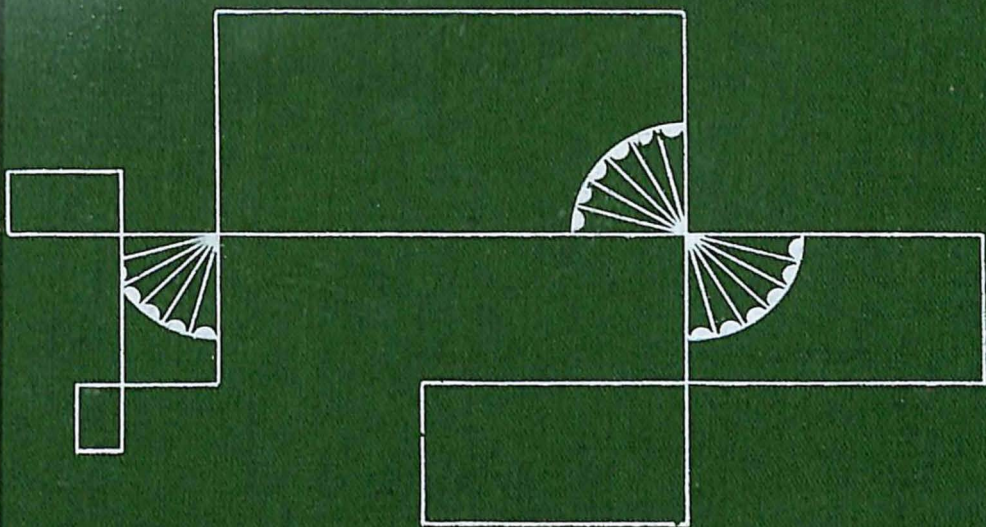




**DECOLONIZATION
AND
DEVELOPMENT**

Hind Svaraj Revisioned

Makarand Paranjape

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Decolonization and Development

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HIND SVARAJ REVISIONED

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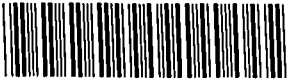
**With a Foreword by
Ashis Nandy**



Sage Publications
New Delhi/Newbury Park/London



Library IAS, Shimla



00082652

320.954

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This *Honeydew Tantra* is devoted to Bhagavati:
Om śivaśakty' aikyarūpiṇyai namaḥ
(Salutations to Her who is the unity of Śiva and Śakti).

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First published in 1993 by

Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd
M-32 Greater Kailash Market, Part I
New Delhi 110 048

Sage Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Newbury Park, California 91320



Sage Publications Ltd
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

Published by Tejeshwar Singh for Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, phototypeset by Pagewell Photosetters, Pondicherry, and printed at Chaman Enterprises, Delhi.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Paranjape, Makarand R., 1960-

Decolonization and development: Hind svaraj revisioned / Makarand Paranjape.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. India—Politics and government—1947- I. Title.

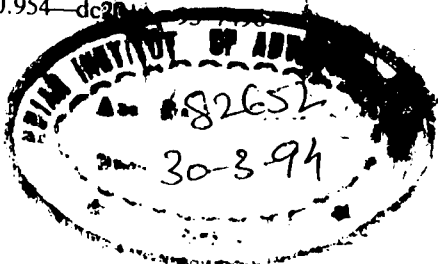
DS480.84.P282 1993 320.954—dc20

ISBN 81-7036-342-X (India-HB)

81-7036-343-8 (India-PB)

0-8039-9116-9 (USA-HB)

0-8039-9117-7 (USA-PB)



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A Trialogue as a Foreword

ASHIS NANDY

Harilal Mohandas Gandhi (to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi):

Tell us, why should we take you seriously?

MKG: (silent)

HMG: (in an insistent voice) You have to tell us. I have waited for that answer all my life.

MKG: *You* don't have to take me seriously.

ASHIS NANDY: That is no answer. You should know he has to take you seriously but cannot do so.

MKG: Why?

AN: Because he is your son; he has to rebel against you. Sons are always patricidal. But even that requires a serious, steady target of demystification and violence.

MKG: But I have disowned him as a son. He has disappointed me. He has lived a sinful life.

AN: Sons are supposed to disappoint their fathers. They have to rebel. But that does not mean that rebellions are ever silent. Harilal may be saying something important when he rebels against the Gandhian worldview. Even if he does so in an odd or ham-handed fashion. There might be in him an implicit intellectual argument against your worldview.

MKG: Alcohol, meat and women tell you nothing. They are his, a guttersnipe's idea of rebelling. Do you call that rebellion? Do they convey anything more than what they mean at the surface?

AN: They tell us that Harilal has objections to your moral universe. He may not be able to articulate his objections in your language but that is neither here nor there. It is your responsibility, as one who has brought up an entire generation, to decode what he wants to say. I know you will vehemently protest but, my dear Mahatma, you *are* a thinker. Harilal is not. You have to give him voice. Or are you going to argue that you are not your brother's (or, in this case, your son's) keeper?

HMG: (angry and defiant) I do not know what you are talking about. I only know that my father is a false Mahatma, a hypocrite. I have many faults, but hypocrisy is not one of them. What I do, I do openly. My father, on the other hand, is not transparent.

AN: Go on. Explain.

HMG: My father claims to be a saint but he has compromised with most of the evils he has fought. His non-violence worked because he had a liberal regime as his enemy, but he turned it into a universal panacea; he called himself a celibate but had to confirm his celibacy through sexual experiments with his own kith and kin, at the risk of what could have been horrendous cost to his innocent experimental subjects; he was supposed to be a saint in politics because few knew how shrewd a politician he was. Remember how he drove out Subhas Chandra Bose from the presidentship of the Indian National Congress in the thirties.

Above all, do not forget his attempts to sell a worldview that goes against the heart of the modern vision. As if he could take us back to some golden era of the past effortlessly and painlessly. As if anybody was going to listen to him and renege on hedonism and consumerism when he himself made so many compromises with contemporary tastes, demands of mass politics, media, and with ultra-modernists such as Jawaharlal Nehru.

MKG: (evenly) I agree I have not led a consistently moral life. I have tried but failed. Harilal, you have a point.

AN: (impatiently to MKG) You are giving in too easily. Of course, despite being Gandhi, you are not a perfect Gandhian. You need not be. First of all, hypocrisy is better than sociopathy. Hypocrisy at least keeps values alive for the next generation; sociopathy does not. Gandhism, if you permit the use of the term for a few moments Mahatma, is the name of a worldview

that is paradoxically larger than you yourself. It is part of the continuing human search for a more humane world, a search for which critiques of progress, scientific rationality, hyper-masculinity and developmentalism have become vital at the moment. In fact, one can argue that what the wily Mahatma himself was has become much less relevant to our times.

MKG: (shocked) That cannot be true. I have always believed that my lived life was an instrument and a vehicle of my thought. You are a Bengali. Actually the only serious Bengali sentence I ever wrote was: 'My life is my message.'

HMG: (quickly, to his father) According to Richard Grenier's well known article in the *Commentary*, it is a bad message because your life was flawed.

AN: Forget Grenier. His argument suggests that we should not take Platonism seriously because Plato supported homosexuality and left instructions on the right way to bugger young boys. Would Grenier claim that Plato was the perfect Platonist, or had to be one, to qualify as a worthwhile read? Can we take seriously Beethoven and Milton who ill-treated children? Or must we reject their art as contaminated? What about Thomas Jefferson who kept slaves? Do we or do we not take his ringing prose on democratic governance seriously? Tolstoy's life was not the best advertisement for his literary works or philosophy of life. Would Grenier as glibly reject Tolstoy?

Grenier has two standards. One for the whites, the other for the browns, blacks and yellows.

MKG: Ashis, I am no thinker despite your claim. But in my way of looking at things, there is a continuity between life and thought and between life and politics. So the principles you apply to Plato do not apply to me. I have to be responsible for my own life. Harilal and the American critic you mention are right. There is, I now suspect, something fundamentally wrong with my thought.

AN: Your highly personalized defence of your position bores me. Our generation has nothing to do with the purity of your image, grandfather. We are worried about being able to grapple with our world. We are not concerned with reconciling the contradictions, real or imaginary, in your life. Our father's generation, in the form of B.R. Nanda and his kind, has tried to do that for decades.

For our purposes we must begin with the axiom that the

forces you represented were larger than you. And the enemies you identified or anticipated, unwittingly or otherwise, have now assumed more monstrous proportions. In that battle, your strategies, your thought and even your controversial life constitute a master text. We reserve the right to read you according to our needs. From the American South to East Europe, where they have sometimes read you seriously, to Manila and Rangoon, where they have not done so but nevertheless carried placards bearing your name while facing army bullets, the story is the same.

HMG: Your argument is incomplete, Ashis. If Nanda belongs to your father's generation, so do I. My reading of the Mahatma has at least as much relevance as Nanda's. After all, as a son, I have known him first-hand. My reading of the man is different.

AN: I *have* pleaded for a voice for you. There should always be a place for a counter-player. Oedipal rebellion is nature's—if you like culture's—way of ensuring that. The dialectics or, if you prefer, adversarial encounter between a parent and a child is one way of sustaining the intellectual and moral renewal of a society through internal critiques and self-corrections. But my generation, too, has its Oedipal ghosts that it would like to exorcise. We, too, will like to defy the Gandhiana spawned by an entire range of self-certain figures—from Jawaharlal Nehru, on the one hand, to Harilal Gandhi, on the other. We cannot afford to get stuck with the inner demons of Gandhi's rebellious children who happened to be our intellectual parents.

MKG: Please do not mention Jawahar and Harilal in the same breath. Harilal has not seriously criticized anyone, not even me. [He has merely lived out a life of sin in protest.]

AN: But the protest has a cultural meaning, my dear grandfather. Harilal lived out a life that was contrapuntal to your preferred life. What Nehru did in a low-key, apologetic way, Harilal did flamboyantly and dramatically. He diagnosed perfectly what you were fighting within and occasionally failing to overpower or master. He embraced your counter-values and pushed them to their logical end. He has actualized a defeated—some may say partly defeated—part of your self.

Grandfather, to the extent you are relevant to our times as a social critic, Harilal is relevant, too, even if in a more metaphorical style. He represents modern India's critique of Gandhism in an absurdized fashion.

MKG: (in a puzzled tone) This might look like a digression, Ashis, but I do not understand why you insist on calling me grandfather?

AN: Because the contradictions of one generation have a tendency to get resolved in the next. You can be more tolerant of your grandchildren and their 'odd' ways of assimilating or defying you than of your own children's 'oddities'. Likewise, your grandchildren acquire a perspective of you that is more seasoned or tempered by time—more benign, less judgemental and competitive, and more forgiving than the perspective of your children. It is no accident that your contradictions do not interest me beyond a point; your moral vision does.

HMG: (angrily) But it is his moral vision that is faulty. In public and private, he was a politician. His compromises have not been noted by his admirers.

AN: That also is a matter of interpretation. To us your father's recognition of politics as a vital human activity is his main claim to immortality. Remember Arnold Toynbee's words: 'After Gandhi, humanity will ask all its prophets if they were willing to live in the slum of politics'. How much of a success the wily Mahatma was in his politics is a secondary issue. That he was willing to enter politics and consider it a central human concern, something that allowed one to define one's *yugadharma*—codes of conduct appropriate to one's own times—was itself a major intellectual dissent within a world where, in the name of rationality and secularism, politics has been artificially separated from morality and religion.

(Turning to MKG) To take up the specific example Harilal has given. You might not have considered Subhas Chandra Bose a scatter-brained crypto-fascist, but you considered Bose's masculine strivings and statism and his Eurocentric model of social engineering an adolescent compromise with the imperial West and a self-defeating internalization of European categories. You had to resist Bose and you chose to do so politically. Whether you were correct in your diagnosis or not does not interest us after fifty-five years.

HMG: (impatiently) You talk of the modern West and modernity as if they were cancerous growths. What was my father's alternative to them? For that matter, what are the alternatives offered by his young admirers pretending to be social oncologists? Do the Ashis Nandys and Makarand Paranjapes have anything

concrete to offer? What is the point of talking in the air with vaguely worked out concepts like *satyagraha*, village communities, *dharma*, *Ramarajya*, self-help, *svaraj*, intellectual decolonization and other sundry utopian ideas?

AN: Harilal, we know what your father's ideas are. Shaken by them, people of your generation have either rejected him as a lunatic or tried to incorporate him within modernity as a hidden modernist. If you accept the second position—that is, if you read your father as an odd internal critic of modernity pretending to be something different—you as a critic of his ideology can be read either as a psychopath or as a lunatic. But I have tried to give you your due; I have refused to accept your rebellion as psychopathic or lunatic. I have read you as a sane and serious critic of the Gandhian worldview who, perhaps without knowing what he was doing, carried the modernist skepticism of Gandhi closest to Gandhi.

This means that I accept the first position: that by conventional concepts of normality, Gandhi was a lunatic. But when in need, like millions of others, I am willing to use his 'lunacy' as a basis of political praxis.

One final point. Even if none of your father's ideas work, his criticism of modernity will survive. This is because modernity is now about four hundred years old and is showing the signs of tiredness that all historical eras show after surviving for four hundred years. Harilal, your father's critique of modernity allows us, those who are living in societies where modernity has not captured the minds and bodies of people entirely, to be prepared for the coming era. That this part of the globe still has a majority of people who do not speak the language of modernity gives us better options for a post-modern future than have the fully modern societies. By default we have retained some of the non-modern foundations for looking beyond modernity; they in the West are busy trying to create, artificially, pseudo-post-modernities. They recognize the vulnerability of their world, but dare not break out of its embrace because that is the only world they know.

HMG: But do we have the option to build another kind of world? Criticism is not everything.

AN: Criticism is *the* main thing. It forces us to admit that no worldview, no ideology, no transformative principle automatically becomes morally acceptable just because, at this point of

time, no one has produced a viable or convincing alternative to it. That keeps intact our moral sensitivities and forces us to search harder for new alternatives. That also powers our struggle to retain available alternatives or diversities as possible foundations for the future.

MKG: (smiles at AN) I am glad that I can at least agree with that last comment of yours.

HMG: (happier but still skeptical) I have heard Ashis say some of these things earlier in different guises.

AN: As C.P. Snow once said, every one has the right to his own clichés. In any case, we have to adjourn our debate. Makarand Paranjape is waiting. He has a different vocabulary and he is not encumbered by our debate. Let us hear his voice. Are you ready grandfather?

1



The Metaphysics of Dialogue

STUDENT: I should like to ask, first of all, why are we having this dialogue? Who are the participants? Who the audience?

TEACHER: Is your self-reflexivity naïve or subversive?

STUDENT: Surely, this is not the age of comfortable self-assurance and complacency. Instead, we have become highly self-conscious today, deeply suspicious of our own motives and methods.

TEACHER: If so, your first questions are both appropriate and auspicious in that they verbalize what has almost become a philosophical imperative of the post-structuralists ¹

STUDENT: I can only react in terms of what I've read and that makes me question any claim to unique or superior knowledge.

TEACHER: But I wouldn't like to take issue with concerns which I cannot fully relate to. Having said this, though, let me try to answer your questions in my own way. We are having this dialogue simply because the topic is important.

STUDENT: But why a dialogue? Why not an essay? Wouldn't that be more normal?

TEACHER: A dialogue, as you know, is a very ancient form of enquiry and debate. We find it being used in the Upanishads. Think of Nachiketa's celebrated dialogue with Yama in the *Kathopanishad*. Or the equally well-known dialogue between Yagnavalkya and Maitreyi in the *Brihadaranyaka* or the dialogue between Janaka and Yagnavalkya in the same Upanishad; or

again the dialogues between unnamed gurus and disciples throughout the Upanishads.²

And perhaps the most famous dialogue of all: between Krishna and Arjuna in the *Bhagawad Gita*.³

STUDENT: And don't forget the dialectical method of Socrates in ancient Greece. Or to jump centuries, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic imagination.⁴

TEACHER: Right. In fact, if you examine the basic form of the Tantras too, you find that nearly all of them are dialogues between Shiva and Parvati.⁵

If we consider all the dialogues between all the teachers and students in the world, from the beginning of time, then we see in this form a basic allegory of learning. All learning, it would seem, is dialogic.

STUDENT: Are you proposing an epistemology that is dialogic?

TEACHER: Well, I would like to emphasize that certain kinds of learning are better facilitated by this form than by others like the essay, dissertation, or the learned treatise.

STUDENT: But can't the essay or thesis also be dialogic?

TEACHER: That's a good point. But shall we say that it is easier to be dialogic in a dialogue than in a monologue?

STUDENT: But can't the essay or thesis also be dialogic?

TEACHER: That's a good point. But shall we say that it is easier to all, it is a very useful means of discovering knowledge. And secondly, it is a non-oppressive, non-authoritarian way of communication.

STUDENT: Please elaborate.

TEACHER: We can talk to each other, communicate, respect our differences, find ways of negotiating them through, tolerate, challenge, modify, or destroy and reconstruct each other's positions—always without an oppressive finality which shuts out further enquiry.

STUDENT: You are stressing, are you not, the openness, the conversational quality, the flexibility, and the freedom of the form?

TEACHER: Yes. You might know that 'dialogue' is closely related to 'dialect' and 'dialectic'. Both have to do with talking together. The dialectic, since Hegel and Marx, has evolved into a rigorous method of thinking through thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

STUDENT: 'Di', of course, implies two. How does that fit in with your notion of who we are and how we relate to each other?

TEACHER: This is a very important issue. Yes, it takes two to have a dialogue. But who are these two? Are they really separate from each other? Is there, further, a hierarchy of power or authority as is usually the case whenever difference arises? In other words are the two an ancient dichotomy?

STUDENT: Certainly, in a traditional dialogue, one of the participants had to be an *apta*, someone who is a reliable source of direct knowledge.⁶

TEACHER: Well, it is precisely such notions of authority which we shall try to avoid here. For me, this dialogue is between two seekers, not between a seeker and a professor.

STUDENT: But the very notion of 'Student' and 'Teacher' implies the opposite. It sets up a hierarchical, not egalitarian relationship. The reader will identify you with the 'real' author and consider me as merely the pretext for airing his views.

TEACHER: Why must we automatically assume that the Teacher-Student relationship amounts to nothing but the stereotype you have described?

Here we would do well to remember the Tantras again. One could easily argue that in them we find two kinds of authorities conflated: knowledge and gender. In the *Agamas* Shiva is both preceptor and male; Parvati is both student and female. One seems doubly superior, the other doubly inferior. We shall talk more about this issue of difference and power later, but we should remember that in all the *Nigamas*, the relationship is reversed; the Devi is the Guru and Shiva asks the questions.⁷ So one shouldn't jump to a facile and dismissive conclusion about the positioning of gender in the Tantras, and by extension, in this dialogue.

STUDENT: Then we may as well specify our gender positions. I prefer to be female. That way I can challenge you with more conviction!

TEACHER: Then, I suppose, I'll have to accept my maleness.

STUDENT: But couldn't I have been a male? Couldn't such a dialogue have been possible between two females? Or two males?

TEACHER: That's what I would say, though critics will be quick to point out that then it would have been a different kind of dialogue.

STUDENT: Then, let's just say that we are *different* but not *unequal*.

TEACHER: And this point applies not only to differences of authority

and gender, but also to those of caste, class, religion, sexual preferences, and so on.

STUDENT: Yet, remember, if you are to play your role convincingly, you'll have to demonstrate that you 'know' more than I do.

TEACHER: But that doesn't mean that you can't be smarter than me; being younger, you can be more alert, more vigilant, more agile

STUDENT: And more cantankerous!

TEACHER: And thus more interesting.

STUDENT: In that case, you can be sure that I shall not be the 'typical' student—though where such students still exist, I don't know—listening to whatever you say with bowed head and respectful silence. I shall challenge every position that you take and bring you back to the main topic if you tend to digress.

TEACHER: You may also teach me a thing or two.

STUDENT: In other words, our positions are not fixed but flexible, even interchangeable?

TEACHER: Exactly. I am positive that the 'real' author of this dialogue has switched our lines around quite often in the numerous revisions of this text.

STUDENT: But I hope this doesn't mean that we sound exactly alike; that would be boring.

TEACHER: If we sound alike at times it's because we are not, ultimately, totally dissimilar either. As everyone knows, Shiva and Parvati are of the 'same' reality; they are not actually separate really. They are a 'one' made up of two; or, to put it more abstrusely, a one that is two-y.⁸

The idea of two is for convenience. The one, in the sense of the original, like the impossible Revolution is beyond thought—purely metaphysical. In practice, we always have two. This notional splitting is a prerequisite for life as we know it. The subject-object duality depends on it.⁹

STUDENT: Are you saying that whenever there is consciousness or thought, there is always the 'Other'? That is, for the 'I' to exist, there has to be the 'Other'.¹⁰

TEACHER: Yes. Though you mustn't consider this 'Other' always as an enemy or adversary as is a contemporary fashion. That will only lead us into a polemic of opposition and conflict, with each trying to suppress the other. We want a dialogue in which both flourish.

STUDENT: Good.

TEACHER: But the point I wished to make was that all dialogues, ultimately, are internal to the Self—that is, if you believe, as I do, that there is nothing external to the Self. The Self includes the world, not excludes it as in Sankara's monism. Brahman permeates the world; matter and consciousness are identical, though stretched out in subtle gradations. At either end they seem to be totally distinct and opposite, but are, in fact, one and the same.¹¹

STUDENT: Slow down! You seem to be setting up an alternate metaphysics here by deconstructing the age old opposition between idealism and materialism.

TEACHER: I certainly think that this is a false opposition. No attempt to establish the primacy of the one over the other can succeed. But we'll talk more about this later.

STUDENT: One more point: if idealism and materialism are not irreconcilable, then what according to you is the basic substance of reality—matter or consciousness?

TEACHER: You're trying to trap me, obviously. If I say matter, then you'll dub me a materialist; if I say consciousness, then you'll triumphantly categorise me as an idealist. Well, let me just say that the primary substance for me is Energy which imbues both matter and consciousness. Energy is the stuff of both matter and mind.¹²

STUDENT: Are you, then, a neo-Shakta—what with your talk of the Tantras, Shiva-Shakti, and now Energy with a capital 'E'.

TEACHER: 'E'xactly, if that is how you wish to bracket me. But there is a more important sense in which this dialogue is a Tantra. You see, the power of the Tantras derives from their ability to subvert, overturn, and even overthrow established structures of thought and action. The Tantras were one means whereby Indian society found a way out of the oppressions of Brahminism. The Tantras can thus be seen as revolutionary texts.

STUDENT: Please illustrate.

TEACHER: Well, consider the approach to self-realization in the Tantras. The dominant ideology of emancipation considered the primary drives, especially sexuality, to be the biggest snares and obstacles to spiritual progress. The Tantras tried to turn these into assets. Nothing is denied in the Tantras, nothing forbidden.

The Tantras reversed the given hierarchies of purity-pollution—not excluding, under certain conditions, several antinomian practices, including so-called abominations such as homosexuality and incest. These, of course, are a part of any society, however much we might deny them. The Tantras, thus, provided an important safety valve to society, allowing marginalized and excommunicated groups also to participate in the grandest and most sublime enterprise of a society.

STUDENT: I never knew that the Tantras had made such a major contribution to Indian thought.

TEACHER: Wait, there's more. The most important aspect of a Tantra is that it teaches us how to turn disadvantages into advantages, and weaknesses into strengths.

STUDENT: So? How does that apply to us?

TEACHER: The application is obvious, isn't it? Our text should enable us to turn our disadvantages into our advantages. In other words, it should help us turn the fact of our being colonized and underdeveloped to our advantage.

STUDENT: So you wish to imbue this dialogue with the ability to empower and emancipate us.

TEACHER: That would be a more ambitious way of putting it.

STUDENT: But let's get back to 'Teacher' and the 'Student'. If what you said is correct, then knowing less can actually be turned into an advantage.

TEACHER: That was the idea of a book like Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society*, wasn't it?¹³

STUDENT: Then, this dialogue is a ruse to learn, a method of enquiry and investigation, if you wish to call it that. Both of us are the necessary inventions which make this exchange possible.

TEACHER: Indeed. But how startling to think that we are both tokens, both shadows, both tropes. Neither of us is a fixable or determinable entity, each has merely a provisional reality!

STUDENT: That's right. That's why we won't oppress our reader. He knows that we are fictions

TEACHER: Just as, I dare say, the reader is too.

STUDENT: OK. But we were trying to begin on a self-referential note, attempting to establish the presuppositions and premises of this dialogue.

TEACHER: Yes. So, let me try to summarize: we are having the dialogue because the topic is important and because the method

of learning which the dialogue embodies is very old and useful, in fact representative of learning itself.

But the dialogue, and hence learning, implies a dualism—a learner and a learner—which could become a problem if not defined clearly. Specifically, it could set up an oppressive and authoritarian structure within which ‘learning’ supposedly takes place.

To avoid this, we define the dialogue as an internal process of learning and discovery between two parts of the Self, rather than an exchange between two separate entities.

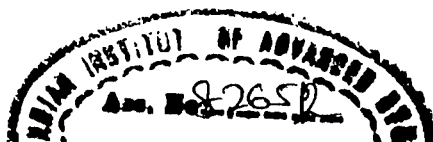
Further, we posit that the roles of ‘Teacher’ and ‘Student’, male and female respectively, are different but not unequal. This is because they are provisional rather than fixed, interchangeable rather than closed.

Finally, that this dialogue is really a Tantra which intends to turn the given worldview upside down, to turn our very colonization and underdevelopment to heuristic advantage.

STUDENT: Thus, both of us are constructs, ideas in transit. But our provisionality does not diminish our utility, explanatory power, or ‘reality’. The world itself being, ultimately, a construct like ourselves, let us not resist but rather celebrate our transience.

Notes

1. Several introductions to, and anthologies on, post-structuralism are available. See, for instance, Robert Young's *Untying the Text: A Post Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981) or Raman Selden's *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Harvester, 1985). For an interesting and readable account of deconstruction, see Howard Felperin's *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1985). The whole debate about the nature or use of post-structuralism is already passe in the 1990's. For the Indian reception of post-structuralism, see Makarand Paranjape's 'The Invasion of Theory: An Indian Response,' *New Quest* 81 (May–June 1990): 151–61. Also see Paranjape's 'Postmodernism and India: Some Preliminary Animadversions' in Sudhakar Marathe and Mohan G. Ramanan, eds., *Festschrift for Professor S. Viswanathan* (Madras: T.R. Publishers, 1993).
2. See *Principal Upanishads* edited, with introduction, text, translation, and notes by S. Radhakrishnan (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953). The Ramakrishna Math, Madras, has published scholarly and readable translations of the



ten principal Upanishads, each in a tidy, separate volume, complete with introduction, text, translation, commentary and notes.

3. The *Bhagavad Gita* is India's most widely translated and discussed text. S. Radhakrishnan's edition, with an introductory essay, Sanskrit text, English translation, and notes was published in London by George Allen & Co. in 1956. For a readable and engaging prose-cum-verse translation, see Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood's edition (1945; 11th impression Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974).
4. Socrates (469–399 B.C.) of Athens is generally considered one of the wisest men of all times. Using a method which is now known as the Socratic dialogue or dialectic, he enquired into the nature of things by pursuing a series of questions and answers with his students. Socrates was sentenced to death for corrupting the morals of Athenian youth and for religious heresies. He willingly drank the cup of the poison hemlock given to him. The end of his life is portrayed by his chief disciple, Plato, in *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*.
Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was an outstanding literary theorist, philosopher, and thinker. Though his significant work belongs to the 1920s and 1930s, he was little known outside Russia until the 1970's after which he assumed the status of a cult figure in the West. See *The Dialogic Imagination* edited by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973). Also see T. Todorov's *The Dialogical Principle* (Manchester: UP, 1984) and *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1984) by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist.
5. The Tantras form an important part of India's religious and mystical traditions. For an introduction see *Shakti and Shaktia* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1951) and *Principles of Tantra* (Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1952) by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe); also see *The Tantric Way* by Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977).
6. Except for Kanada, the founder of Vaisheshika, and the Charvakas or the materialists, all schools of Indian philosophy accept the testimony or authority of the reliable person (*apta*) as a third source of valid knowledge, after *pratyaksha* (perception) and *anumana* (inference). See 'Indian Epistemology' by Dharendra Mohan Datta in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 3 (1953; rpt. Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1983).
7. For an example of how a Tantra works, see the Rudrayamalatantra, *Vijnana-bhairava* translated by Vrajvallabha Dvivedi (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1978). Also see Ernest A. Payne, *The Saktas: An Introductory and Comparative Study* (Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1933).
8. 'Two-y' is a coinage which suggests 'twoishness,' a one that is also a two, a sort of two-in-one.
9. On the unity of Shiva-Shakti see, for instance, Sankara's *Saundarya-lahari* translated by S. Subrahmanya Sastri and T. Srinivasa Ayyangar (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965).

See Karl Mannheim's famous discussion on 'wish images' for a perfect social order in *Ideology and Utopia* (1936; rpt. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948). Also see *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer (London: Allen Lane, 1972).

10. That consciousness is always directed to an object is a commonplace notion. See P.T. Raju's *Indian Idealism and Modern Challenges* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1961). This is also one of the assumptions in phenomenology: see M.H. Abrams' essay on 'Phenomenology and Criticism' in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981).
It was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) which, in recent times, first exploited the tremendous critical potential of unmasking various processes of 'Othoring' in master narratives. She summed up the 'Otherness' of woman *vis-à-vis* man in patriarchy: 'He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other' (16). Since then her methods have become popular in anti-colonial discourse: see, for instance, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).
11. For a discussion of Sankara's Vedanta, see vols. 1 and 2 of Surendranath Dasgupta's *A History of Indian Philosophy* (1922; rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1975).
12. Such ideas are current in contemporary Physics. See Swami Jitatmananda's *Modern Physics and Vedanta* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1986).
13. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

2



'En'titled Premises

STUDENT: Our first dialogue was somewhat abstract and recondite. Several questions about the nature of our endeavour, thus, still remain.

TEACHER: I share your sense of unease. We have yet to reach that lucid space in which all issues become clear.

STUDENT: Yes, it certainly looks as if our premises need more elaboration and refinement.

TEACHER: At the same time, let us understand that we don't aim for a total understanding because such an aim would be dangerous. We shall try, in our modest way, to tackle some immediate problems.¹

STUDENT: Which brings me to the question at hand. Why is this dialogue called 'Hind Svaraj Revisioned'?

TEACHER: To find the apt title is always difficult, but the allusion in ours is obvious. I am harking back to Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, which was first published in 1908.²

STUDENT: Why go back to *Hind Swaraj*?

TEACHER: Because it is a seminal text in the intellectual history of modern India. It addresses most of the questions that we shall raise in these dialogues, such as: Who are we or what does India represent? What is the nature of our relationship with the West? What is tradition? Modernity? What is meant by decolonization in the Indian context? What is the best way for us to

develop? And so on. Our task here is to use Gandhi as a take-off point and to examine critically how much of his ideas we can apply to our situation today. Gandhi himself creatively used the ideas of Thoreau, Ruskin and Tolstoy, among others, you know.³

STUDENT: Are you implying that it is no longer possible to begin such a discussion without showing some awareness of the history of the Indian approaches to decolonization?

TEACHER: Exactly, though we must remember that Svaraj and decolonization are not exactly the same thing. Svaraj means 'self-rule or self-control' according to Gandhi (*Hind Swaraj*, 104); no doubt, that implies the end of colonization, but the emphasis is different.

STUDENT: That's why many consider Gandhi irrelevant considering where we are located today.

TEACHER: True, our location today is not the same as Gandhi's in 1908. That is obvious. Hence, we can no longer even afford a beginning as direct as in *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhi's correspondent opens the book with the assertion: 'Just at present there is a Home Rule wave passing over India' (19). The simplicity, clarity, and authority of the remark are unmistakable. Can we begin this dialogue with such a self-evident observation? In a word, do we know what our *svadharma* and *yugadharma* are?⁴

STUDENT: If you were to ask me to identify the one central concern of our society today, I would not know how to do so. I would be baffled. I would not know what words to use.

TEACHER: Is this inability itself the problem or is it a symptom of a larger malaise?

STUDENT: Perhaps it could be both. That I don't know who I am is a problem in itself but also a symptom of a larger societal inadequacy.

TEACHER: Does this lack of clarity have anything to do with our present social environment?

STUDENT: Well, I think in the early part of the century, when Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj*, our number one problem was, perhaps, easier to define. We wanted freedom. We wanted to become independent. We wanted the British out. The enemy was clearly visible, looming large over us.

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TEACHER: Yes, the very obviousness of the adversary makes one's identity and one's strategies of offence or defence that much clearer. But I would have you remember that it was Gandhi who gave the problem such a crisp and clear formulation. That's why he was the leader *par excellence*. There were also several alternate or competing formulations available during his time. But for most of his contemporaries there would have been a mixture of motives and responses such as we suffer from in our present condition.

Therefore, we need a voice to articulate for us our unspoken anxieties and crises.

STUDENT: Are you saying that it is difficult for us to define our *yugadharma* because our adversaries have become blurred? Freedom has already been won, we think, so we don't know what we are fighting against.

TEACHER: Well, not just that. We are not clear because we are not serious.

But, given our immediate context—with the announcement of the budget of 1992—don't you think you can articulate the dominant mood?

STUDENT: Well, one could hazard a parody of the opening statement of *Hind Swaraj*: 'Just at present there is an Economic Liberalization wave passing over India.' Yet, the two statements are totally unequal in importance. What's happening at present seems to be superficial compared to the struggle for freedom.

TEACHER: The stock markets are booming; at least one section of our population seems to be very clear what our number one priority is.

STUDENT: 'Get rich quickly,' would be the best way of describing both the *svadharma* and *yugadharma* of this group.

TEACHER: This, it seems to me, has always been the goal of the capitalists anywhere in the world at any time. But now, it applies to the whole country. We all want to get richer. We want the country to become more prosperous.

STUDENT: But what has this to do with Gandhi and Svaraj?

TEACHER: The nation cannot get rich at the cost of its independence. Moreover, the means adopted to get rich must not be such that a large part of our population suffers and a whole way of life is destroyed.

Gandhi's critique of the industrial civilization, therefore, is

still valid. We cannot unthinkingly embrace a civilization which destroys nature, alienates human beings, and institutes colonialism. We must be all the more vigilant against the tide of technomodernism which is about to engulf us through the opened floodgates.

But to resist the tide of modernity, we must resuscitate and redeploy such cultural resources as we still have at our command.

STUDENT: Then, do you intend to undertake a 'Svaraj in Ideas' type of discourse?

TEACHER: Well, to begin with, we shall concentrate on this aspect of our cultural life—the decolonization of the mind. It would be salutary to begin with ourselves in our present academic environment as teachers and students in India. We can use our own situation to illustrate the large problem of Svaraj in Ideas. In any case, I am glad you referred to K.C. Bhattacharya's important essay by that title, which was first published in 1927.⁵

STUDENT: So we begin with ourselves and the decolonization of the mind, then go on to the bigger problem of development, is that right?

TEACHER: Yes. Somewhat like an inverted funnel: we begin with specific, even personal issues, and then widen our discussion to social, national, and global concerns.

STUDENT: You have talked of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*; in fact, it's in our very title. But which are the other major texts behind ours?

TEACHER: Gandhi's approach was to direct our attention to ourselves and our own weaknesses. He wasn't so preoccupied with blaming the West as with trying to improve ourselves. There is another major thinker before him who had a similar approach to India's problems. I am talking about Swami Vivekananda. His views and theories on India's regeneration, scattered through his various writings, have been collected in a slim volume by his followers.⁶ There is one more major Indian thinker of roughly the same period who probably knew and understood the West better than most others—Sri Aurobindo. His work needs special mention. Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of articles in his journal, *Arya*, from December 1918 to January 1921, on the cultural interaction between India and the West. These essays were later collected in one volume called *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.

STUDENT: You have now explained at least one part of the title,

that which refers to Gandhi and *Hind Swaraj*, though you have clarified that we must come up with our own idea of Swaraj in the present context.

Now may I ask you why you call this dialogue a 'primer'?

TEACHER: By a primer is meant a sort of an introductory or elementary text book. We should make this dialogue an introduction to the entire problematic of decolonization and development. A primer suggests a simpler format—one which does not aspire to the 'latest-latest' in technique nor aims at being totally 'uncontaminated' by 'inferior' or 'unripe' cognition.

STUDENT: So our dialogue must resist and subvert elite, metropolitan discourses of the Western or Indian variety.

TEACHER: Precisely. Decolonization must be in evidence here, in every sentence of ours, or we shall have defeated our purpose.

STUDENT: Doesn't Ashis Nandy say in that same issue of 'Swaraj in Ideas': 'No theory of oppression makes sense unless it is cast in native terms and categories, that is in terms and categories used by the victims of our times' (416)?

TEACHER: Yes. And this is what Gandhi did.

So we must oppose the notion that our responses or interventions are useless until they are recognized or certified as intelligible by the West. The first dispute is, therefore, over the medium, terms, and metaphors of discourse.

At the same time, we must show them that we are aware of the problem as they have defined it. Again, as Nandy says, 'The resistance must also simultaneously include—and here pure traditionalism fails to meet our needs—a sensitivity to the links between cultural survival and global structures of oppression in our times' (*ibid.*, 416).

STUDENT: In other words, we must simultaneously address people like ourselves in India, and those in the West against whom we are struggling. Perhaps, this is a more specific answer to my question in the first chapter about who our audience was.

TEACHER: Yes, but it is not merely a question of showing our familiarity with Indian and Western theories. The real test is to examine what sort of lives we lead. To look at what we actually practice. Again, we should go back to Gandhi who always endeavoured to live out his ideas, not simply think them through—though most of us even fail to do the latter let alone the former!

Anyway, I think we have now covered the major terms of the dialogue, except decolonization and development. These two we have merely touched upon.

STUDENT: But we have the rest of the book in which to make up.

Notes

1. Both Hegel and Marx, for instance, were obsessed with totality. For a discussion, see William C. Dowling's *Jameson, Althusser, Marx* (London: Methuen, 1984). Also see Jay Martin, 'The Concept of Totality,' *Telos* 32 (Summer 1977). Ideologies which lay claim to total explanatory power have increasingly come under attack in recent years. See Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

The emphasis on attending to the immediate problem is an old one. Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) towards the end of 'The Everlasting Yea' in *Sartor Resartus*, thunders: "'Do the Duty which lies nearest thee," which thou knowest to be a Duty! Thy second Duty will already have become clearer.' Among recent thinkers who concurred was J. Krishnamurti (1895–1986); see his book, *The Urgency of Change* (London: Gollancz, 1972).

2. I have used the 1984 imprint, priced at just Rs. 4 (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust).
3. The Appendix to *Hind Swaraj* lists four books by Tolstoy, and two each by Thoreau and Ruskin, as a part of recommended reading (105). Also see *Tolstoy and Gandhi* by Kalidas Nag (Patna: Pustak Bhandar, 1950).
4. Traditionally, in the epics, puranas, Gita, or Manu, *svadharma* usually meant doing that duty which is appropriate to one's caste and station in life (*varna-shrama*); likewise *yugadharma* meant doing one's duty in accordance with the time, which allowed for some more latitude; see discussions in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 2 (1962; rpt., Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1982).

The words are being used here in a modern sense, however. *Svadharma* implies that course of action which is appropriate and liberating to oneself; *yugadharma* is the larger social agenda for our age. The older meanings can be easily modified and adapted to yield these new ones. Sri Aurobindo uses both words in this sense in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* (1959; rpt., Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1985).

5. *The Indian Philosophical Quarterly* issued a special number on this subject in 1984, publishing Bhattacharya's original essay and scores of contemporary responses to it.
6. Swami Nirvedananda, ed., *Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976).

3



Culture and Colonization

STUDENT: We talked about why we are unable, these days, to identify our number one problem. Perhaps, to begin with, it might be helpful to restrict ourselves to the crisis in our culture, particularly in academics.

TEACHER: Yes, perfectly. Let me offer you a rather bald and sweeping assertion: the academic system in our country is more or less non-functioning.

STUDENT: Do you mean to say that nothing of value is taught or learnt in our schools and colleges?

TEACHER: Isn't that the case, by and large? However, let's examine the system not at its worst but at its best. Let's look at the kind of knowledge which is purveyed at our elite institutions of learning where at least the external trappings of education are, thankfully, still intact.

STUDENT: How shall we critique these institutions?

TEACHER: By being as specific and personal as possible. Let's say that I teach at a Department of English at an elite university in India. If I posed to myself the question, 'What is the number one problem confronting English studies in India', what would the answer be?

The answer, as you may have guessed, entangles us in the whole problem of decolonization. How do we free ourselves from domination by the West? How do we empower ourselves in a situation in which we are essentially unequal?

STUDENT: But, perhaps, you have already withdrawn one remove away from the actual experience of our problem. Our difficulty—almost of the nature of a crisis which is not even intellectualized or formulated in terms of decolonization—rather is simpler, more immediate, and urgent: How to survive? How to make academics meaningful?

TEACHER: Yes, the question is as basic as survival. Of course, by survival we mean more than the mere preservation of our 'lives'. We mean the preservation or the ensuring of a life which is meaningful and worth living. And what makes life meaningful is dignity, self-respect, security, and beyond that, the freedom to create, power to transform our surroundings, opportunity to express ourselves and to be heard, capacity and resources to give and receive love—in a word, to live on our own terms.

STUDENT: And why is such a survival difficult in our profession?

TEACHER: Because of everything. The origin and development of English studies in India. The colonial ideology which made it possible. The imposition of an alien language and literature on Indians. Our utter subordination in the world of English studies even 150 years later. Our continued dependence on Anglo-American definitions of the discipline and on imported books, ideas, and criticism. In short, an initial slavery continued relentlessly.

STUDENT: Aren't you, in your poignance, getting a bit carried away?

TEACHER: But I hope that isn't prohibited. I was just recalling the years of humiliation that I suffered as a student and teacher of English in India. The memory of the self-contempt it engendered in me is permanent. The continued exaltation of everything Western—universities, teachers, critics, accents, publishers, journals, books, recommendations, and so on. If you have that 'foreign-returned' stamp you're a superior creature; if you have a foreign publication, you've made it; otherwise, you're nothing. All along, you must first be recognized by them before fellow Indians accord you any recognition. And just try to seek the recognition of the West through any but the accepted channels—what contempt, disdain, and indifference you experience. The West has no time to look at us, but we need their approval so badly that we spend the greater part of our energy trying to be noticed by them.

STUDENT: But, surely, you exaggerate. There are many ways in which we have tried to empower ourselves in English studies.

TEACHER: Yes, the times are changing. We now have new areas in which our own subordination can be put to use. We have Commonwealth literature, Indian English literature, Indian literature in translation, and so on as additions or alternatives to traditional English or American literature in our universities.

Moreover, the canon is changing. There is greater freedom regarding what we must teach. The entire discipline of English studies the world over is changing. These changes are welcome and their consequences, however belated, are seen in India.

But in terms of the basic power equations, the relations between them and us haven't altered significantly. Even areas in which we have a direct stake, such as Commonwealth literature or Indian English literature, are controlled by the metropolis. Just see the difference between how an Indian author published abroad is treated as compared to someone published in India. The former becomes a national celebrity in India; the latter is, more often than not, largely ignored.

We continue to be colonized by the West. We are reminded of the inferiority of our degrees, teaching, and research. Have you ever read the condescending and often over-generous reports by the foreign examiners of our dissertations? Most of them have a sentence somewhere to the effect, 'I don't know what the standards are in India and therefore would like to give the student the benefit of the doubt.' Implying, of course, that the dissertation would have been failed abroad. And how we crow over some meagre compliments that we might receive from our Western colleagues once in a while. So, some of our inferiority is real, not merely imagined. And it further reinforces our shame and humiliation as second-raters.

STUDENT: But you'll agree that your personal anguish may not be shared by others and maybe an insufficient basis for larger generalizations.

TEACHER: Not really. It just so happens that I am starting with the personal distress and then analysing the system that causes it. I could as well have started with the system and deduce my inferior position within it.

The point is that the only way out of the personally experienced anguish of being a subject is by trying to understand the system

that creates it. If there are colleagues who are not bothered by the problems that beset an English teacher in India, it is either because they have found a way of reconciling themselves to their situation or because they understand the system that they function in. By understanding the system, they don't blame themselves for their predicament: instead of feeling guilty, they are inspired to change themselves and the system.

