

## Horizon, Elsewhere and the Post-Colonial Habitation

TAPAS K ROY CHAUDHURY\*

Horizon is the ocular certification of the conceptual and of frontiers, the farthest end of the lived experience, or even beyond the empiricized, where the post-colonial habitates a no-man's land for a private space. It is the disruption of the marginal borders, particularly of those who are estranged, fugitive, migrants, diasporic, asyllumed, and so much for a trope in the post-colonial discourse. It is an engagement with conceptual boundaries, erected by the urgency for homeliness of the colonial power, or for some privacy in the anonymous diasporic space, as well as the boundaries of meaning. The metaphorically fenced, therefore, posits a pent-land analogy, which is appropriated to nurture marginalized history to underpin, by the narratives of difference, how the *core* is or is to be different from the periphery. Perceiving the horizon beyond the boundaries, presumably, in *elsewhere* than the ambivalence and the hybridity, is one of the major post-colonial theoretical enterprises today. Edward Said has negotiated with boundaries in terms of 'the fetishization and relentless celebration of 'difference'. . . seen as an ominous trend. . . .' Horizon, hence, argues for an uneasy consciousness of individuals and communities, beyond 'not we' or 'not us', being transported into the domain of non-identitarianism. A good part of the post-colonial literature has no better issue to address than the litany of appropriated history, exiled space.

The boundary, in its post-coloniality, is a special metaphor, which is used to state 'the distance between cultures', 'the limits of reason'. Boundaries are viewed as constructs; modernity which is trumpeted as the self-realization of the West has produced 'others', in its imperial discourses, to legitimate its surrogate claims in its cultural encounter with the 'not we'. In colonial representation the boundary of signification has emerged with almost 'inviolable certainty, as it is necessary for the assertion of Europe's presence. Special thinking, consequently, continues to operate as metonymic of racial, political, cultural power within colonialism. Jacobus Coetzee in his *Dusklands* pictures the absurdity of an ambiguous existence of the one who habits beyond free spaces.

There he stands, inhabiting the prescribed place four paces away and three feet down, resignation is in the air, we are now going to live through gifts of tobacco and words of peace, direction to water and warnings against brigands, demonstrations of firearms, murmur of awe, and eventually a lifetime of the pad-pad-pad of straight line, the transformation of savage into enigmatic follower, and the obscure movement of the soul (weariness, relief, incuriosity, terror) that comes with this familiar transformation, we feel as a fated pattern and condition of life.

The trope of seeing is connected to the metaphor of space within which the colonial subject is separated, defined,

demarcated. The space that is sought to be privatized now is the return of the repressed who intends to write back the West in their performative cultural immediacies. Before divided horizons, the 'erstwhile' prior to the worldly alterity and the interminable reworking of power and politics that constitute the marginal's sense of being is the *elsewhere* that the pre-slave of Phyllis Wheatley, an 18<sup>th</sup> century African slave girl interwove in the lineament of *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral* as an ambivalence of a mediated self:

Taws mercy brought me from my pagan land,  
Taught my blighted soul to understand  
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:  
Once I redemption neither sought nor know.  
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,  
'Their color is a diabolic die'.  
Remember, *Christions, Negroes*, black as *Cain*.

It has presumably raised a serious question on how the races are interlinked with nations, the imprisoned space liberated into the textual space of the unmediated horizontality of existence. The *Black Atlantic* incidentally is reiterative; it did not exhaust in Wheatley, from Wheatley to Du Bois to Delany to Paul Gilroy, it has re-incarnated to lay its claim on its appropriated space. Du Bois in his *Dusk of Dawn* has engaged in an Atlantic

\* Fellow, IIAS, Shimla.

peregrination, being conquered by his surrogation against the tidal waves of heroic nation-building activity in his *erstwhile* whose memory he has surrendered to ambivalence of his present. It is in fact a severe theoretical scrutiny by which the post-colonial intends to suture the *Black Atlantic* across its temporality. Delany, of course, has considerably redeemed himself from the paradox of the pre-existing and the existential to configure his marginality and its recovery of self. So, he could be so unequivocal as to say: We must 'make' an 'issue', 'create' an 'event', and 'establish' a 'national position' for Ourselves; and never may expect to be respected as men and women, until we have undertaken, some fearless, bold, and adventurous deeds of daring-contending against every odds-regard-less of any consequence.

The rhetoric of the creation of an event has persisted, and in its urgency it has engendered multiple linearity to be uttered. Chinua Achube, while crafting *Things Fall Apart*, has predicated a way to experience reality where the boundary, which was once interminable, is diminished. The idea has been centred on the anterior; the *egwugwu*, the ancestral spirit of the community, in human recreation, dissolves the frontiers between the human actors and the spirit *per se*. He wrote:

Okonkwo's wives and perhaps other women as well, might have noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springly walk of Okonkwo. And they might also have noticed that Okonkwo was not among the titled men and elders who sat behind the row of *egwugwu*. But if they thought these things they kept them within themselves. The *egwugwu* with the springly walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan. He looked terrible with smoked raffia body, a huge wooden face painted white except for round hollow eyes and the charred teeth that were as big as a man's fingers. On his head two powerful horns.

Though Achube appears to have reinstalled a new boundary in an ethnographic irony the fact that 'The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors' is an act of relocation in the history of the compulsive existence of their pre-history. This capacity to control representation is itself a fundamental horizontal practice; nevertheless, horizontality is installed as a cultural product of the text through the literary representation of the pre-colonial cultures. This vision of 'pre-colonial' is one form of horizontality achieved in the post-colonial discourse and the European ontology. But there is another way to breakdown the various boundaries of the natural world, between the foreground and the background, the animal and human, as suggested by Les Murray in her *Equanimity*:

From the otherworld of action and media, this interleaved continuing plane is hard to focus: we are looking into the light- It makes some smile some grimace. More natural to look at the birds about the street, their life that is greedy, pinched, courageous and prudential as any on these bricked tree-mingled miles of settlements, to watch the unceasing on-off grace that attends their every movement. The same grace moveless in the shapes of trees and complex in our selves and fellow walkers: we see it is indivisible and scarcely willed. That lights us from the incommensurable we sometimes glimpse, from being trapped in the point (bird minds and ours are so pointedly visual): a field all foreground, and equally all background like a painting of equality. O infinite detailed extent like God's attention. Where nothing is diminished by perspective.

The alliance that Murray intends to achieve between the equanimity of perception and the indigenous form of representation is controversial, but that it is with boundary she has been engaged is indeed quiet panegyric to horizontality. The centrality of the issue is what space to inhabit when the marginals invade the diasporic, exiled, estranged boundaries with the contrivance of the horizon. Interestingly, the writer in the borderlands negotiates the fragile space, fragility imputed by their unique observation of porosity, some what directly, though, they cannot decide if their space is the *pre-existing* or the *elsewhere* which can be inhabited securely. Gloria Anzaldua attempted a tentative answer:

When I write it feels like I'm carving bone. It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking and giving birth to itself through my body. It is this learning to live with *la Coatlicue* that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/ state to something else.

In all difficulties which the *pre-existing* encounters to negotiate with the colonially existed, an yearning is expressed for the *elsewhere* to be found in the twilight of the horizon. It is the metonymic of the post-colonial where the innocent habitation in a home is intimidated not only by the inviolability of the fences but also by the ambiguity of the location. So, it is often found that the architecture of varandah is used as the metonym for a no-man's land where the transculturation of the 'insider' and 'outsider' may take place in an apparently non-negotiable boundaries. The metaphor of the contact zone suggests that the discourse is replaced by a counter-discourse in which the very identities of the 'inner' and the 'outer' become negotiable. Its alterity, the imposition of a home on an alien land by the colonizer, is the arrogant 'extra-

territoriality' which is flaunted to demarcate the 'no entry' to those who own the land in tradition and in contemporary legality. In *The Ancestor Game*, Alex Miller introduced Lien to extraterritoriality as '... the continued jurisdiction of their country of origin over foreign nationals resident in the International Settlement ... Did this mean, then, she had wished to know, that these people had travelled to the far side of the world from their ancestral home-lands and yet had managed to remain at home?' Under the circumstances the metaphorical varandah, though emotionally unsafe to live, furnishes the only place for post-colonial habitation where the cultural discourse of the 'inside' and the marginalized 'outside' is less intimidatingly conducted.

So, the question remains how is the home to be inhabited, and what is it that is the authentic home of the estranged. Tom Morrison has struggled with the dispensation of the Western epistemology to liberate the home from its inherited frontierities. In his *Paradise* he pronounces for the black Americans:

This their home; mine too. Home is not a little thing.

I'm not saying it is. But can't you even imagine what it must feel like to have a true home? I don't mean heaven. I mean a real earthly home. Not some fortress you bought and built up and have to keep everybody locked in or out. A real home. Not someplace you went to and invaded and slaughtered people to get. Not some place you claimed, snatched because you got the guns. Not some place you stole from the people living there, but your own home, where if you go back past your great-great grandparents, past theirs, and theirs, past the whole of Western history, past the beginning of organised knowledge, past pyramids and poisoned bows, and back to when rain was new, before plants forget they could sing and birds thought they were fish, back when God said Good! Good! – there right there where you know your own people were born and lived and died.

Imagine that. Pat. That Place. Who was God talking to if not to my people living in my home?

Morisson has espoused a theoretical legitimacy to restitute to Richard a home which he has never lived, but its constitutive being neither the anticident nor the elsewhere has landed him into the unsuspecting freak of the post-colonial argument. If it is all where your own people were born and lived and died, it could be no more than the reiteration of the carefully fenced space, which for its rejection of others, is the same sordid space whose other side is settled by the colonizer with their extraterritorial proclamations. It is a paradox of two modes of habitation, two different ways of being in the same world. Contesting marginality is a legitimate enterprise of the estranged, but finding no better term to do so than recapitulating the argument of fences whether colonial or post-colonial is the resignation of an ideology. The diasporic probably can do no better than that. Boundaries originate in imperial imagination to regulate cultural space of the colonized; but the potentiality of the post-colonial space, unless it is inhabited, is wasted in its invasion by the imperial imagination. It is also equally true that the post-colonial space cannot be settled, as long as the transcendence of the cultural horizon is not materialized, in a rejection of the geopolitical, ethnic, cultural cartography. David Malouf has tried to narrate in *Remembering Babylon* how different it could be to inhabit the post-colonial space from that the habits of European dwelling dictate. The theoretical rejection of the cartography of divisions is the background on which can be foregrounded the conceptual and cultural fences in an underpinning of horizontal consciousness.

*Remembering Babylon* narrates the sojourn of Gemmy, a white castaway whom the aboriginals nurtured beyond civilization. Gemmy has once hovered

like a bird on the fences which enclosed a space habited by a small Scottish Settlement in Queensland, and in his rendezvous he has first negotiated with the enclosure of civilization. Malouf describes:

Out of a world over there, beyond the no-man's land of the swamp, that was the abode of every thing savage and fearsome, and since it lay so far beyond experience, not just their own but their parents' too, of nightmare rumours, superstitions and all that belonged to Absolute Dark.

The Absolute Dark is the conceptual contestation of the frontierity between the savagery and civilization, between the colonial and the colonized, the home and the world. Gemmy unwittingly aims to reconcile his authentic discourse with the one mediated by imperialism. His encounter with both in a state of simultaneity reveals a universe of densely stratified multiple discourses.

It was a question of covering the space between them, of recovering the connection that would put the words back in his mouth, and catch the creature, the spirit or whatever it was, that lived in the dark, the creatures, the spirit, or whatever it was, that lived in the dark of him, and came up briefly to torment or tease but could be tempted, he now saw, with what these people ate and the words they used.

Gemmy's historical subject hood of his aboriginal discourse is now interrogated by his being on the fence of civilization. The boundary demarcating discourses suddenly turned out to be so porous that horizontality, as a loud theoretical rejection of all the claims of inalienable frontierities, has emerged as the logical retrieval of the cultures from their binding paradoxes. The movement from being out of historical subject hood to be within the subjectivity of history is therefore a matter of serious strategic interest in the post-colonial discourse. Gemmy is the paradigmatic other of Kim whose childhood history of Indianness was the pre-history of his

European adulthood, narrative of boundaries culturally fissured and horizontality having travelled through it at ease was suddenly repaired by the discourse of imperialism to grant subject hood to Kim on the notion of 'race'. For Gemmy too the question remains; though he started out white, had he remained white? Can he loose it? The binarism of 'black' and 'white' is the comfortable identity which has been appropriated by colonialism to signify the otherness of the 'other'. Gemmy seeks to violate the frontier edicts by his transgression, because:

You meet at last in a terrifying equality that strips the last rags from your soul and leaves you so far out on the edge of yourself that your fear how is that you may never get back.

It was the mixture of monstrous strangeness and unwelcome likeness that made Gemmy Fairley so disturbing to them, since at any moment he could show either one face or the other; as if he were always standing there at one of those meetings, but in his case willingly, and the encounter was an embrace.

For Gemmy in as much as for child Kim the question continues to exist; can there be a white Aboriginal? For Kim the answer has been an unmitigated 'no'. The white face was finally shown, because without it the foundation of imperialism which has been laid on the racial metonym for demarcation will be weakened. The entire past of Kim, the Indian summer, has been abrogated with all its authentic existence as a strange nightmare of a cultural fugitive. 'The East is East and the West is West' is the appropriate imperial rhetoric which has to be engaged to reclaim the civilization from the invasion of its aboriginality. Gemmy's hybridity is also oppositional. It may seek to subvert but in its subversiveness it evidences the oppositionality of the horizontality discourse of post-colonialism.

Though Malouf's novel offers a different kind of horizontality which

intends to modify the rigidity of opposition that a post-colonial fiction normally posits, but the general trend to 'write back' remains the basic argument in this enterprise. Coetzee's *Foe* which is symptomatic of 'writing back' to Defoe's imperial edict *Robinson Crusoe* is an espousal of *alterity*, an alterity that is grievously searched to retort the hegemony of the 'Great Tradition' of empire. It is a discourse that questions the existing, the enclosed and the codified by offering discursive modes that are fluid, almost indefinable and continually renewable. Coetzee has decided to foreground the battle for the conquest of the identity of difference in a narrative of indigeness. 'Indigenous', culturally legitimate and legally valid for its operationality, is the counter-point with which the imperial discourse aimed to marginalize it to the farthest extremity of its conceptual habitation. In this powerful enterprise of rejection the voices from the margin grow ever stronger, ever more intelligible without even a limb of articulation, the lost self of Susan and the cannibal's marginality of languageless pre-history, which like Friday can only breathe the sound of the islands. Cruso is said to have uttered once. 'The world is full of islands', but very unsuspectingly he has also given voices to the multiplicity of discourses which each one of his islands, as metaphor, signals. Cruso has contrived a discourse to appropriate the marginality of Friday, until Susan landed, to construct his hut which he pompously calls his 'castle' emponymized for imperial power and hierarchic distantiation. A sequestration has been thoughtfully achieved by:

A fence, which a gate that turned on leather hinges, completed an encampment in the shape of triangle which Cruso termed his castle. Within the fence, protected from the apes, grew a patch of wild butter lettuce. This lettuce, with fish and birds' eggs, formed our sole diet in the island. . . .

