

Some Theses on Colonial Consciousness

1. Let me begin by setting up some contexts so that what I say becomes easily digestible. The first context has to do with my interest in the two domains that Cultural Psychology and Political Theory are. Cultural psychology asks questions about the relationship between culture and psychology (both individual and, in some appropriate sense of the term, collective psychologies). Political theory is concerned about the relationship between people (both individual and collective) and their 'polity'. India is a culture which has been tremendously influenced by one of the greatest events in the political history of the human kind, namely, colonialism. Quite obviously, we would expect to find some deep intertwining of political theory and cultural psychology when we talk about India and her people. Of course, the current state of research in either of the two domains does not allow us to raise let alone answer any satisfactory question about the relationship between these two domains in the context of India. What is unsatisfactory about this state of affairs? Answering this question takes us to the second context of these theses.

2. Let us begin with colonialism. Colonialism has been one of the most significant events in the history of human kind in the last three hundred years or so. Its importance to political science can hardly be overstated. Yet, as many have said, it has not been adequately theorised as an event. There is of course a great deal of material on the histories, the effects, and the political resistances to colonialism. Reading them, however, merely increases the puzzlement about colonialism: though it seems to be at the root of all the ills of the modern world, what is not clear is how or why that is the case. Perhaps, that has to do with an implicit consensus shared by many: everyone appears to know what it is and most agree about its immoral nature. Colonialism emerges as a self-

clarifying and a self-explaining phenomenon. If it is self-luminescent and so manifest an evil, why did many people in the Metropolis argue both about the nature of the phenomenon and its moral status for centuries on end?

This question becomes even more complex, if we look at the participants in this debate. Liberal theorists like John Locke, John Stuart Mill and revolutionaries like Karl Marx found colonialism a positive event in world history; among those who opposed it, there were conservative political thinkers like Edmund Burke. Today, however, there is a reconfiguration of this constellation: liberals, leftists and radicals are unanimous in condemning colonialism; those who dare speak about its 'positive' aspects are the conservatives and those from the extreme right. One cannot explain this state of affairs by drawing attention to the shifting nature of political labels like the 'left' and the 'right'. If a political theory that criticises Fascism does a volte-face a century later to celebrate it as a 'liberation movement', such a situation does not say much about the shifting nature of political labels as it throws doubt on our understanding of Fascism.

Consequently, on what grounds can one determine whether the ethical and political stance one assumes with respect to colonialism is adequate? I believe that both the refusal of Marxist theories to assume an ethical position and the nature of moral criticisms that exist today are symptomatic of our lack of clarity about the nature of the event. Often, criticisms of a colonizer's specific action replace an ethical criticism of colonialism. Ethical objections to the role of either the British Crown or the activities of the British East India Company do not allow for an automatic extension. That is, such arguments are not criticisms of the project of colonialism in general or of the colonisation of India, unless one can show what is unethical about the project itself. What is unethical about a project that, among other things, industrialised the colonies,

established courts of Law, laid railroads, and introduced scientific education and modern medicine there? As long as we do not address this issue properly, there are no obvious reasons to assume that the earlier generation of thinkers were wrong. Today, it is not clear how or why colonialism is an evil or, indeed, from where it draws its evil strength. In other words, we lack an adequate understanding of colonialism.

3. Cultural Psychology fares hardly better. While there is definitely an increasing interest in the domain of cultural psychology (thanks mainly to the pioneering work of Michael Cole and Richard Shweder), neither the questions they raise nor the answers they give are satisfactory. Because of the absence of an adequate theorising of society (a lacuna in Sociology) and of culture (a lacuna in Anthropology), it is not at all obvious how cultural psychology differs from, say, social psychology or some or another variant of the socio-cultural school of Individual psychology (the Russian schools of psychology that are primarily influenced by the works of Vygotsky and his pupil Luria). If this difference is not adequately theorised, what distinguishes a story about how individuals are influenced by an aggregate of other individuals occupying the same territory from a cultural psychology that wants to investigate how cultures influence individuals?

The second problem is correlated to the first. Cultural psychology ends up becoming a shallow investigation of how people from India (say) respond to certain events and things without being able to distinguish between cultural responses on the one hand and the responses of a people within a particular culture on the other. Not all responses of a people within a culture are also cultural responses, which distinguish them from other cultural responses. As a consequence, there is no difference between doing cultural psychology and applying statistical aggregation techniques to questionnaires distributed between two sample groups. Doing cultural psychology merely boils down to the kind of

sample groups that one constitutes. One simply presumes that the differences in responses are expressions of cultural differences between these two groups.

Quite apart from identifying these and assorted problems, there is another kind of difficulty we face. Certain questions that appear *prima facie* legitimate and interesting cannot even be raised. As one such example, consider how children learn their first language. Research is mostly confined to this generic problem -- the way I have just formulated the issue. Surely, if a culture is important in the life of an individual (forget my hypothesis about cultural differences for the time being), then there must be a difference in the way an Indian child learns its first language and, say, a child in Belgium. However, today we do not know how to raise this as a question for empirical enquiry let alone answer it one way or another. Not only that. The existing theories about culture, for instance, forbid us from even raising this question. For instance, if a culture is a set of beliefs (or it is 'a producer of meaning'), how can you have these beliefs without acquiring some or another language first? Language-learning (especially learning the first language) becomes merely and only an expression of an innate species ability to learn a language. This could be true; but its truth cannot be assumed beforehand. The problem is that we cannot challenge its truth status as things stand today. The means to do so are denied to us. To an extent we cannot determine today, how one learns (at times, even what one learns) depends on how one is taught. And this 'how' varies across cultures. So, how one learns the first language must depend upon how that language is taught. Yet, learning the first language is not investigated by relating it to how that language is taught.

