

## SWARAJ IN IDEAS



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Quest for Decolonisation of the Indian Mind

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## Preface

Since the modern formation of nation states is the result of contestation and not consensus, the dynamics of relationship between nations is bound to change with the passage of time. In contrast, the dynamics of civilisations need persistence and consistent comparative study. Such studies are not mere academic exercises, but are vital components of civilisational dialogue. In this context, two primary criteria are taken into consideration; one, its longevity or eternality, and secondly, its contributions in the peaceful transition of human society. Such studies should be free from polemics and rhetoric of political programs. In the ancient and medieval world, the nature of historiography was not what we have in the modern world. Memoirs, stories, travelogues, spiritual texts and oratures were truly recognised tools of history. They were more empirical accounts than normative and thus less biased. Travelogues and observations have proven very useful texts to comprehend the past. We procure invaluable information of the Indian and other civilisations of the world through them. Needless to say, the contributions of our civilisation, its Lakshmi (wealth), Saraswati, (knowledge and wisdom), Philosophy and Way of Life have won recognition and acclaim in the annals of world history. Unfortunately, the modern Western system of knowledge halted the process of comparative study of civilisation and unwittingly made a split in the philosophical sequence of different time periods. What is known as European identity or the West is collectively and historically a civilisation whose roots can be traced to the ancient Greek and Roman ancestry. Their main counterpart could be Indian civilisation. Although comparatively and historically India might have geographically shrunk, it still represents the continuation of an ancient civilisation since the advent of Indus Valley. It is a journey continuum.

Contemporary debate however, displays unremitting hostility to India by drastically altering the schedule of time framework. Europe's knowledge system primarily takes pride in its Post-Enlightenment era along with its emphasis on contemporary philosophisation to create a parallel with the ancient philosophy of Indian civilisation. This is nothing more than intellectual conceit. Such is evident when Harold Coward compares Derrida with Shankaracharya and Abhinavagupta. This is arrogance and escapism, besides being a wholly unproductive comparative study. No doubt, there can be comparison between any two scholars or sets of scholarly opinions and constructs, but the comparison cannot be only on the basis of arguments and selective texts. Coward exactly does this.

There is an obvious reason for it. Europe and the US dominated the modern world through their economic and military might. Social sciences are an important tool to justify the domination and also turn domination into hegemony. The West has to answer to the world for many of its odious contributions to humanity. The destructive ideologies like Fascism, Nazism, the two World Wars, identity-based conflicts, colonialism and religious wars have been their yields. The West cannot escape its responsibility in downgrading of civilisational discourse and dialogue. In seeking to do so, it has been creating new international institutions and professing counter-narratives after every invention of destructive ideological weapons. The sole intent of this silent but potent ideological thrust in a seemingly post-colonial world is to exploit, dominate and later undermine world unity. The writer of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon is not wrong when he says: "I had rationalised the world and the world has rejected me on the basis of color prejudice. Since no agreement was possible on the level of reason, I threw myself back towards unreason. It was up to the white man to be more irrational than I...I am made of the irrational. Up to the neck in the irrational."

The African people, who bore the brunt of the aggrandisement and atrocities of the white races, believed in a philosophy known as 'Ubuntu' which means "I am because you are"; in other words, "my existence is



dependent on your existence.” The ideology of the colonizer was totally shorn of any such emotion of mutual coexistence. It unscrupulously believed that the rest of society would remain its legitimate fodder. Disraeli wrote in his novel *Tancred*, has aptly described the mentality of colonising nations and individuals thus: “(for them) the East was a career or source of accumulating wealth.”

Although ideologies imposed by the West have been the cause of destruction, disunity and de-harmonisation, it would be an overt generalisation to dismiss everything from the West as destructive. Western apologists then come with new theories to resolve the crisis they have created. However, the similar past epistemology was employed to comprehend the crisis. History is a witness that the seeds of future disunity, deconstruction and devastation remain embedded in their ideologies and epistemologies. If individualism proved a bad idea, Utilitarianism could not resolve the crisis of civil polity, colonialism has undeniably turned out to be a curse for three-fourths of humanity and modernity was considered a weapon for creating a meta-narrative to prove Western superiority. Now Post-modernity is merely an attempt by Post-structuralists like Michel Foucault to perpetuate Western hegemony through their new emphasis on contextual genealogy of the West and its emergent subjectivity. They do not address the fundamentals of Western civilisation nor are they ready to accept the finer human traits of ancient Indian philosophy.

