduction, Part-I (9 Chapters on Vidyasagar), Part-II (9 Chapters on Swami Vivekananda), Part-III (5 Chapters on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and his INA) Illustrations, Appendices and an Index.

Together they form a triad of *Head, Heart and Hand* or to use the Indian philosophical terms, *Jnana, Bhakti and Karma*. This is an innovative curatorial logic and the greatest strength of this volume edited and compiled by Dr. Lili Sarkar, Dr. Dipak Kumar Singh, Dr. Sukdeb Das and Rajib Lochan Bala

An Intellectual Confluence of Reform, Renaissance and Revolutionary Spirit

'Inspiring Ideas of India: Vidyasagar: Swami Vivekananda and Subhash Chandra Bose', emerges as a compelling scholarly endeavour that synthesizes three monumental streams of India's modern intellectual evolution- social reform, spiritual renaissance and revolutionary nationalism. The work, in its conceptual ambition and editorial coherence, transcends the boundaries of a conventional anthology and instead ascends into the realm of civilizational introspection. It is not merely a book; it is an invitation to rethink India's intellectual lineage through a scientific, historically grounded and critically interpretive lens.

The volume opens with Part-I on Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, which is undoubtedly the strongest part of the book. The section begins with Manisha Choudhury's chapter on Vidyasagar's humanism, which is theoretically the most sophisticated article in this part. She goes beyond the usual praise and frames his widow remarriage movement through the lens of compassion ethics, giving it a modern philosophical relevance. This is followed by Shibanjana Das, who provides solid empirical data on Vidyasagar's schools for girls and his idea of education for all, though she misses the opportunity to discuss why his model failed to penetrate tribal Bengal.

The most innovative contribution comes from Dr. Emdadul Islam, who explores the little-known bond between Vidyasagar and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. By detailing Vidyasagar's financial

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help to Dutt during his financial crisis in Versailles, Islam shows two conflicting models of modernity - vernacular and cosmopolitan - co-existing with mutual respect. Dr. Sukdeb Das in his Bengali chapter strengthens this part by using original records from Sanskrit College to trace Vidyasagar's transformation from a Sanskrit pandit to a social reformer, which is philologically very strong.

However, editorial inconsistency appears with Imran Hasan's chapter on religious tolerance of Swami Vivekananda, which is misplaced in the Vidyasagar section. Sweta Bhattacharya corrects this disjunction with her excellent bridging chapter that connects Vidyasagar's *Barnaparichay* to Vivekananda's man-making education, She shows a continuity in Bengal's educational thought. In contrast, Dr. Lili Sarkar's attempt to link Rabindranath, Ashutosh Mukherjee and Vidyasagar in one triptych becomes too ambitious and remains descriptive. Gopal Singha's chapter on Vidyasagar as a reformer of Bengali language is the weakest in this section, merely repeating known facts without engaging with recent linguistic historiography. The part closes with Rajib Lochan Bala's commemorative reflection on Vidyasagar consciousness which is more analytical academic and well researched.

Part-II on Swami Vivekananda is the largest but suffers from repetition. Dr. Nilesh Verma opens it powerfully by linking Vivekananda's 1893 Chicago address to 21st-century global leadership and India's soft power, making it highly relevant for International Relations. Jayati Bannerjee Dasgupta follows with a critical chapter arguing that Vivekananda understood colonization not just as political but as spiritual and psychological colonization, a reading that resonates with Frantz Fanon.

After these two strong chapters, the quality dips. Chaithra B.M., Tushar Kanti Das, Subhajit Nandi & Anshu Singh, and Smt. Sapna Jain essentially write on the same theme - relevance of Vivekananda today and role of youth - using the same quotations from the '*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*'. This shows a lack of editorial screening and leads to avoidable duplication. Tushar Kanti Das and Mrs. Shubhi Gupta wrote on present society and nationalism, but conflate patriotism with nationalism and offer no empirical data. Dr. Dipak Kumar Singh stands out in this crowd with his data-driven analysis of youth demography and its linkage to NSS and NYKS schemes inspired by Vivekananda. Surat Sarkar's concluding Bengali chapter on Bharat Mata is devotional in tone, lacking critical distance.

Part-III on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose is structurally imbalanced with only three chapters, though it contains the best individual chapter of the entire volume. Dr. Sovana Mukherjee's critical analysis of Netaji's legacy is outstanding; using declassified files and INA trial records, she examines his socialist planning, secularism and the Rani Jhansi Regiment, offering a model of rigorous research. The remaining two chapters fail to match this standard. Ripsita Roy attempts the impossible task of synthesizing Vidyasagar, Vivekananda and Netaji in a few pages

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and ends up producing only a list while Bapan Roy and Rajib Lochan Bala provides a solid but purely descriptive narrative of Netaji's role in the freedom struggle and INA Trials with its resources, useful for students to understand what actually happened to INA after 1945.

The very architecture of the title unfolds like a scriptural invocation - Vidyasagar, Vivekananda, Bose : a triad that symbolises India's intellectual conscience, spiritual vigour and political audacity. The strength of this volume lies in its ability to reveal the structural interdependence of these three figures: how Vidyasagar's rational humanism fertilizes the soil for Vivekananda's spiritual nationalism and how Vivekananda's redefinition of selfhood inspires Bose's defiant political will.

This triune characterization is not a romantic overstatement. It is a thesis supported by rigorous analysis. Taken together, the three thinkers illuminate India's uninterrupted march from intellectual subjugation to civilizational self-assertion. The editors have ensured that this triadic framework becomes an analytical tool rather than a symbolic trope.