The hut, ringed with stakes like a

stockaded fort, defends Cruso's private space, because the space for the 'other', space of the marginal, the shifted indogenous (the apes, cannibals and castaways) is public, which has to be gazeable to the hegemonic scrutiny. He inscribes on that enclosed privacy the visible presence of the colonizer; Susan's silent diseant on claims of adequacy, because something more is needed to evidence their arrival at the periphery of the world is refused by Cruso. 'Nothing is forgotten . . . Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering' is the patented language of authority, but Susan contests, which is also the discourse of the marginal that:

You are mistaken! I do not wish to dispute, but you have forgotten much, and with every day that passes you forget more! There is no shame in forgetting: it is our nature to grow old and pass away.

To this Cruso has responded with the first-order subjecthood, the checkmate *I*, while other requirements, as originations of the gendered second-order subjecthood of Friday and the feminine third-order subjecthood of Susan, are incongruent to the discourse of the *imperium*. The imperial discourse has been continued by Cruso in levelling the terraces, walling them with stones dug out of earth to prepare the 'text' on which others, the invaders like him, can inscribe their 'signs', their 'alphabet' and thereby 'write' a meaningful story. Susan cannot share the overwhelming confidence of the imperial will to be the single authentic historian of the enterprise of appropriation. So Susan feels that the island is never still, it seems to gently slip into the waves.

When I lay down to sleep that night I seemed to feel the earth sway beneath me. I told myself it was memory of the rocking of the ship coming back unbidden. But it was not so; it was the rocking of the island itself as it floated on the sea. I thought: It is a sign I am becoming an island-dweller. I am forgetting what it is to live on the mainland. I stretched out my arms and laid my palms on the earth, and, yes, the rocking persisted, the rocking of the island as it

sailed through the sea and the night bearing into the future its freight of gulls and sparrows and fleas and apes and castaways, all unconscious save me. I fell asleep smiling. I believe it was the first time I smiled since I embarked for the New World.

The narration, presumably, is that of a movement of the imperial discourse being spilled over by the post-colonial discourse of the questioning marginals. It is a movement, which necessarily eclipses memories, erasing the strong, long-established image of a closed space and a linear and stable temporality. Consequently, it imposes the mobile dialectic of different moments and diverse types of temporality: Cruso's linear time, Susan's female, repetitive time; Friday's pre-verbal, indecipherable, native time. It is also time of the post-colonial future. Through her sudden perception of the movement of the island Susan understands that, along with her biologically determined identity, another is being constituted, which also has temporal implications. It is indispensable for Susan to know herself, her own personal story, to construct her own identity and to make her own choices, even if this only means deciding what to recount of her own experience.

I am not a story, Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my account of myself without preamble, slipping overboard into the water and striking out of the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves. There was life before the water . . . All of which makes up a story I do not choose to tell. I choose not to tell it because to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world. I choose rather to tell of the island, of myself and Cruso and Friday and what we three did there; for I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire.

Understandably, Susan's narrative is the rejection of the third order statehood of a tortured feminine self; she seeks to

reclaim her authorship and to securely found it on her assertion to operate her *will*, but in the process she had also to contend with silence, the silence of 'unspoken words', the silence of 'sights concealed'. Susan is verbal which has privileged her to state her assertion, but Friday, the second order pre-verbal statehood, who has already had endowed his silence with a gesture of articulation, is also staking claims of his historical subjectivity. It is in Susan's intense dialogue with Foe that the sound of silence could be heard. Foe continues:

I said the heart of the story . . . but I should have said the eye, the eye of the story. Friday rows his log of woods across the dark pupil or the dead socket of an eye staring up at him from the floor of the sea. He rows across it and is safe. To us he leaves the task of descending into that eye. Otherwise, like him, we sail across the surface and come ashore none the wiser, and resume our old lives, and sleep without dreaming, like babes.

Foe has decoded the silence and Susan tries to read Friday with her sense of responsibility, 'it is for us to open Friday's mouth and hear what it holds; silence, perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a seashell held to the ear'. Towards the end of the narrative Friday's silence has been fully deciphered; out of his silence a *meaning* has been retrieved that in his subterranean marginality Friday is the eternal fluvial of civilization, a quiet defiance of his indignity and the indignity of those who have been pushed to the brink of placelessness by an unfeeling territoriality. Coetzee almost poetically writes:

But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home, Friday.

He turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across the bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in. His mouth opens. From inside him

comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face.

It is precisely the *non-being* of the island, the subalterns on the margins of empire whose silence is not defeated by the archaeology of a noisy centrality, is the principal actor on the centrestage of Coetzee's 'writing back'. It is in this new speech act the Fridays make a radical creative space which affirms and sustains their subjectivity, which gives them a new location from which to articulate their sense of the world.

Further, the entire issue is belatedly felt to centre around the concepts of 'place' and 'habitation'. Can the marginal inhabit a place which satisfies *place-ness*? There is probably no better conceptual arsenal to negotiate with the intractable question of *place-ness* than 'habitation' as the strategy to address the problem of the current universality and also partly anonymity of the Western representation of place. 'Where is my place' roused by the indeterminacy of the place offered/proposed to be offered by the post-colonial settlement arguments has intricately the issue in its studied silence to answer the other question, 'where do I belong to'? The question of belonging bothers as long as *belonging* is despised as an intangible emotional captivity, or it is not regarded as a serious statement of identity as well as a means for the transformation of the conditions of one's life. The conceptual shift from spatiality to 'place-ness' has been necessitated to be a shift from empty space to human and social space can obtain its material and ideological conditions of *place-ness* in a densely woven network of ethnic, cultural and historical belonging only. So, the urgency to search for the roots takes

precedence upon other conditions of habitation. Sally Morgan's novel *My Place* and later Amitav Goshe's novel *Search for Roots* are indeed a quest for some physical and cultural locations to confidently refer to the hidden identities. But it is also an irony of colonial existence that though Morgan has traced the ancestry to Corunna Downs, the return to it is stiffly terraced by colonial displacement. Corunna Down, Sally's 'my place', the object of unchanging pre-colonial identity is not just a post-colonial location, a postal address for mere habitational attestation, it is nurtured by various physical and imaginative environments. In the earlier part of the novel the reader can explore from Sally's grandmother the way of inhabiting space that enables one to transform it, to own it, to make it an extension of one's self. Significantly Sally has been asked to sit on the step and be very quiet;

Suddenly, the yard filled with a high trilling sound. My eyes searched the trees. I couldn't see that bird, but his call was there. The music stopped as abruptly as it had begun. Nan smiled at me, 'Did you hear him? Did you hear the bird call'?

'I heard him Nan'. I whispered in awe.

It is a way of inhabiting Corunna Down, which makes it Nan's own; it dwells in a space outside location, in the imaginative *place-ness* which in the sense of being has carefully nurtured her sense of belonging. In fact, it is a way of being more than location that securely installs the idea of habitation. For Nan 'my place' suggests an inherited way of physical and imaginative habitation which authenticates her Aboriginality for her identity. The gift of being transforms into belonging a location, a human space. But the critical point in the discourse is could Sally retrieve 'my place' from the obliteration of the colonial a-historicity? bell hooks proposes that for a diasporic or estranged people, in particular for those dislocated in one way or the other by

the historic dislocation of colonization, 'Home is that place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference'. It is a strange way of recovering 'boundary' for 'my place'. Paradoxically, even Coetzee who has contested boundaries in his *Foe* as the legacy of hegemony, which has disclaimed not only legality of authorship and along with that the liberty of imagination also finds boundaries in a previous novel necessary for the civilizing project. Indeed the trope of boundary has become inextricable from the trope of seeing in Western epistemology. Boundary, as a metaphor, has a strong presence within the discourse or spatiality. Its rejection does not constitute *place-ness*. Its acceptance does not transform a habitation into 'my place'. Coetzee has been imprisoned by this paradox in his *Dusklands*.

We cannot count the wild. The wild is one because it is boundless. We can count fig-trees, we can count sheep because the orchard and the arm are bounded. The essence of orchard tree and farm sheep is number. Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard and farm. When we cannot fence it and count it we reduce it to number by other means.

Here the mathematical configuration and bounding of space are shown to be critical in the colonizing project, in as much as it is for the purpose of habitation, by 'enclosing' with both physical and epistemological means to install 'my place'. The boundaries in the colonial discourse are therefore very subtle and pervasive. It is being increasingly realized that the 'boundary' in the post-colonial discourse entails a capacity to re-appropriate, renegotiate, realign and replace colonial boundaries not solely as legacy of colonial spatial division and epistemological extremities but as opportunities to manipulate wide variety of circumstances, cultures and societies to serve habitational purposes.

Therefore, the question of the colonized response to boundaries is a critical one in the post-colonial discourse, its own construction of horizon, the conceptual admission of porousness, the disclosure of space and the *place-ness* of the habitational space have woven a dense theoretical snare in which the post-colonial freedom is imprisoned. So, bell hooks suggests that there are other ways of dealing with boundaries than by simply rejecting them, and the most subtly transformative way lies in the mode of their habitation. Probably, pragmatism may legitimate some such position, though the provisionality of boundaries held as the key in this argument to a more subtle dismantling is doubtful. It is true that the pre-colonial *erstwhile* does no longer exist in its inherited geometry of space; it is a mobile topography mediated by a mobile culture and by a mobile social space. Therefore, the trope 'my place' in the post-colonial discourse, without which location cannot be settled by any theory of habitation, necessitates the acquisition of some new meanings in terms of an internalized sense of speciality and of post-colonial epistemology. The tenuousness of the colonial spatial function of boundaries is to be contested, because without some such act the question posed by Gayatri Spivak that 'Can the Subalterns Speak'? perhaps cannot be answered. If the *erstwhile* eludes, as the colonial conditions have made it very ambivalent, then the act 'to habitate' has to be performed outside the epistemological limits of the West into the *elsewhere* of the post-colonial epistemology. The *elsewhere* which was also the erasure of Tagore, 'not here, not here, elsewhere, somewhere else' is the inevitable predicament of the post-colonial existence.

#### Notes and References

1. Said, Edward (1989), 'Representing the

- Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry* 15(2); pp. 205-25.
2. Ashcroft, Bill (2001), *Post-Colonial Transformation*, London. A good part of my argument on *horizon* has been influenced by the position stated to be taken by Ashcroft.
  3. Coetzee, J.M. (1974), *Dusklands*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 81.
  4. Phyllis, Wheatly (1772), *Poems on Various Subjects Religious and Moral*, London.
  5. Du Bois, W.E.B. (1986), *Dusk of Dawn*. In *Dubois Writings*, Library of America (reprinted). The entire issue has been discussed in details by Paul Gilroy (1996), 'Route Work: the Black Atlantic and the Politics of exile', in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curit (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Question*, London, pp. 17-29, and 1993, *The Black Atlantic*, London.
  6. Delany, Martin R. (1852), *The Condition, Elevation and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States Politically Considered*, Philadelphia, p. 215.
  7. Achebe, Chinua (1958), *Things Fall Apart*, London, pp. 63-64.
  8. Murray, Les (1992), *Selected Poems*, Melbourne, p. 181.
  9. Anzaldúa, Gloria (1987), *Borderlands/La Frontera, The New Mestiza*, San Francisco, p. 73.
  10. Miller, Alex (1992), *The Ancestor Game*, Ringwood, p. 93.
  11. Morrison, Tomi (1998), *Paradise*, New York, p. 213.
  12. Malouf, David (1993), *Remembering Babylon*, London, pp. 2-3.
  13. Kipling, Rudyard (1906), *Kim*, London.
  14. Coetzee, J.M. (1986), *Foe*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 9. The arguments of the text under consideration have been very deftly studied by Laura Di Michele (1996), 'Identity and Alterity' in J.M. Coetzee's's *Foe* in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curit (eds.), *The Post Colonial Question*, London, pp. 157-168.
  15. Morgan, Sally (1987), *My Place*, Fermanthe: Fermanthe Arts Centre, p. 14.
  16. bell hooks (1991), *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, London.
  17. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravarty (1988), 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Carry Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, London.
  18. Thakur, Rabindranth (1961), *Balaka, Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 12, Visha-Bharati.

## The Indian Village Colonial Power, Historiography and Forms of Knowledge

MANISH THAKUR\*

Recent scholarship on South Asia has distinctively brought to our attention the power relations of colonial categories, and the constructed and highly mediated nature of social and cultural historical experience. While focusing on the interpretation of power and knowledge in the colonial archive, they convincingly demonstrate the processes through which experiences of colonial modernity were constructed and organized into the lives of the colonized. The colonial state formation was not simply an episodic moment in the long historical journey of the Indian society. Rather, the practices, modalities and

projects of the colonial state constructed a new understanding of caste, tribes, religion, and the village. As Dirks puts it succinctly, 'the power of colonial discourse in India was not that it created whole new fields of meaning instantaneously but that it shifted old meanings slowly, sometimes imperceptively, through the colonial control of a whole range of institutions'.<sup>1</sup>

These theoretical and methodological shifts in the concerns of the anthropological practice, from the bounded spatial entities to 'the construction of cultural categories and the process of that construction', have yielded rich

insights illuminating the power relations of colonial history.<sup>2</sup> They have helped to interrogate processes by which official knowledge was produced. Not only do they foreground the implication and deployment of anthropological knowledge in all the administrative concerns but also reveal the creation of new subjectivities and political language. Even otherwise, a critical assessment of the legacy of colonial knowledge and its categories is more than an arcane question of representation. This legacy has posed great challenges to the postcolonial enterprise of nation building. In a way, 'the postcolonial

\* Department of Sociology, Goa University, Goa.

predicament' remains rooted in the knowledge, assumptions and representational categories of colonial modernity notwithstanding political independence and decolonization. Evidently, anthropology can no longer claim an unmediated access to an objective social reality. Its prime task turns out to be a mapping of the discursive terrain in order to retrieve historical narratives that have a bearing on the contemporary context.<sup>3</sup>

We have come to appreciate the constitutive role of colonial 'investigative modalities' (conceptual categories and the assumptions underlying them) in the representation of Indian society as a series of facts. For the colonialists, the administrative power stemmed from an accurate knowledge and an efficient use of these facts. What recent studies have highlighted is that the forms applied to these facts were far from self-evident.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, we attempt to explore the ways in which colonial discourse brought about a fundamentally different view of Indian village, or rather where no view of village as a separate objective entity had existed ever before, there emerged an official view of Indian village.<sup>5</sup> Not only did the village occupy a prime place in colonial social morphology but also became enmeshed in the leading theoretical and historiographical debates of the day. It became the theoretical site where conceptual knots of some of the grandest evolutionary schema of the nineteenth century were sought to be resolved.