STUDENT: Perhaps, this is the anguish of elites who think they are as good as the best in the West but still have to accept subordination by virtue of being in a Third World country. What about those of us who know that we are hopelessly below par, that by metropolitan standards we would not even qualify to be students, let alone teachers? For such people concerns of decolonization are secondary; they are simply happy to get the job.

TEACHER: In other words, it is this same unjust system which forces them to seek jobs for which they are totally unfit. It is this same system which, perhaps, creates more jobs in teaching English in a country like India than in any other discipline at the college level. These people are even more powerless because they have yet to even understand how they are being exploited, let alone find means of resistance.

STUDENT: In that case, if we are really serious, the challenge—at least for us, the more privileged—is to be able to understand what causes our subordination. How can we use our personal experience to do this?

TEACHER: Don't you remember the great slogan of American feminism of the 1970's—'the personal is the political.' In cases like ours, personal experience has a direct relationship with political and cultural reality. Or, as Fredric Jameson would say, the personal in the Third World becomes, at once, an allegory of the national.¹

STUDENT: You were speaking of how you wanted to start with your personal experience in identifying what is the number one cultural problem we face.

TEACHER: Thank you for reminding me where I digressed. What I found, then, was that the greatest problem that I faced as a teacher of English in India has a direct relationship with an unequal world system. That is, my problem as a teacher and researcher was the outcome of a particular system of inequality whose victim I was.

STUDENT: What was this system?

TEACHER: One word for it would be post-colonialism.

This word has excruciating connotations. It conjures up visions of world dominion by the West. It reminds us of our own colonization for nearly 150 years by the British. How we were exploited by them economically. How our way of life was destroyed. How our population was devastated by repeated famines. How we were broken culturally. Post-colonialism, in addition, reminds us that most of our present problems have a direct connection with this past.

No doubt, post-colonialism also suggests that we are no longer a colony—at least in the sense that we used to be. How we ceased being a colony, then, brings to mind another side of our history, a more inspiring and glorious side. This is the story of our Independence. Of how we reacted to the West and transformed ourselves as a society, culture, and polity.

This is the dual legacy of the word, 'post-colonial'.

STUDENT: So you believe that the anguish you suffer as an English teacher is a direct outcome of our being post-colonial?

TEACHER: Certainly. Moreover, I find that the state of English studies is not very different from that of most of our other academic disciplines—History, Economics, Political Science, Linguistics, Philosophy, Sociology, and even the Sciences.

All of us suffer from a similar malaise. We are part of a system in which we are inferior and the West is superior. The superiority of the West derives mainly from its greater power—economic, military, and cultural. They make the rules by which we have to play the game. Hence, they also win. We are small players, often insignificant and subaltern to their main enterprise.

Moreover, our inferiority over the decades has bred in us the disgusting traits of servility and self-contempt. We despise ourselves for being inferior so we try to be as much like our masters as possible. We hope thereby to be recognized by them and thus to rise in our own estimation. But we are deluded by such hopes. Neither do they give us more than a patronizing nod, nor do we ever become their equals—even in our own eyes.

STUDENT: But there must be exceptions to this pattern that you have outlined. Otherwise, we would have long been finished.

TEACHER: Of course. But exceptions, as they say, only prove the rule. Those individuals who are able to escape the ill-effects of

the system are few and far between. They succeed partially, notwithstanding the tremendous odds, because they are truly exceptional. For the general run of colonized intellectuals, however, the experience is how I have described it.

STUDENT: So is this the number one challenge for us as a culture: the challenge of post-colonialism?

TEACHER: Yes, I was coming to that. I would say that our major crisis in academics and culture is the crisis of self-preservation in a system of neocolonialism. Note that I am using neocolonialism, not post-colonialism. Neocolonialism implies that the system of colonialism, far from being a relic of the past, still survives in a new *avatara*, in an altered form. The struggle for Svaraj, then, is far from over. It is still being fought on several external frontiers—economic, political, cultural, and so on.

If colonialism is active, then the need for decolonization is as urgent today as it was in Gandhi's time. Of course the definitions and forms of both colonialism and decolonization have undergone major changes. Therefore, our agenda, too, must change accordingly.

STUDENT: Speaking of changed agendas, don't you think that by your own definition of a life worth living, most people in the West also would be 'colonized' in one way or another and hence not free?

TEACHER: Well, from the viewpoint of Svaraj, they too would be 'colonized', though they live in countries which were and are the perpetrators and beneficiaries of colonialism and neocolonialism. Certainly, most people in the West are not free to lead the kind of lives they might really wish to. There is tremendous disenchantment within the most affluent societies of the West as is evidenced in their successive counter-culture movements. Obviously, being a part of an exploitative system is not always in the basic interests of those who live by its gains.

STUDENT: But we must try to see how the problems of the average Westerner differ from ours. Over there, there is enormous scope and freedom for personal development, upward mobility, and self-definition—all owing to the fruits of development.

TEACHER: Well, the Westerner is 'colonized' not by some outside agency but by the political, social, and economic systems which govern his or her existence. These people are powerless cogs in a huge alienating system which, though guaranteeing them a

certain measure of prosperity and choice, denies them the freedom of defining and holding values contrary to the dominant ideology, especially as regards the ultimate goals of life.²

In a sense, they are trapped within this system. We are trapped outside it, prevented from entering. They suffer a colonialism of inclusions and we of exclusions. They have no way out; we have no way in.

STUDENT: But aren't you equating the colonized with the colonizers?

TEACHER: No, I wouldn't like to do that at all. But we must realize that both, though in different ways, are victims. Our concept of Svaraj must include both the colonizers and the colonized, not just the latter. We must take into account the West's own dilemmas and contradictions, even as we concentrate on our own problems and needs.

STUDENT: Are we any closer to our number one concern?

TEACHER: If we can at all talk in terms of our number one concern, then I would say that it is the definition of the appropriate agenda for decolonization and development.

Notes

1. The slogan was coined by Carol Hanisch in 1971. See Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Hampstead: Harvester Press, 1989).
See Jameson's 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital,' *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65-88. For an interesting and spirited response, see Aijaz Ahmad's 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory,"' *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3-25.
2. It was Max Weber who first spoke of the impersonal and restrictive effects of large organizations on individuals in developed countries: 'It is horrible to think that the world would one day be filled with little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs and striving towards bigger ones.' Quoted in *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* by M. Haralambos with R.M. Heald 1980; rpt. New Delhi: OUP, 1991): 284. For a preliminary discussion also see *The Social Science Encyclopedia* edited by Adam and Jessica Kuper (1985; rev. ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1989): 892-96.

4



Decolonization or Svaraj?

STUDENT: We ended our last dialogue by identifying decolonization and development as our number one concern. Can we clarify these concepts and their relationship to one another?

TEACHER: I believe that there is a close relationship between decolonization and development; in brief, the right sort of decolonization will lead to the right kind of development. Both are related on-going processes. But we shall talk about development in the second half of our book.

STUDENT: Then, can we try to define decolonization? To begin with, I'd like to know if decolonization and Svaraj are identical; you seem to be using them interchangeably.

TEACHER: This is an important crux. There are differing definitions and approaches to both terms.

Let's go back to Gandhi. As far as I know, he never used the word 'decolonization' but spoke and wrote a great deal about Svaraj instead.

STUDENT: What was Gandhi's view of Svaraj?

TEACHER: Well, it was a total concept for him, though he often emphasized its ethical and spiritual dimensions. As he himself said, 'I submit that *swaraj* is an all-satisfying goal for all time' (352).¹ The sort of freedom that he wanted was not a one-shot thing; it needed enormous self-discipline throughout.

STUDENT: It would seem that Gandhi spoke the language of truth and self-perfection, whereas decolonization has definite economic and political connotations.

TEACHER: But it was not as though Gandhi just stopped there. He had a remarkably detailed vision of what Svaraj implied. In reply to a question such as yours, he spells out his ideas quite comprehensively in an article in *Harijan*, 28 July 1946. Svaraj for Gandhi meant: (a) Independence for the whole of India, including the Princely States and the Portuguese and French territories. (b) Independence for the ruled, not just the rulers; the latter as the servants of the former. (c) Independence which begins from the bottom, not from the top; thus each village a republic with full powers to the panchayat. (d) Further, each individual free and autonomous, yet willing to cooperate with his neighbours and the world. (e) Such cooperation to be free and voluntary. (f) Thus, a society based on a high degree of culture and self-discipline, in which each individual knows his or her rights and responsibilities. (g) A society based on truth, non-violence, and also a belief in God as 'a self-existent, all-knowing living Force.' (h) A society which is not like a 'pyramid' but an 'ever-widening, never-ascending' 'oceanic circle' (347-48).

Finally, for Gandhi, the freedom of India was symbolic of the liberation of other subject peoples in the world: 'Through the deliverance of India, I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation in which England is the greatest perpetrator' (353).

STUDENT: I am forced to admit that not studying Gandhi has been my loss. A definition of decolonization as comprehensive as this can seldom be found anywhere else.

TEACHER: Note how decentralized Gandhi's idea of independent India is. By his yardstick, we have failed miserably in the last forty-five years.

STUDENT: Yes, on almost every front. The people have not enjoyed the fruits of freedom, only the rulers and ruling classes have. Moreover, our society and polity have become more and more violent and brutal. Similarly, the state has become more repressive and authoritarian. And so on.

TEACHER: True. If Gandhi's idea of the autonomy, intelligence, and empowerment of each individual, village, state, or country

is followed to its end, then an exploitative system such as colonialism cannot exist.

STUDENT: Let's get back to the relationship between Svaraj and decolonization.

TEACHER: There is, obviously, a considerable degree of overlap between the two; the difference is in emphasis. Take decolonization. It ties us up with someone else—de + colonization. Thus, inadvertently, decolonization seems to be linked to colonization. Svaraj is a more self-sufficient word, but in the narrow sense of 'independence' or 'self-rule' we have already won Svaraj because we are an independent republic. That's why we cannot revert to it without constantly harping on its extended sense. Keeping a connection with colonization, on the other hand, offers us a degree of explanatory power which tends to be obscured by a narrow notion of Svaraj. An obsession with just the self may end up being solipsistic—unless we remind ourselves that the Self includes the world. No one else, otherwise, will bother to take us seriously.

STUDENT: So is your use of decolonization strategic? A sort of appropriation from social science vocabulary?

TEACHER: One would like to build a bridge linking Svaraj and decolonization. Decolonization, for me, is a process more centred in the Self than in the Other. By decolonizing myself, I mean developing myself and my society fully, realizing our potential, enlarging our capacities—rather than displacing, overthrowing or defeating the Other.

STUDENT: The way you've defined both terms, the bridge will be a very short one.

TEACHER: Thanks. That's why we've put both terms in the title.

STUDENT: Yet, one cannot realize oneself without understanding one's Other.

TEACHER: Certainly. This is true both philosophically and socially. Our attempt at decolonizing ourselves will involve a definition of both ourselves and of the West. It will also entail an identification of our allies and our adversaries.

STUDENT: How would you sum up, then, your view of decolonization, especially in view of what you said about your experience of subordination as an English teacher in India?

TEACHER: From where I am located, decolonization seems to imply

as much a preservation of something old as an acquisition of something new. Decolonization, then, is not merely the overthrow of foreign domination, but also the conservation of what is indigenous. Without the latter, the former will have little meaning or value.

But if in the process of such empowerment I end up like my former adversary, I shall have achieved a bitter success. To become the very image of my former exploiter—either by dominating him or suppressing some aspect of my own self—will result in a narrowing, not broadening of my capacities.

Hence, decolonization means that process of empowerment whereby a culture or society can arrive at its own self-definitions, formulate its own goals, and work towards achieving these goals without interference from or domination by another culture or society.

Thus it is that decolonization implies a genuine independence or Svaraj.

STUDENT: I find your concept of decolonization and Svaraj too idealistic. What about improving the material conditions of the colonized people? What about their efforts to achieve a less exploitative social order in their own country? What about the right of our people to work, food, health, clothing, and shelter?

TEACHER: You are right. We continue to be colonized not only by a worldwide unjust economic order, but we also practice our own internal colonizations, exploiting vast sections of our society for the benefit of a few.

STUDENT: Then our discussion concerns only these fortunate few, doesn't it? People like us, securely bourgeois, who have already reaped the benefits of the system. Therefore, we can now afford to wallow in such aesthetic discussions.

TEACHER: If indeed we are representatives of the ruling and exploitive classes in our country, our mere denial of this or adoption of a so-called proletarian stance or discourse will not be enough to wipe off our guilt. We shall have to assume responsibility for our positions, even accept our limitations, and try to do our best under the circumstances. Otherwise, we shall get trapped in a useless inertia in which impotent rage becomes the only substitute for meaningful action.

STUDENT: Perhaps, we should identify our limitations and our strengths.

TEACHER: You know that as intellectuals we occupy a peculiar position. The state supports us and therefore the natural tendency would be for us to get incorporated into the dominant ideology. But our relative security and freedom of expression also allows us to take stands which are contrary to the interests of this dominant ideology. We have the capacity to become rebels, in the most profound sense of the word.

STUDENT: How?

TEACHER: Let's remember Gandhi again. He planted a traitor in every middle class family. Earlier, the same class had displayed an unquestioned loyalty to the British; subsequently, the leaders of the anti-imperial struggle came from these very classes.²

STUDENT: How do you apply that example to the present times?

TEACHER: The state today is a reflection of the contradictions of our society. In that sense, it is not all evil. Moreover, it does represent, albeit precariously, the will of the people. Today, the challenge is not to plant a traitor in every middle class family—that is what the radicals or naxalites had hoped to do. The challenge is to split the middle class, to make it rebel against the dominant ideology.

STUDENT: You must elaborate.

TEACHER: The middle class, the most dynamic in our society and which is also the ruling class today, is thoroughly confused. It is being seduced by an international culture of modernity and consumerism. By being co-opted into this system, it has lost its 'progressive' character. The same class which produced most of our social reformers and leaders of the freedom struggle, is today churning out 'yuppies,' 'puppies,' and what have you—the leaders of money-making enterprises. So the aim is the split of this middle class not along caste and community lines, as Mandal and other measures threatened to do, but along moral and political lines.³

STUDENT: But what is the position that these rebels should take?

TEACHER: If you look at the closest followers and associates of Gandhi, you'll find that they came from the educated, Westernized middle class. Nehru and Sarojini Naidu are prime examples. Even the proximity of Maulana Azad, a traditional Muslim, to Gandhi was possible only after he became a nationalist and accepted certain crucial aspects of modernity.

Thus, what we need is the right combination of the traditional

and the modern. Only a mind that has a feel for Indian culture and yet understands modernity and its imperatives can be truly revolutionary.

STUDENT: But are you saying anything that's really new?

TEACHER: Well, if you look around today you'll find, primarily, three kinds of intellectuals. You have the leftists who have accepted a Eurocentric utopian ideology. Then you have the liberals and the right-wing types who are also essentially Western in outlook but support capitalism and the free market. Finally, you have the newly emerging conservative Hindutva-walas who have also embraced modernity, though they ostensibly stand for a return to Hinduism.

STUDENT: What about the Gandhians, the Socialists, the critical traditionalists, the environmentalists, and so on?

TEACHER: These are, surely, a minority. The point is that all the three groups that I've mentioned above have completely capitulated to modernity and positivistic rationality. In that sense, they have turned their backs on the resources of their culture. The fourth group that you mention, thus, is the most promising. But few are able to understand or identify it. The moment you talk of, say, the Upanishads or the *Gita* you are likely to be branded a communalist or neo-Brahmin. This is a ridiculous situation in which you are denied access to your culture because that represents a return to undesirable social formations; but it is all right to pretend to belong to a modernity defined by the West, in which we are not only subservient but also marginalized.

Therefore, I think it is very important to create a space in which we can criticize both our own traditions and the West.

STUDENT: In fact, I myself wasn't aware that such a space exists. In academics at least, you're either with the latest from the West or you're out of the running; or if consciously anti-Western, you're a fundamentalist.

TEACHER: We started by talking about definitions of decolonization and Svaraj.

STUDENT: And we saw how cultural and economic emancipation were closely related. Without an alternative value-system underpinning our thinking, our notions of development will be derivative and skewed.

TEACHER: As our concerns deepen, we find issues converging. The personal becomes the political, the ethical becomes the economic, the spiritual becomes the political.

STUDENT: The decolonization of the mind then leads to be decolonization of the body politic.

TEACHER: But we need to forge an irrefutable, logical link between the two—the decolonization of the mind and social transformation.

STUDENT: Yes. And placing decolonization in the context of Svaraj serves to create an alternative space for discussion. It allows us to become rebels against the various dominant ideologies of our times.

Notes

1. For this and other quotations from Gandhi, see *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Raghavan Iyer (Delhi: OUP, 1991).
2. See *Gandhi: The Traditional Roots of Charisma* by Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph (1967; rpt. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1987); 38–39 for a discussion of the difference between ‘real’ and assimilated Indians.
3. See ‘The Alternative,’ an interview of Ashis Nandy by Amrita Shah in *Debonair*, January 1992: 6–16.

5



The Enemy Outside

STUDENT: If decolonization is one of our foremost goals today, then what is preventing us from achieving it? Who is the enemy?

TEACHER: Your question impinges on how issues are defined in polemics. Nearly all major thinkers, especially those whose thought had some radical or revolutionary content, defined issues in an adversarial manner. That is, whenever we are fighting *for* something, we are also fighting *against* something. So, if we are fighting for decolonization, then what are we fighting against?

STUDENT: Exactly. You yourself said that before Independence our adversaries were obvious. But who are our enemies now?

TEACHER: The enemy may appear obvious on hindsight but not during the struggle. When fighting for Independence not only were we divided by religion, caste, ideology, and conflicting interests, but so were our rulers. In fact, Gandhi tried to sidestep precisely such a simplistic paradigm of India vs. the British by positing the struggle for Svaraj as a part of a larger struggle between two ways of life—the modern, material, metropolitan, machine civilization of the West, and the traditional, spiritual, rural, and agrarian civilization of India.¹ Such a move made the identification of the enemy a more complicated matter. After all, there were many within India, perhaps including Nehru himself, who were proponents of Western civilization. Similarly,

there were those among the British, like C.F. Andrews, who had a greater affinity with the Indian point of view. Gandhi knew that the struggle for Svaraj meant the overcoming of both external and internal enemies.

STUDENT: How would you apply this model to our present situation under post- or neocolonialism?

TEACHER: It might work like this: Today, we are not under direct colonial rule. Our country is neither occupied nor ruled by a foreign power. But we are being controlled, nevertheless, by a world economic order. In this order, a handful of overdeveloped countries hog most of the wealth of the world. They control a system in which what they produce with their machines is overvalued and what underdeveloped countries produce, mostly raw materials or agricultural produce, is undervalued.

Simply speaking, those who support and strengthen this economic order are the enemies, both outside the country and inside it. Those who oppose it, either by trying to better our position in this order or by proposing alternatives to it, are our allies. However, we should remember that, ultimately, the fight is not over superficials but over fundamental principles. We must ask: what kind of world and what kind of human beings do we wish to create? Not just what kind of system to produce more wealth.

STUDENT: In other words, the fight is still against one version of modernity—the capitalistic, materialistic version, perhaps?

TEACHER: Our fight is not based on a romantic fascination with the pre-modern way of life, but on the misery, inequality, and destruction inherent in the dominant version of modernity.

STUDENT: Isn't it true that the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America have actually become poorer in the last hundred years?

TEACHER: Certainly, the gap between the rich and poor nations has been increasing. For instance, around 1850, the average income of people in industrialized Europe was about twice that of those in non-industrial countries, or about 2:1. A hundred years later, by 1950, the ratio was 10:1. And by 1960 it was 15:1. If present trends continue, the difference by the end of the century will be 30:1! Today about 23 percent of the world's population 'earns' 85 percent of the world's income, which means that the remaining 77 percent must make do with 15 percent of the total income.² And of this 15 percent, the richest

among the poor probably corner 80 percent. So a more realistic figure would be that about 4 billion people in the Third World are absolutely poor and about 1 billion are virtually on the verge of starvation all the time!

STUDENT: It looks as though things have become worse instead of getting better; instead of progressing towards a more just world order we are retrogressing.

TEACHER: However, it is also true that, by and large, infant mortality rates have declined in the poorer countries, and that life expectancy and enrollment in schools are increasing.³

STUDENT: But these gains are minuscule because even though the literacy rate in India has gone up from 36.17 in 1981 to 52.11 in 1991, the total number of illiterates in India has increased from 233.94 million in 1981 to 352.08 million in 1991.⁴ The same trend, I am sure, will be found in statistics on those below the poverty line.

But the question really is, why? Why this imbalance and inequality?

TEACHER: The orthodox Western theorists will explain this situation by attributing the cause of the West's prosperity to certain values and social conditions. Essentially, they will trace the source of the wealth of the West to the ethos of capitalism—the management of natural resources, technology, capital, money; that is, to the spirit of entrepreneurship in a free-market system.⁵

STUDENT: That might explain the wealth of nations. But what about the *poverty* of nations?

TEACHER: The orthodox theorists will merely mark the absence of these qualities in the Third World. But for a more satisfying explanation, we must look to the radical theorists. They will point to the unequal terms of exchange, to the unjust trade patterns that we developed under the colonization of the rest of the world by Europe starting in the 17th century. To use Marxian terms, the inequality is a result of the extraction and appropriation of surplus from the Third World by the metropolis.⁶

STUDENT: But why must we accept this unequal system? Why not overthrow it?

TEACHER: Usually, we have little choice in the matter. The system is enforced by a combination of subtle and overt coercion, plus seductions and blandishments of all kinds. Remember, that most of the Third World countries were once colonies. Before our colonial masters withdrew, they ensured that their profits would

keep accruing even afterwards. They devised economies in their colonies which were not self-reliant but hopelessly dependent. This relationship of dependency was reinforced through aid—of both food and money—and through foreign investment, ostensibly for development but really to perpetuate this hegemony. The overall result is a continuation of the power and prosperity of the West and the slavery and impoverishment of the rest of the world.⁷

Earlier, we talked about the implications of the economic liberalization wave sweeping over India. Critics argue that this will only impoverish India further, that it is a part of the IMF–World Bank strategy to globalize poverty and ensure the economic domination of the West.

STUDENT: What are the arguments against economic restructuring, IMF–World Bank style?

TEACHER: Simply speaking, the following: (a) By submitting to periodic monitorings and verifications by these world agencies we lose our sovereignty. (Remember the arguments before the Budget session in February 1992?) (b) Taking these huge loans and opening up our economy to foreign trade result in the devaluation of the national currency, inflation, shrinking of the domestic purchasing power, and ‘dollarization’ of the economy. The net result is that we become poorer not just individually but as a nation. (c) The worst affected are wage-earners and the poor. They don’t have adequate safeguards to protect themselves against the changing economic conditions. (d) Ultimately, the poorer countries become producers for a world market. So you have about 4 billion people working to keep the 750 million ‘developed’ in luxury. In Michel Chossudovsky’s words, the logic of the IMF programme is that ‘maximizing poverty minimizes production costs and that the developed countries can purchase commodities at extremely low prices from a large number of low cost producers’.⁸

STUDENT: But before the IMF and World Bank came in we were going broke!

TEACHER: The system is such that you lose either way—lose if you stay away and lose if you join them. It seems that there is only so much wealth going around in the world; it can keep only a certain number of people in affluence. The rest have to toil in poverty to survive.

STUDENT: But surely the picture is more complex. What about the

erstwhile Communist Bloc? Japan? And more recently, Taiwan and South Korea?

TEACHER: In Russia and other once prosperous communist countries, for instance, the state did the job that the capitalists had done in Western Europe. So we had a kind of state capitalism: the state controlled the surplus and invested it in development. In such societies, the state became a great concentration of power. In China, this process was aided by two traditional institutions: an all-powerful Emperor and an efficient bureaucracy.⁹

STUDENT: But communism failed.

TEACHER: It failed economically as much as it did ideologically.

The European communists were gradually getting poorer and poorer. This bred discontent and eroded the support for the dominant ideology of centralized planning and power. Also, the USSR's militarist adventurism in the global arena with its attendant costs could not be supported by its economy. Hence the collapse. It is no wonder that the downfall came in Europe first because that's where the socialist experiment first struck roots and where it was in closest contact with its Other—the West. Communism was a European idea; its collapse is also European. We know that outside Europe it still survives in its Chinese, Latin American, African, and Asian versions. And you can never tell even in the former USSR. In Russia, for instance, the present economic crisis has spurred a regrouping of the communists; they have already organized a couple of mass rallies in what used to be the Red Square.

STUDENT: Between two kinds of materialistic ideologies, the more successful won.

But what about Japan?

TEACHER: Japan's rapid transformation is truly exceptional. It was possible because that society is organized to aid communication and acquiescence; the entire society was driven by a unified goal of prosperity. This drive was aided, in large part, by the United States, through direct intervention in the beginning and a favourable trade relationship later.¹⁰

STUDENT: Doesn't this disprove the idea that capitalistic success is the sole preserve of the West?

TEACHER: It certainly does. Now the West *includes* Japan, though. Again, those who support the orthodox theories of wealth will argue that the same kind of prosperity is available to anyone who follows the formulas of the West. They will also cite the

newly emerging players in Asia such as Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore."

STUDENT: It looks like the West is, finally, being beaten at its own game.

TEACHER: Yes. Look how unsporting and childish a loser the US is proving to be. These days, there's actually a new sense of contempt for the Americans developing in Japanese society. Now it is Japan's turn to give concessions to the US. The only reason why the US can still pretend to dictate terms is because it is so powerful militarily. It's like the big bully in class who cannot compete with his rival in studies but enforces his authority through brute force. Americans think that they only have to be more selfish and less generous and the Japanese won't win. But, perhaps, deep inside they know that they have been beaten and all that they can do is postpone their final defeat.

STUDENT: As long as your opponent opposes you, you are safe. But you better watch out when he starts agreeing with you!

TEACHER: Yes, because then he is sure to better you at being yourself.

STUDENT: Where do the OPEC countries fit into such a view of the world?

TEACHER: The oil-rich nations have become prosperous by simply selling a commodity which is much in demand. Their prosperity does not owe itself to industrialization or development. You must have heard the joke about the Arabs returning to camels after their oil dries out. Such racist jokes apart, we must remember that their prosperity is dependent on and guaranteed by the West.

STUDENT: As illustrated by the Gulf War?

TEACHER: The military might of the West is a key factor in maintaining its economic supremacy. I am sure the US wouldn't have bothered if instead of oil-rich Kuwait some other country, say Costa Rica, had been invaded. They fought for Kuwait because it was willing to pay, in more ways than one, for the war.

STUDENT: So much for the US's claim of being a defender of human rights and democracy in the world!

TEACHER: But we must not forget that Iraq, according to all international norms, was the guilty party, what with the megalomaniac dictator Saddam Hussein at its helm.

STUDENT: Well, the US actually profited by the war, didn't it?

TEACHER: At least it did not lose by it. Kuwait shelled out 16 billion dollars. Other allies like Saudi Arabia, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, and so on pledged a total of over 60 billion dollars. The war ended up costing a mere 42 billion!

STUDENT: So the 42-day long war ended up costing a billion dollars a day; in all, almost as much as India's total budget for 1991-92.¹²

Would you then say that might is right, that power always prevails?

TEACHER: Might is right, but not always. What actually prevails is not power but, to use an old cliché, Truth. *Satyamevayajate*. We observe in history that the powerful do not always win. In fact, there comes a time when they weaken from within and lose initiative. Their will to dominate collapses. Thus, many great empires have risen and fallen. The power of the sword is, ultimately, inadequate.

STUDENT: Then how do we resist our external enemy, this unequal and exploitative world economic order?

TEACHER: From our discussion it is clear that until the present world order is altered, we will never have our rightful place in the comity of nations. Other Third World countries share our predicament.

But it is not easy to overthrow this order. The poorer countries themselves are hopelessly divided. Moreover, the fight is not only between two groups of nations; it is also between different levels and means of development.

STUDENT: You mean some of us may not want to overthrow this order at all?

TEACHER: Precisely. We may want a better place in this same order. On the other hand, others such as Iran who also want to overthrow imperialism may want to substitute it by a revivalist and reactionary theocratic system.

STUDENT: So what do we do?

TEACHER: We must determine the exact nature of our cooperation and complicity with this world order. We must decide how far we wish to go along and where we must draw the line.

STUDENT: But I don't see any way out: the present system is unequal and there doesn't seem to be an alternative.

TEACHER: Look, the fundamental question is this: What is the goal of civilization? Is it only material well-being at the expense of

everything else, including the very survival of this planet as a living ecosystem? Should we emulate the West, capitulate to their idea of materialistic civilization, even if it is based on looting and plundering others and wasteful extravagance?

STUDENT: But we can't speak only in moral and spiritual terms. I remember Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada saying somewhere that progress was a total illusion, and that our only purpose on earth was to seek salvation, whether by lamplight or electric light made no difference.

TEACHER: The difference becomes significant when someone else has electric light whereas I only have lamplight.

STUDENT: Precisely. So we cannot afford to lag behind. We must catch up with the West and have what they have.

TEACHER: We can't beat them at their game by joining in, nor can we afford to be left out completely.

STUDENT: Seems like a Catch-22!

TEACHER: We never find the world to our liking, but must alter it to suit ourselves. According to me, ours is not necessarily a position of weakness.

Let me take you back to our discussion of the causes of material prosperity. We've already talked about conventional theories. Some talk of natural resources, others of inherent qualities in various civilizations. Some even attribute prosperity to climatic conditions!¹³ But as Galbraith says, to get rich you need to (a) understand poverty; (b) want to get rid of it; and (c) adopt the right means to do so.¹⁴

Do you know what all this really boils down to? It means that those nations who really want to become rich do so, sooner or later. It's a question of having the drive for material advancement.

STUDENT: You make it sound ridiculously simple.

TEACHER: Not quite. Remember that poverty was a universal phenomenon until a couple of hundred years back. The modernization and industrialization of the world, which resulted in this tremendous wealth, was an uneven and unequal process. Naturally, the drive for material well-being, too, is uneven all over the world. As Barbara Ward says, in traditional societies there are other things such as hierarchy, status, and privilege which compensate for the lack of wealth; these sometimes block a society's total urge for expansion (82).

STUDENT: So, we in India are still poor because we have not been able to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to a programme of becoming rich.

TEACHER: Precisely. And I think this is what makes us different. Our civilization seems to resist a wholesale commitment to *artha* and *kama*, shorn of *dharma* and *moksha*. Even the Buddha's Eight-Fold Path enjoins Right Livelihood on its followers.¹⁵ In other words, the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself is abhorrent; it is demoniac. I am sure that the Bible can also be quoted to support such a view. No nation, then, can enjoy ill-gotten wealth without suffering disastrous consequences. The decadent life style of the West—wherein the intemperate and unbridled pursuit of *kama* and *artha*, pleasure and wealth, have become the cardinal aims of life—must not be emulated.

STUDENT: Are you saying that given the overall cultural and material condition of India, we are in a position to offer a critique and a challenge to the West and its dominant ideology of consumeristic, techno-modern, materialism?

TEACHER: Yes.

STUDENT: Can you spell out what we should resist in the global system?

TEACHER: We must resist the violence of Western civilization. Remember that their wealth is founded on a history of plunder, genocide, colonization and war. We must oppose the violence inherent in capitalism itself.

Secondly, we must resist the continued exploitation of the rest of the world by the West. This exploitation is propped up by unequal terms of trade and military might.

Thirdly, we must resist the globalization of culture that consumerism necessitates. We must resist the superficiality of mass-produced, pop culture and the way it threatens to displace local, indigenous cultural production.

We must abandon imitative life styles that seek to replicate the hedonism, waste, and decadence of the West.

STUDENT: Yet, it seems to me to be impossible to compete in the world without allowing at least a sector of our economy and culture to go global.

TEACHER: True. We have to make such adjustments and compromises, but also resort to various stratagems of containment and resistance. And the key to this is the values and lifestyles of

the educated middle classes, who are being seduced by the growing globalization and totalization in what is increasingly becoming a unipolar world.

STUDENT: Then by turning our backs on consumerism and self-indulgence, we are at once rebelling against an oppressive world system *and* saving our souls?! Sounds like a pretty good deal.

Notes

1. See Gandhi, Ch. 6, 'Civilization,' in *Hind Swaraj*, 34–38.
2. Lynn H. Miller, *Global Order* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1985): 129. Also see the Worldwatch Institute's report on the state of the world, 1992.
3. See the World Bank's *World Development Report* (New York: OUP, 1985).
4. *Manorama Year Book 1992* (Kottayam: Malayalam Manorama, 1992): 423.
5. Weber, for instance, traced the 'spirit of capitalism' to the doctrines and beliefs of Protestant Christianity, particularly to Calvinism. See the entry on Weber in *The Social Science Encyclopedia*.
6. For a discussion of these views, see John L. Scitz's 'The Wealth and Poverty of Nations,' in *The Politics of Development* (1988; rpt. Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1990): 1–15.
7. For an introductory essay on Dependency Theory, see *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, 191; also see the essays 'World-System Theory' and 'Imperialism'. For a Marxist account of the inequalities in the world, see Yuri Popor, *The Developing Countries from the Standpoint of Marxist Political Economy* (Moscow: Novsti Press, 1977).
8. See 'Globalisation of Poverty,' Michel Chossudovsky interviewed by Madhura Swaminathan and V.K. Ramachandran, *Frontline*, 13 March 1992: 92–95.
9. See Barbara Ward's *The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962): 71–72.
10. A fascinating account of Japan's spectacular rise is given in the many-part series, *Nippon*, made by BBC.
11. See *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialisation* by Alice H. Amden (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1989) and D.N.'s discussion of the book in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 February 1992: 405–08.
12. At Rs. 1,13,422 crores (see *The Observer of Business and Politics*, Special Budget Edition, 1 March 1992: 5) the budget works out to \$42 billion at Rs. 27 to a dollar.
13. Ellsworth Huntington, *Civilization and Climate* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1924).
14. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Nature of Mass Poverty* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979): 46.
15. For a discussion of the famous *purusharthas* or primary aims of life according to

Hinduism, see M. Hiriyantha's 'Philosophy of Values' in Haridas Bhattacharyya, ed., *The Cultural Heritage of India*, vol. 3 (1953; rpt. Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1983): 645–54. Also see K.J. Shah, 'Philosophy, religion, morality, spirituality: some issues,' *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 7:2 (January–April 1990): 1–12. For Buddha's Eight-Fold Path, see C. Kunhan Raja, tr., *Dhammapadam* (Madras: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1956) and Swami Suddhasatvananda, comp., *Thus Spake the Buddha* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1988).

6



The Enemy Within—I

STUDENT: We agreed that in order to decolonize ourselves we would have to fight against an exploitative world order outside. We also saw how this world order was supported by us, the very people who suffer from its ill-effects.

TEACHER: The 'us' that you refer to above needs to be defined. Again, we could start with what happens to the psyche of a society which has been colonized."

The experience of colonialism is traumatic, both economically and psychologically. It produces some peculiar kinds of neurosis or anxiety. Frantz Fanon has written at length about the pathologies of oppression—what the oppressed suffer under colonialism. It seems to me to be fairly clear that when the self is under tremendous stress, it copes or survives through certain devices. Societies, too, evolve their own coping strategies to deal with sudden, unwanted changes in internal and external environment; they devise various means to minimize and reduce the resulting cognitive dissonance.¹

STUDENT: You mean societies also resort to denial, repression, transference, displacement, or sublimation—sort of like Freud's defence mechanism?²

TEACHER: The mechanisms and methods are, really, numerous. But I wish to concentrate on a few which will help us identify the 'enemies' within our society.

Colonized societies, often, use at least two self-destructive methods of coping with their trauma. First, the exploitative and reactionary elements within these societies become stronger, encouraged and patronized by the colonizers. Secondly, a new class of assimilated natives—carbon copies of their masters—develops.

STUDENT: You mean, the self is under tension all the time; but under colonialism, the tension becomes unbearable. This results in a split. That is, a part of the self 'goes over' to the adversary, becomes its mirror image. Another part retains pristine values.

Even if there is no split, there is continual tension between the acquired self and the older self, between the colonized and the pre-colonial, between the new and the old.³

TEACHER: This sort of thing is happening all the time, not just under colonialism but also under neocolonialism.

STUDENT: Hence a novel like *Samskara*?⁴

TEACHER: And indeed all those novels which show a conflict between tradition and modernity, between the East and the West.

STUDENT: So isn't the tension creative?

TEACHER: It may be. But often it is debilitating. Very few people can move from their confused tensions to the clarity of self-expression. That requires deep understanding and enquiry.

STUDENT: So how is this related to the enemy within?

TEACHER: The enemy within is that aspect of the psyche which has internalized the values of the colonizer. These values prevent the decolonization of the mind. They create confusion and inertia.

STUDENT: But by contrary implication, can one decolonize oneself entirely? Can one remove, excise, or terminate that part of one's mind which has been occupied, colonized, and penetrated by the adversary?

TEACHER: Not unless one is looking at the problem in Manichaean terms. You can never completely rid yourself of your opposite, your Other, because, in a sense, you *are* the Other. But certainly through understanding, through knowledge, through enquiry, one can arrive at a stage where one's own shaping influences are clarified. Then they cease to threaten and overwhelm one. Then one can employ them creatively and usefully as Gandhi said we could English education if we only understood what it stood for (*Hind Swaraj*, 90–91).

STUDENT: So you are suggesting no radical removal of a part of the psyche, but its transformation.

TEACHER: Right. The colonized part of the mind mustn't dominate one's thinking. It mustn't cause confusion and self-contempt. It must be understood and tamed. This would be a positive method of coping, somewhat like sublimation.

STUDENT: What about the other 'enemy', that aspect of the oppressive pre-colonial past which lingers on or is actually strengthened?

TEACHER: I'll illustrate with two examples, one economic and the other cultural, of what actually happened in India after the British took over our economy. Because the burden of taxation on the peasant became fixed and unbearable, the village money-lender assumed a key position in the economy. A lot of small peasants had to mortgage or lose their land, which led to untold hardship. Similarly, the institution of *sati* reached epidemic proportions in Bengal. Thus, several reactionary and destructive forces and traditions were strengthened under colonialism.⁴ One cannot also help remembering how important a role the local tribal chieftain played in the slave trade in Africa, often actively assisting the capture and sale of his own people.

STUDENT: Colonialism also led to revivalism—the glorification of our past beyond all reason—almost in a desperate bid to preserve our identity.

TEACHER: In fact, even the residual past, traditional values, which one has inherited from one's pre-colonial heritage can be harmful. That too can be a kind of colonization. Moreover, it might merely be a reconstruction by the colonized of their past.⁵

STUDENT: We seem to have tied ourselves into knots. What's the way out?

TEACHER: I think we must remember that decolonization implies rejection not only of the harmful ideas from the West, but also of destructive aspect of our past.

The way out is to radically question the *given*—whether it comes from the West or from India. Only a deep questioning will lead to clarity about who we are and where we are going. Questioning only the West will lead us to unacceptable positions from our past; questioning only our past and accepting the West on trust will make us more powerless and self-contemptuous.

STUDENT: If we question everything, then where does that leave us?

TEACHER: It leaves us free to act as nothing else can.

STUDENT: Then what about the enemy within?

TEACHER: The enemy within is thus tamed, harnessed to a new programme in which its knowledge is useful but not enslaving. The enemy within is thus disarmed and integrated into a newer understanding of reality.

STUDENT: You mean through deep questioning, we deconstruct the enemy within; uncover its premises, decode its secret language—thereby rendering it harmless.

TEACHER: Yes, something like that. But also once we have understood the causes of the tension, we must act. There can be no truce with the enemy within. We must ruthlessly pursue this enemy to its lair and expose its machinations.

STUDENT: Can you give an example?

TEACHER: Well, I need to ask myself, which values of the West have I really accepted and which have I denied?

STUDENT: Isn't that difficult? Aren't the strands hopelessly intertwined?

TEACHER: Yet, an effort is needed. For instance, do I accept that the goal of life is to achieve a progressively more humane, just, and materially comfortable social order on the basis of technological invention? I must ask myself this if I think that this is what the 'good' West represents. Then I must ask what goals from my own culture, *dharmā* or *moksha*, for instance, do I wish to retain. Are these compatible with progressive humanism of the West? And, finally, can a viable synthesis be worked out?

STUDENT: Usually, the problem is much more mundane: do I buy a VCR or washing machine?

TEACHER: Ha, ha! Then you will have to come to terms with what the VCR represents. Who produces it? How much it costs? And what do you have to do to be able to possess it? But with the advent of Cable TV, I can safely advise you against buying it.

STUDENT: OK, but that doesn't solve the problem of whether or not to buy a microwave, a washing machine, an air conditioner, and so on. I know people who will literally take a bribe to get these goods because their prices in India are so high.

TEACHER: There you have your answer. If the prices are so high, there is a reason for it. Excise, duties, whatever be the reason; if

the good that you wish to possess is beyond your reach, then in order to acquire it you will have to breach some norm of conduct. This in turn will affect your country because it encourages corruption, false values, and so on. So in your particular case, a microwave or a Maruti is out!

STUDENT: Thank you. But can we go back to decolonization?

TEACHER: I said that the enemy within prevents decolonization. It wants to continue with its slavish ways, either blindly following tradition or chasing an illusory modernity.

There is a similar split in the social self. A small section of an elite fringe gets totally Westernized. This fringe becomes a kind of comprador faction within our society. It collaborates with the exploitative world system.

STUDENT: This fringe is probably not a fringe at all—I see all of us to be a part of it, in one way or another.

TEACHER: Yes, the middle class, the bourgeoisie, is the most vulnerable to the lure of the West and of modernity. That's why, as we said earlier, we have to split it!

STUDENT: Then the internal enemy is really all of us as a group, not just a part of our individual psyche.

TEACHER: Yes.

Notes

1. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) and Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). Also see Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1983; rpt. New Delhi: OUP, 1988) for a valuable and lucid discussion of some of the issues raised in this chapter.
2. See Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1937; rpt. Madison, Ct.: Inter-Universities Press, 1967).
3. See Alert Memi, *The Colonized and the Colonizer*, tr. Howard Greenfield (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).
4. By U.R. Anantha Murthy, tr. A.K. Ramanujan (1978; rpt. New Delhi: OUP, 1989).
5. See Bipan Chandra et al., *Freedom Struggle* (1972; rpt. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1991) for an excellent introductory account of the economic

effects of British colonialism. See Ashis Nandy, 'The Sociology of Sati,' *Indian Express*, 5 October 1987; this and other articles on the subject can be found in *Sati* edited by Mulk Raj Anand (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp., 1989).

6. See Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Critical Theory,' in *Problems in Marxism and Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1981) for a discussion of residual culture.

7



The Enemy Within—II

STUDENT: You have defined the enemy within as that section of our population which is not really interested in decolonization.

TEACHER: And there are at least two distinct groups of such people. The older vested interests, exploiting the residual culture, and the neo-colonized urban elite.

STUDENT: But isn't the first group, more or less, defeated?

TEACHER: Only partly. The back of the priestocracy is broken; it cannot terrorize people in the name of God and religion. But there is a new class of neo-Hindus, kulaks, caste lords, brokers of backwardness (not to be confused with those who are really backward), and so on. Worst affected by this new combination of rapacity born out of a commercial culture *and* the older, oppressive culture are our women. Lower class/caste and rural women are the most exploited and oppressed section of our population.

STUDENT: We need a separate chapter to discuss the question of women in our society. But, briefly, how do we dismantle older, traditional tyrannies?

TEACHER: By a two-pronged strategy: first, by redefining tradition and drawing inspiration from it to fight its abuse, as all social reformers from Rammohun Roy to Gandhi did. Secondly, to repudiate certain aspects of tradition altogether, as lower caste reformers such as Jyotiba Phule and Ambedkar did, when they rejected Brahminism and Hinduism. In both cases, we can also

judiciously apply several liberal and humanistic correctives—drawn from modernity—to tradition, thereby challenging and revitalizing it. Of course, there are some who think that tradition, modified, is entirely self-sufficient; on the other hand, there are those, like our Marxists, who think that modernity is entirely self-sufficient.

STUDENT: We can talk about these strategies in greater detail later. Here I wish to devote more attention to the enemy within—the latter, urban, Westernized kind.

TEACHER: This section is happy enough with the subordinate position that India occupies in the world order as long as it continues to enjoy a place of prominence within India.

STUDENT: But can you please relate this idea to our central concern with Svaraj or the decolonization of our culture and society?

TEACHER: Let me ask you, rather provocatively, who *is* interested in decolonization? Who among our politicians or academicians or even artists is really committed to it?

STUDENT: Do you want me to mention names?