It is true that ancient philosophy needs to be contextualised. Only then can it acquire constitutive power in the contemporary world. However, it does not any way diminish its importance in defining civilisational traits, the nature of the individual, civil polity, traditions and approach to nature.

At this juncture, the challenge is to break Western hegemony through civilisational comparative studies, dialogues and debate. This is not for the sake of counter-hegemony, mocking or belittling and proving non-Indian civilisations inferior or lesser developed. The essence of a historic civilisation has taught people to consider the Earth as Mother and to identify with the creatures before accepting the superiority or at

least consider inorganic matter, stone, water and fire, sun, moon and the stars as part of the larger family of the Universe. Indian civilisation has explicitly shown the limitations of anthropocentric world view. No part of the earth is beyond our civilisational concern. Therefore, for us nationalism is important but our nationalism essentialises Culture as its central component. Culture initiates spiritual pluralism, Earth as Mother and the Universe as our home. Therefore no philosophy, no spiritual song or prayer of ours displays particularism. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam* is not an empty slogan. The relationship between the Earth and a Hindu is that of a mother and a son. The mother is served; she needs our selfless service, as she selflessly feeds and nourishes us. Therefore, every Hindu relates himself with the Universe. This is a primary and natural relationship. Other relationships are not looked down upon, but are considered to be supplementary to Universalism. Therefore, when Gandhi experimented with non-violence to confront the British who committed all sorts of indescribable crimes against women and children, indulged in killing and plundering our people and wealth, people endorsed his path. In the shorter term, it drew criticism from some corners and pained many, but in the longer term it became exemplary for those who had been enslaved and those who behaved like savages. Colonialism was a historical phase but it is also an ideology that perpetuates enslavement even without physical domination. Again, to quote Frantz Fanon: “Colonised people — people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave”.

Carl Olson’s plea for hermeneutical dialogue as a methodological tool, to end the gap between the West and the East is no solution. It is merely a cover for the infantile disorder of Western civilisation. The need is to theorize this disorder. The process of decolonisation is not merely confined to the exposition of our own civilisational contributions and cultural gains but also to make perennial colonisers realise their civilisational inconsistency and the inherent danger of an unaltered Semitic ideology which poses the biggest stumbling block to any peaceful progress of human society. But while doing so, one should also be self-introspective and overcome one’s own pitfalls of becoming dogmatic, political and polemical. The impact of the West is prevalent to the extent

that people in former colonies define themselves through the Western prism. In this context, Lord Bhikhu Parekh uses a very appropriate term 'decolonisation of imagination'. Hans-Georg Gadamer, through his term 'fusion of horizons' seeks to extend this human project to something far more lofty. However, his work is also a mere attempt to accommodate the efforts at decolonisation. Any knowledge system should be inclusive; only then can decolonisation of the mind take shape and become constructive and productive.

The title of the book, *Swaraj in Ideas* was first used by Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya (1875-1949) in his speech in 1931 on decolonisation of ideas. It is indeed a travesty that Bhattacharya's speech did not attract the attention of Indian intellectuals to the extent it merited. That in itself is a question mark on those who talk a lot of decolonisation but do little in this regard. The slogan of decolonisation should not be treated as an endeavour to merely recast scholarly identities as the counter ideologues of the West, but should be a silent mission. Civilisations are built through silent, enduring anonymous efforts and not by intellectual noise. Bhattacharya in his speech attempted to give a direction that is still relevant even today. Hope this work will prove to be the squirrel that contributed its own mite in the construction of the Ram Setu.

An alternative thought process utilising Indian intellectual traditions and contributions will herald productive debates in the context of decolonisation. It is neither anti-Westernism, nor to create a counter hegemony since conflicts are embedded within both perspectives. The basic objective is to address the root-problems of humanity which Indian philosophers and thinkers attempted to do in the past. The aim is to create a perspective which is not only in itself free of conflicts but will proceed to free the world from conflicts.

