
Revisiting Eugenics and the Left: JBS Haldane, Diversity, and an Independent India.

Gordon Mcouat*¹

¹University of King's College – 6350 Coburg Road Halifax, NS CANADA B3H2A1, Canada

Abstract

Session: Eugenics I & II (Double session. Part I, eugenic traits: Amir Teicher, Rob Wilson, Caroline Lyster. Part II, politics and eugenics: Judy Johns Schloegel, Aida Roige Mas, Gordon McOuat) Diane Paul's pioneering "Eugenics and the Left" (1984) exploded received myths that eugenics was a movement of the political "Right". For Paul, eugenics was just as much a platform of the *Left*: progressivists, socialists, and liberals, envisioning a state supported, planned, biological intervention into social engineering. For Paul, exemplary of the movement was J.B.S. Haldane (1892-1964), geneticist, co-founder of modern neo-Darwinism, recognized leader of the scientific left, member of both the Communist Party and the Eugenics Society, and author of the strikingly bio-political *Inequality of Man* (1937). Paul's story, however, glossed over important developments in Haldane and his associates on the far Left. For, as Haldane traveled leftward his lifelong interest in biological difference and innateness intertwined, and was radically modified, by his "Communist" view that a good society would be built on irreducible diversity (the "inequality of man") not on engineering. This embryonic critique mustered strength as Haldane abandoned his prestigious chair at University College, London (1956), and his British citizenry (1961) and threw his lot with the newly Independent India and its programme to build a new modernist anti-imperial state with an associated new science (of biology and statistics) based on diversity. Haldane's last project to create a hybrid "Indian Perspective on Darwin provided the final ground for a thorough critique of the eugenic project and the political assumptions upon which it was built. Using new archival sources, this paper explores Haldane's late Indian period, his reworking of Darwinism in favour of radical diversity, and his crucial contribution to the "progressivist" critique of eugenics.

*Speaker