4. It is within these two contexts that I want to formulate my theses on colonial consciousness. I want to begin by thinking about the British colonialism. As I said in my earlier piece on the colonial consciousness, colonialism involves setting up a framework

that presupposes and thus proves the superiority of the western culture. This is not a very accurate formulation of what colonialism is, because it implicitly refers only to “modern colonialism” (or western colonialism). So, let me separate the two threads that I brought together in that piece: British colonialism introduced the framework about the superiority of the western culture that was both presupposed and proved; such a framework relied on violence for its introduction, sustenance and reproduction. The latter is characteristic of colonialism; the former is the specificity of the British in India. What kind of violence are we talking about? In my article on intercultural dialogue, I have spelt out what violence is. Let me take them up here as well.

This framework enables both the emergence and acceptance of descriptions and theories that trivialize the experiences of the colonized subjects. By virtue of this, their experiences are transformed. What does the transformation consist of? Such purported theories and descriptions redescribe experiences by twisting or distorting them. The twist or the distortion consists in the fact that these new descriptions tell us that “only fools and horses” could have the experiences that the colonial subjects believed they had. These descriptions correct the experience massively by throwing doubts on the very possibility of any ‘reasonable being’ ever having the experiences that the colonial subjects believed they had.

Of course, it is the case that scientific theories ‘correct’ experiences too: we see a stick appearing bent when immersed in water and see the movement of the sun across the horizon. Our scientific theories tell us that neither is true. In such cases, it is important to note that these theories preserve our experiences the way they are. In fact, scientific theories explain to us the necessity of such appearances. They do not distort them much less deny them. That is precisely what these redescriptions do: deny experiences. What happens

when the experiences are trivialized, distorted, and then denied? They also deny access to one's own experiences.

Who or what is denying the access to experience? It is not a theory, but a theorizing of someone else's experience. It is the experience of another culture, or the theorizing of such an experience. One's experiences are being trivialized, distorted, denied and made inaccessible by someone else's experience of the world. Even this does not complete the story. The colonial subjects are also compelled to accept the experience of another culture as their own, whether or not this happens to be the case. They are compelled to become volunteers in the process of denying their experiences of the world to themselves.

5. I have just said that the framework about the superiority of the western culture both allowed for the emergence and acceptance of these theories and descriptions. We have only a partial grasp of how such a framework brought such theories and descriptions into being: my continuing research into the growth of western culture and the role of Christianity as a religion therein is slowly beginning to unravel some of the threads. However, there is enough preliminary evidence to assume the truth of the assumption that the framework enabled the emergence of what we call the social sciences of today. The more important question for us (now) is this: how did the very same framework enable us to accept such theories and descriptions? How or why did we become volunteers in the process of denying our own experiences?

6. The first partial answer is located in the nature of this framework. This framework is not a mere sentence ('The West is the most superior culture') nor is it merely a set of sentences. It is almost (but not quite) a stance or an attitude that one accepts with respect to the world. Such a framework takes root in the soil of a culture, spreads itself far and

wide and is never fully fleshed out because of the nature of the process itself. The creation of modern institutions in India by the British is this process of building the framework. The English education system, the judicial system, the colonial state, the state bureaucracy, institutions of learning, the social sciences and their teaching, etc. are the modes through which this framework took roots. The complexity of the process requires a few more words because, without them, what I write sounds very 'anti-modernist'.

When the British came to India, they were very convinced about the truth of what their religion teaches them: human beings are set on earth to obey the laws of God. All human societies had some or another set of laws as their foundation. Living together in a society that was founded upon God's Laws were the only means through which human beings could do what God ordained them to: worship Him. The same religion also taught them that, in the absence of God's revelation, His original dictates would have been corrupted due to the influence of Devil and his followers. The priests of the heathen religions would have tampered with these divine laws and the mass of people would be sunk in misery and depravation. Driven by this absolute conviction, the British tried to locate the laws that governed the Indian culture. Once they located such a text (the laws of Manu), they codified it and insisted that the people of India followed the codification. What united both the Anglicans and the early Orientalists was this idea that the Indian culture was founded upon laws; they sought to find the "most ancient text" on these laws because it would be the least corrupt of all. This idea has its origins in the Semitic religions and their empirical history. Once such a text was 'found' and its standard interpretation codified, Indians 'had to follow' it because that text should not anymore be allowed to follow the corrupt vagaries of fluid interpretations by the priests of the heathen religion. Of course, such a situation was bound to create problems among the British: should these people be allowed to follow their heathen laws or should one

impose the results of the revelation? At any one period of time, this or that faction dominated the debate, but the debates never really died. But underlying this debate was a cultural consensus about the relation between laws and society. In this sense, the judicial system that the British introduced was both alien and native: it was alien because of the notion that some or another law text is the foundation of society; native in so far as the text was eminently a product of the Indian culture.

Introduction of such a judicial system forced the Indians to become volunteers in the process of denying their own experience. Laws took on a status and force they never had in their culture, even if it was their 'own' laws. They had to act as though these laws had the character the British attributed to them. In doing so, they became volunteers in the process I have spoken of. The same applies to many of their practices: from the sati through hook-swinging. They would be tolerated by the British if one came up with proofs that these practices were sanctioned by the Indian 'scriptures', and the Indians dug into their library to come up with such proofs. In this way, they began to provide a scriptural foundation to cultural practices. And so on.

7. All the institutions that the British introduced coerced people into living up to them. However, Indians responded to this demand by trying to be what the British said they were. That is to say, the Indians responded to the British requirements by learning to become what the British wanted, and they did this by using the dominant process of learning practical knowledge: mimesis. They imitated the British and they did this by satisfying the requirements of the institutions that the British set up. That means, within the colonial context, a cultural way of learning was used to deny one's own experience to oneself. One became a volunteer. What the British did, however, was to inflict violence by denying the Indians their own experience of the world.