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**Rakesh Sinha**  
6 November 2016



# I

## Deconstructing Western Hegemony

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The 20<sup>th</sup> century remains a memorable era in the history of human civilisation for many reasons. It witnessed the two World Wars leading to an unimaginable destruction. It was also during this era, the mighty Empires of the Western world crumbled. Suppressed nationalities and masses raised their voice against imperialism and achieved the goals of national freedom. These liberation movements were not merely conflict of interests or alien rule versus self rule, but it further engaged itself in more serious questions concerning fundamental rights and universal human values like equality, dignity and liberty of human society. It concomitantly declaimed the civilisational superiority of the West discarding the western notion of 'White Man's burden'.

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century narratives, as well as that of the present century, show that foundational principle of the Western civilisation, *i.e.* 'self-aggrandisement'<sup>1</sup>, remains unchanged. It is reflected in their colonial policies to the newly formed idea of neo-liberalism. Therefore, no discourse on imperialism or neo-liberalism can be objective, constructive and impactful without questioning the civilisational foundations of Western society.

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1. Golwalkar, M. S. (2000) "*Bunch of Thoughts*", Bangalore, Sahitya Sindhu Prakashan, p 3.

As we say, events do not occur in vacuum; they are reflections of ideas and philosophies of an individual or race/nation which is nurtured in their sub-consciousness. Therefore, national liberation movements and their powerful resistances could be seen as a clash of civilisations. They reflected the dichotomy of ideologies about different civilisations and the natives residing therein. In this context, the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America were denied freedom of expression and will and were meted with savage treatment. They thereby, collectively emerged as almost the genuine spokespersons for an egalitarian world order and opposed the civilisational ills like, Fascism, Nazism, Apartheid, racisms and un-spiritualised Evangelism, which intended to debase indigenous cultures and free evolution of spiritualism. Charles Grant<sup>2</sup> (1746-1823) pleaded that Evangelical system of education in English would provide colonialists a 'sense of personal identity as we know it.' He advocated partial reforms, which according to him would produce semi form of "the imitation of English manners which will induce them to remain under our protection."

The imperialistic era of thought propelled the leadership in West that witnessed symbiotic relationship between politics, trade, Evangelism and philosophy. It was only the proportion of each element that varied from one individual to another. The tragedy of Indian Social Sciences is also reflected in its non-comprehensive understanding of the Western epistemology and philosophers. Many political thinkers, who have been quoted and studied for their progressive ideas, civil polity and individual's rights in the textbooks of social sciences, had been officers under tyrants or despotic rulers, with underlying commercial interests in colonialism. Interestingly, they have greatly influenced the formative ideas of students of social sciences. Bhikhu Parekh highlights two representative thinkers John Locke and J. S. Mill who are considered champions of liberalism and democracy. John Locke (1632-1704) was of

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2. Grant was motivated by Evangelical Christianity and had been in India during (1767-1790) holding responsibilities in military and the East India Company. He was also a Member of British Parliament (1802-1818). He wrote, *Observations on the state of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* (1792), seasonal papers of the EIC, Vol X, No 282 (1812-13). He described Indian society as 'corrupt and uncivilised'.

course relatively progressive than Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), another English philosopher, who justified despotism. But relative and contextual progressiveness does not qualify him enough to be taught as a prophet of universal liberalism. His biographer, Maurice Cranston has revealed Locke's zeal for commercial imperialism with reference to his patroniser Earl of Shaftesbury who had strong financial interest in the New World, *i.e.* North American colonies. Locke provided the most articulated and philosophical justification of colonisation. He argued that Indians were not entitled for territorial integrity which, on the other hand, was held ideal and respected by 'Other' West in this case. For him, Indians were 'wild' and 'savage', lacking the capacity to raise themselves to the level of 'civilised part of the mankind'<sup>3</sup> if unaided.

