On Decolonizing Theory

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Classical Indian thinkers advised readers to practice an extreme form of reading. To read meant reading everything, reading from the start – from the title itself. That kind of reading would be appropriate in this case, because the author applauds such thinkers. We must then start with the title – though following one distinguished tradition of Indian philosophy of language can lead to intriguing questions. If meaningfulness lies in the sentential connection and boundedness of terms, is a title a virtual sentence, or is it meaningless because of its non-sentential character? There can be no doubt that the title – though by convention it cannot be a sentence, contains evident meaning intent. What then does the combination of these two words – decolonizing and theory – mean?

What is theory?

What is meant by theory? This is the simpler term to interpret: clearly what Nigam wants to be decolonized is the theory working *inside* and *behind* the thinking of modern social science. We could probably step ahead, and say that he is primarily concerned with social science thinking in the world once colonized, because it is in these specific thought geographies that 'theory' needs decolonizing. However, if that task is accomplished, that, in turn, is likely to have a transformative effect on the overall architecture of social science theory. His concern then is with those types of large theories that have framed and shaped analytical and historical thinking on the major aspects of our social and historical life – theories of history, of state/politics, of economy/production, of society/orders of class/caste, of culture, or secularization – change or decline of religious life. The central engagements of the work are with theories of history, particularly of modernity, the present phase of history[1], followed by three constituent parts of this transformation – sovereignty or the rise of the modern state, secularization or the decline of religious experience of the world, and

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capitalism or the transformations in the productive economy. There can be no disagreement that the primary epistemic task of modern social sciences is to reflect critically on these themes.

Large critical transformations in knowledge-systems occur through two types of reworking. Some are arguments at the general level: questions are asked about the largest processes, or sometimes connections established that were not observed before. Some arguments work on smaller segments of cognitive themes – a particular structure of power, a specific system of social hierarchy, a special kind of capitalist corporation or work process. By proposing an altered analysis of these smaller themes, such work forces a reconsideration of the field or the discipline as a whole. Nigam's book is pitched at the general level – though it also offers analyses of individual problems or moments of social experience, which in his view should be analyzed differently, and he shows how such unaccustomed analysis can be done.

Colonialism was a vast, internally diverse, phenomenon. One could say, echoing Weber, that one cannot write a history of colonialism, only of colonialisms. European colonial power – in its political, economic and epistemic forms - encountered quite different social and epistemic universes in its path to world conquest. Subjection of each social universe – the Indian, the Islamic, the Latin American, the East Asian, the African[2] – required different types of power strategies, and produced different kinds of eventual configurations of subordination. The only similarity amongst them was that these were all colonial. If this is accepted, it would follow that the task of de-colonizing would be highly specific. Colonized subjects from South Asia will have to deal with their own special demons which may have little similar to others except their rather general demonic quality. This historical diversity is acknowledged in Nigam's work though it also succeeds in bringing to relief the central questions, and the overarching problem of modernity which floats over all of them.

What is decolonizing?

At a bare minimum, decolonizing must mean the end of 'colonizing'. I think we should also note the verb – which is an intentional activity in the present. Our focus should shift to what colonizing means. Is it so hard to understand? I think it is, because a simple but quite powerful counter-question could be: why do you continue to complain against colonialism – which is long past? Colonialism ended in 1947, and what has happened since is surely what Indians have done to Indians, not the British. We should not dismiss a truth contained in this objection as well – though this is of course too simple. What was colonialism, or rather the process of colonizing of the world by the West? The verb in this form draws attention to the fact that it was a vast scene of contradictory enterprise – in which the project of one side prevailed decisively over that of the other. Though we should be careful not to overplay a conflictual picture of the

colonial project. Acts of European colonization were not protested and resisted by the 'colonized' every inch of the way – though that is an attractive picture to which nationalists have habituated us, and linked to an idealized picture of philosophical anthropology that suggests that it is part of human nature to resist imposition of others' projects.

I want to complicate the usual simplistic picture of colonizing in two ways. Colonialism, first, had many sides, and without a disaggregative analysis it is hard to grasp fully what it did to colonized societies. Second, colonialism was not entirely a process of imposition of foreign institutions on a reluctant society by use of raw power: it was a complex mixture of emulation and resistance. Let us start with the many-sidedness. First, colonialism was a long historical process which affected decisively, sometime irreversibly (this will be important for the meaning of the 'de' in de-colonizing) nearly all aspects of life of the colonized societies. Evidently, colonial domination influenced and altered the fundamental nature of political power, the productive processes and the nature of the economy, the cultural landscape and epistemic practices of our societies. This is not necessarily a truism. Since colonialism was primarily a process involving seizure of political sovereignty, that was the most obvious aspect of its history. In this sphere too, however, we can find mixtures of collaboration and emulation. After British power was solidly entrenched, large numbers of elite Indians became its willing, grateful and valued collaborators. Imperialist history understandably overplays this collaboration, and claims at times that British colonialism was in effect one set of Indians ruling the others according to benign new rules – like rule of law – laid down by the British. Apart from the fact that this was to an extent empirically true, it is common to find elite Indians who still feel thrilled that their ancestors were in the ICS (Indian Civil Service). By our acquiescence with this gloating, we show our concurrence with the idea that these highly talented individuals were engaged in a heroic task of pulling their ignorant and unruly countrymen into some modern order of life. Many of their successors, sometimes in the same family, joined the IAS and continued to carry the half-White man's burden. Even in the political sphere, the history of colonialism should not be painted as an epic struggle in which, for two hundred years, Indians were fighting the dominance of the British in continuous wars of position and maneuver.

Nationalist self-reflection produced a rich literature on colonialism's economic processes. The critique of economic nationalists could be extended to claim that processes like de-industrialization, or economic drain either continued after political independence, or left deep long-term consequences which should not be marked by temporal boundaries determined by political events. Marxist economists who inherited, continued and expanded the economic critique of colonialism – and who were influential in Indian intellectual life after the 1950s – stressed the idea that the end of political colonialism did not spell an instant end to economic dependency. Rather, economic dependency could continue after political freedom, and if not

counteracted, could hollow out the content of political sovereignty. The third world was full of states which were formally independent, but lacked the ability to control their own economic life, or resist subordination to an unjust world capitalist order. A large number of our Leftists spent time to prove that Nehru's government was no better than South Vietnam's. This is a serious matter, because though they themselves have frequent lapses of memory, and now direct faint praise towards his government, this was after all one major reason for splitting the communist movement into three parts – each intent on exterminating others before they began their struggle against the bourgeoisie. In assessing the historical effects of colonialism, economic analysts recognized the continuing presence of colonial structures, and continuing effects of earlier processes.

The sphere of culture can be defined in many equally plausible ways. One will comprise all intellectual activities from painting pictures to teaching mathematical astronomy; another will separate the artistic side of culture – literature, painting, music, media from the more epistemic side consisting of knowledge systems contained in scientific practices – in the wide sense, not referring to natural sciences – and production. I prefer the second approach for a simple reason that it is both analytical and historical. It seems to me that artistic practice absorbed influences from the West, but mostly *on their own terms*. These were not subordinated in any sense. Few musicians left Karnatic vocal and started desperately to learn opera singing. Tagore absorbs diverse influences from the West, but remains a recognizably Bengali-Indian poet. Bankimchandra, Madhusudan Datta tried briefly to do what academics practice as an inflexible rule – to compose in English in some high Western style- but quickly dropped the idea. It is remarkable how this agonizing debate about 'de-colonizing' ourselves would be comically redundant in the arts. Salil Chaudhury set one of his songs to a tune stolen from Mozart's 40th symphony: but what came out was a quintessential Hindi film song. We should lavish analytical attention to that accomplishment, instead of taking it for granted. In fact, I believe this could be a fruitful site for discussion: when an Indian academic theorist composes a paper whose subject matter is recognizably Indian, but whose style of theoretical thinking - that lies behind the writing – is derived from Mill, Spencer, Marx, Weber, Rawls, Foucault Derrida or Agamben is what comes out like 'itna na mujhse tu pyar badha'? An Indian formed by a common musical sensibility, who has never heard of Mozart, can ignore his own ignorance and tap joyfully to Chaudhuri's tune. He would enjoy it as something familiar, and musically intelligible, Indian, rather than stumble over the contusions of the theoretical terms from Marxism, analytical philosophy, structuralism, post-structuralism, postmodernism or critical race theory. Why is a passage from Chaudhuri instantly enjoyable, and a passage from high academic writing instantly excruciating? This is my long apology for not using 'cultural' in the wider meaning, and focusing on the 'scientific'.

Indian culture is not colonized, academic culture is. Problems of decolonizing are specific, and particularly acute in the social sciences.

Colonialism was a many-sided, complex historical process. Each side of it had a different temporality: its own separate causal process, time-line, its own peculiar punctuations. It follows that each aspect would have to be dealt with according to the specificities of its separate history. Economic effects of colonialism cannot be dealt with in the same way as its political aspects. Quite simply, it seems that the major problem with colonialism is that the more crude and overt aspects were harder to fight against, but easier to eradicate. Aspects that were less direct, overt are harder to erase. Political colonialism ended with independence: economic dependency remained a major structural entanglement in the capitalist world economy where it was quite possible that, if a state did not adopt counter-measures, it was possible for its economy to come under more intense control of large economic players from the centers of capitalist globalization. Decolonization in science or knowledge raised other kinds of issues: was decolonization good? What would it mean to decolonize knowledge? Was decolonization even possible?

Academic demand for incessant originality pushed recent writers to claim that no one thought about decolonizing epistemic cultures before them, or Edward Said.[3] As Robert Young's historical account showed, this is simply untrue. But we cannot merely applaud nationalist writers for their sensitivity, courage, intelligence and other elevated virtues. We should follow closely what they thought was the core of the problem, what they saw as solutions, and why, despite their plausibility, their suggestions were mainly ignored. How many Bengali – not to speak of Indian – social scientists know of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, or K C Bhattacharyya?