TEACHER: Try even that if you wish. You'll find only a very few. Because decolonization is not very simple.

Instead, you'll find most people pretty much satisfied with the compromises that they have reached.

We all talk of decolonization today. But how many of us really want it?

STUDENT: Yes, come to think of it, I can think of very few of our teachers or scholars who have really achieved a breakthrough. But isn't everybody speaking of it nowadays? Aren't books being written and papers published on the subject?

TEACHER: Yes, but that's the point, isn't it? Today, it has become fashionable to speak about decolonization. But nobody wants to actually get there. They want to remain colonized intellectually, but to continue to speak of decolonization.

STUDENT: How startling! You mean it's like the man who goes around saying I want to be enlightened, but never becomes enlightened?

TEACHER: You see, this very project of seeking God becomes a way of postponing the finding. Krishnamurti points this out very clearly. He regards all our efforts at freeing ourselves to be a camouflage of our deep fear of freedom; we are merely

putting off the inevitable. Our quest becomes the baggage that we carry around, that is our new crutch, our excuse, our security blanket. Remove even that and we'd be nowhere.¹

Those who speak of decolonization have made it not only a way of life but also a way of earning their livelihood. It is their ultimate crutch and solace. It gives them a sense of being on the right side of things ideologically. It gives them security and assurance.

STUDENT: Aren't we also speaking of it? So are we really ready for it? Are we also making it merely a topic of conversation? How are we different from them?

TEACHER: That is a question each one must ask himself or herself. This discussion, to me, is our immediate contribution to decolonization. We must decolonize ourselves even as we proceed in this dialogue. Otherwise, we shall have failed completely.

STUDENT: Do you mean to say that most of us are not really interested in decolonization?

TEACHER: Some are merely cynical. They use it as the latest bandwagon, to acquire all the worldly advantages. Others are more serious, but confused. They don't know a way out.

STUDENT: You are speaking against some of my favourite young teachers, especially the foreign-returned ones, fresh with the latest imported ideas. What is your evidence to prove that they are mistaken?

TEACHER: For one thing, the discourse of decolonization that they deploy is itself totally colonized. That is, this discourse has been penetrated by the West, appropriated by it, and made a part of its market. Hence, these days, it pays to speak of decolonization. The West's own motives for this self-flagellation are interesting. It helps assuage their guilt but also earns them money because it sells. Finally, it confers power and becomes a way of recolonization. As long as they control the discourse of decolonization, they are preventing decolonization.

STUDENT: Amazing!

TEACHER: But more convincing evidence is seen in the absence of any radical or meaningful understanding of decolonization from within our academia. We are merely duplicating the latest trends in the West. Our great concern is not to be left behind. We want to prove that we understand what is going on and are 'with it'.

A real concern with decolonization would result in ending,

not perpetuating, our dependency on the West. Are our intellectuals interested in this? Or are they interested in acting as middlemen or brokers in this unequal exchange, thereby ensuring that their position, their scholarships, their trips abroad are not threatened?

The Indian intellectuals, especially the professional ones, have a bit of the cheat and an idler in them. They don't want to think for themselves. They would rather live with what K.C. Bhattacharya called the shadow mind: a realm of borrowed ideas and thoughts.² They would rather not question their place in the Western-dominated global intellectual system.

So they're not interested in decolonization at all, but continue to speak of it.

STUDENT: This hypocrisy is frightening. Rather like a radical Marxist professor who rakes in a huge profit by moonlighting as a real estate agent. These people want to be pure ideologically, but as bourgeois as possible in their daily lives.

TEACHER: It's the old problem of means and ends which obsessed Gandhi. If you want to decolonize, but everything you do actually leads to further colonization, then you have a very big contradiction in your life.

STUDENT: Is everyone who speaks of decolonization the enemy within?

TEACHER: I hope not, otherwise this dialogue would be meaningless.

I used the instance of the discourse on decolonization as an example of how something so seemingly anti-colonial can lead to further colonization. The enemy within academics is that section of our intelligensia which perpetuates our position of inequality and inferiority.

STUDENT: How do they do this?

TEACHER: By accepting Western notions of what our goal as a society is.

STUDENT: I think this is where their attitude to tradition becomes important.

TEACHER: Yes. It seems to me that the enemy within has accepted a largely Occidental version of what the world should be like. They have accepted the Enlightenment and its totalizing project of changing the world. They have accepted History and the idea of a linear progression for human kind. They have accepted scientific materialism. They have, in a word, accepted modernity.³

STUDENT: Do you mean to say that we should revert to some pre-modern, Hindu view of the world, the so-called spiritual goal of culture? What about the oppressive aspects of our tradition?

TEACHER: Let us not make the mistake of thinking that we can automatically reoccupy some ideal space from the past from which we are today divorced. Such an idea may serve as a cementing factor, imbued with tremendous emotional appeal to a beleaguered culture—and the best example of this is perhaps Iran—but it is still a chimera both theoretically and practically.⁴

To question modernity does not make one a die-hard obscurantist, revivalist, or traditionalist. I mentioned earlier that one must be equally critical of tradition as one is of modernity.

I would agree with Ashis Nandy when he says that the debate today is between the critical traditionalists and the critical modernists.⁵ However, I am not very sure how critical our Indian modernists are.

Perhaps, I should rephrase Nandy: the struggle is between those who are critical and those who are not—whether traditionalist or modernist.

STUDENT: But where does this take us as far as the issue of decolonization is concerned? Don't you think that decolonization implies a conflict between the West and India, and therefore that's where we must turn our attention?

TEACHER: Yes. But we have tried to see that this fight is not so simple and clear-cut as it seems. The West must be defined. Those aspects of it which are inimical must be resisted. At the same time we have seen how our own response is by no means uniform, how much we ourselves contribute to our continued domination, and how little we have actually done towards our own decolonization.

Notes

1. For an introduction to Krishnamurti's thought, see Mary Lutyens, ed., *The Penguin Krishnamurti Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) and *The Second Penguin Krishnamurti Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972). Also see Luis S.R. Vas, ed., *The Mind of J. Krishnamurti* (1971; 2nd. rev. ed. Bombay: Jaico, 1975) for a set of readings on Krishnamurti.

2. 'Swaraj in Ideas,' *The Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 11: 4 (October 1984): 383–93.
3. See my essay, 'Postmodernism and India: Some Preliminary Animadversions,' for India's relationship with modernity and postmodernism.
4. See Ali Shari'ati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique*, tr. R. Campbell (1980; rpt. Areekode: Islamic Foundation Press, 1987). A major problem with such critiques is that they are grounded in a fundamentalist reading of the *Quran* and offer no room to non-believers in their vision of an alternate society.
5. Ashis Nandy, 'Cultural Frames for Social Intervention: A Personal Credo,' in *The Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 11:4 (October 1984): 411–22. Nandy says: 'Today, the battle of minds rarely involves a choice between modernity and traditions in their pure forms. The ravages of the former are known and, if the past cannot be resurrected but only owned up, pure traditions too are a choice not given to us. Ultimately, the choice is between critical modernism and critical traditionalism—it is a choice between two frames of reference and two worldviews' (415).

8



Defining India

STUDENT: We have seen that decolonization is not a simple process of the overthrow of the West by India. In fact, the focus of our former dialogues has been on the internal contradictions within ourselves which hinder decolonization. But through these discussions, I have been puzzled by the problem of what India is. Can you define India? This is important because we are speaking of the decolonization of India. Therefore we need to understand what or who needs to be decolonized.

TEACHER: Quite right. Unless we have some understanding of ourselves and our culture, we shall not be able to decolonize ourselves.

In fact, a theory of decolonization such as we seek to formulate must have at least three parts: a theory of India; a theory of the West; and a theory of the nature of their encounter.

STUDENT: So, may we try to explore the nature of India here so that we have, at the end, some understanding of who we are?

TEACHER: Instead of asserting what India is, we may be better off trying to deconstruct already existing formulations which are reductive or limiting.

To begin with, I would ask: is there one India or are they many? That is, we have to be able to clarify if we believe that there is any one truth about India or if there are several truths.

STUDENT: Yes, this is crucial.

TEACHER: What we find in both Vivekananda and Aurobindo is a definition of the 'soul of India' or the 'mission of India.' Both believed that they could formulate what the essence of India was, do the same for the West, thus defining the parameters of the encounter.¹

STUDENT: Today, any talk of the 'Soul of India' sounds awkward. It seems to be a kind of essentializing which we would like to avoid.

TEACHER: So, first of all let us agree that there is not one India, but that there are many Indias. That is to say, we may or may not be able to reach *the* truth of India, but do have a record of several versions of it.

One very powerful version of India was to regard it as a spiritual civilization. This was Aurobindo's definition. Before him, Vivekananda had declared, 'Here in his blessed land, the foundation, the backbone, the life-centre is religion and religion alone. In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life' (6).

These views are similar and we are familiar, by now, with their implications: the clash of the spiritualist India vs. the materialist West.

STUDENT: And we are today trying to escape from precisely such formulations because we find them reductive.

TEACHER: Let us instead say that there is a spiritual India and a materialistic India. Further, that one does not really deny the other. Side by side the lofty metaphysical speculations of the Upanishads we have the homely and practical, this-worldly wisdom of the Jataka tales and the Panchatantra.

Similarly, even in Indian philosophy, we see contending with the authoritarian, Vedanta tradition of monism, not only the materialistic Lokayata, but several forms of Bhakti and pluralism. There is likewise a tussle between a personal and an impersonal God throughout India's religious enquiry. And alongside the quest for personal liberation we observe an urge for a better social order.²

STUDENT: Are you proposing a new theory of how we must read our past and the past of other nations of the world?

TEACHER: That sounds too ambitious. But what I am driving at is a different way of defining and understanding cultures. Instead of

trying to locate some one overriding concern of a society as both Vivekananda and Aurobindo tried, is it not possible to see cultures as constantly in a state of conflict and change, with certain forces battling other forces?

STUDENT: Are you proposing a Marxian framework which sees history as the story of class struggle?

TEACHER: Not quite, because again we would give primacy to some one factor, in this case the economic, which would in turn explain all other aspects of that culture. Similarly, I wouldn't like to see all human history in Hegelian terms, which I think Aurobindo modifies, as the evolution of the Absolute Spirit through time and matter.

STUDENT: In other words, you don't want a dominant formula, which when applied, would offer instant interpretations of all the phenomena of a particular culture.

TEACHER: Yes, I suppose I have a deep unease with any notion of a master narrative, whether Christian, Marxian, Freudian, Hindu nationalist, or otherwise which would then help decode the meaning of diverse cultural phenomena.

STUDENT: In this sense, you are post-structuralist. It is the structuralists who wished to discover the grammar of large systems such as culture in order to have a total understanding of all the particular parts of the system.

Then what is your definition of India?

TEACHER: India is whatever you want it to be. That is, from the present, informed by contemporary compulsions, that image or construct which you find convenient, strategic, useful—that construct is your India.³

STUDENT: Doubtless. That's what Vivekananda and Aurobindo did. They constructed India, when they had to, in oppositional terms with the West, as a land of spirituality versus the mechanical civilization of the West. So how will you construct your India?

TEACHER: For me, India offers a culture of plural possibilities, but also a culture with certain emphases. These multiple and overlapping concerns interact not in the hierarchical, superior-inferior manner of the so-called Great Tradition and Little Traditions—remember, that comes from an Orientalist imperative to simplify and organize the multiplicity of our culture—but in a

mutually enriching, reciprocal manner. Why should we subscribe to such a centralizing narrative when we can not only access but revel in our plurality?⁴

STUDENT: What about Indian spirituality? What about the mission of India? What about the 'Truth' of India?

TEACHER: I don't know about India's spirituality. In fact I cannot conceive of a quest for the spirit without a corresponding theory of the body and its materiality. I think that in India we always recognized the value of Kama and Artha, pleasure and material prosperity, but both these were hedged in by Dharma and Moksha. Yes, if forced to commit myself, I would agree that in Indian culture, we do not accept our materiality as the entire truth about ourselves. Now whether you call this Indian spirituality or not, I can't say.

I don't know if I believe in any spiritualizing mission for India. I cannot see India as the Teacher of the World and all that. But yes, we can be a lesson to others by being ourselves. Being ourselves is very important.

But what is equally important to bear in mind is that there is no *one* truth about India. There are several contending truths.

STUDENT: What has such a definition got to do with Svaraj and decolonization?

TEACHER: In this particular sense, decolonization for me implies more of preservation and conservation, less of overthrow or disavowal.

Just as we speak so much of ecological conservation today, I would like to speak of cultural conservation. That is, we must speak of the cultural ecology. Just as we have a natural habitat and environment, we have cultural habitat and environment. Decolonization for me implies a preservation of our cultural habitat. And just think of how valuable our resources are in the total 'memory of the world.'⁵

As Aurobindo said in *Foundations*, a great 'diminution of the world's riches would result from the disappearance of the distinctive Indian civilization' (19).

STUDENT: Does this imply a wholesale acceptance of tradition, including things like untouchability, oppression, Hindu superstitions, and so on?

TEACHER: Of course not. We've already stressed the need to

question traditional beliefs, practices, rituals, ideas. But questioning does not imply only rejection. Questioning may lead to modification, adaptation, creative mutation. But what I am against is the dumping of tradition and its substitution by some hybrid modernity, which is both indigestible and detrimental.

STUDENT: Would you then define India in terms of tradition and the West in terms of modernity?

TEACHER: Obviously, both are not opposed to one another in that clear-cut manner. There is a tradition in and of modernity, just as there is a modernity and a modernizing impulse within tradition.⁶

STUDENT: You have already identified India as (a) plural and (b) traditional. Would you like to add to this?

TEACHER: Yes. For me, there is an Indian way of thinking. This way is not restricted to India, but we have better access to it than the West does. Our thinking is not logocentric and exclusive, but symbolic or inclusive. This has major implications on how the two civilizations evolve and develop.⁷

The West develops through substitution. It rewrites itself again and again. The same fundamental text, at the source, seems to be rewritten again and again in new languages.

India develops through accommodation. New ideas may supplant older ones, but the older ones linger on. They are allowed to co-exist with what is new.

Thus, Indian reality is always contemporaneous. That past matters to us which is still living.

The West is literal-minded. India is metaphorical-minded.

The West moves from the past to the future; India moves from the present to the present

To sum up, India represents a space in which certain life forms and life choices are available.

STUDENT: Coming back to the question of decolonization, how would you say that Svaraj in Ideas must be achieved?

TEACHER: Svaraj in Ideas means the protection and continuation of Indian ways of thinking, seeing, perceiving, and experiencing reality. It means protecting and fending off disruptive and appropriative cultural and intellectual practices from the West. It means adapting our imported knowledge systems to indigenous modes of living. It means challenging Western ideas about self

and society. It means finding traditional ways of empowering ourselves and even attacking our adversary. It means strengthening ourselves from within.

It also means adapting, assimilating, remoulding those Western ideas which will help us in our goals.⁸

STUDENT: I propose to come to the latter point later, but before ending this dialogue, can you tell me how the definition of India that you have provided helps in achieving decolonization?

TEACHER: If India is a space for plurality, tradition, and metaphoric thinking, then it offers an alternative to the Western way of life. One element in this plurality may well be a modernity of the Western variety, as we are increasingly observing. But it should not imply the *loss* or a destruction of the other, older value systems.

Our plurality should not be converted to modernity, but it should not exclude modernity either.

Cultural plurality, inclusiveness, variety, and compatibility—this is India. Svaraj is one way to ensure that it remains so. A recolonization would substitute this plurality with one dominant version of global modernism.

For me, India is a space where a spiritual conception of life can co-exist with a materialistic one. It is not a place where the spiritual is the dominant and thus India's gift to the world.

The alternative that India offers is not spirituality versus materialism, but the choice of both versus the forced acceptance of one.

STUDENT: You have defined India as a plural space, but if you examine the Indian past or rather Hindu past, we observe exclusions of all sorts.

TEACHER: This is one of the profound contradictions of Indian culture which Vivekananda identified over a hundred years back. In theory, we are the most plural, tolerant, even egalitarian culture; but in practice, the most narrow-minded, hidebound, and oppressive. Vedanta, for instance, holds that everything—stone, plant, insect, reptile, bird, and animal—is Brahman. But we treated a large section of our population as untouchables!⁹

STUDENT: The theory was totally divorced from actuality and, in fact, supported the status quo. Theoretically, everybody was Brahman regardless of how you treated them. So what difference did it make whether you oppressed them or not!

TEACHER: Therefore, one of the challenges of the social reform movements was to show the incompatibility of a doctrine of emancipation with the daily reality of oppression. Gandhi was the culmination of this movement. He was not the first to speak of truth and non-violence, but he was certainly the first in recent history to make their practice incompatible with any form of oppression in society.¹⁰

Our theory is perfect; it's the implementation which is not just faulty, but sometimes completely contradictory to the theory. But does that mean that the theory is useless and therefore to be discarded?

STUDENT: Then would you say that not being literal-minded, which is one of our strengths, also leads to all kinds of hypocrisies, adjustments, and self-deceptions?

TEACHER: Yes, I am afraid you are right. However, our job will be to show that the weaknesses are not fundamental to this mode of thinking but a lapse.

STUDENT: One last question. If you define India in this manner, then how do we differ from other 'underdeveloped' societies which also offer similar alternatives to global modernity?

TEACHER: There has been in the past talk of a special mission or destiny for India. Both Vivekananda and Aurobindo thought India had a special role to play in the world. I am not sure I would take such a stand. But I do think we are more fortunate than others, have greater resources than others to preserve our culture and to resist modernity.

STUDENT: It seems to me that few other countries in the world have our cultural resources, few have a viable civilization of over five thousand years behind them.

TEACHER: Even countries like Japan and China with similar resources have consciously repudiated their difference with Europe in favour of a Western style modernity. This is also true of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and, to some extent, of South Korea. Unless they do something about this, their past will no longer be living; it will be museumized and fossilized like the Western past.

STUDENT: But what about the Islamic world? Hasn't there been a revival of traditional values there? Aren't they holding out against modernity?

TEACHER: Frankly, I have not been inspired by their experiments,

though I am not without sympathy with some of them. This may be because their best minds are suppressed; most Islamic countries, as we know, are not democracies. They hardly have a tradition of intellectual freedom and enquiry.

Often, I see in these countries a terrible confusion regarding the meaning of tradition. The worst aspects of tradition are adhered to or revived in order to provide an alternate identity from the 'Satanic West.' But all the political, economic, and philosophic structures are penetrated through and through with Western modernity. In other words, their modernity enables them to keep up a pretence of traditionalism. Such traditionalism is merely superficial, going no deeper than the *chador* or the Arab national dress. It has no cultural or philosophical vigour. It cannot respond to the West on equal terms or pretend to offer an alternative.

I also see this confusion in most countries where Islamic fundamentalists have captured power. Iran is the classic example, while Afghanistan is the newest of them. Do you know that while several Hindu families have been driven out of Afghanistan, a large number of Afghan refugees in India don't want to go back!

STUDENT: Can you give a specific instance of the failure of an Islamic critique of the West?

TEACHER: Perhaps, the best example would be the work of Maulana Mawdudi of Pakistan. He was one of the most respected Islamic ideologues of our times. Mawdudi's critique of the West is both rigorous and rational, but the problem is that it is always oppositional and logocentric. For him the fight is between the true way, which is Islam, and *Jahiliyah* or ignorance. The way to counter *Jahiliyah* is through *Tajdid*—an effort to re-establish a pure and pristine version of Islam. The basis of which, of course, is the *Quran* itself, but whose true interpretation is possible only by leaders like Mawdudi."

STUDENT: So we are back to theocracy, authority, and fundamentalism.

But don't the religions of the world share a common core which represents the traditional values of the world, values which are threatened by modernity?

TEACHER: I think it is very important to remember that there is a space for enlightenment outside religion, within modernity itself in fact."

However, religion is a valuable source of a strong critique of modernity and materialism. The leaders of the nineteenth century counter-culture in Europe, from Blake to Tolstoy, often used religious ideas to counter the dominant trends of their day. Moreover, if you define religion the way Raimundo Pannikar does as 'the way to liberation,' then Marxism, humanism, scientism, or any 'ism' which 'makes life more worthwhile is a religion.'¹³

STUDENT: But are you also not implying that religion and spirituality—in the broad, liberating, and enlightening sense—are unavailable outside India?

TEACHER: Of course not, though I would hazard an informed opinion that a continuous, authentic tradition exists more abundantly in India than anywhere else.

STUDENT: But in that case, you are again making India a special case, the last bastion of spirituality in the modern world. This is not much different from the role of the spiritual vanguard which Vivekananda, Aurobindo and others assigned to India.

TEACHER: Well, I suppose, there is no escape from it. We are special! But, seriously, each country, each culture, has its distinctive role and contribution to make—either positive or negative. Why should we be squeamish about defining for ourselves where we stand?

I mean, let's be as tentative as possible in claiming any special status for India, but let's not be apologetic about celebrating what is ours. I cannot think of any other country which has produced, in the last 150 years, mystics and thinkers like Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his disciples, Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Ram Tirtha, Paramahansa Yogananda, Ramana Maharashi, Shirdi Sai Baba, Atmananda Guru, J. Krishnamurti, Anandamayi Ma, and a whole host of lesser known swamis, sannyasis, godmen, yogis, sufis, and so on. I do think that this phenomenon is truly remarkable.¹⁴

We must also remember, however, that perhaps nowhere else has as much falsehood, humbug, hypocrisy, ugliness, or illegality been allowed to flourish in the name of religion.

STUDENT: Look, either you say that India is a special case or you say that India's problems are similar to those of several other countries. Either way, you'll have to define these problems and propose a way out.

Similarly, whether you regard the West as strife-torn or

single-minded (the latter it certainly is not), you'll have to define our relation to it. But I can't see how you can have it both ways!

TEACHER: Personally, I don't see any contradiction between considering India to be specially endowed spiritually and seeing it as beset by problems typical of other Third World countries. Indian culture, civilization, and philosophy have the former potential; the nation state suffers from the latter compulsions.

There are a multitude of Indians, as I pointed out earlier. The question is, which one do you wish to invoke?

I, for one, would want the freedom to be flexible in my references and invocations.

Notes

1. See Swami Nirvedananda, ed., *Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems* and Aurobindo's *Foundations of Indian Culture*. Also see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism* (1901; rpt. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1981); R. Lipsey, ed., *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers*, 3 vols. (Princeton: UP, 1977) and *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work* (Princeton: UP, 1977).
2. See Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya's *In Defence of Materialism in Ancient India* (Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1989) for an introduction to the place of materialism in Indian philosophical traditions and the politics of this tradition. See Ainslie T. Embree and Stephen Hay, eds., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 2 vols. (1958; rev. ed. 1988; rpt. New Delhi: Viking, 1991) for an idea of the breadth and plurality of Indian thought.
3. See Eric Hobsbawm's Introduction to *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1983) and Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India* (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Library, Occasional Papers, 2nd. series, August 1991). Also see Bernard Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971) for a typology of approaches to understanding societies, cultures, and civilizations.
4. See Robert Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture* (Chicago: UP, 1956), in which he speaks of the interactions between 'a great tradition of the reflective few' and 'a little tradition of the largely unreflective many' (41). For India as a plural space, see Veena Das, 'Difference and Division as Designs for Life,' in Carla Borden, ed., *Contemporary India: Essays on the Uses of Tradition* (Delhi: OUP, 1989): 45-56.
5. The phrase is the title of the UNESCO's worldwide project to help preserve

humankind's rich and varied cultural heritage for future generations. The UNESCO is trying to promote normative and legal action for cultural preservation across the globe. See 'UNESCO hails India's expertise,' report in *Times of India*, 24 March 1992: 5.

See Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

6. See Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Introduction to Indian Civilization* (1972; rpt. Chicago: UP, 1980) and Singer, ed., *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (1959; rpt. Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 1975). Also see Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India* (Chicago: UP, 1983).
7. There have been many attempts to define and contrast Indian and Western ways of thinking. See, for instance, Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree* (London: OUP, 1971); Hajime Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (Honolulu: East-West Centre, 1964); and Wilhelm Halbfass' monumental *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988).

It was D.D. Kosambi who said 'India is a country of tremendous survivals.' See *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline* (1970; rpt. New Delhi: Vikas, 1981): 34.

8. Such ideas have been in the air for years, but there is very little actual practice of them. An exception is Ramachandra Gandhi's *I Am Thou: Meditations on the Truth of India* (Poona: Indian Philosophical Quarterly Publications, 1984). The book is also an ongoing redefinition of India's religious ideas and symbols. Also see *Tradition, Modernity and Svaraj*, a journal with great promise, which unfortunately died after its first issue in 1990. The Editorial to this issue, 'Something Seriously Amiss' by K.J. Shah, is not only seminal and stimulating, but also sets the agenda for such a project.
9. See my essay, 'Vivekananda's *Letters*: An Introductory Reading,' (174-85) and other essays in *Perspectives on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Tradition*, ed. M. Sivaramakrishna and Sumita Roy (New Delhi: Sterling, 1991).
10. See Acharya J.B. Kripalani, *Gandhian Thought* (Chandigarh: Panjab University Publication Bureau, 1964): 44.
11. For an introduction to Mawdudi's thought, see Khurshid Ahmad and Zafar Ishaq Ansari, *Maulana Mawdudi* (Aligarh: Crescent Publishing Co., 1979). Also see *Nations Rise and Fall: Why?* (1971; rpt. Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1990) and *The Economic Problem of Man and its Solution* (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba Islami, 1989) by Sayyid Abdul A'la Mawdudi.
12. The point was made by Ramachandra Gandhi in a seminar on Hinduism at Max Muller Bhavan, Delhi, 3 December 1991.
13. 'Keys to the Kingdom,' an interview with Raimundo Pannikar by Darryl D'Monte, *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 20 October-5 November 1988: 38-41.
14. See Kamakhya Prasad Singh Choudhury, *Modern Indian Mysticism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1981).

Also see Kathleen Raine, *India Seen Afar* (London: Gran Books, 1990) for a Westerner's view of India as a spiritual continent.

9



Defining the West

STUDENT: From our foregoing discussion, it seems pretty certain that you wouldn't like to see the West merely in oppositional terms to India.

TEACHER: Yes, it is important to see how the West is not a monolith, but a divided entity.

STUDENT: Come to think of it, our last dialogue mentioned Vivekananda and Aurobindo, but not Gandhi. Why?

TEACHER: It's very important to bring in Gandhi into this India versus the West debate. Unlike Vivekananda or Aurobindo, Gandhi saw the conflict not so much between the East and the West as between a moral and a material civilization, between India and modernity.

In his letter of 14 October 1909, to H.S.L. Polak he sets forth his views pretty clearly:

1. There is no impassable barrier between East and West.
2. There is no such thing as Western or European civilization, but there is a modern civilization; which is purely material.
3. The people of Europe, before they were touched by modern civilization, had much in common with the people of the East, anyhow the people of India; and even today, Europeans who are not touched by modern civilization are far better able to mix with Indians than the offspring of that civilization.

4. It is not the British people who are ruling India, but it is modern civilization, through its railways, telegraphs, telephones, and almost every invention which has been claimed to be a triumph of civilization.¹

STUDENT: It seems that Gandhi refused to see the problem in an East versus West light. He wished, if possible, to divide the West against itself.

TEACHER: Right. If you see the issue merely in an oppositional frame of reference, you begin to hate the West, not understand it. Today, they are trying to escape this trap by substituting 'East-West' by 'North-South.'

STUDENT: That seems also to be geographically more accurate. Then why have we persisted in the older usage?

TEACHER: Well, 'North-South' has an economic, while 'East-West' a cultural emphasis. Because our dialogue concentrates on culture, I thought we might continue to use the older terms even as we redefine them.

STUDENT: In other words, we must deconstruct the West too, just as we deconstructed India.

TEACHER: Yes. That's the idea.

STUDENT: But you defined the West as being linear, literal, and modern as opposed to India being plural, co-existential, and figurative.

TEACHER: If the West is *primarily* literal, logocentric, or modern that is because they suppressed all dissent, all alternative forms of perception and experience. It is not because these alternative forms did not exist.

STUDENT: How did this suppression take place?

TEACHER: It is the very efficiency of the West which has resulted in the destruction of alternate approaches to life. The use of reason in a particular manner—say in the form of human engineering—gave the West a tremendous developmental edge. They industrialized rapidly and still hold the edge in technology. This dominance requires not only certain kinds of talents, but also a very efficient social organization. This totally efficient organization of society according to 'scientific' principles makes it very hard for any resistance to survive. All resistance is liquidated or co-opted; Antonio Gramsci called this process of domination hegemony.²

STUDENT: Then how is the West divided?

TEACHER: It is divided ethically as well as ideologically. There is a 'good' West and a 'bad' West, just as there is 'good' India and a 'bad' India. The 'good' West has always believed in a non-materialistic ideal; it has had a tradition which was not logocentric, but mystical. This is the truly 'Christian' side of the West, going back to the original tussle between different forms of early Christianity—the Pauline versus the Gnostic. The former, of course, won. The latter didn't lose completely. It went underground, surfacing in the form of an unbearable disenchantment with the mechanistic concept of human life. Even today, we see versions of this disenchantment in counter-culture movements, like the hippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the ecological movement of today. There is also in the West a great curiosity about Eastern 'spirituality.' All these aspects are a part of the other West.

What better point than this to introduce Rabindranath Tagore into our dialogue? In his lectures on nationalism he said, 'When we truly know that Europe which is great and good, we can effectively save ourselves from the Europe which is mean and grasping.'

STUDENT: Did India come into contact with this 'good' West?

TEACHER: Of course it did. It is erroneous to think that the only West we encountered was the cruel, the predatory, and the colonizing West. We also found allies in that West which was tired of itself, which was looking for alternatives to its own logocentricism.

STUDENT: Can you give us examples?

TEACHER: When Vivekananda went to Chicago, he discovered many Americans genuinely interested in the philosophical ideals of India. Even prior to that, Rammohun Roy discovered a great similarity between the Unitarian doctrine and his Brahmo version of Hinduism. Even today, Unitarian chapels in the USA often offer a forum for alternative religious persuasions such as Zen and Yoga. California and Colorado have monasteries and missions from all over the world. There are many people there who are interested in Eastern philosophy and religion. You find a similar interest in other countries of Europe.⁴

STUDENT: Then there is a very important story here that has not yet been told fully, the story of India's influence on the West.

TEACHER: Indeed, we are obsessed with how they colonized and

influenced us, but not interested enough in how we also changed them.

There are at least two aspects to India's influence on the West. One is the direct impact wherein Indians went to the West, themselves carrying Indian ideas. Here too there is a distinction between missionaries and cultural ambassadors who only visited the West from India but did not settle there permanently, and settlers or immigrants who now live in the West and have transmitted our culture and thought.

The other sort of influence is indirect; this concerns the West's own interpretations and uses of India. There is quite a long tradition of this too. Not only Emerson and Thoreau, but Whitman, Melville, and the transcendentalists were also influenced by India. This has been well documented. Similarly, India's influence on England, particularly in literature, has been analyzed in books like *India and the Romantic Imagination* by John Drew. The Germans, of course, have also been influenced. There is a long tradition of Sanskrit scholarship in Germany. France, too, has been receptive to Indian ideas and culture. Through them other European nations have received Indian ideas. It is possible to argue that Europe's discovery of India had an important role to play in the Enlightenment.⁵

STUDENT: But how does this influence help us? How does it show that the West is divided?

TEACHER: It shows us that cultural exchange is not unidirectional, but bidirectional. It shows us that when two countries, peoples, cultures clash, not just one, but both are affected. Kosambi called it 'reciprocal acculturation,' a phrase of great cognitive value.⁶

If the West reshaped us, then we also reshaped them. Or even if you don't want to use the active voice you would say that they were reshaped by us. It is precisely the difference between active and passive influence that makes us ignore the latter and over-emphasize the former.

STUDENT: Now that you say it, I realize that many modern writers have been directly involved in Indian thought or social reality—Eliot, Yeats, Orwell, Huxley, Forster, Isherwood—the list reads like a who's who of twentieth century English literature. All these writers have written on Indian themes.

TEACHER: And there are others too—Somerset Maugham, Thomas

Mann, Hermann Hess, Gunther Grass, Octavio Paz, Allen Ginsberg, and so on.⁷

STUDENT: And think of all the Europeans who became Indianized and stayed on in India, like C.F. Andrews, Mira Behn, or Mira Richard, better known as the Mother of Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

TEACHER: You didn't mention Sister Nivedita. The Ramakrishna Mission has had several European followers. In more recent times, Westerners have been attracted to Osho Rajneesh and to Satya Sai Baba.⁸

STUDENT: How does this other West help us?

TEACHER: If nothing else, it earns us a lot of foreign exchange! But seriously, even at the height of colonialism, there were conscientious objectors within the West. The Quakers, for instance, worked very hard for the abolition of slavery. Both the press and the liberal opinion helped us in our fight for Independence.

Even the much maligned Orientalists played a crucial role in the Indian renaissance. They helped us redefine for ourselves what our past was. Think of the tremendous impact of movement such as Theosophy and of its charismatic leader, Annie Besant. Both enabled us to deglamorize the West and regain confidence in ourselves.⁹

STUDENT: In other words, if the West is divided, we can seek alliances with a section of it against itself.

TEACHER: Exactly. Just as the British could not rule us without a class of native collaborators, we could not overthrow them without support from a section of the oppressed West. The civil rights movement saw one such identification between the oppressed in America and the oppressed in India.¹⁰ The Indian majority can find its ally in a Western minority; just as, earlier, the Empire found its ally in the comprador minority in India.

A more complex definition of the West is imperative. Otherwise we flatten it into some kind of bogeyman or goblin. We will thereby lock ourselves into a confrontationist model of decolonization and thus narrow our own choices and options. By denying the West its redeeming humanity, we shall deny ourselves our humanity too. As Gandhi said so eloquently in *Hind Swaraj*: 'We who seek justice will have to do justice to others' (23).

STUDENT: So then, how do you define the West?

TEACHER: The West is a construct which is in strategic opposition

to India. Though divided, its dominant self can be identified with the system of world capitalism which it controls. This system has made a heavy investment in modernity, a product of scientific materialism.

So defined, ultimately the West is not a monolithic structure, but a loose federation of interests. It is really an appropriating agency. Whatever world capitalism appropriates becomes Western, whether it is Bakhtin or Yoga.

STUDENT: This is a very original definition. Normally, we see the West as real—existing geographically, politically, and culturally.

TEACHER: Yes, this appropriating agency is located primarily in Western Europe and America but not confined to these areas. It is more a conceptual entity whose main menace derives from its totalizing tendencies. It will not allow competing views of reality to survive. Its machine steam-rollers all alternative life choices and offers instead a phony freedom of choice within capitalism. The choice is between, say, one brand of toothpaste or another; one TV channel or another; one aspirin or another; one car or another—but not between a toothpaste and a neem twig; not between TV and folk art; not between aspirin and a home remedy; not between a car and a bicycle. This is the choice that India still offers.

STUDENT: But is the dominant aspect of the West itself all bad? Have we not got science and technology, political institutions, education, and the values associated with these from the West?

TEACHER: Doubtless. But all these have been mixed blessings. Gandhi realized this probably more clearly than anyone else. The technological advancement which the West offered us was a package deal, not a onetime import. It reduces us to total dependency. You cannot import a computer without importing the values it stands for. The Arab world, for instance, lives in near total ignorance of the values which undergrid the technology it imports. This will insure their continued dependency and slavery.

For us in India, the problem is different. We have accepted several aspects of modernity but not sufficiently absorbed the values that go with them. Hence, our institutions are inefficient and ineffective. We continue to be second-raters.

The point is that we must be clear which aspects of the West we wish to accept and which reject. Accordingly, we must ensure

that in what we accept we are the best, as good as the West itself. That will make us self-sufficient. That is Svaraj. On the other hand, reject those we don't need and not hanker after them. It is only this clarity that will save us.

STUDENT: So defined, the West is not entirely an adversary; it is also a teacher.

TEACHER: Our radical friends will have a hard time accepting this, but I am afraid we shall have to admit it. We have a lot to learn from the West, just as we have a lot to *unlearn*. Unless we are clear about what we need to learn and what to unlearn, we'll continue to be miserable and oppressed.

Notes

1. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 9; quoted in K. Swaminathan and C.N. Patel, eds., *A Gandhi Reader* (Madras: Orient Longman, 1988): 6.
2. This idea is akin to Weber's theory of rationalization. See H.H. Gerth and C.W. Mills, eds., *From Max Weber* (London: Routledge, 1949).

For how the dominant ideology silences dissent, see W.L. Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: Antonio Gramsci's Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) and J.V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (New York: OUP, 1987).

3. See Rabindranath Tagore's *Nationalism* (1917; rpt. Delhi: Rupa and Co., 1992): 43.

For an account of Western mysticism, see Evelyn Underhill's classic, *Mysticism* (1911; rpt. London: Methuen, 1977). Thomas Merton is a good example of a contemporary Western practitioner; see, for instance, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (1971; rpt. London: Unwin, 1980). A useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources is Mary Ann Bowman's *Western Mysticism: A Guide to Basic Works* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978).

On the counter-culture in America, see Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969); also see Laurence Vesey, *The Communal Experience: Anarchist and Mystical Counter-Cultures in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

4. See Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981); Swami Nikhilananda, *Swami Vivekananda: A Biography* (1953; rpt. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964) and Eleanor Stark, *The Gift Unopened: A New American Revolution* (Portsmouth: Peter E. Randall

- Publisher, 1988). Also see Carl Thomas Jackson, 'The Swami in America: A History of the Ramakrishna Movement in the United States, 1893-1960,' Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1964. For an account of Hinduism in the US, see Wendell Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America* (New York: Beacon Press, 1930). For a remarkable narrative of an Indian yogi's life in India and abroad, see Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946; rpt. Bombay: Jaico, 1985). The book documents Yogananda's interaction with some of the leading counter-culturists in the West. Also see Spencer Lavan, *Unitarians and India: A Study in Encounter and Response* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977).
5. See Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Chicago: CP, 1965); John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Delhi: OUP, 1988); R.K. Gupta, *The Great Encounter: A Study of Indo-American Literary and Cultural Relations* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1986); Dale Riepe, *The Philosophy of India and its Impact on American Thought* (Springfield, II.: Charles C. Thomas, 1970); and Leslie A. Willson, *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 1964).
 6. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India*, 46.
 7. See, for instance, Frederic I. Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1930); V.K. Chari, *Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1964); K.S. Narayana Rao, 'T.S. Eliot and the Bhagavad-Gita,' *American Quarterly* 15 (Winter 1963): 572-78; Christopher Isherwood, *My Guru and his Disciple* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980); Paul Portuges, *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1978).
 8. See, for instance, K.L. Seshagiri Rao, *Mahatma Gandhi and C.F. Andrews: A Study in Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (Patiala: Punjabi UP, 1969), Prema Nandakumar, *The Mother* (1977; rpt. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1985), V.K. Gokak, *Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba: The Man and the Avatar* (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1975), and Shireen Jamali, ed., *The Mind of Bhagawan Shree Rajneesh* (1974; 2nd. rpt. Bombay: Jaico, 1983).
 9. See Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: UCP, 1980) and Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography* (Delhi: OUP, 1991).
 10. See Nissim Ezekiel, ed., *The Martin Luther King Reader* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969). The famous 'Letter from Birmingham Jail' is not included in Ezekiel's anthology but can be found in King's *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: New American Library, 1964). Also see E.T. Clayton, *Martin Luther King: The Peaceful Warrior* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

10



Indo-Western Encounters

STUDENT: I think we have come to a crucial juncture in our dialogue on decolonization. We saw how much decolonization, especially in the realm of culture and ideas, consists in preservation and conservation; in finding ways of maintaining our continuity with our past; and in warding off the totalizing power of Western modernity.

But what aspects of the West should we accept? And what are the processes of this acceptance?

TEACHER: Even in this regard I am afraid we no longer have much of a choice. We have already, whether deliberately or confusedly, gone quite a distance towards modernity and the West. I think before we consider our options in the future, we must try to understand how far gone we are. That is, instead of speaking of choice, we must once again speak of understanding.

STUDENT: The language of choice is spoken by the West; we in the Third World must content ourselves with the language of understanding.

TEACHER: So let us enquire how far we have gone in our embrace of the West.

STUDENT: Once again, what better point of reference than *Hind Swaraj*?

TEACHER: In it Gandhi advocates a complete rejection of 'modern civilization.' He is against the railways, against lawyers and

doctors, against mechanization. Even in his own time, such views were considered too unreasonable by even sympathizers such as Gokhale. Aurobindo defined 'modern civilization' more specifically as 'scientific materialism', thereby exposing its metaphysical underpinnings. Both had a deep abhorrence for this civilization. Aurobindo, though, accepted a whole set of liberal values, including parliamentary government, democracy, human rights, and so on. Gandhi, on the other hand, had little respect for Parliament as an institution. After Independence he was for the abolition of the Congress party. He never joined any government in his life. The British Parliament, that mother of all Parliaments, was dismissed by him as a sterile woman and a prostitute.¹

STUDENT: What is the gist of these criticisms? They sound insane and totally impracticable to me.

TEACHER: The gist of these criticisms is Gandhi's shrewd awareness and abhorrence of the system which made 'modern civilization' possible. This system was, of course, world capitalism. In his total and radical rejection of it, Gandhi was far more revolutionary than any leftist of his time. Gandhi, like Carlyle and Tolstoy, knew that once sucked in, India would never be able to extricate herself from world capitalism. You might say that his rejection was romantic and symbolic, much like Carlyle's prophetic but futile critique of capitalism from within England. Earlier, the Romantic poets had already expressed their deep anguish at the impending social system which capitalism and industrialization were ushering in, with its alienation, exploitation, and dehumanization. So Gandhi's rejection of modern civilization was a very significant position.

STUDENT: But wasn't it doomed to failure?

TEACHER: Yes and no. Because Gandhi's rejection was not *merely* romantic. He had an alternative model of development to offer in which a self-sufficient village would be the backbone of the Indian economy. This model, however impractical, was never given a fair trial. Nehru did not agree with Gandhi. He had a different model for development, a socialistic model of rapid and heavy industrialization, controlled by centralized planning.

The point is that even in Gandhi's own times, India had already entered capitalism in a big way. There was sufficient industrialization to indicate which direction India would take.

Gandhi knew he could not easily undo all this. He also knew that one could not have a fanatical hatred for machines. He knew that even the *charkha*, which he advocated as the symbol of self-reliance and panacea for India's economic recovery, was a machine. Gandhi said that even the body itself was a machine. But his point was that just as the body was a means to an end, something which enabled the soul to realize itself and do noble deeds, a machine was merely a tool, a device to serve men. When the machine enslaved and dominated man, it would become a devil's engine.²

Gandhi's terms were moral, not economical. But still, the enslaving by the machine that he spoke of was what anguished Marx too. Gandhi's critique was therefore radical.

STUDENT: But how is it useful today? Have we not turned our backs on his views?

TEACHER: To all appearances, yes. Today we have accepted modern technology in a big way. We have accepted Western medicine. We have accepted industrialization. We have accepted consumerism. And so on. But even here isn't there a difference between us and the West? Are we not still less possessed by world capitalism and its uniform culture than the West is? Hasn't our 'backwardness' preserved traditional handicrafts, arts, textiles, alternate medicine systems and so on?

In other words, again with respect to modernization, we see a co-existence of older, traditional forms alongside imported ones. We do not see the dominance and substitution of the former by the latter.

As long as this remains, we will need Gandhi. We will need him as a constant reminder to avoid going further into the embrace of the West. We will need him as a warning which will help us redefine and indigenize even imported forms and technologies.

STUDENT: I find your analysis of the co-existence of the Nehruvian and the Gandhian, of the Indian and the Western very interesting. Perhaps, it is this hybrid culture which best defines what India is today.

TEACHER: Yes, we said this earlier. But notice how the Gandhian is always identified with the poor, the dispossessed, the small, the cheap, and the rural. Think of khadi, for instance, as opposed to Ambani's Vimal. There are different values embodied in each. Look at how much money one eats up, and how little

the other needs to survive. A meter of synthetic textile costs about ten times as much as khadi. It is probably hundreds of times more expensive to produce, considering the cost of heavy machinery, import bills, high salaries, marketing costs, and so on. Who pays for all this? The people of India do, directly or indirectly. It is the financial institutions, who are the trustees of the people's wealth, which bear more than 50 percent of the costs of the private sector. The public sector, despite an even heavier investment, is not even profitable.

STUDENT: How does this narrative on modernization or industrialization relate to our central concern with decolonization?

