

# Using Gaming to Understand the Patterns of the Future - The Sarkar Game in Action

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## Abstract

*This article introduces the 'Sarkar Game', presents case studies, and offers insights from participants in role-playing the four types of power (worker, warrior, intellectual and capitalist). The Sarkar Game is used to help individuals and organisations better understand macrohistory and the structured shape of the future(s) as well as to audit the leadership style of their own organisations or institutions.*

**Keywords:** Macrohistory, P.R. Sarkar, Theories of Social Change, Types of Power, Leadership, Sadvipra, Six Pillars

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## Six Pillars and the Sarkar Game

As part of the Six Pillars foresight process (Inayatullah, Six Pillars, Foresight, Vol. 10 No. 1 2008, pp. 4-21), designed to make it easier for participants to gain insight into the social reality generally and foresight specifically, I run a number of role-playing games. These are intended to embody the concepts being discussed. The intent is also to move participants to other ways of knowing (Wildman & Inayatullah, 1996) so that they may thus gain a deeper and more personal understanding and appreciation of alternatives futures.

The games I use are the Sarkar Game, intended to give participants a better understanding of the third pillar, the timing of the future – macrohistory – and the CLA (Causal Layered Analysis) (Inayatullah, 2004) game, intended to grant participants an enhanced appreciation of the differing perspectives of litany, system, worldview and metaphor. I also use drama skits in which participants use the futures triangle to explore the pulls of the future, the pushes of the present and the weights of history. The skit format has been developed in conjunction with

Performance Frontiers and their Transformatory Performance approach to foresight (see [www.performancefrontiers.com](http://www.performancefrontiers.com)). Again, the approach is “whole of brain” (Queen’s University, 2013; Begley, 2011). By visualising and drawing the future, the participants can gain a better understanding of the future they want and, often, of the limits of their imagination. By role-playing the pushes of the future, they can often feel the power of technological and demographic change, and by role-playing the weight of history, they gain insights into the challenges of organisational and social change. The CLA game exposes robustness and reveals the supports, or lack thereof, of particular strategies at the litany, system, worldview and myth levels of analysis.

In this article I focus on the Sarkar Game, invented by futurists and academics Joe Voros and Peter Hayward (Inayatullah, Bussey, & Milojevic, 2006). This game is based on the theories of social change of Indian macrohistorian, and spiritual mystic, P.R. Sarkar. While I will not articulate his theory extensively, as this has been done elsewhere (see Inayatullah, 2002; 1999; Inayatullah & Fitzgerald, 1999), it is worth noting that for Sarkar the purpose of understanding history is to enhance agency so that an alternative future can be created. Even while he posited a cyclical theory of social change, his intent was to create a new form of leadership that could transform the cyclical to the spiralling, wherein the patterns of the past are transformed for a progressive future.

Transforming the classical Indic notion of *varna* (colour) or caste, Sarkar articulates four types of power, or, indeed, epistemes: the worker (*shudra*), the warrior (*ksatriya*), the intellectual (*vipra*) and the capitalist (*vaeshya*, or merchant, depending on the historical episteme). Each of these types has an aspect which is progressive and an aspect which is regressive. For example, the worker can fruitfully produce enhancing the entire system, or can be chaotic, destroying the system. The warrior is both the protector of the innocent and the killer. The intellectual innovates through new ideas, and can use ideas to “dogmatise” the world so that he can stay in a privileged epistemological position. The capitalist qua trader or owner can create wealth, keeping money moving, or can use financial power to “exploit” others by increasing inequity, by using capital strategically to weaken others, and to “keep it all for themselves”.