In this context, it would be fruitful to revisit one of the doyens of the post-colonial thought, Homi Bhabha. He argues that mimicry is also an expression of the 'resistance' of the colonized to the efforts of the colonizer. As I have said in my piece on colonialism, this description of 'mimicry' makes the colonized into an immoral creature. Let me recapitulate the argument here. If the colonized is expressing his 'resistance' through imitation, it follows logically that this 'mimicry' is not authentic. Imitation is the cloak that hides his true intention, which is to express resistance. He needs to hide it, furthermore, because he is unable to express it openly. This inability, however, is moral in nature: he does not have the moral courage to express his resistance openly but needs the act of imitation as a subterfuge. He is, in short, a moral coward as well. In other words, there is duplicity, deceit and cowardice involved even in the process of imitation. Writing such a resistance into the heart of the colonized is to write immorality into his core and transform him into a fundamentally inauthentic and unethical being.

My arguments give a different drift: mimesis, or learning through imitation, is the process of learning practical or performative knowledge. It becomes 'mimicry' when such a learning process entails a self-infliction of violence by the colonized: in mimicking, he is becoming a volunteer in denying his own experience to himself. Mimicry is an expression of self-infliction of violence and not an act of resistance. It is an act of 'self-alienation'.

8. We can now see the difference between violence as it is inflicted in intercultural dialogues and colonialism. They are related to each other the way murder (even serial murder) is related to the act of genocide: the latter acquires properties the former does not have. Colonialism institutionalizes violence. One cannot opt out and fail to participate in social and cultural institutions. Participating, however, requires denying one's experience to oneself.

9. Vivek Dhareshwar recently told me that Gandhi makes a very interesting distinction between people and civilization in the context of discussing British colonialism. He appears to have said that the British people are not to be blamed for colonization but their civilization, whereas the Indian people and not their civilization should be blamed. That is to say, in Gandhi's view, the western culture has successfully colonized the Indian people. Why does he blame the Indian people and not their culture? Answering this question (in my way; I do not know what Gandhi would have said) allows me, among other things, also to tackle two important issues: how did the British so successfully transform us? Why did we not offer resistance to this process of sculpting us?

10. All people who have a culture are rooted in that culture. (My formulation would be that many structures mediate an individual to a configuration of learning. What makes some difference into a cultural difference depends on how the individual is culturised, i.e., it depends on how the individual relates to and uses the mechanisms or structures of socialization.) If this is the case, how is it at all possible to uncouple a people from their cultures, something which Gandhi's formulation suggests and even demands? One way would be to suggest that there is a break in the transmission of culture: something in that culture is transmitted in an inadequate way or is arrested in its transmission. The British colonialism, then, is to be blamed not so much on the Indian culture but on the arrested transmission of some of its 'parts' to the people. Something or another from this culture is transmitted inadequately or even hardly transmitted so that the people become susceptible to colonialism.

What could cause an arrested transmission of parts of a culture or even lead to its total breakdown? Many things including natural disasters could do that. We do not know of any such calamity affecting the entire region that India was prior to its colonization by

the British. Consequently, we have to look elsewhere: either to a problem present in a culture or to some or another historical occurrence that has had a massive impact on that culture.

Assuming for a moment that Gandhi is on the right track, we cannot assume that some defect of the culture of India uncoupled (or uprooted) a people from its culture. Even an arrested or impeded transmission of some parts of the culture could not have been the result of some defect in that culture. If it was, then Gandhi would have had to say that it is some or another defect of the Indian culture that allowed its people to be colonized by the British. (In that case, the locus of the arrested or impeded transmission of some parts of the culture has to be located in the nature of the culture in question.)

Consequently, we have to look for a historical occurrence that has had a massive impact on the Indian culture as a whole before the British colonized us. If we look at the history of India, and look for a possible causes that can arrest the transmission of a culture through external impact (external, that is, to the culture in question), we stumble across the fact of Islamic rule. Thus, the only cause that appears to have the ability to arrest or impede transmission of culture would have to be this historical fact. In that case, by arresting the transmission of a culture, the Islamic rule would have had the same impact as the British later: render aspects of their experience inaccessible to the natives. If this is the case, we need to speak of Islamic colonialism the way we speak of British colonialism. Islamic colonialism also made our own experience (partially) inaccessible to us and this is where we were when the British colonized us. In fact, the British build on Islamic colonialism: the former continued the work of the latter, albeit in a different way.

11. In which way are these two colonialisms different? It is my hypothesis that the Islamic colonialism arrested or impeded the transmission of the many theories that had crystallized in the Indian culture: our theories about people, society, and nature. By arresting their transmission, by breaking the unity that was established between these theories and daily experience, Islamic colonialism inflicted violence on the Indian people. In the absence of access to these theories in the way this culture was used to, certain aspects of experience lost their intelligibility and could not be reflected upon. That is to say, Islamic colonialism took our abilities to reflect about experience away and thus made these facets inaccessible to us.

How did they take these abilities away? The answer becomes obvious if we look at the origin of such theories. They originate as explicit theories in the intellectual circles and percolate in a thousand ways into the daily lives of people. So, the Islamic colonialism must have hit the intellectual circles: it would have impeded and arrested the growth and development of these theories in the intellectual circles. That is to say, over a period of time, the quality of intellectual life should have degenerated under the Islamic colonial rule in India.

How could this hypothesis be tested to see whether it is worthy of further development and refinement? Let us assume that the impact of colonial rule is maximal in its 'immediate vicinity' but gets progressively 'diluted' as one moves further and further away from the 'center'. Under this assumption, areas which were very close to the colonial centre would suffer maximally; other areas would follow suit as this centre expands. That means to say, there would be regions in India that were continuously exposed to the 'maximal impact' of the Islamic colonial rule, and regions that were less so exposed. There will have to be a differentiation between these regions in India in

terms of their intellectual production. Some regions will have suffered longer-term damages than others; intellectual rejuvenation in some regions will have taken longer time than in others. Under the British colonial rule, some regions would have recovered faster from the impact of the Islamic colonial rule in the sense that there would be a differentiated response to the British colonial rule as well. And the regional disparity in responding to the British colonial rule will probably map the degree of closeness of that region to the Islamic colonial rule.