Given the theoretical, ideological and pragmatic salience of the village for the colonial rule, this paper looks at the colonial idiom of the village as a pretext to understand the history and character of colonial forms of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, the nineteenth century debate on the nature of the Indian village community has determined the nature of the discourse on the Indian village since then.<sup>7</sup> However, our intention is not to examine the facticity of the British accounts in relation to the

supposedly indigenous categories and forms of thought concerning the village. Rather than unravelling the distorting influence of colonial history and western social scientific categories, we endeavour to foreground the capacity of the colonial state to reconstruct fundamental aspects of Indian society—village in the instant case.

#### THE INDIAN VILLAGE: GENEALOGY OF A STEREOTYPE

The village has been at the centre of unending historiographical controversy being deeply embedded in the historical morass caused by the interlocking of land tenures with tax collection structures in an ancient order of civilization. The discrepancy between 'the British law and the Indian fact' has been as true of the village as of the other institutions.<sup>8</sup> Quite often, 'the legal description of the society failed to fit the economical and sociological'.<sup>9</sup> That does not, in any case, undermines the power of the colonial discourse to recast the village as the fundamental working unit of Indian society. The discovery of this cornerstone of society started mundanely, as the colonial administrators felt the need to collect and compile factual information about land settlements and revenue collection. Indeed, most of the characterizations of the village are contained in the despatches of senior British officers engaged in land revenue administration. One such despatch, which formed the basis for discussions in the British House of Commons in 1812-13 on the renewal of the East India Company's charter, outlined the idea of the village as a mini republic. More particularly, it is in Thomas Munro's report on the Ceded Districts of Madras (1806) that one comes across the initial stereotype of the village as a little republic.

Like his contemporaries, Munro was less concerned with the village as such than the mode of land settlement. His primary interest was to plead and win

the case for *ryotwari* settlement in the Madras Presidency as against Bengal Presidency's *permanent* settlement. In his acrimonious debate with Francis Ellis, he showed that his advocacy of *ryotwari* respects the principles of native tradition and that he was merely adhering to indigenous precedents. Once Munro became the Governor in 1820 and established *ryotwari* as the definitive legal basis for land settlements in the Madras Presidency, his formulations became part of the official wisdom.

Some of these administrative reports set the tone for future debate on the nature and character of Indian village. In the subsequent literature we find repetitions and variations on the same set of themes that formed part of the Fifth Report. What is noteworthy, however, is that the celebration of the Indian village is guided more by the ideology of particular administrator/s than the characteristics that the village actually displayed. Stokes identifies administrators, such as Munro (1761-1827), Malcolm (1769-1833), Elphinstone (1779-1859) and Metcalfe (1785-1846), who served under Lord Wellesley, the Governor General (1798-1805), as the chief proponents of the republican nature of the Indian village.<sup>10</sup> Munro was the leader and founder of this particular school of thought. While sharing a certain emotional kinship with the heritage of the past, these *Romantic Paternalists*, as Stokes labels them, were horrified at the wanton uprooting of an immemorial system of society. In their general political orientation, they were antithetical to the liberal attempt to anglicize, assimilate and reform Indian society. From their attitudes of romanticism and paternalism flowed a certain conservatism of thought that made them challenge and resist the policy of applying British constitutional principles to the Indian administration. In terms of routine administration it meant countering the spirit of Cornwallis system.



Whereas Munro was in favour of the *ryotwari* (cultivator-wise) system of land settlement, Metcalfe made a powerful advocacy of the *mahalwari* (village-wise) settlement. Madras and Bombay Presidencies largely followed *ryotwari*, but, in the Northwest provinces, Metcalfe ensured that the village communities were made the basis of revenue settlement.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, their advocacy for a particular type of revenue system was contingent on their political philosophy. Their opposition to the utilitarian *laissez-faire* was reflected in their attempts to preserve something of the methods and institutions of Indian society. Their opposition to the Cornwallis system was, in essence, an opposition to the imposition of English ideas and institutions on Indian society. In their attempt to cushion the impact of foreign dominion they resuscitated 'unchanging village republics' as a sign of their benevolent paternalism. Village communities provided them with a system of indirect rule without much meddling in Indian affairs. They firmly believed that the ultimate objective of their variant of land settlement was the protection of the (village) community by the government, and not against it. Fearful of the social effects of the sudden dissolution of the co-sharing village community, they were in favour of fitting the colonial administration to the native frame of society. Their awareness of the wholly artificial and foreign character of administration made them hesitant and wary of interfering with the prevailing forms of society. They were convinced that once law and order had been established and property rights in the soil defined and land revenue fixed in cash, there was no need to subject the village to disruptive changes and disastrous effects of the *Anglicization* drive. For them, *Anglicists* were responsible for setting aside the immemorial institutions of the native people and erecting in its place an incomprehensible

technical form of law that was unsuited to the native genius. In other words, these paternalists were all set to challenge the dominion exercised by utilitarianism and show that utilitarian principles were not of absolute and universal validity.<sup>12</sup> Since utilitarianism and its underlying principles were conditional truths by virtue of their historical origins, there was the urgent necessity of restraint in pressing Western reforms upon an oriental society like India. To them, unbridled utilitarianism only increased the danger of a rapid disintegration of Indian society. Munro went to the extent of advocating the restoration of the jurisdiction of the village panchayats so as to prevent the further erosion of this mainstay of the social order.<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, the village community was, used as an argument against the generalization of Munro's *ryotwari*, both in Madras and in Delhi. Those who were in favour of *mauzawari* or *mahalwari* shared the apprehension that direct engagement for revenue with each separate landholder or cultivator (that is, *ryotwari*) might lead to the destruction of the original constitution of the village. Though the early administrative literature of the nineteenth century does not talk of the community, the stereotyping of the village emanates from its community character.

The colonial stereotyping of the village community had, thus, two principal ingredients: (1) the portrayal of the village as an idyllic and utopian political community—a society of equals, and (2) its characterization as a body of co-sharers of the soil. This emphasis on the village community as a political entity tended to ignore or, at least, underplay the facts of dominance and hierarchy within the village. The stability and isolation of the village and its political independence from the state were over-emphasized. Given the political fluidity that was evidenced at the macro-level, the permanence of the village held a great attraction.

Yet, this romanticized vision of the village was difficult to reconcile with the community it described. Although the disruptions of the later eighteenth century had enforced a great degree of self-reliance upon the Indian village, it was much less isolated from the state and the market, and much less egalitarian than what some of the administrators believed. The community of co-sharers in the land rarely encompassed the entire population. Surprisingly, when village was being substantially incorporated into a system of general law and colonial economy, its alleged virtues of political autonomy and economic self-reliance were gaining ground. This clearly reveals the elements of nostalgia in the way village was perceived by early colonial administrators.

In a way, the stereotyping of the village emanates from the quantum conceptual leap from the realm of economic self-sufficiency and internal organization to the supposed political independence of the village.<sup>14</sup> One does not find any reference to the existence of inequality in these early administrative accounts. This could be because inequality and hierarchy were considered to be natural and in tune with the spirit of the age. However, the village tends to acquire a metaphoric content as a 'republic', 'commonwealth', or 'state' by virtue of its being an ordered society in miniature.

The second aspect of the village stereotype, namely, that of a corporate body of persons sharing right in a common territory, is linked to the first one, for the idea of the village as a political community presupposes economic self-sufficiency. This view of the village finds its initial articulation in Ellis's *Report on Mirasi Rights* (1814).<sup>15</sup> Also, it is this aspect of the village community which was catapulted to the arena of high theory by Maine and Marx.

The essence of all such characterization of the village was a euphoric

celebration of its inner elasticity as a system. Romantic conservatives were attracted to its permanence, more so when it was seen in relation to highly volatile and fluid character of the Indian state. Its high degree of internal cohesion and enduring solidarity, and its constitution as the sum total of mutually dependent groups rather than mutually antagonistic classes, provided the romantics the raw material on which to construct their image of the Indian village. In the inner-directed, tranquil, unchanging rhythm of the Indian village lay the secret of the wisdom of Indian civilization.

However, it should be noted that the enthusiastic reception accorded to the Indian village by these romantic paternalists was not shared by one and all. That is how the village was caught in the larger political battles of the day between 'conservatives' and 'radicals'. Administrators like Stephen and Strachey distrusted the sentimental attachment of the paternalists to the Indian village. For them, the truths of political economy had to triumph over nativistic sentiments, and that only in a system of free exchange and completely free individual property rights could the prosperity of the people be fully secured. Naturally, this meant stringent application of utilitarian doctrines to India irrespective of its effects on the village community.

Thus, a series of policy initiatives and the attendant ideological correlates went into the making of the Indian 'village republic' in the broader framework of the British colonial enterprise. With the consequent desire to dampen the pace of social change, more so after the Mutiny, the village community served the imperial need to fall back upon an unchanging and unthreatening institution. It came handy in projecting the Raj as a protector of native institutions. The ideological assertion of its enduring permanence fitted well in the colonisers' quest for a secure agrarian order. It could be seen as an ultimate refuge

against those forces of disorder that the Mutiny had unleashed. In other words, the very nature of the British rule necessitated a particular theory of Indian village, so that Indian realities could be fashioned not only to justify the rule but also its moral overtones.<sup>16</sup>

In a way, for the colonial scholar-administrators the Indian village was the ultimate touchstone to assess the content and direction of social change. If the village community were an approved form of organization, then its conservation had to be the primary duty of the state. Conversely, if it were condemned, then the state had to be called upon to hasten the pace of its dissolution through a *laissez-faire*-induced social revolution. In either case, attitudes to the village community were more the outcomes of the corollaries of attitudes to the great political doctrines of the day than direct responses to its empirical characteristics.<sup>17</sup>

#### VILLAGE AND THE MAKING OF AN AGRARIAN TERRITORY

Reconfiguring the village as a well-circumscribed area amenable to revenue assessment has been the driving force behind the colonial state's mapping of the agrarian territory. Being concerned with various aspects of agricultural organization, the state has understandably wielded its authority to regulate and monitor the territorial units of agricultural organization. As Ludden forcefully asserts, 'organizing agriculture in the circumscribed spaces and legitimating state authority in them have historically been the central concern of the state'.<sup>18</sup>

Admittedly, the state has historically been powerful in relation to the individual village/s. It has continually shaped property rights and revenue demands with respect to land. Though, the basic unit for this relationship has very often not been the village at all. At times, revenue demands would be settled on the basis of smaller estates

within the village. Likewise, many a times, larger estates comprising several villages would be the basis for revenue settlement. Marriott has shown how for the first time the whole countryside was divided into village units for administration with reference to *mahalwari* system of land tenure.<sup>19</sup> In his 'Directions for Revenue Officers' (1844-1848), James Thomson (1804-1853) directed that wherever possible, the whole body of proprietors in each village should be made individually and collectively responsible for paying the land tax. This was a novel requirement, as the previous Mughal policy had often been to recognize estates as units even when they cut across several villages. In the new system, one finds some sort of a disposition to treat each village as if it were a great family. In this sense, the modern ideas of territorial organization of land (based on the unit of revenue village) have unambiguous colonial ancestry.<sup>20</sup> In fact, this was true for the whole of colonial Asia. Thus, in India, as in much of the colonized world, the village became a lynchpin in the overall colonial regulation of agrarian territory. It helped new rulers to settle farming regions in accordance with their conceptualizations of landed property and polices of revenue collection.

By 1815, the colonial rulers had settled upon the village as the basic unit of agrarian administration. While erasing the traces of the previous forms of territorial organization, the British rule enshrined the village community as the core economic, political, and social unit. This projection of the village as the elemental unit of Indian socio-economic organization sub-served several functions. In ideological terms, the village came to represent a survival of agrarian tradition and the administrative foundation of agrarian modernity. . . . The territory called 'India' became traditional and the village and family farm became its elemental units. The cultural construct called 'India' came to rest on the idea that one basic cultural

logic did in fact organize agriculture in all its constituent (village) territories from ancient to modern times.<sup>21</sup>

As the village was being made the basis of a new type of territorial organization, it came to be regarded as the repository of 'authentic' tradition and culture. Stable, traditional village societies got embedded in the territorial expanse of an ancient agrarian civilization surviving all sorts of historical odds. In a way, it was an archetypal 'invention of tradition' where modernity invented traditions of civilization in its own image.<sup>22</sup> According to Ludden, 'the modern invention of civilisation territories continues a very old elite project of using narration to organise agrarian territories'.<sup>23</sup> By projecting the map of British India back into history of ancient times, the British sought to legitimate its authority over all the villages in this agrarian territory. Also, this projection helped achieve a continuity of discourse where the village represents a constant unit of agrarian order from ancient times to the present. To quote Ludden, 'village becomes that part of agrarian space which can be effectively bounded physically and culturally and marked as a spatial domain for organized state power and activity'.<sup>24</sup> Thus, under the colonial dispensation, the *revenue village* became the elemental unit of indigenous agrarian order.

This attempt to create a new type of unified agrarian territory around the idea of the village was bound to dislodge earlier conceptualizations of the village. As the British went about mapping and surveying every inch of the agrarian territory, and organize it in terms of the cellular units of the village, they inflicted enormous violence on those conceptualizations that considered villages as locales of social power outside the state. Even today there is a persistent discrepancy between what the *state calls* 'the village' and what the *villagers think* is 'the village'.

The pre-eminence of the state has

certainly resulted in the gradual loss of the defining characteristics of the village as a social universe. In an interesting study of a village in Tamil Nadu, Daniel demonstrates how the statist definition of the village has marginalized the villager's notion of the village. Contrasting *Ur* and *Kiramam*, he shows how Tamil villagers conceptualize the former as distinct from the latter.<sup>25</sup> A *Kiramam* refers to the revenue village, and thus, to a political unit created for the purpose of taxation and the organization of local government. Administratively, it is under the jurisdiction of the taluk, which is governed by the district, then by the state, and ultimately by the national government. There is no ambiguity about its boundaries, as *Kiramam* refers to the bounded, standard, and universally accepted spatial unit. The government determines what a *Kiramam* is, and it is the same for everyone. There is no contextual variation in the use of the term *Kiramam* even though it is abstract and distant.

While *Kiramam* is a term whose meaning is really context free, universal, and fixed, *Ur* is a person-centric term that derives its meaning from the contextually shifting spatial orientation of the person. In the words of Daniel, '*Ur* is not so much a discreet entity with fixed co-ordinates as a fluid sign with fluid thresholds'.<sup>26</sup> *Ur* is always in relation to a given person or *jati* that is known to have established a special relationship of substantial compatibilities with that particular *Ur*. In the reckoning of the villagers, *Ur* is culturally more significant as soil substance of an *Ur* mixes with the bodily substance of the human inhabitants of that *Ur*. In essence, *Ur* is an indigenous concept of territory. Villagers invariably draw the boundaries of the *Ur* with reference to 'ritually vulnerable spots, flow and transit of substance, shrines of the sentinel deities, the points at which roads or the village streams enter the village, the haunted tamarind tree at the edge'. In fact, 'the villager's concern is

not only with what substances enter the *Ur* and affect its inhabitants but with the effect of these alien substances on the substance of the *Ur* itself'.<sup>27</sup> Despite the fact that *Ur* and *Kiramam* are neither semantically isomorphic nor mutually substitutable, villagers misleadingly represent *Ur* as *Kiramam* in their routine practices. Irrespective of whether this isomorphism between *Ur* and *Kiramam* is apparent or real, it becomes evident that, in terms of scope and political significance, *Kiramam* has been overshadowing *Ur*.