For Sarkar, these are not ideal types, but rather evolutionary categories. They are reflective of concrete historical eras. In the broad scheme of history, we have moved from the worker, to the warrior to the intellectual to the capitalist era. At the end of each full cycle, there is often a revolution or evolution and the cycle begins again (Sarkar, 1984). In organisations and institutions, when there are bottlenecks in each era, technical solutions are often proposed, but for Sarkar it is more important to engage in adaptive solutions, wherein the cycle not only continues to move, from warrior to intellectual, for example, but that the cycle does not stall during the pendulum’s regressive swing. Often each class, as Pareto argued earlier (Pareto, 1968), stays too long in power, in epistemological dominance. While overstaying, their creativity declines, and instead of innovation, dogma results, as with the intellectuals, *or* power becomes authoritarian and brutal, as with the warriors. With the capitalists, instead of prosperity for all, inequity expands, leading to a collapse of the overall system through a workers’ revolution or evolution. The capitalists use the other forces: military and police power and religious power to keep the system stagnant, instead of allowing it to become more inclusive; moving, for example, from a single bottom line of profit to a triple bottom line of environment, social

justice and prosperity.

In Sarkar's conception, the goal is to create a new class – the *sadvipra* - who can use aspects of each class in progressive ways. They are service-based, protective, innovators, and wealth-creators. By having a sense of the whole, the integrated, *sadvipras* can judge which skills are required for the good of all. They thus cannot be beholden to either their own personal, ego needs, or to religious, nation-state or other identity needs, but rather they must think and act for the entire planet. This expanded sense of identity Sarkar called neohumanism. Neohumanism, for Sarkar, liberates the intellect, allowing for deeper ways of knowing and the inclusion of the other. It is an escape route to ensure that the *sadvipras* do not slip into a particular class, which would ensure continued stagnation. While Sarkar framed his theory in planetary terms, it is equally applicable to organisations and institutions. Thus, participants can ask in a workshop setting, is a particular type of power dominant? Has a group stayed too long and thus not allowed the other ways of knowing to be expressed? What can be done to keep the cycle moving? Can the organisational cycle be transformed into a spiral?

Within the context of a foresight course or strategy workshop, I use the Sarkar Game within the “timing” pillar of the *Six Pillars* format. After presenting – in a workshop context – the first two pillars, *Mapping* (the future through the futures triangle) and *Anticipating* (through emerging issues analysis and the futures wheel), I move the discussion to the *Timing* of the future, which entails an analysis of when is it best to act. I explore the patterns of macrohistory, such as the linear, the cyclical, the pendulum, the spiral and bifurcation. Along with these “shapes” of history, seminal thinkers are glossed: Ibn Khaldun, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Arnold Toynbee, Pitirim Sorokin, P.R. Sarkar, Riane Eisler, Nikola Kardashev (Galtung & Inayatullah, 1997; Inayatullah, 2012). These frameworks and thinkers provide an overall context for futures thinking. This is done at an organisational level and participants ask questions such as: is my organisation in the midst of a pendulum swing toward centralisation or decentralisation? Is my nation or institution engaged in a linear rise toward economic development (like many Asian institutions, becoming wealthier, more democratic and more transparent) or is there a cyclical decline because of leadership overreach? These questions help to frame strategy. However, these framings are conceptual; through the Sarkar Game, learning is *embodied*.

Write Voros and Hayward:

P. R. Sarkar's 'Social Cycle' elegantly demonstrates how easily 'social roles' are adopted and how these roles bring forth partial and limited understandings of change and change processes. As a macrohistorical model of social change and as an embodiment the process of social construction, it is a pivotal learning element (Inayatullah, Bussey & Milojevic, 2006, p. 285).

And:

By 'creating' the experience of the social cycle in the classroom, via the playing of the 'Sarkar Game', students learn of their own social constructions and roles. They experience the frustration of how these roles and constructions limit the effectiveness of their actions. They can also recognise the qualitative difference in the potential of actions that arise (Inayatullah,

Bussey & Milojevic, 2006, p. 285).

For Hayward and Voros:

The Sarkar Game experience taps into the 'deep' scripts that we all have; scripts that cover role, power and relationship. Our societal processes have programmed those scripts into us and they continue to operate unconsciously until an experience draws them into consciousness thereby making them accessible to inquiry and examination (Inayatullah, Bussey & Milojevic, 2006, p. 291).