Anti-imperialist nationalist thought had developed a set of responses to the question of cognitive decolonization. Because some strands of nationalism saw cultural and epistemic colonization as the central determining process of subjection. Drawing upon traditions of economic nationalism, and influenced by Leninist economic critiques, the Nehruvian elite developed clear objectives regarding knowledge production after independence. Colonialism was viewed as an obstacle in the path of modernity – growth of modern science and technology – of which knowledge was a crucial element. Here the sudden and inexplicable demise of Gandhian thought had negative consequences. Obviously, one difference between Gandhi and Nehru was on the question of modern knowledge. Gandhi saw colonialism as the imposition of an inferior civilization on the colony. Nehru thought colonialism obstructed the achievement of real modernity. At the centre of this difference was their totally opposed responses to modern knowledge systems. Nehru viewed them as triumphs which had to be acquired to the full. Gandhi looked at them with deep suspicion. Unfortunately, before Ashish Nandy's work, and Ramchandra Gandhi's efforts in philosophy, there was little serious critical opposition to a general acceptance of modern Western knowledge – in all fields – including

social science.[1] On the question of knowledge in *natural science and technology* the task appeared relatively simple. Even a conservative Hindu thinker, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, had acknowledged that there was no dishonor in learning some form of knowledge from those who knew it better. Ancient Indians may have had a great scientific tradition in the 10th century; but in the modern age, European science was clearly the most advanced. Indians should simply learn this science, and master its cognitive and technological procedures. A policy of scientific training dovetailed easily with the larger objective of industrial self-reliance. Scientists had to be trained in major world centers of learning, and return to practice science at an advanced level to attain self-reliance. Ideally, cognitive dependency would be removed if science knowledge in Indian institutions could parallel levels of advanced research abroad. In this paradigm of knowledge production, ideally, self-reliance meant achieving what Germany and Japan demonstrated in particular fields of technology. Eventually, self-reliance meant an independent capacity to produce advanced research – so that Germany outstripped England in some technological fields, and Japan seized leadership in electronics and car manufacturing. In India, little intellectual questioning occurred around the question of the positivist method in social science – on whether the right policy for social sciences simply paralleled the self-reliance projects of scientific-technical knowledge and economic industrialization. Clearly, this was a crucial question: because, if social sciences were seen as just another branch of scientific knowledge, these had to be learnt from major Western centers and attempts were to be made to achieve self-reliance in exactly the same way. If social sciences were conceived entirely differently – as being centered on a different type of epistemology – such training would be of limited use.[4] Interestingly, few scholars with a critical, dissenting perspective – followers of Gandhi or Tagore, or scholars with training in traditional modes of thought based in Sanskrit or Persian –presented critical objections to the default positivist positions.[5] Language may have played a part in this silence. Traditional scholars rarely took part in general intellectual discussions in modern institutional arenas – even in vernaculars, if ever in English.[6] Gandhians and other critics took part in lively debates on political questions. Some scholars of distinction – like sociologists and economists based in the Universities of Lucknow and Pune – made interesting and forceful interventions in specific fields, mainly in philosophy, sociology and economics.[7] But larger debates regarding basic principle were rare. In cases like K C Bhattacharyya's lecture on 'Swaraj in ideas', the critical argument was too general; and its central argument was not translated into the intelligible language of specific disciplines – to turn it into a catalyst for serious further debate. It was periodically invoked for ritual reverence.[8] Intellectual debates routinely happened through sharp exchanges between liberals and Marxists, but both sides were similarly Eurocentric.[9] Liberals examined Indian developments through girds of concepts and criteria drawn entirely from

constitutional or social scientific analyses of Western democracies. Marxists did not evince much awareness of conceptual historicism. Empirical evidence that the Mughal economy was quite different from the medieval European was given a perfunctory acknowledgement in the concept of Indian feudalism. Feudalism as a category was applied to designate all pre-modern economic systems in all cultures and regions – making it, ironically, as universal as modern capitalism.[10] However, the debates about Asiatic mode of production, Indian feudalism, and finally the odd dispute regarding 'was there feudalism in Indian history?' contained ideas and argument which showed unease with the happy Eurocentrism of Indian social science. Sociology was an exceptional discipline in one respect, because its central cognitive subject was the caste system which compelled recognition of historicist specificity. Yet, even in this field, uses of terms like class, stratification, hierarchy exhibited an undertow of thinking that sought to assimilate it into more 'mainstream' European/Western forms of social inequality. If the 'positivist dispute', and consequently, the distinction between natural and historical sciences, had been taken more seriously – as in the US through the widening influence of German thought through figures like Arendt or institutions like the New School of Social Research – these initial moves might have expanded into a more substantial perception of Eurocentrism. Absence of attention to the 'positivist dispute' in the 1960s – from both Liberals and Marxists - meant that an opening towards the question of decolonization was wasted. This is simply to give ourselves a historical view of the latent presence of this question, and the baffling indifference of scholars to its existence. In a sense, it was always there, in another, it was always ignored.

Let us return to look at the meaning of *de-colonizing*. At the first sight, decolonizing seems to mean dispensing with the effects of colonialism. But we must ask: should we dispense with something simply because it has come from the West through colonial contact? Also, it is possible to de-colonize at all? Can we dispense with the thinking – often colonial or colonized – of the last century and a half? If that is not what it means, what is its meaning? The past exists in two forms – as remnants, and as effects. Clearly effects cannot be erased, remnants can. What could be the meaning of decolonizing in systems of social science knowledge?

Why concentrate on theory?

Aditya is, I think, entirely right in focusing on *theory* rather than making a more general, exhaustive criticism involving empirical social science. This is a problem that we discover if we seek to think with Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, and wish to continue the thrust it inaugurated. A major problem with Said's critique is its lack of logical clarity on some points and its organization. Are we supposed to be outraged by the *general* bias of Europeans about the inferiority of Oriental peoples, or only of the individuals who wrote

those texts[11], or painted those pictures[12]? Should we criticize and reject only the *depictions* of the Orient, or are there deeper, bigger *thought structures* lurking behind these individual instances and forcing their thinking to be what they are? Why should bias be systematic otherwise? Though Said is primarily concerned with literary writers, and makes occasional references to theorists like Marx, it is possible to read his material in a different way, and conclude that prejudice becomes systematized and general only if these work through not just empirical observation, but theoretical frames. What is really troubling in Orientalism is not the quantitative measure of these empirical observations, but the nature of the theoretical apparatus that produces such observation, and normalizes it. The task of criticism then must target – not the series of objectionable pictures, but the method of seeing that goes into the painting, the way of thinking, not the individual results of seeing in particular cases. Aditya is clear sighted on this question: his critique is therefore aimed not so much at particularly egregious instances of prejudice, as at theories of social science.

What is the real task of epistemic reconstitution here? Said's critique does not form into a serious argument because it remains a series of episodic critiques – of individual literary figures or historians, and of a series of historical theorists. He does not indicate what is the connection between them. He does not specify that in his own thinking itself we detect two levels, and these ideational norms are hidden inside the theories. Nor does he say – though he comes very close saying – that the trouble lies with the general theory of modernity at the heart of the Enlightenment. It is not that no European thinkers objected to their experience of modernity: but we do not find alternative theories of modernity. Aditya agrees that we must move forward through an attempt to produce an outline of a different theory of modernity itself.

Aditya makes a reference to my observation that taking recourse to existing theory inevitably leads to a kind of ontological depletion of the non-Western. 'Ontological depletion' needs to be thought through more closely. One immediate sense of this inheres in the description of our reality itself – in the basic moves of description through what can be called, in logical terms, its persistent *negativity*, its lack of a positive account. His critique mentions the well-known argument that Western theories of modernity force us to think of our history through lacks or absences. Descriptive depletion is a separate argument. This is different from saying that the principal feature of our colonial economy is its lack of proper capitalism, or a lack of a bourgeoisie, or a proper bourgeoisie i.e., a bourgeoisie that behaves like the Parisian entrepreneurs of the nineteenth century. Our history is then turned into a lament of the inhabitants of the 'waiting room of history'. This is a separate argument. I have made this argument elsewhere, and will make a brief reference. To use a color metaphor, if I have many jackets of different colors, and want to bring the red jacket, I can work through a dichotomous distinction between red and *other* colors – which are all turned conceptually into non-red. But non-red is not a

color description; it is vaguer, less precise, because it is a negative reference, not a positive one through its own color designation. Existing theories of modernity push us to begin our historical or social science – even at the basic descriptive level – from a conceptual operation of this kind by calling an object non-red: 'traditional' in Weberian theory is non-modern or pre-modern, feudal in Marxist parlance is non-capitalist or pre-capitalist.[13] There are clear limits to what can be analytically accomplished when the first move of descriptive pointing itself is negative. No conceptual purpose is served by characterizing the Mughal economy as feudal, and then by way of expostulation adding the qualifier 'Indian'. If the Mughal economy is really not like the medieval European, is it not better to say so at the start, instead of confusing ourselves by saying first that it is feudal, and then saying that it is not. Conceptually, this is both confusing and uneconomical.

Aditya wants to go beyond my emendations of the theory of modernity. Here I have a question. 'To go beyond' it theoretically suggests altering the explanatory mechanism the theory offers. It seems to me that what he suggests is providing a longer epistemic genealogy for the rationalist elements of intellectual modernity – which I welcome. Acknowledging this longer and spatially complex history of rationalism – through Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd – is important in trying to counteract the narrative of a big bang theory of the origin of modernity in Europe. Clearly, in the history of Islam powerful rationalist strands existed – themselves drawn from Greek philosophy. A combination of processes of military skill, scientific development, bureaucratic rule, juridical elaboration had for several centuries placed Islamic culture in a commanding position in Asia and Europe. The story of the loss of Greek knowledge and its recovery through Islamic channels is well known. Historians of thought would acknowledge that before Aquinas, Greek knowledge was gathered, systematized and developed by Islamic thinkers. I do not think however that these irrefutable facts should persuade us to trace the origins of modernity to Islam. Though, it is an interesting counterfactual to think about whether Islamic cultures might have developed knowledge systems in similar directions – leading later to something like an irruption of modernity. Simply, modernity was either European, or not. I still believe it was. In the next section on Quijano, it seems Nigam too accepts that it was European modernity that conquered the world: he does not think that lack of mention of Europe's intellectual debt to Ibn Rushd vitiates their sense of the history of modernity as a new formation that changes the world fatefully.

Zizek as an irrelevance

I shall ignore the detour through Zizek. Aditya himself believes that the Zizek discussion does not add anything to his argument: it is meant as an illustration of an attitude. That attitude is so common and well known that I am surprised

that he thought an illustration was necessary. Notably, Aditya is not concerned with Zizek's other substantive arguments, but with his relevance as a commentator on non-Western thinking. It would be odd to waste time discussing what the author himself characterizes as a waste of time. That does not mean that Zizek or other Western Marxists do not have colonial devotees in India. Devotion is a mysterious affect: it irrupts towards the most unexpected objects, and for inexplicable reasons. Consider the vast devotion for Donald Trump. Love, as the saying goes, is blind.