Arguably, the village *per se* was not universally the key unit in terms of local political and power structures. In olden days, powerful notables determined where one revenue village ended and another began. The state did not have so direct a say in deciding the land rights. Until the 1870s, many struggles for the control of land occurred outside the purview of the state. In few cases, land rights were granted as part of remuneration of the state functionaries. There was a curious amalgam of land rights and official status. People with rights to land exercised various types and degrees of power over the local territory and its inhabitants. In other words, the boundaries among local politics, society, law, police and administration remained fuzzy, as land rights were the chief levers of power. In a restricted sense, those who controlled land also controlled much of civic and judicial administration. But then, as Heesterman notes, 'neither the vogue of the village, or the caste, seems to derive from any real Indian arrangement, but rather from the needs of the modern bureaucratic state as it was introduced at the beginning of the last [nineteenth] century'.<sup>28</sup>

The colonial rule created a distance between state and society. Personal proximity to the ruled was unthinkable under the British rule, as it was based on supposedly universal principles of governance. Naturally, the pragmatics of governance required the making of

an official view for the purpose of dealing with society from a distance. This official view, as a rule, had to be an exhaustive grid of narrowly defined categories covering the whole of society and enabling the state to apply its impersonal rules and regulations rationally.<sup>29</sup>

The manufacturing of an official view involved two things. In the first place, the whole of the territory had to be uniformly mapped out in discreet entities. These neatly separating official units obviously could not take cognizance of the multidimensional and widely stretched out networks and interests. The latter were part of the strongly personal and particularistic nature of the old regime, where the overlapping and shifting networks of various right holders and domains used to be the norm. Against the cacophony of the old regime, the British set apart the public domain of the state and society. Here, the concept of the village as an autonomous unit came into its own; it marvelously filled and legitimized the colonial need for a well-defined basic unit. The village made Indian territory intelligible and manageable to the colonial rulers in terms of categories which the latter preferred to employ, and which had historically made sense to them in the light of their own experiences as members of the English society. What caste did in relation to Indian people the village did in relation to Indian territory: made land and people intelligible for categorization and counting. Thus, 'making village knowable was part of the enterprise of making it governable'.<sup>30</sup>

Viewed thus, the creation of 'revenue villages' was part of the making of modern institutions that delimited precisely the content of property rights in British India. The modern making of the village, however, took a long time. It set into motion processes that signalled a definitive shift in power relations between localities and the imperial state. That is, the emergence of the village as

the key unit of administration not only organized agrarian territories and farming regions, but also altered local power relations throughout India in the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

Under the colonial dispensation, the definition and delimitation of localities were no longer the handiwork of powerful families and caste groups. They assumed an official institutional form. Even when village communities were organized around socially dominant landed families, they became part of the administrative jurisdiction of urban centres that housed government offices. The then-prevailing theories of culture and modernization fuelled the distinctive shaping of the Indian village and tried to naturalize it as an essential component of the new agrarian social order. The newly configured village was considered to be fit enough for modernization. The market economy and state policies were to liberate its progressive potential by dismantling old bottlenecks arising out of ambiguities and confusion about land rights, prohibitive social controls, and the dominance of caste, sect, and other forms of cultural collectivity.

There is another angle as well. The shaping of the village suited the supposed theoretical opposition between 'Europe's competitive, individualist rationalism and Asia's collective, traditional, peasant community consciousness'.<sup>32</sup> This theoretical dualism has always highlighted the co-operative and harmonious aspects of the ontology of village while underplaying its internal diversity and conflict. In the colonialist reading, village communities formed solid collective identities with closed unitary moral economies. Dewey makes a related argument when he says that more directly dictated by the administrative convenience was the need to reduce social reality to a bi-polar constellation: state and village. There was an attempt to give content to the dictum 'the princes at court, the peasants in the village', so that an

authentic original situation is restored.<sup>33</sup>

#### INDIAN VILLAGE AND THE COLONIAL TYPOLOGY OF CIVILIZATIONS

In the charged nineteenth century theoretical debates, village came to be seen as more than a historical relic; it was, indeed, imbued with much contemporary relevance. For the Westerners, village stood for a world that they had lost. Since it was a world almost lost, depending on one's ideological predilections, it could be embedded in one's version of 'progress' or 'degeneration' in relation to the present. For romantics, idyllic village communities of the past realized those qualities of life that they highly valued and craved for, and which could indeed be realized in some future utopia. Those who were on the side of progress—and there were many—set out to debunk the idyllic image of the village by associating it with economic inequality, a rigidly stratified and stagnant society and its historic subordination to arbitrary powers.

As history and progress were unremitting preoccupations of the nineteenth century Victorian mind, the conceptualization of village in this framework was itself only an instance of a larger problematic predicated upon the (lack of) commitment to progress. Village became a pretext to establish the civilizational stage to which India's extant conditions corresponded. An evolutionist reading of the Indian village suited the British in constructing such a civilizational hierarchy. In fact, the study of the Indian village cannot be seen in isolation of this primary and explicit obsession of the British mind. From the perspective of the Victorian social thought, India was an abstraction, 'variously represented through social structure, religion, mythology, and the pervasive influence of unreason, all embodied and represented in its history'. Not only its singularity and distinctiveness were simply played

down but they were also related to a vision of universal history that is itself 'tethered to an eschatology of progress'. India in general, and the Indian village in particular, had only a provisional status in this grand universal schema of history that the colonialists constructed. Whatever value Indian institutions had was only with reference to illumining the said scheme of progress and civilizational typology.<sup>34</sup>

Expectedly, the construction of a history for India became the major interpretative strategy of the British. It was through her history that India was to become known to the Europeans in the colonial times. Europeans no longer saw India as merely an exotic and bizarre land but as a kind of living museum of the European past. More importantly, such thinking established an enduring structural relationship between India and the West. Notwithstanding the variations in the content of the literature produced on India during the colonial era, one message comes out strikingly: Europe is progressive and changing, whereas India is static and stagnant. It was this crude dualism that enabled the colonialists to look at India as a kind of living fossil bed of the European past. And where else to look for this past but in the living Indian village?<sup>35</sup>

It has been argued that the colonial rulers tried to legitimize their presence in India by designating the village community as the basis of colonial policy. That is, the colonial construction of village was embedded in the principle of territoriality which formed the basis of colonial organization of power. By making village all-important, they could frequently claim to restore a pristine institution that had fallen from grace by the tyranny of the native despotic rulers. This also imparts to the British the credit for having brought to the fore a tradition that was unknown to Indians themselves. In this sense, colonialism as a form of knowledge has shaped much of the modern history of colonized places

and peoples. It went to amass knowledge to enable itself 'to classify, categorize, and bound the vast social world that was India so that it could be controlled'.<sup>36</sup>

Inden gives an ideological explanation for the new preoccupation with the village as the basic formation of Indian society. He argues that the Orientalist perspective that gained currency during the nineteenth century placed European modernity in a hierarchical relationship with Asiatic tradition.<sup>37</sup> Seen thus,

The constitution of India as a land of villages was also due to the efforts of the British to deconstitute the Indian state. As they were composing their discourses on India's villages, they were displacing a complex polity with an 'ancient' India that they could appropriate as an external appendage of a 'modern' Britain. The essence of the ancient was the division of societies into self-contained, inwardly turned communities consisting of co-operative communal agents. The essence of the modern was the unification of societies consisting of outwardly turned, competitive individuals. Just as the modern succeeded the ancient in time, so the modern would dominate the ancient in space.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, India constituted a vast field on which the British could impose their own version of history. And in their versions, India was a land of oriental despotism, and it has been historically steeped in decay, degeneration and chaos. Nonetheless, there were enduring and unchanging institutions, such as village community, in India at the local level. This fitted well with their notion of unilinear history clearly organized into developmental stages. Thus, India's unchanging institutions based on family, caste and the village communities were construed as empirical indicators of the presence or absence of progress. In other words, Indian village was seen in the light of general concerns animating Western historiography. Certain universal features constructed as markers of progress (the presence of private property in land, for instance)

were vainly looked for in the historic constitution of the village. It was this empirical quest for the markers of progress or (the lack thereof) which made India and Europe appear as braided concerns, and which, in turn, also signals the entry of Indian village into the domain of European social theory.

#### COLONIAL CONSTRUCTION AND THE STATE-VILLAGE DUALITY

Dirks argues that colonial knowledge both enabled conquest and was produced by it. In certain important ways, knowledge was what colonialism was all about. In this view, colonialism was, nay, primarily, a cultural project of control.<sup>39</sup> For him, the historical anthropology of the colonial state must not be separated from the historical anthropology of the modern nation-state in general, as there was a range of institutional contexts in which colonial knowledge and colonial power were implicated. Indeed, what Dirks calls 'the epistemological violence of the British rule' has left its imprint in ample measure on the categories of contemporary thinking.

Effectively speaking, colonial construction of the village operated along three axes. First, it created a polarity between the ancient and the modern. The essence of ancient India was the division of society into self-contained, inward-looking communities consisting of co-operative communal villagers. Whereas the village was a pre-eminent institution in the ancient times, the state had a nominal presence. When the state was more than a nominal presence, it was rapacious, brutal and arbitrary in relation to the village. Very often, the Indian village was presented as opposed to the Indian state in its essence.

Second, the village was placed in relation to the modern colonial state. Not only was the Indian village opposed to the indigenous forms of state, but also

was the *other* of the modern colonial state being shaped in India. At the very same time the village was being brought into relation with the colonial state, it was also primordialized through a 'denial of co-evalness'. This was a spectacular instance of temporal distancing whereby a hierarchy of societies along a scale of modernity was constructed.<sup>40</sup>

Lastly, the Indian village was placed in relation to a unitary developmental history. In the colonial construction, village had performed a number of survival functions for Indians by insulating itself from the tumultuous ebb and flow of Indian history. In the process, it had stagnated at a low level of political and technological development. Clearly, there was an urgent need to draw the village into the general spirit of the day, that is, development. And, since the colonial state was based on the accumulated wisdom of science and rationality, so the Utilitarians thought, it was the agency to 'develop' the village and restore to it its lost glory that the Romantics had always celebrated.<sup>41</sup>

What comes out strikingly from the colonial accounts is an overdose of generalization on the basis of limited empirical experience. Very often, villages found in one area, or amidst one particular community, were made to represent as the Indian village (for example, Metcalf raised the Jat villages of the region of Delhi to be the embodiment of the Indian village). Viewed thus, idealization of the village necessarily entailed its reification. For the colonialists, village was not merely a crucial institution by virtue of its being the bedrock of land systems or land revenue administration, but was also associated with a characteristic approach to knowledge about Indian society. Underlining the epistemological and political significance of the village, Smith goes to the extent of saying that 'government intervention in village affairs was clearly more basic a condition of British rule than the

periodic enumeration and classification of its subjects'.<sup>42</sup>

In the stereotyped colonial village, time stood still. In no uncertain terms, this yearning for the past, and the consequent desire to keep the past alive in India, was reflective of a certain disenchantment with the Victorian British civilization itself. The ideal of the village community in particular resonated well with nostalgia for 'the world we have lost'. In other words, the stereotyped village served the needs of the British Empire, Western social theory as well as the English nostalgia for a romantic past.

In effect, the conception of a village community, though subject to some shifts in emphasis, cannot be dislodged from its place in the relations between the West and India, both in practical (i.e., political) and theoretical terms.<sup>43</sup> It also betrays a particular European disposition towards the idea of community.<sup>44</sup> In the Indian context, the then reigning Orientalist discourse saw community as something, which the East had retained, but the West had lost. Community was seen as a foundational category in the East, and a theoretical opposition between community and individual, or community and modern society was central to discourses on modern society that developed in Europe and which had a discernible impact on the way Indian village was conceptualized by European scholar-administrators.<sup>45</sup> Positing community as the hallmark of traditional society relegated the Indian village to the realm of an unchanging East that stood in sharp contrast to the individualism of modern society.

#### CONCLUSION

Thanks to the colonial construction of the 'immemorial' village community, even for Indian nationalists, the village remained a compelling sign of 'traditional' India, which the colonial

rule had sought to sustain for its own purposes. Eventually, Indian nationalists appropriated this idealized village, as they saw in these communities evidence for the antiquity of an indigenous concept of democracy, socialism, and much more that suited their ideological palate. The elements of traditional India constructed by the British had always fitted jarringly with the commitment to the ideals of progress and modernization that the nationalists held. An incipient nation had to muddle its way through, without unsettling the basic elements of 'traditional' India such as the village. This reinforces the argument that, in our times, the state has also become dispenser of socio-political identities. This means that the process of labelling (be it of territorial units or social groups) by the state contains the potential of unleashing new solidarities that the labelling might itself engender.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, to label a given human settlement as a village is rarely just a taxonomic or classificatory exercise. The village becomes much more than a semantic slot or a lexicographic gloss. It gets firmly entrenched in the dynamics of power/knowledge. Unfortunately, the locality (place, territory) as a component of social identity has been a largely neglected field of study in Indian sociology/social anthropology.<sup>47</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Dirks, N.B. (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 75.
2. Cohn, Bernard S. (1987) *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 97.
3. Mathur, Saloni "History and Anthropology in South Asia: Rethinking the Archive", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 29, 2000, p. 101.
4. Smith, Richard Saumarez (1996), *Rule by Records: Land Registration and Village Custom in Early British Punjab*, Delhi: Oxford University Press and "Rule-by-Records and Rule-by-Reports: Comple-