J.S. Mill (1806-1873), who spent a good deal of his career as an officer in Indian office, authored *Liberty and Representative Government*, argued that his views on man's liberty and elected government could not be applied to India because they were civilisationally inferior. Mill worked in the East India Company from 1813 to 1858, *i.e.*, for more than four decades. He propounded that India was incapable of self-development and only foreigners could regenerate them since he regarded Indians as backward people, similar to children who justifiably face parental despotism. In this line of thought, Bhikhu Parekh explains the phenomena as "liberals stressed the virtues of individuality, autonomy and moral self development, but they vigorously supported the 19<sup>th</sup> c capitalism that made these virtues unrealisable for masses of men and women, and they often resisted the attempts by the state to regulate the evils capitalism produced." He further opines, "Liberals thought and practice have revealed similar paradoxes and contradictions" even in recent times<sup>4</sup> they were both sectarian and liberals according to their respective contexts. The cherished ideas of liberty, equality and freedom were hailed essential as per the context,

3. Parekh, Bhikhu (1995) "Liberalism and Colonialism: A Critique of Locke and Mill" In Pieterse, Jan Nederveen & Parekh, Bhikhu (eds) *Decolonisation of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power*, London, Zed Books Ltd. p 81. I have taken accounts on Locke from Parekh's essay.

4. Ibid. p 81.

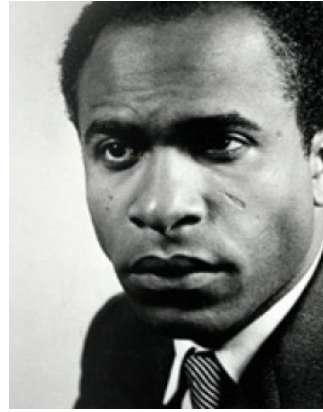
which liberals regarded fit to be spaced into and affirming the colonised as inherently in need to be colonised by the superior breed of western entities. Their universalism was deterred by their own presumption of perennial inequality based on race, civilisation, nature and pattern of human beings which naturally, according to them, divided the world community into superior and inferior races or nationalities.

The end of colonial rule has not obliterated the Western rots that are repackaged as 'modernity'. Their hegemony has still not ended. There are two primary reasons for this: One, the economic inequality between the West and the rest of the world. Colonialism was a system to drain wealth from the colonies, which ruined one set of the nations whereas it strengthened the material foundations of a few. In the post-colonial era, this economic imbalance gave positional superiority to the ex-colonialists and their civilisational fraternity. They created international institutions to mask their hegemony from direct contestations. Their earlier paradigm of 'civilising mission' was transformed into 'developing mission'. Earlier justification as 'White Men's burden' was supplanted by 'West's responsibilities and duties for backward nations.'

Second, the Western policies, politics and philosophies of suppressing, plundering, subjugating people whom they contemptuously characterised as 'Others', also faced some feeble theoretical counter narratives on their soil. Though, they could not influence the colonialist policies. However, once the civilisational experiment of imperialism collapsed, the counter narratives from the 'Others' emerged, the marginalised thoughts in the West advocating liberal and egalitarian approach became the mainstream theoretical position. This enabled them to perpetuate their leadership and to control ideas in their ex-colonies. They increasingly influenced history writings, parameters of international relations and also the opinion industry of the non-Western world. They created institutions and patronised academics of non-western societies. This West Co-optionism created generations of clones of Western thoughts. It was a carbon copy and at times replica of inbuilt thoughts of the former with a layered and packaging from non-Western scenarios.



The history of liberation struggles primarily is void of actual history. It is because they are written with considerations, both psychological and philosophical, imposed by the Western thought industry on non-Western writers and historians. This had an effect, wherein a false sense of unity and harmony led the authors to dilute imperialistic events. These struggles characterised the extreme form of sacrifices by the people who were not materially advanced as Western nations



*Frantz Fanon*

were, but at the same time were not incapacious in their moral strength and values. The reactions from the colonialists to these struggles were full of brute force and extreme forms of atrocities. Instances from India and Africa are illustrations of this Western cruelty and insensitiveness. Frantz Fanon says, “colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state”<sup>5</sup>. As, stated by Albert Memmi, in his book *The Colonizer and Colonized* that “Conquest occurred through violence, and over-expolitation and oppression necessitate continued violence, so the army is present. There would be no contradiction in that, if terror reigned everywhere in the world, but the coloniser enjoys, in the mother country, democratic rights that the colonialist system refuses to the colonised native”<sup>6</sup> reveals the remorselessness of colonialists. The Britishers were not only unfazed but rejoiced killing of even unarmed schools boys. On 11 August 1942, W. G. Archer, district Collector of Patna in Bihar, ordered to fire on school boys who were just holding the tricolor. Six boys were deliberately killed, with one of the martyrs as a college student.<sup>7</sup> Such instances were not