Theories of Modernity

On the question of modernity, Nigam's argument is that theorists should move 'beyond' the analysis presented in various contemporary conceptions of modernity – of which he chooses Charles Taylor's analysis and mine for specific mention. I cannot understand where exactly his objection to my argument lies. My argument was concerned to clarify the idea of 'multiple modernities' – a strand of thinking which worked against the conventional orthodoxy that modernity starts as a process in Europe which 'spreads' or diffuses to other parts of the world. Nationalists at times portrayed this process as one of pure violence and coercion. Calmer portrayals acknowledged it as a complex process of both emulation and coercion; but a major feature of this line of thinking was an expectation of processual re-enactment. With more careful historical scrutiny of non-European colonial modernity, it became clear that paths of modernity rarely led to a replication story outside of societies under settler-colonial domination. Initially, this was sought to be explained through an argument of transition – that such complex processes took time. Subsequently, a complication was added to this by admitting the role of social practice. If there was resistance to modern transformations, it was not surprising that those transitions would fail to occur. My paper was driven by a simple conceptual dissatisfaction: it was not legitimate to claim multiple paths of modernity if we could not point to a 'mechanism' that made it happen in quite that way. What diversified the paths? My suggestion was that if we disaggregated 'modernity' into several component processes that were relatively separate, this provided an opening to theorize the *causal process* of multiplicity. It seemed to me that two pictures of modernity could be constructed after this disaggregation. I do not think classical theorists of modernity did not see this possible decomposition. We should get over the universal tendency – after Lyotard's pathbreaking discovery of misleading metanarratives – to think of classical thinkers of modernity as naïve believers in ridiculous simplifications. That belief heightens the semblance of our own subtlety; but is hard to sustain in face of textual evidence. I think important modern thinkers saw this decomposition, or complex character fairly clearly, but in most cases, they advanced some version of a *primacist* device to overcome the difficulty. They simply posited a cause of causes – which absolved them from the responsibility

of following up on this idea towards a more complex presentation of modernity. Weber, clearly, thought carefully about these questions in his reflections on historical method. It seems to me that Aditya agrees with both my moves: of decomposition, and the distinction between the symmetrical-functionalist and the sequential pictures. I briefly mentioned – because it was a mere outline – that the path of modernity was also determined by the diversity of the initial conditions. I do not agree with him that there is no singular theory which gathers all these processes together. It is a theory that is vaguely accepted by all, but stated by none: a theory that works powerfully in the popular narratives of modernity as being caused by 'Enlightenment' – i.e., a rationalist form of philosophical thinking that restructures philosophy, corrodes religious beliefs, drives the rise of modern science and technology. When this triumphant form of rationalist thinking is applied to different fields of thought and practice, each one is discretely transformed, and because it is the same principle of 'rationality' that is behind every single transformation, these can be coalesced into a larger process that Weber termed 'rationalization'.[14] Clearly, Weber does not believe that rationalization starts with modernity. In his sociology of religion, he plainly reveals his belief that this slow but inexorable operation of 'rationality' works as a law of human history – in both thought and organization of social practices. But in the modern period of history, it gets a qualitative acceleration, and is able to rework all substructures of social life. There is thus a powerful theory that unites all these processes. Writing in the German context, Habermas may have simply taken it to be too familiar to require formal statement. In the field of rationalist philosophical thought, Aditya points out, Islamic culture played an essential connective role. I now think we should not say that Greek knowledge was 'lost' to Western Europeans. That is implicitly buying into the anachronistic construction of Europe – assuming that the theoretical 'Europe' that existed in the seventeenth century also existed since ancient Greece – was merely lost in the middle. Aditya is quite right that we must historicize this story, and see this Europe of modernity as an historical emergence in which Islamic rationalist philosophy played an essential role. After Aristotle was rediscovered, and thought upon by Christian religious thinkers, Europeans created a rationalistic intellectual culture centred around research in science and speculation about politics.[15] I entirely accept this history, and agree that the technique of philosophical 'ethnic cleansing' simply enhances the illusion of European 'originality' – a concept invented by European modernity. There can be a very interesting counterfactual question about history of Islamic thought. Had Islamic thought overall followed the line of Ibn Rushd's thinking, had that not been overcome by an opposing strand – which also used Greek thought, but for different purposes - given the enormous scientific achievements of Islamic cultures, and their military power, what might have happened?

But I do not see how this genealogical concern affects the structure of the argument about modernity. It does not, surely, claim that the civilization of

modernity was actually invented by Islam, and stolen by Europe. Modernity remains, in Aditya's own telling, a European process, an 'event' of European history. If we want to understand it, or change our understanding of what it is, it makes sense to focus our analysis there and not somewhere else. Whether other civilizations produced high cultures of rationalistic thought outside of modern Europe is a larger question, and hardly merits much discussion. Cultures as diverse as the East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern (including ancient Greece which was a ME culture, not in some sense a spatially displaced 'childhood' of English and French rationalism) contained rationalistic thought in abundance. Bankimchandra pokes fun at this 'history' in his comic writings, stressing the idea that this history that Europe has given itself can only be taken comically.

Totality

There is another important point of difference between me and Aditya, as he correctly points out: this is about what he calls a vestigial influence of Marxist structuralism in my argument. The only fault is that he does not stress it sufficiently. I entirely accept a strong, unrepudiated 'effective' presence of structuralism in my analysis of history. I do not think later developments prove earlier positions 'wrong', and force us to delete them from our hard disk. Earlier theories are modified, transformed, 'deconstructed' (for devotees of Derrida) and their cognitive effects are now compounded, or go through something like an effect of a reagent, and now produce effects which the theory itself would find it hard to recognize as its own consequence. I now feel that French thought in particular was so imprinted with the signature of a theoretical humanism (thinking starting from the zero-point of the individual – the Lockean laboring individual that Aditya finds so crucial, as I do) that it required an excessive counter-emphasis on the structure that reduced persons into its Althusserian 'bearers'. Now I think we should not treat them seriously as *argument*: I take them more as rhetorical tropes which could not present a truth except by an exaggeration. Unless we accept an utterly chaotic and contingent world of monadic individuals, and utterly contingent equally monadic happenings, I do not think we can dispense with either the notion of structure, or of 'totality'. I readily acknowledge that in common formulaic Marxism or sociology these two ideas – structure and totality - become reified in alarming ways, becoming substitutes for serious thought. Once we detect a structure, or declare triumphantly the existence of a totality, it takes away the empirical tasks of further examination of more minute filaments of causality. But I feel Althusser's struggles with the concept of the totality, and his attempt to borrow from Freud to reduce the reductionist pull of 'determination' by introducing 'overdetermination', and his simultaneous borrowings from the language of structuralism to make the analysis of contradictions more complex – all go in the same direction. These all attempt to soften the idea of structures into

something constituted by human action (I have become somewhat allergic to the vagueness of 'agency'); but after the action (whose intention we need to understand (verstehen) through hermeneutics) has occurred, its congealed effects exert an 'external' Durkheimian pressure on further action. Thus, we can have the structure and eat it too. I believe we are returning to an idea that was already somewhat inexplicitly present in Marx. Subsequent influence of hard determinism diverted the discussion into an unnecessary and wasteful debate between absurdly determinative structures and absurdly nebulous agency.

On totality too I have a similar position. Totality is basically the search for patterns – seeking unity in a plurality (its simple Kantian categorial definition), without which we have to surrender the social universe to chaos and happenstance. Here too Althusser made an important move by trying to think about an unterminal and unteleological totality.[16] It is always possible and necessary to seek causal orders in what has happened, but the 'outside' – the undetermined future is open, subject to the pressures exerted by the structural properties of the real. Aditya seems to be inclined to extend our theoretical thinking in a different way – by placing the origins of capitalism in a *disposition* of human beings, such that a possessive – acquisitive character comes to qualify everything. This also 'structures' the capitalist world, gives it coherence and symmetry, but by a causal technique that is more reminiscent of arguments from political economists like Smith – who view this as an inescapable 'human nature'. This is an undeniably forceful argument, not dissimilar to ones often found in Marx's analyses of earlier economists in *Theories of Surplus Value*, or Lukacs's reflections on reification, though Althusserians would see a hidden use of an expressive totality behind it. Of course, nature=disposition in the thinking of radicals is not a transhistorical *human* nature; but a nature *internal* to capitalist modernity. This argument seems to me to be persuasive, but quite compatible with my notions of structure and totality. To me, the great advantage of this move is that it preserves an essential insight of classical Marxism in a rearrangement that suits modern complexities.

Aditya's statement that we must go beyond Kaviraj can mean two different things: the first will be to restructure the explanatory model because of an analytical shortcoming; the second would be to historically extend our explanatory effort further back into the past. The second move, again, could be for two separate reasons: the first would be alter the nature of the explanatory model: to claim that the explanation itself cannot be function without bringing in an earlier stage in history – for example, if we had to argue that something had happened in a much earlier period which plays a crucial role in the creation of modernity, but is excluded because we are working with a shorter time horizon. That does not seem to be his argument. Which leaves the other possibility that the complain is not against my analytical *argument*, but against the common amnesia in European intellectual history that does not recognize its deep connection and therefore indebtedness to medieval Islamic adoption

and elaboration of ancient Greek systems of knowledge. I entirely agree with that criticism. But the earlier style of history where there was an explosive initial enlightenment in Greece, petering out in Rome, reigniting after a long night of medieval slumber with a rediscovery of the classics, has become less common in serious scholarly debates.

Was there an unnoticed modern before the colonial modern?

A more proximate concern for our debates about modernity is the recent eruption of ideas about a stage of 'early modernity' in India that preceded the coming of colonial modernity. That position also contains two distinct claims: the first is more local – the suggestion that there was a distinct period – from the 16th to the 18 centuries when distinctly *modern* developments can be discerned in Indian social and intellectual life. I believe this is a very important discussion from the point of view of philosophy of history. Its first premise is that there is no conceivable reason why, because the long durée of European history divides felicitously into a tripartite temporalization – i.e., divided into three periods – all human history must follow that rule. There is no better example of default Eurocentrism. An idea that is eminently suitable to one region's history becomes the rule of all. Obviously, this can be a sensible initial hypothesis, posited deliberately in order to be rendered more complex by further research. Already we find actual historical research gerrymandering the temporal boundaries according to argumentative requirement. Leading scholars of Kashmiri aesthetic philosophy have characterized the period of efflorescence of Saiva philosophic thought as 'medieval' rather than ancient [17]– though there is not much explicit reasoning about the *grounding* of this characterization. Briefly, my own reading of the "early modern" debate is that the suggestions were both right and wrong. Clearly, in many different fields- of intellectual creation, political institutions- new forms emerged that were distinctly different from those of the preceding epoch. So, this new epoch in history certainly requires a differentiating theoretical name – say, something like post-medieval, even if we have failed to name it by some identifiable dominant characteristic. But I am skeptical that that appropriate name is an early version of 'modernity'. I cannot go into the details of the argument here. I also feel unconvinced by an accompanying larger idea that there is a *global* 'early modernity' – simply because it is unclear if that is because of an accidental similarity between processes in different parts of the world, or some latent common mechanism.[18] I also think that the evidence from fieldslike literature shows something more ambiguous. After the emergence of some undoubtedly new forms, they tend to collapse, and literary practice tends to go back to medieval alankaric conventions, instead of growing into a bold new dawn of modernity. Modernity still seems to require a mediating intervention of colonial power.