TEACHER: Decolonization in this context would entail a constant scrutiny of the terms on which modernization and industrialization proceed. It would involve a questioning of projects like big dams and heavy import of technology. It would, contrarily, also involve a strengthening of alternative modes of production, rural movements, cooperatives, and so on. It would even involve an export of some indigenous ideas and practices like the Chipko movement, for instance.

STUDENT: Either way, the state would have a major role to play as the chief broker and arbiter in this East-West encounter, and likewise in the process of decolonization.

TEACHER: Doubtless, and it is to this that we need to turn our attention soon. But prior to that we must understand what our narrative of the East-West encounter shows us.

There is no 'pure' East or 'pure' West'. Each has been influenced by the other—either actively or passively, either by a direct penetration or by a gradual seepage. Moreover, both have in some way been reshaped by this influence. Both have redefined themselves and their Other in the process.

Therefore, it is not possible to adopt a totally confrontationist posture vis-à-vis the West. To reject the West entirely would be both impossible and undesirable. Aurobindo realized this long back and declared as much in his *Foundations of Indian Culture*.³

Hence, the real question for us is the extent and the terms of our acceptance of the West. And these have to be negotiated and redefined from time to time.

Notes

1. See Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and Sri Aurobindo's *The Foundations of Indian Culture*.
2. See K.G. Mashruwala, *Towards Sarvodaya Order* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1971) for a critique of the Indian economic policies from a Gandhian perspective. For an introduction to Nehru's economic ideas, see ch. 3, 'Socialism and Planning,' in Arjun Dev, compl., *Jawaharlal Nehru: Years of Struggle* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1989): 119–71. For Gandhi's qualifications of his views on machinery, see Iyer, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 397–99 and 401–2.
3. See Notes to ch. 9 for references on the intellectual, religious, and cultural exchanges between India and the West. Also see K.M. Panikkar, *Hinduism and the West: A Study in Challenge and Response* (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1964).



India and the West: Terms and Conditions of Interaction

STUDENT: Assuming that we have no option but to accept the West, then how far should we go?

TEACHER: Again, Aurobindo has given us an answer in his essay, 'Indian Culture and External Influence' (*Foundations*, 385–94). He lays down the following theoretical framework:

1. It is impossible for any culture to be entirely self-sufficient or completely closed from the outside world. Such a culture will atrophy and die.
2. Foreign influences must be assimilated into the receiving culture so that they challenge, rejuvenate, and energize it.
3. As opposed to this, a self-defeating imitation saps the strength of the receiving culture and destroys it.
4. To solve this problem, Aurobindo speaks of the method of 'selective assimilation' as a way of enriching oneself from another culture (*Foundations*, 392).¹

STUDENT: I like the phrase 'selective assimilation'. Isn't that what we have been doing ourselves?

TEACHER: The question is whether the assimilation has always been beneficial, whether the selection has been right, whether the end result has strengthened or weakened us.

STUDENT: With respect to academics, we have already seen that there has been not so much assimilation as imitation; that it has not been selective so much as total; that the end result has weakened rather than strengthened us.

TEACHER: Perhaps, I wouldn't go so far as that, but I will agree with you by and large.

STUDENT: What about the other areas?

TEACHER: You can see that in specific areas like foodgrain production, we have made tremendous gains. Higher yielding varieties, the use of fertilizer, more efficient farming techniques, the prediction of weather, and so on have helped us to become self-sufficient in food—the basic step in any process of decolonization. But here too, we should remember the increasing criticism being directed at industrial farming.²

In most of the other areas the gains, perhaps, haven't been as significant. We have lagged behind in providing the basic amenities to our citizens; we have not been able to remove the glaring disparities in income levels and quality of life; we have not been able to control population.

STUDENT: Again, the state comes in here as the primary agency of planning and development. But I wanted to ask you about Aurobindo's model of selective assimilation. Is it applicable today? What are its shortcomings? And how does it relate to decolonization?

TEACHER: The model is a very good one and is applicable today. But, as we asked earlier, who decides the terms of the assimilation and who selects what is to be assimilated?

STUDENT: If the terms are set by the West or its agents in India, then we will continue getting a bad bargain.

TEACHER: Precisely. That is what neocolonialism is all about, isn't it? The terms of exchange are always unequal, always loaded in favour of the West.

STUDENT: Then how do we tackle this problem?

TEACHER: The problem can be summed up in a nutshell: If power—economic, political, military—confers superiority, then the West is superior to us. How do we empower ourselves? How do we bridge the gap between us and them? How do we ensure that our terms of exchange are equitable?

STUDENT: This, again, seems like a Catch-22. For them: power confers superiority; superiority confers power. And for us:

powerlessness means inferiority; inferiority means powerlessness. How do we break the vicious circle?

TEACHER: There is only one way to do it. Change the definitions somewhere along the line. Refuse to believe, for instance, that economic or military power automatically confers ethical or cultural superiority. That is what Gandhi did. He used spiritual might to turn a weakness into a strength. Ahimsa was the natural weapon of those who were unarmed, those who were used to suffering themselves rather than making others suffer. He converted these very weaknesses into strengths—instead of suffering as victims, he made us suffer as satyagrahis, as rebels. The same anguish that we suffered as the oppressed was turned into a weapon against the oppressors. The passive became the active, the lack of power became its very source.

STUDENT: I think we have reached that very point of breakthrough—of entering a lucid space—you spoke of earlier.

TEACHER: The breakthrough comes when we understand and accept the position in which we really are, instead of fighting it or denying it. And equally important, we must then face our responsibilities and strike back. Aurobindo called it an aggressive defence (*Foundations*, 21).

STUDENT: Could you apply this to our quest for decolonization or Svaraj?

TEACHER: Simply speaking, the Indian intellectuals will have to accept responsibility and respond positively to the situation they find themselves in.

There is no use moping and groaning about our powerlessness, about post- or neocolonialism, if after all this complaining you do nothing to remedy the situation.

STUDENT: Then why are we so immobile, so confused, so apparently helpless?

TEACHER: Could it be because we have neither earned nor worked out our positions? We feel like interlopers in our own country, pretenders to the intellectual thrones that we occupy by default.

Indian intellectuals always feel guilty about their place in society and confused about their mission. Unlike the intellectuals of yesteryear who fought the British, suffered untold inconveniences for their views, earning their spurs in direct contact with their society, the present-day intellectuals find themselves with a comfortable sinecure.

Our problem is that we refuse to identify what our self-interest is. This leads us to assume all kinds of postures of revolt and revolution, which are actually nothing but solemn humbug and parodies of received attitudes. Only when we analyze the causes of our guilt and confusion, only when we rise to the challenge of facing them, only when we stop shifting grounds and take a stand—can we do something worthwhile for ourselves and our society.³

STUDENT: But you seem to forget the unequal system in which they function. Can they really perform effectively when the whole system encourages them to be mediocre and conforming?

TEACHER: I admit that our system is faulty. This problem needs independent and far-reaching examination, followed by some solutions. I also agree that the international academic system of which we are a part gives us little room for original work. We have seen all this. The question, however, is how to turn our limitations into strengths, how to break the vicious circle in which we seem to be trapped.

Remember that we never function in an ideal situation anywhere. Do you think that the Western intellectuals are free from problems? Their whole profession is fragmented into special interest groups; there is fierce competition for the better jobs; there is little job security; there is a big disparity between the incomes in various disciplines, and so on. Plus, they have to constantly face the consequences of what the West did and continues to do to the rest of the world. These are some of *their* problems.

Thus, in their own way, they must bear the burden of being Western and post-colonial. They must cope with the guilt of colonialism. They must learn to live in an altered world in which their myth of superiority as a master race has been shattered. They too must deal with advanced capitalism institutionalized as 'publish or perish': the plethora of journals, the pressure to survive in the rat race, to keep producing 'work' regardless of interest, authenticity, and originality—surely, these are not advantages, are they?⁴

STUDENT: Are you implying that our situations are similar, that they have their limitations and we have ours?

TEACHER: Our situations are very different; but, yes, they have

their limitations, just as we have ours. Having seen how different these limitations are, at last we must be prepared to own up to ours. We must be willing to build upon our strengths, upon the tremendous privileges that we enjoy in our society, upon the advantages of our class, education, and cultural values—all these advantages must be put to the service of our larger national and cultural interests. In short, we must use whatever is available and then get on with our work. Only then can we function effectively.

As to turning our limitations into our strengths, we must learn a lesson from our ancestors. Their position was much worse than ours, yet how great they became. From Rammohun Roy to Ambedkar, what an illustrious lineage of great intellectuals have we produced. If you fight for a great cause, you become great. Instead of pussyfooting all the time about how badly off we are, let us locate the great cause of our times that we must fight for. Let us accept both the challenges and responsibilities of being intellectuals in the Third World and then create something worthwhile and lasting.

STUDENT: But should we bank upon our weaknesses or on our strengths?

TEACHER: A strength is not a strength until it is recognized as such. Such recognition is precisely what decolonization is all about. Thus, what our adversary thinks is a strength may not necessarily be one; likewise, what is considered a weakness may not actually be one. In the eyes of the developed world, our resistance to modernity is our greatest weakness but it may well turn out to be our greatest strength.⁵

STUDENT: So you believe that the unequal encounter can really be made to work in our favour?

TEACHER: What choice do we have? We begin with a disadvantage. Agreed? Now instead of denying it or trying to escape from it in some way or the other, let us confront it. Let us exert ourselves, constantly examining the terms of our encounter with the West; let us try to ensure that we get the best terms possible; let us decide just how much of the West we really need; let us ensure that we don't end up with more than this; and finally, let us make sure that this 'selective retention' is not detrimental to us.

And we can do all this only if we get out of our present habit

of complaining about our disadvantages and instead, accept the responsibility of meeting the challenge head-on.

Notes

1. Also see T.K. Oommen, 'Towards Reconciling Traditional and Modern Values: The Indian Experiment', in *India and the West*, ed. Joachim Deppert (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983): 253–63. Oommen uses the 'selective retention approach' to Indian tradition.
2. See Masanobu Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming* (1978; Ind. ed. 1984; rpt. Rasulia, M.P.: Friends Rural Centre, 1990). Also see Seitz, *The Politics of Development*, ch. 3, 'Food and Development', 46–75, and Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution* (Penang: Third World Network and London: Zed Books, 1991).
3. Ram Bapat made this point during his presentation at the Bharat Bhavan 'Samavaya' on 'The Critical Time', 17–19 February 1990.
Also see H.C. Srivastava, *Intellectuals in Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Heritage, 1979).
4. See John Bowen, 'Post-structuralism, Pedagogy, Politics: the American Connection,' *Critical Quarterly* 31:1 (Spring 1988): 3–25. Bowen argues that present day Western criticism is no longer written from the position of empire, but from a position of 'loss, absence, anomie' (11). Though his essay ends with a plea for compromise and collaboration between the American and British critical establishments, his anxiety over the fears of American domination sounds very similar to ours. Such anxieties also characterize critics in Canada and Australia, who invoke other categories such as Commonwealth literature to resist and subvert American hegemony; see my essay, 'Towards Redefining Boundaries: The Indo-Canadian Encounter in *Days and Nights in Calcutta*', in *Post-Colonial Preoccupations in Canadian and Indian English Fiction*, ed. A. Jameela Begum (Trivandrum: Institute of English, 1989): 80–98.
Also see Edward Said, 'Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World', *Salmagundi* (Spring-Summer 1986).
5. See I.R. Sinai, *The Challenge of Modernisation: The West's Impact on the Non-Western World* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964). According to him, Gandhi, Tilak, and our other nationalists were mistaken:

Weak and paralysed at home, with a feeling of wounded national pride, knowing in their heart of hearts that they suffered from a kind of inward senility, the fatigue of untold and unchanging centuries, they yet created for themselves a vision of India's peculiar and unique place in the world. They began to extol India's spiritual and metaphysical profundity over and against Western materialism and its intellectual shallowness. Indian religiosity and pacifism was going to save the world from the effects of Europe's inherent aggressiveness and its propensity to permanent strife and chaos (62–63).

12



The Role of the State

STUDENT: You said last time that the state was the biggest broker in the process of modernization and development. Can you elaborate?

TEACHER: By state I don't mean a territory or a group of people, but the centralized authority, including the government and the bureaucracy, ruling such an entity. In India, the state is not only the biggest broker in the process of neo-colonization, but should also be the biggest player in the game of decolonization. Such is the all-pervasiveness of the Indian state. But most of this power operates by default, self-contradiction, and confusion.¹

STUDENT: Are you suggesting that the Indian state is not sufficiently progressive in character?

TEACHER: Though this state came into being at the end of an independence struggle against an imperial power, the classes which rule it soon slipped into a post-colonial lethargy and complacency. The state has been captured by power-seekers and vested interests who cynically use populist slogans to further their own anti-national, selfish interests. Instead of a servant, it has become a master.

STUDENT: But what does this have to do with Svaraj and decolonization?

TEACHER: Ideally, the state embodies the power of the people. It should act in their interests. Svaraj and decolonization are good

for the people of India. But the Indian state is not particularly interested in these goals as long as its own power, privileges, and legitimacy are protected.

STUDENT: What can the state do?

TEACHER: The state, ideally, decides how far we want to go in our assimilation of Western technology, institutions, and ideas. It then acts as importer, regulator, and disseminator of these technologies, institutions, and ideas. Likewise, it can play a vanguard role in preserving and promoting the best of our own traditions and institutions.

STUDENT: But what about culture?

TEACHER: Even in the import of culture—whether this is through foreign films, books, television series or, in a more complex manner, through the Indian advertising media—the state has a key role. It controls the mass media in India either directly, as in the case of Doordarshan and All India Radio, or indirectly through excise duties, import curbs, advertisements, wage boards, and threats and blandishments to individual journalists, in the case of print media.

STUDENT: How does it aid neocolonialism?

TEACHER: Often through sheer stupidity and confused policies, but also through corruption, double-dealing, and exploitation.

Let's consider the latter first. Look at the role of several of our public sector companies. They are not only inefficient and overstaffed, but they also prevent competition and innovation. They have become the agencies to keep us continually underdeveloped and inert. Worse, they collaborate with monopolistic capitalism so that the resources of the state, which actually belong to the people, are hijacked by a few individuals. For instance, they might produce steel at costs which are higher than those which obtain in the world market and sell them at still higher prices in India because of state support. Once the price of steel is fixed so high, the private manufacturer can actually increase his profit by producing it at a lower cost than the government but selling it at the same price. The private manufacturer has a vested interest in the state's inefficiency and high prices. Sometimes, state capitalism works even more blatantly: it can sell a good that it manufactures to a private company, which will resell it for a higher price.²

STUDENT: What about its confused policies and programmes?

TEACHER: As a policy maker, the state must understand what we need to import and what we can do without. Often, however, its policies are contradictory. Take the case of saving petroleum, for instance. We know that we need to drastically curtail our dependence on imported oil if we are to remain solvent. Yet, the state has a vested interest in increasing the consumption. Petroleum is highly taxed thus making it a source of income. Our prices are often much higher than those of the international market. But worse, the government itself owns a car company, Maruti. Now the more cars it produces, the greater the consumption of petrol. But it will not reduce the production of cars to cut down fuel consumption. It will not invest enough in public transport. Because Maruti must make a profit. Finally, the design and components of Maruti car are largely imported. So we pay valuable foreign exchange to manufacture cars with a high import content, which then consume petrol which further increases our bill and loses us more foreign exchange.

We are paying others to take our money away.

STUDENT: What about its endemic inefficiency?

TEACHER: That is legion. Nearly every citizen of India has personal experience of it. The state is the greatest parasite. It is not only non-productive, it is also overstaffed and inefficient. Its demands keep increasing. It has no way of meeting them except by taxation. It adds to the inflation by printing more and more money to make up for its deficit financing. It perpetrates the mixed economy and all its contradictions. It has shown itself to be incapable of clear thinking or action.

We all know about the wasteful and extravagant lifestyles of governors, ministers, and bureaucrats. The huge bungalows, servants, cars, and other paraphernalia that each important government functionary enjoys. Think of the enormous expenditure on these perks.

Therefore, I think that the government is the biggest agent of our continued colonization. Yet, let me emphasize that an inefficient and confused government is preferable to a totalitarian one.

STUDENT: How can this problem be solved?

TEACHER: As if we could solve problems through such discussions!

But let me put it this way: when the people become more powerful, then the state becomes increasingly irrelevant. Then its power to do harm is diminished.

STUDENT: But can it not become more efficient and effective in what it does?

TEACHER: There are many difficulties here—some institutional, some cultural. The venality of the electoral process is the root of the larger corruption—the black money and parallel economy in our society. Larger and larger sums of money are needed to win elections. Where does the money come from? Wherever it is taken from, it has to be returned when the party comes to power. Both the sources of extraction and the means of return are illegal. Therefore the whole system is corrupt, the Bofors scandal being just the tip of the iceberg.

But we must remember that some types of 'corruption' are beneficial to the people and without recourse to these 'illegal' activities, they will simply not be able to survive. Encroachment of land, stealing of water or electricity, travelling without tickets, vending on pavements, and so on are examples. It is the cynical, ugly, and large-scale corruption of powerful government functionaries which is responsible for the continuing inequalities in our society.³

STUDENT: Sometimes I feel that it is precisely our lack of efficiency that has saved us. If we were efficient, then there would have been no room for the pluralism and cultural alternatives that you spoke of which make us so unique and different from the West.

TEACHER: But I am afraid that the default mode, which you say has saved us, may well result in our undoing. Today, we suffer from the problems of both underdevelopment and overdevelopment: the poverty, squalor, wretchedness, hunger, ignorance, and rising population owing to the former; *and* the ecological threat, pollution, industrial disasters, chaos, and disease of the latter. I only see disaster ahead if we continue on this contradictory course.⁴

STUDENT: In other words, our task is doubly hard. We have to be good at being ourselves and also good at learning from the West. We have to excel at both tradition and modernity.

TEACHER: Yes, that is the only way. And both are related, not

opposed. Excelling in tradition will also enable us to excel at modernity.

Wherever we want modernity, we will have to cultivate the systematic efficiency which makes it work. Without that discipline, our industries, our technology, our institutions will all remain inferior. Therefore, decolonization in this sector actually means a more thoroughgoing and complete assimilation of both the values and qualities which sustain modernity. Later, we can make our own improvements and changes with regard to what we have learnt and imported. But to begin with, we need to attain the minimum levels of workability and efficiency.

STUDENT: Do you see us failing in this?

TEACHER: Obviously. Look at all our systems and institutions. Is any one of them running efficiently? Our bureaucracy is hopelessly incompetent and corrupt. Let us consider the example of our own university. Except for teaching, research, and examinations, what else works? The library is in a mess. The transport breaks down frequently. The workshop is dead. Power and water supply are unreliable and erratic. Even the bathrooms are not cleaned properly. Why? What is our excuse?

STUDENT: It seems that the state works in terms of the lowest common denominator, bringing out the worst in people.

TEACHER: Quite true. Often, employees, draw their salaries only to come to the office; to do their work they need to be bribed. The callousness, the utter disregard to duty, the corruption, the disorganization, and the shamelessness of our government are appalling beyond any limits of tolerance.

STUDENT: How does this prevent decolonization?

TEACHER: Decolonization means Svaraj, independence, the power to determine our own destiny, equality in the comity of nations, and so on. The state has become the biggest obstacle in this process by nurturing mediocrity, inefficiency, corruption, and self-deception. It prevents the assimilation of valuable qualities, even as it encourages, through its lop-sided emphasis, dependency and slavery in the exploitative order of world capitalism.

STUDENT: It is amazing that nationalism, the great force that overthrew the British, has resulted in a state which is keeping us enslaved.

TEACHER: In fact, we need no longer put our faith in the nation-state as a unit of culture or development. I think the idea of identifying India with the Indian state is totally misplaced. The display of arms on Republic Day doesn't appeal to my patriotic sentiments at all. Gandhi himself didn't care for the state. We have already seen how his idea of Svaraj implied minimal government. This gigantic state apparatus is the biggest fraud that has been perpetrated on the Indian people after Independence. It has inherited all the trappings and repressive machinery of the colonial state and is now fattening itself on the life-blood of its people. Besides, there is a basic contradiction in the new world system which we haven't grasped as yet; while the economy of a country is international, its politics and culture remain national and even regional.

STUDENT: Before we end this discussion, can you comment on the role of the state as the arbiter of culture within the country?

TEACHER: Unfortunately, the state is a totalizing agency working to control, eliminate, or integrate cultural diversity; pushing us towards one dominant vision of India and Indianness. The state is basically a purveyor of propaganda, no matter what it does. Its touch kills creativity and disallows difference, dissent, and diversity. Very few of its programmes or institutions have succeeded in fostering Indian culture. Its awards and grants are totally meaningless to any sensitive and self-respecting person, though that doesn't mean that the individual recipient should turn them down.

I am afraid that the attempt to create a universal, dominant image of India has intensified in recent years with the growing power of TV. Perhaps our much vaunted plurality—which I used as the defining yardstick of our culture—may vanish one day, swamped by the juggernaut of cultural uniformity.

STUDENT: But what about the government sponsored Festivals of India? Didn't they help promote and showcase the rich diversity of our culture, including tribal, folk, and other non-classical forms?

TEACHER: One cannot legislate diversity. Culture is what we live with, not necessarily what we wish to promote or showcase.

Initially, yes, the festivals made our culture accessible and available to people in different areas. These festivals changed the patterns of both the production and consumption of culture.

But after a while, we begin to notice a lack of freshness, a standardization of forms, a deadening of the spirit.

Hence, slowly, official forms of tribal and folk art begin to develop. These official forms acquire power and become oppressive. The state should stay out of culture as much as possible; the best role it can play is that of an enabler, not a producer or director. But which state would like to pass up an opportunity for control, self-promotion, and interference?

Notes

1. For a lucid and insightful overview of the concept followed by a useful bibliography, see Ashis Nandy's essay, 'State', in Wolfgang Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Books, 1992): 264-74.
2. See, for instance, *The Challenge to the South* (Geneva: South Commission, 1990): 125-26.
3. See Peter M. Ward, *Corruption, Development and Inequality: Soft Touch or Hard Graft?* (London: Routledge, 1989).
4. For a devastating critique of development, see Claude Alvarez, *Science, Development and Violence: The Twilight of Modernity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992). Also see Scitz, *The Politics of Development*, ch. 5, 'The Environment and Development', 117-48.



Theories of Colonization and Decolonization

STUDENT: I think we have covered sufficient ground now to address certain questions directly. You spoke, earlier, about the terms and conditions of our encounter with the West. You also spoke of the role of the state in this process. Can we now talk about the different strategies of both assimilation and resistance?

TEACHER: Yes. Both are crucial to our praxis. But what is important is to have a sound foundation on which to build our ideas. Without this we'll flounder.

STUDENT: You mean we should have a clear theory of assimilation and resistance, both of which can be integrated into a larger framework of decolonization?

TEACHER: Precisely. Speaking of assimilation and resistance, I think it is important to realize how both of them are related aspects of decolonization. In fact, to put it another way, both colonization and decolonization are two facets of Svaraj. But for most of our dialogues, we have identified decolonization with Svaraj.

STUDENT: We are beginning to see their relationship more clearly.

TEACHER: Yes. Notice the subtle, partly contrary, implications of each. We had argued earlier that the goal of decolonization would be Svaraj. But decolonization immediately drags us towards larger,

universal systems—economic, political, cultural—while Svaraj, with the emphasis on *sva*, points to a personal, individualistic solution. The tension between these two tendencies sums up the range of theoretical understandings of colonialism. The *Sva* of Svaraj, of course, need not be an individual *sva*—it could be a collective self. But that is possible through extension, not in itself obvious.

STUDENT: I think you have made two important points. First that both assimilation and resistance are related; the way one is defined will determine the way the other is practiced. That is to say, our understanding of colonialism will shape our thinking about decolonization. Or our analysis of the problem will determine the solution we arrive at.

The second important point is that theories of both assimilation and resistance—that is, theories of colonialism which may be construed to include both processes—tend either in the direction of the universal or the individual.

TEACHER: Consider the Marxian understanding of colonialism. It is perhaps the most cogent and powerful example of a universal theory. For Marxists, colonialism is a world system. That is, there may be different versions of it but the system is larger than its different manifestations. Secondly, they consider its root cause to be capitalism. It was Lenin's great insight which clarified that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism. Thirdly, capitalism itself is to be understood in terms of its base, which is economic, and not its political or cultural superstructures. Again, it was Lenin who said that politics is condensed economics.¹

Similarly, the way to decolonization in such an understanding would also be via a change in the capitalistic modes of production, which would finally usher in a new, non-oppressive world order. The cultural implications of this theory are also universalizing. The struggle, then, is not between India and the West, the Third World and the First World, but between international capitalism and the resistance to it. In this resistance, the Third World can find cultural, political, and ideological allies in the West itself.²

STUDENT: Would you then say that the essence of the Marxian praxis of decolonization would be to mount an attack on world capitalism and its cultural productions?

TEACHER: Precisely, Often the attack is really an expose. It entails the identification in any cultural product of those means of its production that it seeks to mask. The text is now read as much for what it does not say as for what it does. Pierre Macherey called this symptomatic reading because the text becomes the symptom of the malaise that is capitalism. The text is one way of both coping with and containing this malaise. To expose relentlessly the ideologics which produce the text is the function of the radical critic.

For critics like Terry Eagleton, the project is even wider. Literature, which Matthew Arnold considered the future substitute for religion, is seen to play the same role that religion played—it puts people to sleep, allowing them respite from their daily suffering and alienation under capitalism; in a word it is an escape. Eagleton's project is to undermine the role of literature itself, to question its ideological underpinnings, to subvert the institutions which fund and support it.

These are merely two examples of the enormously fruitful and productive uses of the Marxian praxis of decolonization.³

STUDENT: What are the drawbacks of this theoretic?

TEACHER: The drawbacks stem from its universalizing rhetoric. Marxism is a child of the Enlightenment. Its method is marked by the positivist faith in reason as the sole arbiter of human destiny. It believes in History—a History which is total and universal in its sweep. True, it acknowledges that there may be different versions of capitalism as there were different modes of feudalism; but its very faith in itself as a science, as a master discourse impels it to believe in its universal explanatory power.

What happens then to Indian Marxists? They become converts and accept this universal religion. They have no option but to follow the latest theories and interpretations of the international left. They become the agents of colonization because they themselves are colonized by a discourse produced in the West.

Luckily, the idea that Marxism is a universal praxis is also a myth. The fissures within Marxism are deep and wide enough to offer an independent space for analysis. In fact, these days people have already started talking of 'post-Marxism'—what happens when the master discourse that is Marxism is overturned.⁴

There is another danger in Marxian praxis. It can degenerate into an academic mafia, which takes over all available forums and shuts out dissent. This is especially true of the social sciences in India where universities like JNU have been completely taken over by the Left. Their methods too are often unsavoury and self-contradictory. What is remarkable about them is their utter indifference to the gap between their life style and their ideology. The Marxist in India usually is thoroughly bourgeois in his habits but ultra-radical in his ideology.⁵ This is sad and pathetic malaise.

STUDENT: You seem to have shifted from an understanding of Marxian theory to its practitioners in India.

TEACHER: True, but they are not totally unrelated. The security afforded by a theory which claims universal application and which accords primacy to reason is so appealing that it often becomes a substitute for clear thinking. D.D. Kosambi called such thinkers official Marxists or OM for short; I think it was he who had quipped that Marxism is a way of thinking, not a substitute for thinking. OM, then, makes its adherents stupid and slavish or, what is worse, violent and aggressive.

In India the intellectual violence unleashed by the Left is perhaps equalled only by the bigotry and intolerance of religious fanatics. Moreover, the Indian Left has tended to glamorize violence as the only hallmark of revolutionary praxis. Often the repressive measures of the state or the violence of upper caste oppressors is cited to justify such 'counter' violence.⁶

STUDENT: You sound as though you would dismiss the Left outright.

TEACHER: Sorry. That is not what I meant. In the process of decolonization we have several allies and adversaries. Even fundamentalists are allies in the sense that they are fanatic proponents of native religion and culture. What is wrong with them is their imperfect and exclusive understanding of the issues. Though the orthodox Leftists are far better than the fundamentalists, often they tend to be as intolerant and violent. Our disagreement with them stems out of their exclusiveness, their claim to a superior truth, and the oppressive outcome of such a claim.

But we must admit of the changes that have occurred within the Western Left after the 1940s. Post-Althusser Marxism is quite different from the 'vulgar' Marxism of the Stalinist era.

Moreover, the New Left has given us some of our best critics of English literature—Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and so on.

STUDENT: Going to the other extreme, what are the individual centred theories of decolonization?

TEACHER: These theories are not directly about decolonization at all, except that Gandhi directed them to that end. These theories are about self-realization, self-knowledge, and self-empowerment. Often they have to do with spirituality and mysticism. In most of these theories, the emphasis is on freeing the self from all forms of false knowledge and bondage. Colonialism is one type of false knowledge and bondage, therefore it too falls under the purview of these theories.

The key strategy of such theories is to minimize the significance of colonialism by relegating it to a larger class of unrealities or false-consciousnesses. Colonialism then becomes a delusion which the enlightened self can simply ignore. Gandhi said that only he who has attained Svaraj for himself can try to fight for the Svaraj of others. For Gandhi the outward struggle for Svaraj was at once an inner struggle towards Godhead, Truth, and self-realization.⁷

STUDENT: Gandhi's ideas seem to be the exception. The general rule seems to be that the spiritual person withdraws from political action.

TEACHER: This is not necessarily true. One can be political even without the appearance of being so. There have been several highly political mystics. Think of Shivaji's guru, Samarth Ramdas. Or of the Sikh gurus. Or later, Swami Vivekananda. Or of Swami Ram Tirtha. Or Sri Aurobindo. And so on. Mystics question authority, both internally and externally. They question theories of superiority of one nation or race over another. Ideally, they also refuse to participate in a capitalistic economic order by practising poverty and non-possession.⁸

The emphasis on personal emancipation does not go contrary to collective action. Decolonizing oneself personally would lead to the decolonization of the whole society. That is the belief.

STUDENT: Doesn't that seem rather limited?

TEACHER: On the contrary, to be obsessed with one aspect of life, say colonization, is limiting. We must question all the inherited

structures of power, whether social or personal. The questioning will need to be deep and far-reaching before any lasting understanding is possible. Both the social and the psycho-spiritual must be integrated in our praxis. We must question not only the myths of the colonizers but also the myths of the colonized. We must explore and deconstruct the different types of colonizations that assail us—be they religious, economic, cultural, or intellectual.

STUDENT: That seems to be an impossible ideal.

TEACHER: All ideals are impossible, the communist utopia being no less impossible than another which promises personal salvation to all.

STUDENT: We have talked of the two directions in which theories of colonialism tend. One obliterates the personal, the other obviates the social. Would you advocate a synthesis or compromise between the two?

TEACHER: Well, I don't like either of the words because both suggest duality and artificiality. Yes, I think we must mediate between both tugs to arrive at our own individual level of equilibrium and satisfaction. It is inevitable that for any theory to succeed, it has to be personal and political simultaneously. There is no escape from it. Either one's commitment to outward action is so absorbing and rewarding that one develops as a person at the same time, or one's quest for self-realization becomes so powerful that it drives one to outward, social action. One is not separate from the other. Krishnamurti often used to say that you are the world.⁹ Interestingly, the reclusive philosopher's words were picked up by the group of pop musicians who sang to raise money for Ethiopia's famine-struck people.

STUDENT: Finally, can you offer a practical version of such a via media or meeting point between the outward and the inward?

TEACHER: As I said earlier, any theory of social action, no matter towards which direction it tends, must be integrated with the inner development of the person practicing and advocating it. Simply speaking, outer development must be in synchrony with inner development.

But, the theory of social action which tries to do this is available to us in India. It is Sarvodaya, the upliftment or emancipation of all. This is neither *sva*-odaya or self-upliftment

alone, nor *para*-odaya or the upliftment of the others; but it is the upliftment of everybody, including oneself, directed outwards. The communists always speak the language of *parādoya*, the transformation of society and so on. In the process, they lose any sense of introspection. They become blind to their own failings and betrayals. The outward gaze without the corresponding inward look is a curse; it makes people hard, callous, intolerant of others, and self-righteous.

On the other hand, *svaodaya*—self-realization to the exclusion of an outward commitment—leads to a selfishness of a different kind. A person becomes withdrawn and self-centred, like a little frog in a well.

STUDENT: How does the practice of Sarvodaya differ from other socially oriented theories such as feminism or civil rights or the dalit movement?

TEACHER: Again, we notice an important distinction. Movements such as feminism or dalitism are, to all appearances, special interest movements. If they are not founded on some larger premise of social justice, such as the best of their thinkers and theoreticians believed in, they are doomed to a fragmented and self-contradictory praxis. I think it was Simone de Beauvoir who said that women's liberation was good because one liberated woman also meant one liberated man. This is a fine thought because it is built on a deep insight into the interrelationship and connections between the Self and the Other. There can be no liberation for myself without a liberation for the world. The Buddhists realized this long back and even in our own times, Aurobindo's philosophy is based on the emancipation of the entire terrestrial life. Gandhi too realized that there cannot be Svaraj for individuals without Svaraj for all.

The point is that women's liberation is merely one more means for the liberation of all humanity. But if it is directed against men, towards the interests of women alone—I wonder if that is possible at all—then I am afraid it will lead to further fragmentation of society.

STUDENT: But isn't this happening all around us? People are fighting for specific interests without keeping in view larger goals.

TEACHER: Yes, we are fighting for the narrow sectional interests of caste, religion, community, and so on. But that is a big illusion, isn't it? I mean the thought that I alone can progress while I

keep the Other suppressed. Within Sarvodaya there is ample room for the interests of specific groups such as women, dalits, etc. Sarvodaya is the method of development for us."¹¹

STUDENT: Ironically, so far we have been speaking of decolonization, which itself is the narrow interest of one nation against another.

TEACHER: Yes, but such a conflict is initially necessary, before nations learn to cooperate.

Aurobindo speaks of three stages in the interaction of cultures—conflict, concert, and self-sacrifice. I don't know about self-sacrifice, which seems to be too lofty and noble an ideal, but certainly we can aim for concert or cooperation with our former adversaries. Conflict, however necessary to begin with, must lead to concert and cooperation later."¹²

Thus, our emphasis on decolonization, which may seem like a nationalistic project, will actually contribute to the decolonization of the colonizer as well. Remember that the colonizers need decolonization as badly as we do, though they may not really think so. Decolonization, in that sense, is not one nation fighting for its interests against another; it is a fight, rather, for just interests common to both; that is, there is a higher principle involved than merely self-interest. I cannot conceive of justice in selfish terms; justice, like love, is not for one against another, but works in favour of both the aggrieved and the aggressor. Justice for the oppressed is also justice for the oppressor because it will, ultimately, save him from the inevitable results of his own misdeeds.

STUDENT: So to sum up, we need a theory of decolonization which includes both the colonized and the colonizer—as partners, not necessarily as adversaries. We need a theory which tries to integrate Svaraj with Sarvodaya. In fact, you are really saying that Svaraj *is* Sarvodaya.

TEACHER: Yes, that's it.

Notes

1. See *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism: A Popular Outline* by V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977): 634–731 for a classic and masterly analysis.
2. For an example of such an argument see Aijaz Ahmed, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory,"' *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3–25 and 'Disciplinary English: Third-Worldism and Literature' in *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*, ed. Svati Joshi (New Delhi: Trianka, 1991): 206–63.
3. See Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, tr. G. Wall (London: Routledge, 1978); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).
4. For varieties of Marxist thought see Robert A. Gorman, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Neo-Marxism* (London: Routledge, 1985); also see Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978). For Marxism and religion, see Trevor Ling, *Karl Marx and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1980). For the 'end' of Marxism, see Alex Callinicos, *Is There a Future for Marxism?* (London: Macmillan, 1982) and *Marxism and Philosophy* (London: OUP, 1983).
5. See, for instance, 'Middle class dominates CPM' by Sudhin Dey, *Times of India*, 15 February 1992. A survey of the 625 delegates and seventy-one observers at the 14th party congress of the CPM revealed that only 14 percent were working class, 13 per cent poor peasantry, and 3 percent agricultural labour. The rest, or nearly 70 percent, were: middle class (40 percent); middle peasantry (19 percent); rich peasantry (3 percent); landlords (4 percent); petty bourgeois (2 percent); and bourgeois (1 percent).
6. See D.D. Kosambi, *Exasperating Essays* (1957; rpt. Pune: R.P. Nene, 1986): 3–4. Also see Rajbhau Gawande's Editorial Note to his edition of D.K. Bedekar's *Towards Understanding Gandhi* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975): v.
Kosambi refutes the idea that Marxism encourages violence in *Exasperating Essays*, 3: 'No Marxist work contains incitement to war and specious arguments for senseless killing remotely comparable to those in the divine *Gita*.' But see, for example, Randhir Singh, 'Terrorism, State Terrorism, and Democratic Rights,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 8 February 1992: 279–89, for one example of such a justification of violence.
7. See 'Introduction' to *An Autobiography* (1927; rpt. Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1983): 'What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *Moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end' (x). Also see Iyer, *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 109: 'I think political life must be an echo of private life and that there cannot be any divorce between the two,' and 115–25.
8. See Aurobindo's observations on 'Indian Polity' in *Foundations*, 322–91.

9. Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Fulfilment*, 74: 'You and the world are not two different entities. You *are* the world, not as an ideal, but factually As the world is yourself, in the transformation of yourself you produce a transformation in society.' The song, 'You are the World,' was written by Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson, and recorded in aid of famine relief in Ethiopia in 1985; some of the biggest rock stars lent their voices to it, including Bruce Springsteen, Tina Turner, Elton John, Paul McCartney, Lionel Richie, Cindy Lauper, and Diana Ross.
10. Gandhi's ideas on Sarvodaya are collected in a book, by the same title, edited by Bharatan Kumarappa (1954; rpt. Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1984); the book also contains valuable essays by Vinoba, K.G. Mashruwala, and J.C. Kumarappa.
11. See Aurobindo, *Foundations*, 5.



Strategies for Resistance

STUDENT: I think we may now try to apply our theory of decolonization to strategies of assimilation and resistance.

TEACHER: Yes. The way we have defined it, decolonization involves both positive and negative action, both the accepting of certain kinds of foreign influence and the rejecting of other kinds. In a word, the actual practice of decolonization involves a combination of assimilation and resistance.

STUDENT: Shall we start with the latter first? It seems to me that decolonization conjures a picture of violent rejection and overthrow of the colonizer.

TEACHER: But this is not possible without raising the consciousness of the colonized and the oppressed. They must be made to feel and understand that they are not inferior, that colonization is an unfair system, that the myths of the colonizer are false.

STUDENT: How is this done? How do we attack the colonizer's ideology?

TEACHER: By relentlessly questioning and exposing it. But attacking its premises and conclusions.

STUDENT: Can you elaborate on this point with specific examples?

TEACHER: Yes. I think there are two processes involved. On the one hand, we must deglamorize our opponents. We must show them up for what they are: greedy, ruthless, and power-hungry. We must debunk and undermine their myths of civilization and

progress. So, one major technique of decolonization is directed against the colonizer.

The work of most of the African and Latin American theorists of decolonization falls into this category. I can think of Aime Cesaire, Manoni, Albert Memmi, Franz Fanon, Chinweizu, Ngugi wo Thiang'o, Paulo Freire, Chinua Achebe as examples.¹ These writers direct their just indignation against the West. They expose the West's pretensions. They bring about a sense of disgust and disillusionment in those of us who glamorize the West, who have accepted the West's image of itself.

STUDENT: Doesn't Gandhi also do this in *Hind Swaraj*?

TEACHER: Certainly. He speaks against the condition of England. He rejects modern civilization itself. One reason the book is so disquieting is that it challenges so many of our notions about ourselves and the West.

I would state further that any extended attempt at decolonization will involve such a tirade or campaign against the colonizer. This is an appropriate and useful anger, but must not degenerate into a stock response as is happening with some black and dalit writers. Then we have cruder forms of protest literature and revenge histories. These will not take us very far either.

STUDENT: This attack against the colonizers and their civilization, culture, ideology is one aspect of the strategy of resistance. What is the other?

TEACHER: The other aspect of the strategy is directed inward, at the victims and the colonized themselves. The aim is to make them stronger by first exposing their weaknesses. The attack is on oneself. Its aim is to give the colonized a sense of their own complicity in their exploitation. This strategy has great philosophical importance because it forces the victims to see themselves not as merely victims, but also as partners and participants in their own oppression.

STUDENT: That is so disturbing. Isn't it like blaming the victims for their being victims?

TEACHER: Not really. We locate the blame outside, in the colonizers, but simultaneously look at how it became possible for them to colonize us. We examine ourselves to see how we cooperated or participated in our own abuse.

Such an enquiry is important because it inspires and rouses the victims, even shames them into acting on their own behalf.

But it is more important because it gives the victims a sense of their capacity to alter their destinies. This is crucial. Unless the victims believe and realize that they can change their lot, no social action is possible.

STUDENT: Why is this a philosophical issue?

TEACHER: Because it means that you cannot colonize a people without their consent. This notion of consent, whether tacit or explicit, is so significant, isn't it. It implies that we suffer the world at our pleasure. That if we wish to change it, we need to simply withdraw our consent to those of its ways which we don't like. It also means that no one can exploit us against our will, that no one has power to destroy our subjectivity, no one can be themselves and us at the same time.

STUDENT: This reminds me of Hegel's disquisition on the master-slave relationship. The master needs the slave to be notionally human to recognize the master's power over the slave. But at the very point of enslavement, the master has destroyed the slave's humanity and the slave can no longer give the master that recognition.²

TEACHER: Unfortunately, masters don't regret their own reciprocal dehumanization that much. So they must be educated, if necessary, through conflict and violence.

STUDENT: Do you then accept the notion that the oppressor's violence is different from the violence of the oppressed?

TEACHER: Even Gandhi accepted this distinction in principle when he admitted that violence in self-defence was preferable to capitulation and cowardice. Self-defence is one of duties enjoined on householders, but sannyasins or monks cannot resort to it. Satyagrahis, likewise, must never use violence but must suffer the violence of others on themselves for the others' sake.³

So to answer your question, violence against the colonizers is also, I think, a valid type of response; however, it is very difficult to practice effectively in reality. The violence eats up the colonized as well and leaves them, in the end, no better than the colonizers.

STUDENT: But perhaps we should return to our discussion on consent, will, and freedom of choice.

TEACHER: By pointing out our own weaknesses, our own complicity in our exploitation, we are subtly stating that we are not helpless. We are indicating choice and responsibility where none

were hitherto perceived. That is, where the colonized thought that they had no other option but to submit, we are blaming them for their submission. In other words, we are telling them: you only *thought* you were helpless; actually you could have resisted your oppressors.

STUDENT: But suppose they reply: if we had not submitted, we would have been beaten, raped, killed?

TEACHER: Now we come to the crux of our theory of resistance. The whole idea of the consent of the oppressed is based upon the assumption that they always have the choice to die rather than submit.

STUDENT: That is a gruesome and cruel choice.

TEACHER: But that is the only choice any of us really has. It is upon this choice that all movements for any higher cause are founded. And this has been true from the beginning of time. The ultimate weapon of oppressors is to threaten you with bodily injury or death. All you can do in return is to choose between your ideal or death. When you prefer to die, you are affirming that the ideal is more important, more real, more permanent, more valuable, more substantial than the life in your body.

STUDENT: Then, we all must already make this choice before we begin to act for our ideal.

TEACHER: Not necessarily. Not everyone can be so clear about the choices involved. They might gain clarity as they proceed in their fight. Remember that your life is the most precious thing that you have. You cannot be willing to give it up unless you are convinced that there is something more worthwhile than that. You must distinguish a foolhardy risking of your life from a risking of it for a higher and more meaningful cause. A suicide is not a martyrdom.

STUDENT: But, don't you think that where we attain such clarity, we end up affirming that the idea is more important than the body, I mean don't we assert the primacy of mind over matter?

TEACHER: The first thing to remember is that the clarity that you speak of is almost always *forced* upon us. We may never choose it. As St. Thomas realized in *A Murder in the Cathedral*, we don't choose martyrdom, it chooses us.⁴

Secondly, I think you are positing a false dichotomy between matter and mind. Both mind and matter are matter; both body and soul are material. This is what the Marxists and other

materialists would say. The idealists would aver instead that both mind and body are spirit.

STUDENT: You mean there is no real difference between idealists and materialists?

