THE INTIMATE ENEMY

Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism

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Preface

"Through a curious transposition peculiar to our times", Albert Camus once wrote, "it is innocence that is called upon to justify itself." The two essays here justify and defend the innocence which confronted modern Western colonialism and its various psychological offshoots in India.

Modern colonialism won its great victories not so much through its military and technological prowess as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible with the traditional order. These hierarchies opened up new vistas for many, particularly for those exploited or cornered within the traditional order. To them the new order looked like—and here lay its psychological pull—the first step towards a more just and equal world. That was why some of the finest critical minds in Europe—and in the East—were to feel that colonialism, by introducing modern structures into the barbaric world, would open up the non-West to the modern critical-analytic spirit. Like the 'hideous heathen god who refused to drink nectar except from the skulls of murdered men', Karl Marx felt, history would produce out of oppression, violence and cultural dislocation not merely new technological and social forces but also a new social consciousness in Asia and Africa. It would be critical in the sense in which the Western tradition of social criticism—from Vico to Marx—had been critical and it would be rational in the sense in which post-Cartesian Europe had been rational. It is thus that the ahistorical primitives would one day, the expectation went, learn to see themselves as masters of nature and, hence, as masters of their own fate.

Many many decades later, in the aftermath of that marvel of modern technology called the Second World War and perhaps that modern encounter of cultures called Vietnam, it has be-
come obvious that the drive for mastery over men is not merely a by-product of a faulty political economy but also of a world view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the subhuman, the masculine over the feminine, the adult over the child, the historical over the ahistorical, and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage. It has become more and more apparent that genocides, ecodisasters and ethnocides are but the underside of corrupt sciences and psychopathic technologies wedded to new secular hierarchies, which have reduced major civilizations to the status of a set of empty rituals. The ancient forces of human greed and violence, one recognizes, have merely found a new legitimacy in anthropocentric doctrines of secular salvation, in the ideologies of progress, normality and hyper-masculinity, and in theories of cumulative growth of science and technology.

This awareness has not made everyone give up his theory of progress but it has given confidence to a few to look askance at the old universalism within which the earlier critiques of colonialism were offered. It is now possible for some to combine fundamental social criticism with a defence of non-modern cultures and traditions. It is possible to speak of the plurality of critical traditions and of human rationality. At long last we seem to have recognized that neither is Descartes the last word on reason nor is Marx that on the critical spirit.

The awareness has come at a time when the attack on the non-modern cultures has become a threat to their survival. As this century with its bloodstained record draws to a close; the nineteenth century dream of one world has re-emerged, this time as a nightmare. It haunts us with the prospect of a fully homogenized, technologically controlled, absolutely hierarchized world, defined by polarities like the modern and the primitive, the secular and the non-secular, the scientific and the unscientific, the expert and the layman, the normal and the abnormal, the developed and the underdeveloped, the vanguard and the led, the liberated and the savable.

This idea of a brave new world was first tried out in the colonies. Its carriers were people who, unlike the rapacious first generation of bandit-kings who conquered the colonies, sought to be helpful. They were well-meaning, hard-working, middle-class missionaries, liberals, modernists, and believers in science, equality and progress. The bandit-kings, presumably like bandit-kings everywhere, robbed, maimed and killed; but sometimes they did so without a civilizing mission and mostly with only crude concepts of racism and untermensch. They faced—and expected to face—other civilizations with their versions of middle kingdoms and barbarians; the pure and the impure; the kafirs and the mosheks; and the yavanas and the mlecchas. However vulgar, cruel or stupid it might have once been, that racism now faces defeat. It is now time to turn to the second form of globalization, the one which at least six generations of the Third World have learnt to view as a prerequisite for their liberation. This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds.

This is primarily the story of the second colonization and resistances to it. That is why these essays are also forays into contemporary politics; after all, we are concerned with a colonialism which survives the demise of empires. At one time, the second colonization legitimized the first. Now, it is independent of its roots. Even those who battle the first colonialism often guiltily embrace the second. Hence the reader should read the following pages not as history but as a cautionary tale. They caution us that conventional anti-colonialism, too, could be an apologia for the colonization of minds. If the following account displays a ‘distorted’ view of some of the Enlightenment figures and of radical social critics in Europe, it is a part of the same story. They do not often look the same when the viewpoint is the immediacy of the new oppression and the possibility of cultural defeat. Nor have I, for the same reason, managed to make some well-known reactionaries look as villainous as many
would have liked. Time has rendered them either toothless or unwitting allies of the victims.