What kind of 'response' to the British am I talking about? I am talking actually about the additional growth to the colonial consciousness that occurred under British colonialism. (Very soon, I will explicate a bit more on this issue.) The regional variation in how people (let us say the intellectuals) reacted to British colonialism has something to do with the impact of Islamic colonialism on these regions. This way of 'measuring' the response to the British colonialism would give us a handle on the impact of Islamic colonialism on the Indian culture.

From what I know, there is very little empirical support to the hypothesis that the Islamic colonialism had a great impact on the fertility of the Indian intellectuals. Indian intellectuals continued to produce original theoretical tracts under the Islamic colonial rule. There is one hypothesis I have come across that tries to explain this: Rajiv Malhotra's claim that these contributions were merely the results of the earlier investment made by the Indian culture. The Muslims prevented any further investment in this area by the Indian culture. So, after a couple of centuries of their rule, intellectual life in India came to a standstill. Once this happened, something peculiar happened in the Indian culture that the British built further on. Before seeing what it is, let us notice very clearly that we need to investigate the Islamic colonial rule from the following point

of view: which mechanisms did they use to prevent the further growth of theories and speculations in the Indian cultures? How did the intellectual circles die in India? There would have to be at least two indicators of this state of affairs: the loss of fecundity in the debates within the Indian traditions, and the disappearance of centers of learning from the Indian culture.

12. For the time being, I will assume this hypothesis as true (and requiring further investigation to prove its truth or falsity). Islamic colonialism prevented access to our experience by arresting or impeding the transmission of theories that alone could help us make sense of experience. The question is: why should the death of intellectual life in India lead to this state of affairs? There are two factors to consider here. One is that intellectual life was mostly tied to the experience of daily life. (This has to do with the specificity of the Indian culture, more about which later.) The death of such an intellectual life (it must have been a massive social process) also severed intellectual research from daily life: the emergence of a class of 'pundits', isolated and removed from the experiences of daily life and concerned only with interpretations and reinterpretations of texts, is a phenomenon (I speculate) that made its appearance as a distinct social phenomenon under the Muslim colonial rule. The second factor is partly related to the first and partly to the nature of the Indian culture. When intellectual research divorces itself from daily life, the concepts and words used in daily intercourse between people lose their transparency and become 'dead', as it were. They cease signifying units of experience because the theories they depend on are not accessible to the people anymore.

The nature of Indian culture is simply this: the knowledge it has produced (practical knowledge) has been mainly what I call experiential knowledge and is a means to reflect

upon and form experience. This knowledge makes sense in experience; it is about experience; its goal is to form and transform the human experience. The Indian theories are about experience and were devised to think about and change the human experience. It is the transmission of these theories that get arrested under the Islamic colonial rule.

13. The Muslims did not fundamentally alter the nature of daily life, having tried and failed to do so in the initial stages of colonization. What does that mean? People continued to learn language, use the words they used and transmit them to succeeding generations. But with each generation, these words began to mean less and less because the theories they relied upon to make sense were not accessible to these people (unless in the form of texts written in a dead language). So, under the Mogul colonial rule, a way of going-about had come into existence in India already: less and less people knew what they were talking about when they spoke of human beings, life, society and nature. The words that made sense once were not signifying much any longer.

What kind of words am I speaking about here? They are the words that we use today too when we talk about human beings: Manas, raga, iccha, chitta, gyana, buddhi, vikara, Bhavana, Dharma, papa, punya, adharma, and so on and so forth. In short, they embrace what is often called "the Indic categories". Already, under the Islamic colonial rule, we were developing an inability to identify what these words referred to, what their meanings were, and so on. Our daily language is saturated with these words, but our ability to make sense of these words was fading fast under the Muslim colonialism.

14. This is how the British encountered us and discovered that the intellectuals of the Indian culture were singularly ignorant of their own traditions. (I am now inclined to view this as a true description, albeit couched in Western cultural idiom.) The British

colonial rule simply introduced forms of western knowledge and these could thrive in the vacuum that was already here. The British did something that was even more remarkable: they described us as they experienced us, and we accepted their experience as truths about ourselves. How could we do this? Because we had no access to (multiple facets of) our experience by then already! Their descriptions of their experience supplanted our reflections about our own experiences, and their translations became our translations. It is not that we understood the British or English as well as they did, so that we could agree with their descriptions and translations. Because we did not understand the meaning of the words we were using in our daily language any more, we were unable to challenge their descriptions or their translations. Consider this: today, many of us challenge the translations of texts that the westerners undertake. Why was such a challenge almost singularly unavailable in the heydays of translations of the Indian texts? Why do we have to wait till the end of the twentieth century to challenge the translations of the Indian texts? I believe this has to do with the fact that a new layer was being added to the colonial consciousness by the British. In any case, we end up parroting both our own languages and English. However, we entertain the conviction that we understand both very well. How to understand this conviction?

In a way, the answer is obvious. We have merely learnt the use of words. We know how to use both 'mind' and 'manas' proficiently. We are at a loss only if one interrogates us about how we identify either of the two. So, if our understanding of 'deva' is shallow, how could we protest against its translation into an equally superficially understood 'god'? In other words, we have no way of finding out (if we take our proficiency of our own native languages as a criterion) whether we understand English any better or worse than our native languages. Our grasp of both is equally good, if equally shallow.

15. The Muslims did not merely rule over us and collect revenues. Nor did they merely indulge in forced conversion into Islam or destroy temples. Their 'rule' was not just limited to making Islam a part of the Indian culture nor was it finished with the emergence of Bhakti traditions inspired by Sufi-mysticism. This colonialism arrested and impeded the transmission of theories that were required to make sense of our experience. The Islamic colonialism cut the link between reflections on experience on the one hand and having such experiences on the other by destroying the fecundity of intellectual life in India. How did they accomplish this? Perhaps, one way of figuring that out is to undertake a different kind of study of what has happened and what is happening in Kashmir, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Today, Sharadamba, "the Kashmirapuravasini", has become an alien in Kashmir. How did this happen in a matter of fifty years? This Islam, I believe, is substantially of the same variety as the Islam during the colonial rule.