TEACHER: Yes, the difference is not fundamental. They are arguing from the same plane of understanding. The opposition, in that sense, is like between atheists and theists.

STUDENT: But are you not affirming that an idea is more important than the body, therefore the subtle more important than the gross?

TEACHER: It seems so, but actually the body is also an idea, just like justice is an idea. Or both are material—both the idea of the body and the idea of justice.⁵

STUDENT: But coming back to strategies of resistance, would you say that by offering the victims this choice of not submitting to oppression even at the cost of death, you are really empowering them?

TEACHER: Not all victims need to die to resist oppression. Many die in the process of being oppressed. When we direct our attention to our own weaknesses we are essentially arguing that we have the ultimate freedom to resist, but we also have several relative positions before we actually stake our life against injustice.

Once this range of options becomes clear, there is a genuine empowerment and sense of choice.

STUDENT: Isn't this emphasis on our own weakness quite rare in the literature on decolonization?

TEACHER: Well, it is found less in African writers than in Indian writers. The latter have always stressed on the reform of our own society as the best way of resisting colonization. Rammohun Roy, who comes at the beginning of this discourse in modern times, also worked to reform and uplift Hindu society. He was as critical of Indians, if not more so, as he was of our colonizers. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo, Dayanand Saraswati, Syyad Ahmed Khan, and Gandhi also pointed out the ills of our own society.⁶

The African writers concentrate more on the misdeeds of the colonizers because they had so little to fight with, so little to blame themselves for in their oppression. Their culture was so utterly different from that of Europe that they really had very

little choice. Certainly, they had less choice than Indians, less room for resistance.

STUDENT: The distinction is very interesting and useful. It means that the choice to die for one's beliefs is only an ultimate position; actually, the range of options available is also important—for on that will depend one's strategy or emphasis.

TEACHER: Precisely. Ultimate choices are philosophical positions; they have to be mediated through actual social realities. The Africans may consider blaming Europe for their miseries as the best means of decolonization; we may consider blaming ourselves as a better method.

Both are related. No practice of decolonization can be free of either of these techniques. The Africans, after blaming Europe for fifty years, will ultimately have to focus on their own ills if they want to survive. We shall also have to understand where to stop blaming ourselves and where to start blaming the West for our woes.

These two strategies of decolonization, therefore, though pointing in opposite directions are related. One blames and attacks the colonizer; the other acknowledges the complicity and responsibility of the colonized. Both aim at changing the present inequitable order.

Notes

1. See Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, tr. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); O. Manoni, *Prospero and Caliban* (New York: Praeger, 1964); Albert Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized and Dominated Man* (New York: Omni Press, 1968); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth and Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967); Chinweizu, *The West and the Rest of Us* (New York: Vantage, 1975); Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind* (London: Methuen, 1985); Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970); and Chinua Achebe, *Morning Yet On Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975).
2. See D.P. Verno, ed., *Hegel's Social and Political Thought* (New York: 1980).
3. See Iyer, *The Essential Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 236–80.
4. T.S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935; Delhi: OUP, 1978), pt. 1, lines

667–68: 'The last temptation is the greatest treason:/To do the right thing for the wrong reason' (52) and Thomas's sermon in the Interlude:

A Christian martyrdom is never an accident, for Saints are not made by accident. Still less is a Christian martyrdom the effect of a man's will to become a Saint, as a man by willing and contriving may become a ruler of men. A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr (57).

5. See a similar discussion in ch. 1: 19.

6. See Stephen Hay, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 2nd. ed., vol. 2.



Strategies for Assimilation

STUDENT: We have seen that both resistance and assimilation form the basis of any theory of decolonization. Before we speak of assimilation can we ask once again, if it is at all necessary?

TEACHER: By assimilation, we mean a process by which one culture absorbs, accepts, and uses influences from outside itself.'

STUDENT: I was asking if we can't be self-sufficient totally, without really needing anything from outside ourselves. For instance, I have heard you yourself say that Indian metaphysics has nothing to gain from the West. So can a culture be completely self-sufficient in anything?

TEACHER: The first part of the question suggests a response which is too obviously 'incorrect' to need elaboration, but the second part complicates your question enormously, making it anything but obvious.

Can a culture be self-sufficient entirely? This depends on how we define the limits of a culture. A culture is not like a geometrical figure, with clear boundaries. In fact, to talk in terms of a culture itself is to impose boundaries and limits where there are none.

That is, whether there are cultural boundaries or not is itself doubtful. So we must accept that all such boundaries, when we posit them, are provisional and indefinite. What is more, all such boundaries are porous, like the skin which covers us. They

cannot be watertight because cultures must breathe, allow exchanges of populations and ideas.

If cultures then are not units with definite boundaries, how can any culture be self-sufficient? In fact, every culture is in constant interaction with other cultures; hence we speak of cultures in contact. From the earliest times, trade has been one reason for cultural interaction. Another has been conquest. There have been several human migrations in the past. All these have resulted in the mingling of populations and cultures.

STUDENT: Are you saying that there is no such thing as a 'pure' culture?

TEACHER: Yes, and this has been said before. No culture is pure and completely free from outside influence. It may wish to perceive itself as pure and self-sufficient, but that is merely an attitude not a reflection of the true nature of that culture.²

STUDENT: Then all movements to purify a culture or purge it of corruptions are false?

TEACHER: Such movements show how a culture wishes to preserve or define itself. They do not reflect what the culture is or how it evolved or how it's lived. Such movements reflect desires and needs, the mythologies of self-preservation and identity, not actualities of cultural operation.

STUDENT: Then, no culture is self-sufficient?

STUDENT: Vivekananda said, 'I am thoroughly convinced that no individual or nation can live by holding itself apart from the community of others, and whenever such an attempt has been made under false ideas of greatness, policy or holiness—the result has always been disastrous to the secluding one'.³ Thus, in its actual practice, every culture has to adapt and learn all the time.

STUDENT: So you are saying that we have to learn from others, that we can never live by our own resources?

TEACHER: I think we have already made two points: whether we like it or not, we have been influenced by the West; and even if we don't like it, we shall have to live with these influences. In fact, one can go a step further. As Aurobindo said long back, if a culture is secure in its premises, it is not merely threatened by outside influence; it meets such influence with vigour and strength, head-on. Outside influences actually may end up being invigorating.⁴

STUDENT: So we need to evolve a strategy or method of assimilating outside influences.

TEACHER: Well, one strategy is to deny that we need it, as you already pointed out. This can be the stance of a particular society, born out of its drive to preserve its own identity and separateness. Then it can claim that it can learn nothing from a particular contact. The present Khalistan movement is trying to create precisely such a self-sufficient national identity for the Sikhs. They are trying to make the Sikhs into a nation. The logical culmination of nationalism, in this sense, is regionalism.

STUDENT: So, one can pretend that one needs nothing from another culture. But what if one actually has been absorbing things all along?

TEACHER: Then the problem is how to define a value, an idea, and how to locate its origin and transformations.

STUDENT: You mean, how to identify something as Indian or Western?

TEACHER: Precisely. Often we hear of how Gandhi's ahimsa was a Christian importation. Or how Rammohun Roy's rationalism was European. And so on. In fact, the location and origin of the influence become crucial to our understanding of the person's Indianness or Westernization.

STUDENT: And both are such loaded terms. If we trace the most important ideas of Gandhi to Western sources, then we end up subtly devaluing our own culture.

TEACHER: Yes. And often, we have been trained to trace and locate ideas in such ways. Our knowledge of our own traditions is so poor that we cannot find local sources of an idea and must therefore look abroad.

STUDENT: Then, once we trace the source abroad, we dismiss the writer as derivative.

TEACHER: That is a separate problem. There is a genuine difficulty with what to do with the imitators. They play a very detrimental role in decolonization. But for those who assimilate things from other cultures such an argument becomes an unfair ruse for rejecting their work.

STUDENT: Would you say then that cultural influences must be defined in a particular way to be seen either as examples of assimilation or imitation?

TEACHER: Though the quality of absorption must be judged independently of such criteria, it is often judged in terms of its authentic nativeness or derivative foreignness.

STUDENT: Then what are the meaningful ways in which assimilations can take place? How do we speak of assimilations?

TEACHER: I already said that one language that is spoken in this connection is the language of self-sufficiency and rejection of influence. Another language is the language of borrowing. This assumes that what we are getting from another culture is something we do not possess indigenously. Take the two examples cited above. One can question whether Gandhi's idea of ahimsa was a Christian borrowing at all. One can point out that Vaishnava tradition stressed ahimsa locally and that Gandhi had access to this tradition. Similarly, Rammohun's rationalism came before his contact with the West. There are signs and evidences of a local enlightenment to which he was heir, from which he got his monotheistic ideas.⁵

STUDENT: Are you saying, then, that if we wish to decolonize our thinking we must be very careful in the way in which we locate influences.

TEACHER: As far as possible, we must look for local sources from which major ideas spring. Or at least ways in which borrowed ideas could be grafted on to existing ones.

STUDENT: Without such grafting, we have the shadow minds that K.C. Battacharya spoke of—living in subcultures which have no relation to their environment.

TEACHER: But the crucial thing is what theoretical framework we have for understanding assimilation.

STUDENT: You already said that we either speak of the complete incompatibility of ideas, or of some common ground which makes mutual influence possible.

TEACHER: And considering the way in which we have defined both India and the West, we notice that each culture has within it opposing currents which can be allies of its Other.

STUDENT: It seems to me that we must posit a common space from which all cultures derive their ideas, regardless of how they shape them later.

TEACHER: Yes. This common space, for lack of a better phrase, may simply be called human culture. So, all ideas really come from this non-dualistic space, and are appropriated by each culture according to its propensities.

No idea, then, is so foreign to a culture that it can never be adopted or understood. No idea is the exclusive preserve of any nation or culture. Even the scientific materialism which contributed to the West's dominance, then, will need to resonate with the indigenous Indian psyche for it to be adopted and assimilated. Indian spirituality too will find a welcoming voice from within the depths of the West's anguished search for itself.

STUDENT: So we have at least three strategies of assimilation: surreptitious and unconscious dependence and borrowing, camouflaged by an ostensible close-mindedness; a borrowing which appears to be totally imported or novel; and a grafting of a useful idea upon native cultural resources.

TEACHER: And our view of these strategies depends on what we consider to be the origin of ideas in the first place. I think we have tried to argue that ideas are not exclusive to cultures but belong to all humanity; however certain versions of ideas gain prominence in certain cultures.

Again we need to remember that this is not an either-or choice. Language is both conditioned by culture but potentially capable of freeing itself from such conditioning and limitation, just as cultures are.

STUDENT: Would you then dismiss as rubbish Kipling's famous dictum of the East being the East, and the West being the West?

TEACHER: The East is both itself and the West, and the West is both itself and the East. But the twain shall never meet only if both these cultures refuse to give up conflicting goals. If they don't wish to meet, it's their business. Actually, they may choose to meet on several less important, but useful grounds, and continue to differ on fundamental premises.

STUDENT: You have claimed that India has nothing to learn from the West so far as its metaphysics is concerned.

TEACHER: Metaphysics is the enquiry regarding the nature of the ultimate reality. In the West, metaphysics has always been speculative; that is, removed from daily reality as the word itself implies. Whether it is removed from daily reality or not is another issue. The way we read the world depends on our metaphysics. This we have seen in the very first chapter of this book. However, the West has considered metaphysical questions to be unsolvable and therefore not worthy of continued attention. Such a view gained ground especially after the eighteenth century, when there was a positivist attack on metaphysics.

In India, our metaphysics has always been experiential. I must experience the nature of the ultimate reality before I can theorize about it. In that sense, our metaphysics has been mystical. Now, the goal of uniting with the ultimate reality—whether known as Brahman, or Nirvana, or some *saguna* form of it like Rama, or Krishna, or Kali—has been a perennial quest for us in India. Can this goal be improved upon? Can you, as Raja Rao says, improve upon a zero?

But the quest keeps changing, not in its essence, but in its forms. This may be attacked as a kind of Aristotelian formalism, with its built-in dualism. Never mind. One could say, instead, that there is no essence but only new mutations of the quest, though that is not how most of the mystics and sages of India saw their work. I think even while stressing continuity and renewal, they did not advocate a rejection of the past and the dismissal of tradition. Even otherwise, when you say 'always historicize,' you still have an irreducible, master formula which itself evades historicization. On the other hand, you can argue that the Absolute, by definition, is beyond time and mutation. And so on. Now tell me, are these positions really all that different? So yes, I don't think we can improve upon Indian metaphysics. The basic questions have been asked and answered. Now how we work out their relationship with our daily lives is something each one must discover.⁶

Such a view does not preclude any new formulation of the perennial philosophy as in Ramakrishna Paramahansa or Ramana Maharshi, nor does it preclude any modification of the social structure or means of production in the historical life of a culture.

STUDENT: No wonder it is called mystical. Such a view seems to be beyond my grasp! But why is this metaphysics peculiarly Indian?

TEACHER: It is beyond 'your' grasp because to understand it 'you' must cease to exist! Now you cannot will your own self-dissolution, can you?

But yes, in identifying this metaphysics or mysticism with India, we do have a problem. It is the heritage and right of all humankind, of all cultures. Yet, in India you see an unending line of sages, seers, rishis, bhaktas who bring it up to the present. This is available only in India as far as I know, and nowhere else. This is what makes us unique.

STUDENT: So how do you reconcile this paradox?

TEACHER: Well, you can argue that we are the custodians, not the owners of this rich, spiritual tradition. As Ramachandra Gandhi says, 'Advaita, non-duality, is a universal, and not a culture-specific, discovery The shepherding of Advaita by India and of India by Advaita is what makes Advaita the distinctive truth of India India is a trustee, not the owner of Advaita.'

STUDENT: How can the West absorb this from us?

TEACHER: It must go back to the springs of its own mystical traditions—Christian and pagan—and try to relate this wisdom to itself thereby.

STUDENT: This is very interesting, but I think we must return to our discussion on strategies of assimilation.

TEACHER: Yes. To assimilate constructively, we need to create within our own culture a fertile ground for receiving ideas from abroad, without letting these ideas overrun our culture completely. The overrunning takes place when such a theoretical receptacle is denied to an alien influence, and the influence is backed, instead, by superior economic, political, and technological prowess.

Notes

1. See Aurobindo, *Foundations*, especially 387–94.
2. Veena Das says: 'complete purity is a condition of sterility'; see 'Difference and Division as Designs for Life' in Borden, ed., *Contemporary India*, 45–56.
3. Swami Nirvedananda, ed., *Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems*, 17.
4. Aurobindo, *Foundations*, 391.
5. See D.K. Bedekar's *Towards Understanding Gandhi* as an example of such scholarship.
6. See Aurobindo on Indian and Western philosophy in *Foundations*, 57–61. See Raja Rao, *The Chessmaster and His Moves* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1988). See J.O. Urmson, ed., *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers* (1960; rpt. London: Hutchinson, 1975) for essays on Aristotle, Metaphysics, Positivism, and so on.
7. Ramchandra Gandhi, 'Advaita: Meditations on the Truth of India,' in Borden, ed., *Contemporary India*, 67–75.



The Colonized as Colonizers and the Colonizers as Colonized

STUDENT: The title of this chapter suggests a neat reversal of roles. In a way, you have prepared me for it by showing how both India and the West are internally divided. We have seen that a simple confrontationist framework won't do for our theory of decolonization.

TEACHER: But we can take this idea further. It is not just that India and the West are divided, but it is important to notice how their roles have changed.

STUDENT: You mean that now we are the colonizers and they the colonized?

TEACHER: Well, some recent books on the subject seem to think that that is the inevitable direction of history. One such book (*Empire and Emancipation* by Jan Pieterse) argues that there is a dialectical relationship between Emancipation and Empire. Both these movements are not unified, but heterogeneous; both contain contradictions. Emancipation leads to empire which in turn leads to another movement of emancipation, and so on.¹

STUDENT: This logic sounds very specious. It takes away the bad *karma* of the colonizers in one shot.

TEACHER: Wait a minute. Let's try to understand the theory first. The idea is that a movement for emancipation starts with overthrowing oppression, but soon becomes oppressive itself.

STUDENT: You mean a revolution eats its own children?

TEACHER: There are examples of this the world over, be it Russia, Cuba, or the African countries. Former liberation fighters become dictatorial rulers. The new regimes that they inaugurate are nearly as bad as the ones that they have fought to overthrow.

STUDENT: But how does that work with, say, the British empire.

TEACHER: The explanation is that the British empire begins with Britain's attempt to ward off the domination of Spain, Portugal, and France. All this happens sometime in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. So what begins as a movement for emancipation ends up as an empire.

STUDENT: But how does that work with, say, the British empire?teenth century, then there was certainly no drive for emancipation?

TEACHER: On the other hand, one could argue that the threat was never totally absent. Other European powers were competing with Britain. It could never afford to lose initiative.

STUDENT: But surely once Britain became powerful, say in the sixteenth century, then there was certainly no drive for emancipation.

STUDENT: But there will always be an external threat, therefore a struggle for survival in a competitive world system. Does that justify colonialism?

TEACHER: No it doesn't and we'll come to that in a moment. But it is important to see how the erstwhile colonized become colonizers in turn. The freedom movement in the USA is an instance. What started off as an emancipatory movement later metamorphosed into a state which was itself imperialistic.

STUDENT: Can we say the same for India?

TEACHER: Think of our role in the subcontinent. Think of how we took over Sikkim. How we bully Nepal. How we moved into Maldives to protect President Gayoom. How we sent our troops to Sri Lanka. Basically, we have all the trappings of a regional empire.

STUDENT: But would you agree with the theory that you cited above that emancipation leads to empire and vice versa?

TEACHER: The idea is very interesting. It also has a symmetrical structure to it. But I think it essentializes and metaphysicalizes the problem. I am not sure that the dialectic operates so neatly. Why do some systems remain in the imperial mode for so long.

while others for such a short time? Also what about those countries which did not build conventional empires? Ancient India is an example. Our culture expanded overseas to what was known as 'greater India'. But we did not hold this empire together by force of arms. The conquest was by and large cultural.

STUDENT: Are you suggesting that there are different kinds of empire and different kinds of emancipation?

TEACHER: Exactly. Now we may have a country functioning in an emancipatory mode in one sphere and in an imperialistic mode in another. There are super empires and mini-empires. There are colonies within colonies, empires within empires, emancipations within emancipations. That is what complicates the model. However, our focus is not on a general theory which explains the history of colonialism, but on what is happening to India at present.

STUDENT: I like your idea of a country functioning in seemingly contradictory modes at the same time. May that be applied to India?

TEACHER: Yes. You see, India is struggling against the global hegemony of the world capitalistic system and Western military power; at the same time, in its own sphere of influence, it is enacting a role not very different from that of the countries it opposes in the larger global system.

STUDENT: In other words, vis-à-vis USA, we are India—poor, backward, underdeveloped; but vis-à-vis Bangladesh, we are like the USA itself—large, powerful, rich.

TEACHER: Obviously, a country like Bangladesh or Nepal is doubly oppressed. That's why Nepal tried, unsuccessfully, to break free of the Indian stranglehold. But to make Nepal into a Taiwan overnight was as unpleasant a dream as the reality of being India's colony.

STUDENT: So you have on one hand, a colony of a colony; on the other, you have the colonizers of the colonizers; and we are in the middle, at once the colonizers and the colonized—colonized by the West ourselves but colonizing our more underdeveloped neighbours at the same time. Sounds ghoulish.

TEACHER: The world system works such that if we do not exercise our influence, we won't have any left. It's like the law of atrophy—if you don't use something, you lose it.

STUDENT: But I thought you were trying to argue against such abuse of power.

TEACHER: Indeed, I am. We must not dominate our neighbours, but help them in every way possible with their 'development'. But are we really in a position to do so? Or are we ourselves in need of aid and assistance, guidance and education?

You see, the West itself is in a similar trap. Its foreign and military policies are disastrous all the world over. Yet, it provides a wide spectrum of aid and support in food, medicines, agriculture, science, education, and so on to the underdeveloped world.

Again and again, we are confronted with similar contradictions. The real challenge is to obviate the need for aid altogether; but for that to happen, military domination will have to go first. No domination, no need for aid. That's the real connection which we must understand. Not just globally, but locally.

STUDENT: That seems like an impossible agenda. Please let us leave it aside for a moment. I am interested in returning to what you said earlier about colonizations within colonizations.

TEACHER: Just look at those sections, of our society—the north-eastern tribes, dispossessed people all over India, harijans, adivasis—who are outside the system. Are they not colonized by us and the state? Do we not support their continued oppression just as we support our country's bullying of its neighbours? How many people protested when we sent troops to Sri Lanka? Similarly, how many people protest at the continued oppression of millions of our fellow citizens today? States like Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, and Meghalaya are not even part of the cultural mainstream. That's why they take to both English and Christianity so easily.

Actually, the problem of being 'Indian' is larger. We agreed that India was a plural space. But the integrating mechanisms of Hinduism, the dominant religion, already were inadequate by the time Islam became powerful. There had to be, therefore, compartmentalization and exclusion even in the India that we accept as ours. The rise of Islam, Sikhism, and Christianity are examples of this inability of Hinduism to absorb the new, the threatening, the Other. So, we already have a concept of India which is larger than that of Hindutva, or Hindu society. That's why the idea of a secular India, encompassing and embracing diversities within its unifying structure.

But even the idea of a secular India larger than Hindutva is proving inadequate. So, there are those who are outside even this 'India'. Think of not just the north-eastern states, but of tribal populations all over India—the more remote, as in Andamans, the more outside the system.

Aren't all of them colonized by our state? Don't we have a problem of how to be fair, just, and non-oppressive to them?

STUDENT: It's quite clear to me now that we ourselves act as colonizers not only in our regional sphere of influence, but also in the way we treat several sections of our own society. But would you blame the people—all of us—for this? Is it not the state which is responsible?

TEACHER: The alienation of the people from the state or from very large systems is precisely the kind of problem they are facing in the West. In India, because we are a young country, the identification with the state is stronger. But already, we are beginning to get tired, weary, and indifferent to how the state functions. Several states such as West Bengal or Kerala are already out of the mainstream, culturally or politically. They don't give a damn about what happens in Delhi. They want to get on with their own lives, with the least interference from Delhi.

STUDENT: In that case, the alienation of the people from larger systems will also breed in them a sense of frustration, helplessness. They will feel like victims.

TEACHER: Exactly. In fact, in the West today, large sections of the population feel similarly victimized. I have heard it said that they feel like 'Third World' people in their own countries. When you abuse their 'country' to such people, they don't mind it at all—they feel as victimized as you do if you are a foreigner. Whether they are gays, blacks, women, or other minorities, they feel like foreigners in their own country. So they see you as a potential ally.

STUDENT: The oppression of the Indian people by larger systems and their alienation from the state, then, should make them doubly colonized.

TEACHER: Yes. In a sense that is true. We are victims of a state which itself is a victim of the world system of exploitation. But I think we have greater freedom, manoeuvrability, and scope to change the system than our counterparts in the West do. They lost the game in the nineteenth century itself. The system won.

STUDENT: So can we say that people living in the West are colonized by institutions, corporations, and the various systems which govern their lives?

TEACHER: Yes. They are not being colonized in any direct fashion by us, their former colonies. Though large sections of our people are living there, they haven't taken over yet. They are merely struggling to survive. But if you look at the larger exchange of populations that has taken place, then there has certainly been a backlash of colonialism, if not reverse colonialism itself.

STUDENT: What do you mean?

TEACHER: Take the case of the USA for instance. Think about the blacks in America. These people were slaves once. Today, they constitute about 12 percent of the total population, or nearly thirty millions. Then there are Asians and Hispanics. Together, they comprise nearly a sixth of the total population of USA. The case of UK is very similar.

The colonized world will gradually penetrate the world of the colonizers. This is an inevitability.

STUDENT: That ties in with the idea of reciprocal acculturation that you already spoke of. But this type of impact is not what you mean when you refer to the colonization of the colonizers.

TEACHER: No. Nor do I refer to the other kind of backlash in which a new empire emerges from the colonized world and then takes control of the territories of their former masters.

I am speaking of the victimization of the average person living in the West. Today, we no longer speak of the oppressor and the oppressed. Everyone is merely a 'subject'. What we are subjected to maybe different, but the fact of being a subject, it is argued, is universal.²

In the West, the average citizens suffer from a variety of oppressions. They may be black, Chicano, Indian, female, gay or lesbian, and so on. Everyone is a minority. Even the majority suffers from being a part of the dominant group. And all these people are oppressed by consumerism and advanced capitalism. The individual is powerless before gigantic corporations and alienating systems. The mass media controls thought. The entire mental make-up or consciousness of a person is colonized by these large forces. The individual is powerless to resist them.

That's why we've had so many alternate-culture movements there, including the Greens. Average university students feel so

lost and confused that they invariably join some special interest group or bandwagon.

Then there is the endemic and ubiquitous presence of drugs in the West—alcohol, heroin, cocaine, or just cigarettes and coffee—everyone seems to be in need of some fix. The world is too much with them.

STUDENT: You seem to be, once again, preaching against the ills of 'modern civilization'.

TEACHER: Gandhi spoke of these ills long back. And before him there were many others, including Blake, Thoreau, Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Tolstoy, in the West itself. They knew what was coming—the enslavement of the human spirit by the vast power of the machine.

The pervasive neurosis in the West today is symptomatic of the same malaise.

STUDENT: But can we call this 'colonization'?

TEACHER: That's the point. There are different kinds of colonizations. There is the overt economic-political kind, or the more covert cultural-philosophical kind. We have already made such distinctions. But there is this kind of colonization too in which the mind of a person is completely dominated by a system, a machine, a state apparatus. In this sense, large sections of the West feel similarly worthless, victimized, and marginalized in their own societies.

STUDENT: So what does this do to our model of decolonization?

TEACHER: Obviously, decolonization is no longer a simple process of overthrowing the enemy out there. We have seen this already. It is also not a simple matter of defining ourselves as the colonized and the West as our colonizers. We must strive for a decolonization which aligns a whole set of forces on one side, whether in the colonized or the colonizing world, and pits them against contrary forces the world over. We must have a global strategy and agenda. We must see clearly that the same systems that oppress people in the West also oppress us. It gives the West its prosperity, but denies its people humanity; it allows us humanity, but denies us prosperity.

We must continue to resist the West and its systems of dominance, for our struggle on that front is not yet over. At the same time our struggle with our internal enemies must continue. This part of the equation we have already understood. What we

also need to understand is how we as a people, who support the Indian state, should stop colonizing others—both within and without our borders. Finally, we must see how those people whom we consider our oppressors are themselves oppressed by larger systems. We must in our struggle be able to reach out to them, offer them assistance and consolation, and seek their help in moving towards an equitable world culture.

The agenda may seem too vast. Perhaps, we need to define our own limits and look at our own problem of development. Yet, the intellectual challenge is how we can move into wider and wider circles of understanding and comprehension. What is the use of making a straw man out of our opponent and then demolishing him? That would be like witchcraft—we make little effigies of the West and then poke them with our intellectual pins. That is rationalized hatred, not decolonization. We must examine the oppression of our opponents so that we don't flatten them into ciphers, thereby dehumanizing both them and us.

STUDENT: Complicating and demystifying our notion of decolonization certainly makes it difficult to resort to such easy reductions and simplifications.

Notes

1. Jan P. Nederveen Pieterse, *Empire and Emancipation: Power and Knowledge on a World Scale* (London: Pluto Press, 1990).
2. See Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton, 'Theory Pedagogy Politics: The Crisis of "The Subject" in the Humanities,' *Boundary 2* (1988): 1-21, as an example of such an argument.



From Svaraj to Sarvodaya: Decolonization to Development

STUDENT: Don't you think it's time we paused to take stock of what we have done so far?

TEACHER: It seems to me that we have just about finished talking of decolonization and must now go on to the second half of the book, which will be about development.

STUDENT: In our previous discussions, our main strategy has been to think through decolonization in terms of Svaraj.

TEACHER: Obviously. But once the colonizers are removed, at least to a distance from where they don't interfere directly, then we must turn our attention to something else.

This something else was called nation building earlier but is now better known as development.

STUDENT: Would you then say that development is the number one national issue that faces us?

TEACHER: Seems like that. One view is that decolonization is an older obsession. Now we may forget about it and get on with the business of development.

STUDENT: But development is not unrelated to decolonization, is it?

TEACHER: Certainly not. Because the theories and models, resources and capital, skills and cultural mores of development—all bring

us back to the older encounter with the West and the rest of the world.

STUDENT: So your idea of development is one which includes decolonization?

TEACHER: We must remember that decolonization must never be divorced from development. If we adopt a strategy of development which once again makes us weak, dependent, and oppressed by world capitalism, then our development programme will be a miserable failure.

Therefore all the points that we raised with reference to decolonization—our definitions of India and the West, our discussions of the theories of decolonization, and our talks on the strategies of resistance and assimilation—apply equally to development; they must be implicit in our discussion of development.

STUDENT: In other words, our notion of Svaraj will influence the kind of development we advocate?

TEACHER: Precisely

STUDENT: But what's wrong with the present notion of development?

TEACHER: The abuses and horrors of development are so well documented as to make critics declare that 'development is dead'. We now have fairly rigorous and thoroughgoing critiques of not just development but also the immoral and violent science that backs it.

STUDENT: Then, would you join the bandwagon against development, advocating its worldwide dismantlement?

TEACHER: A certain kind of development, the dominant kind sponsored by the West and its financial institutions, might well be dismantled to the benefit of the world. Yet I wouldn't like to dismiss development out of hand, but modify its methods and goals.

STUDENT: Some people may argue that this is impossible.

TEACHER: Yes. The fact is that a lot of us, especially those who rule and govern us, are sold on development. By merely saying that development is dead, we will not have killed it. Also, remember that the alternative to development at present seems to be subsistence, which is easy to glorify but hard to practice.

STUDENT: Then can you define what development means to you?

TEACHER: Certainly. That's what these remaining chapters are for. But I wish to make a brief intervention here about why I am not

totally anti-science and anti-development. My position is that we need both tradition and modernity, both local skills and crafts *and* science and technology. We don't want one at the expense of the other. It is, ultimately, a question of managing them such that they don't end up managing you.

STUDENT: So is there an alternate model of development which you wish to invoke, quite in the manner in which you brought the idea of Svaraj to bear on our discussion of decolonization?

TEACHER: As a matter of fact, I do. And we have already identified that brand of development which flows out of Svaraj. Gandhi called it Sarvodaya, the development of all. It means the amelioration of the entire society, not just a section of it. It means guaranteed standards of livelihood, education, health, and culture to all our citizens. It means eliminating both poverty and waste. Above all, it means peace, security, and freedom from fear.

STUDENT: By the standards of Sarvodaya, we have failed.

TEACHER: Yes. Gandhi questioned both the goals and ends of this development by challenging the superiority of modern, mechanistic civilization.

STUDENT: Then, developed countries have not succeeded either.

TEACHER: Well, by the standards of Sarvodaya, Western technomodernism too has failed to uplift the vast majority of the people of the world, not to speak of large sections of society in the West. What we want is Svaraj and Sarvodaya—the good of everyone. That's why we must never take for granted either the goal or the methods of development.

STUDENT: What would you say is the number one issue before nations who are already developed?

TEACHER: Actually, their main concern should be how to cope with and minimise the ill-effects of development. Nuclear waste, pollution, and the degradation of the environment are some of their internal problems. Outside, they have to introspect about situations they might have contributed to—poverty, war, unemployment, disease, industrial disasters, and adversity in the poorer countries of the world.

But the dominant ideology of the West is not prepared to deal with the ill-effects of development but works to ensure more development, more power, more progress for the West. In that sense, they haven't changed at all since the industrial revolution.

STUDENT: Are you saying that development should be concerned not only with the standard of living but also with the quality of living, whether in India or the West?

TEACHER: Yes, the paramount focus should be on the quality of human life, on justice and equality for everyone, on a peaceful world order, on the prevention of war, on protection of the earth and its flora and fauna.

STUDENT: How can India join in this global programme while safeguarding her own interests?

TEACHER: There's only one way to do so. And that's by making sure that our path of development is saner, safer, and more intelligent than that of the West.

STUDENT: Are you saying that our dialogue on development will be an illustration or application of the ideas that we have already developed in our discussions on decolonization?

TEACHER: Yes. It will be an application, rather than a reformulation of new theories. Moreover, a lot of thinking on development has been going on the world over for several decades. We cannot hope to take issue with all of it. We shall, instead, try to focus on specific questions, offering new insights wherever possible, but otherwise being content with presenting existing points of view.

STUDENT: But don't you think that development is a very broad concept, including issues like population, food production, environment, science and technology, and so on? How can we, non-experts that we are, talk about it?

TEACHER: Since development concerns all of us, it is crucial that we find ways of participating in it or resisting its evils. Otherwise, we will never be able to empower ourselves; the experts, the bureaucrats, and the makers of policy will take over our fight—as it is they have all but hijacked the global environment movement. They will say to us, 'We are professionals, trained to help you. Leave your future to us.'

And that, of course, will be a fatal mistake.



Versions of Development

STUDENT: What do we mean by development?

TEACHER: Development signifies a process of change and progression. But in actual usage the term is employed to distinguish one group of countries from another: some countries are developed and some are developing or some are developed while the others are underdeveloped. These distinctions were made in the 1950s and the 1960s when the term gained currency and power. So the question arises as to what progress the developed countries have made since then? Where do they stand today? Because 'developed' implies a completion of the process, it suggests the *end* of development—end both in the sense of termination and goal.

But is this really so?

In other words, we need to question the idea that some countries have attained a perfect state of development towards which we, who are supposedly underdeveloped, must also strive.

Actually, all the countries of the world are developing. None is developed. This doesn't mean that no distinctions can be made between countries at different levels of development, but that no one stage is necessarily superior and thus the natural goal of the other.¹

STUDENT: To think that we are all a part of one large developing world is alluring, but the fact is that we are poor, illiterate,

disaster-prone, and all the rest of it, while they are rich, educated, secure, and so on.

TEACHER: Yes, I am not exalting our poverty, illiteracy, and general backwardness, but only suggesting that alleviating these problems will not necessarily make us 'developed'.

We gain as well as lose in the process of development. Therefore, we must ask ourselves what is it we wish to gain and at what price? The varieties of answers to these questions will produce the varieties of development.

STUDENT: It seems to me that we have little choice in the matter. The developed world has already evolved the technologies for development. We can do little but to adapt them to our situation and go along.

TEACHER: I am glad you said adapt and not adopt. The problem is precisely in this adaptation. What we must remember is that the process of development undertaken by the West cannot be emulated by us.

STUDENT: What do you mean?

TEACHER: I mean that we cannot colonize others, industrialize at the expense of the rest of the world.

STUDENT: But is that the only way?

TEACHER: We hope not, we believe not, otherwise our plans for development would be futile. Gandhi knew this long ago. He said that it has taken the exploitation of one whole globe for England to attain its present level of prosperity; how many globes would be required to be exploited if India wanted to reach the same level of development?

God forbid that India should take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world like locusts.²

STUDENT: Gandhi wanted to turn the clock back. He hated machines and what they could do. But we like machines today. They improve our standard of living.

TEACHER: We have spoken about Gandhi's views on machines earlier, so I don't want to repeat that conversation. But what Gandhi was really worried about was the price that we would have to pay for development, Western style.

And just to check whether what he said is true, look around you in India today. We have created a severe imbalance in our country. There are today two Indias, one rich, the other poor; one urban, the other rural; one industrialized, the other agricultural; one literate, and the other illiterate, and so on.

STUDENT: Actually, it's worse. Urban India itself is no paradise. It is polluted. It has slums. The standard of living is appallingly low.

TEACHER: So you see what a monstrosity we have perpetuated all in the name of development. Wouldn't you say that our development plan has failed?

STUDENT: But one could argue that we have failed not because we developed this much, but because this much is not enough. We need more, not less development.

TEACHER: But all that depends on what you mean by development. If by development you mean mega dams, big industries, and huge investment, then its logical offshoots are displacement of populations, exploitation of labour, pollution, over-urbanization, and rural poverty. There are further consequences which we don't see clearly. The surplus extraction from peasants, landless labourers, and other agriculturists is appropriated by the state and redistributed to big industry. The system results in the degradation of the environment which so many people inhabit. In fact, it is increasingly clear that the erosion of the natural resource base the world over is a direct outcome of the consumption demands of the rich—be they in affluent countries or within India.¹ This, in turn, aggravates rural insecurity which is intimately linked to an increase in population.

STUDENT: The picture that you paint is very bleak. But hasn't this model of development resulted in the creation of a sizeable urban middle class, the strengthening of democracy, and an overall increase in living standards?

TEACHER: The increase in living standards due to mass-production cannot be ignored. Nor the improvement in health care, and other marginal gains that you speak of. But what about the costs? About 300 million people living at subsistence level; growing consumerism in the cities; a corrupt government which is hardly democratic at all.

STUDENT: We might have been worse off without this development. You seem to think that if only we hadn't developed and remained backward, we'd have been all right.

TEACHER: I never said that, but yes, I do want to suggest a cause-and-effect relationship between this model of development and the horrors that we see today. The fallacy is to attribute the successes to development and the failures to something else—poverty, stupidity, corruption, overpopulation, and so on. I think it is important to see that all these are related, that you can't get one without the other.

STUDENT: Are you suggesting that there is a fundamental contradiction within this model of development?

TEACHER: Yes, that's it. This contradiction was noticeable to critics of industrialization right from the beginning. Engels, for instance, traced the existence of slums to the capitalistic mode of production:

The breeding place of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalistic mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished, they are merely shifted elsewhere! The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place produces them in the next place also. As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist it is a folly to hope for an isolated solution to the housing question or to any other social question affecting the fate of the workers.

Engels was right. Now the slums have just been shifted farther, to the Third World! Dharavi in Bombay, for instance, has the peculiar distinction of being the largest slum in the world. It has 5.5 million people living in 1.1 million tenements of 1,000 slum pockets, spread over 25 square kilometres!⁴

STUDENT: What about the contradictions within socialism?

TEACHER: Evidently, they led to the downfall and dismantling of the USSR!

STUDENT: Hmm. Then every social formation has its share of contradictions?

TEACHER: Well, Marx himself said that all historical societies contain contradictions which make change and, thus, history mandatory. One group exploits another as a consequence of which there is a fundamental conflict of interest. For Marx, the basic contradiction was between the *forces* of production—land, raw material, machinery, etc.—and the *relations* of production—the social relationships, especially between capital and labour,

which people form in order to produce goods. This contradiction in the infrastructure would produce a corresponding contradiction in the superstructure.

STUDENT: All this is well known, orthodox Marxism. Why repeat it now?

TEACHER: Because I intend to take a leaf from Marxism in order to suggest that there is a similar contradiction at the base of modern industrial development. The contradiction is between nature and culture, to use an old opposition. The culture of industrial capitalism is sustained at an enormous natural cost; sooner or later, the earth itself will be unable to support such a use of its resources.

STUDENT: Then we are doomed.

TEACHER: I won't go that far. We must question this model of development, change it to suit our goal, experiment with newer or older models—that is the challenge. Our whole discussion is predicated upon the belief that there can be another model of development which is less damaging, less dangerous.

STUDENT: But can we afford to keep experimenting? Can we turn the clock back?

TEACHER: That is precisely the point, isn't it? We cannot turn the clock back. Nor can we afford to continue a known evil. We must, in that sense, turn the clock fast forward.

STUDENT: What do you mean?

TEACHER: For instance, we must stop using fossil fuels, particularly oil.

STUDENT: But America will never stop using oil as long as it is so cheap.

TEACHER: That is exactly what's wrong with the West. It's symbolic of the kind of development which I want us to reject. Our dependence on oil, our attempts to imitate the American life style, are doing us untold damage.

We have plenty of sunlight, but we don't have the courage and the vision to develop ways of using it. Our solar technology is imported. But the West is not interested in developing solar technology in a big way as long as oil is so cheap. Also because they don't have that much sunlight. So it's not really profitable to them. Now we continue to duplicate the inadequate kind of work they are doing in alternate energy sources and thus continue our dependence on fossil fuels. Instead, we should take the

initiative in developing solar energy; and stop the kind of mediocre R & D efforts that we have been investing in till now.

STUDENT: Are you saying that underdevelopment is a necessary consequence of the kind of development that the West has engaged in?

TEACHER: And is still engaging in. That's why I referred to their continued use of oil; their wasteful consumption of it and of the earth's other resources; their going to war to protect and perpetuate this evil. The extent of their immorality is unspeakable.

STUDENT: They also waste paper, food, and every type of consumer good that we can conceive of. I believe that Americans produce more garbage than any other people.

TEACHER: Perhaps, they believe that they can trash this earth itself and move on to another planet after they have used it up.

The sad thing is that if they stopped wasting so much, stopped over-consuming, then their whole economy would collapse. The chewing gum companies, the cosmetics industry, the aspirin manufactures, the publishers, and so on would all have to close shop. They depend on, nay demand over-consumption, in order to survive. There would be a severe recession if America decided to become frugal overnight, if its people decided to consume only what they needed.

The only way that the West can save itself is by trying to undo the damage it has done: By devoting all their energies to saving the world. By helping others full-time. By developing alternate sources of energy. By distributing food all over the world. By cutting down on their defence spending. By not being 'the West' and becoming the rest of us.

But don't forget how blameworthy we ourselves are. We should stop looking for help from the West and strike out on our own. We should, for instance, import the best solar energy expertise to begin with, and eventually become leaders in this alternative energy technology.

STUDENT: Where does Japan fit in this scenario? And what about the new entrants into the game like South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan?

TEACHER: The cases of Singapore, Japan, and Taiwan are very similar. Take the case of Singapore, for example. They consciously decided that they didn't want to be the typical, poor, Asian country. They also knew that the only way they could be

otherwise was by playing tango with world capitalism dominated by the West. And they succeeded. Through tremendous discipline, single-minded planning, and the right policy decisions, they have managed to join as smaller players in the West's game of economic dominance. You can say that they are living off the scraps of the West or, should I say, of the world capitalistic order.

Taiwan's case is similar. They are a nation made up of those upper-class, Westernized Chinese who fled after Mao's revolution. They had already sold themselves to the Western idea of progress. Today, they are a voluntary colony of USA. They also have no Chinese culture left to speak of.

STUDENT: One can accept this interpretation of the success of Singapore and Taiwan. After all, they are small countries, with small populations. It is easier for them to change, to adopt a new value system in a disciplined and controlled manner.

TEACHER: Don't also forget that they are both authoritarian societies, where freedom is suppressed. Their people have no choice but to participate in world capitalism. All opposition will be put down ruthlessly.

STUDENT: But what about Japan? It isn't a small country. It has a very large population. And it hasn't been assimilated by the West.

TEACHER: The last point is debatable. Japan is also an authoritarian society dominated by a single idea. Earlier, the idea was military supremacy. Then it became economic domination. The single-minded zeal with which they pursue this one idea is frightening. It has led to moral and mental sickness. Patriarchy is particularly nasty in Japan. The living standards of a middle-class Japanese are not very high. The rents in the cities are exorbitant. People have to commute long hours to go to work. Education is very costly. The net result is that an upper-middle-class Indian has, perhaps, a freer, more fulfilling life than his Japanese counterpart.

But all these factors do not diminish their tremendous achievement. They have smashed the myth of Western superiority in capitalist industrialization. They have proven that there is nothing inherent in the West which makes it necessarily superior to the other peoples of the world. They have proven that given the

right combination of qualities, anyone can break into the system. In fact, they have expanded the base of world capitalism, making it a less exclusive club and showing the way to imitators like South Korea.

But, remember, that Japan's success owes in part to its extraordinary discipline and single-mindedness. Its case is special. Not everyone can emulate its success. Moreover, Japan was never colonized like India. If anything, it was a potential and actual colonizer of other nations including China and Korea. Today, Japan is an economic colonizer—if not directly, through America—of the world. If America and Western Europe collapse, Japan collapses too. That's why they are looking for alternate markets in China and India.

STUDENT: But how does Japan fit into this world-destroying model of development that you are speaking of?

TEACHER: It fits in as the apparently benign outsider. But this outsider is very much an insider. Their involvement is masked by their non-aggressive foreign policy, by the fact that they don't have a huge defence system. But all this is slowly changing. Japan almost decided to send its troops overseas for the first time during the Gulf crisis. It knows that it has to pay with both money and blood to protect its economic interests. The decision was revoked after nationwide protests, but Japan did end up pledging about nine billion dollars to the Allied war effort.