- mentary Aspects of the British Imperial Rule of Law”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol.19, no.1, pp.153-76.
5. Some of the scholars assert that the discourse on the Indian village under the colonial rule was not fashioned exclusively in the form of revenue and settlement reports. They point toward the vernacular literature— innumerable short stories, novels and other genres—which contains accounts of the Indian village in all its richness. Sadly, so far professional sociologists or historians have barely tapped this literature on the village, which started pouring from the end of the nineteenth century. For example, Lal Behari Dey’s *Bengal Peasant Life* (1906), a description of his native village in the Burdwan district, is frequently cited. Also, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay had composed a tract—*Bangadesher Krishak* (Peasant in Bengal)—around the same time as Maine was constructing his theory of the Indian village (see Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, p. 151; Jan Breman, “The Village in Focus”, in Jan Breman *et al.*, eds., *The Village in Asia Revisited*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.63. For the use of vernacular literature for social scientific analysis, see Rajat K. Ray, “The Rural World of Tarashankar Banerjee: Social Divisions and Psychological Crosscurrents”, in Peter Robb, ed., *Rural India: Land, Power and Society Under British Rule*, London: Curzon Press, 1983, pp. 275-311 and Vikash N. Pandey, “Re-presenting Rural: From Definition to Discourse”, *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2003, pp. 32-52.
  6. This has been a noteworthy contribution of the historically inclined social/cultural anthropologists. It should be noted that village community is currently the provenance of the anthropologists so much so that it has aroused vociferous protests over the ‘annexation of Indian anthropology by the village community’ (for example, Louis Dumont and D.F. Pocock, “For a Sociology of India”, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. I, 1957, pp. 7-22 and Satish Saberwal, ed., *Beyond the Village*, Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1972. The longevity of the debate over the appropriateness of the village as the unit of sociological analysis shows how firmly it has been placed in sociological/anthropological imagination of India. The dominance of the anthropologists, however, is a recent phenomenon. As Clive Dewey, “Images of the Village Community: A Study in Anglo-Indian Ideology”, *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.6, no.3, 1972, p.291, observes, ‘prior to the post-war anthropological boom, the village community was the plaything of historians and administrators’. In the West, studies of the village were primarily carried out by historians under the influence of the German historical school. This was so because, except for a handful of survivals, the village community was a purely historical phenomenon there. On the contrary, in India, village being an omnipresent reality was studied initially by revenue officials as part of assessing and collecting land revenue. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the East and the West, the historians and the revenue administrators, literally met so far as the study of village community is concerned. This brief interaction was made possible thanks to the growing popularity of *evolutionism* and the *comparative method*. The convergence of these two ‘insisted on the essential identity of the defunct English village community and the living Indian village, separate in time and space, but co-existent in the same phase of social evolution’). *Ibid.*
  7. Parasher, Aloka (1992), “The Village Given to Us: Intellectual Constructions of the Village Community in Historical Writing”, in Alok Bhalla and Peter J. Bumke, eds., *Images of Rural India in the Twentieth Century*, Delhi: Sterling Publishers, pp. 17-42.
  8. Neale, W.C. (1990), *Developing Rural India: Politics, Policies and Programs* New Delhi: Allied Publishers, p. 6
  9. Stokes, Eric (1978), *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 3.
  10. Stokes, Eric (1959), *The English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  11. Bearce, G.D. (1961), *British Attitudes Towards India, 1748-1858*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  12. ‘Utilitarianism’ was the name given to a set of social and ethical principles formulated by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, and developed subsequently by the latter’s son, John Stuart Mill. For a classic study of utilitarianism. see Stokes, n.10, and for its recent treatment, see Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: India in British Liberal Thought*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.
  13. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-18, 119.
  14. Dumont, Louis (1970), “The ‘Village Community’ from Munro to Maine”, in Louis Dumont, *Religion/Politics and History in India, Paris/The Hague: Mouton Publishers*, p. 118.
  15. F. W. Ellis, as the Collector of Madras, was intent on settling the revenue on the basis of village rather than individual peasant, and had a running debate with Munro on this issue.
  16. Upadhyaya, Carol (2001), “The Concept of Community in Indian Social Sciences: An Anthropological Perspective”, in Surinder S. Jodhaka, ed., *Community and Identities: Contemporary Discourses on Culture and Politics in India*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 32-58.
  17. See Dewey, n.6, pp. 292-94.
  18. Ludden, David (ed.), (1999), *An Agrarian History of South Asia*, The New Cambridge History of India: IV.4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 34.
  19. Marriott, McKim (1955), “Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilisation”, in McKim Marriott (ed.), *Village India: Studies in the Little Community*, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 184.
  20. See also Jan Breman, *The Shattered Image: Construction and Deconstruction of the Village in Colonial Asia*, Amsterdam: Comparative Asian Studies, 1987.
  21. Ludden, n.18, p.34.
  22. Hobsbawm, Eric J. and Terence Ranger (eds.), (1983), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
  23. Ludden, n. 18, p. 173.
  24. *Ibid.*
  25. Daniel, Valentine E. (1984), *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 61-104.
  26. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
  27. *Ibid.*, p. 79
  28. Heesterman (1985), p. 181.
  29. *Ibid.*
  30. Smith, n. 4, p. 156.
  31. See Ludden, n.18, pp. 173-74.
  32. *Ibid.*, pp. 178, 222.
  33. Dewey, n. 6.
  34. Mehta, n. 12, p. 111.
  35. See also Cohn, n. 2, pp. 78-79.
  36. Cohn, Bernard S. (1997), *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 5.
  37. Inden, n. 5.
  38. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
  39. Dirks in his foreword to Cohn (1997), pp. ix-xii.
  40. Fabian, Johannes (1983), *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, New York: Columbia University Press.

41. Constable, Philip (2000), "'Imagining' and 'Developing India'", H.H. Mann and B.S. Rowntree: Wealth, Subsistence and Poverty in Rural Western India 1907-27", *South Asia*, vol. 23, no.1, pp. 1-37.
42. Smith, n. 4, p. 2.
43. Niranjana, Seemanthini (1991), "Conceptualising the Indian Village: An Overview of the Indian Village Studies Tradition", *Indian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 371-85.
44. For a detailed treatment of *community* as a unit idea of sociology, see Nisbet, Robert A. 1970, *The Sociological Tradition*, London: Heinemann.
45. See Upadhyaya, n. 16, p. 35.
46. See Wood, Geof (1985), 'The Politics of Development Policy Labelling', *Development and Change*, 16 (3), pp. 347-73.
47. See Lambert, Helen (2002), 'Caste, Gender and Locality in Rural Rajasthan', in Vandana Madan. (ed.), *The Village in India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 144-60.
- 

## The Neurobiological Paradigm of Consciousness

PRASENJIT BISWAS\*

Kuhn in his defining moment of 'revolutionary science' simultaneously defined and deconstructed the notion of paradigm in Philosophy of Science. Existing paradigms are always under determined by new methods and new facts such that tradition shattering complements determine the attitude to scientific inquiry. Neurobiological explanations (NBE) of human consciousness throw up quite a few disparate facts like activated processing of neural masses that do not have to either supervene on syntactic or corresponding external content from the world. NBE, therefore, marks a shift from a synthesized and integrated nativism to an activation based multiple processing of accessible internal states. But such a shift is not without its casualties: computational neuro-biological models of Churchland, Dennett and Searle are either reconstructed to fit into the self-organizing autonomous agency of the mind, or they are abandoned along with many a philosophical parallelism drawn between biological systems and the conscious processes.

The so called cerebral celebrities like the globally available physical state N and the hard problem-binding problem duet are now exchanged with a partially ordered matrix of non-conscious judgments that depends on propagation of a dynamic neural loop. Such a partial ordering opens up a new neurobiological paradigm of 'radical interpretation' of the feedback loop created out of activation and transition. This offers a different choice of 'parameters' that plays the natural game of conscious decisions differently, by way of introducing continuous and graded levels of activity. In the words of Stuart Kauffman of *Investigations*, 'Being autonomous agents, cells must, as individuals living in communities, make the maximum number of reliable discriminations possible and act on them reliably, without "trembling hands".'<sup>1</sup>

If neural descriptions of conscious phenomena achieves what Kauffman called 'expanding the adjacent possible', that is, a transitivity of the form, the representation of a content in

a neural mass N is sufficient to represent that content in the Conscious neighbourhood of the agent. Such a transitivity marks a Turing type computation of internal states of an organism that works in a dynamic manner in order to evolve a semantic content that not only establishes a context dependent relationship with physical constituents of the system, but it also assumes an epistemic 'view from within' kind of function. Such a function is dynamically incoherent at the level of physical constituents, while it attains an epistemic regularity and success at the level of self-organization. Dynamic incoherence at the level of the causal affect of the world is the determinant of context dependent self-organization that contingently orders the internal states of the biological system. Kauffman's methodology of 'Boolean networks' that is self-consistently self-organizing along a classical limit portrays co-evolving networks in a fitness landscape. These networks assume the form of 'information carriers' that could be decoupled from a particular dynamic agency. Further, it is possible



to maintain a distinction between genes that carry information, that is, those which know the amino acid configurations in themselves as well as what they are going to encode, *and* those genes that merely copy certain codes. Such a distinction brings out a distinction between internal/external boundary conditions that is conceptualized by Howard Pattee as 'semantic closure' condition of coding and information through genes in a material symbolic system.<sup>2</sup> Such a closure is a necessary result of a dynamic system that can reproduce the initial conditions of replication, but this does not need a prior knowledge of the code, it only needs information about its own components. Such information is carried by a configuration of amino acids to implement a semantic relationship with the genic products. Such a semantic relationship depends on the structure of codes that genes carry with themselves, which is communicated through the processes of selection. The moot question that we can ask at this point is, can the neurobiological explanation use genetic processes as a substratum of constitution of conscious agents?

Taking conscious agents to be self-consistently self-organizing, one can go into the functioning of the system in terms of influence of an external world that can act as the trigger for selection of certain memory tokens that constitute the internal state of the system. Such an internal state acts upon the repercussions generated within the system by the external trigger by way of selection of 'meaning' that can only be understood in the context of selection pressure on the agent. Such a meaning is emergent as the internal states of the agent are caused by a dynamic interaction with the selection mechanism. This is how the molecular strings of genes only become symbolic representations if the physical symbol tokens are, at some stage of string processing, directly recognized by translation molecules (tRNA's and synthetases) which

thereupon execute specific but arbitrary actions (protein synthesis). The semantic closure arises from the necessity that the translation molecules are themselves referents of the gene strings. Through such translation molecules, which themselves are alterable in the process of decoding DNAs, and by this, they can switch on or off any part of the Gene. In other words, it would be proper to consider the notion of semantic closure in terms of arbitrariness such that the code for protein contained in Genes is switched on or off in relation to their causal role in interactions with RNAs. The notion of semantic closure, therefore, provides for a different translation molecule giving rise to a different genetic code. So, *there is a code switching mechanism latent in the very process of decoding.* What made it clear is the discovery of messenger RNA (mRNA) molecules containing information not coded in DNA. The difference in code between pre-transcription and post-transcriptional alteration of genetic information was called 'RNA Editing'. The term is used to identify any mechanism which will produce mRNA molecules with information not specifically encoded in DNA. Further through such a mechanism of alteration of translation molecules, there is a connection between the gene and the non-genetic factors that can also encode significant information and can enter into larger regulatory processes of interaction. Such interactions are crucial to determine the strength of interaction between a genetic structure and the environment.

The question is, can such explanations based on genetic activity explain the claim of mind or consciousness in the brain? The crucial feature of consciousness understood in terms of a distinction as employed by Ned Block in terms of 'phenomenal consciousness' and 'access consciousness' is of much use here. If genes constitute information about a certain phenotype and its brain,

do we maintain that genes as carriers of information are phenomenally conscious, while they do not per se access information about what the phenotype expresses in terms of self-consciousness or consciousness of the world? This gives us a clue to understand why *genes do not encode information such as how to fold a protein. The mechanism of protein folding comes for free with the laws of matter and self-organization.* Such laws of matter are expressed not just by the genetic code but by the entire causal pathway through which amino acid in genes would bind themselves with other molecules like nucleic acid. What the genes do is to organize the protein sequence into a code that carries 'information' as a material symbol system (MSS) with a semantic content. What Pattee argued is that such a MSS gives us a precise semantic message that could be rendered as a self-organization of protein sequences.<sup>3</sup> He further argued that there is no open-ended evolution without symbols, but conversely, there is no need for symbols without material self-organization. Such a material organization is a genotype encoding amino-acid chains (initial conditions) for proteins to be folded into dynamical self-organization. Such proteins-to-be-folded is mediated by coding relations that bear a dynamic incoherence with the environment. This incoherence can make us think of genes not as description or programmes, but as data to the dynamic self-organizing agent. How a *semiotic code* between symbols and building blocks (DNA/RNA) can arise from a material system is still very much a mystery both for biological and cognitive systems. The semiotic code between bases of nucleotide is a double stranded molecule running in two opposite strands such that bases across from each other are complementary. For example, a DNA strand is a set of nucleotide bases like {a,c,t,g} in which a and t are placed opposite and c and g are placed opposite to each other. Various ways in which base-pairing

could be permitted follows the basic rule of pairing opposites such that one strand uniquely determines its opposite. When DNA is converted into RNA, it follows the same interactions that occur between opposite elements of the base-pair in the DNA and indeed between DNA and RNA bases during the process of transcription. The relationship between DNA and RNA assumes a semiotic relationship in the sense that DNA-RNA sequences are signs for proteins and genes that are produced out of this interaction follows, according to Pattee, follow the laws of the environment. This following of law is explained in terms of dynamic incoherence with the environment that acts as a selection mechanism.<sup>4</sup> But such a mechanism turns out to be 'fuzzy' as the emergent relationship between self-organizing system and the external environment turns out to be non-descriptive symbolic systems that do not follow laws of self-replication in toto.<sup>5</sup> Rather evolutionary strategies of self-organizing systems can alter the interactive patterns that are emergent by way of operating within a causally enactive environment. Therefore it could be maintained that parameters determined by the genetically encoded material symbol system are causally as well as semantically closed, although they are not necessarily self-replicating. This violates a Von-Neumann type 'Universal Instructor'<sup>6</sup> machine primarily by way of post-transcriptional coding relationship that evolves through context dependence. How this context dependence results into a creative reproduction of a genetically encoded self-organizing system could be understood following the processes of RNA editing. By a close parallel what cognitive scientists do is to treat such context dependency of symbol manipulation in terms of an unalterable signifier-signified relationship that makes reprogramming subject to laws of *eigenstates*.<sup>7</sup> Such Eigenstates

represent the externally observable manifestations of the phenomenally accessible cognitive states. Such eigenstates, in case of MSS in biological-genetic organisms turn out to be fuzzy that takes care of emergent causal networks between internal-external environments.

#### COMPUTABILITY AND PLASTICITY OF EVOLUTIONARY MECHANISM

Autonomous Agents (AA) stand out as a model of self-replication as well as action in/on the world.<sup>8</sup> Autonomous agents not only functionally know what a part of it does, but it also alters its states in response to the world. The tradition shattering challenge comes from the intelligent character of AAs, who not only makes it possible to give an *interpretation* of their states as reflective and rational in the sense of what they do. The ascription of self-consciousness to AAs in terms of their recognition of themselves as the same thing/being is justifiable by facts of semantic-semiotic-linguistic genoneural architecture, which is also an emergent property of AAs. Such AAs are situated in two interrelated contexts: one in the connection between evolution and computational embodiment of AAs and second, looked from the side of the world, how evolution throws up self-constructing agents. This double situatedness of AAs in embodiment and agency, both taken together are implicated in a co-constructing, co-evolutionary and localizable topos or space that blur the boundary between the real and the imaginary, between the experiential and the fictional boundaries of centring consciousness in an agent. In this crossing of boundary, blurring of boundary between the genoneural and the lived specie, the incommensurability between neurobiological and the anthropological paradigms of consciousness falls apart.