## The Script

The game begins by dividing the participants into four groups. Each group is given a script and tools. Workers get tools for labour, with the following script (adapted from Hayward & Voros, 2004):

*I am a worker or a simple peasant. I have individual wants; first - safety, security, food (to be free of my environment). When these are met I want belief, inspiration, faith (to be free from my suffering and fear of death). When these are met I want material comfort and wealth (to be free from want, work, discomfort and struggle). My power is chaos, the ability to disrupt. When satisfied I am quiet (for a while) and then I want, and demand, more from the system. I can stand against the system and bring it or myself down.*

Warriors are given plastic guns, and the following script:

*We are the warriors. We honour loyalty, courage and unity. We serve to protect the system from danger and chaos. We bring order where there is none. We enforce the wishes of the system. Our power is the ability to dominate the environment. Only we have the weapons.*

Intellectuals are given books, and the following script:

*We are the intellectuals. We search for the truth. We remove error and confusion. We use words and speech to convey ideas that give knowledge. We value ideas. Some of us have knowledge of scientific reality and some of us have knowledge of spiritual reality. Some of us as well use art, poetry and story to understand the past and present and create different futures. Our power is ideational. Only we can create ideas to believe in. We create the enlightenment.*

Capitalists are given cash, and the following script:

*We are the capitalists. We seek to apply ideas to create material growth. We seek opportunities to be successful. The more we have the more power we have. Our power is economic. Only we can create material wealth.*

The workers are asked to begin the game. As they work – build, clean, type - (or not), after a few minutes the warriors are invited into the game. They may suggest

improvements, for the workers to work harder or with more honour, or they may construct the workers as lazy and shoot them. As a discussion between workers and warriors begins, after five minutes or so, depending on whether there is “regression”, the intellectuals are brought in. They may engage in dialogue directly with the workers or with the warriors. After another five minutes or so, the capitalists are brought in. They can negotiate with any of the other three groups. At this stage, all four groups are active in playing out the dynamics of power. The game can then conclude, either with a resolution or a total system collapse. Timing when the next group is brought in and when the game should be concluded is somewhat intuitive. It is important for the facilitator to allow individuals to role-play and not judge, i.e. “this is how the game is meant to be played.” It is best to bring in the next group if there is a natural lull in the action or conversation, or if it appears that there is a deadlock; a new type of power or energy is required. After the game ends, it is crucial that there is a reflection period for the four groups and for the individuals in each group. What did they experience? How did they experience the other groups? What was their self-learning? What does this tell them about their own organisation? What is needed in terms of governance at the planetary level? I often have an observer evaluate the process, offering a reward (a bar of dark chocolate) to the group that the observer believes has been the most effective or successful. The observers and participants then reflect on the process and share what they saw. After reflections, the game is complete.

## Case Studies

The game can go a number of ways. Sometimes there is extensive negotiation between all parties and attempts are made to move toward consensus. Other times, violence is used to make a point. While warriors begin with the guns they do not always end up keeping the guns - guns can be sold or simply taken away. Recently, I have used water pistols, so that in case there is a shooting, the person who has been “killed” is marked (and usually moves to the floor) so everyone can see that she or he is no longer an active player (though “dead” players do attempt to speak from beyond the grave). And there are times when, once a number of players are killed, participants reflect and negotiate until a solution is reached.

While it may appear that the warriors have the real power, this is not the case. All have power, just of different types.

In one game, one of the workers used his script to create a marijuana joint. He then suggested to his co-workers that they had been working too hard and needed a rest. Soon all the workers were on the ground in an imagined state of stupor. Once the warriors arrived, they sat down and joined the workers. They intended to threaten them but the charisma and humour of the lead worker overwhelmed them. The intellectuals, too, went to the land of nod once the workers suggested that their strategies would improve with some creative juices. The capitalists were easily convinced once the lead worker suggested to them that they could make a fortune producing weed. Warriors could protect them against external parties.