Vidyasagar: The Grammar of Reform and the Architecture of Rational Compassion

The volume's treatment of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar situates him not merely as a reformer but as an epistemic architect who placed India's ethical conscience on a rational foundation. Vidyasagar's insistence on widows' rights, women's education and social equality emerges here as part of a broader moral-scientific methodology - where logic, textual hermeneutics and compassionate humanism converge.

The reviewers and contributors successfully underscore that Vidyasagar's project was not iconoclastic destruction but moral reconstruction. His reformist imagination was grounded not in Western mimicry but in India's own ethical traditions, revitalized through reason. Thus, he becomes the "*intellect of India*"—measured, transformative, and deeply humane.

Vivekananda: The Metaphysics of Strength and the Spiritual Cartography of a Nation

The section dedicated to Swami Vivekananda stands as an intellectual bridge where metaphysics meets modernity. Vivekananda is interpreted not as a monastic idealist but as a strategic thinker who understood national awakening as a psychological and spiritual science. His vision, as portrayed in this volume, is neither confined to religious revival nor to philosophical abstraction; instead, it is presented as a disciplined project of civilizational reclamation.

The contributors highlight his unprecedented synthesis -- spirituality as service, faith as strength, religion as rationality and nationalism as character formation. In doing so, the editors reveal

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Vivekananda as the “visionary spirit of India” -- the one who transformed inward awakening into outward action.

Subhash Chandra Bose: The Revolutionary Grammar of Freedom and the Politics of Memory

In portraying Subhash Chandra Bose, the book reaches its crescendo. Bose becomes the embodiment of India’s political will were unyielding, morally fierce, historically conscious and strategically astute. His nationalism was not episodic rebellion but a disciplined science of liberation, grounded in sacrifice, ethical rigor and geopolitical foresight.

The discussions in this section powerfully confront colonial archives, contested narratives and the moral memory of the freedom struggle. Bose’s transformation of patriotism into an existential creed is analyzed through a methodological framework that combines historiography, archival critique and political theory.

My own contributions to this volume - “*Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose: Revolutionary Nationalism, Contested Archives and the Politics of Memory*” (pp. 230-241) and “*‘Tum Mujhe Khoon Do, Main Tumhe Azadi Dunga’: A Methodological and Historical Study of Netaji’s Slogan*” (pp. 242-249) - seek to strengthen precisely this aspect: that Bose’s legacy cannot be understood through celebratory myth alone but must be rigorously examined through scientific research, critical archival analysis and a deeper interrogation of memory politics.

A Civilizational Dialogue Across Generations

What distinguishes this book is its intellectual audacity. By bringing together Vidyasagar, Vivekananda and Bose -- the editors construct a civilizational dialogue -- between reason and spirituality, individual conscience and collective destiny, ethics and emancipation. The thematic unity of the volume demonstrates that India’s modern intellectual journey is not a fractured narrative but a coherent evolution guided by her own thinkers, not by imported paradigms.

The young scholars who crafted this work deserve commendation for their methodological clarity, archival sensitivity and interpretive maturity. Their scholarship reanimates India’s internal conversation with herself - a conversation that interrogates, inspires and elevates.

A Volume that Revitalizes India’s Civilizational Memory

Ultimately, Inspiring Ideas of India is not a mere edited collection but a strategic intellectual intervention. It challenges India’s contemporary scholars, policy thinkers and young readers to revisit foundational ideas through a scientific, critical and historically textured methodology. It compels the reader to recognize that India’s future cannot be architected on borrowed philosophies; it must be constructed upon the inner light of her own reformers, sages and

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revolutionaries. The work stands as a luminous testament to India's civilizational continuity - where Vidyasagar's pen, Vivekananda's voice and Bose's sword become three complementary expressions of the same national soul striving toward truth, dignity and liberation.

Overall Critical Evaluation: Strengths and Limitations

1. *Thematic Innovation*: Linking three reformers across a century under the rubric of compassion, man-making and courageous action is intellectually stimulating.
2. *Bilingual Scholarship*: The inclusion of 6 Bengali chapters alongside 17 English chapters ensures reach to both national and regional academia. It honours Vidyasagar's own commitment to vernacular.
3. *Interdisciplinary Contributors*: Contributors range from history, Political Science, Philosophy, Education, Law and Literature across India making this volume truly multidisciplinary.

Apart from this, Present volume have many areas to be improved e.g. Chapters as well as authors should follow strict academic format with uniformity of referencing style. The chapters also tend to be laudatory rather than critically interrogating contradictions e.g. Vidyasagar's failure on peasant question, Vivekananda's complex view on caste, Netaji's wartime alliances. The volume would benefit from a detailed Index and a comprehensive study on the '*Trio*'. Illustrations and Appendices are mentioned with references are commendable. Despite its limitations, this edited volume is a sincere and significant contribution to the field of intellectual history and reformer studies in Bengal. In an age of increasing political polarization where historical figures are either deified or demonized, this volume takes a balanced, educational approach. It reminds us that social reform is a continuous process.

This book is, thus, a call to reflection, to scholarly renewal and to civilizational awakening; a reminder that the "Inspiring Ideas of India" continue to guide her moral, intellectual and political voyage in the twenty-first century and beyond. It will be especially useful for undergraduate and postgraduate students of History, Bengali, Political Science and Education in colleges for whom access to such compiled bilingual material is rare. And for anyone interested in understanding how 19th century ideas of compassion and education still provide a compass for 21st century India's quest for justice and nationalism.