#### a. Genoneural Structure of Consciousness

Methodologically speaking, there is an inherent challenge to the closures produced by computational-intentionalistic and building block approaches to consciousness that thrives on a metaphysical two-dimensionalism: the envatted and the enclosed versus the enworlded and the enacted. From the point of view of a disembodied paradigm of reason and control, it is possible to disengage mind/consciousness from AAs in the sense of AI, but the challenge is that AAs are nonpositional and yet base themselves on the concrete universe of external world that supplies the context. Given that Kuhn adopted a transcendental perspective in determining paradigms, the role of AAs in the immanent world of the concrete produces incommensurability with the very notion of paradigm and therefore, assumes autonomy. This autonomy of AAs outside paradigmatic sciences creates a demand for itself such that some of the qualitative features of the transcendent can now be re-translated into the domain of the AAs. This is the neurobiological explanation of AAs, where the explanans is evolving in relation to explanandum and hence assuming the form of a critical reflection on parallel between them. The parallel that is drawn between the computational and the cognitive roles of mind, between the genoneural architecture and the lived expressions of conscious mind is based on an apriori/aposteriori factual/counterfactual connection that demands reduction of consciousness in that connection. Such a reduction not only leaves an explanatory gap but it also becomes a simultaneous movement between a conscious machine and the real world consciousness, which is a move from the intensional to the extensional referent.<sup>9</sup> Such a move is an abstract parallelism that identifies a

physical substratum with consciousness in terms of similar roles: role played by physical processes in explaining consciousness is the same as role played by consciousness in explaining first person ascription of mental/physical states. But there is no conceptual apriori entailment of physical processes from consciousness and vice versa- the parallels do not meet ever in their explanatory purposes. The conceptual gap rather demands that we discover a common underlying layer to both the physical processes and consciousness may be in world of pure bits or in a unifying theory. The best outcome of this demand is brought forth in its non-accomplishment in a twisted matrix: blurring of the boundary between the physical and the embodied by way of shuffling and mixing them in a given centre of consciousness. Further the parallelism takes the form of a structural hierarchy (S-H) that posits an underlying state as the explanatory basis of the physical aggregate of the total structure as in the case of the physical process. Yet another form of this parallelism finds its expression in a control hierarchy (C-H) that turns underlying states into messages that are assigned a linguistic-semantic and semiotic role in the structural description of Consciousness as an integrated whole.<sup>10</sup>

The neurobiological challenge lies in understanding how the symbolic role of DNAs as the building block of self-constructing autonomous agents emerge in an activation of biocognitive phenotype that embodies the process of its becoming? In other words, how is that a biocognitive phenotype is both a product and an effector of genoneural architecture? What seems to be the apriori necessity of the role of consciousness in the human-world embodiment is an intersubjective realization of ascriptions of content, which gets its *affect* in a genoneural architecture that passes through such a

necessity in a dynamic iteration of certain patterns. Such ascriptions cannot prestate the initial conditions and the boundary conditions.

#### *b. Language in Genes as Conscious Codes*

Finite number of symbols (e.g. codons in DNA) can encode a finite number of primitive parts (e.g. amino acids). Functional structures that can be constructed from these 'parts' are 'recognition sites' that recognizes which structure of amino acid matches or mismatches these codon or mRNAs. Such matches could be counted from a number of mutations that have occurred from a given initial condition. The encoded messages in genes which we call 'representations' are embodied and enacted through this process of parsing a part of the code. For example, a grammar for an RNA molecule called transfer RNA (tRNA) provides a syntactical and structural description of how tRNA is going to capture a folded structure of protein, but such a description is based on actual protein structure of the tRNA. Therefore, it is rather a rule following move or a strategy that is evolved in operations like re-combination and splicing. More than the physical process, tRNAs follow a pathway of action that is strategically embedded, depending on which protein it is going to fold. Can this pathway be expressed for the symbol manipulation kind of operation through representation of external reality as cognitive scientists would design in understanding neuronal behaviour in the brain? Or is it like the extended Computationalism that reduces the functioning of self-organizing systems to connections with external-world-as-memory? Or is it like an off-line advance planning to match with the task that tRNAs perform? The agent neutral neural phenomena in their dynamic structures, as explained by an inherent and embedded functionalism

with a computational-intentionalistic-connectionistic-synaptic explanation conflates agency with manifest external functions. But the conceptual role played by tRNAs in amino acid folding is 'instructional' such that genes can produce a certain phenotype in the causal network of the organism and the environment. The sense of instruction here is that tRNAs fold protein in a certain way, which is essentially a part of code-switching events in evolution as well as in mutation.

The sequences of amino-acyl-tRNA synthetases are proteins that assign amino-acids to codons. Those tRNAs that are charged with the correct amino-acids can produce functional proteins from genes. How do the first synthetases arise that functionally distinguish within classes of amino acids and codons? A defined code in DNAs catalyzes the synthetases to assign the correct genetic code. Some genetic sequences interpreted by assignment catalysts are reflexive with respect to the mechanism of their interpretation. The choice of a certain subset of all the proteins as catalysts also is reflexive with respect to genetic information. But the genetic information needed by a catalyst is ambiguous until the catalysis work begins in the tRNA. In other words, the amino-acid structures in DNAs undergo states of transition in catalysis in order to reorganize the genetic information. This reorganization is constrained by the way catalytic proteins in tRNA are related to their sequences. A set of proteins that execute the rules of a genetic code can be re-constructed from not just the functions of genes but from what those protein containing cells perform. For example, promotion of dendritic growth by the gene called CPG15, an activity induced signaling molecule and the role that it plays mediating synaptic plasticity is a case in point.<sup>11</sup> Such signaling molecules are reflexive by their very structure in a self-regulated expression of genetic

information. The important philosophical question is, *can we ascribe phenomenal consciousness to such self-regulated expressions?*

Two arguments: (1) Cariani argues that to the extent an adaptive epistemic system constructs itself and determines the nature of its own informational transactions with its environs, to that extent the system achieves a degree of epistemic autonomy relative to its surroundings<sup>12</sup> and (2) Von Neumann's argument maintains that if we do not have symbolic descriptions directing self-replication, then an organism must replicate through material self-inspection of its parts.<sup>13</sup> Cariani's argument about epistemic autonomy expounds the notion of brains as material systems capable of supporting conscious awareness in terms of classes of linkages between neural patterns produced by sensory inputs (external semantics), those produced by internal coordinations (syntactics), and those produced by intrinsic goal-states with correspondences in the structure of experience. These internal co-ordinates are catalysts that unfold protein sequences in the relevant areas of the brain. So, it has both a subjective and objective dimension, for example, genes encoding odour receptors proteins are active in the olfactory neurons such that each olfactory neuron expresses only one receptor gene.<sup>14</sup> The neural signal patterns generated by internal coordinations are the means by which the brain interprets its own states. Such interpretations are causally re-afferent and they are circularly built up through dynamically created templates such that they act as autonomous subjective states of the brain. The tRNA molecules that map particular tri-nucleotide codons to particular amino acids in transcription implement the interpretation of the genetic code that plays not just a physical-constitutive role in the genoneural architecture. Rather tRNAs observe and interact with their genic environment and this results into alter-

native and even multiple interpretations of the same nucleotide sequence. As Semir Zeki argues how form, colour and movement are understood differentially in various areas of the brain follow how genes are mapped in neurons in those areas. In the case of prosopagnosia, as Zeki shows that the capacity to recognize familiar faces is absent thereby showing in genic terms that the genetic code responsible for 'information about a face' remain inert, although the regular visual neurons are fired.<sup>15</sup> These internal patterns are not related to goal-states which the brain can measure or observe and this non-relation is experienced as pain or grief. But the pattern is there as genetically encoded functions in a damaged neural area only need an improvement. Following laws of self-organization, these internal states are simultaneously effectors and affected as explained by Ramachandran's study on synaesthesia where brain areas for smell get crosswired with colour neurons. In fact synaesthesia as a phenomenon can explain the brain process that recognizes, although wrongly, colours as sounds and shapes as tastes, which are not affected due to smell areas being affected. This is an embodiment of the phantom colour that Merleau Ponty called 'reproduction intention'.<sup>16</sup> Such an intention is expressed in the neural assemblies of the brain that makes use of genetic information by way of what Merleau Ponty explained later as a need for 'form' to enter into the world.<sup>17</sup> This also is a telling evidence of the epistemic autonomy that arises in organizing the neural configurations such that genetic code works in a bottom up way. tRNA molecules are single nucleotide triplets attached to single amino acid that are located by codons at ribosome such that codons can strip off amino acid from the distant end of tRNA and add it to the protein that ribosome is building from mRNAs. In case of prosopagnosia, for example, the polymorphic character of expression in

genes *affects* at least two different areas of the brain, namely olfactory and visual. The modular distinction that is supposed to be there between distant area and nearer area seem to get crosswired in a modified sensorimotor activity. The affect is that the corresponding reports enjoy only a first personal veracity without an integrationist perspective. In case of prosopagnosia, the properties of being such a sort can be there in the Subject without being conscious of it. Such affect is different from mere processing deficits such as 'congrual processing'<sup>18</sup> of inputs from the face as an object, rather it has to do with the subjective incapability to recognize the face as an object. This means that there is no corresponding representation of the face in the brain, but there is a mere awareness of something external, like a pattern that could be accessed by a flick of the eye or attention. In terms of mRNA and tRNA it simply means codons strip off those proteins from tRNA that are responsible for smell in an 'instruction' for vision- it overcomes distances within brain areas by mere awareness. Ramachandran's explanation of synaesthesia in terms of absence of sequencing that happens through importation from one region of the brain to the higher regions as in the case of normal brains merely explains the context of synaesthesia.<sup>19</sup> It does not explain what is to see, hear or taste for a synaesthetic Subject, rather it only explains the effects in terms of underlying physical processes. In contrast, need for 'form' is phenomenal in order to explain how synaesthetic subjects organize their world.

How Subjects organize their world could be understood from Von Neumann's arguments about self-inspection by molecules like Genes. The internal processes that transcribe and translate the genetic information contained in the DNAs do not fully specify the neural configurations that act as stand-in for on-line intelligent

consciousness. Genetic information rather works offline by way of decoupling on-line from off-line, while at the same time internal states and processes can be exploited by an organism to develop certain connection with the external. This makes any sequence of nucleotide possible and its informational value does not depend on couplings with the external environment. Such functional dynamic structures like nucleotide do not depend on physically non-functional descriptions. Rather they unfold themselves so that they can replicate and this function of 'replication' cannot take place without an inspection of its internal states, as if such states are owned in various parts of the constitutive elements (e.g., genes) of the dynamic structure. In the genoneural architecture, such genes play a cognitive role by unfolding themselves from the code or symbolic structure of itself and thereby selecting those parameters that allow replication through inspection of its parts. Such selection based replication acts like a gene or protein copier and a reader that correctly reads the information encoded in the gene. Such copier and reader role of genetic molecules construct the initial conditions from the dynamic function of the genes, which is mediated through an arbitrary coding relation that translates nucleotide sequences into amino-acid sequences that express genetic information. At this point a crucial distinction could be made: genotypes without descriptions of amino acids that they are going to fold might reproduce themselves differently, while phenotypes bearing determined coding relations shall reproduce themselves in toto. As far as genotypes are concerned they can recover the initial conditions, while the phenotypes evolve into a complex organism that cannot recover the initial amino acid building blocks. Protein sequences as symbols do not participate dynamically (chemically) in the self-organization process of the encoded

building blocks. Rather, they participate as information carriers which are effectively read to construct initial conditions for self-organization.

In the case of autonomous agents, such a self-organizing process enters into an intersemiotic identification of functions like reading, copying and reproducing. Such an intersemiotic identification of processes are mapped into the complexity of organization of autonomous agent. In other words, determination of conditions of identification of processes implies a space of distribution of singularities such as synthesis/folding of protein that goes for determining the very character of genetic information. Protein acts as the space for self-determination of the genes. In our metaphysical and transcendental notion of ground of Consciousness, such self-determination remains indiscernible unless genetic information/code finds its semiotic relation within the specific areas of the cell/brain. One can talk of AAs in a manner that it does not need specification of a completely determined brain, as that would amount to a kind of neural reductionism. One implication of such reductionism is that it assumes an internal first person state as well as a blissful ignorance of the microphysical parameters of the conscious experience. Contrarily, a genetic explanation of consciousness is an intersemiosis between the syntactical, i.e., base pairing rules between codons and tRNAs and the semantical, i.e., the phenotypic traits. The very nature of the intersemiosis can be understood from how the syntactic and the semantic relate to each other by way of performing roles that are signified by genetic code. The signifiers of reading and copying as syntactic roles and the signifiers of semantic properties such as localized genes turn into 'signified' in the course of self-organization. This also marks a transition from semiotic states to world states. Such a transition again signifies an absence of self-

referring subjectivity in the very process of ensuring self-inspection through signs.

#### PARALLELISM REVISITED

What sophisticated parallelism between the genetic and the anthropomorphic-linguistic approaches to Consciousness aims to do is to read one off from the other without exploring the possibility that one can read the other off only from a situation of mutual embeddings. How such embeddings happen in explanations could be grappled with from a specific theoretical move of dissipating some of the usual binaries like self/nonself; conscious/non-conscious etc. into the self-organizational properties of autonomous agents who make the external into internal in order to make functionings a process of decoding the world from the internal codes. As Post-structuralists famously state that the self as an agent is produced by a discursive formation by way of freeplay between the semiotic code and the world, similarly in the context of genetic explanation, it could be surmised that consciousness is a process of forming and forging gene-organism relations that complements the conscious relation between the self and the world. For example, the way genes response to the external or the way genes tolerate an external intervention and the way in which they work as an assembly to establish a fit between the world and the organism is much more than causal. It is quite self-conscious as each molecule knows how to respond to the role played by other molecules in the system to evolve in an open ended manner.<sup>20</sup> Such evolution makes molecules behave in a manner that the causal connections with the world can be subsumed under the process of self-inspection. This makes the world jump out from the activated states of the system to an abductive knowledge of the mind. This is a simultaneous organization of the self

and the world that manifests itself in almost indiscernible molecular interactions that subsume the very consciousness of it only to give birth to a depth that consciousness can only fathom with. This is what made Wittgenstein to remark, 'Being able to climb a mountain' may be called a state of my body. I say 'I can climb it-I mean I am strong enough'.<sup>21</sup>

What Wittgenstein meant is that the verb 'climb' is to be understood not in terms of the mountain but in terms of the ability of the agent. The question here is, is the ability necessarily self-referring, or it is more of an apriori cognizance of capability? Wittgenstein's answer lies partly in the capacity to use the word 'ability' correctly in language and it partly lies in organizing the act as represented by the verb in language. In genetic explanations, consciousness is more like this simultaneous correct use and organization of the information by an organism in which genes are both the cause as well as the effect organized by a network of prior connections between the genes and the world. As Hermann Weyl remarked,

... we need *signs*, real signs, as written with chalk on the blackboard or with pen on paper. We must understand what it means to place one stroke after the other. It would be putting matters upside down to reduce this naively and grossly misunderstood ordering of signs in space to some purified spatial conception and structure, such as that expressed in Euclidean geometry. Rather, we must support ourselves here on the natural understanding in handling things in our natural world around us. Not pure ideas in pure consciousness, but concrete signs lie at the base, signs which are for us recognizable and reproducible despite small variations in detailed execution, signs which by and large we know how to handle.<sup>22</sup>

A genetic code is like these signs made with evolutionary mechanisms on the 'fitness landscape' of co-evolving species. Although such signs follow the

laws of physics, but when they are treated as observables, they are understood the way Wittgenstein understood 'climb' reflexively that is by way of observing the reflexivity between genes and the evolution of self-inspection in autonomous agents. We can justify this by reproducing what Gary Marcus says about this reflexive character of genes.