Theories of Sovereignty

Aditya's next move follows the argument about disaggregation and suggests – I think very plausibly – that on each significant constituent process of modernity, we should ask if our questions, not just our answers, need to be different from standard theory. If we take the sequentiality thesis seriously, the historical impact of modernity has to be seen as a negotiation between two specific historical logics: we need to know exactly the configuration of structures in a society before the entry of European influence. In India, this task is rendered harder, more complex, by the fact of diversity between different regions. In each field - political power, productive structure, religious life – it is essential to determine the conditions in as much detailed accuracy as possible just before the colonial impact. Following my earlier argument that history does not allow any clean slate, new practices are written upon and over older ones (but that does not always leave the simple solution of a palimpsest: think of the inaccessibility of Sanskrit in our cognitive endeavors), we could then seek to determine exactly what the structure of European institutions were which came in with colonial power to reorder Indian society. To take a simple textual example, if we wish to engage in Koselleck inspired *begriffsgeschichte*, there would be at least three conceptual elements to examine. Suppose we are trying to understand the conceptual and practical effects of the entry of the bourgeois conception of 'property' – always individual, always alienable to modern Europeans – into Indian society. The first task is to understand and semantically map the denotations of earlier concepts – say *svatva* in Sanskrit, and Persian equivalents of property. The second task would be – not to say that 'a new Western conception' invaded proprietary practice, but to capture precisely what the concept of 'property' meant in British jurisprudence at that particular moment of late eighteenth century. A final task would be to examine how the new conceptual system displaces the older one: to ask – is it totally replaced, semantically erased, forced into a hybrid, turned into a two-tier practice in which the explicit level shows the British norm, but it is pulled from underneath by a now subterranean, but hardly eliminated set of vernacular understandings? British civil servants and judges constantly complained that crafty Gentoos are successfully fooling them – pretending to go by rules of British law, but ensuring underhandedly more conventional outcomes. In case of each one of the great *grundbegriffe* of modernity, an analytical exercise of this kind needs to be conducted.

Aditya is entirely right in claiming that in order to understand what colonialism or modernity really does to a society, we need a reliable picture of the pre-modern. Clearly, it is hard for individual scholars to accomplish this task – except for very few like Sanjay Subrahmanyam or Sheldon Pollock. This is why collaborative projects are required: we should ultimately rely on the impersonal intelligence of the disciplines, not just that of rare individual scholars. Most of our sociological, historical arguments are 'filled' on the

modern side and 'empty' on the side of the pre-modern. That is, we know in considerable detail the real features, attributes of the colonial and the postcolonial state; but our argument becomes thin when we make the contrast. We are obliged to suggest a *negative* description of the pre-modern[19]: that it was different from the modern. Obviously, this statement is tritely true. Without an equally determinate picture of the real features of the pre-modern state it is, in fact, hard to characterize the change. We can confidently declare that change happened, but not what changed and how. The analytical or in Aditya's language the explanatory task of historical cognition remains unfinished. Difficulties in producing this picture are immense. First is the difficulty of language. Evidence for these historical facts is hidden in sources written in Sanskrit, Persian and vernaculars – which are all usually inaccessible to modernists. Even if we somehow overcome the language problem – there are English translations of the *Seir Mutaqherin* and the *Dabistan* – the theoretical forms in which such evidence are presented are vastly divergent. We do have translations of these Persian texts, but not of hundreds of others, and if we take Skinner's injunction seriously – that there is no real way into the 'great text' without going through the small ones surrounding them – this presents a serious difficulty. Is the analytic of the *Seir* asingle author's idiosyncratic view, or the standard picture produced by an underlying analytical 'language' of Mughal statecraft?[20] Evidence gathered from roughly contemporaneous accounts of the social world from Sanskrit texts cannot be easily used to form a composite picture, because the 'language' of Sanskrit reflection is so deliberately de-sociologized and de-historicized. The *Viramitrodaya* – a text Pollock regards as highly significant, because it restores a whole section on *rajadharma*, places the detailed discussion of statecraft in the middle of an assemblage in which another segment[21] is entirely devoted to bhakti. Extracting elements of knowledge from these deeply dissimilar framing systems is hard, and putting them together into a reliable unitary picture of social power is even harder. Aditya seeks to access a theoretical understanding of social power that comes from an even time: the *mandala* theory of royal authority. Sanskritists have in recent times explored these sources, and that enriches our raw understanding of the operation of political power by drawing upon ancient Hindu and Buddhist texts.[22]Two ways to think theoretically about the long-term trajectory political power in pre-modern India appear plausible. The first is to construct temporally specific pictures of the workings of royal power – Kashmir from the Rajataranginis, central India from Nagarjuna's treatise, besides the conventional sources like Arthsastra, Kamandaki Nitisastra, Manusmrti, Sukraniti etc. staying close to an empirical-descriptive mode, but also to seek to construct a more abstract 'theoretical' design of longue durée political authority. It is highly likely that each text is a product of a local context though they all speak a language of abstract generality. While parts of our sources are historical – the Rajatarangini or the Islamic chronicles, others like the sastras and some Islamic texts like Barani's Futuhat are theoretical. Others

often alternate between the two modes in the same long text. To me it seemed safe to suggest that pre-modern political power was often 'bureaucratized' (see for instance the normative sections of the *Sukraniti* or the *Ain-i-Akbari* both of which discusses administrative arrangements in considerable detail) but significantly different from the modern notion of sovereignty. I sought to capture this distinction by differentiating states of *sovereignty* and of *subsumption*. But we must recognize that without further research (where such questions are internalized into historical enquiry, without which these questions cannot be answered), and more lively exchanges between historians and political sociologists it remains difficult to move forward. Theorizations by Weber and Marx were facilitated by the great abundance of historical research that preceded their 'theorizing' enterprises. Meanwhile, we have to do with a highly synthesized, artificially de-diachronized model of pre-modern political life – a stylized 'model' - which we must edit as we accumulate new knowledge. I think Aditya is wholly right in asserting that the theoretical project must be to suspend the operation of the concept of sovereignty as the defining mark of the state in our minds when we examine pre-modern political power. "One of the major difficulties with our theorizations of politics in the Indian context is that because they have drawn on categories and concepts derived from the very specific experience of Western modernity, they largely miss out on what is specific and in fact, quite central to the making of the political in India." That central category is sovereignty.

Theories of Secularity: Secularism, paramodern, puranic, and the 'outside'

Aditya is again entirely right in regarding the cluster of concepts around religious history – secular, secularism, secularization, Indians do not use secularity frequently – as a second major field of re-theorization.

He is only half right in saying that secular arguments were contested in the 1990s in the academia. This ignores the presence and sectional popularity of the idea that secularism did not suit India, and particularly after Pakistan was conceded, India should be an unapologetically Hindu state - among Hindu nationalists. Despite its presence, after independence, this idea suffered a defeat in political public discourse, and in the academia. Politically, Indian political debates fashioned a new peculiarly Indian meaning of the term 'secular' to mean political groups which opposed conflict between religious communities, leading to the startling semantic resignification of the term that made it applicable to figures like Gandhi, Nehru and the Communists alike. Standard English users would have been baffled by the description of a deeply religious thinker like Gandhi as 'secular'. But Indian public discourse normalized this local usage. Academic discourse however did not produce much direct analytical reflection on this question before the 1980s. Standardly, India was seen as insufficiently evolved in the rectilinear movement on the universal

historical path of secularization. The most careful and scholarly examinations assumed the norming of a vague Western or specifically American definition of the concept, and used that as a criterion of measurement of juridical or political success.

After the powerful dissenting interventions by Nandy and Madan, Indian scholars were forced to rethink; but it is interesting to closely examine the actual lines of rethinking. Nandy and Madan did not question the categorial complexes through which historical analyses proceeded. They differed from the conclusions of the standard narrative. Madan's analysis was that a secular state could not flourish in a society that was not secularized. It did not raise the more radical question of the applicability of the concepts of the religious and the secular. Nandy's startling move was to view religious nationalism as modern rather than traditional, but not to question the principles on which this dichotomy was founded. The effect of these interventions was profound: the disturbance to the calm expectation of societies progressing teleologically single file through historical stages towards universal destinations, threw certainties into turmoil, and forced people to begin to think rather than apply replication 'models'. Later discussions produced a great deal of interesting analyses of this field. But that literature reached a threshold in the 1990s. To go beyond that requires two different enterprises of further theoretical reflection: the first is to re-examine the basic theories of the secular in Western sociology – in Durkheim, and particularly in Weber.[23] Secondly, for social theorists to undertake what Weber did – to plough through the evidence of Indian religious life – both its social and intellectual practices, with Weber-like questions in mind. We can start with Weber's formulations – *as hypotheses*, with the explicit expectation that the evidence will allow them to be disrupted, and we shall have to look for trends and concepts of our own. Eventually the two tasks are really one, or two aspects of the same theoretical effort: to enter into the historicity of our past, and to conceive concepts that make sense of its own directions and caesuras. Following Weber should mean this thinking process rather than looking for evidence of disenchantment, and resigning from the police-force if we cannot find them. 'Did disenchantment happen?' – as a question – should turn into 'what happened, if not disenchantment?'. Seriously 'following Weber' leads, at some point, to not following him.

Where is the 'outside'?

All modern processes, because these are processes of social practice, must have what Aditya calls their 'outside'. These are all modes of practice – doing something in a particular way which structures behavior and their outcomes – the basic material of the reproduction of society. Capitalism is a *mode* of production, secularism is a *mode* of thinking, sovereignty is a *mode* of using political power. As these new practices come from outside, and are not products of endogenous evolution, there is always going to be large 'outsides'.[24]

One fundamental difference between Western and colonial modernity is the success, constantly noted by historians, of the Western modern elites to transform ordinary people in their own image, and the failure of the colonial elite to do that. Colonial authorities themselves were not always interested in a complete transformation, as Bankim and Naoroji noted in different ways.[25] Modernist Indian elites declared victory too soon– after their own transformation to modernity. Ordinary people did not follow their example – leaving thereby a vast outside – large swathes of social life that remained attached to and colonized by modern sectors, but not transformed.[26] Aditya characterizes the general thinking of this part of society as the *Puranic mode* – though it is short of definition. I may have a difference with Aditya on this point. It is entirely true that strictly rationalistic philosophies, including Marxism, failed to appreciate the space of the spiritual in ordinary peoples' everyday lives. But 'the spiritual' bears many meanings. To do anything more with this preliminary insight – which is shared by many critics – we need to analyze and unpack the content of 'the spiritual'. What makes me uneasy is a move to invert the conventional Marxist idea of people being immersed in 'false consciousness' by rushing to a rather indiscriminate defense of the supernatural. I doubt that respect for popular consciousness really requires a stout defense of peoples' belief in jinns and spirits, or a robust defense of their existence. Belief in divinity is not necessarily closely connected to a belief in such supernatural beings. Epistemically, God and *jinns* and *bhut-petnis* are not immediate neighbors.

Imagination is not a failure of reason, and evidently, religious thought has been a scene of the imagination – which disenchantment seeks to eviscerate from the world. I am not certain that ordinary people require such robust defense of beliefs – which they probably do not have. I doubt if ordinary people believe that there is a lurking *jinn* behind every darkened bush, though they might believe, like Gandhi, that not a leaf turns without God's will. Also, there is hardly strong evidence that the state– ministers, bureaucrats, politicians, police, tax collectors – are trying strenuously to divest people of such Puranic beliefs. On the contrary vast numbers of 'the state' functionaries apparently partake of such beliefs themselves. So it is hard to take the state as a relentless engine of secularization. The state's drive to secularize the world might have been true of the state in the hands of Lenin and Ataturk, but hardly in India.