5. Fanon, Frantz (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press, p 61.

6. Memmi, Albert (1991) *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Boston, Beacon Press, p 20.

7. Umakant Prasad Sinha, Ramanand Singh, Devipadma Choudhry, Ramgovind Singh (all class 9<sup>th</sup> students) Satish Prasad Jha and Rajendra Singh were class 10<sup>th</sup> students and only Jagatpati Kumar was a college student.

exceptional and rare. They were repeated in every nook and corner of India. 13 unarmed freedom fighters were killed indiscriminately in an unprovoked firing at Dhekiya Juli (Assam) on September 13, 1942. In Andhra Pradesh, on August 12, 1942 seven non-violent freedom fighters were shot dead in broad day light by the colonial police.<sup>8</sup> 18-19 years old young men were hanged without any remorse.<sup>9</sup> There was an unbounded and limitless immortality of suppression. Atrocities were no less in other parts of the globe. The following poem David Diop aptly portrays the demonised character of the colonialists:

“The white man killed my father  
 Because my father was proud  
 The white man raped my mother  
 Because my mother was beautiful  
 The white man  
 Wore out my brother in the hot sun of the roads  
 Because my brother was strong  
 Then the white man came to me  
 His hands red with blood  
 Spat his contempt into my black face  
 Out of his tyrant’s voice:  
 Hey boy, a basin, a towel, water.”<sup>10</sup>

There are two related questions before us that remain unexplained but form a major part of our collective conscience. Why do we need to revisit colonial conflicts when the world has entered into an accelerated process of globalisation? This interwindly gives birth to another question, *i.e.*, whether the process of decolonisation is complete or is it still being perpetuated in one form or another? It also speculates that the phenomenon of

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8. Majeti Subba Rao, Srigiri Lingam, Lakshminanryan, Tamminani Subba Reddy, Gali Ramkotaih, Pragma Raghavaiah, Jasti Appaiah.
  9. Khudiram Bose was hanged in 1907 when he was only 18 years old, so were Badal Gupta, Gopinath Saha was hanged in 1924 again an 18 years old student, Hemu Kalani, Kartar Singh Sarabha all were hanged when they were only 19. Prafull Chaki was hanged at the age of 20.
  10. Diop, David “Le temps du martyre” quoted by Frantz Fanon In Nayar, Pramod. K(2016) (eds) *Post Colonial Studies: An Anthology*, Sussex, Willy Balckwell, p 29.

globalisation is an innocent/non-intended outcome of a faltering attempt at decolonisation. They are ontologically related to each other.

It has been proven a misnomer to assume that political independence provided full and free opportunities for the regeneration of a nation's self. Colonialism was not merely a physical suppression of people, but also caused deconstruction of indigenous culture on the one hand, and psychological subjugation on the other hand, of the people who became intellectually laidback. Ashis Nandy in his book, *Intimate Enemy* discusses this viewpoint that how the colonisers used psychological tools to subjugate the natives of colonies and to sell the moral justification back home for the brutality and atrocities on the colonies. The colonisers demeaned the native culture to promote their own racial and masculine superiority on the otherwise defenseless persons<sup>11</sup>. Colonial ideological impacts have been on culture, literature and political institutions. The thought process has become an outcome of nothing but the colonisation of mind. However, the will, desire, efforts to erode such impact along with alternative constructions is decolonisation of the mind. To put in other words, empowerment of a nation's self, mutation from uncritical to critical perspectives to see Western world views, and resurrecting civilisational narratives beyond the Western time zone of Modernity and Post-modernity will be a complete cycle of decolonisation. Fanon points out that "Imperialism leaves behind germs of rot which we must clinically detect and remove from our land but from our minds as well." A Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) puts it in another way that there is a natural tendency among oppressed to resemble the oppressors. He uses 'liberation literacy' to create mass political awareness along with literacy teachings. Therefore political decolonisation is not as difficult as the challenge of rejuvenating ourselves to recreate our ideas which have remained suppressed and uncontextualised. It would be a narrow interpretation to say that decolonisation is merely de-Westernisation. Rather, it has far wider objectives and ideals. As Frantz Fanon aptly says "Decolonisation never takes place unnoticed, for it