Genes are widely seen as either blueprints or deterministic dictators but, in fact, neither view is correct. A single organism's collection of genes—its genome—can lead to many different outcomes, depending on the environment surrounding that genome. The African butterfly *Bicyclus anyana*, for example, can take on two different forms—a colorful version in the rainy season and a dull brown version in the dry season—depending on how its genes are switched on and off.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, the capacity to switch on or off according to environment as well as the internal capacity to know what the other parts are going to do are essential for an autonomous agent to have judgments as they are reflected in choice of action. What is reflected gets decontextualized from the process of its culmination in a notion of consciousness that centres on the supremacy of the self. It means that the genes can do what phenomenal consciousness can do and this doing do not depend on access to states of mind/world. Access is rather an end product of a flexible re-wiring of brain areas. Such re-wiring ensures recursivity of genic communication that reproduces the phenotype with functional variations. It could be argued that a single gene can take multiple functions and its copies can take new functions. Otherwise, a single gene can serve multiple functions recruited in multiple domains. In all such cases, the autonomy of the agent in being aware remain intact, although it will establish new kind of dynamic loops that will break the stable circuitry of cognition.<sup>24</sup> This also shall make an abductive

switching from awareness to consciousness without the apriori necessity that a conscious machine, going by our usual metaphysical presuppositions should possess. This will rather be recursive neural-genic loop that needs an access to an external world and such an access shall be further regulated by self-constructing loops through self-inspection.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Kauffman, Stuart (2000), *Investigations*, London: Oxford University Press, p. 177.
2. Pattee, Howard (1995), "Evolving self-reference: matter, symbols, and semantic closure." in *Communication and Cognition - AI*, vol. 12, nos 1-2.
3. Pattee, Howard H. (1982), "Cell Psychology: An Evolutionary Approach to the Symbol-Matter Problem." in *Cognition and Brain Theory*. Vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 191-200
4. Howard H. Pattee (1995), "Evolving Self-Reference: Matter, Symbols, and Semantic closure." *Communication and Cognition - AI* vol. 12, nos 1-2, pp. 9-27.
5. Rocha, Luis M. (1995), "Contextual Genetic Algorithms: Evolving Developmental Rules." in F. Moran et.al. (eds.) *Advances in Artificial Life*, Springer-Verlag, pp. 368-382.
6. In a Von Neumann type universal instructor machine for designing a computational automaton, one requires a set of computable symbols with instructional rules that operate on symbols to result into regular states. See, J. Von Neumann, *The Theory of Self-Reproducing Automata*, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1966, pp. 1-5.
7. Rocha, Louis M. (1998), "Selected Self-Organization and the Semiotics of Evolutionary Systems" in S. Salthe et.al. (eds.), *Evolutionary Systems: The Biological and Epistemological Perspectives on Selection and Self-Organization*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 341-58.
8. Kauffman, Op. cit., p. 64. He argues that AAs perform one complete thermodynamic cycle.
9. Andy Clark calls this as a shift of boundary from the real to the virtual and then morphing one for the other and then again mixing it up to blur the boundary between what is morphed and what is not morphed. He calls it a 'twisted matrix', an end product of paradigmatic science. See, Christopher Grau (ed.), *Philosophers Explore The Matrix*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 195.

10. I use a slightly different version of G.L. Pandit's interpretation of Pattee as Pattee's later works on material symbol systems that propagate open evolutionary emergences does not talk of control of dynamic incoherence between organism and environment through messages. Rather Pattee proposes a DNA-environmental interaction without a control of switching on or off. Further, Pattee considered control as computational based on Turing model and enlarged the possibility of self-organizing systems as fuzzy development problems. See, G.L. Pandit, *The Structure and Growth of scientific Knowledge: A Study in the Methodology of Epistemic Appraisal*, Dordrecht: Dordrecht, 1983, pp. 54-60 and Howard Pattee. "Evolving self-reference: matter, symbols, and semantic closure." *Communication and Cognition - AI*, vol. 12, nos 1-2, 1995, pp. 9-27 .
11. Nedivi, Elle (1999), "Molecular analysis of developmental plasticity in neocortex" in *J. Neurobiology*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 135-147. (review)
12. Cariani, P. (1998), "Epistemic autonomy through adaptive sensing" in the *Proceedings of the 1998 IEEE International Symposium on Intelligent Control (ISIC)*, National Institute of Standards and Technology, Gaithersburg, MD., pp. 718-23, Sept. 14-17.
13. Von Neumann, J., Op. cit., p. 74
14. This is Buck and Axel hypothesis. See, R. Axel, "The molecular logic of smell" in *Scientific American*, October, 1995.
15. Zeki, Semir (1999), *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 175
16. Ponty, Maurice Merleau (2000), *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958 org., p. 21.
17. Ibid., p. 475
18. Duchaine, Bradley C. "Developmental Prosopagnosia with normal congrual processing" at [http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/bec/papers/Duchaine\\_NeuroReport.pdf](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/bec/papers/Duchaine_NeuroReport.pdf). accessed on 6.06.2006.
19. Ramachandran, V.S. and E M Hubbard, "Hearing Colours, Tasting Shapes" in [www.sciam.com](http://www.sciam.com), Scientific American 59, May, 2003 accessed on 10.04.2004.
20. Marcus, Gary F. (2004), *The Birth of The Mind: How a Tiny Number of Genes Creates the Complexities of Human Thought*, New York: Basic Books, pp. 56-7.
21. Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1981), *Zettel*, (tr.) G.E.M. Anscombe, 2nd Edition, Oxford: Blackwell, sec. 608.
22. Quoted in Peter Cariani (2001), "Symbols and dynamics in the brain" in *Biosystems* special issue on "Physics and evolution of symbols and codes".
23. Marcus, Gary (2004), "Genetics Will Help Social Engineers Nurture the Brain's Nature" in *Los Angeles Times*, Op-ed, April 21, 2004
24. Ramus, F. "Neurobiology of Dyslexia: A Reinterpretation of the Data" in *Trends in Neuroscience*, vol. 27, no. 12, pp. 721-26.

## Need For a Participatory Model of Development

SR MEHTA\*

An attempt has been made here to critically examine the various perspectives of development. Of these, the dominant paradigm of 'Modernization' based on the capitalist path of development was found inadequate and weak for the development of the developing nations. Instead of development of new nations, this led to crisis of income and regional disparities, poverty, unemployment and underemployment, shanty living conditions, inadequate educational and healthcare facilities and

population growth. In response to inadequacy of this paradigm, Latin American scholars proposed a framework of development for the developing nations, which is a derivative of Marxian perspective of political economy and recognizes the underdevelopment of new nations as a consequence of the development of the developed nations. These have been referred hitherto as the Dependency Theory or the World System Theory within the realm of the sociology of underdevelopment.

Of these neo-Marxian perspectives, the World System theory has been observed to come closer in understanding the influence of international capitalism as a factor of development or underdevelopment of a nation. However, this perspective also falls short of the expectation of the developing nations and has faced the wrath of both the Marxists and the non-Marxist scholars. It would be worthwhile to examine the critique on this perspective before we direct our attention to the need for the participatory model of development in the context of

\* Fellow, IAS, Shimla.

developing nations which has amply shown positive results in Mao's people's movement in China, Gandhian mass movement in India, Another development and its application in the Latin American countries as a result of Human Scale Development, and increasing involvement of grassroot organizations and social action groups through the process of conscientization, multiplying effect of electronic media, and diffusion of innovations as a part of development communication perspective.

However, let us first take up the critique provided by the Marxists and non-Marxists on the underdevelopment theory (dependency theory or its sister variant world system approach) Marxist scholars' argument is that in conceiving capitalism, the relations of production within the capitalist system have been ignored both by Frank and Wallerstein. In fact, they have confused capitalism with the existence of an economic system. Even no importance has been accorded to the factor of unequal exchange so crucial in productivity of its free labour force in the growth and maintenance of capitalism. As such, both the class formation and class struggle have been treated as residual categories in the analysis. The thrust on national and international contexts of class struggle has not been taken into account. This has compelled the Marxist scholars to emphasize that there is a need to consider the nation-State as a unit of analysis rather than the global capitalist system. This necessitates to consider class conflict existing within the indigenous social structure of the developing nations for the development purposes. Empirically speaking, even some of the Marxists observe that the underdevelopment theory has not correctly interpreted the empirical data on the development of the developing nations as development is taking place and capitalism is fulfilling its historical mission. The development problem is not due to their dependence on the

developed nations but mainly due to internal contradictions within these nations. The world system theorists studied relations of the 'core' with the 'periphery' but they focussed on the capitalist 'core' countries to the neglect of the socio-economic structures of the Third World and misinterpreted the nature of capitalism which was contrary to the expectations of the Marxist scholars (Harrison 1989).

On the other hand, the non-Marxists pointed out that the world system approach is tautological. It is argued that if formal colonialism was responsible for the under-development of the Third World, then it should imply that countries which did not experience colonial domination, should be more developed than the other parts of the Third World. However, this theory negates any such division because it believes that capitalism has penetrated every new nation, whether it experienced colonialism or not. These nations have been classified as colonies, semi-colonies or neo-colonies and even nations of Eastern Europe and China have been incorporated into the world system. It is further observed that every society, to a certain extent, is dependent on the other, so the dependency of the developing or the developed nations is not an issue of underdevelopment. Besides, we cannot ignore the non-economic linkages of the 'periphery' to the 'centre' as these are contingent upon the specific cultural characteristics of the developing nations. The world system theorists considered all social action and interaction and culture to represent some kind of objective economic interest and this is non-convincing. Moreover, non-Marxists like Marxists, argue that empirically speaking development can and is taking place in the Third World and it is closely linked with the formation of close ties with the 'core' societies. It is stated that as and when these ties are weakened, the underdevelopment of the periphery nations increases. Moreover, the

dependency theory fails to account adequately with the transfer of technology and the role of values and diffusion in development. These arguments suggest us to get back to the position which the modernization theory occupied (Harrison 1989).

In the wake of the above critique on the sociology of underdevelopment (dependency theory and world system theory) and earlier criticism of the 'modernization' paradigm, it is clear that none of these perspectives are adequate in articulating and managing social and economic inequalities in the developing nations. The debates and the counter debates in these perspectives are inconclusive. The gun or butter argument by development scholars, currently is, that there is a need to take into account the indigenous social structures of the developing nations including their political structures and the relationships of these nations (social, economic, cultural, political and military) with the developed nations, through development oriented bureaucracy and local leadership along with participation of people to relate development initiatives to their needs and aspirations. This should form the basis of a 'paradigm' for the development of these nations. This brings into focus the participatory model of development for the developing nations as the earlier perspectives (Modernization and Dependency and World System Theory) on development have provided only privileged roles to national elites (Mehta 1999). As such, people's movements through the mobilization of grassroot organizations and social action groups supported by NGOs in interface with local leadership and bureaucracy for encouraging development initiatives that suit to the needs of the people, remain a serious alternative for the development of the developing nations.

Before we highlight the essential elements of a participatory model of development for the developing nations, we need to understand the concept of



participation. Puri (2004) in her perceptive analysis of participation at the community level points out that over the years there is a greater agreement about the desirability of participatory model of local resource management, both by those who emphasize on participation as a means to achieve institutional efficiency, and others who conceive participation as a mean to realize the goals of empowerment, equity and democratic governance. However, recently the second dimension of participation has caught the imagination of academics and the policy makers because of people centred policies, civil society and social capital aspects associated with the participation than the first one. Despite it being a fuzzy concept, participation to some may simply mean membership in a group and to others, it may convey having an effective voice in the decision making process.

Referring to Amartya Sen's capability approach (the goal of the Public Policy approach is to enlarge a person's functioning and capacity to function and expand the range of things that he or she can do in his or her life), a distinction has been made by Puri between efficiency-based participation and agency-based participation. The former focusses on participation as an instrumental means to achieve the goals that may vary from institutional efficiency to the state-defined public interests while the latter emphasizes on the role of human agency in empowering those who are affected by policies and political change, besides providing opportunities that may promote an equitable distribution of costs and benefits among them, thus making participation a goal in itself.

In the historical context, we can look towards Aristotle who considered a citizen as one who is entitled to participate in an office and contributes towards deliberation or decision for the self sufficiency of the city or to other political scientists, who conceive of

political participation as a mechanism of communicating the needs and preferences of the citizens to the decision makers in the political system in order to bring pressure on them to respond. In the Indian context, Gandhi's concept of 'Gram Swaraj' and MN Roy's people's committees, come close to treating participation as an end to itself to promote participatory democracy based on community life and values. However, in the contemporary scenario, participation has to be viewed in the context of a liberal bureaucratic welfare state, the decisions of which determine, practically all the spheres of public as well as private life besides situating it in increasing process of globalized economy and knowledge revolution and of demands made through a political voice by marginalized groups and other excluded sections of the society. As such, participation shall have to be viewed in relevance with the role of the State to provide institutional structures to facilitate it besides that of global organizations like The World Bank and the global and local actors (NGOs) and research institutes and universities which generate global knowledge and identify the people who need to be included in the participatory process (Puri 2004).

For effective 'Good Governance', it is argued that two pre-requisites are essential. First, there is a need for active participation of the civic community in public affairs while the second refers to a civic culture which should bind participants together through horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation and not through vertical relations of authority and dependency. Further, there is a need to instill in the minds of the people norms and values that promote cooperation, solidarity and public spiritedness in terms of social capital to build up a social organization based on trust, norms and networks in order to improve the efficiency of the society through coordinated action (Putnam 1993). So, instead of 'top-

down' approach of the State for the development of the developing nations, the 'bottom-up' approach through involvement of 'people' was considered more effective in efficient development of new nations. There is, therefore, now a greater stress laid on social capital to shape or influence the development initiatives for mobilizing the already existing local social networks to achieve varied policy goals (Rankin 2002).

Apart from the institutional agency-based efficiency perspective on participation, as highlighted above, another approach which is applicable as a part of the democratization process to include and recognize the marginalized groups of society as collective identities for furtherance of democratization of the system which provides interventions of a nature that suit these groups, is based on the Amartya Sen's concepts of entitlements and capabilities. Sen's argument is that the normative goal of empowerment (enlarging one's capacity and capability to function), equity (of both costs and benefits) and human agency is much more significant than the factor of institutional efficiency in the development milieu. The basic objective of development is to expand human capability referred as the alternative combinations of functionings from which the person can choose out of a range of options in deciding what kind of life he or she wants to lead (Dreze and Sen 1995, 1999). It is in this sense that development policies should view people as an end rather than as the 'means of production' (Dreze and Sen 1995).