This book takes the idea of psychological resistance to colonialism seriously. But that implies some new responsibilities, too. Today, when 'Westernization' has become a pejorative word, there have reappeared on the stage subtler and more sophisticated means of acculturation. They produce not merely models of conformity but also models of 'official' dissent. It is possible today to be anti-colonial in a way which is specified and promoted by the modern world view as 'proper', 'sane' and 'rational'. Even when in opposition, that dissent remains predictable and controlled. It is also possible today to opt for a non-West which itself is a construction of the West. One can then choose between being the Orientalist's despot, to combine Karl Wittfogel with Edward Said, and the revolutionary's loving subject, to combine Camus with George Orwell. And for those who do not like the choice, there is, of course, Cecil Rhodes' and Rudyard Kipling's noble, half-savage half-child, compared to whom the much-hated Brown Sahib seems more brown than sahib. Even in enmity these choices remain forms of homage to the victors. Let us not forget that the most violent denunciation of the West produced by Frantz Fanon is written in the elegant style of a Jean-Paul Sartre. The West has not merely produced modern colonialism, it informs most interpretations of colonialism. It colours even this interpretation of interpretation.

I have said at the beginning that these pages justify innocence. This statement should be amplified in a world where the rhetoric of progress uses the fact of internal colonialism to subvert the cultures of societies subject to external colonialism and where the internal colonialism in turn uses the fact of external threat to legitimize and perpetuate itself. (It is however also a world where the awareness has grown that neither form of oppression can be eliminated without eliminating the other.) In the following pages I have in mind something like the 'authentic innocence' psychoanalyst Rollo May speaks about,
my tendency to speak of the West as a single political entity, of Hinduism as Indianeness, or of history and Christianity as Western. None of them is true but all of them are realities. I like to believe that each such concept in this work is a double entendre: on the one hand, it is a part of an oppressive structure; on the other, it is in league with its victims. Thus, the West is not merely a part of an imperial world view; its classical traditions and its critical self are sometimes a protest against the modern West. Similarly, Hinduism is Indianeness the way V. S. Naipaul speaks of it; and Hinduism could be Indianeness the way Rabindranath Tagore actualized it. At one time these could be ignored as trivialities. Today, these differences have become clues to survival. Especially so when the modern West has produced not only its servile imitators and admirers but also its circus-tamed opponents and its tragic counterplayers performing their last gladiator-like acts of courage in front of appreciative Caesars. The essays in this book are a pacan to the non-players, who construct a West which allows them to live with the alternative West, while resisting the loving embrace of the West’s dominant self.

Thus, the colonized Indians do not remain in these pages simple-hearted victims of colonialism; they become participants in a moral and cognitive venture against oppression. They make choices. And to the extent they have chosen their alternative within the West, they have also evaluated the evidence, judged, and sentenced some while acquitting others. For all we know, the Occident may survive as a civilization partly as a result of this ongoing revaluation, perhaps to an extent even outside the geographical perimeters of the West. On the other hand, the standard opponents of the West, the counterplayers, are not, in spite of their vicious rhetoric, outside the dominant model of universalism. They have been integrated within the dominant consciousness—type-cast, if you like—as ornamental dissenters. I suspect that the universalism of those ‘simple’ outsiders, the non-players who have been the victims of modernity—the armed version of which is sometimes called colonialism—is a higher-order universalism than the ones popularized during the last two centuries.

I do not therefore hesitate to declare these essays to be an alternative mythography of history which denies and defies the values of history, I hope the essays capture in the process something of the ordinary Indian’s psychology of colonialism. I reject the model of the gullible, hopeless victim of colonialism caught in the hinges of history. I see him as fighting his own battle for survival in his own way, sometimes consciously, sometimes by default. I have only sought to clarify his assumptions and his world view in all their self-contradictory richness. That way may not be our idea of what a proper battle against colonialism ought to be like. But I doubt if he cares.

This is why in the second essay even the babu has been grudgingly recognized as an interface who processes the West on behalf of his society and reduces it to a digestible bolus. Both his comical and dangerous selves protect his society against the White Sahib. And even that White Sahib may turn out to be defined, not by skin colour, but by social and political choices. Certainly he turns out to be, in these pages, not the conspiratorial dedicated oppressor that he is made out to be, but a self-destructive co-victim with a reified life style and a parochial culture, caught in the hinges of history he swears by. In the age of Adolf Eichmann, one might add, a Rudyard Kipling can only hope to be an unheroic foot soldier and supply cannon fodder. All theories of salvation, secular or non-secular, which fail to understand this degradation of the colonizer are theories which indirectly admit the superiority of the oppressors and collaborate with them.