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11. Nandy, Ashis (1983) *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.

influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with grandiose glare with history's floodlights upon them.<sup>12»</sup>

The most fundamental ideological feature of colonialism was its conviction that there are two sets of nations. One, comprising economically, politically, culturally and civilisationally more advanced and the other of the backwards, which were in turn, need to be colonised. The terms changed to define the relationship between the two sets of countries over a period of time, but the intent and objectives of the West still remain unaltered. Earlier, it was categorisation of the victor and the vanquished; colonial masters and their colonies; civilised and the uncivilised/ barbarians, and in present scenario the modern and the backwards. The ideology emanating from the West has strong affiliation with their ancient civilisational content. The trait of expansionism is inbuilt in a society or civilisation which considers materialism and accumulation of possession as *sine qua non*. St Augustine (354-430 CE), one of the most respected Church Fathers in Western Christianity, had moralised expansionism of Roman Empire. He concluded that 'to carry on war and extend rulership over subdued nations seems to bad men a felicity, but to good men a necessity'<sup>13</sup>: This clearly shows that imperialism cannot be understood merely as a modern phenomenon or in economic terms as Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) defined it as 'the highest stage of capitalism'. History has proven him wrong and St Augustine right. It is a civilisational creed, emanating from the Semitic social-cultural and political system. This is the reason why imperialism has not only drained the wealth but also consciously ruined the culture and changed the demographic character of the space it encroached.

Decolonisation is a universal factor without symmetry. It is proportionally related to the country's own culture, history and intellectual treasure. There are no history-less and culture-less societies.

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12. Fanon, Frantz (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York, Grove Press, p 36.

13. Quoted in Hagerman, C. A. (2013) *Britain's Imperial Muse: The Classics, Imperialism, and the Indian Empire, 1784-1914*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, p 85.

But the length of civilisational history, quantum of intellectual and cultural legacies, along with contributions to the knowledge system of the world, varies from one nation to another. Here the question of decolonisation of Indian mind assumes much more significance. India inherited centuries old civilisation with immense historical tradition, cherishing her cultural legacy. There is a common understanding that Indian civilisation has a history, even before the formation of the European identity or birth of Christianity took place. It has played very significant and made unparalleled contributions to the knowledge system of the world. The claim of Modernity by the West in the fields of science and technology or mathematics is juvenile, a shameless, and self-aggrandised certification. This 'modernity' existed in the Indian system of knowledge thousands of years ago.<sup>14</sup> The Look-West-Intellectuals (LoWeIntel), born in Macaulay-Marxist knowledge system mocked these contributions of ancient Indian science and technology and mathematicians, with a reluctant and often superficial mention of such contributions: as it is they were viewed to be a burden on the syllabus. Kautilya's *Arthshastra* published by Shamsastri but Indian textbooks have shown non-openness to bring his work to centrality. Aryabhatta, Baudhayan, Brahmagupta, Bhaskaracharya, Kanad, Nagarjuna Susruta and Varahmihira have been best used for general knowledge only. Their contributions and ancient Indian achievements have not been theorised in civilisational context. However, India has been emerging from the shadow of the (LoWeIntel). This is the beginning of identifying India's Self which has so far been imprisoned in the context of few hundred years, depicting our social dichotomies and contradictions. This has been identified as the only and real Indian story to perceive India or to define the nation. Native civilisational content and length both have been suppressed as a western civilisational program. Here, it assumes significance to make a difference between the meanings of decolonisation for India on one hand, and for

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14. In the recent past contributions of India in science and technology in Mathematics and the Statecraft have been increasingly highlighted. Invention of Zero, the Decimal System, Numerical Notations, Fibonacci Numbers, Binary Numbers, Algorithms, Theory of Atom, The Heliocentric Theory, Plastic Surgery, Ayurveda are some of the examples of umpteen contributions.