However, participation whether conceived in equity sense or based on agency interventions highlights significantly the idea of community and the local. Both these perspectives seem to ignore the fact that any community has internal differentiation, competition and conflict and power differential within its space. This has led to criticism of the social capital and efficiency-based participation approach on the

count that the proponents of these schema have not taken into account the elements of bad social capital existing in the community that is the paradoxical co-existence of trust, cooperation and reciprocity with coercive, hierarchical and exclusive communal formations. They also seem to have ignored the fact that in most situations, collective action at the community level is circumscribed by ascriptive affiliations such as caste, religion and tribe. On the other hand, the capability theory of participation is better equipped to withstand the ideas of difference, while dealing with empowerment, equity and voice. In this regard, Sen's argument is that a person is exposed to poverty when his or her exchange entitlement is insufficient to meet his or her basic necessities of life, which are often determined by his or her gender and class status in the society. But, in spite of that, issues of difference and power inherent in communities affecting their participatory goals for development are not given much attention. These are, rather, seen as impediments towards people-based development, but are likely to disappear, once the participatory development is institutionalized. In short, both the perspectives on participation (social capabilities more than social capital) have recognized that inequalities, social hierarchies and discrimination are realities confronted in day-to-day and face-to-face relations and interactions within local communities (Puri 2004).

After peeping into the window of theoretical formulations on participation as given above, it may be desirable to examine the operationalization of the same in the development process. It is now a very well recognized fact that in a participatory model of development, people have to be set in the centre-stage of development. The cultural perspective specific to a nation demands that people's needs, aspirations, motivations and inclinations should be given the utmost considerations. In this context, although it is

desirable to evaluate the value preferences of the people, yet it is a difficult task to make an assessment of the people's preferred social activities. In the context of the developing nations, there is a need to empower people, especially the weaker sections, so that they are capacitated socially and psychologically to initiate action on their own in relevance with their own needs and interests in a more effective and efficient manner. Felt needs of the people should be given priority over the real needs of the planners, by making a beginning with the overlapping needs, that is, the needs that overlap the felt and real needs. We need to involve people not only in designing but also in the implementation of the development schemes to promote agreement, cooperation and interaction not only in between the beneficiaries but between them and the implementation agencies so as to reduce delays, increase service output and minimize costs (Paul 1987).

Basically, three steps have been suggested in evolving a strategy of participation of the people in the development initiatives. First, there is an urgent need for conscientization of people through information sharing and consultations. A large segment of the population, especially the marginalized groups, have absolutely no idea of the type of problems that need developmental attention and tackling. They need to be made aware, conscious and given relevant information and provided knowledge so that they could assert their voices and make suitable demands through appropriate political means on the governing and implementing agencies. Secondly, people must be involved in various decisions on issues concerning them to undertake development initiatives. Decision making is a complex phenomenon and whether taken at the individual or collective level, is based on maximum utilization expectation of people from the actions involved along with the likely consequences that may result from such

actions. As such, we need to weigh pros and cons related to such actions within the social organizational and value framework of the community or society. This would necessitate analysis of the community or societal social structure including power structure and leadership patterns, norms, values and sanctions which may retard or promote development initiatives or diffusion of innovations, influence patterns through caste and class affiliations, gender roles and equity dimensions, land-labour arrangements and relationships, family structure, religious adherences of people etc. In short, a thorough analysis of the community social structure can prove instrumental in involving people and helping them to take decisions on the specific development schemes in relevance with their needs (Mehta 1999).

Before taking up the third step, an empirical model for Community Involvement by Christopher and his associates (1957) based on the analysis of the existing social structure of the community, is described briefly. Analysis of the community social structure brings out the convergence of interest of those members of the community that have appropriate sentiments related to social order, beliefs and rationally calculated purposes in regard to a problem which is also rationally perceived so by the agency involved to tackle the same. The next step is to establish an initiating set based on the convergence of interests to begin the action process by all those who can or have right to call upon each other and have some obligation in regard to each other through relationships which will provide a basis for them to cooperate and work together for the realization of some of the common goals or purposes. After the establishment of an initiating set, it must be legitimized and sponsored. In the case of a voluntary action, authorization of action should be diffused through out the community, that is, there is a need to have access to

groups, formal social institutional setups, and other influential persons whose sponsorship or approval can legitimize an action. This should be proceeded by the establishment of an execution set having personnel who need to work through various channels such as community organizations or groups, influentials or leaders, cliques or factional groups, propinquity (neighbourhoods) and kinship networks etc.

Further, there is a need to make use of the reciprocal rights and obligations already existing in the community to ensure that besides those who exhibited reservoir of good will, others who were indifferent, variable in their attitude, and had shown an organized opposition to the development initiatives or issues, are converted to the maximum extent to a group of people who provide legitimation, sponsorship and approval or remain neutral to the efforts of the agency to salvage the problem of development. This can be done by making appeals and justifications through both personal and impersonal channels of communication. Even then, there would be some contained opposition in the community to the development initiative, as no community is fully organized and there are factious and conflicting groups who compete, context and confront one another to find a space in the community. In this approach, the technical support system to the execution set is to be provided by the agency or organization seeking involvement of people (Christopher et al, 1957).

After having discussed the community analysis of the social structure to involve people in the decision making process in a community action programme which led to enlistment of a large number of personnel on voluntary basis to conduct a survey in the area of Public Health in a county in the USA, we may highlight the third important step of participation of people in the development initiatives. This is related

to institution building process at the community level.

As discussed above in the case of establishment of a execution set for community action, it is not an easy task to build up an institution for action as it takes long time through people's own initiative and affirmative action to tackle a developmental issue or a problem. A number of NGOs, over the years, are involved in the welfare of the people through their own initiatives. In fact, in the recent past, we observe rather an explosive emergence of these NGOs as a collective actor in managing the development activities. The invisible world of NGOs needs encouragement from the formal economic and political structures of the State, which often feel threatened by the emergence of such groups. As such, wherever, the spaces for economic and social development are available, the NGOs should be encouraged to occupy them (Maxneef et al 1989).

It is now increasingly realized that the mainstay of contribution to development by NGOs is not that much financial as it is organizational. In other words, the NGOs are not required to financially induce development but their efforts have to be directed in mobilizing people into organized structure of group action. It is also suggested that the two major actors in the development of people are the local governments and local communities but we have observed that bureaucracy and community are antithetical systems or styles of social organizations between the State and the people. As such, the alternative strategy to the governmental intervention is decentralization. Decentralization would comprise decentralization of power and authority through delegation of the same to semi-autonomous or parastatal agencies, devolution of power to local government and transfer of functions from public to non-governmental institutions or joint exercise of both (Cernea 1988).

But, the question often raised is that

if centralization has failed in accomplishing development then what is the guarantee that the decentralization approach will hasten the development process towards its ultimate aim. However, the argument in favour of decentralization is that through this approach, we could ensure greater commitment of people to develop themselves through participation in the development activities. Further, it will help them to build up confidence in themselves to take appropriate decisions on their own. Centralized planned development has brought in greater dependency among the people which needs to be discouraged to imbibe self-reliance, basic for the progress of people in the developing countries (Mehta 1984).

Coming back to NGOs, it is observed that they are subjected to many handicaps. There are limited reliability of their efforts on a larger scale, inadequate ability to have self-sustainable technical capacity and lack of broad programming context. But they are advantageous in certain ways, for example, they have necessary capacity and willingness to outreach the inaccessible areas and the rural poor, besides promoting local participation. They can also operate on a small scale while innovating and adapting themselves to the new settings and situations (Cernea 1988).

It is also observed that those NGOs which entered into coalition with others, promoting one or other aspect of development initiative like health, population, environment, forestry, gender equity and empowerment, poverty alleviation, land use through cooperative efforts or youth affairs etc or if they have established networks in between and among different NGOs, then they proved successful in determining or influencing policy concerns at the national and international levels in accelerating and streamlining the development of new nations through the skill of strategic competence acquired

by them. For example, in anticipation of the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo (1994), NGOs associated with women's right and women's health, throughout the world were mobilized at national and international levels, in order to influence the action programme, prepared in advance for finalization at that meeting (Klugman 2000).

It is observed that people's organizations should attempt to find alternative ways of organizing the community or society through generation of values that provide direction to our economic and political life. Of late, people have become conscious of their worth and started voicing that they should be allowed to shape their own development process through setting up of their own agenda which should match with their needs, aspiration and motivations. Poverty eradication, equitable distribution of resources, access to resources especially to the weaker sections, appropriate education and skill development, technological innovations, social and welfare services should be on the priority agenda for development of the developing nations.

Development schemes or projects whether implemented or instituted by the governmental agencies or community based organizations must be monitored periodically to improve upon or provide corrective measures for successful realization of the developmental goals or objectives. For that purpose, evaluation system must be built within the planning process of the development programme and through feedback and feedforward mechanisms to the programme management, the efficiency of the agencies involved in development of people can be enhanced by taking note of cost-benefit dimension, service output and delays in implementation of the projects or schemes. It is observed that in the context of the developing nations, the efficiency of an organization is

generally hampered by role diffusedness, structural inconsistency because of gap in expectation and performance and ad-hoc decision making. As such, evaluation can improve the functioning of a development agency and help in the process of institution building, so essential at the community level for involving leadership, voluntary organizations and mobilizing local resources for a wider community participation (Mehta 1999).

It is suggested that the essential elements in the participatory model of development are conscientization, organization and mobilization of people. This process can go a long way in ensuring greater social justice and equality for all. Further, it is believed that epistemologically speaking, the growth of development theory and practice will take place in a dialectic manner as at each stage, the lessons learnt out of practice will form basis for further building of theory in this model of development (Wignaraja 1991). We also need to have human rights and democracy as top priority on the development agenda of developing nations in a people-centred development perspective, in order to encourage human dignity and ensure full participation of people in the affairs of the nations. As such, a step towards social and cultural development must be in complement to economic development so necessary for human survival and well being. Media of communication can play a significant role in that direction. But, there is a need for democratization of media of communication for development purposes (Mehta 1992).

In short, the participatory model of development is mainly guided by the ethno-development perspective and the development communication perspective. In the ethno-development perspective, people are in the centre stage and they are to be conscientized, organized and mobilized and empowered to show commitment and responsibility towards themselves as well as towards others for

evolving a self-reliant development strategy. On the other hand, in the development communication strategy, communication acts as a catalyst to accelerate the development process of the people by evolving a popular culture for development purposes and helping people to arrive at value consensus through resolutions of conflicts and tensions. Perhaps, in the context of developing nations, these perspectives should provide a better impetus to the development process than the 'Modernization' paradigm or 'Dependency' or 'The World System' theory (Mehta 1999).

It may be appropriate to emphasize here that the participatory model of development based on development communication perspective appears in line with the Habermas Theory of Communicative Action which advocates an action based on the negotiated understanding of the actors in a societal system, acquiring knowledge affluence and looking beyond modernity to tackle some of the emerging issues or realities by enlarging the public rather than the private sphere of social life and integrating these (lifeworld) in a coordinated manner with the polity and the economy (system).

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Cernea, Michael M. (1988), *Non-Governmental Organizations and Local Development*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank (Agriculture and Rural Development Department).
- Christopher, Sower et al. (1957), *Community Involvement*, Glencoe: The Free Press.
- Dreje, Jean and Amartya Sen (1995), *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dreje, Jean and Amartya Sen (1999), *Hunger and Public Actions*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Harrison, David (1989), *The Sociology of*

- Modernization and Development*, New Delhi: Heritage Publishers.
- Klugman, Barbara (2000), "The Role of NGOs as Agents for Change", *Development Dialogue*, 1-2, Sweden, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, pp. 95-120.
- Maxneef, Manfred A. et. al. (1989), "Human Scale Development" *Development Dialogue*, Sweden, Dag Hammar-skjold Foundation.
- Mehta, S.R. (1984), *Rural Development Policies and Programmes: A Sociological Perspective*, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Mehta, S.R. (ed.), (1992), *Communication and Development: Issues and Perspectives*, Jaipur & New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Mehta, S.R. (1999), *Dynamics of Development: A Sociological Perspective*, New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
- Paul, Samuel (1987), *Community Participation in Development Projects, The World Bank Experience*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank.
- Puri, Ellora (2004), "Understanding Participation: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Implications", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, June 12, pp. 2511-2517.
- Putnam, Robert (1993), *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, N.J. Princeton University Press.
- Rankin, Katherine N. (2002), "Social Capital: Microfinance and the Politics of Development", *Feminist Economics*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 1-24.
- Wignaraja, Poona (1990), "Participatory Development, Growth and Equity: No Trade Offs", *Development* Rome, Society For International Development.

Forthcoming  
from IAS

## *Nirvāṇa in Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā*

*A Study in the Mādhyamika Concept of Nirvāṇa in the Context of Indian Thought*

GC Nayak

The present work is an analytical philosophic enterprise dealing with a specific topic, viz. *nirvāṇa*, in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, which represents and is a standing testimony to the Buddhist critical philosophy *par excellence*. A unique revolution in the world of thought has been brought about by Ācārya Candrakīrti, the great Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika thinker of 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E., through his theory of *nirvāṇa* as *sarvalnirvaśeṣa Kalpanākṣaya* (cessation of essentialist thought-constructions/speculative picture-thinking) developed in his *magnum opus*, *Prasannapadā*, thus giving the idea of *nirvāṇa* a novel turn, viewing it from a fresh perspective.

The idea may have had its basis in *Mūla Madhyama Kārikā/Madhyamaka Śāstra* of Nāgārjuna, the unique philosophical master-mind of the world of 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E., and of course in the enlightenment of the Buddha, the credit goes to the author of this volume, however, for bringing to the fore the genius of Candrakīrti in working out the theoretical and practical implications of this idea by a rigorous analysis of the logic of essences (*Svabhāva*) and allied concepts. A critical and comparative study of *nirvāṇa* of *Prasannapadā* with that of early Buddhism on the one hand and of *nirvāṇa* with the concept of Vedāntic *mokṣa* on the other as well as points of comparison and contrast brought out with such pioneers of Western thought as Aristotle and Wittgenstein are features of special interest in the volume, meant for promoting a greater clarity in understanding.

The volume, primarily aiming at an understanding of the Buddhist concept of *nirvāṇa* in its proper perspective, through eradication of certain earlier misconceptions, highlights for this purpose Candrakīrti's unique critical philosophy advocated and worked out so diligently in *Prasannapadā* which is a significant milestone in the development of the Buddhist thought. It is expected to be of interest for all scholars of Indian thought. At the same time it is likely to prove itself to be of value for further intensive research in the field.

ISBN 81-7986-066-3

Rs. 200