We are now in a position to make better sense of Gandhi. When the British colonized us and denied access to our experience, we were already (partially) denied of it through the Islamic colonialism. The British colonialism could build further on the success of Islamic colonization; the British introduced a framework that could thrive in the partial vacuum that the Muslims had already created. Both forms of colonialisms denied access to our experience, although each did it in a different way.

16. However, it remains the case that we use our native languages with ease and fluency. We use words, whether 'manovikara' or 'chittashuddhi', in a way that makes one strongly believe that we know the (multiple) meanings of these words. In fact, so strong is this belief that we ourselves believe that we know what we are talking about until we force ourselves to explain these words. Only then do we feel the embarrassment, even though

the tendency is to justify this ignorance by referring to learned tracts on the subject. How to make sense of this situation?

I would like to use the hypothesis developed in 'The Heathen...' to explain this situation. If ritual has brought forth a configuration of learning that the Indian culture is, our way of learning language will also be demonstrably 'ritualistic'. The emphasis is on 'correct speech', or the 'right speech', where both 'correctness' and 'rightness' will be understood by referring to the way the rituals are structured. That is to say, 'speech' will above all be appreciated in terms of its syntactic purity. If this is the case, the way the children are taught (and learn) languages will be different from the way the same thing happens in another culture where meaning issues predominate. (This could be one of the reasons why 'rhetoric' is associated with 'right speech' in the western culture and not 'grammar'. This contrast is merely meant to highlight the difference in emphasis but not to deny that rhetoric and logic were also important in India or the other way round.)

The Islamic colonialism did not destroy the Indian culture anymore than British colonialism did. Consequently, we continued to learn languages the way we learn them and the colonial consciousness that emerged due to colonialism merely strengthened its own perverse effects. We learnt to speak 'correctly', i.e., learnt to use the words correctly, without being able to identify for ourselves what these units referred to. The focus became even more firmly 'syntactic' because the speech units did not appear to name or refer to anything recognizable in our experience. Because some philosophical issues are entangled in this claim, let me briefly touch on a relevant aspect from the philosophy of language.

17. There are multiple fragmentary theories about use and meaning. Some people suggest that the meaning of a word or a sentence is its use; yet others would like to distinguish between the two. I think the situation I have sketched throws a peculiar light on these discussions.

Consider a word like 'manas', which has made its home in many Indian languages. What we learn, I would like to suggest, is its use when we learn some or another Indian language over a period of time. [In so using, some theories suggest to us, one learns the use of the word in many contexts ('contextual meaning') and over a period of time learn also its 'lexical meaning'. Others suggest that learning the multiple uses of this word is all there is to meaning and there is no other separate entity called 'meaning'.] Our state of being, as beings with a colonial consciousness, shows us why this discussion is not sufficient for our purposes.

We learn to use the word 'manas' correctly is to say that we are able to relate it correctly to the earlier and the succeeding word. That is, we are able to use this word correctly in sentences that talk about, say, human beings (and animals?) and do not use it when we talk about, say, the quality of Idlis. In correctly using this word, we learn the 'proximal meaning' of the word (or its correct use in the context of other words in a sentence). This 'proximal meaning' is primarily (and merely) restrictive in nature: it tells us where it is not appropriate to use the word. We cannot use the word with respect to Idlis, we use it definitely with respect to human beings (and perhaps animals) but, in so doing, we do not use it regarding (identifiable) body parts. This proximal meaning is neither contextual meaning nor lexical meaning of the word. It does not help us identify what we talk about, but tells us (negatively) what we are not talking about. Put in simpler terms: the proximal meaning of a word teaches us (negatively) the domain of its application (or use), but no

more. This meaning of the word tells us nothing either about the range of the domain or about the scope of the word in that domain. The linguistic practice of a community cannot settle issues about the use of the word, even where their use conflicts. As an example to illustrate the previous sentence, consider an imaginary conversation between two Indians.

"You look absorbed. What are you doing 'dhyana' about?"

"I was doing 'alochana', not 'Dhyana'"

To this, both the following answers are acceptable: (a) "They are the same: 'deep alochana' is what 'dhyana' means". (b) "Oh, is that all? I thought you were absorbed in dhyana ('dhyanamagya')."

Our linguistic practice cannot help us decide about which of these two sentences is true, whether either of them is true or whether both of them are false. This has to do with the fact that we have learnt only the proximal meaning of the word 'dhyana'.

18. There are two important points worthy of note regarding the previous paragraph. The first has to do with the fact that almost all the words we use in the Indian languages with respect to human beings are used by us analogously. That is to say, we have learnt only the proximal meanings of these words. The list of the words is mind numbing: 'manas', 'chitta', 'bhavana', 'dharma', 'dhyana', 'atman', 'Ishwara', 'deva', 'karma', 'manana', 'chittashuddhi', 'manovikara', 'buddhi', 'ahamkara', 'grahana'.... There is only a negative linguistic intuition guiding us in the use of these words and the linguistic practices of the language communities are unable to arbitrate about their use.

The second point concerns the theories of meaning and use. As far as I know the literature (I would appreciate hearing from people if I am wrong), there is no cognizance of this state of affairs. We can say definitively that the use of a word cannot be identical

to its meaning unless one recognizes the kind of use I have just talked about. One can use the word in an apparently proficient way (up to a point) and yet not know either its contextual meaning or its lexical meaning or be even in a position to arbitrate about contradictory usages of the word. One cannot explain this away by speaking about not having learnt a language either sufficiently or proficiently because this is the state of affairs of communities of language users and not a failure of an individual. On top of that, it is not an affliction applicable to the entire range of words in a language but applies only to an identifiable subset of the words. In short, the meaning of a word cannot be its use, unless one begins to nuance the notion of use itself. In any case, the bland thesis about meaning and use is empirically false. (This also puts paid to the 'Turing test' in Artificial Intelligence.) At the same time, the other bland thesis that knowing the meaning of a word is to be able to use it in all contexts is also false: one could know the proximal meaning of the word; knowing this, one cannot use the word in all possible contexts.