At another workshop, a worker lay on a nearby couch, resting. Although there was bloodshed around her, her refusal to commit to any solution that did not respect her human rights led to a protracted negotiation through which she won the right to rest. She did not actively engage the others; rather she removed herself. My conclusion is that non-violent creative resistance can work, as Otpor (or “Otpur”,

see Lakey, 2003) clearly showed in the downfall of Slobodan Milosevic in the late 1990s. However, for capitalists this is not an option. Capitalists are least successful when they do not spend their money, and instead only show it. When they spend their cash, they can quickly move to a dominant position. They can use their cash to purchase weapons, to hire intellectuals to create more effective productivity schemes, or give workers incentives to keep on producing. Intellectuals, to some extent, have the most challenging task. When they inquire into the conditions of others, they tend to be successful. However, when they claim exclusivity of knowledge, then they are either ignored by the other classes or eliminated rather quickly by the warriors.

Write Hayward and Voros:

The Vipra role is a devastating one for many participants. Most have no idea how to operate within this episteme. It is obvious from many iterations of the game that most participants are incompetent in this role. ... Some participants comment that they have ‘nothing, only ideas’ whereas others have instrumental power and yet participants also realise that it is ideas, more so than instrumental power, that has changed the world. The vipra also tends to try and speak directly to the shudra-ego and by doing so the ksatriya is ignored. Often the weapons of the warriors are turned towards these ‘vipra-troublemakers’. One Warrior tellingly reported in the lecture that, “I originally thought that the shudra were the problem but then I listened to the vipra and I realised that they wanted to change things. They were the real problem”. Many participants recall that this is how it often feels when new ideas are brought to an organisation. Sarkar says that only the vipra can conquer the fear that the ksatriya have of their death by writing their history and thereby making their honour live forever. Most vipra do not understand how they can work with the ksatriya rather than just be seen as a threat. Effective vipra do not try to dominate the physical environment but attempt to adopt authoritative stances on the periphery. Almost no-one has played the vipra as a ‘large’ force—they are almost always small and come across as apologising for their ‘inconvenience’. The observation here is that neohumanist development is stunted without the spiritual leadership of the vipra. Without the vipra ideology is non-existent and the game is imbalanced. Thus the need for vipras to become sadvipras, to appropriate the qualities of other classes (Inayatullah, Bussey & Milojevic, 2006, p. 292-293)

Warriors that are overly prone to use their weapons ensure that the entire system fails. In a recent game with a regional department of health in Australia, the warriors first shot the workers, then the intellectuals and then the capitalists. I had earlier asked three players to judge the process, to give an award to the person they felt had won the game, the person who was the most effective. The evaluators gave the award to one of the intellectuals, who they felt had attempted to work for the system as a whole. The warriors, having eliminated their labour force, and their sources of ideas and capital, had reached a dead-end. I then asked the entire group to reflect on the outcome. They suggested that the health system was reactive, short-term-oriented, risk averse and that it acted as if threats were everywhere, within and outside the system. Thus, the immediate response was to eliminate all potential threats; the result was that the entire system fell apart.

An international policing group followed a similar pattern. However, the warriors in this workshop did attempt to negotiate with the other parties before eliminating them. Wisely, the warriors kept two of the capitalists alive so that cash would keep coming to them. Again, the evaluators judged that the intellectuals had won since they attempted to create win-win solutions. They were given a bar of dark chocolate posthumously. The warrior who had led the attack was concerned afterwards that the game had been a psychometric test and that I would report him to his National Police Commissioner, thus putting a stumbling block on his career path in the police force. On reflection, similar reasons to those of the health department officials were used to explain their behaviour: police are short-term oriented, risk averse (public and political criticism) and fearful (quite justifiably) of other groups (Inayatullah, 2013).

Recently, at a course for senior executives in Australia at the Mt Eliza Executive Education Centre, the warriors quickly began to bully the other classes, eventually killing quite a few. However, one of the intellectuals convinced the warriors to put down their weapons and negotiate with the other classes to create a productive economic system for all parties. However, this was only possible once it dawned on participants that they were eliminating the very people they needed to succeed. Thus, quite swiftly, a learning cycle emerged in which those who survived realised – in real-time – that the victory of one group was occurring at the cost of other groups; indeed, of the system as a whole. They adapted and optimised conditions so that it became possible to move to a higher order level. Through *sadvipra* leadership, the cycle had become progressive, creating a spiral.