The essential reasoning is simple. Between the modern master and the non-modern slave, one must choose the slave not because one should choose voluntary poverty or admit the superiority of suffering, not only because the slave is oppressed, not even because he works (which, Marx said, made him less alienated than the master). One must choose the slave also because he represents a higher-order cognition which perforce
includes the master as a human, whereas the master’s cognition has to exclude the slave except as a ‘thing’. Ultimately, modern oppression, as opposed to the traditional oppression, is not an encounter between the self and the enemy, the rulers and the ruled, or the gods and the demons. It is a battle between de-humanized self and the objectified enemy, the technologized bureaucrat and his reified victim, pseudo-rulers and their fear-some other selves projected on to their ‘subjects’.

That is the difference between the Crusades and Auschwitz, between Hindu-Muslim riots and modern warfare. That is why the following pages speak only of victims; when they speak of victors, the victors are ultimately shown to be camouflaged victims, at an advanced stage of psychosocial decay.

This work is primarily an enquiry into the psychological structures and cultural forces which supported or resisted the culture of colonialism in British India. But it also is, by implication, a study of post-colonial consciousness. It deals with elements of Indian traditions which have emerged less innocent from the colonial experience and it deals with cultural and psychological strategies which have helped the society to survive the experience with a minimal defensive redefinition of its selfhood. For parts of the book, therefore, colonialism in India began in 1757, when the battle of Plassey was lost by the Indians, and it ended in 1947, when the British formally withdrew from the country; for other parts of the book, colonialism began in the late 1820s when policies congruent with a colonial theory of culture were first implemented and it ended in the 1930s when Gandhi broke the back of the theory; for still other parts of the book colonialism began in 1947, when the outer supports to the colonial culture ended, and resistance to it is still continuing.

It goes without saying that I have not tried to give a complete picture of the Indian mind under colonialism. I have selected my examples and chosen my informants, to make some rather specific points. These points are political. Their referents lie in the realm of public politics as well as in the politics of cultures and cultural knowledge. And at both planes, they get involved in the politics of the modern categories usually employed to analyse man-made suffering. The unstated assumption is that an ethnically sensitive and culturally rooted alternative social knowledge is already partly available outside the modern social sciences—in those who have been the ‘subjects’, consumers or experimentees of these sciences. There are two colonialisms in these pages, and subjection to one is examined with an awareness of the subjection to the other.

This framework explains the partial, almost cavalier, use of the biographical data and the deliberate misuse of some concepts borrowed from modern psychology and sociology. The aim is not to adjust, alter or refurbish Indian experiences to fit the existing psychological and social theories—to make a better case for cultural relativism or for a more relativist cross-cultural psychology. The aim is to make sense of some of the relevant categories of contemporary knowledge in Indian terms and put them in a competing theory of universalism. What the subjects of Western colonialism did unselfconsciously, I am trying to do consciously and without being able to fully shed my professional baggage. The colonized Indians did not always try to correct or extend the Orientalists; in their own diffused way, they tried to create an alternative language of discourse. This was their anti-colonialism; it is possible to make it ours, too. At one place in this book I use the example of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–91) who, though deeply impressed by Western rationalist thought and though himself an agnostic, lived like an orthodox pandit and formulated his dissent in indigenous terms. He did not counterpoise John Locke or David Hume against Manusmṛti; he counterpoised the Parāśara Sūtra. This was his way of handling not only Indian social problems but also the exogenous idea of rationalism. (I believe, perhaps wrongly, that rationalism too could learn something from this odd version of it.) It is the second part of the story—an unheroic but critical traditionalism which develops a sensitivity to new experiences of evil—which I have stressed. Even if this sounds hopelessly like another case of unresolved ‘counter-transference’, I hope this book contributes to that stream of
critical consciousness: the tradition of reinterpretation of traditions to create new traditions.

Admittedly I have, in the following pages, picked up clues from—and quarrels with—contemporary social sciences. But my dialogue or debate is mainly with those who have shaped and are shaping the Indian consciousness, not so much with the world of professional social sciences. Modern colonialism is too serious a matter to be left entirely to the latter.

For those who are not happy unless they know the element of self-interest in any methodology—I count myself among them—this approach does give me a distinct and rather unfair advantage. I suspect that a purely professional critique of this book will not do. If you do not like it, you will have to fight it the way one fights myths: by building or resurrecting more convincing myths.