So far, there's plenty of moolah to go around. But when more and more players, small and big, fight for the pie, the present economic order could collapse, with USA and Japan falling out. Given the increasing impoverishment of USA and the steady enrichment of Japan and Western Europe, this is bound to happen. Finally, the contradictions of the present world order will catch up with the leaders!

Until then, Japan will continue to support the West as an honorary member. In that sense it is a proponent of the same model of development, but an exceptional case thereof. It too is directly and indirectly contributing to the impoverishment of the world's finite resources, at a rate disproportional to its size or needs.

In order to achieve its levels of prosperity it had to adopt the Western model of modernity and development. And this is true

of South Korea too. When you adopt such a model, you lose the plurality of your culture. You become just another bad copy of the West.

STUDENT: As opposed to this, do we have another model of development?

TEACHER: Yes. And we have already identified it as Sarvodaya. Gandhi used the *charkha* as a symbol of it. Each person equipped with a *charkha* became a producer. Suddenly, our manpower became an asset. Today, we have several experimental villages in India where gobar gas and other appropriate technologies help to ensure a fairly decent standard of living for our people. These technologies work in pretty much the same way as the *charkha* did to make people self-sufficient producers.'

STUDENT: So can you define for us what you have been describing as the two models of development?

TEACHER: That development which leads to the impoverishment and underdevelopment of others, which results in the degradation of the environment and the displacement of people, which adds to the disparities of our country—that model of development, called by whatever name, is evil. I don't know all the constituents of that model, whether they are the Nehruvian dreams of dams and steel mills, heavy industries and infrastructure, or other things such as multinational cosmetic conglomerates with slick advertisements. All of these are embroiled with the state in a conspiracy which keeps the rich, the bureaucrats, and a part of the middle classes happy at the expense of the rest of the country.

As opposed to this is a model of development which is concentrated in rural India, employing alternate technologies, local means, manual labour. It improves the standard of living of the people without polluting and destroying their environment, without displacing and uprooting them. Instead, it empowers individuals, generates local wealth, and prevents the migration of impoverished peasants to the cities.

Notes

1. Figures have been taken from various newspaper and television reports. Also see the Worldwatch Institute's report on the *State of the World 1992* by Lester Brown et al. (New Delhi: Horizon India Books, 1992).
2. For an account of the Green Revolution, see K. Griffin, *The Green Revolution* (London, 1979).
3. See 'The Culture of Food,' in Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution*, 134–38. For a severe indictment of the Green Revolution, see Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution* and Claude Alvarez, *Science, Development and Violence*.
4. Barbara Ward, *Progress for a Small Planet* (New York: Norton, 1979): 92.
5. See Paul Ehrlich et al., *Ecoscience: Population, Resources, Environment* (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman, 1977).

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Population

STUDENT: May we now go on to discuss some of the important issues related to development that confront us today? Of these, I think our expanding population is the chief one. Don't you agree that the population explosion is our greatest problem today?

TEACHER: Yes. The dimensions of this explosion are truly alarming. If you look at the population growth of our world, you will find that there are more living people on the earth today than the total number of human beings that ever lived on the planet! The population of the world was about 5 million in 8000 B.C. Today it is close to 6 billion! It took 2 million years for the population to reach 1 billion in 1850, but the last billion was added in only 12 years, from 1975 to 1987. That's the meaning of an exponential birth rate. It's what is known as the 'J' curve: for a long time there isn't much growth, but when the bend of the curve is reached growth shoots up. Each year the population of the world grows by about 92 million, which is equivalent to adding a Mexico to the world annually. Moreover, the highest growth rates are in the poorest countries. Out of these 92 million, 88

million are born in developing countries; so that by the year 2000, about 80 percent of the world will experience want and deprivation, with only 20 percent constituting the affluent. The results of this increase can only be disastrous—hunger, poverty, pollution, migration, and environmental degradation.

For us in India, the problem is especially worrying. Figures vary, but at least 45,000 children are added to our population each day (more are born but some die leaving us this figure). This works out to about 17 million each year, so we're adding an Australia to our population each year. At this rate, our population will cross the one billion mark by the end of the century, and be twice its present size in another 35 years! Can we double our production of food, clothing, housing, health, recreation, transportation, and so on within this period?'

STUDENT: Impossible!

TEACHER: So, obviously, something needs to be done very soon.

STUDENT: I think we should analyse the causes of the rising population and also try to find ways of checking it. How do you fit into your paradigm of decolonization and development the problem of our ever-increasing population?

TEACHER: I'll try a direct answer. The rising population is another symptom of our uneven and asymmetrical absorption of an imported model of development. It is part of the legacy of colonialism. To control our population would be an important step in the decolonization process.

STUDENT: You attribute this enormous and still burgeoning population to an imbalance in our developmental model and to colonialism. What's your evidence for such a claim?

TEACHER: Colonialism alienated a large section of our population from the state and its values. These people were simply outside the quasi-modern system that the colonial state tried to install in India. The people who were left out continued their old ways of living. At the same time they became more and more impoverished and insecure: therefore, they continued to proliferate. They suffered the consequences of colonialism but could not yet partake of its benefits. They continued to be exploited by modernity but could not participate in it, and therefore could not imbibe its values. These people are the victims of colonialism and modernity.

STUDENT: So what is your theory of population increases?

TEACHER: High birth rates are more common to pre-modern societies or societies where modernity has not made adequate inroads. On the other hand, low birth rates are found in modern societies. Small, nuclear families are common to modern societies because they have high standards of living, good health care, low infant mortality, and high life expectancy.

So the highest rates of population growth will be found in societies which have a mix of the pre-modern and modern: pre-modern or high birth rates and modern or low rates of infant mortality.

STUDENT: Yes, it has also been shown that the higher the level of education, the lower the birth rate. OK, so we seem to have the worst of both worlds: high birth rates, which are a pre-modern legacy and low death rates, thanks to modern medicine.

But eventually, the gap will diminish and our population will reach a plateau, not rising rapidly thereafter.

TEACHER: That will only happen when people feel more secure, more certain of their future in this country.

It has been shown that one major cause for high fertility rates is insecurity. When people feel insecure, they have more children. Because there is security in numbers. And there may be various reasons for insecurity: poor health care, high infant mortality, poverty, lack of education, and so on.

STUDENT: Why can't these people see that more children will mean more mouths to feed?

TEACHER: These people don't see this equation at all. As long as a child can earn more than it consumes to stay alive, the poorest will continue to have more children.

STUDENT: But what about their standard of living?

TEACHER: You have used the phrase 'standard of living'. But the people you seek to apply it to have no standard of living to speak of. They are already in a pretty bad situation. The fear of a drop in the standard of living applies only to the middle classes who have something worth maintaining. But these people are completely out of the system—they have no health care, no insurance, no social security. So who will look after them if they are sick or old or incapable of working? Their children, who

else? The more the children, the more the available hands to work and to support the family.

Ironically, it's their lack of surplus which makes them prolific. Their children are their only surplus. If they were better paid, could accumulate more, they would begin to have a standard of living which they would want to protect. Their very poverty and exploitation makes them produce more children.

STUDENT: How is this related to the problem of development and decolonization?

TEACHER: We have seen that incomplete decolonization leads to lop-sided development. Lop-sided development leads to tremendous social disparity. Social disparity leads to poverty and insecurity. Poverty and insecurity lead to overpopulation.

STUDENT: That is a very clear chain of causality indeed. But what about people or communities who are not necessarily poor, like the Muslims in India. Why do they have such high rates of birth?

TEACHER: It is certainly not because they are allowed to have four wives each. That is rubbish. Personally, I know no middle class Muslim—and I do know quite a few—who has more than one wife.

The fact is that minorities anywhere tend to be more prolific. In India this is true of Sikhs too, not just the Muslims. Indians in UK and USA also have a higher birth rate than the local population. One can explain it as arising out of insecurity.

STUDENT: So what is the solution? More contraception?

TEACHER: As someone said, the best contraception is development. As larger and larger sections of the population are able to share in the benefits of development, they begin to feel more and more secure; and hence, tend to have fewer children.

But the participation of more people in the process of development cannot come about by trying to extend the present model of development. We have seen that it has some inherent constraints which prevent its benefits from reaching a bigger chunk of the population. Therefore, our planning must be radically reoriented so as to take the benefits of education, health care, and family planning in a meaningful way to people who are outside the safety net of society.

STUDENT: But what about family planning programmes?

TEACHER: The first thing to remember is that women must be at the centre of any family planning campaign; right now, they are still at the periphery. The message is directed at men, supposedly because it's they who decide how many children their women will have.

STUDENT: In other words, Indian women have very little control of their own bodies.

TEACHER: This is one of the worst consequences of the patriarchy. Women have not only no control over their sexuality, but also over their reproductive mechanisms. So, the goal of any family welfare programme should be the empowerment of the woman.

STUDENT: But how are we to achieve this?

TEACHER: There is only one tried and tested way: education. Taking education as one of the yardsticks of people's participation in the process of development, we see that those who have the least access to education, have the highest birth rates. In other words, once women are educated, they not only have greater awareness of their own rights but also some basic knowledge of health and hygiene. Once they learn how they can control their own biology, they will begin to opt for smaller families on their own. Do you think any woman would like to be turned into a child-producing machine at the cost of her own and her children's health?

Family planning will only work if the people who are expected to practice it are convinced that it will benefit them. You have to convey an idea, a concept, not sell a product. Though contraception should be widely available, this availability alone will not suffice.

STUDENT: But Gandhi was totally against contraception. He believed that it would lead to vice and immorality. People would begin to have sex for pleasure, not procreation. He considered it a great evil. For him, abstinence was the only way.

TEACHER: But Gandhi also admitted that it would be hard for the ordinary person to practice the latter.²

I think that abstinence is possible and that one can have a very full and loving life despite it. Sex is not just intercourse. In fact, for most couples, intercourse itself is not at all an attractive, sharing, and fulfilling activity. So why make such a fetish out of

it? Surely one cannot dismiss abstinence out of hand. Many couples practiced it in traditional societies. After two, three, or whatever number of children seemed sufficient, they stopped having sex. So why run down this method?

STUDENT: But then, one mustn't run down contraception either. For some people it has become a panacea. One cannot expect the entire society to become saintly.

TEACHER: Well, even in contraception there are less and more 'unnatural' methods. The rhythm method, for instance, does not involve the use of devices or foreign bodies. The condom or the IUD are less body-altering than the pill and so on.

The point, as I see it, is that contraception like all technology is a mixed blessing. It promises unlimited sexual fulfillment without its attendant natural consequences. But this is a myth, just like unlimited expansion and progress through technology is a myth.

STUDENT: Why can't we force people to have less babies like in China?

TEACHER: Thank God we are not doing that! Human engineering on that scale destroys the soul. The freedom to reproduce is perhaps the only freedom our poor people have, that too by default. If we take away even that from them what will they have left?

STUDENT: But they may swell our numbers beyond our capacity to supply food. How are we going to provide housing, education, clothing, and a decent life to so many people? It's impossible! How much better off we'd be with the same facilities and, say, a third of our present population.

TEACHER: There is this notion of the 'carrying capacity' of any ecosystem. If we go beyond this capacity, certainly nature will offset the imbalance through natural disasters, calamities, war, and so on. Even now we see that people in Africa and Bangladesh die by the lakhs from droughts, floods, cyclones, and so on each year.

STUDENT: So can't we stop them from destroying us?

TEACHER: We may have destroyed ourselves and them by then. We are the perpetrators of this senseless development; *they* the victims. What if they hold us responsible for messing up their lives? Just as we hold the colonialists and the neocolonialists

responsible for continuing to mess up the world. Who is responsible for whom? Are we not all responsible for all of us?

If so, then let us remember that that development which leaves a majority of our population untouched or worse off, is no development. If we use Gandhi's words, we would say that it is a sin. Only by changing that model or pattern can we make a better tomorrow for us all.

By extending education and awareness, by re-prioritizing our investments, by changing our emphasis, we will give these oppressed people more control over their bodies, over their lives, over their future. That is the solution to the problem of population.

STUDENT: What should the rest of the world, particularly the developed world do?

TEACHER: They are already doing their bit through aid of various kinds. But again, this aid is the other side of an exploitative world order. They must dismantle neocolonialism. That is more important than giving aid.

In the meantime, we must continue to accept their aid and assistance and use it where it is needed, not appropriate it ourselves before it reaches the poor.

Notes

1. See Seitz, *Politics of Development*, ch. 2, 'Population and Development,' 17-45 and the Worldwatch Institute's 1992 report on the state of the world. Also see Rashmi Saxena et al., 'Birth Pangs,' cover story in *The Week*, 22 March 1992: 28-38.
2. See Gandhi, *Self-Restraint vs. Self-Indulgence* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1947).

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Food

STUDENT: In *The Politics of Development* John Seitz begins the chapter on 'Food and Development' in a singularly effective way: 'A civilization can be judged by its success in reducing suffering. This can also be used to judge development Throughout human history, hunger has caused untold suffering' (46). So my question to you is very simple: How to solve the problem of hunger in India?

TEACHER: First, it is necessary to understand the dimensions of this problem. Not just in India, but all over the world, there are a lot of hungry people. It would not be inaccurate to say that from the very beginning of time, large numbers of human beings have always known hunger. What makes this problem so hard to accept is the fact that the world grows enough food today to feed everybody, at least to meet their minimum needs. And yet, though starvation is rarer these days, more people are hungry today than perhaps ever before. If you consider hunger to include malnourishment, then I believe that there are upwards of one billion hungry people all over the world. One out of three children in the world is malnourished. Over a billion people lack safe drinking water. Nearly three million children die each year from preventable diseases. A million mothers die each year in childbirth. The extent of hunger and poverty in the world is truly beyond thought or belief. At

this very moment, millions of people are starving to death in Somalia, Sudan, Mozambique, and some other parts of Africa.

In India alone, I would guess that over 400 million people are hungry. Malnourishment, including vitamin deficiency, is so rampant that all but about 100 million of our people probably suffer from it. In other words, in India alone more than 700 million people don't eat properly!¹

STUDENT: The whole scenario boggles my mind.

TEACHER: We must face it: we are a hungry people. Even the middle classes don't really eat well in our country. Have you noticed how people like you and I eat at weddings, seminars, or parties—wherever there's free food?

STUDENT: It's nauseating. As if we've never had a decent meal in our lives.

TEACHER: You know, what you say is truer than you think. A sumptuous meal is a rarity for us all.

STUDENT: So what about the Green Revolution and our much vaunted self-sufficiency in food production?

TEACHER: In the fifties and sixties India was a typical 'basket case.' The country would wait anxiously for the next consignment of wheat from USA to fend off starvation. It was literally a ship to mouth existence. All this changed in 1967–68. That was our first Green Revolution. With the development of yielding varieties of Mexican wheat by Dr. Norman Borlaug and of dwarf rice by the International Rice Research Institute, Manila, food production in Punjab, Haryana, and Western U.P. grew enormously. In 1983–84 we underwent a second Green Revolution, owing mainly to improvements in input management—better supply of fertilizer, pesticide, and seed to the farmers.²

STUDENT: But there has been considerable criticism of the Green Revolution.

TEACHER: Well, it does have certain drawbacks. First, only certain areas like Punjab and Haryana and cereals like wheat, rice, and maize benefited from it. Its technology could not be transferred to other regions and crops, especially the arid and semi-arid areas, though research is being done to this end.

The other problem is that the Green Revolution has benefited rich farmers—those who could convert farming into a business. It hasn't helped subsistence farmers. Hence, there's greater rural poverty, joblessness, landlessness, inequality, and migration to cities.

Then there are the attendant risks of the Green Revolution technology. The promotion of high-yielding varieties of seeds has resulted in a severe erosion of the gene pool. These new seeds push out traditional varieties so that after a couple of decades the latter simply vanish. The hybrid varieties are not only costly, but also not hardy enough to resist local diseases. The US has been pressing for the patenting of seeds, which will only increase our dependency. Finally, an increase in pesticide use has had a harmful effect on the entire food chain.

STUDENT: Hence alternative farming?

TEACHER: We mentioned Fukuoka's natural farming before.

Fukuoka claims that that food has other qualities besides nutrition, including taste, colour, and texture. Modern farming has made food tasteless. I myself can vouch for this. Today's apples are tasteless and insipid compared to the apples I ate as a child. This is also true of other vegetables and fruits, not to mention eggs and poultry.³

STUDENT: You've shifted the discussion from quantity to quality.

TEACHER: Obviously, they are related. Quantity alone is insufficient. Please remember that our ultimate goal is to have a high-quality life. In the West, overeating is a very big problem. I read somewhere that one in three Americans is obese or overweight. As Barbara Ward put it, people in rich countries are literally 'eating and drinking themselves into the grave.'⁴

STUDENT: Then the *kind* of food that we eat is also important.

TEACHER: Definitely. Do you know that in the USA it takes ten times as much energy to produce 270 calories of beef as it does to produce 270 calories of corn! And to produce 270 calories of corn itself, it takes about 2,800 calories of energy in all—or enough to feed an average Indian for one day. More incredible is the fact that about sixteen kilos of soyabean cattle feed go into the making of one kilo of beef! So, in effect, whenever an American eats a kilo of beef he's eating enough grain to feed sixteen or more people in India.

Therefore, both what we eat and how we grow it is of crucial importance.⁵

STUDENT: Taking up the latter first, it's obvious that the wasteful methods of farming in the USA should not be duplicated elsewhere.

TEACHER: No doubt about it. Traditional farming, even if it is less efficient, consumes much less energy. Of course, the energy.

expended by a US farmer is mostly derived from fossil fuels—that is, oil. But the irony remains that they expend much more energy to produce food than is got through the food thus produced! So emulating them will not only be impossible but also suicidal.

STUDENT: It's just like development. We cannot use their methods, but must adapt the advances made by them in the agricultural sciences to suit our resources and requirements.

TEACHER: Yes. And that's the beauty of Fukuoka's method. It uses no fertilizer, no pesticides, no soil-improving ingredients, no irrigation. It's truly a revolutionary method because it's so energy efficient, though it might not work everywhere and for everyone.* The point is that we need to put all the traditional skills of the Indian farmer to work so that we can temper modernity with traditional wisdom. This is what our experts should be working on instead of duplicating and confirming the latest research from overseas.

STUDENT: In that case, certainly, we need to resist the 'dollarization' of our agriculture.

TEACHER: Otherwise, we'll start growing only cash crops everywhere—crops which are exported—at the expense of food for local people.

STUDENT: Already basmati rice and alphonso mangoes are unavailable or prohibitively expensive in India. At this rate, we'll end up importing wheat from USA and exporting mangoes to them.

TEACHER: Which is ridiculous. Agriculture is a way of life in India, not just a business. And this must not be tampered with or disrupted. So we cannot go the whole hog with agribusiness, but must evolve local means and methods to absorb and adapt the fruits of modern science and technology.

STUDENT: Any examples of success stories?

TEACHER: The example of Amul and the whole cooperative movement in India immediately comes to mind, notwithstanding the growing criticism against them. Operation Flood, of course, is always cited as a great marketing success story; what with Bharat Dhabolkar's witty copywriting—'Utterly Butterly Delicious'—which made Amul a household name. However, Operation Flood ended up promoting rural extraction for urban consumption. It has not only disrupted local patterns of the

distribution and consumption of milk, but also relies heavily on European handouts, imports and subsidies. Even their 'Dhara' brand of oil needs government subsidies and MIO (Market Intervention Operation); besides, NDDDB, its sponsor, is showing annual losses of about Rs. 2.5 billion on this account, which the government must bear. Yet, we must not forget the circumstances under which the NDDDB was set up; and the fact that it succeeded in increasing the output of milk in the country several times over, and in enriching the small and medium farmers of Gujarat.

Better examples of technology whose benefits accrue to the local people include solar electricity, gobar gas, smokeless *chulas*, improved sowing and harvesting techniques, poultry farming, sericulture, village handicrafts, Khadi gram udyogs, and so on—all of which can improve the living standards of rural communities.

STUDENT: Now to your earlier point about what we should eat.

TEACHER: Well, food is the most important item of consumption, so we must apply to food what we normally take for granted in other items of consumption. That is, we must avoid waste, encourage conservation and recycling wherever possible, and certainly not over-consume.

STUDENT: But these days food is increasingly being used as a source of stimulation, even recreation.

TEACHER: That's to be totally opposed. The problem is that selling an inessential item like Coca Cola or Pepsi is more profitable than selling rice, bread or milk. Likewise, chocolates, potato chips, jams, cookies, and other consumer foods allow huge margins of profit. A sensible person will avoid wasting money on these. Eating for stimulation or recreation is a sickness which has afflicted the majority of people in the West. That's why they have a whole pathology of eating disorders there. Similarly, it is absolutely sinful to waste food, to overindulge, to eat unhealthy or costly food, and so on.

STUDENT: What about the *kind* of food we should eat?

TEACHER: Eating too much meat is not just expensive but also unhealthy. It seems to me that a simple, vegetarian diet is the best; supplemented if necessary by eggs or fish. Local and seasonal foods are always preferable to exotic and imported foods. I think eating simply is the basis of an ethical life.

STUDENT: And it can also have larger, social implications.

TEACHER: As with all kinds of consumption, reducing our needs and sharing what we have will go a long way towards bridging the gulf between the haves and the have-nots. In India, we have always believed in sharing food; eating alone is considered sinful.

STUDENT: On a global scale this means that those who are affluent must reduce, not multiply, their wants, and learn to share what they have with others.

Notes

1. See 'Developmental Studies' in *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, 198–99 for an introductory essay.
 2. See Gandhi's *Economic and Industrial Life and Relations* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1957) and *Industrialise and Perish!*, edited and compiled by R.K. Prabhu (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1966).
 3. A scathing expose of the evils of development can be found in Claude Alvarez, *Science, Development and Violence: The Twilight of Modernity* (Delhi: OUP, 1992). Alvarez, with Mexican writer Gustavo Esteva, holds that 'development is dead,' that it is a 'label for plunder and violence, a mechanism of triage'. Also see 'The Environment and Development', in Seitz, *The Politics of Development*, 117–48.
 4. See Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (1872; Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975): 73–74.
The figures on Dharavi are from *Manorama Yearbook 1992*, 376–77.
 5. See Detlef Kantowsky, *Sarvodaya: The Other Development* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980).
 6. See Fukuoka, *The One-Strand Revolution*, especially pt. 2, 33–76.
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The Environment

STUDENT: Our discussion on food leads us directly to the environment, the protection of which has become a global concern. All over the world, the goal is to protect whatever natural reserves we have, alter modes of development which threaten the ecosystem, and find ways in which people can survive without destroying this earth, which is our only habitat.

TEACHER: Let's do a quick overview of the state of our planet today. The protective ozone layer in the atmosphere is being depleted rapidly: this could mean an estimated 200,000 skin cancer fatalities in the US alone and over a million worldwide in the next fifty years.

A minimum of 140 plant and animal species are going extinct each day due to the destruction of the tropical rain forests.

Atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide are now 26 percent higher than the pre-industrial concentrations. The greenhouse effect is now a reality. In 1990 the earth's surface was the warmest ever in recorded history; six of the seven warmest years on record have occurred since 1980.

Forest are vanishing at the rate of seventeen million hectares per year, an area greater than the size of Bangladesh.

And what is amazing is that we not only know that we are heading towards disaster, but we actually have the technology to prevent it. What is lacking, of course, is the political will.¹

STUDENT: What are the various ways in which our environment is being degraded?

TEACHER: One of the greatest problems facing the world today is pollution. Our air, water, land, sea, rivers, and lakes are being contaminated at an unprecedented rate. Then there are nuclear accidents, industrial disasters, acid rain, ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect, and what not. At this rate, the planet will no longer be capable of supporting various life forms.²

STUDENT: What about deforestation?

TEACHER: In India, we have a peculiar problem. The West has relentlessly chipped at its resource base and that of other countries to achieve its present level of prosperity. Moreover, it continues to do so. Environmentalists give you amazing images to capture the extent of this depredation. For instance, they say that the US paper industry consumes enough wood each year to make a boardwalk to the moon! Most of the wood comes from forests outside the USA. The Amazon rain forests in Brazil are being cleared at the rate of something like 100,000 acres a day to create pastures for beef cattle exported to the USA. For twenty years, under the guise of development, the World Bank has been encouraging such deforestation. Now the same World Bank is giving money for ecological conservation.

The West has already caused untold damage to its own environment and continues to play havoc with the environment of the rest of the world in order to perpetuate its life style.

At the same time the awareness that this must be stopped is pretty strong in developed countries. In fact, they are in a position to do so. They have the technology and the resources to find other means of maintaining their present levels of affluence.

In India, for instance, our problem is that we have already lost a lot of forest cover, without having achieved the high levels of development that the West has. At the beginning of the century India's forest cover was 50 percent; by Independence it declined to 33 percent; today it is down to 13 percent!

It is easy to see how development pushes tribals and villagers deeper and deeper into forests. They have nothing to fall back on except the forest to eke out a subsistence. Willy-nilly, they end up destroying the very forests that keep them alive. Forests prevent the rainfall from rapidly running down mountain slopes and carrying valuable top-soil with it; they trap the moisture and keep

the earth alive by replenishing its streams, springs and aquifers. Thus, when we destroy our forests, we cause droughts as well as floods. Unchecked water runoff leads to soil erosion and flooding in the plains. As a result, fertile agricultural land is laid to waste. On the other hand, diminished rainfall means droughts. The Thar desert is moving eastwards each year. They say, it has already reached Delhi.³

STUDENT: Yes, these facts and trends are well known. Several of our non-governmental agencies have targeted these issues. There is considerable awareness about them today.

TEACHER: Right. The point is that we are facing the brunt of both development and underdevelopment. Our development provides us the means to destroy our resources rapidly; our underdevelopment furnishes us the reasons, the excuses, and the compulsions to do so.

STUDENT: That is why imitating the West is so disastrous.

TEACHER: We need to learn how to manage our environment. Here the 'good' West can help us. The essence of decolonization is to use the 'good' West against the 'bad' West.

STUDENT: Gandhi was so far-sighted even at the beginning of the century. His programme of development was designed to cause minimum damage to the environment.

TEACHER: Gandhi was the father of the environmental movement in India.

But even earlier, our basic ethos taught us to live in harmony with nature, in a relationship of mutual dependence. Tribal wisdom also recognized this. That is why in India we have no 'virgin forest'; what we have instead are 'forest villages.' There are no forests which do not have people in them, which are untouched by man. But man has lived in forests for thousands of years in India without destroying them. Environmental protection comes naturally to us.⁴

STUDENT: Are there some philosophical reasons for this?

TEACHER: Here's another causal chain for you: The progress of the West is based on a particular ideology about the relation of man to nature which holds that nature has been created for man. The Judeo-Christian civilization believed in this all along, but after the renaissance this ideology acquired a new potency; man became the measure of all things, the center of the universe; industrialization provided the technological means to exploit

nature to the fullest. This doctrine was rejected by the Romantic poets who believed that Nature was imbued with divinity, but the West persisted in its course. Hence its development, its modernity, its prosperity.

STUDENT: What about India?

TEACHER: We never believed that nature was solely material or that it was for man to exploit. We have believed in the sacredness and sanctity of all life and matter—animal, vegetal, or mineral. That's why trees are sacred in India; and so are animals, birds, and stones.

STUDENT: So movements like 'Chipko' come naturally to us.

TEACHER: Yes. We believe that all nature is sacrosanct, that the earth itself is a living organism capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. Today, science has proved that the environment is a living system. The earth, with its rivers and rich flora and fauna, is an intricate web of life. Development means the annihilation of this living organism. For traditional Indians, that is sinful.

STUDENT: What can we do as individuals to save our environment?

TEACHER: Stop wasting paper; stop wasting fuel; recycle as much as you can; don't pollute the atmosphere; don't waste the resources of the earth.

STUDENT: But all this is so obvious.

TEACHER: Then try this: stop building big dams; stop displacing people; stop investing in industries which destroy forests; stop this satanic development which threatens our habitat.

STUDENT: In other words, we need a massive effort to change the direction of our development, from urban-industrial to rural-agricultural.

TEACHER: I should think so.

The point is, it is that much harder for us to do so now because we are committed to imitating the Western model of development. Yet, we stand to lose much more by traversing this path than the West did. That is why our urgency is greater. That is why we need to quickly and efficiently absorb the technology to make this transition. Otherwise, we face unmitigated disaster from both directions—poverty from below and development from above.

STUDENT: What is the role of alternative living experiments such as the Quaker settlements, communes, ashramas, and so on in environmental protection?

TEACHER: These are manned and inhabited by people like us who have rejected the fragmented life of the city and seek a more holistic life style.

But what about the people in the surrounding villages? You will observe that they yearn for the very metropolitan life style of polyester, electronic gadgetry, and conspicuous consumption which those living in the commune have renounced.

STUDENT: So the villagers move towards the city and the city-dwellers, disillusioned, move away to the farmhouses, communes, or villages?

TEACHER: The point is that the villagers cannot, on trust, reject the city and the life style it promises him. They cannot bypass development unless they have a very good reason to. Similarly, can we as a society become postindustrial without having first industrialized fully?

STUDENT: You mean that the same cycle must be repeated. That there is no knowledge without suffering, no regaining of innocence without the painful journey through experience?

TEACHER: Well, I am not sure that there is no way out. By rejecting destructive modernity, intellectuals, activists, and other exponents of alternative life styles are making an important statement. But they are still dependent on the existing economic and social structures for their support and sustenance.

So the only way is to challenge and transform the existing system. If living in a commune is one way of doing it, fine. But there is no escape from the society we have created.

STUDENT: But can't an alternative life style which is environment-friendly serve as a source of inspiration even to villagers?

TEACHER: Certainly. If the efficacy and financial viability of benign technologies can be demonstrated, the peasant will be the first to adopt them.

Why should anyone leave the village if it can offer a fairly good standard of living?

STUDENT: The problem of the environment, as we have noticed with other problems too, must be tackled not just locally, but nationally, and even globally.

TEACHER: Right. We have to address the problem in its entirety, not just a part of it. Only then can we hope for some betterment in the living conditions of the planet.

STUDENT: Aren't you afraid that the rate at which the environment

is being degraded, drinking water and clean air will soon be bought and sold at a premium.

TEACHER: It is already happening. The rich countries may start marketing portable atmosphere bubbles if the levels of pollution rise further. Individuals, if they can afford it, will carry their own environment with them as they now carry their water or food.

STUDENT: Sounds like science fiction. What about the poorer countries?

TEACHER: They'll simply have to develop more resistance—or perish!

STUDENT: Dreadful! What can we do in India today?

TEACHER: We have already mobilized the necessary public opinion, but we need some tough environmental protection measures to save the lands, waters, forests, air and all the plant, animal, and human diversity that this country supports.

Notes

1. The figures have been adapted from the Worldwatch Institute's *State of the World 1992*; see, N. Suresh, 'How near is earth to extinction,' *Times of India*, 22 March 1992 for a summary.
2. See Steve Van Matre and Bill Weiler, eds., *The Earth Speaks* (Warrenville, IL: Institute for Earth Education, 1983); Erik P. Eckholm, *Down to Earth* (New York: Norton, 1982); Council on Environment Quality and the Department of State, *The Global 2000 Report to the President* (New York: Penguin, 1982); and Seitz, *The Politics of Development*, ch. 5, 'The Environment and Development', 117–48 for an overview.
3. See, for instance, Brown, ed., *State of the World 1992*. Also see Anil Agarwal et al., eds., *The State of India's Environment, 1982: A Citizen's Report* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1982) and *The State of India's Environment, 1984–85: The Second Citizen's Report* (New Delhi: Centre for Science and Environment, 1985).
4. See, especially, Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1988), and Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*. For an account of the Chipko movement, see Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Delhi: OUP, 1989) and Thomas Weber, *Hugging the Trees: The Story of the Chipko Movement* (New Delhi: Viking, 1987).



Science and Technology

STUDENT: We have spoken a lot about decolonization and development. What role do science and technology have to play in these processes?

TEACHER: But, before that, don't you think it is necessary to spell out what we mean by these two terms?

STUDENT: Yes. It seems to me that science is a body of cumulative, systematic knowledge about the natural world. Technology is the application of this knowledge to solve practical problems.

TEACHER: Furthermore, science is also a method of enquiry with a distinctive epistemology, which pretends to be universal and objective.

STUDENT: I think we are getting into the philosophy of science here.

TEACHER: Which, unfortunately, very few of our Indian scientists bother to study.

STUDENT: Why should this be a problem?

TEACHER: Because not being aware of some of the key issues in the philosophy of science makes them terribly arrogant and obtuse. They think that they have some God-given right to Truth.

STUDENT: But the key issue in Anglo-American philosophy of science has been the problem of the verifiability of scientific knowledge.

TEACHER: Precisely. They are not even aware of the Popperian falsification thesis that science can only disprove false theories, not prove any theory correct.¹

STUDENT: Then what about the work of Kuhn and Feyerabend?

TEACHER: I have personally spoken to dozens of practicing scientists all over the country only to find that not a single one of them had heard of the two worthies that you mention. The whole idea that science 'progresses' through radically discontinuous paradigm shifts is alien to these scientists, so locked are they in their current paradigms. They are unable to even imagine that they could be wrong or that these changing paradigms are incommensurable.²

STUDENT: Would you say that Indian science is mired in 'realism'?

TEACHER: Certainly. As Feyerabend observed in *Problems of Empiricism*, 'Realism . . . only reflects the wish of certain groups to have their ideas accepted as the foundations of an entire civilization and even of life itself.'³

STUDENT: But what has this to do with science in India?

TEACHER: I am coming to that. I want to show how science in India is, at times, not just primitive and derivative, but also arrogant and oppressive. This oppressiveness derives from its claims to objective truth.

STUDENT: But science is as much an ideological construct as, say, Marxism?

TEACHER: Yes. As Bernard Susser observes:

Science answers the requirements of Archimedean strategy surpassingly well: first, it rigorously demarcates a sphere of ostensible autonomy and certainty; and, second, it effectively condemns whatever falls beyond its boundaries to the limbo of unverifiable assertions toward which agnosticism is the proper response. Moreover, science combines an exoteric accessibility (the omnipresent technology of modern civilization) with an esoteric inaccessibility (the underlying theoretical logic) that renders its authority virtually unassailable The aura of science, its trappings and related thought-styles are similarly utilized to lend authorization to liberal ideas, programs and institutions.⁴

STUDENT: OK, so what role does science perform in development?

TEACHER: The role of science is ambiguous and ambivalent. It both helps and hinders us depending on who is doing science, what kind of science is being done, and who benefits from it.⁵

STUDENT: Hasn't science become some sort of a 'holy cow' which no one can touch or question?

TEACHER: Yes, science has become our new superstition. We use it to justify the unjustifiable. Science has become a 'reason of state,' something which legitimizes an imbalanced and inequitable system. Science is the government's favourite prop and watchword, a magic wand used to silence opposition. The government needs its pseudo-achievements for its image-building exercise, and in turn sponsors wasteful expenditure in the name of scientific research and technological advancement.

STUDENT: The machine has acquired a mystique in our culture. A xerox operator, a computer analyst, or a CAT scan technician have become the new priests of technology, the keepers of power, and hence exploiters of the people.

TEACHER: Those who control and operate the technology bask in its reflected glory. Because high technology is so expensive, its operation is also expensive. So anyone in the high tech sector, no matter how stupid, gets more money, though the level of skills involved may be lower than what is required in basket-making.

STUDENT: Society values science and technology disproportionately.

TEACHER: And there is a consequent devaluation of traditional crafts, skills, and ways of life.

STUDENT: How do you define the role of science in our society? How do you explain its enormous power?

TEACHER: Science for a poor country offers the hope of a quick transformation. However, transformation can take place only where the ground has been carefully cultivated and prepared, where the societies involved are unanimous in their avowal of specific goals, and where science is deployed intelligently to achieve these goals.

But is this the case in India? We are neither united about our social goals nor on the means to attain them. We have not defined a clear role for science in our developmental strategies. The result is that Indian science has a crisis of identity. It doesn't know what to do and where to go. In the absence of such clarity it goes on imitating the West, producing second-rate work, acting as a source of cheap labour for it, confirming and

reconfirming its findings, contributing very little that is original and worthwhile.

All the while our scientists clamour for more and more funding because they claim that good research depends on sophisticated instrumentation. All the machines are imported, the problems that are taken up are imported, and most of this second-rate research is exported, its publication usually paid for by the government.

This kind of science is a big fraud on our society.

STUDENT: But isn't this an overstatement? Surely, Indian science has done much better than that.⁶

TEACHER: Are you sure? Just look around you. We talk so much about investing in high tech today, but look at how miserably we have failed even in low tech areas.

Look at the roads, electricity supply, water, sanitation, housing; look at the quality of Indian goods or Indian engineering. Doors don't shut properly, taps don't close, the finish of the most common goods is so poor. The 'fruits' of Indian science are substandard and shoddy.

How can a society which fails in implementing even the most basic goals do well in high tech endeavours? Isn't that a contradiction?

STUDENT: We are a society of disparities. We must face that. We have elite institutes of science in which telephones don't work. Can this be helped?

TEACHER: Let's look at our achievements more objectively using a schema developed by M.R. Bhagvan in *Technological Advance in the Third World*. Since 1760, one can speak of essentially three industrial-technological revolutions: 1760–1860, involving textiles, iron and steel, with steam as the major energy source; 1860–1960, involving steel, railways, automobiles, chemicals, plastics, electrical goods, and synthetic, with petroleum as the major energy source; and 1960 onwards, involving telecommunication, aerospace, computers, informatics, biotechnology, with a new source of energy yet to emerge. These can be termed as phases of 'early modern technology,' 'standard modern technology,' and 'highly modern technology' respectively. Of these, we are out of the running as far as the third phase is concerned; even in the case of the second, while we are fairly self-reliant, we are nowhere near becoming a world leader.⁷

STUDENT: But what about Indian scientists? Aren't they aware of the problems you raise? Haven't they done some thinking on it?

TEACHER: Doubtless, some have. Several names come to mind. Scientists like C.V. Raman knew that India couldn't compete with the West in every branch of science. He advocated using local instrumentation, and wherever possible, adapting the choice of our scientific projects to our situation. That is, certain problems are better tackled in India, given our limited resources.

STUDENT: One of the paradoxes of Indian science is that the great scientists of this century were products of the colonial era—Ramanujan, Raman, Bhatnagar, Saha, Bhabha, and so on. The facilities available to them were next to nil.

TEACHER: Yes. Now the lowest common denominator has gone up, but the quality of the best seems to have come down. We have broadened our scientific and technological base tremendously without really achieving a take-off. It's so frustrating.

STUDENT: Nowadays, our best scientists work abroad. I have often heard even middle-level Indian scientists say that they cannot return to India because their work is too important and that such work cannot be done in India.

TEACHER: We cannot quarrel with the life choices that people make, especially given the lack of opportunities in our country. But the best statement that I can think of on the comparative value of scientific achievement in India and abroad was made by S. Chandrasekhar:

There is no doubt that living here made it enormously easy for my own work on the whole. But when I think, for example, that I had fifty PhD students and an *Astrophysical Journal* for twenty years—that is as much service to the scientific community as one normally makes or can make in one's lifetime. But I don't think these kinds of services either make or destroy sciences in this country. On the other hand, suppose I had stayed in India and had not fifty PhDs but half that number of students, and ran a journal, creating the kinds of standards I did with the *Astrophysical Journal*, I think, relative to India, that would have been a far greater contribution Because in total terms for the future, it would have meant more for Indian science than in fact it has to American science.⁸

STUDENT: So, What is your overall assessment of Indian science?

TEACHER: I agree that we have had significant successes, particularly in growing food, predicting the weather, harnessing power, and so on. But overall, I am afraid Indian science is mediocre; it draws more from society than it returns to it; and it is supported by a government which seeks legitimation from it.

STUDENT: How can we improve science research in India and its attendant technical benefits?

TEACHER: We have broadened the base of science in India over the last four or five decades. Now we must improve its quality. Science must be made more accountable. Second-rate research should be totally stopped. We must identify areas such as energy, communications, food, transportation, rural development, etc., where we think science can play a part. We must invest in these areas, cutting off funding to others if necessary. We must use the skills of the scientist directly.

STUDENT: But don't you think we have achieved a very high standard in science overall? I believe that about 10 percent of all scientific publications in referred journals are by Indian scientists or those of Indian origin working abroad.

TEACHER: That may be true. But what is their quality? What kind of problems do they consider? Are these problems original or secondary? These are important questions.

There is an argument that the only way excellent science can be done is by imitating the whole system that obtains in the West. We have tried to do just that. The result is mediocre science in all areas despite the enormous costs. It has also led to brain drain—the export of trained manpower to other countries. This export takes place because our teaching, which is based on Western models, makes them better equipped to work abroad. So we have a scientific establishment which produces mediocre work or creates a vast army of assistants for Western science.

STUDENT: What is the alternative?

TEACHER: Again, selective assimilation. Let's identify areas of national interest where we can use the knowledge and expertise of scientists. These can be our thrust areas; in which we should produce the best work in the world. The rest can be left to the West.

Simply speaking, we want a science which can feed us, clothe us, give us alternate sources of energy, reduce disparity, help us

become a more egalitarian society. We don't want a science which is wasteful, mediocre, damaging to the environment, and which supports the harmful policies of the state.

STUDENT: This adaptation of science to our needs is again a part of your strategy of decolonization. And we already spoke of the development of appropriate technology.

TEACHER: Yes. Science is one way in which the lop-sided development of our society can be checked. Unfortunately, the scientific establishment itself has been co-opted by the state to confirm and buttress this model of development. It seems very difficult to break away, but only when individual scientists start exerting pressure to change the direction of science, can we learn and benefit.

STUDENT: But isn't science universal? What can individual scientists do to alter its course? After all, science is culture-free.

TEACHER: Science implies a certain methodology. And this methodology has been universally accepted as the only available one. Yet the scientific method is not static, but evolving. Now, each culture can play a role in shaping this evolution. But what is more important is that though the method is universal, its applications are local. There are bound to be different schools of science; the way we do science in India may be different from the way the Japanese or the Chinese do it. So cultural factors do influence the way in which science is conducted.

Unless Indian scientists have a larger vision of their role in society, I am afraid, they will continue to be hirelings of a confused state and perpetrators of a harmful and misguided model of development. They will continue to work against decolonization and Svaraj.

Notes

1. Karl Raimund Popper's works include *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1934; English tr.: Basic, 1959); *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1945; 5th. rev. ed. Princeton: UP, 1966); and *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977). See Brian Magee, *Philosophy and the Real World: An Introduction to Karl Popper* (Peru, IL.: Open Court Publishing Co., 1985). Also

- see Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power: Toward A Political Philosophy of Science* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1987).
2. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd. ed. (Chicago: UP, 1970).
 3. Paul K. Feyerabend, *Problems of Empiricism*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: UP, 1981); the quotation is from the Preface to vol. 1, xiii. Also see *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1975) and *Farewell to Reason* (London: Verso, 1987).
 4. Bernard Susser, *The Grammar of Modern Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).
 5. For some reflections on science in India, see Vikram Sarabhai, *Science Policy and National Development*, ed. Kamala Chowdhury (Delhi: Macmillan, 1974). For a more thoughtful and provocative discussion, see G.C. Ghiradi and H.R. Dalafi, eds., *Physics and Development*, Internal Report of the International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste, July 1982; 'The Isolation of the Scientist in Developing Countries' by Abdus Salam (1-5) is particularly interesting. Also see Urquidí, ed., *Science and Technology in Development: Planning* (London: Pergamon Press, 1979). For a frontal attack on science and development, see Claude Alvarez, *Science, Development, and Violence*.
 6. Such was the assessment in a special issue of *Nature* published in 1985 which had Indian scientists in India and abroad crowing for months.
 7. M.R. Bhagavan, *Technological Advance in the Third World: Strategies and Prospects* (London: Zed Books, 1990).
 8. Kamleshwar C. Wali, *Chandra: A Biography of S. Chandrasekhar* (Chicago: UP, 1991): 296-97. Also see, Jagjit Singh, *Abdus Salam: A Biography* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992).



Inefficiency

STUDENT: I remember the definition of efficiency from my high school text book: it is the ratio of output divided by input—that is, the ratio of work to the energy expended.

TEACHER: I think the definition will serve our larger social context too. Efficiency is the ability to produce a desired result with minimum energy, effort, expense, and waste.

STUDENT: Then, don't you think that one of our biggest problems is inefficiency? If you look around, you'll find nothing works properly. Nobody seems to be motivated about their work. Perhaps all the other problems of development can be subsumed under this root problem of inefficiency.