Africa and Latin America or other parts of the globe on the other. In the latter case, the challenge was to protect localism through indigenous values and traditions by eroding the impact of Western notions, cultures and languages, say English. Dehumanized form of political domination and cultural suppression of African people was an effort to uproot them from their own self. Although there has not been suppression on the part of Westerners to the ancient cultural and philosophical contributions of Africa but they did everything to civilisationally different Africa to fit in their constructed social, cultural and religious image. It was an application of Procrustean bed phenomena with African civilisation which philosophically differed from Europe. This can be proved by their foundational ideology reflected by **Ubuntu**, which is a humanist philosophy of affirming others and existence. In brief, it can be described as “I am because you are.” But Africa experienced altogether opposite to what the African people had witnessed during the colonial regime. Ngugi wa Thiong’o in his essays uses a metaphor ‘cultural bomb’ for colonial politics of cultural engineering in the colonies.

## II

## Undiminished Quest for Decolonisation

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In the post colonial period one of the most effective interventions towards decolonisation has been made by an African novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o. His creative writings in English were appreciated and widely recognised not only in Africa but also in the English literary world of Europe and US. Ngugi's writings inspired and intensified a new theoretical debate on the decolonisation of literature, language, and culture. He also set an example for the intellectuals and literary giants to contest colonial culture not as a subject matter, but as a movement. Although Ngugi wrote in English and was a product of colonial education and neo liberal culture, but that has not wiped out his quest for originality.

Even before his formal expression through a book or lecture, an author/intellectual conceives the idea much earlier. The seed of his influential writing or speech germinates first in his subconscious mind and only then is transferred to his conscious mind. It is at this



*Ngugi wa Thiong'o*

stage he or she marks an important beginning. It should not be viewed as an abrupt expression, but a continuation of his thought process which is affected by his surroundings. Thus, he tends to behave even contrary to what he expresses through his writings. A manifestation of this can be found true in the works of Ngugi. His childhood memory as well as his later experiences of the colonial culture which was based on brutalities and anti-humane traits, negation of people's self by implantation of consciousness and image construed in alien culture and society did not allow Ngugi to remain integrated with the new form of colonial philosophy *i.e.* neo liberalism. The first effective change he did was to renounce Christianity and English. He changed his name from James Ngugi to Ngugi wa Thiong'o in 1976 as the former was given by the colonial society which was influenced by evangelical forces. This was a potent rebellion against the precedent set by other African authors who preferred foreign languages such as English, French and Portuguese as mode of their expression. He wrote *Petals of Blood* in 1976 which was his last work in English. He then opted for Kenyan language 'Gikuyu' for his future literary endeavors. This exemplary act of him was an inspiration and appeal for other African authors to abandon the use of foreign language and instead opt for their mother tongues. He termed the craze for foreign language among the elites and literary figures in Africa like 'lingucide'. He advocated that 'to speak of African literature in European languages is not only an absurdity but also part of a scheme of Western Imperialism to hold Africa in perpetual bondage. He reviews his own position as a writer in English and decides that he can no longer continue in treachery'<sup>15</sup>

One of his most important publications came out in 1986 with the book '*Decolonising the Mind*'. It was a collection of fictions through which he critically reexamined the impact of English on past, present and posterity as well as on culture and society, idea and imagination, thereby unsettling the post colonial discourse. It resurrected a new

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15. Achebe, Chinua (2010) "*The Education of a British Protected Child: Essays*", New York, Anchor, p. 96.



debate on perpetuation of colonial impact through language, literature, art, culture and social sciences. It was not only meant for Africa but can be generalised as a form of message for both the ex-colonialists and their ex-colonies. Ngugi's *'Decolonisation the Mind'* should be considered as a landmark beginning of the second battle against colonisation.