However, even myths have their biases. Let me state some of those associated with mine. In the following pages, I have deliberately focused on the living traditions, emphasizing the dialectic between the classical, the pure and the high-status on the one hand, and the folksy, hybrid and the low-brow on the other. As I have already said, it is the unheroic Indian coping with the might of the West I want to portray. To him, the classical and the folk, the pure and the hybrid, are all parts of a larger repertoire. He uses them impartially in the battle of minds in post-colonial India.

Secondly, a comment about the more academic concerns called psychological anthropology and Freudian social psychology with which I have maintained a close relationship for two decades and from which this book, if written even five years ago, would have borrowed much of its theoretical frame. There is a clear tradition in works of this kind and one must state in what way this book deviates from that tradition. I have not tried to interpret here Indian personality or culture and to show their fate under colonial rule according to any fixed concept of health, native or exogenous. Instead, I have presumed certain continuities between personality and culture and seen in them political and ethical possibilities. These possibilities are sometimes accepted and sometimes not. In other words, I have tried to retain the critical edge of depth psychology but shifted the locus of criticism from the purely psychological to the psycho-political. There is in these pages an attempt to demystify conventional psychological techniques of demystification, too.

This however means that the broad empirical outline of Indian personality has been taken for granted by me. In the last twenty-five years, a galaxy of psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, anthropologists, philosophers and even political economists have studied the various dimensions of the Indian mind. This knowledge is now a part of the Indian self-image. One should be able to build upon it. Thus, I have not discussed many aspects of Indian selfhood which would have given a touch of completeness to the following analysis. Nor have I done full justice to the individual witnesses I have called from the past to argue my case or to the textual traditions I have invoked. In this respect, I am guilty of leaving a number of loose ends which will have to be tied up by the fastidious reader, either with the help of his superior knowledge of the Indian mind and culture or by his intuitive understanding of them. I hope nevertheless to have provided clues to one possible meaning of living in this civilization today. To the extent I have succeeded in freeing that meaning from the shackles of cultural relativism and managed to restore to it its claim to an alternative universality, the following interpretation of Indian traditions will not have been in vain and it will have some relevance for other cultures under attack. After all, this work is based on the assumption that all man-made suffering is one and everyone has a responsibility.

Finally, a word on the possible ‘sexism’ of my language. This issue has dogged my steps for a while and I want to state my position on it once for all. English is not my language. Though I have developed a taste for it, it was once forced upon me. Even now I often form my thoughts in my native Bengali and then translate when I have to put them down on paper. Now that after thirty years of toil I have acquired reasonable com-
petence in the language, I am told by the progeny of those who first imposed it on me that I have been taught the wrong English by their forefathers; that I must now relearn the language. Frankly, I am too old to do so. Those who are offended by my language may console themselves by remembering that the language in which I think has traditionally looked at the male and the female differently.

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The ‘Uncolonized Mind’ has grown out of a presentation I made at a meeting on Culture, Power and Transformation, organized by the World Order Models Project at Poona in July 1978. Parts of an earlier version of it were published in the Times of India, October 1978 and in Alternatives, 1982, 8(1). The present version has gained much from comments and suggestions from M. P. Sinha, Giri Deshingkar, Girdhar Rathi and R. A. P. Shastri. The preface draws upon an article published in the Times of India, February 1983.

M. K. Riyal and Bhuvan Chandra have prepared the manuscript, Sujit Deb and Tarun Sharma have given bibliographic help. Without my wife Uma and my daughter Aditi I would have finished the work earlier but it would not have been the same.

One
The Psychology of Colonialism:
Sex, Age and Ideology
in British India

I

Imperialism was a sentiment rather than a policy; its foundations were moral rather than intellectual . . .

D. C. Somervell

It is becoming increasingly obvious that colonialism—as we have come to know it during the last two hundred years—cannot be identified with only economic gain and political power. In Manchuria, Japan consistently lost money, and for many years colonial Indochina, Algeria and Angola, instead of increasing the political power of France and Portugal, sapped it. This did not make Manchuria, Indochina, Algeria or Angola less of a colony. Nor did it disprove that economic gain and political power are important motives for creating a colonial situation. It only showed that colonialism could be characterized by the search for economic and political advantage without concomitant real economic or political gains, and sometimes even with economic or political losses.¹

This essay argues that the first differentia of colonialism is a state of mind in the colonizers and the colonized, a colonial consciousness which includes the sometimes unrealizable wish to make economic and political profits from the colonies, but

² I am for the moment ignoring the fact that the colonial societies in our times lost out in the game of political and economic power in the First World itself.