There is little evidence that 'the state' is seriously trying to eradicate these mythological stories of origin and self-endorsement – except the derision that a small English-speaking elite feels for this mode of thinking. Even if this elite securely controlled the actions of the state in the fifties, it does not do that now. The result of this derision is 'the isolation of the continent'[27]: a depletion of this elite's ability to even communicate with the surrounding world of ordinary people. But disapproval is not the use of state coercion. Lenin's state used the state's violence against Islamic beliefs of Central Asian peoples; but

that was never true of the Indian state. On the contrary, at lower levels of the bureaucracy, there can be evidence of the bureaucrats themselves happily immersing themselves in this puranic world, its images, language and behavior. Though it is also interesting to note that when it comes to winning elections, things are not left to the unaided workings of the omnipotence of a just God, or worship at a local shrine. Politicians of the Puranic world too show considerable skill in using the purely instrumentalist implements of power and money. They do not show an unqualified belief in the efficacy of the Puranic modes. It is not easy to remain without intensive transactions with the modern world: so that world does not leave any 'outside' in Aditya's sense. Of course, there are large sections of people who are not incorporated inside it, or who are unreconciled to it, who reject it: but all of them have to fashion resisting strategies from inside. Because the structures of modernity envelop and affect their lives. My disagreement is conceptual, not empirical. I understand his point; but I do not see the advantage of portraying it as a radical 'outside'. Just as the paranormal depends upon the normal as the norm from which its difference is defined, quite similarly what he calls the paramodern exists in a world increasingly dominated by the power of the modern. The paramodern needs greater theoretical specification, just like 'the spiritual'. As residual categories their analytical capacity remains rather limited. Though I do not deny that these precisely indicate areas where our theoretical efforts must be directed. Thus, the paramodern – while suggestive – requires further internal specification – because it is so capacious; it can contain on one side ideas that are spiritual - drawn from one side of religious thought, and supernatural ones like the 'kala bandar' taken from another. That instance is interesting in many ways. A first question would be whether the transfer across the linguistic boundary creates an excessive mystery: kala bandar does not seem particularly alarming, except the deplorable fact that the animal is not fairer. When transformed gratuitously into 'monkey-man' it takes on more hair-raising qualities. Is this a transfer of a mundane idea of ordinary people into an 'irrational mystery' by enlightened English-using journalists? They report of people who fail to disenchant their world – like disinfecting their kitchen of bacteria – what can you expect of Hindi-speaking slum dwellers immersed in pre-Enlightenment darkness? –The three images offered in Aditya's description all appear to be taken rather directly out of TV serials. That could be a result of excessive viewing of sci-fi by both the seers and the reporters of this apparition.

No doubt religious thought, similarly powerful because it is capacious, contained both aspects of the supernatural. Here it might be useful to push this question by asking what are the aspects of the supernatural that are invalidated by modern epistemic culture? Or can popular consciousness entirely dispense with the kind of scruple/embarrassment we can detect in high culture figures like Bankim and Tagore with explicitly supernatural ideas? Bankim wanted to take the figure of Krishna through a rationalistic filter, and create an image invulnerable to rationalistic objections. Similarly, modern Bengali creative

writers seem busily engaged in re-creating a zone of enchantment through mythopoetic history (Rajsinha), nonsense verse (Aboltabol) and science fiction (Premendra Mitra), but can no longer write stories like those in Thakurmar Jhuli. Is popular consciousness entirely exempt from such rationalistic embarrassments?

This is one reason I feel unease in the implication of using the term 'outside'. Clearly, the pre-modern is waging a losing battle against the modern. The tragic shortness of kala bander's life is an illustration. When I grew up in a small town in West Bengal in the late fifties, it was reliably known that in a singular tree, a malevolent *brahmadaitya* had his dwelling. That was his permanent address, not an occasional haunt. Although we did not always discern his presence, he was always there – ready to cause harm, particularly to unguarded young children. His existence was part of the existence of our *pada*, just as physical things were. Evidently, even he was a victim of an imaginative shrinkage: though he was politely given the title of a *daitya* – a demon in respectable English – he was obviously not a real demon of the puranas – the size of a mountain like Kumbhakarna. The inexorable corrosion of modernity had already resized him to fit children's imagination, and left adults untroubled. The *kala bandar* was a phenomenon that created terror for a few days; but the significant fact is the shortness of his colorful life, that he decisively disappeared. That does not refute Aditya's argument that there is an 'outside': I simply think it is not large enough to deserve that name. But that does not mean that I reject his broader claim that the idea of the supernatural – the sense of an imaginative universe outside the material and rationalistic – persists. My own preference is to seek its presence in ideas of the spiritual, in God and his presence in the world rather than fleeting spirits and demons. I suspect human beings can do without the darker imaginative side of the supernatural – the demons and ogres, but not without its lighted side – a demand for some sense of transcendence reflected in the undiminished urge for religious consolation and above all, for art.

Aditya asks – correctly – the question why serious historians are pre-committed to a secularized view of the world. The instance of Ranajit Guha's discomfort with the testimony of the Santal rebels is widely known – critically discussed in Dipesh Chakrabarti's work. Use of the phrase 'self-alienation of the rebel' is a telling illustration of the problem. Though the rebel had no problem with saying that God came to him a dream, and asked him to start the rebellion, the historian says that the rebel said this, while, in the same act, distancing himself from this statement. The historian has to posit a secular rationalist world-picture as unconditionally true, and then portray the rebel as being somehow estranged from this belief. This is a strange, immensely convoluted operation. The use of self-alienation suggests that the default secular world-picture, the historian believes, was also the Santal self's picture, from which he was alienated – by himself – to place his belief in God and his advice. We could say that this is a process in which the belief of the historian is

somehow intruded into the rebel to subsist as his belief. From that he is alienated into believing that God began the rebellion by 'giving him that dream' (*swapna deowa* in Bengali). But Guha's difficulty is not easily resolved. Should the historian then say as an assertoric statement – 'God asked Sidhu Santal to start the rebellion – in a dream'?

Aditya quotes Ashish Nandy as posing this as a problem of Time. Nandy sees these problems of history as arising out of its modern, linear time-consciousness, as something that closes off, by definition, the possibility of relating to other modes of being that are lodged in a different conception of time. I do not see why using one conception of time must 'close off' our appreciation of other conceptions. In the real world, we constantly see people switching between different conceptions of time – linear to cyclical – with ease. But this does raise a fundamental problem. Can we grasp/understand one conception of time, or one ontological conception of the world if we inhabit another? The secularist resolution – to see the other ontology *as an error* -that is, different but not something that should be given the respect due to a serious ontological position – is unpromising, and leads inexorably to the 'false consciousness' move.

Aditya characterizes this difficulty by stating 'our language has no vocabulary to understand the Puranic' – which has its own difficulties. The question of the envelopment of existence in language is a larger question, but it is central to this discussion. It is not clear what we can easily do to effect this understanding. A vocabulary does not produce meaning on its own: even if we have a vocabulary – terms for *jinns*, spirits, gods, divinities – does not mean we would actually understand what these terms produce semantically when they work in their own language – the puranic language. Again, we must thank Aditya for forcing us to confront a deep and serious problem. But we need a clearer elaboration of what a vocabulary of the puranic in the midst of a language of the modern will mean, or look like. If we add the further restrictive condition that meaning is dependent on a horizon of experience, that makes the problem much more intractable.

Theories of Capitalism

The making of the modern economic world is appropriately Aditya's third theme: the realm of theories of capitalism. I find it hard to accept Aditya's opening statement that in Marxist theory time is so tied to the notion of totality "that there can be only one present (the most advanced form) all other social forms being residues of survivals of the past." Some radicals do of course see time this way: as if, it is the latest that alone is fully real; anything that is prior is somewhat already ontologically degraded. But Marxists need not view time in this oversimplified manner. To see capitalism in two ways – as a *mode of production* and as a *social form* – which is a standard Marxist procedure –already presupposes a powerful distinction that can obviate this simplification. A mode

of production begins by definition inside an economy that is dominated by another– the previously dominant mode. Gradually, the economy – its totality – is taken over by the new mode, despite resistance by real inhabitants of the previous mode to which their livelihoods and forms of life are connected. This immediately creates the possibility that this transition might fail, be stalled, get retarded, or, because of contingent -aleatory if we like Althusser – circumstances form into unprecedented combinations. The idea of a *structured* totality is meant precisely to capture this complexity. Later Althusserian Marxists often spoke about the articulation of (disparate) modes of production in a concrete social form. In a sense, this is another instance of our different readings of what 'structure' or totality involves. Any sensible notion of a society as a totality must accommodate conceptions of heterogenous modes and temporalities, if it is to do serious analysis of history. To me, therefore, co-presence of different structures which might possess their different temporalities, is assumed to be part of the basic idea of a historical totality. Otherwise, the totality fails to be properly historical. I agree that in history we have to deal with the presence of 'synchronous non-synchronicities' – if we prefer Bloch's terms – but that seems to me to be such an elementary requirement that no idea of a structure – a '*complex* whole' – can work without it. The whole has to be complex precisely to make room inside itself for such heterogeneity. I think Althusser's chapter in *Reading Capital* on 'an outline of a theory of historical time' gives us a clear elementary picture of structures in history in this sense.