TEACHER: You seem to imply that if only we were efficient, we would be saved. Our development model would work. Its benefits would reach everyone.

STUDENT: Yes. For instance, if both our planning and execution were efficient, we might be able to solve most of our problems, including that of population.

TEACHER: In theory what you say sounds right. The Japanese, for instance, attribute any economic or social crises to a failure in planning. The idea is that if you plan properly, you can prevent future mishaps.'

STUDENT: Exactly. And in India we think our planning has been all right; we have failed only in our execution, and that too because of our inefficiency.

TEACHER: I cannot accept such an argument. To plan efficiently, you must have an insight into what is possible and what is not. In India, planning has often been an exercise in self-deception and self-delusion. As I pointed out earlier, our developers made desperately inadequate and inaccurate assessments of our problems. Because, a comprehension of the real dimensions of the problems would have completely shattered their borrowed frameworks and notions of planning. But they had a vested interest in pushing for a particular type of developmental planning; and to ensure its perpetuation, they continually made false judgements and false predictions. The result is before you—a country divided and unequal.

STUDENT: Can you cite a specific instance?

TEACHER: Take any sector of our planning, and you'll find that what I said is true. We were promised universal primary education in the late 1950s; we have still not achieved it forty years later. Housing, electrification, alleviation of unemployment and poverty, transportation, urban planning, rural development—nearly every sector of our economy shows how our planners have failed.

STUDENT: But that is because of inefficient execution.

TEACHER: Is this inefficiency rare and infrequent, or endemic?

STUDENT: Obviously, it is endemic. That's why I called it the biggest drag on development.

TEACHER: So you agree that inefficiency is basic and not superficial to our system.

Then why didn't the planning process take inefficiency, corruption, and other malfunctions into account? If they could not plan for these things, then they were fooling themselves. The plans were made hoping for an ideal environment of execution. This is nothing but a delusion, a myth, a lie to the nation.

So, they knew that their plans would be subverted by a corrupt and inefficient system, yet they continued in their projections. Outwardly they would pretend to be earnest; inwardly, they would admit of the failure of the whole system. Actually, planning has become a sham, an exercise ritually undertaken to prop up the duplicity of the entire system.

STUDENT: Then how do you explain this great evil of inefficiency?

TEACHER: You tend to believe that inefficiency is an unmitigated evil, but I don't think so.

STUDENT: You mean to say that you are in favour of inefficiency? How appalling!

TEACHER: What is so appalling about it? In certain situations inefficiency can actually be beneficial. Suppose someone set up a system to kill people—like Hitler did. Wouldn't inefficiency in such a system prove a blessing to innocent millions? Similarly, under a rapacious dispensation like colonialism, inefficiency would save us from complete destruction and penetration.

It is now well known that without the modern factory, instrumental rationality, bureaucratic culture, compliance of the scientific establishment, and the centralization of power in the state, the holocaust would never have occurred. An ethically blind pursuit of efficiency can thus be very harmful.²

STUDENT: That is very interesting. You mean that inefficiency can act as a buffer, as a means of diffusing a harmful policy?

TEACHER: Yes. Inefficiency can in fact be a mode of resistance. Suppose you give me orders which are detrimental to my interests; then, by not carrying them out efficiently, I may be saving myself.

STUDENT: But is there something 'Indian' about this inefficiency?

TEACHER: I think efficiency has something to do with the internal workings of a society; how it acts, how it transmits power, how it passes on information, how it communicates with different segments—in a word how it functions.

Though power and authority generally permeate all levels of society both in the West and in India, the difference lies in the way they are transmitted from the top to the layers below. Moreover, here we are talking specifically of political authority rather than cultural or religious authority. In India, political authority is not communicated and imposed as efficiently as in the West; rather, it is deflected, diffused, and rendered less damaging. Given the rationalization and bureaucratization of the West that Weber talked about, authority is communicated and implemented very efficiently and ruthlessly.

In the West, a certain mechanization of society has occurred. In India, we have a society which functions organically; mechanized efficiency is not possible.

STUDENT: Why?

TEACHER: It might have something to do with our history, with the waves of invasions, with the political instability which almost

became a way of life. Our society found ways of coping with all this. There evolved a system whereby we could resist power, deflect its impact, find interstices and gaps in its advance—in short, find ways of surviving.

This explains how so many different types, levels, and groups of people have survived in our society. That is why I consider plurality a way of life with us. Our plurality resists a certain kind of efficiency.

STUDENT: Then we are condemned to be inefficient?

TEACHER: No. Ultimately, of course, there is nothing uniquely Western about efficiency—it is merely an outcome of modernity; likewise, our inefficiency has to do with our uneven modernization.

So it is important to remember that in certain contexts inefficiency is beneficial and in others detrimental. If people are stuck in a derailed train bogie, there is obviously an efficient way of removing them. If there is a flood, there is an efficient way of reaching food and supplies to the stranded victims. When money is allocated for health care or education, it should be distributed efficiently and so on. Inefficiency in such situations would result in untold misery.

STUDENT: That's what I was talking about. Where we need to be efficient, we have failed. Why?

TEACHER: First we must identify where we really need to be efficient. It seems to me that the inefficiency of our modernization project may have actually proved to be a blessing in disguise. But on the other hand, inefficiency in certain aspects of the enterprise of modernity—say the management of ecology—will prove to be disastrous.

STUDENT: But you yourself say that both our efficiency and inefficiency are related. I think the most inefficient system is our government itself.

TEACHER: Our inefficiency is the result of an incorrect and unsuccessful assimilation of those values and ideas of modernity which we need. Of course, we have also been relatively inefficient about those values which we do not need.

STUDENT: So do they cancel each other or duplicate the failures of the system?

TEACHER: I am afraid that the gains of our inefficiency are purely in the default mode. These gains amount to the preservation and continuation of our plurality in the face of an oppressive

and dominant modernity. But what use this preservation if it is accompanied by impoverishment and environmental degradation, insecurity and overpopulation for the majority of our citizens?

If our planners had their way, they would have modernized everyone; that they couldn't achieve. Instead, they kept a whole section of people poor, modernizing a small group at the expense of the former.

STUDENT: Do you think the government has a vested interest in inefficiency?

TEACHER: The government's inefficiency has become unmanageable and incurable. This goes back to the unsuccessful assimilation of a foreign model of government. So overall, we have a society which has an uneasy relationship with modernity—unable to either reject it as Gandhi wished, or to assimilate it efficiently as Nehru wanted it. It's like the story of the snake who tried to eat the bullfrog—he could neither swallow it nor eject it.

STUDENT: So what is the solution?

TEACHER: We have already spoken of it. It involves a selective assimilation of modernity. It involves increasing the efficiency of the grass-roots movements; increasing the efficiency of alternate technologies and their propagation; increasing the pressure on governmental agencies to make them work better; increasing the efficiency of life-saving and socially useful services and sectors; and so on.

STUDENT: Does it also not mean that whenever required we must learn to live like moderns, even like the Europeans, if necessary?

TEACHER: Yes, though it sounds impossible. We have to learn not to litter the streets, not to spit and urinate in public places, not to dirty the railway compartments; to run trains on time, to queue up at counters, to run our labs, computers, airplanes, telephones, and other modern systems efficiently. This efficiency will have to be learnt through personal sacrifice and the renunciation of immediate self-interest; it will have to be maintained, even enforced, by the authorities.

At the same time, we must learn to be efficient in preserving the inefficiency of our system in certain areas, particularly in the way power is transmitted; so that we have plurality, so that we may resist the totalization of our culture by the government.

STUDENT: Can you think of one instance when such a combination was possible?

TEACHER: We see it all the time in some people who have made a fine adjustment between modernity and tradition. We have always had this dual existence and managed to live with it—one life, usually Western, at the workplace and another, traditional, Indian at home. But the best social application of this balance is found in the freedom struggle. The movement was very well organized and efficient. The Congress party, its vanguard, was itself run very efficiently. Even today we find several systems in India that are efficient—the whole chain of Birla Mandirs, for instance. They are clean, well maintained, and efficient.

STUDENT: In other words, are you suggesting that just as there are some typically Indian forms of inefficiency, there are also some typically Indian forms of *efficiency*?

TEACHER: Obviously. Haven't you ever travelled in an auto-rickshaw through the crowded streets of any of our cities? It seems to me that the auto-rickshaw drivers know an efficiency which even auto-racers in the West may not have. They follow one rule very efficiently: occupy any empty space on the road *provided* you don't hit anyone.

Similarly, our weavers, carpet-makers, musicians and all our craftsmen and women are very efficient at certain jobs.

We are also very efficient in recycling and other survival techniques. All our garbage is picked clean of every usable item before it really becomes trash. We collect dung very efficiently so that no fuel is wasted. The cow, as anthropologists have pointed out, is a very efficient garbage disposal system. She converts trash into usable energy.

So I would say that we are a very efficient society in some ways, especially at survival strategies, but when it comes to modernity we flounder. That is why we need a combination of both traditional efficiency and modern efficiency to survive. Paradoxically, we need to be efficient in resisting the ill-effects of modernity and embracing its benefits.

STUDENT: Hasn't efficiency got something to do with energy?

TEACHER: Absolutely. Energy is the key to development and productivity. Efficient energy management is, therefore, crucial.

STUDENT: By that token, the USA is an affluent but an inefficient society.

TEACHER: Right. In fact, they are the most wasteful and inefficient of societies. This is sinful because they are wasting not just their own resources but those of our planet earth.

STUDENT: I think as regards the personal management of energy, Indians have been some of the most efficient people in the world.

TEACHER: All eastern philosophies of liberation have emphasized the management of energy, physical and psychological. The sublimation of nervous energy is just one example of such discipline.

STUDENT: Are you saying in effect that inefficiency is a virtue when the rulers don't know what they are doing, and a virtue when they do?

TEACHER: Yes, that's it. Our inefficiency is the direct outcome of and the only sane response to the stupidity of our rulers. But that doesn't mean that we must make a virtue of inefficiency. We have to abandon it to save ourselves and our culture from continued decolonization and inequality.

Sane, wholesome, and people-oriented development will automatically encourage efficiency; insane, lop-sided, self-delusive development will breed inefficiency, wastage, and corruption.

Notes

1. See Arturo Escobar's essay on 'Planning', in Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary*, 132-45. The standard book on the subject is J. Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain* (Princeton, N.J.: UP, 1987).
2. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989).



Communalism

STUDENT: From inefficiency, can we turn to an issue which, though not directly linked to development, certainly threatens to tear the country apart? I am speaking of communalism.

TEACHER: But what is communalism?

STUDENT: It is an ideology which claims to speak exclusively on behalf of the interests of a particular religion or community in opposition to the interests of other communities.

TEACHER: Let us remember that in this extended and special sense, the word is, perhaps, unique to the Indian subcontinent. Ordinarily, the word 'communal' simply means 'of a commune' or 'of or belonging to a community' (*Websters New World Dictionary*). 'Communalism,' though, is more complex; it means 'a system of government in which communes or local communities . . . have virtual autonomy within a federated state,' or 'the conflicting allegiance resulting from this' (*ibid.*). There are other meanings too, but these are the most relevant to our context.

STUDENT: In the first sense, then, communal isn't a bad word. From a certain standpoint, all of us are communal because we all belong to a certain community, caste, religion, and region, though we are Indians.

Communalism, in the dictionary sense, isn't quite applicable to India except in the case of the Khalistani movement. But here too, what the militants want is an independent state, not so

much an autonomous region within the Indian federation. It's the question of conflicting allegiance which takes us to the heart of the problem.

TEACHER: So you can see how complex the issue is. Communalism in the first of the dictionary meanings is what Iqbal had in mind, in his famous Presidential Address at the All-India Muslim League in Allahabad in 1930.¹ Such autonomy within a federation is, however, not possible in the present political setup. The conflicting allegiance, however, continues—something which is always made much of by the Hindu fundamentalists. But it is your first point that is most significant: we are all communal, more or less; the real issue is of permissible communalism versus impermissible communalism.

STUDENT: The first kind refers to a communalism which co-exists peacefully with other communalisms; while the second kind is aggressive, violent, and even threatens the very idea of a secular Indian nation.

TEACHER: Gandhi devoted more energy to this issue than anybody else in this century.²

STUDENT: But today, people blame Gandhi for having destroyed the country and encouraged the Muslims.

TEACHER: The view is quite old. There were communal parties in India before Independence and they still exist today, saying practically the same things.

STUDENT: But today we see an upsurge of Hindu fanaticism, which is very disturbing.

TEACHER: Hindu fanaticism was very strong even before Independence. The Hindu Mahasabha was a powerful party then. After Independence, it withered away. Today, we have another powerful communal lobby, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, in its place.

STUDENT: How do you explain the resurgence of such communalism?

TEACHER: Usually communalism is a reaction to a perceived threat. Muslim communalism in the shape of the Muslim League may be seen as a reaction to the growing strength of the Congress. The League both appealed to the Muslims' desire for power and played upon their fear of losing this power to the Congress. Despite the secular credentials of the Congress, the Muslim League succeeded in portraying it as a Hindu party; thereby adding to the insecurity of the Muslims. The British administrators, for their part, encouraged the Muslim League by

recognizing it as the sole representative of Muslim interests. The result, eventually, was Partition. During that period, the Hindu Mahasabha was a reaction against Muslim communalism in the shape of the Muslim League.

STUDENT: In other words, communalism proceeds through an accretive series of reactions. If so, what is the initial spark?

TEACHER: It will not do to try and locate the origin of this spiral of violence. The point is that whenever a society is threatened, it splits unless it is very strong. We saw this in our earlier dialogues. Therefore, what is imperative in such a situation is to never react; to make sure that hatred is not returned with hatred, but that the hatred stops with you. This is exactly what Gandhi taught: he said, the only way to stop the carnage is to return hatred with love.

STUDENT: So, you're saying that the seeds of communalism are always present in society; all it takes is some stress to make them sprout. Once there is a communal flare-up, it has a back-lash. Then a series of reactions takes place. Before long, a society is destroyed.

TEACHER: We have seen this in our own times in Punjab, in Sri Lanka, and in Kashmir. Before our eyes we have watched communal forces taking over. We have seen unwisdom prevail. We have seen hatred stamp out love.

STUDENT: But could we go back to why there's been a rise in Hindu fanaticism in recent years?

TEACHER: It's obviously in reaction to something else.

STUDENT: But whom is it reacting against? Hindus are a majority in India. Why should they feel threatened? Which is the communal power against whom Hindus are reacting?

TEACHER: Certainly, the power is not the Muslim League, or any other overtly communal national party. Nor have the Hindus been reacting to the events in Punjab, where more Sikhs than Hindus have been killed by the terrorists. It is true, however, that Punjabi Hindus faced the possibilities of a second migration—not just from Pakistan to India, but from Punjab to Delhi and other parts of India. In Kashmir, most of the Hindus have already left the valley either to go to Jammu or to Delhi. But more than these events, Hindus are reacting to something else—their perceived insecurity of their position in India.

STUDENT: Then how do you explain this upsurge?

TEACHER: We have always been blaming communal parties for the current flare-ups. We have blamed the BJP, the RSS, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Yet we have seen that these parties are the symptoms, not the cause of the problem. They are reacting to, not initiating the problem.

STUDENT: Then what is the source?

TEACHER: It's the Indian state, I am afraid, ruled by the Congress party. For all its secular talk, it has been the single most consistently communal entity.

STUDENT: But the state has always claimed to be equally partial to all religions. Indian secularism doesn't mean an opposition to religion but rather a kind of *sarva dharma sambhava* or an equal regard for all religions.¹

TEACHER: Actually, the state has inherited the divide-and-rule doctrine of the colonialists and they have played the game very ruthlessly. The Congress encouraged settlers from Bangladesh to come to Assam so that it could secure their votes. It has consistently given out concessions on the basis of caste, creed, and community. Declaring national holidays on the birthdays of religious founders shows a state being far from secular.

STUDENT: But that's because the Indian definition of secularism is not a distance from religion, or the separation of the church and state, but an equal sympathy for all religions.

TEACHER: If the state had practiced this impartiality, there would have been no problems. Instead, it has a history of appeasement, betrayal, underhand dealings. Often politicians encourage communal riots to strengthen their base or to get rid of opponents.

STUDENT: There is a notion that communalism has an economic base which has to be understood.

TEACHER: No doubt. Most fights are not over an abstraction like 'religion,' but over specific material gains, over a piece of land, the control of a particular area, and so on. These are tangible economic causes.

But these fights are allowed to be communalized because of the role of the state. I would say that the single biggest communal force is the Indian state ruled by the Congress, and not the BJP, the RSS, or the VHP, or even the Muslim fundamentalist parties.

STUDENT: You mean that the Congress has made Hindus feel insecure and forced them to turn to the communal parties?

TEACHER: That's right. You must remember that communal refers to a single community which is not necessarily religious. Giving concessions to castes, groups of people, regions, or states, is also a kind of communalism which the Congress has been practicing.

STUDENT: You seem to be agreeing with the BJP analysis of the situation. Haven't they always accused the Congress of being 'pseudo-secularist'? How does our analysis differ from the BJP line?

TEACHER: The BJP's accusation has no analytical value: what they mean is that the Congress is hypocritical about communalism and that they are not: the Congress is pseudo-secular, that is pseudo-communal, while they are openly communal.

STUDENT: It is clear that the Congress is not secular and that it has misused religion for its political ends. Secondly, it does not deal equally with all religions, communities, or castes. But do you think that the Hindus have really suffered since Independence as the BJP would like us to believe?

TEACHER: No. I don't think they have suffered. Actually, they have prospered. The problem is that they are reacting to the government's double-dealing. The concessions given to the most backward and fundamentalist of the Muslims are objected to by the Hindus. The best example is the Shah Bano case, in which the government reversed its decision. Really, the Muslims have not gained. They are poorer than before. But, some concessions have been made to worst elements among them, just as the government tried to make a deal with Bhindranwale.

The result is that the intelligentsia among the minorities and the oppressed realize that nothing much is being given. That's why they are upset. The majority of the Hindus object to the government's concessions, thinking they are substantial. The remainder of the Hindus are dismayed by this duplicity of the government. They know that neither have the Muslims benefited from this policy, nor the Hindus who only felt insecure.

STUDENT: What else could the government have done?

TEACHER: Obviously, it could have supported secular forces among the Muslims. Those who encourage family planning, education, government jobs, and so on.

STUDENT: Today, there is talk of finishing off or driving away Muslims.

TEACHER: That's impossible. But suppose it were possible, it would be an unmitigated catastrophe. The Muslims are a very important segment of our cultural heritage and plurality. They are in professions which demand intricate skills and a high order of sophistication—music, dance, and painting; carpet-making, weaving, and handicrafts; copper, ivory and leather work; *bidri*,⁴ and so on. Imagine how impoverished our society would be without them.

STUDENT: Moreover, our culture is composite. We cannot separate the Hindu from the Muslim today.

TEACHER: Of course that is true. We have the same blood in our veins. We are blood brothers. The end of the Muslim is also our end. There is no separate existence for us on earth.

STUDENT: But haven't the Hindus been driven out of Kashmir for no other reason but that they are Hindus?

TEACHER: Yes, that's a terrible tragedy.

STUDENT: Several Pandits have lost all their property and are trying to start all over again in other parts of India.

TEACHER: I am not trying to minimize the extent of their tragedy. All I am saying is that their removal has impoverished the culture of Kashmir, and has not really solved the problem of the Muslim Kashmiris. That's the fallacy of communalism—that it takes care of the interests of religious community. In fact, it only polarizes peoples and divides them. Muslims have to live with their 'Other'—the Hindus—either in their own state or in a neighbouring state. Like the Jews and the Palestinians have to.

STUDENT: You have put the blame for the present communal disturbances on the state. So is our state really communal?

TEACHER: The state is a dishonest broker. It is neither secular nor communal, but can pretend to be either to perpetuate its power. The so-called pampering of the minorities goes back to Gandhi's theory that we must go out of our way to make our neighbours and minorities feel secure. But the state has made a travesty of turning the other cheek. It has pretended to turn the other cheek, but instead of receiving the slap itself, has slapped someone else.

STUDENT: That sounds like its policy on job reservations.

TEACHER: Again, this was a cause that Gandhi was willing to die for. He undertook a fast unto death against the Communal Award of separate electorates. This government has turned its

back on Gandhi so shamelessly, again playing the communal card of divide-and-rule.

STUDENT: But what about social justice? Isn't it the government's duty to ensure social justice for the underprivileged?

TEACHER: How will it do that? By denying people basic standards of living but reserving a few jobs for them in the government? Isn't reservation an appeasement like the Shah Bano bill? Isn't it a way of buying off those among the oppressed who are most powerful?

STUDENT: One argument is that if it can't do the real thing like providing free, compulsory, primary education, then it can at least do the token thing by reserving jobs.

TEACHER: Not if it will never deliver on the real thing, and keep handing out tokens instead. The token is offered to escape from delivering the real thing. This is a dishonest piece of political brokerage.

STUDENT: But who are the so-called upper castes to object?

TEACHER: Precisely. They are nobodies. If they object, they will be dubbed as reactionary or casteist. The so-called leaders of the lower castes should resist such cheap gimmicks. They should ask for genuine change, real redistribution of wealth, a different model of development, a true decolonization. But they have been bought by the same system. They are smaller players for the same stakes. They make the government's task easy by accepting the bribe of a few jobs while the rest of their fellow backwards continue to languish in utter poverty.

STUDENT: Aren't you being cynical and unrealistic at the same time—cynical about the motives of the dalit leaders and unrealistic about the kind of change that is really possible?

TEACHER: Perhaps, you are right. Perhaps, their strategy is to take what they can get and keep striving for the real thing all along. That is, to accept the cosmetic changes not only for their symbolic gains, but also for the very real empowerment of certain sections, while gradually fighting for the real changes. But even if the former is true, I don't really see the latter happening anywhere. Which dalit leader has made a cause out of education, sanitation, slum clearance, or health care? They have always spoken the language of concessions and privileges.

STUDENT: What's wrong with that?

TEACHER: Because it implies that the inequitable system that obtains is based on privilege alone, and that a mere rearrangement of privileges can create social justice. They don't see that social inequities are also predicated on real achievements, hard work, excellence, creativity, and productivity.

STUDENT: But Babasaheb Ambedkar always wanted the dalits to improve themselves, not just blame others for their position.

TEACHER: That was a different age. Jyotiba Phule also used a similar double-pronged strategy—improve yourselves *and* remove oppressive social structures.

STUDENT: Today, however, being a dalit leader is profitable—it is a means to political power. No wonder, the whole rhetoric of social reform has been debased. But how do you reconcile the contradictory positions of Ambedkar and Gandhi?

TEACHER: That calls for a long discussion, but I'll try to put it in a nutshell. Ambedkar was a rationalist and a pragmatist (remember that Dewey was his teacher at Columbia); Gandhi was also a pragmatist, but in addition, he was a mystic. Ironically, these two great men were often at odds with each other, though no one worked harder than them to remove untouchability and social injustice. Ambedkar accepted the project of modernity, Gandhi was skeptical of it. In a different sense, Ambedkar also invites comparison with the 'father' of the other nation—Jinnah; both were irreligious, but both championed communal causes because both understood *realpolitik*. Jinnah got a separate state for the Muslims; Ambedkar converted to Buddhism himself and exhorted lakhs of his followers to follow suit. The challenge that Ambedkar offered to Hindu society was absolutely necessary—this was a corrupt society which refused to accept its corruption and sanctified it with religion. Ambedkar, then, belongs to the long tradition of heterodox social reformers of India from the Buddha to the Rev. Tilak. They reformed Hinduism from the outside, by leaving it; Gandhi reformed Hinduism from inside. Ultimately, we shall realize that Ambedkar's message was primarily for the dalits, but Gandhi's message was for all humanity.⁵

STUDENT: But I consider Ambedkar's contribution to be invaluable.

TEACHER: So do I. Certainly, he was one of the architects of our nation. Moreover, he was an ideologue, a scholar, and a thinker,

besides being an activist and politician. No dalit leader of his ilk has emerged since. But today, his legacy is being appropriated by opportunist politicians who understand only too well how they are misusing him. Just like the Congress misused Gandhi all these years.

STUDENT: Coming back to communalism, do you see its role decreasing or increasing?

TEACHER: It is hard to predict, but I cannot see its role increasing. I think it is clearer than ever before that religion cannot be the basis of a nation; this not only the Muslims have realized, but the Sikhs and Hindus are also realizing. Hence, there is something patently fallacious about a politics which favours Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs as such. Religion, however, will continue to be a guise for those who seek power; it is this misuse of religion that we must oppose vehemently in the years to come.⁶

Notes

1. See Stephen Hay, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition*, 218–22.
For a Muslim point of view of secularism in India, see Mushir-ul-Haq, *Islam in Secular India* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1972).
2. See *The Way to Communal Harmony*, ed., U.R. Rao (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1963).
3. See M.S. Gore, 'Secularism and Equal Regard for All Religions,' *New Quest* 72 (November-December 1988): 357–64.
4. A fine form of inlay work in which intricate patterns of silver are embedded in gunmetal; it is widely used to ornament and embellish vases, ashtrays, paper cutters, and other giftware.
5. See B.R. Ambedkar, *Speeches and Writings* (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, 1979); Dhananjay Keer, *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1954).
6. For some recent views on communalism, see the special issues on this topic of *Social Scientist* 18: 6–7, 8–9, 10 (1990).



Education and Language

STUDENT: I have this dream that the children of India should get a good education which is free, compulsory, and universal. Imagine every little boy or girl, faces bright and scrubbed, dressed in clean clothes, going to the neighbourhood school each morning!

TEACHER: If that happened, we could change this country totally. But we are still very far from realizing this dream. India has the largest number of illiterates in the world—some 324 million of them of the age of seven and above according to the 1991 census. About half of our population is still illiterate (*Manorama Year Book 1992: 423*).

STUDENT: This is a shocking figure, all the more because education is so vital to development.

TEACHER: Experts all over the world have realized that education is the key to social transformation. The right kind of education in our country will solve the problems of population growth, illiteracy, poverty, and communalism.

STUDENT: You said 'the right kind of education', but here we are talking about any education at all.

TEACHER: The two can't be separated. The moment you speak of education, you have to decide what kind. Gandhi realized this. He knew that it would be impossible to provide a European-style education to the millions and millions of poor people in our country. That's why he spoke so vehemently against the ills

of English education.¹ He also devised his own system of education, the Nai Taleem. But what is more important is that he made a distinction between being unlettered and being uneducated. He believed that the formal, organized education that we receive in schools and colleges does not necessarily make us better human beings. An educated person is a better human being, not someone who has merely book knowledge. That's why he considered most of our education useless.

STUDENT: What's wrong with the present system of education?

TEACHER: We have an education system which with its urban, middle-class bias is, by and large, irrelevant to the needs of the villagers.

Also, our entire system is totally Westernized. I already pointed out how it prepares our graduates for jobs abroad, not for employment in India.

Higher education is over-emphasized. Primary education is neglected.

The budgetary allocation of education is too low, about 3.5 percent of our total plan outlay. This is clearly insufficient.

Moreover, it is a system where a few at the top live and function in environments which are totally removed from our normal world, while the majority of our primary schools lack blackboards, teachers, and buildings.

STUDENT: The problems seem to be too enormous to be solved.

TEACHER: The steps to begin the process may be as follows: reduce the allocations to higher education. Make affluent students pay for technical and management education. If they go abroad, make them undertake to pay back at least a part of what the state spent on them. Increase the allocations to primary education. This has to be done in a really big way. Introduce compulsory national service, so that those who have benefited from the system can return something to it.

In brief, decolonize education, make it more relevant to our conditions. Emphasize skills instead of book-learning. Change the allocations. End the disparities.

STUDENT: We have so many unemployed graduates today. What can we do about that?

TEACHER: Do we need so many universities? So many people doing M.A.s for instance? Most of these degrees have a very low standard. They are practically useless. They only serve to keep

young people off the streets, giving them something to do. Have fewer colleges and universities for higher education, fewer but better, that is. Let our best be the best anywhere. Otherwise, let's dismantle these educational factories which produce such poor human results.

STUDENT: What can we learn from the West?

TEACHER: They have a public school system in the USA which is generally excellent. Everybody, by and large, goes to the same kind of school, whether they are upper-class or working-class. Schooling is free, but higher education is very expensive. Here market forces operate. Students have to take loans to educate themselves or work simultaneously. This makes them value the education that they receive.

STUDENT: In India, the opposite obtains. There are different kinds of schools for different classes of society. Undergraduate and postgraduate education is subsidized, and that makes students devalue what they receive.

Our system is totally upside down.

TEACHER: The American system stresses a basic training and thoroughness in whatever they teach. Every Ph.D., for instance, must meet certain minimum standards. Their professional standards are very high. Politics is kept out of education almost entirely. Everyone does their work conscientiously. At the same time, their system does not encourage real creativity. It engenders conformity and uniformity.

Here, the university is the hotbed of politics, as the cliché goes. Nobody wants to work or study. We teach our students irresponsibility and misuse of freedom. The teachers are hired on caste and community lines. There's always the interference from politicians in the higher appointments. The vice-chancellor is usually a politician, not an academician.

STUDENT: Don't you think that science and technical education gobble up more than their share of funds?

TEACHER: Of course. We have already talked about that earlier. If the allocation to science and technical education itself is computed, it would be the equivalent of funding lakhs of primary schools all over India.

STUDENT: Do you think that if schools were opened all over the country our poorest people would send their children to them? What about the most marginalized—migrant labourers, tribals, and so on?

TEACHER: Why shouldn't they send their children to schools? Especially, if they are also given a midday meal? Even migrant labourers could enroll their children into schools wherever they work.

STUDENT: But wouldn't all this require a massive investment and a political will to change the present priorities?

TEACHER: Doubtless. But the investment will certainly be less than what we put into defence each year. I would say that for Rs. 100 billion, or Rs. 10,000 crores, we can get about 1 million primary schools. Isn't the price worth it?

STUDENT: That seems to be more important than building dams, steel plants, atom bombs, or hosting the Asian games.

TEACHER: You said it.

STUDENT: Speaking of education, what do you think should be medium of instruction? We ourselves are conducting this dialogue in English. How does this behove a larger project of decolonization like ours?

TEACHER: The question of the role of English has been hotly debated for decades. It is linked to two other issues: first, to what can take the place of English. Secondly, to the notion of English as an agent of Westernization and colonization.²

STUDENT: Yes, but don't you think that the controversy arises because of the position of English in India, the importance and privilege it enjoys?

TEACHER: Of course. English gives power and social mobility to its user. The language has prestige in India. It is the language of masscommunication, higher education, and science and technology.

Now those who don't know English feel that its hegemony denies them their just place in society. On the other hand, those who have access to English fear a loss of privilege if it is replaced.

STUDENT: In both these approaches, the medium is being equated with its role and function.

TEACHER: Exactly. I would like to argue that the power of English derives from our unequal social system; you cannot abolish privilege by abolishing English. You cannot get rid of unfair advantages that some people enjoy by simply removing English. They will use some other means to throw their weight around.

So if English is replaced by some other language, say Hindi, then the English-wallas will realize that they can still learn Hindi to acquire power, just as they learnt English.

But why would they rather learn English than Hindi?

STUDENT: Wouldn't it be too much trouble to learn Hindi?

TEACHER: I think that is simplistic. Is it easy to learn English? Isn't *that* too much trouble?

STUDENT: Then it's a political ploy?

TEACHER: Exactly. And this brings us back to the first point—the issue of what would replace English. Just as English is considered a symbol and possession of a certain class or group, Hindi too is identified with the 'North', the cow-belt or call it what you will. South Indians don't object to Hindi so much as to North Indian domination and hegemony. They are using their fight against Hindi as a strategy of resistance. Just as the Hindi-wallas are by pretending that English is aligned to Westernization.

So, we are not talking of English vs. Hindi or some other Indian language; we are talking of an English-dominated bilingualism vs. an Indian language-dominated bilingualism. Because we are all bilinguals in India.

STUDENT: I find this ploy fascinating. You have redefined the conflict as not between English and, say, Hindi, but between one kind of Indian bilingualism versus another.

TEACHER: Check it out. If you think that Hindi is less colonized than Indian English, then you're mistaken. The whole language was reconstructed during our colonization. Today, Hindi is as much a carrier of Westernization as English is. When used for official purposes, Hindi is more or less unintelligible without the English original from which it has been translated word for word. Just listen to the Hindi news to see how colonized the language is. Look at criticism in Hindi. It is even more colonized than that in Indian English. Though in both languages there are those who are resisting colonization.

STUDENT: So you're saying that both languages, whether Hindi or English, really reflect the conflicts and contradictions of their user communities, and further that the user communities are basically the same.

TEACHER: Or overlapping. Yes, I think that's it. So now what kind of choices do we have?

We could get rid of English entirely. But is this possible or desirable? I think neither. Remember our discussion on Westernization? We cannot purge ourselves of the West entirely. The real issue is of the terms of exchange.

On the other hand, we could go on giving further importance to English. Clearly this is not desirable. Nobody, not even the staunchest proponents of English, is in favour of increasing its importance.

Or we come to some compromise. That's to say, we spell out the terms on which we want to use English.

STUDENT: Yes, on what terms do we want English?

TEACHER: Well, for starters, we don't want it to oppress any other Indian language. In order that this does not happen, we must drastically reduce its official and political patronage. English should no longer be the language of the law and bureaucracy. The common man's access to the government should not be curtailed by his lack of English. This move to dislodge English from its political pre-eminence is not new. In the cow belt, for instance, you can do without English entirely in so far as the government's work is concerned.

Now, let's consider the other side. We don't want to lose the English we have. It's useful as a frontier language, link language, library language, diplomatic language, scientific language, developmental language, and so on. English is a universal language today and we don't wish to lose our access to what it has been and will be giving us.

So, without destroying what good we have already gained, can we minimize the harm?

STUDENT: How is that to be done?

TEACHER: In principle, by switching to Indian languages as much as possible. Even to the extent of conducting such dialogues in an Indian language.

STUDENT: You have not spoken of the reach of English all over India, its non-regional character; hence its symbol as a national, non-partisan, progressive medium.

TEACHER: Yes, English does represent those values. But that's why we need one Indian language which can do the same. And that, as everyone knows, can only be Hindi.

STUDENT: Then you are a Hindi-wallah?

TEACHER: Even Gandhi wanted Hindustani to be the language of Indians. The present Hindi is much narrower than Hindustani, but that is partly because of the Partition of India. When Hindustan was partitioned, the language of Hindustan too was partitioned too—into Urdu and Hindi.³

But now that we have accepted this fact, we must examine the capacity of Hindi to play the same role as English.

STUDENT: Isn't the range and vocabulary of Hindi very narrow? Won't it be an inadequate medium for the expression of complex ideas and science and technology?

TEACHER: The debate on 'which Hindi' can continue. We could make the language less Sanskritized, more accessible to the common people. You must remember under what conditions the present 'high' Hindi was created; the pundits and Hindi-wallas had to fend off not just the influence of English, but of Urdu too. It was a question of the very identity of Hindi. But otherwise, there is no problem about Hindi being unsuitable for complex intellectual debates or for science and technology. We have a foolproof system for creating new words from Sanskrit just as the West has from Greek and Latin. Moreover, we could import words which we don't want to invent. The Japanese are doing that on a very large scale.

STUDENT: It seems to me that our approach will depend on how ambitious we are, on how great we want our own language to be.

TEACHER: Very correct. If we want to suddenly make Hindi as great as English, we'll run into a problem. The greatness, the power, and the authority of English derive from the greatness, power, and authority of the societies that back it—primarily USA and England, but also most of the West indirectly, and the formerly colonized world more directly.

Hindi cannot get there overnight. We need not reinvent the wheel. Our ambitions for Hindi must be more practical, more reasonable. So let's not try to duplicate everything that English can do. Let's leave some things for them, and try to do other things ourselves.

STUDENT: But are the Hindi-wallas aware of this?

TEACHER: I am afraid they want a Hindi substitute for everything that is available in English. This makes them fanatical and

narrow-minded. They invent tongue-twisters and difficult words as alternatives to English technical expressions. These inventions don't catch on. So we have a continued dependence on English for science and technology. Even a native speaker of Hindi finds it easier to use English for this purpose than to relearn a totally new register, which may have already become obsolete by the time he masters it.

But in the social sciences and humanities, Hindi has proved its flexibility, range, and viability. I believe that the most up-to-date discussions can now take place in Hindi.

STUDENT: But why have you substituted Hindi for 'other Indian languages' which you were using previously?

TEACHER: Because, as I already stated, if we're looking for a substitute for English, then the best candidate is Hindi. But let me clarify that I am using Hindi also as short for 'other Indian languages.' What's true for Hindi may also be true for other powerful languages such as Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, and so on.

STUDENT: You haven't spoken of the significance of translation.

TEACHER: That's a very important point. In any polyglot society, translation is necessary for communication. Now, we can expand our linguistic reach through translation. That is, those who can't learn Hindi might try to get their ideas and works translated into it. Like ourselves and our dialogue. Its value would be considerably impoverished if it were confined to English. It must be translated into Hindi and the other Indian languages to find its true audience in India.

STUDENT: You mentioned the translation of not just works but ideas.

TEACHER: When two people communicate, even if they do so in the same language, there's some process of translation going on. To understand anyone, we must translate their meaning into a language comprehensible to us. When two cultures meet, they have to translate each other's ideas to understand them. Translation, then, is a trope for a larger encounter between any two entities—ultimately, it is a trope for the encounter between the self and the other.

STUDENT: So we are translating each other's thoughts in this very dialogue.

TEACHER: Yes. Dialogue has to be 'trans' some medium. So in all processes of cultural encounter, there is a translation of ideas. This process involves problems of decoding, representation, and equivalence. Ideal or perfect equivalence is impossible; so there is always some loss of meaning, some falsification, some ideological interference.

STUDENT: As will be the case in translating the West to India or English to Hindi or vice versa.

TEACHER: But to get back to the language problem, I think we can take the following clear positions: Reduce the privilege or importance of English without throwing it out completely; increase the use of Hindi without resorting to coercive tactics; throughout, keeping in mind that neither English nor Hindi is the real problem—both, as it were, belong to the superstructure. The real change must take place in the base which is Indian society.

STUDENT: This seems to be in line with your previous thinking of finding the via media between two extremes.

TEACHER: Yes, we must always try to create this unoppressed and unoppressive space.

Notes

1. See Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, ch. 18, 87–93.
2. See my essay, ' "Howzatt Umpire!" or Ten Meditations on English in India,' *New Quest* 89 (September–October 1991): 285–91 for a summary of the major debates. Also see, Probal Dasgupta, *The Otherness of English* (New Delhi: Sage, 1993). For an argument against the continued dominance of English, see Badri Raina, 'A Note on Language, and the Politics of English in India,' in *Rethinking English*, ed. Svati Joshi (New Delhi: Trianka, 1991): 264–97.
3. See Amrit Rai, *A House Divided* (Delhi: OUP, 1984).



The Women's Movement

STUDENT: What role do you envisage for the women's movement in the process of development?

TEACHER: The role has to be central, not peripheral, as Gandhi himself believed. Women are the key not only to family planning as we have observed, but also to an alternative model of development, especially in the rural areas. To improve the condition of women is also to improve the condition of children and the entire family.'

STUDENT: But before we proceed, there is the question of whether you, being a man, can talk about this issue at all.

TEACHER: Are you raising a philosophical question or a political one?

STUDENT: A feminist would dismiss the distinction.

TEACHER: Though I think that, politically, it would not be a good strategy to do so. Women must speak on their own behalf, just as all the oppressed should. Men shouldn't pretend to speak for them.

At the same time, we must have a space wherein such a discussion on constructive cooperation can take place. Otherwise, all men would automatically be considered the enemies of the feminist movement.

The problem is quite serious and fundamental. How can I hope to change my adversary if I don't believe that he has

something I can appeal to? Of course, the only other option is to force him to change by becoming more powerful. Then my methods become the same as those of my opponents; to overthrow my opponents, I dehumanize them. Do I, as a victim, want to become like my oppressors? Should we not hope for some third way wherein we are neither being oppressed nor becoming oppressors?

If we don't imagine and work for such a space, we'll be locked into either one of two known evils.

STUDENT: The feminists are very conscious of their difference. That's why we don't want men to speak on our behalf.

TEACHER: We?

STUDENT: Aren't you male and I female? Isn't the male is always the authority, the learned, while the female is the unlearned, the powerless?

TEACHER: You have reintroduced gender into the dialogue at the most opportune moment. But why can't *I* be female for the purposes of this dialogue and you male? Do you deny our author that imaginative freedom?

STUDENT: Isn't 'authority' itself identified with the male? So I want to see how you can escape this time.²

TEACHER: Yes, but when a female becomes an author, isn't she assuming a 'male' position of power and authority?

STUDENT: In other words, one can be female by sex and male by gender or vice versa?!

TEACHER: Provided the 'male/female' are symbolic and provisional, defined in terms of power or—as Lacan would have put it—by the positioning of each in the Oedipal structure.³

STUDENT: If we apply this to our present situation, we find several feminists who are of female sex, but whose symbolic position is akin to that of males.

TEACHER: Their inability to recognize this subtlety actually makes them enemies of the women's movement.

STUDENT: This is preposterous! How can that be? They are fighting for the cause of their oppressed sisters.

TEACHER: Are you sure? Are you sure that they are not using someone else's oppression to further their own privileges?

STUDENT: You seem to be a hater of feminism. So you deserve to be roundly condemned and rejected.

TEACHER: Please don't get into a position in which you dub everyone who is not for you as being against you. It is precisely this hunt for enemies and their subsequent lynching that worries me.

STUDENT: We've been oppressed so badly that we don't want to hear any criticism. Either you support us or shut up. Men always want to poke their noses into everything we do and to give advice.

TEACHER: I am only talking about some of the feminists who are entrapped in a victim syndrome; no matter how privileged they themselves are, they will assume extreme victim positions, appropriating the oppression of the most wretched members of their sex, in order to unleash their oppositional rhetoric. These same feminists are, often, very powerful in terms of class, caste, education, status, employment, and usually have very supportive home environments. It was about such feminists that K.K. Ruthven remarked, 'Feminist terrorism is a mirror image of machismo.'⁴

STUDENT: OK, OK. But you must admit that the 'feminism' you're talking about is a very narrow, limited one and hence easy to condemn. But this does not take away from the real achievements and gains of the movement.

TEACHER: I thought that it was understood that I was speaking only of those things that I didn't like, not of the movement in general.

STUDENT: Please clarify your position then.

TEACHER: I would like to critique one faction of the women's movement here, what one would call the urban, middle and upper-class feminists.

STUDENT: But there's a lot more to the women's movement than this group.

TEACHER: Certainly. There are grass-roots movements such as Chipko and middle-level activism and service groups like SEWA and other women's cooperatives. I fully support these movements. I even support urban feminism because it has helped sensitize us to gender roles and how patriarchy operates. But there are some aspects of the urban feminist movement which I would like to criticize.⁵

STUDENT: Such as?

TEACHER: Specifically speaking, the following things: first, their colonization by the West. Urban feminists often speak in a borrowed language which is of little relevance to the concerns of the majority of Indian women.

Secondly, their acceptance of the Judeo-Christian logos. This model of discourse always seeks enemies and expresses itself through anger and confrontation. It is a very violent use of rationality to browbeat and intellectually exterminate opponents, perhaps out of a fear of being browbeaten or exterminated. The Judeo-Christian law was, of course, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Thirdly, their acceptance of the Enlightenment paradigm and of universality. Their notion of a totalized oppression of women across cultures and nationalities. Also their acceptance of historicism and materialism as the sole coordinates of defining consciousness.

Unfortunately, these dyed-in-the-wool Indian feminists stick to their orthodoxies, though their Western counterparts have gone far beyond. Today, the liberation of differences within the movement—with black, Third World, and gay women voicing their criticism of white, Eurocentred feminism—has resulted in what is called 'post-feminism.'

STUDENT: Do you make a distinction between the women's movement in India and Indian feminism?

TEACHER: Of course. I would say that the women's movement in India is different from the feminist movement. The former is quite old—going back, in modern times, to the Bengal renaissance. The latter is only a few decades old—almost completely an importation, not yet properly assimilated, representing the interests of a very small section of women.

STUDENT: But are their goals different?

TEACHER: What are the goals of the women's movement? Are they not the goals of Sarvodaya? Of the upliftment of the entire society? Of finding a better place for women in India? Of lessening their oppression? Of improving their standards of living? Of giving them education? Of giving them control over their own biology? Of giving them the freedom to be what they want to be?