For Sarkar, this is the purpose of the social cycle, to move people to the position of the *sadvipra* – the leader who exists not for a particular group but for the good of all. This requires seeking win-win solutions and using the core attributes of each class wisely – the ability to serve others, to work; the ability to protect others, the ethical warrior; the ability to use ideas to create innovation; and, the ability to ensure that money keeps on circulating, so that the entire system can benefit.

With one group of deans in Southeast Asia, over time (almost 20 minutes) almost everyone sat down in one group. All weapons had been put away and a shared vision created. When I asked for the secret to their success, they said, “In the West, people agree to disagree. We, here, agree to agree.” This was quite remarkable and showed the power of deliberation, of trust and of a few taking a leadership position and convincing others that the good of all was primary.

In a recent Sarkar Game held in Bellagio, Italy for a UNESCO foresight project, the workers managed to hold centre stage by literally camping out in the middle space. Like “Occupy Wall Street” protesters, they moved chairs into the middle of the game space, and refused to move. They negotiated with the warriors to create win-win solutions, listened to intellectuals and discussed financial incentives with the capitalists. Even when they were threatened they were unwilling to move from centre state, where they were resting after a long day’s work. The others groups became hesitant, uncertain of their strategy. A capitalist did attempt to purchase a gun from a warrior, but she refused to give up her weapon as she suspected that her honour and integrity would be compromised. The intellectuals were successful in selling their ideas to the capitalists: in total, two books were sold. However, beyond that, the intellectuals reflected that they were the most marginalized. Indeed, in the context of the broader research question of the future of futures research, there was

a lack of interest from the other classes in purchasing the “enlightenment” offered by the intellectuals. After the game, the capitalists remained on the side, with the workers putting their chairs between them and the intellectuals. If Bert Hellinger’s work on spatiality and embodiment is to be believed, this positioning should not be seen as accidental, and certainly not as insignificant (Hellinger & ten Hövel 1999). The marginalised physical reality mirrors what many foresight practitioners feel in the real world – a desire for a post-industrial, green, gender partnership world, but an inability to create it: ever the bridesmaid, never the bride.

Intellectual marginalisation, however, while apparent from the outside, may not be the experience of the intellectuals themselves. In a recent game as part of a two day workshop conducted for the Family Day Care Association, the intellectuals defined their task in decidedly narrow terms. The workers swiftly decided to construct a building. They worked diligently and then decided to take a rest. At that time, the warriors entered the game and swiftly and mercilessly eliminated all the workers. The intellectuals then entered the game and, instead of speaking to the warriors or engaging with them in any capacity, proceeded to count the dead workers and take copious notes as to the cause of death. Once they were finished they politely went to their table and sat down and compared notes. The capitalists entered and immediately went to the warriors, purchased their guns, and then held up the warriors, thus ending up with the guns and taking back their original investment. One intellectual made a small amount of money conducting additional research for the capitalists. On reflection, the lessons of this game were many: most significantly, research in the family day care culture is neither advisory nor policy-based but rather conservative and data-oriented, counting what the researchers had been told to count. As one person said, “we just do what we are told.” They did not feel powerful. When I asked the warriors why they shot the workers, they replied: “well, you told us to.” I said I had not told them to, and the bystanders (in this case, since there were 60 people in the room, and about seven per table – only four tables played) agreed with me. Then one said, “Well, the script said we should eliminate the workers.” I read out the script and they noted that nothing in fact had been said about killing the workers. The role-playing had accurately portrayed the participants’ experience in the real world.

## Insights

Insights vary post-game. In the case of Family Day Care, the analysis was that the future is *done* to them – and thus, when they do have power, instead of using it wisely, they simply react. The award from this game went to the capitalists, not for being ethical – they were not – but for being strategic, for moving the energy, for spending money (even if they later got it back). The system was unable to deal with private capital, and indeed this mimics the current reality with *private* family care providers seen as a kind of “Gollum” from *The Lord of the Rings*, captured by the allure and evil of the money-power spirit, to rephrase Spengler (Spengler, 1962). In contrast, Family Day Care is seen as Bilbo the Hobbit; small, homely, kind and capable of doing great things, in this context of raising children to be great human beings, contributing to the world. The meta-lesson was clear: without losing their core story, Family Day Care participants needed to expand their abilities in research, in regulation and certainly in raising and spending capital. Workers they knew how to be, but holding the spaces of the other archetypes would require far more



leadership transformation.