That does not mean that I disagree with Aditya in his strictures against standard Marxist economic history writing. But there we seem to disagree on something else. He thinks standard history follows Marxist theory: I think they disregard the best moves that are possible inside it, and take it through an initial simplification. If Germany, as Bloch says, is 'the classic land of non-synchronism', what can we say of Gramsci's Italy, not to speak of India? In my reading, the appendix to Althusser's essay, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination'– on the idea of 'the last instance' – does not refer to the termination of a transformation process leading to the formation of a fully capitalist economy; it is rather about the relation of 'determination' 'in the last instance' of other strata of social facts by the economic/productive stratum. But I do not disagree that Marxist writings on capitalism are full of an expectation that given time, capitalism will overcome all lags and eventually produce a fully capitalist economic structure everywhere. Marxists like Vivek Chibber appear to believe that any denial of the omnipotence of capitalism is – strangely- a denial of the truth of Marx's theory. Consequently, I agree entirely that this is a field that requires urgent theorization – because conventional Marxist economic analysis has often been deeply Eurocentric, deeply teleological, and deeply involved in ontological substitution. When normal people see Marwari merchants carrying on traditional business in increasingly modern settings, Marxists have seen in them inadequate specimens of Parisian bourgeoisie –

evolving at a deficient speed towards what they are fated by history to become. Writers like Chibber assure us that if we learn to wait, and allow the logic of history to work out, we shall soon find a 'familiar' economic world – i.e., a world like the Parisian economy of the late 19th century. This is a strange kind of 'familiarity. A world not made familiar by our experience, but made familiar by our overfamiliarity with texts. Eventually, the Indian proletariat – at least its most advanced vanguard – will abandon the worship of Viswakarma in the machine room, and learn to be a real proletariat, not like the factory workers that Dipesh Chakrabarti found in Bombay's mills. Yet, I feel that Indian social science has never been in greater need of serious – not imitative – class analysis-to seek to understand what kinds of classes are slowly forming through the vast process of capitalist transformation after liberalization. What are these classes? Are these equivalents to their European counterparts? What is the nature of their classness? To what extent do these objective classes recognize themselves as subjective classes: are they, in more arcane terminology classes in themselves also classes for themselves, and classes for others? Does classness work out its effects only inside the logic of the economy, or affect directly – as it did at one stage of European history – political behavior of these vast formations? It is unlikely that even classes like the bourgeoisie would display features similar to the 19th century European equivalents, because the bases and nature of their power in India are quite different. For example, there is no reason to simply take for granted that leaders of large digital empires will think or act like the captains of capitalist manufacturing industries. They do not in the US; why should they in India? There is also the great mystery about the Indian middle class. What does its middleness consist in? Is it a single class – if it includes professionals who shop on Fifth Avenue in New York during their vacations at one end of the spectrum, and recently promoted officials in the lower state bureaucracy who have just risen out of poverty? The question of 'class for itself' is quite crucial here: do they see each other as class brothers – bearing common interests? Or are they united only conceptually – only for academics – by their dependence on wage-labor? All these are most urgent questions of class sociology without which post-liberalization India is hard to conceive and analyze. Class analysis that is urgently required might not look at all like 'class analysis' for those who have memorized the Communist Manifesto. History has found ways of evading the iron frame of those hundred pages: and we can understand history only if we agree to be surprised at first.

I feel that at times we can avoid unnecessary spilling of ink by simply deflating the language. To say that we are discussing the 'history of capitalism' is preferable than saying we are 'thinking' the 'history of capital' – which leaves us unsure about whether the question is about an economic formation, structure, or about an idea that is materialized into productive and social forms or some such idea that is more vague and more elevated. At one level it is not easy to understand what is meant by the potent combination of words – "universal history of capital". Of course, the unfortunate consequence of such

descent in language would be the deflation of the idea that we are engaging the immensely effortful conduct of stratospheric theory. C Wright Mills showed a way of such linguistic dis-elevation by his anti-inflammatory treatment on Parsonian sociology.

I agree with Aditya's criticisms of the standard Marxist tendency to defend the theory at the expense of history: but I conclude from that that we should not abandon what the theory in its complex and necessarily developing form can give us. Two historical movements facilitating change can be found in any theory. Theory itself develops as it encounters new historical material.[28] Secondly, the theory itself works in a larger, complex environment of other theories which similarly capture specific aspects of reality with exceptional clarity. Any individual theory must remain in conversation with both the enhancements and objections that can emerge from both these sources. Althusser does not hesitate to borrow the idea of overdetermination to give clarity to the intuitions about structural/complex causality. Similar clarification can be achieved by using techniques drawn from analytical philosophy. On the other hand, non-Marxist approaches to the state and the economy raise questions about its arguments, not just its simplifications – which need to be addressed – if we have to live in the world, outside a theological chamber of echoes.

Aditya has offered significant criticisms of the idea of the passive revolution. I do not see "passive revolution" arguments as teleological. Thinking of modernity through sequential braiding is intended precisely to move away from the seduction of a common terminal point. Gramsci himself clearly wanted to 'theorize' a deviation to the 'rule' – which the sequential argument seeks to radicalize into questioning the relation between the rule and the exception. After acknowledging a different path of "passive revolution", to go back to a mandatory trajectory of 'universal history of capital' is pointless. But I agree that this move showed a tendency to think that the answers to all our bafflements were hidden in some corner of pre-existing European thought. Thus, one way of 'following' Gramsci, paradoxically, is not to follow him; but to follow his 'method' – i.e., to break from received theorizations whenever required. I do not think there is any disagreement between Aditya and Partha and me on this question.

I think Aditya is entirely right in pointing to a reductionist element in our analysis of Indian capitalism in that discussion. It admitted one kind of complexity – stemming from complexities of class alignment and economic power. Although there were vague acknowledgements of the insufficiency of 'classness' in the classes themselves, other emerging insights from the work of historians of the working class – about the inadequacies of class formation itself – that is, the group we viewed as a class failed to view itself that way, and its classness was not formed, but imputed to them from theory – were not integrated into this class analysis. In other words, to have any chance of epistemic or political success class analysis had to grapple with the complex

relations with caste-structures. Considerations of caste were entirely absent from our analytical thinking about passive revolution.[29] Yet, that was the most important requirement of true Gramscian historicism (it should be clear that I use the term in the conventional Diltheyan sense, not the Popperian meaning in which it is often used now): to recognize what are the constituent features of a society. Historicist incorporation of caste in fact required an acknowledgement of the ways in which rising capitalism affected the caste economy, but also an admission that an excessively 'Brahminical' conception of caste had to be modified by a registration of colonial and postcolonial processes that conferred caste power on landed groups (the works of Srinivas and Beteille). On this point, Aditya's criticisms against the uses of "passive revolution" arguments are entirely justified. I am skeptical of Sanyal's extreme formulation: that we "need a characterization of capitalist development that theoretically rules out the possibility of capital superseding pre-capital". I fear this is too confident a prediction; an obverse of the other conviction that capital will conquer the world. In these discussions too I think we shall see our way more clearly if we change words, and return to a talk about capitalism, and pre-capitalist forms, structures, practices, understandings – leaving behind the seduction of the elevated realms of 'capital and pre-capital' and 'inside and outside'. In some cases, this high language prevents us from seeing whether we agree or disagree, and to what extent. This threatens to lead us into a different but essential discussion about the relation between language and thinking in Indian social sciences and humanities. Is outside a resistance from the inside? Is it not better to think of a 'formation' in which several structures – capitalist and pre-capitalist – coexist, where neither is able to overcome the other, but each is able to force the other to adjust to its presence? I always thought that the attraction of an idea of a social totality or structure was precisely the ability to cognitively encompass the uneasy, conflictual, non-terminal, and non-directional co-presence of such heterogeneous elements. Aditya's reading of these concepts is different from mine: but that conceals a great deal of agreement about the facts of the epistemic field.

What is our task? Pre-colonial knowledge systems

A great merit of Aditya's book is that it does not view its work as finished with criticism. It also reflects on the harder challenges of 'positive' epistemic re-construction. Aditya is completely right in characterizing epistemic colonialism as a situation in which – in a replication of economic colonialism – "the Non-West simply serves as the 'field' from where 'data' is collected and the market where the goods are sold." (275). Responding to this critical assessment requires that "we undertake the task of actually reconfiguring social and political theory by moving away from received modes of relating to theory". (275 -276) I shall make a distinction between the claims of 'exceptionalism' and the demands of historicity. Are pre-modern forms of thinking still useful? I have to return an

agnostic answer to this question. In some fields – e.g., political and social theory – those forms of theorizing seem to retain little relevance. But that makes the usual sweeping generalizations about colonial 'epistemicide' more problematic. If destroying the world of the *Manusmrti* is an 'epistemic massacre' of some kind, this is part of that process. I am not comfortable with the idea that erasure of the deep knowledge of nature embedded in indigenous knowledge is comparable with the erasure of the knowledge-systems embedded in Manusmrti and Arthasastra. Even these two texts are not of exactly the same kind. The *Arthasastra* is primarily concerned with administration and statecraft in a wholly obliviated world. The *Manusmrti's* concern with the punctual observances of the caste order is connected to still effectual social practice. First, in a sense, this 'knowledge' is not fully erased. And second, it is not at all apparent that we should lament about its demise as a deplorable act of colonial epistemicide. It is true that Sanskrit knowledge systems (alongside similar Persian forms) were swept aside in a strange transformation of cognitive power during the colonial era. But decolonizing politics did not mean, despite Gandhi's utopian desires, restoring the pre-colonial. The real hardship in thinking about what decolonizing should mean stems from the non-equivalence of the decolonial and the pre-colonial. First, this means that we must seek closer analysis of the processes of colonial cognitive re-constitution of society in the 19th and 20th centuries. I don't think it is promising to think through vast abstractions – like the entirety of Sanskrit knowledge. Various parts of this knowledge corpus raise different questions of validity and value. It is more sensible to disaggregate it, although in the 17th century it was in some real sense, undoubtedly a single unified system. Sanskrit astronomy might not have anything to offer scientifically valuable today, except historical knowledge. It would not help us at all in thinking about the universe, for which we should depend entirely on modern astrophysics; but it would help us understand how Sanskrit scholars thought about the universe in the past. In politics, the detailed discussion about fortresses and fortifications, medieval tax-rates and land-revenue, employment of spies to collect information and to invigilate officials also seem in the main inapplicable to our political world. In the study of caste, textual knowledge about the Niti works might offer us some information about the heuristic systems which sought – without success – to keep variations and deviations under strict Brahminical control. Though there are striking variations among texts. The *Sukraniti* generally advises appointing people to positions according to suitability rather than caste. Making our thinking 'Indian' by following past patterns of thinking does not seem a promising project.

In thinking about social life and politics, what makes our thinking Indian is not that we think by extending pre-colonial epistemic rules and forms. Yet, some aspects of Sanskrit knowledge systems are evidently valuable, and consumers have not waited for academic certificates before flocking to Ayurvedic brands. They have not been deterred by the sniggers of rationalists

and Marxists. Research into ayurvedic systems is expanding: and here is a parallel to the arguments about saving indigenous knowledge from epistemicide. Are there pre-modern thought systems that are valuable? I think these belong to two areas where the cognitive field is ahistorical- where ideas might originate in the tenth or fifteenth century but they analyze subjects of a general and abstract character – like logic, ethics or aesthetics – and therefore they can offer general insights. Philosophers can compare abstract logical operations about the idea of negation, and although it is unlikely that they would become practitioners of a Buddhist or a Navyanyaya system in their 'normal science' work, individual concepts, distinctions, arguments can be used in forms of 'fusion philosophy' which I admire along with Aditya.[30] But caste and class cannot be 'fused' in that fashion because these are categories embedded in deeply historical social ontologies. We can study historical fusions – where hierarchies show both caste and class qualities – but not use categorial fusions. In actual ethical life millions of people pick their way through constant conundrums by selectively following religious precepts – adapting them to their altered technological and historical circumstances. I believe that these systems – which are often mediated through high art and literature –offer powerful visions of ethical and natural inhabitance in the world– how to think about God, nature, the self and other human beings- that are not merely deeply persuasive, but also extremely valuable, precisely because modern thought systems superstitiously submit to the claim of disenchantment, and are poor in thinking about these issues. God may have disappeared, but nature, self and other human beings are inconveniently present and incessantly demand ethical attention. I find the immense tradition of aesthetic philosophical reflection from ancient and medieval India 'living' and forceful in two separate senses. Like Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, or Kant's third *Critique*, these offer entirely general systems of philosophical enquiry about the nature of aesthetic pleasure and its place in human flourishing which appear to me entirely unobsolete. They simply need to be extracted from their textual enclosure like files in zip folders - to be rendered usable more generally. Like any other highly valuable philosophic system, they need dis-closing into accessible current languages. My own sense in reading literature and listening to music is that the modern artistic universe in India has much more profound continuities (sometimes regenerated continuities in case of classical dance or music) than in other areas of intellectual culture. To make any serious productive move, breaking down these abstract unhelpful unities of 'Indian and Western thought' is essential.