How shall we call the way we use the word, while knowing its 'proximal meaning'? I suggest we call it 'mantric use' (or ritualistic use). Without intending any thing negative or pejorative, let us say that we use words from a certain sub-domain in our languages as 'mantras'. Provocatively put: we learn mantras about human beings when we learn Indian languages as native speakers. I am using the word 'mantra' to get across another point about the use: we do not know, as Indians, whether mantras have meaning or not (some say yes, some say no) despite being linguistic entities. Such is the status of the words we so fluently use in our daily intercourse.

19. There is another way of formulating what I have said. Semantic entities are transformed into syntactic units. However, the only grammatical rules at our disposal in

this case are the mantras. How does the use of mantras prevent access to our experience? I have already partially answered this. These mantras were meaningful words that should help us reflect on our experience, on fellow human beings and guide us further in life. They have been elaborated, refined and developed in the theories that our culture developed. The Islamic colonialism took a major step in transforming semantic entities into syntactic units. Because of this, the British colonialism thrived. In their turn, the British remapped these syntactic units onto the semantics of their language. 'Manas' became 'mind', 'bhavana' became 'feelings', Dharma became both 'ethics' and 'religion', 'Ishwara' became the name of a god, 'Deva' became 'God' and so on. We took to English like ducks take to water not because we understood either our culture or languages or because we understood the western culture or their languages better. We also learnt the proximal meanings of the English language, mapped them onto the proximal meanings of our native languages. This remapping appears to provide us with the impression that we know what 'God' means (for instance) because we can use it as a mapping of the word 'deva'. In the background, there is a promise of intelligibility because of the presence of explicit theorizing in the English language about 'God'. Such a mapping does not give access to the western experience. It merely provides us with an illusion that we know the western culture.

If the hypothesis about how we have learnt English has bite, it falsifies another widely held thesis about the relation between language and culture. Learning the language of a culture is not identical to having access to that culture. Nor does the language of a people express their culture in any necessary way. Learning the proximal meanings of words, and learning the grammar of a language (which is what our knowledge of English amounts to) does not give us any access to the western culture. It merely further denies us access to our own experience because it reinforces two false beliefs: (a) we know the meaning of

English words and thus understand English the way the native speaker uses them; (b) that we have access to our cultural experience because we speak Indian languages as natives.

This situation also settles another debate about the use of 'Indic categories'. It also explains why one uses a Michael Witzel to fight a Wendy Doniger. Because we have learnt only the proximal meanings (as native language speakers), we have no special capacity (by virtue of this) to settle issues of translation. That is also why many people reproduce the criticisms of Witzel (or someone like him) to challenge Doniger's translations of Sanskrit texts.

20. I began by sketching the two contexts that frame this set of notes. One was the context of political theory and the other was that of cultural psychology. The emergence of colonial consciousness makes it quite clear why political theory forms one of the contexts. In what way does this colonial consciousness have an impact on the cultural psychology of the Indians? To answer this question with some degree of precision, we need to have theories about both and we lack them. Apart from the quasi-philosophical (and at times partially psychoanalytical) writings of some African intellectuals (Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire come to mind) or the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (who talks about the consciousness of the oppressed), I know of very few other writings on the subject of colonial consciousness. Cultural psychology has hardly progressed to the point of helping us in our quest. So, I would like to put across some considerations that go some way in developing a hypothesis.

It appears obvious that centuries of colonial rule must have had a very great impact on our cultural psychology. How to assess the extent of this impact? Could we, for instance,

put across the claim that what I am describing is not merely colonial consciousness but a fragment of our cultural psychology itself? That is to say, today, could one suggest that it is spurious to make a distinction between 'colonial' consciousness and an 'Indian' cultural psychology, which would be different from this consciousness? Have we, psychologically speaking, already become a variant of the western psyche?

Though it is possible that we are already western but merely wear Indian clothes, I think this possibility is unlikely. The colonial rule did not destroy the Indian culture but merely modified it in some way or another. If cultures are configurations of learning, and this particular configuration of learning was not destroyed, then what the Indian culture has done is to adapt some of its learning processes. (This is my assumption.) Forming the psychology of the members of a culture is the coordinated task of many social and cultural structures. From the patterns of family interactions through the educational institutions to peer group interactions, many processes contribute towards this end. Even if each of these were modified under colonial rule, it involved a modification and not their destruction. Consequently, there is a distinction between colonial consciousness and the Indian cultural psychology. We have learnt to get along with our colonial consciousness; we notice its presence only vaguely and dimly; but this consciousness is not (yet) a part of the cultural psychology of the Indians. Perhaps, one of the specificities of the Indian cultural psychology is its accommodation to the colonial consciousness. While this argument merely lends plausibility to the claim that we are not yet variants of the western psyche, it does not establish it. We do not need to find an 'original' or 'uncontaminated' Indian cultural psychology to make this suggestion. It is sufficient to suggest that a cultural psychology in a culture is formed by different processes and structures and that most of them were not destroyed under colonial rule. Colonial rule did create a consciousness (the colonial consciousness) that is impinging on the cultural

psychology of the Indians of today. How is it impinging, or interacting with our psychology?

By way of beginning to think about this process, let us look anew at the phenomenon of colonial consciousness from a different perspective. So far, I have spoken mainly about two things: (a) use of words about a certain domain of our experience (the domain being one of our experiences of ourselves, the others around us, and fellow human beings) without being able to provide any kind of reference to these words in our experience; (b) the lack of access to explicit theorizing about our experiences with respect to ourselves and our fellow human beings. What is their significance to our psychology? That is to say, how do these two facts impinge upon and affect our psychology?

21. I would like to recount two of my recent experiences in India that have formed the basis of this set of notes. These experiences are anecdotal and do not have the status of either evidence or proof. They are mere illustrations even though they have provided me with much food for thought.