For the futurists, the primary insight was marginalisation. The second was the ability of the workers to control physical space, and to leverage this for winning the game. The futurists needed to use the tangible to help to create the visionary, the intangible.

Scientists at one federal-level agriculture department understood that, while they saw themselves as intellectuals, the executives in the Ministry – senior bureaucrats – had adopted a capitalist worldview, and saw them as workers. The insight allowed them to understand why they felt undervalued. As one senior scientist said, “Now I understand. I see myself as an international scientist. But the Minister sees me as his lackey worker.” This insight helped the scientist rethink his strategy when approaching the Minister and his staff.

In one national department of statistics, the Sarkar Game helped the participants to understand that those who collect field data, while seeing themselves as workers, wished to be warriors. Field workers – data collectors – asked for warrior-like uniforms and titles like “Data Force”. They believed that they needed the uniforms to protect them from rude citizens, untethered dogs and other obstacles. Managers in the Statistics Department began to understand that they needed to see field data collectors through their own lens, and not the lenses that they had been using; i.e. not as intellectuals but as “data warriors”.

While from the outside it may appear that certain groups were given more resources, this is not the case. Each group had resources that they could use and resources they could decide not to use. While certainly the warriors could quickly ensure that there were no winners, they could also negotiate. In one game, for a Canadian policing board, the warriors refused to use their weapons, even when provoked. Later, on reflection, these police officers argued that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is meant to negotiate first; weapons are a last resort, a strategy which, they argue, differentiates them from their south-of-the-border neighbours. In a Sarkar Game held in a Confucian country, one intellectual took the money he had been offered by the capitalists (to engage in activities to help the capitalists to control the other groups) and threw it on the ground, stating: “I cannot be bought.” The power of his declaration swung the game dramatically and allowed the intellectuals to frame the discussion.

## Individual Insights

While this is a collective game, insights for individual players are also possible. One worker regretted that he let the leader of his own group worker take over, saying to me afterward that it wasn't a fun game, because X had taken over. For this disgruntled participant, the game became an opportunity to explore his passivity. Another warrior, pre-game, had constructed herself as Gandhian. She was serene, pregnant and very much the Gaian mother; but during the game, she quickly used her weapons to eliminate all who resisted. On reflection, she could see that, in her day-to-day life, she had disowned her aggressive or warrior self. Having done so, instead of owning or asserting power – commanding power – she *demand*ed power, and when unable to do so, “killed” others. A gentle CEO, as well, quickly became a killer during the Sarkar Game. It was obvious on reflection that he was tired of always being the pleasant negotiator. He needed to learn warrior-like skills to become a better leader. Monks playing this game commented that they failed at

the capitalist role because they did not spend the funds they had been given. They felt uneasy in the merchant role and thus did poorly. This alerted them to the skill development required, not in order to become capitalists, but to better understand money and the economy.

Thus, the game becomes an excellent way to explore one's own leadership style; one's own repressed, projected and disowned selves (Stone & Stone, 1989). For organisations, the Sarkar Game aids in exploring what aspects of leadership are weak or missing, and what aspects need to be nurtured. It offers an understanding of the dynamics of power. Most significantly, the Sarkar Game offers a way forward in changing history and the future.

The game can be played as a stand-alone organisational intervention to explore power and leadership and the mechanisms and stages of change, or it can be played in the context of a foresight workshop. I tend to play the game on the second day of a two day workshop in the "timing" pillar. After the Sarkar Game reflection, we move to causal layered analysis, which further explores scripts, structures and narratives. The four types of power are seen as archetypes, with the goal in CLA being to transform the traditional narratives that bind into new stories that better match preferred visions of the future. The Sarkar Game thus allows not just for an understanding of the deep structures of power, but creates the possibility of new forms of leadership, of a transformation of history and self.

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