Implicit in Aditya's argument generally, there is the proposition that the problem of decolonizing is especially pressing in case of 'theory' – though his examples are from social and political theory, the theory that is at work inside historical study of societies. I do not know if this is an overreading of his case. But it makes sense to me. After all, in social analysis that stays close to the empirical ground, temptations of Euronormality are necessarily kept in check. In disciplines like political sociology, analysts cannot easily escape the

perception that they are studying a village in rural West Bengal, and at least in their gathering of raw materials of the eventual cognitive product, they cannot escape encounter with the natural and the conceptual language of the natives. Functionalism offers a route to escape this brutal registration of reality by suggesting that the natives do not really understand what they are doing. While they believe they are simply offering grain for a sacrifice to their deity, they are really preserving the egalitarian structure of a tribal society by destroying surplus wealth. Empirical investigation is obviously not innocent of theory, because theoretical concepts precede and pre-structure their cognitive expectations. Marxists may approach a caste society with the resolution that they would bring to light its 'underlying' class structure. But the empirics of the case exercise restraints on a wild 'theoretical' imagination. It is scholars who are committed to theory who can see Parisian bourgeoisie in Marwari businessmen who conceal their Parisianness, are not aware of it, or need some more time to reveal the full flowering of those 'essential' characteristics. Theory of course works at many levels – from the elementary, sometimes imperceptible level of basic concepts – from inside 'states', 'markets', 'law', 'property', 'democracy', 'constitution' etc. It also works at the intermediate level of analytical models – Gramsci's 'passive revolution' rather than conventional capitalist transitions, and also at the level of high theory – like the inexorable process of secularization (decline of religion mandated by sociological theory), or the 'universal history of capital' (similarly mandated by Marxist political economy), or the march of modernization. We have to move away, as Aditya suggests, from received modes of *relating to* theory – though 'relating to' will be unpacked differently by different scholars. Mainly, the question of theory then translates into conceptualization and building arguments of higher levels of generality.

Where can different concepts come from?

I entertain a heterodox view that all Western thinking is not equally Western. Ideas at very high levels of generality can be treated as 'universal' or 'ahistorical' – meaning that these are not affected by historicity in any fundamental sense. Ideas will always first appear in some context of time and space; but these are ideas which are not determined by the time and space of their production or conceptualization. To take an example, some ideas in Marx – like the notion that 'being determines consciousness' or less grandly, that evolution of productive technology determines structures of social life – might be judged right or wrong, but its European provenance does not play an important role in that judgment. However, simply because in medieval times some European societies had an economic structure conceptualized as feudalism, that does not sanction the epistemic practice (widely accepted at one time) of calling and analytically modeling all pre-modern economies as feudal. The description 'pre-modern' itself was subject to varied uses. Pre-modern could mean, in some cases, the one immediately preceding the modern – in

India, the Mughal economy of Northern India; or, in others, the whole span of time before the modern – which could include the economy of the Maurya empire as well.

As I have argued elsewhere[31], when we say we should use *Indian* traditions of thought, it can mean two entirely different things – the first, is to use in our thinking categories of analysis or analytic structures drawn from pre-modern Indian reflection. An example will be an analysis of Indian politics through the analytics of Kautilya's *Arthasastra*, or even a much later text, Mitra Misra's *Viramitrodaya*, or the entire corpus of such texts and their disciplinary vocabulary. It is unlikely, as we have seen, that such exercises will yield good results.

But following 'Indian' thought need not mean drawing from pre-colonial thought alone, because in some sense only precolonial thought was truly Indian. If we accept, as I do, the Hegel-Marx notion that modernity is a thoroughly *contradictory* structure – because, inside it, metropolitan, colonizing modernity and colonial modernity are intertwined in an inseverable conflictual juncture – we should not be surprised by the idea that the historical experience of modernity appeared quite differently to Indian thinkers, and they subjected this experience to close analysis. That will give us quite a different optics to modern Indian thought. At every point where an Indian liberal or socialist differs from a Western counterpart, instead of suspecting cognitive inadequacy and failure, we should start suspecting a deviationist maneuver. This might be an overgenerous procedure; but I think it is better than the comprehensive contempt in which Indian modern thinkers are held by contemporary Indian scholars. There is a task of rescuing them from the utter condescension of posterity.

Non-comparabilities: not to create an orthodoxy of decolonization

It is hard to expect that eventually social sciences would lead to a unified orthodoxy of decolonial theory. The destruction of pre-colonial thought cultures by colonialism was a highly decentralized and dispersed affair. As we know very well, the internal history of colonialism was heterogeneous. European colonialism enacted a distinctively different history of devastation in different continents – producing vastly divergent colonizing projects. Decolonizing knowledge, if successful, is likely to result in separate, non-comparable, historicized forms of thinking in each milieu rescued from its own peculiar form of colonization. It cannot produce a unified canon of decolonial knowledge.

What should we do?

It appears to me therefore that decolonizing knowledge would have to be an internally highly complex project – with numerous layers and aspects. In some

cases, the right decision will be simply to accept Western theory – at a high level of generality – where, in my sense, the thinking is not Western – i.e., we do not get anything serious by insisting that it is Western. Aspects of Heidegger's thinking about the temporal structuring of the life-world, or Derrida's suggestion that unfixity rather than fixity should be the accompanying quality of the iterative nature of word-use, or Gadamer's insistence that a tradition consists of the thoughts through which we think – are in this sense ahistorical. These ideas are Western; but we do not fail in any cognitive responsibility if we make them our own. Just as some profound observations in Bhartrhari or Abhinavagupta equally are. Due to the colonial rupture, we must recognize, we do not have an easy or effortless access to those ideas: it is a very strange sense in which we can call them 'our own'. But we can use these abstract European ideas as our own, just as Islamic philosophers after the eighth century used Greek philosophical language. On this level of generality, acceptance of Western theory is a matter of philosophical choice. Several Latin American decolonial theorists depend heavily on ideas and the arguments of the Hegelian or Heideggerian traditions – without any anxiety about falling back into coloniality.

There are many other instances where even general theoretical propositions of Western thought would not fit – without modification – into our thinking needs. But it is possible to deconstruct theoretical ideas. A major consequence of Derrida's interventions in the philosophy of language has been a wide acceptance of his insistence that the impossibility of word meanings and constructions staying static and in semantic fixity should not be taken as an exception, but the rule. This argument has to be taken with caution: some of its consequences, at least implications, can be anarchic. But this emphasis and appreciation of unfixedness as the constitutive quality of words and therefore of all lingual products assists new uses, and experiments with uses of theoretical ideas unintended or even explicitly unsanctioned by the originators of doctrines. An utterly salutary effect of this intervention is a liberation from the anxiety of orthodoxy – the fear that we might somehow deviate from the exact meaning that a sentence had in Marx's mind at the time of its original writing. In many cases of serious theoretical difficulties, Aditya has suggested, what is required is a deconstructive move from specific Western doctrines. Another component of theoretical decolonization must be the courage to simply reject Western 'theory' when the evidence goes against it, not apologetic disagreement followed by genuflections. There can be two ways of being wrong: sometimes a theory is wrong in the sense that it captures something accurately in the Western context – but there is no equivalent to that in our history. Therefore, looking for the same object or process amounts to ontological substitution, and correspondingly, ontological depletion of our reality. But there are other cases where the large generalization might be questionable in itself – like Weber's hypothesis about disenchantment. In some instances, large propositions of Western theory should be simply called out as

doubtful or wrong. That of course involves the risk that celebrities may feel peeved and not write blurbs for our next hesitant attempt at theorizing. From rejecting Marx's or Weber's erroneous ideas about Indian village communities or religious views to Perry Anderson's revisionist history proving Nehru's destruction of Indian democracy, there are occasions where our conviction that theoretical pronouncements do not match historical record, must be expressed without prevarication. We shall never be able to produce consensus. Some devoted to Marx might still seek to make good his views about the Asiatic mode of production; others will remain grateful to Anderson for unmasking the Indian ideology. But this is a colonial privilege – of showing to us the true nature of our history, the right of the epistemic vanguard to assist the laggards – which some still concede. At times, what we must learn to reject is the breathtaking extrapolation of theories rather than explicit statements. The idea that modernity in its Western form will be replicated elsewhere exists in classical Western theories of modernity – not as serious arguments, but as an extrapolative expectation. Without an initial gesture of questioning those casual axioms, we cannot even begin to construct some theoretical thinking on our own. In some cases, the critique of Western theorists should be based not on their ignorance of historical facts, but on angles of interpretation which consisted of modelling an Indian reality on the basis of a more familiar European one.

This complex project will have many segments – accept Western theory, deconstruct Western theory, reject Western theory, accept non-Western theory – from three sources: pre-modern high theory, modern critical anti-imperialist thought, theorize popular intelligence – harnessing the subtlety of the slave, add new theory.

Once these obstacles are out of the way, the path will be clear to really 'following' Western theory in a really productive sense – by making theoretical moves that are not derived from Western precedents, but which seek to replicate the *theoretical orientation* that theorists established with their own historical world. In a sense this lies in the logic of social science thinking. Any serious engagement with significantly different historical material produces this result. I have argued elsewhere that when Marx encountered a new body of historical material, he experimented with new theoretical conceptualization.[32] For India, he advanced the hypothesis of the Asiatic Mode of Production[33]: when he engaged more deeply with Germanic and Slavic historical material, he suggested Germanic and Slavonic forms to be separated out of the general characterization of European feudalism.[34] An identical logic of theoretical construction applies to engagement with Indian historical evidence as well. When I examined the new nationalistic conception of community, I turned initially to Toennies, to realize quickly that his questions were entirely different. I had stumbled on to the realization that enumerative processes objectified communities in unprecedented ways, which had immense implications for understanding political conduct of collectivities mobilized by modern state

processes. Partha Chatterjee's exploration of political mobilization in Indian democratic politics pushed him to recognize a novel way of using the requirements of populations (which are quite different from ones Foucault demonstrated, though his thinking was occasioned by Foucault) and pouring an entirely new semantic content into the idea of 'political society' – a concept with a long Gramscian, Hegelian lineage.[35]   All serious engagements with a body of evidence – eventual or textual or institutional – in case of secularism, or citizenship have pushed scholars beyond the boundaries of existing conceptualization into grasping for new distinctions and identifications.[36] This is hardly surprising: this lies in the logic of the theoretical cognitive enterprise. Vestigial colonialism reveals itself in two ways: the way in which pedestrian arguments about well known realities seek to ennoble themselves by enlisting the services of a high language.[37] Contrarily, at times serious unraveling of new patterns, trends and causalities lack the confidence of explicit theorization, and seek unnecessary and entirely dispensable endorsement from Western theory. But to rectify this difficulty we have to overcome the much harder habituation to the distinction between natives who produce the raw material, and theorists who then produce the high-end product, and re-export them to us. The deep circuitry of colonialism operates in the cognitive as much as in the economic sphere – as Aditya sees quite clearly.