Last year, for no apparent reason, my brother suffered a very severe nervous breakdown. In the process of interacting with him to help him recover, the first thing that struck me forcibly was my inability to communicate. Even though he is perfectly capable of understanding English, he could not figure out the meaning of sentences like the following: "you are losing yourself in your feelings"; "you are wallowing in self-pity"; "try and raise above your feelings"; "try and get a grip on yourself" and so on. He very much wanted to recover because he could not take the psychic pain, believed that it was crucial that he understood me so that he might recover, but try as he might he could not. He neither knew what these and analogous sentences meant nor did they help him in

figuring out a way to climb out of depression. I very soon realized that his failure was rooted in his unfamiliarity with the western psychological theories but short of giving a crash course on that subject, there was little else I could do. After futile attempts at figuring out simple analogues of similar sentences for weeks on end, I switched to talking to him solely in our native language. (As must be obvious, most of the sentences like the above cannot be expressed in the Indian languages.) The problem of communicating with him, instead of disappearing, became even more complex: (a) I did not know how to talk about either 'depression' or his state of being in any of the Indian languages I know without using English words; (b) where I could translate some of these sentences, he did not understand (to the statements "do not get lost in bhavanas" or "do not run behind bhavanas", I would get the question, "what do they mean?"); (c) where he did appear to understand, I received replies that stumped me because they made sense and were nonsensical at the same time ("I have no bhavanas in my manas, there is nothing in my manas, only sorrow and pain is happening" – I am literally translating here) or (d) requested instructions I could not provide ("come outside the bhavanas and look at them" elicited the question "how to do it?"); (e) he was mapping certain words from Indian languages to English without realizing what he was doing ("use your buddhi" invariably elicited the statement "I am not intelligent" – he was mapping 'buddhi' to intelligence because very often he would use this English word) or he would ask "if you say that, what does it mean to 'use buddhi'?" and so on. My brother is both a very intelligent man and reasonably well-versed in English. If there was merely an incomprehensibility problem when I spoke in English appealing to the western psychological theory, other problems were added when I spoke in our mother tongue. I do not want to clutter up this piece by chronicling all the roads I vainly tried except to say that using analogies seemed to work better. One day, in the process of one such discussion where I was trying to tell him not to look for the 'causes' ('kaarana') for his

feelings, I made the following statement: “when you feel sorrow, do not go searching for its origin in any of your past deeds; none of these deeds is de ‘kaarana’ for your sorrow; all of them function merely as hangers” – coat hangers, I used the English word ‘hanger’. This statement had an extraordinary impact on him: he said that he suddenly found a way to deal with his feelings of guilt, sorrow and such like by making use of this analogy. This is one of the analogies that have helped him get better.

What was so illuminating about this analogy or even why is it an analogy in the first place? I was repeating a profound truth that the Indian traditions proclaim; this claim also forms our cultural experience of the world. And it was an analogy because I mapped this truth to coats and their hangers.

22. In the western conception of man (I know of no theories in philosophy or psychology that do not endorse it), in the course of their lives, human beings develop multiple desires: the desire for fame, wealth, power, women, recognition, identity ... The desires are indefinitely many as are their ends. I am told (I am too lazy to check whether this is true) that ‘desire’ in the English grammar (for instance) is a transitive verb: to make a well-formed sentence about desire one has to specify the object of desire. That is to say ‘desire’ cannot stand alone without a specification of the object of desire (‘desire for what?’). In western theories about human beings, man is a creature with many different desires (always in the plural).

In contrast, the Indian traditions speak about desire in the singular. Desire has no particular goal, which is why it can take anything else as its end: money, fame, sex, identity, power, status... It is in the nature of desire to be limitless because it does not have any specific object as its end; it can attach itself to any and every object in the

world. This is one of the reasons why desire is the root of sorrow. This claim about desire has been further extended to cover all our feelings: if one wants to, one could trace the origins of all feelings in desire or see feelings as variants of desire or whatever else. In other words, it makes intuitive sense to the Indians to (a) speak of desire in the singular; (b) see desire functioning as 'hangers' for objects (i.e. desire becomes the 'hanger' on which you can hang any kind of coat, shirt, undershirt, or trousers).

I was using this framework (I surmise) when I spoke to my brother about 'hangers'. His feeling of sorrow was analogous to desire; all his past deeds were the objects. (Even though, in the statement that helped my brother, they got reversed: 'guilt' and sorrow became the clothes that were searching for hangers; his past deeds were the hangers.) The point is the structure of the analogy: his past deeds were not the 'cause' ('kaarana') of his depression; his depression was merely searching for something to attach itself to.

[A small digression. One of the consequences of this difference reflects itself in the ways in which they get worked out further in these cultures. The frustration of desires becomes a central problem in western thinking: invariably, the world (meaning mostly the presence of other human beings in the world) frustrates the desires of each individual human being. The world becomes a hostile place ('hostile' because it frustrates the fulfillment of our desires) in which each of us has to learn to accept this frustration. (In some post-modern thinking, the 'Other' – who is both alien and inhuman – is at the root of this frustration. This 'Other' denies fulfillment of our desires.)

In Indian thinking, the indeterminacy of desire and hence its limitlessness, and the futility of the objects in the world to satisfy it become the central problems. The attention turns inwards, into reflections about the nature of desire. The world has little to do with either

desire or its fulfillment. In a way, the world is indifferent towards our desire; other human beings, finite resources on this planet, etc. are not relevant to this issue. Even in a (possible) world where there are infinite resources, human beings will continue to feel unhappy if they give themselves over to their desire. Desire is unsatisfiable.]

I believe I was able to help my brother the way I did because I appealed to some basic structure of his experience of himself and the world. The analogy made sense to him because it was related to his experience. This structure is also the structure of Indian psychology and not merely the individual psychology of my brother. As such, this is the structure of the cultural psychology of the Indians.