What are the goals of the feminist movement in India? I am not sure. Ostensibly, the same as those of the women's movement.

But the positioning of the feminists, their urban, upper-middle class privilege, places them farthest away from their sisters. Their modernity and Westernization alienate them.

STUDENT: It seems to me that the women's movement is interested in finding a better place for women in society as it exists. But the feminists are pointing out that this is impossible. They would like to dismantle not only patriarchy, but if possible, capitalism too.

TEACHER: Quite right. But in the process, they tend to dismiss as inadequate everything which falls short of their ideological position. The result is that the only action that issues from them is the expression of repeated and ineffectual outrage.

But I am not only speaking of the social and psychological gap between theory and practice, but also of a methodological problem with their theories.

STUDENT: Do you mean that the theory is all imported?

TEACHER: This I have already said. The discourse of feminism in India is, to put it bluntly, a colonized discourse.

STUDENT: But this isn't your real objection to it, is it?

TEACHER: No, my real objection is to a certain type of thinking that this discourse is built upon. This type of thinking pervades the entire culture of Western modernity itself. But let me confine myself here to only feminism and its strategies for empowering women.

Most feminist thought has traced inequality to gender construction. The very notion of 'construction' implies artificiality and therefore the possibility of change and deconstruction. So far so good.

My quarrel starts when it comes to the method of deconstructing gender. I would imagine that the moment you realise that something is a construct, you stop mistaking it for reality. Seeing the construct as a construct is therefore the most powerful deconstruction of it.

STUDENT: Again, this is amazing. You mean nothing else needs to be done to achieve emancipation?

TEACHER: Seeing the false as the false—is that a joke? That is something very difficult to do.

But the feminists don't stop there. They want to put some other construct of gender in place of the existing one. So, their obsession again is with substitution.

The substituted construct is as 'unreal' as the original one. But, the West would argue that the substitute is more just, more equitable. Again, the goal seems to be to achieve a utopia, a perfection here and now. But since this is impossible, we are left instead with progress through endless substitution. Of course, the control of the 'latest' rests with the most aggressive debunker of the previously prevailing ideology. Ultimately, this is nothing more than a naked quest for power and dominance.

STUDENT: Is this the central crisis of feminism?

TEACHER: Yes, the central crisis is not knowing how to deal with difference.

STUDENT: Can you give some specific examples of this difficulty?

TEACHER: Simply speaking, the difficulty is as follows. Either you say that women and men are different or that they are similar. If they are different, as everyone traditionally thought they were, then you subscribe to a kind of biological essentialism. But this has been the very basis for the traditional arguments against the equality of the sexes: it has always been argued that men are stronger, bigger, and don't have to bear children, can impregnate hundreds of women, and therefore are superior.

You can counter this position by arguing that men and women are different only biologically; the inequality arises from unequal socializing, or gender. The notion of gender has been instrumental to our questioning of several traditional sex roles and has resulted in considerable change in every aspect of our lives.

Then there is also the idea of androgyny which suggests that both men and women have male and female personality traits. A balance between the two results in a stable personality; extreme machismo can, thus, be pathological.

But feminists have realized that they have something to lose in all these positions. The first idea of biological essentialism denies uniqueness to women. Recent French feminism has revived essentialism in a modified form. They celebrate themselves as women. They have even invented a name for such writing—*gynocritics* or *feminine ecriture*; literally, they write with their womb instead of the phallus! Both gender and androgyny imply that men can be as much like women as they wish, which is seen as an encroachment. To counter this they say that though men can't be like women—they are afraid then that men would take over—women can be as much like men as possible.

The whole argument boils down to this: either men and women are similar or that they are different. But either option is a trap for feminism. What is the solution? It's as follows: women are different from men when they wish to be and similar to men when they wish to be. But this privilege of exercising choice is only for women. The last sentence is in parenthesis.⁶

STUDENT: Sounds good to me. Women are similar to men as much and whenever they wish to be, but that shouldn't obliterate their difference. Difference can be an asset if it confers autonomy and identity, but detrimental when it results in exclusion and oppression.

TEACHER: I agree. Early feminism was built on Enlightenment ideals about the rights of 'man'; these feminists argued that women are also human and therefore must share equal rights. Later, women also demanded special rights as *women*—who are different from men. But, there is a flip side to this theory, whose implications you have to acknowledge.

STUDENT: Give me a specific example.

TEACHER: Consider this question of bearing children. The strategy would be to argue that it is a handicap to women; so women must have the choice not to bear babies. Well, I can grant that choice. But by the same logic, women must also have a choice to bear babies.

But the latter is not stressed. So you have not bearing babies being privileged over bearing babies. Most feminist science fiction attempts to get out of the biological trap of childbirth. In this genre, men bear babies, or men become women for a while, or machines bear babies, or women don't need men anymore but clone themselves, and so on.

STUDENT: In India we don't have any such distaste about childbirth.

TEACHER: But that's only because society defines the woman in terms of her reproductive potential. Isn't that very unfair too?

STUDENT: You seem to speak from both sides.

TEACHER: Look, wouldn't you agree that if a woman does not wish to be a mother, she mustn't be victimized?

STUDENT: But that's what the feminists are saying.

TEACHER: But by the same logic, if a woman wants to bear children, to work in the house, to serve her 'lord and master,' to be a 'doormat,' and so on, shouldn't she be allowed to do so?

STUDENT: But does she ever do this out of choice? Isn't she conditioned to be a doormat? Therefore, only when she refuses the role that society expects from her is she rebelling.

TEACHER: But that's not fair. It's philosophically untenable. You are defining choice only in terms of rebellion. For me we have the choice to both rebel and conform. Even conforming is a choice, though it may work by default. Why should rebellion be privileged over conformity? Isn't rebellion itself a type of counter-conformity? Both imply conformity to some ideology. Why should heterodoxy be privileged over orthodoxy?

STUDENT: But isn't that the current trend in the West? Subversion, transgressivity, and rebellion have become virtues in themselves.⁷

TEACHER: But that's the whole point of this dialogue. All privileging is artificial, all of it is constructed. All of it leads to inequality and therefore to injustice. There is no 'good' injustice and 'bad' injustice. All injustice is bad.

The Western system replaces one type of inequality with another, one yardstick of privileging with another. Ordinarily, society rewards conformity; now non-conformity is being rewarded. Actually, neither conformity nor non-conformity are good or bad in themselves. It depends on what you are conforming to and why.

STUDENT: This seems to make sense.

TEACHER: Thanks. Remember that difference which is a source of inequality is also the source of diversity and richness. If we had no differences, there would be no joy in life. Uniformity is death. So, can we preserve difference without letting it lead to inequality? That is the question. Not replace one inequality with another as feminism does.

Childbearing should not automatically confer superiority; but by the same token neither should it be devalued.

STUDENT: But don't we devalue those things which keep people enslaved and exalt those things which free them?

TEACHER: Yes. But one's biology, which is the source of one's difference from the opposite sex, will neither enslave us nor free us. Something else enslaves us and frees us. This something else is the notion that one type of sexual organ is preferable to the other.

STUDENT: But society has always taught us that.

TEACHER: But that is exactly what you mustn't accept. That is what you are resisting. Now to want to get out of the biological trap is to agree in the first place that it is a trap. But that's what I am questioning. I am saying that only you can make it a trap; and only you can make it an emancipatory device. In itself it is neither. Like all other differences, it is incidental, not fundamental.

Differences can neither be the source of superiority nor inferiority. They are simply facts of nature—or to put it another way, in nature there is difference and variety, but no inequality.

STUDENT: Are you saying that Western feminism is based on the perpetuation of the very inequality which it claims to be fighting?

TEACHER: Ironically, it clings to inequality. It uses inequality to build up solidarity, outrage, and the drive to change among its proponents, and to induce guilt in its opponents. But inequality then becomes a crutch; you need the crutch to keep reminding others how you are suffering. What I am saying is, OK, there is inequality but throw off the crutch now, walk like everyone else. Then they will tell you, it's easy for you to talk that way because *you* never needed a crutch; but we're unique—we've suffered, even the memory of a crutch makes us different from you who've never had to use one, and so on.

STUDENT: All fragmentary movements are like that; unless they are grounded in a metaphysics which can accommodate difference without viewing it as inequality.

TEACHER: Like this dialogue in which you can be Shiva and I Parvati, you the teacher and I the student, or vice versa.

STUDENT: For you what is the chief importance of the women's movement in India?

TEACHER: I see women as the key to the alternate kind of development that we were speaking of. It is the masculine thinking of the West that has done the most damage to the world. This type of thinking is based on the quest for power and dominance, not on the search for love and peace.

Women in India have given more to society than society has cared to admit. They must be given their due. They must be given both dignity and choice. The choice, even, to be selfish for a while until they empower themselves. But perhaps, they need not turn back on their alleged gentleness and compassion in this process of equalization.

Patriarchy must dismantle its oppressive structures, make

amends for its injustices. Men must make women happy by learning to give and love.

STUDENT: So are you saying that women mustn't cease to be womanly?

TEACHER: We've seen that there's no such thing as being womanly or manly *per se*. But if being womanly is to be gentle, compassionate, and non-violent, then I'd want not only women but also men to be more womanly.⁸

STUDENT: Does India have any special resources for bringing about an equality between the sexes?

TEACHER: Certainly, if we only look for them. Indian religions and myths are more androgynous and less phallogocentric than Judeo-Christian religions and myths. Here we actually have older cults of the worship of Mother Goddess still extant. Though many of these goddesses were incorporated into patriarchy as spouses of the different male gods, their autonomy has not yet been fully obliterated. Our myths have several instances of goddesses killing male demons and rakshasas: the stories of Chandi, Mahishasurmardini, and Sherawali Ma are such examples. In the latter case, the Mother actually beheads and defeats Bhairava or Shiva himself. In the end a compromise is reached: Whenever the Goddess is worshipped, Shiva will also be worshipped through her; and if Shiva is worshipped without propitiating the Goddess, then such worship will be in vain.

STUDENT: The point seems to be that in the battle of the sexes, no one can win. There must be, instead, equality and co-existence.

TEACHER: Precisely. Both Shiva and Shakti are coeval as are Purusha and Prakriti or Yin and Yang. Even today, in every Hindu ceremony, though the husband initiates the rites, they are incomplete without the participation of the wife.⁹

STUDENT: But in actual practice, Hinduism has oppressed women very badly.

TEACHER: Yes. Actually, Vivekananda considered this one of the reasons for the downfall of our country. A hundred years ago, he said: 'We are horrible sinners, and our degradation is due to our calling women "despicable worms," "gateways to hell," and so forth It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious Self is present in all beings.'¹⁰

STUDENT: So, again, we notice that we can draw on a wealth of traditions, including a different metaphysics and epistemology, to fight for the equality of women. Do other religions also have such resources?

TEACHER: They must have. Patriarchy, after all, is neither universal nor timeless, but was instituted variously in various societies; it functions differently in different parts of the world, with varying degrees of complicity and resistance by women themselves. All societies have a pre-patriarchal past, vestiges of traditions and beliefs from which must still exist. The cult of the Madonna in Catholicism, for instance, or the idea of witches and earth mothers in Christian societies. Even in Islam, there were the Goddesses of the Kaaba, whom Mohammad banished only on second thoughts."

STUDENT: How do you react to the changes in gender roles that have come about because of feminism?

TEACHER: Though it's not easy, both men and women have to learn how to live with these changes. In fact, the reason why patriarchy is so harmful to men is that it not only gives them a false notion of who they are, but also limits them in what they can be.

STUDENT: You seem to be a hater of patriarchy.

TEACHER: Yes. It is, like apartheid or slavery or colonialism, an oppressive system based on a false ideology. It subordinates women and enslaves them; it perpetuates myths about female sexuality and personality; it destroys men and women. That's why what needs to be emphasized is not just the liberation of women, but also the liberation of men who, as oppressors, are also victims of patriarchy. Let women lead the way in this struggle, joining hands with men to dismantle patriarchy. I feel like echoing Gail Omvedt's cry, 'We will smash this prison!'"¹²

Because, ultimately, we are also people—human beings. Our aim is to help each other, to live in peace and harmony with everyone else. Man or woman, black or white, rich or poor, Hindu or Muslim, we must figure out how to do this, how to co-exist with our Other. There are no separate spaces of security for any of us. We must share, learn, love, and live.

There is no other way.

Notes

1. See *Gandhi on Women*, compl. Pushpa Joshi (Ahmedabad: Navjivan and CWDS, 1988). Also see Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*.

For a good bibliography on the subject, see Carol Sakala, *Women of South Asia: A Guide to Resources* (New York: Kraus International, 1980). The Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, publishes bibliographies on women in India. For women's studies in the West, see Esther Stinemán, *Women's Studies: A Recommended Core Bibliography* (Littleton, Co.: Libraries Unlimited, 1979).

2. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).
3. See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977) and Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (London: Free Association Books, 1986). Also see Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991).
4. K.K. Ruthven, *Feminist Literary Studies: An Introduction* (1984; rpt. Cambridge: UP, 1990).
5. See Ela R. Bhatt, 'Organizing Self-Employed Women for Self-Reliance,' in Borden, *Contemporary India*, 203–19. Also see Rehena Ghadially, ed., *Women in Indian Society: A Reader* (New Delhi: Sage, 1988).
6. See 'Feminine Sexuality,' in Allan Bullock et al., eds., *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana, 1988) for an excellent summary. See Muggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (Hempstead: Harvester Press, 1989) for essays on some of the terms used. See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985) for an overview of Anglo-American and French feminism. Also see Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore, eds., *The Feminist Reader* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
7. See, for instance, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Viking, 1977).
8. See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: OUP, 1983) and 'Woman Versus Womanliness in India,' in *At the Edge of Psychology* (Delhi: OUP, 1990). Also see his *Traditions, Tyranny and Utopias* (Delhi: OUP, 1987).
9. For an introduction to Hindu myths, see Margaret and James Stutley, *A Dictionary of Hinduism* (Bombay: Allied, 1977) and Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968).
10. Swami Nirvedananda, ed., *Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems*, 19.
11. See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of the Patriarchy* (New York: OUP, 1986).
For entries on earth mothers, withces, and goddesses, see Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1982). Salman Rushdie writes about the pre-Islamic goddesses in the infamous *Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1989).
12. See Gail Omvedt, *We Will Smash This Prison: Indian Women in Struggle* (London: Zed Press, 1980).



The State of the Nation

STUDENT: Whether in Punjab, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, or the very heartland of the country, India seems to be going up in flames.

TEACHER: Is today's dialogue about the falling apart of India? 'The centre cannot hold,' as Yeats put it?'

STUDENT: Actually, haven't people been saying that for several years?

TEACHER: The threat of secession has always been used to get a better deal from the Union. You may recall that DMK politicians burnt the national flag and the Constitution on their way to power.

STUDENT: So do you think that India will never fall apart, but will hang together for ever?

TEACHER: The physical or conceptual boundaries of any state are never fixed, but always changing. The map of the world gets redrawn every thirty or forty years.

STUDENT: I was amazed to see a pre-World War II map of Europe. All the national boundaries were different.

TEACHER: Even in the last twenty years, how many new nations have been reborn or have changed boundaries.

STUDENT: USSR, Germany, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, to name only a few.

TEACHER: Even the boundaries of India have changed since Independence. We lost a part of Kashmir to Pakistan and another part to China. We annexed Goa and Sikkim. And so on.

STUDENT: So is the stability of the nation state a myth?

TEACHER: A people, a civilization, a cultural group, or a way of life persists. The geographical, political, and military entity changes. Think of Tibet. It's been gobbled up by China, but the idea of Tibet persists in the minds of the Tibetans, even when the geographical and political entity has vanished. And once, Tibet was a very powerful kingdom, which ruled over a large part of China.

STUDENT: So is this a goodbye to nationalism?

TEACHER: There is nothing sacrosanct about the idea of a nation. In fact, a nation is a convenience.²

STUDENT: You mean that the moment Khalistan will be convenient to the majority of Sikhs, then they'll get their own state?

TEACHER: This idea of a particular group of people forming their own state on the basis of language, religion, race, or some other binding factor is a big myth.

No group is totally pure and cohesive. It always has minorities, factions, subgroups.

Take the Sikhs themselves. They have so many internal dissensions—caste differences, vocational differences, class differences, and so on. Will Khalistan be in everyone's interest? And what will they do with the 45 percent or so Hindus still in Punjab?

STUDENT: Their slogan has been '*Raj Karega Khalsa*.'

TEACHER: But that's precisely the point—they want to rule, they want power. And within any democratic setup, that's legitimate.

STUDENT: Then how would you define terrorism?

TEACHER: Terrorism is the illegal and unjustified use of violence, often for political ends.

STUDENT: One would have thought that terrorism is violence for the sake of violence.

TEACHER: But who can afford that? Terrorism, no doubt, has an economic base. Someone has to fund, sponsor, and underwrite it. But its ends are political. The way to deal with it is to make non-violent ways of negotiating with the state more rewarding than violent ones.³

STUDENT: You mean, never take the terrorist literally?

TEACHER: Precisely. He may say I want to leave. But if you give him his own room in the house, he may simply stay back.

STUDENT: But aren't you worried about the escalating violence in our life?

TEACHER: Of course, we must see very clearly that violence cannot solve human problems. Violence is simply a coping device, an escape from a reality which is too unbearable. After the blood-letting, we find the initial problem still staring us in the face.

That's because we cannot destroy the enemy. The enemy, our Other, will persist forever. We must learn to live with him. We must make out peace with him.

Look at what happened in Sri Lanka. There was an unending cycle of violence and counter-violence between the state and the LTTE. India intervened, but couldn't solve the problem. Then the LTTE came to India and started their killings here, including the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. But what was achieved? Are they any closer to a Tamil state than they were?

In a sense, there's no solution but for the Sinhalese and the Tamils to learn to co-exist. Neither can finish off the other.

STUDENT: Closer home, what about the ideology of Khalistan?

TEACHER: Are the Sikhs a race, a nation? Are Muslims a race, a nation? Are Hindus a race, a nation? No, no, no. The concept of a racial or theocratic state is a failure except in certain exceptional cases. The ideology of Pakistan failed with the breaking away of Bangladesh. Similarly, the Israelis haven't figured out what to do with the Palestinians. They want a democratic state for themselves, but they want to give no rights to the Palestinians.⁴ That's a bit like the regime in South Africa. They have very liberal government for the whites, but the blacks have no rights at all. There is a fundamental contradiction in an ideology which believes in the rights of one group of people while denying others the same rights. Such states will eventually be torn apart.

Any state which gives rights to people on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, race, or some other parochial ground is, thus, trying to realize a contradiction. People deserve a certain form of government not because they are Muslims, Jews, Hindus, or Christians, but because they are human beings.

STUDENT: But how to apply all this to India?

TEACHER: Talk to the terrorists. Always keep the door open for negotiations. Decentralize as much as possible. Safeguard civil liberties. And most importantly, make elections, not guns, the avenue to power.

STUDENT: I never understood politics. Different groups of people are always trying to take over. We never have a state which satisfies everyone.

TEACHER: No state is completely just. It is always ruled by a specific group, like the house of Saud in Saudi Arabia. There are dynasties, tribal affiliations, vested interests, and class groupings who wield power. The whole quest for power and the maintenance of it are horrible nightmares.

Even in India, the jockeying for power is pretty ruthless. There are secessionist groups like the Punjabi, Assamese, and Kashmiri extremists and there are those like the naxalites who want to usher in the revolution. Everyone disgruntled with the present order wants it modified or overthrown. And they all offer so much more justice, equality, security, or if they are less sophisticated, power to some one group or the other.

Gandhi detested this very drive for power. That's why in his utopia, the state itself would wither away, leaving citizens to live in maximum freedom. The only law would be self-regulation. The only authority he recognized was that of the conscience.

STUDENT: So Gandhi was an anarchist?

TEACHER: Something like that.⁵ The point is that human beings have not found the perfect form of government or social organization. Even if such perfection were possible theoretically, in actuality the form of government which will ensue may be very unsatisfactory.

STUDENT: Among the present systems, which do you prefer?

TEACHER: I suppose, I would call it democratic socialism. Plenty of freedom for the individual with a minimum standard of living guaranteed by the state. This is what we wish to do in India, but you know the contradictions that we face.

STUDENT: What about secularism?

TEACHER: No, if it means an irreligious, modern way of life; yes, if it means the separation of church and state. To be ruled by religious leaders—priests, mullas, khazis, mahants, or saints *because* they are priests, mullas, khazis, mahants, or saints would be abhorrent. But we must remember that being irreligious is not the only way of co-existing with one another; one can be religious and yet be tolerant to people of other faiths.⁶ This is the kind of co-existence which Gandhi wanted.

STUDENT: That's why the idea of Khalistan is so repulsive. Who are these so called 'pure' people? Who are they to dictate to you what to eat, what to wear, what to read, and so on? These are forces of reaction and repression. I can only think of unmitigated catastrophe if they come to power.

TEACHER: All authoritarian regimes are, similarly, repulsive. Whether it's Indira Gandhi's emergency, or BJP's Hindutva, or, to a lesser extent, Rajiv's yuppie India.

STUDENT: As we end this dialogue, I find that you have left most questions unanswered. Will India stay together or fall apart? Will our experiment in democracy succeed? Will we be able to evolve a more just and equitable form of government? In a word, will we survive as a nation?

TEACHER: Whether we survive or not is up to us. It's up to all our politicians, bureaucrats, judges, journalists, teachers, businessmen, farmers, workers, and peasants—in short, it is up to the people of India.

Let us not waste the opportunity that we have earned through our freedom struggle—the opportunity to shape our destinies, to fashion our future. Let us accept our responsibility and safeguard our rights.

Because if we fail, we shall have no one to blame but ourselves.⁷

STUDENT: But what can we, the common people, do?

TEACHER: If we really want to do something worthwhile, we'll find the way to do it.

Notes

1. W.B. Yeats's famous poem, "The Second Coming," particularly its first stanza, continues to surprise us with its relevance to all sorts of situations:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

2. See, for instance, Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Delhi: OUP, 1986). Also see Ashis Nandy on 'State,' in Sachs, ed., *The Development Dictionary* and Ravindra Kumar, 'Nation-State or Civilizational State?' (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Occasional Papers, 1989).
3. See Ashis Nandy, 'Terrorism Indian Style,' *Indian Express Magazine*, 7 April 1991: 1, 3.
4. See Khalid El-Sheikh, *Zionism: A Tale of Terror* (New Delhi: League of Arab States and Embassy of the State of Palestine, n.d.).
5. See Gandhi's *India of My Dreams* (Ahmedabad: Navjivan, 1947).
6. See Ashis Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance,' *Alternatives* 13 (1988): 177-94.
7. For a discussion on the current state of India from various points of view, see *Another India*, the special issue of *Daedalus* 118: 4 (Fall 1989). Also see Rajni Kothari, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1988) and *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1989).



Conclusion: Towards a World Culture

STUDENT: As we near the end of our discussions, let me ask you about what our Gandhian model of development means for Indian culture. What kind of a culture will it be? Indian? Western? A hybrid?

TEACHER: The question is not so much whether it will be Indian or Western. We have already seen how the two interpenetrate. The Indian becomes the Western, then comes back to India via the West, then is re-exported again. And so on. Throughout there are modifications. There is no untainted original; no 'pure' culture. We are all hybrids whether we like it or not. I think we have seen this very clearly.

Similarly, the question of whether ours will be a traditional culture or a modern culture is hard to ascertain. There are many dimensions to tradition and many to modernity. The vital past becomes the living present through a continuity. Similarly, what is not vital to the present quickly becomes the forgotten past. Sometimes, what is valuable in the past is lost and has to be rediscovered painfully; sometimes what is unimportant in one age, reassumes importance in another. In any case, the present and the past are in constant interaction, transforming one another.

Ultimately, one can argue that modernity itself is not an evil

and neither is tradition. If so, then the culture that we want will be one of various combinations of useful modernity and useful tradition.

And how do we define useful? That is useful which gives life; that useless which gives death. But can that be useful which gives me life and my neighbour death?

That is the culture the world knows today, a culture in which if we live we do so at the expense of the other. Can we change that?

We can only change it by a culture which practices Sarvodaya and Svaraj. A culture, which is strong enough to withstand stress, but not so strong as to oppress others.

Perhaps, such a culture can never be fully actualized. But that doesn't mean we must stop striving towards it. Each day, specific choices have to be made from this ideal perspective. We must live as if we have the power to change the world; we must live as if each one can perfect the world. We must not live as if the world will go to the dogs anyway, and thus go to the dogs ourselves.

STUDENT: Can you apply this to specific cultural mediums like architecture, painting, poetry, and so on?

TEACHER: Throughout, we must sustain the impulse to preserve what we have, to build upon it, to innovate by assimilating creatively, that is to keep decolonization and Svaraj in mind.

Consider the specific instance of architecture. Present day casual architecture is hideous. Everything is made into box-like concrete structures. Trees are cut, and the ground cleared for some ugly high-rise building.

I like a house built with simple, local materials; not one which is exorbitant, luxurious, but spacious, comfortable, homely, full of light, well ventilated.

As to painting, the artist must examine if his very image, the basic unit of his composition, has been colonized. He must learn to see with his own eyes, not the borrowed eyes of his Western masters.

The poet's wrestle with words mustn't amount to shadow-boxing.

The intellectual must confront the real situation around him, including his own colonized mentality.

And so on.

STUDENT: May we go back to *Hind Swaraj* before we end? Which aspects of it do you accept and which do you reject?

TEACHER: I accept its general drift and its principles. I also accept most of Gandhi's conclusions. I agree with him that modernity, when defined in a particular way and followed to its logical ends will lead to disaster as it has done already.

However, I believe that modernity is a house divided against itself. It has spaces of resistance to offer against itself. Moreover, some of its features have improved the lives of millions.

Technology, therefore, if not neutral, is at least capable of multiple applications. I don't think Gandhi fully understood the power of technology to change the world. In this sense, he was a bit old-fashioned. But I believe that the right technology holds the key not only to social transformation, but also to saving the planet from disaster.

Gandhi's strategy was to flatten the issues so that they could become crystal clear. Today, we can live with a more complex model of cultural encounter and conflict than what Gandhi gives us in *Hindi Swaraj*.¹

Today, we can see us as fighting both ourselves and the West simultaneously. Gandhi saw the fight primarily as one between ourselves and Western modernity. Moreover, the option to remain ourselves, which seemed to be available to Gandhi, is no longer available to us. We have moved a great distance towards modernity since his time.

Only a radical questioning of both ourselves and of the West will lead to an effective praxis. Often we question only one or the other.

What we need today is a bridge between critical tradition and critical modernity—that will yield a culture which has depth and compassion, diversity and richness.

STUDENT: What about Gandhi's views on lawyers and doctors?

TEACHER: We haven't talked about them here, but briefly, I think most of them are still relevant. Take advanced medicine, for instance. Despite its tremendous successes, it still has several drawbacks. It dehumanizes the patient and though it can prolong life, it seems to deny the right to die in dignity. In India, of course, medicine has become a racket, a way of exploiting people. Allopathic drugs are all toxic and often don't go beyond offering symptomatic relief. Modern medicine, thus, ends up

making us stupid and self-indulgent, denying the tremendous intelligence of our bodies. The right kind of diet, exercise, and life style can ensure good health much more than modern medicine can; moreover, the body's healing capacity can take care of most ailments. I, for one, would hate to turn myself over to a doctor unless absolutely necessary; I wouldn't like to forego my autonomy or to be kept out of the effort to restore myself to health. No doubt, in the rarest of cases, it is possible to find a good doctor, but otherwise the whole system is nothing but quackery and fraud.

STUDENT: Are you saying that we cannot improve on Gandhi?

TEACHER: In certain principles that he enunciated, we indeed cannot go beyond him. But these principles are ageless. They are based on a mode of thinking which is opposed to the ordinary mode, which is higher than the ordinary mode, but which subsumes it.

The principles, though ageless, are continually reinterpreted, rediscovered, modified, redeployed, and so on.

We cannot discover so much as *rediscover* them. Each discovery is really a recovery because it teaches us that we had never completely lost them.

Similarly, we must rediscover and redeploy Gandhi. The need to do this is urgent. At the same time, we must question his formulations and modify them wherever necessary. Otherwise, we shall end up being Gandhian fundamentalists—a sad, irrelevant lot, completely marginalized today. We need to treat ourselves with as much self-respect as Gandhi might have wished us to, thus freely questioning, reinterpreting, even misreading him. When we do so, then what we have is not Gandhi but our version of him. We have created something new. And without creating something new, we can never face the challenge of tomorrow.

STUDENT: It is interesting how Gandhi has been rejected by his original constituencies but is being rediscovered by new ones.

TEACHER: Isn't that the proof of the timeliness and timelessness of genius? Genius, like a classic, persists. It resists complete decoding, renewing its mystery with each passing generation.

Gandhi was disowned in his own lifetime by a large section of Muslims whose cause he thought he was championing. So we had the triumph of communalism and the birth of Pakistan. But Gandhi did not reject the minorities and their cause though they

had rejected him. He gave his life protecting their interests. Similarly, the so-called Harijans have given up on Gandhi. The Congress party has given up on him. The Indian nation itself has turned its back on him.

But Gandhi continues to be relevant and we shall have to face this fact even if Gandhi's ideas return to us via the West.³ But if that happens it will be such a pity.

STUDENT: What can we learn from the West?

TEACHER: Many qualities—adventurousness, drive, punctuality, integrity, competitiveness, respect for the rights of others, the work ethic, efficient use of technology, cleanliness, open-mindedness, generosity, the quest for knowledge, equality, and above all, rationality.

Of course, there is nothing inherently Western about these qualities. We must find the appropriate Indian interface for assimilating them.

STUDENT: What can we give to them?

TEACHER: A different mode of thinking, intellectual tolerance, plurality, compassion for others, belief in a reality higher than the phenomenal, a sense of wonder and mystery about life, the sacredness of nature, and several traditional arts, crafts, skills, philosophies, and ways of life.

STUDENT: You have spoken only of India and the West for most of this dialogue. Why? What about the other countries and cultures of the world?

TEACHER: The challenge of the West is a fundamental one. The other civilizations have, more or less, lost their initiative. As I suggested earlier, they have become incorporated into the Western-dominated system of modernity and world capitalism. The true challenge to us comes from the West. And we must continue to face this challenge. I think our response should be a radical one, a response that can face this challenge without anger or shame, without reaction or acquiescence.

About the other countries now. Together, we form one world culture. That is the mother culture or the ur-culture which subsumes and includes within it the totality of what human beings have struggled to achieve these several millennia. This world culture and the earth which houses it belong to all of us—whether we are black, white, brown, yellow, or some other

hue; whether we are the colonized or the colonizers; whether women or men; whether human beings or animals.

The choice before us is basically simple: Do we wish to survive or to perish? If we wish to survive, no matter what our differences or provocations, we must find ways of living with each other. We must resist the false choices which say: Kill or be killed; oppress or be oppressed; eat or get eaten.

We must enlarge the space for the third option: Live and let live; eat and let eat; survive and let survive.'

And the only way to that goal is through love. Only when we return love for hatred can the world be changed. That is the root of satyagraha or ahimsa.

And the challenge is to let this basic truth mediate all our daily actions, to weave it into a social theory, into international action. It is this challenge that intellectuals, writers, artists, poets, and politicians face.

STUDENT: Do you think that there is some metaphysical basis for such a theory of life?

TEACHER: Of course there is. The metaphysical basis of love is the notion that you and I are not really separate. Or to use Ramachandra Gandhi's famous aphorism: 'I am Thou'. We appear to be separate, if at all, only to demonstrate that we can love each other. Why must we love? Why can't we hate each other? Because hating the other is also hating oneself, killing the other is also killing oneself, oppressing the other is also oppressing oneself. As long as we cannot see this clearly we will continue to oppress, kill, and destroy ourselves.

STUDENT: Then why should we bother to love another? We could well love ourselves and be done with it.

TEACHER: Yes, if in yourself you include the other. Otherwise, if you hate the other, you will never be able to love yourself. Contrariwise, to love the other you will first have to love yourself. Because love for another can only be generated by a love for the self; it is only when we realize that the other is 'none other,' *ananya*, than our self can we stop this ancient war.

Notes

1. *Hind Swaraj* continues to be a much discussed text. See, for instance, M.L. Gujral, *Thus Spake Bapu or dialogues between Gandhi's spirit and the scribe* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985) and Nageswar Prasad, *Hind Swaraj: A Fresh Look* (New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1985).
2. See, for instance, D. Kantowsky, 'Gandhi Coming Back from West to East,' *Gandhi Marg* 5:3 (1983): 129–39.
3. See Ramchandra Gandhi's moving debate on this in *Sita's Kitchen* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1993).

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Postscript: Re-reading the Dialogue

STUDENT: If you call this a 'Postscript,' then we have already ended our dialogue. By still talking, aren't we contradicting ourselves?

TEACHER: It all depends on which discourse you belong to. If this were a text in the human or social sciences, then we should have ended with the previous chapter.

STUDENT: And if this were a literary or religious text . . . ?

TEACHER: Then it would have to reveal its own origins and destinations, pointing to the silence from which it was born and the silence into which it would recede. That would be an appropriate ending, even if it called for such a Postscript.

STUDENT: Then, I want you to tell me how to put an end to this dialogue.

TEACHER: To end this dialogue, we must reach its end—its goal, purpose, objective.

STUDENT: And that is, obviously, decolonization, freedom, Svaraj?

TEACHER: We must read it so as to make us free.

STUDENT: How do we know that what we have is enough? Perhaps, we need to read more to know more and to make this dialogue better, more useful, more complete?

TEACHER: Reading everything is a myth. Even Habermas, who appears to have done it, speaks of the 'new unsurveyability' (*neue Unübersichtlichkeit*) of contemporary scholarship. Simply

too much is being written all over the world, particularly in the West. As Feyerabend says, 'it is impossible to find one's way in the flood of styles, theories, points of view, that inundate public life.'

So there is no systematic way of approaching any subject; all disciplines are constructed through arbitrary exclusions. One of the biggest cheats of our times is organized knowledge, quite like the organized churches of the medieval times.

So I would say, read what you can use and use what you can read; read as much as you need to and try to find a need for whatever you have read.

You can't pave the whole world; so buy a pair of shoes instead.

STUDENT: But how much reading is required to reach understanding?

TEACHER: The question is not so much of reading as of understanding. Reading books is a part of this process of understanding life. At a certain stage, we understand or think we understand the basic structure of life and its major themes. Thenceforth, we can fit most of the new things we encounter into this understanding.

What I wish to say is that you cannot arrive at the unlimited through the unlimited—that is you cannot know everything through reading everything. Instead, by seeing the unlimited in the limited, you get there directly. That is, in every limit, you see beyond the limit to the limitless.

STUDENT: Can you apply that piece of esoterica to our dialogue?

TEACHER: No dialogue is ever finished. It is abandoned at some juncture. The dialogue of Shiva and Parvati has no beginning or end. When it begins, Time begins and it ends with the end of Time. What we have excerpted is an arbitrary, though ordered, slice of it.

We have written out a portion of this never-ending dialogue—that portion which we could access, interpret, and transcribe. Our performance will depend on our own perfections/imperfections. Our imperfections need not dishearten us; they do not diminish the perfection we have visioned and sought.

And therein lies the paradox of perfection

STUDENT: And the perfection of paradox.

TEACHER: So let both of us return to the space from which we were summoned.

STUDENT: You mean end our present roles.

TEACHER: Like actors returning to the dressing room after the last bow.

STUDENT: To take off our masks of 'teacher' and 'student' which made the dialogue possible, thus returning into the consciousness of our 'author'. Do you think we will meet again?

TEACHER: Perhaps. But not in our present guises. Dialogues like this are written only once in one's life. In a sense, we have written ourselves out.

STUDENT: But there's a lifetime ahead to practice what we have imagined.

TEACHER: Amen. Aameen. And Om.



Afterword

Before Ayodhya

The first draft of this book was written during an extended curfew in Hyderabad in November 1990. Fearing an outbreak of communal violence, the Chief Minister, Chenna Reddy, had placed most of the city under a strict dawn-to-dusk curfew. I spent a few days as a virtual prisoner in my flat at Mehdipatnam. The experience was both sobering and distressing. I quickly began to feel dull and gloomy. It was not possible even to go out for a walk; all that I could do was to gaze upon the deserted streets of a lifeless city, which ordinarily would be bustling with activity and colour. When the curfew was lifted for a few hours, I gave my last loaf of bread and jar of jam to a friend who needed them and, packing a few belongings, escaped to the campus of the University of Hyderabad, outside the city limits.

Here, I had unlimited access to the single p.c. in my Department and lots of time because classes had been suspended. That's how, in the space of a few days with very long working hours, this book was born. Throughout its writing, I was driven by the pervading mood of crisis. A certain way of life which I had taken for granted was threatened. Chenna Reddy's curfew seemed to be punitive, disciplining an entire population of innocent people for the attempts of a few hooligans and killers to disrupt social peace. The worst affected were the residents of the old city, where people who lived from hand to mouth not only lost their livelihood, but also had to undergo great hardships to get essential commodities. Chenna

Reddy's ploy, however, did not work. On 8 December, a few days after normalcy seemed to have been restored and the curfew relaxed, the worst communal riots broke out since Hyderabad's accession to India in 1948. Over 500 people, mostly in the old city, lost their lives. The riots were particularly brutal; the majority of victims were poor and defenceless; even children and old people were not spared. The consensus was that the riots had been engineered, with hired mercenaries precipitating them. We heard that the going rate for a murder was Rs. 10,000 and for a stabbing, Rs. 5,000. Soon afterwards, Chenna Reddy was removed from the Chief Ministership and N. Janardhana Reddy, also of the Congress-I, assumed charge in his place.

I recall these events not only to record the conditions in which the book was conceived, but also to commemorate all those who died. It is events such as these which pull one into the vortex of national life, disallowing one the safety of spectatorship from safe shores. Some of the values embodied in this book, particularly the message of Mahatma Gandhi, then seemed to me to be more relevant than ever, clamouring to be reaffirmed and restated. At any rate, this was the best way that I thought I could contribute to the struggle for a more humane national culture.

Several great books have been written in jails and prisons. I would not presume to compare this one with them. Yet, I do seek an affiliation, however tenuous, with this tradition because as a 'curfew book,' this too was written from an angst and duress peculiar to the genre. And yet, paradoxically and also typically of the genre, I think this is a book of hope rather than despair, affirmation rather than nihilism.

A work like this would not have been possible without the help, support, and cooperation of several people. First of all, I wish to thank Professor Sudhakar Marathe, my Head of Department, and his wife, Meera, for their hospitality during my stay on campus. Not minding the odd hours I kept, they welcomed (and fed!) me whenever I returned.

The book was revised thrice: first in April 1991, later in March 1992, and finally in July 1992. In the meanwhile I had circulated copies of the manuscript to several colleagues, whose comments and responses benefited me immensely. Here they are, roughly in the order of their seeing the text. I mention their designations and

affiliations to provide some idea of the range of the feedback I received. I cannot thank them enough:

Probal Dasgupta, Professor, Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad;

D. Kantowsky, Professor in Sociology, University of Konstanz, Germany;

Ramachandra Guha, Reader, Institute of Economic Growth, now Senior Fellow at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi;

Sachidanada Mohanty, Lecturer in English, University of Hyderabad;

V. Bhargavi, Research Scholar in Philosophy, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, I.I.T., Bombay;

Rajneesh Krishna, Research Scholar in Sociology, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, I.I.T., Bombay;

Ramesh Chandra Shah, Professor in English, Bhopal University; novelist, poet, and critic in Hindi;

K.J. Shah, retired Professor of Philosophy, Karnatak University, Dharwad;

Ashis Nandy, Senior Fellow, Centre of the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi;

and Ram Bapat, retired Reader in Politics, University of Poona.

Two chapters of the manuscript were read at I.I.T., Bombay, where I faced helpful questions and comments from Professors L.M. Bhole (Economics), Ashok Kelkar (Linguistics), Milind Malshe (English), D. Singh (Philosophy), Rehena Ghadially (Psychology), and others. Other portions of the book were read at the Commonwealth Conference, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, and at Karnatak University, Dharwad. I thank my hosts and audiences at these three venues. One chapter was published in *Journal of Contemporary Thought* (Baroda), edited by Professor P.C. Kar and others; special thanks to them for allowing me to reprint it here.

I would especially like to thank K.J. Shah and Ram Bapat for their extended interest and detailed responses. Sarina Paranjape helped me track down some of the references in the book. I am

grateful to Primila Lewis, the Acquisitions Editor at Sage, whose suggestions and constructive criticism were immensely helpful. I would also like to register my appreciation for Tejeshwar Singh and Sage Publications for their interest in and support for this obviously unusual manuscript.

Finally, I owe an unrepayable debt to Ashis Nandy for his encouragement throughout. He offered comments and suggestions, lent me books, consented to write the Foreword, and even sent the manuscript to Sage. But for him the book would never have taken its present shape. People like him have had a great impact on the intellectual life of our country.

After Ayodhya

After all the intolerance, hatred, fury, violence, killing, arson, bloodshed, terror, anguish, suffering, shame, and loss of faith, I fell asleep, utterly miserable and exhausted. In my dream, Ayodhya became not just a watershed in the history of independent India, a point of no return, but also an opportunity for all of us to learn from our mistakes and to rectify our ways:

First the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, who caused the damage, suddenly found the true nationalism that they had always boasted about. They realized that they were sitting on a tinderbox which could explode, blowing themselves and the whole country to pieces. They acknowledged that Hinduism nowhere encourages or sanctions the destruction of shrines belonging to other religions; nowhere does it preach hatred and intolerance; nowhere does it condone religious violence or the slaughter of the innocents. So they resolved to repent, to give up their *rakshasa neeti*, their power-lust; and instead, devote themselves to social work, rural development, family planning, health care, education, and so on.

The Congress, whose errors of commission and omission facilitated the destruction of the mosque, resolved not to misuse religion themselves, not to divide and rule, not to be dishonest brokers, not to carry on the policy of appeasement, not to be corrupt and inefficient; but to offer a just, humane and responsible government, a government dedicated to a prosperous, self-reliant, and equitable India.

The Shiv Sena, whose culpability in the Bombay riots was incontrovertible, consented to join various *ashrams* and mental asylums in India as patients, penitents and menial labourers so that their pathologies could be cured and thereby do no more harm to society. As for Bal Thackeray, who remained defiant and unrepentant to the end, he was sentenced to exile in any Muslim country of his choice, for it is well known that we are most attached to what we hate the most.

Hindus, who supported the demolition, understood that this was an irreligious act, that their religion teaches tolerance, plurality, freedom of belief, and love; not hatred or violence. They realized that Muslims are their brothers and that they must learn to live with them, not only in the present, but until the very end of time.

Hindus, who opposed it, had an even greater moral and spiritual burden because they must pray for and try to reform those of their coreligionists who were led astray by words of hatred.

Muslims who felt lost, betrayed, and insecure realized that preserving one's identity does not mean remaining backward, illiterate, or impoverished. They decided to renounce the rhetoric of separatism and special favours, to embrace social and religious reform in their own community, and to join the multicultural national mainstream, even if it was dominated by a Hindu ethos.

The intellectuals, who watched the madness helplessly, understood that neither the pseudo-secularism of the Congress, nor the pseudo-Hinduism of the BJP would save India; but only a genuine secularism and a genuine practice of one's religion, regardless of what it may be. They realized that the religious and the secular are, after all, not antithetical and incompatible but correlative and cooperative ideologies, both striving for human emancipation, justice, and happiness. There is a space for personal enlightenment within the secular, as there is a space for social equality, justice, and freedom within the religions. Just as the earth itself is imbued with the Divine, the Divine itself is a projection of the best that is on earth.

When I awoke, the riots in Bombay re-erupted with renewed horrors and untold suffering. I realized that I had only been dreaming, that the world had not been saved, that it was still as fallen as it had always been.

Yet, I knew that I would never stop dreaming; because my

dreams were not mine alone but also those of millions and millions of people. I knew that the world of our dreams would one day surely come to be; and I knew that we would never stop working to make it happen.

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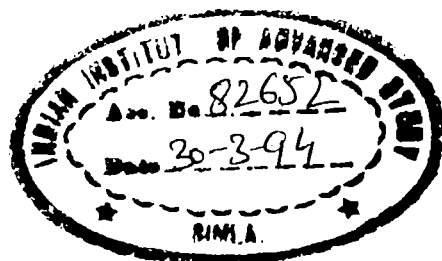
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