Sociology of knowledge: the hegemony of American mainstream and radicalism

The harm that colonialism really does in intellectual life is to suborn our ambitions: our Macaulayan training convinces us that we must walk around in the children's' section of the theory supermarket. But we must understand that we are *all* trained in Macaulay's invisible and inescapable school, not just those who went to Oxbridge and now attend the Ivy League. Foreign training simply puts the last layer on the cake, and provides those fortunate ones with a code by which they can unfailingly recognize each other. But it uses an unsecret code: a language that is being displayed in front of us all the time. So that the unfortunate can also pickup scraps of it from their own training, occasional academic visits, and interaction in which every mention of 'ontology' or 'performativity' or 'politicality' is rewarded with unfailing respect. Remember that performance is mundane; it is performativity, this peculiar noun and the capacity of your mind to hold such subtle and complex thoughts, that elicits admiration. It is hard to object to such language: because anything that is a subject of conversation has a nature, and is therefore 'ontological', any act is by definition performed, and thus has a side of performativity. The trouble is that after some time the overuse of the high language simply obfuscates the distinction: a clear sense of the logical occasion of difficulty that forces somebody to tell herself that she is not thinking about a performance, but about what makes it a performance. Overuse of ontology simply erases distinctions of

difference and weight and boundaries in the use of words. And drops us all in a primeval soup where all thinking is theory. All cows are black in this theoretical night that is falling upon us. I sometimes find it hard to understand what is being said, and hover in an ambiguous state suspended between assent and dissent. Because it is not a vigorous dissent, it is generally mistaken for an assent. Such 'theory' does not elevate our thinking, it simply serves to degrade language.

Colonialism degrades ambition itself: it creates a new ambition – of becoming small/achieving smallness. It turns our greatest intellectual ambition - not to be oneself, but to be (like) someone else. This also deforms one of the elementary processes of intellectual life: what it means 'to learn from someone'. To learn from Foucault becomes repeating Foucault or Gramsci or Hegel. In some cognitive contexts, learning can mean that we can adopt a concept or an argument from a Western thinker, precisely because those ideas are general and abstract. Learning from them in other, more historical, contexts of argumentation must mean *not* taking up their arguments, but setting up between us and our cognitive questions the kind of relation they set up between themselves and their historical themes or objects of knowledge. Paradoxically, then, to 'follow Gramsci' will mean *not* using his concepts directly. Otherwise, we shall fall into the trap of a homogenizing 'cosmopolitanism' – which means a complete generalized acceptance of languages and modes of thinking of one part of the world by all others. Like Marxism in the past, a woke liberal radicalism might also be tempted to seek such world domination. It is essential to realize that this can mean, from one perspective, the end of epistemic colonization; but from another, simply the beginning of a new phase. If we accept that dispensation of the world's epistemic order, our role as under laborers/subcontractors will not change; but we will be able to draw satisfaction in the idea that we are subcontractors of the most advanced forms of thinking (that money can buy)[38].

Notes

[1]Unless we subscribe to an extreme postmodernist view which views postmodern as a stage that followed modernity and supplanted it by a new stage of history, so that modernity is our past, not our present.

[2] Each of these universes retain their specificities despite their common subjection to processes of imperial modernity.

[3] Originality is particularly infectious in the modern academia. Highly intelligent individuals, after joining the academia, look around and find that to survive and flourish they have to claim that their Ph D thesis had a Copernican effect on their field; but every subsequent publication must continue to instigate a revolution. We have got used to living in a state of Trotskyan permanent revolution in epistemic terms. Among other ill effects, this obstructs a clear understanding of the genealogies of our own thinking – a clear sense about when a discipline really undergoes a change, and when it is simply continuing as 'normal science'. It is confusing when epistemic revolution becomes part of the conduct of normal science.

4 What is puzzling to me is that Marxists had an opportunity of developing an anti-positivist critique, but neglected it. Lukacs's works were popular with Marxist intellectuals in the 1960s. But their attention was drawn entirely towards his analyses of literature – specially, the novel form – rather than his absorption of Neo-Kantian thinking and elements of historicism into orthodox Marxism. Interestingly, Habermas saw this as the distinctive aspect of Lukacs's thought. Jurgen Habermas, 1984, *A Theory of Communicative Action*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press. In the Indian context, the emergence of Subaltern Studies created a similar moment of possible methodological exploration. But, instead of a serious examination of the two questions: (1) were philosophical hermeneutics and structuralism – a radically intentionalist and an equally anti-intentionalist approach – compatible? and (2) were these, specially hermeneutics, compatible with Marxism? Actual debates however focused on the more 'political' question of 'elitism' of differing forms of history-writing.

5 Though some scholars in sociology and philosophy sought to develop more critical perspectives: A K Saran in Sociology, or J L Mehta in Philosophy. What is particularly unfortunate is the total separation between traditional learning and modern learning based in the universities. Daya Krishna had taken some innovative initiatives in the 1990s to arrange conversations between traditional specialists and modern academic scholars of in philosophy. But instead of spreading the effects of his distinctive initiative shrank, and slowly faded.

6 In the field of philosophy, there was a line of thinking that used Western and Indian philosophical reasoning in exploring big philosophical questions. After K C Bhattacharya, Surendranath Dasgupta, Sibajiban Bhattacharyya, Jitendra Mohanty, Bimal Krishna Matilal continued this tradition of philosophic ambidexterity. Arindam Chakrabarti and Jonardon Ganeri have continued this in our times. There is very little comparable thinking in historical social science. This might not be a straightforward 'failure'. It could be argued that questions in history and social science do not have the kind of intertemporal stability great philosophical questions have. Thinking about modern power through Kautilya or relevant parts of the *rajadharma* sections of the Dharmasastras is not likely to be fruitful. However, there is an intriguing exercise in a 'traditional' assessment of the Indian Constitution in the last section of the last volume of P V Kane's *History of Dharmashastra*, Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, Pune, 1962-1975.

7 Radhakamal and Radhakumud Mukherjee, Dhurjati Prasad Mukherjee, A K Saran, Iravati Karve, G S Ghuriye, M S Gore.

8 I am not suggesting that this was because the arguments were not sufficiently forceful to stir doubts in the minds of social science theorists. Few even looked at these attempts, and knew about these infrequent interventions.

9 These were also routine in a more dismal sense: few new arguments were launched. Exchanges in India mainly recycled argumentation common in the Western academia.

10 Victor Kiernan, History, in David McCelland (ed) *Marx: the first hundred years*, Fontana Books, London, 1983.

11 Subjected to criticism in Said or Spivak.

12 Linda Nochlin, 'The imaginary Orient', ch. 3, *The Politics of Vision*, Routledge, New York, 2018.

13 Though, obviously, when European historians use the concept of feudalism, they are using a positive characterization, not a negative one masquerading as positive.

14 For a recent careful examination of Weber's thinking on disenchantment and rationalization, see Hans Joas, *The Power of the Sacred*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2021.

15 The two fields in which Hobbes was active.

16 He tended to express it with usual French flair as 'process without a subject'. Frankly, I do not see how a reference to a subject or subjects helps us in thinking about what we have already conceived as a process.

[17] See Lawrence McCrea, *Teleology of Aesthetics in Medieval Kashmir*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 2008.

[18] Hans Joas, *The Power of the Sacred*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2021 also analyzes some of these issues in relation to the 'axial age' hypothesis by Karl Jaspers.

[19] Precisely in the sense discussed above.

[20] We now have an interesting analysis of the *Firishta*, Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Loss of Hindusthan*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2020. Do the Ghulam Hussein and Firishta share an analytical language? Do the differential contexts in which they are embedded affect their analytics as well? So that we cannot say there exists an *Islamic* language of statecraft?

[21] Volume 9.

[22] Andrew Ollett, 'Satavahana and Nagarjuna: religion and the Satavahana state', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, (41), 2018.

[23] Though, for accuracy, it is important to note that ideas of enchantment, disenchantment, rationalization (which is much less frequently used in Indian writing) and secularization are not taken directly from Weber's texts, but from an American mediation through Parsonian sociology.

[24] But there can be 'outside' spaces even in cases of endogenous change – for instance, in case of capitalist transformation, those regions that are still not transformed.

[25] Bankim observed this in case of cultural and thought practices, Naoroji in economic ones.

[26] In some ways using the term colonized is better; because, 'dominant' or 'dominated' may be synonymous with completely transformed. 'Colonizing' can convey the meaning of subordinating something without transforming it.

[27] The British boast that when there was storm in the channel, the continent was isolated.

[28] I find that in the evolution of Marx's own thinking on history, Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Marx and postcolonial thinking', Constellations, 2018.

[29] I think this can be said fairly about my analyses and Chatterjee's. Though, at the time, we would have probably said that we were concerned with the economic analysis of capitalist development, and not political sociology. Now I would see that as an inadequate defense. Caste is not a constituent of a separate social ontology: it must be seen as constitutively related to the ontology of class.

[30] In philosophy, we have a serious lineage of such experiments from K C Bhattacharya, Surendra Dasgupta, J N Mohanty, Bimal K. Matilal, continued by Arindam Chakrabarti and Jonardon Ganeri. I believe theoretical ideas about society and politics are more deeply historically indexed – which makes such operations more difficult.

[31] 'Response to Tully', *Journal of World Philosophies*, 2 (1), 2017.

[32] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Marx and postcolonial thinking', *Constellations*, January, 2018 (25), 3-17.

[33] Diptendra Banerjee engaged with deep seriousness with this idea. Diptendra Banerjee (ed.) *Marxian Theory and the Third World*, Sage, New Delhi, 1985.

[34] Hobsbawm, Precapitalist Economic Formations, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965.

[35] The term lineage occurs in the title of Partha Chatterjee's book.

[36] Rajeev Bhargava, *The Promise of India's Secular Democracy*, OUP, Delhi, 2010, and Niraja Gopal Jayal, *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2013.

[37] This rent a language phenomenon is a serious problem, and produces a confusion about what theoretical work is; often it produces work in which theory lies in the language, not in the thinking. This obscures the fact that these are feats not of thoughtfulness, but of salesmanship.

[38] Usually, the fees are quite high.

About the Author

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