As long as a crisis situation does not come about, we can get around with what we have today. In a crisis, we realize, that the Indian concepts ('buddhi', 'chitta', 'manas', 'bhavana'... etc) we so frequently use have little or no meaning to us. The concepts from the western psychology (even if you know the theories) do not help because we do not have a corresponding experience in the world. But we have no direct access to our experiences of the world because we have simply mapped one set of words (from our native languages that might have helped us) onto another set of words (which require another experience of the world than the ones we have). Colonialism has (a) prevented the transmission of earlier reflections on experiences; (b) allowed the retention of languages which are saturated by words that require the earlier reflections to make sense; (c) forced us to map these (partially) un-understandable words into a language and theory which require a different experience of the world than we have to make sense. Because of these (d) it prevents access to the structure of our experience. Colonial consciousness (I am speaking only about India here) emerges out of a combination of these four aspects.

23. If this is the story of my generation (and generations preceding us), what is the situation regarding the Indian youth of today? Again, an anecdotal illustration will have to come before theorizing. The situation is even more complex but let me draw the outlines of some threads. I have a few nieces and nephews between 17 and 20 years of age and they behave no differently than their peers at school. The first striking thing about them is the way they describe (or talk about) peer-group interactions. With each other, they speak in idioms that hardly distinguish them from peers within India (a Bangalorean speaks the way a resident of Calcutta or Bombay or Delhi speaks) or from Belgium, France or New York. Some examples must suffice: "they were making out"; "he was hitting on her"; "he was coming on heavily"; "I beat myself up regularly". Most parents hardly have a clue what these kids are talking about and, in most cases, kids do not talk like this at home. At home, they are the dutiful children that the parents want: these kids cannot either stop visiting temples or insist on going on 'pilgrimages' or show their devotion to the 'gods'; they do not stop impressing their parents how they are 'true' to their upbringing while all their 'friends' eat meat or have boy- and girl friends and so on. (Of course, this is probably applicable only to the growing middle class in India.) The more foolish the parents and the family circles are (I know quite a few of them in India), the more they encourage and sustain this schizophrenic behavior from their children. But let us focus on the kind of experience these kids have of their world and speak about the relation between their language-use and their experience of the world. Even though most of these kids speak English most of the time (and have learnt the native languages either badly or not at all), their experience of the world (again, in most cases) is still typically that of the lower middle class: sexual hang-ups, emotional blockages, and unstable psychological profiles. While they might "beat themselves up regularly", they hardly know what self-recrimination means; actually what they mean is "scolding oneself" (as

we use this expression in the Indian languages). Guys might “come on heavily”, but these kids cannot distinguish a polite compliment from a seduction move. Someone might be ‘making out’ with someone else, but they only have their biology lessons in mind when they talk like this. Either they have, or want very badly to have, boy or girl friends; but their imagination is restricted to holding hands and running around the trees, singing songs. In short, even though these (and analogous expressions) make some kind of intuitive sense to them, their experiences of the world is not that of a kid of the same age from London, Paris or New York who also uses similar expressions. Their experiential worlds are not even similar: at some basic levels, I discovered, there was no difference between talking to my parents and talking to these kids even if the conversations with the latter took place entirely in English. Their attitude towards their deva’s, for instance, is as genuine as the attitudes of my parents; when these kids go visit the temples, they are not doing that only to impress their parents. They genuinely partake of the feeling of Bhakti as well. Yet, there is also a great difference between them and my parents: surely, the emotions of these kids are getting formed through this kind of language use that requires a different experience of self and personhood to make sense. Talking to these kids, I discovered that their problems are more acute: English appears to make intuitive sense to them, yet words from this language cannot identify units from their experiential world. Unlike my brother, they are even less familiar with words from Indian languages (either because they do not speak these languages or speak them badly). They have not become ‘westernized’ because their experiences of themselves and the world are not western. However, their Indian experiences are inaccessible to their language and reflections. In them, the colonial consciousness has taken deeper roots. In other words, there is no transformation (as yet) of their psychologies: the basic structure remains the same. But isolating them from their psychology is that thick layer (it has only become thicker with these kids) that I call ‘colonial consciousness’.

24. Perhaps, the best illustration of this peculiar mixture of Indian cultural psychology with the colonial consciousness is to be found in the courses that swamijis of today offer, whether he is a Sri Sri Ravishankar or a Rishi Prabhakar. The former's 'theoretical teachings' (I am not talking about his Sudarshan Kriya) is a peculiar mixture of Eric Berne's 'I am OK, you are OK' kind of psychology mixed with some Indian 'metaphysics', and some mumbo-jumbo words from some Yogic tracts about human psychology. The latter explicitly draws his 'psychological theory' from the practice of 'sensitivity training', encouraging his students to follow 'expert' courses in a psychological 'theory' that no self-respecting psychologist (of whatever theoretical persuasion) would like to associate him or herself with. The middle class Indians, whether in the States or in India, become ecstatic about these 'deep psychological insights'. This is because of the absence of transmission of any kind of theoretical reflections about the nature of their own experiences of the world.

25. In a way, this situation sets both the context and the task for the intellectuals of India. Resuscitating Sanskrit words (the 'Indic categories') by digging into this or that tract or treatise will not even begin to address the problems we confront. In some senses, these 'Indic categories' are rapidly losing their semantic content to us, whether from my generation or from the younger generation. Writing compendia on 'Indian psychology' by culling the meaning of words from Sanskrit texts or by having various scholars summarize 'theories' of Indian psychology as 'Gita formulates it', 'in Patanjali's Yoga', 'according to advaita' and so on are curiosa that can only satisfy the ego of the writer or the publisher. What we need to do is to start the process of reflecting on the Indian cultural experience, fashioning terms as we need them and reaching out to the past only so that we can identify whether their problems were similar to ours, and whether they

formulated answers that could make sense to us in the twenty-first century. Our task is to take up anew the challenge our culture posed and answered so successfully in the past: reflect on human experiences and relate these reflections to experiences so that the latter can be molded, changed, formed and transformed.

Balu

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