Language not only serves as merely a tool of communication but also acts as a carrier of one's culture. Language is intrinsic and cannot be separated from the culture, history and civilisational trajectory of a community or a nation. He very aptly traces the interdependence of culture and language. As Ngugi says:

“Any language has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English it is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people English is only a means of communication with non Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British, particularly for the English, it is additionally and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history.”<sup>16</sup>

Language harmoniously mingles with the evolution of a community or a nation. Therefore, it is quite obvious that it nurtures the history, emotions, messages and social consciousness of nations in its womb. Every language internalizes cultural values of the community and the idealism it cherishes. Folklores and stories, fictions, narratives in the mother tongues are in consonance with idealist view of the community. Ngugi recounts his childhood memories and its impact as evident in the following passages:

“There were good and bad story tellers. A good one could tell the same story over and over again, and it

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16. Thiong'o, Ngugi wa (1986) *'Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature'*, London, Heinemann Educational.

would always be fresh to us, the listeners. He or she could tell a story told by someone else and make it more alive and dramatic. The differences really were in the use of words and the images and the inflexion of voices to effect different tones.

We therefore learnt to value words for their meaning and nuances. Language was not a mere string of words. It had suggestive power well beyond the immediate lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words. So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us a view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own.”

As, stories tutored in mother tongues always engage children and give mental fodder for future life, they interpret and evolve their own thinking on that basis. They correlate stories with activities they observe around them, and communicate during normal life. When this unbreakable chain of communication is wrecked, it also delinks the pattern of thinking, imagination and social perspectives. Ngugi says that in his childhood stories that were narrated to them had mostly animals as the main characters. He further tells how they used to mould their thinking and perspectives accordingly.

“Hare, being small, weak but full of innovative wit and cunning, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of prey like lion, leopard, and hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong. We followed the animals in their struggle against hostile nature-----drought, rain, sun, wind—a confrontation often forcing them to search for forms of co—operation. But we were

also interested in their struggles amongst themselves, and particularly between the beasts and the victims of prey. These twin struggles, against nature and other animals, reflected real-life struggles in the human world.”

Ngugi holds the view that colonialism has proven a curse for impressionable mind when they were compelled to adopt a language which was completely alien to them and not reflected the world view of Kenyan society and culture. “The home and field were then our pre primary school but what is important for this discussion, is that the language of our evening teach-ins and the language of our immediate and wider community and the language of our work in the fields were one. And then went to school, a colonial school, and this harmony was broken. The language of my education was no longer language of my culture.”

The colonial stress and imposition of English as a means of education created two sets of ideas, values and imaginations, one disseminated through school education in English and other through natural mode of communication in homes and community life. Nevertheless Colonial education increasingly succeeded to alienate people from their own culture, heroes and customs. Thus a new artificial self was implanted in each and every child. Ngugi elaborates this when he says that:

“Literary education was now determined by the dominant language while also reinforcing that dominance. Orature (oral literature) in Kenyan languages stopped. In primary school I now read simplified Dickens and Stevenson alongside Rider Haggard. Jim Hawkins, Oliver Twist, Tom Brown — not Hare, Leopard and Lion— were now my daily companions in the world of imagination. In secondary school, Scott and G.B. Shaw vied with more Rider Haggard, John Buchan, Alan Paton, Captain W.E. Johns. At Makerere I read English: from Chaucer to T.S. Eliot with a touch of Grahame Greene. Thus language

and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds.”

Further, “And since those images are mostly passed on through orature and literature it meant the child would now only see the world as seen in the literature of his language of adoption. From the point of view of alienation, which is of seeing oneself from outside oneself as if one was another self, it does not matter that the imported literature carried the great humanist tradition of the best Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy, Gorky, Brecht, Sholokhov, and Dickens. The location of this great mirror of imagination was necessarily Europe and its history and culture and the rest of the universe was seen from that center.”

Ngugi says that language as culture is like ‘the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history’. And therefore ‘culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next.’

Ngugi’s following passage truly unravels the contours of colonial mindset. The colonial masters were not only interested in making students learn how to use English, but also intended to completely cut off children from their mother tongues. This objective was achieved by employing force, treachery and greed.

“One of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment — three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks — or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY. Sometimes the culprits were fined money they could hardly afford. And how did the teachers catch the culprits? A button was

initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking his mother tongue. Whoever had the button at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day. Thus children were turned into witch-hunters and in the process were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one's immediate community. The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in the arts, the sciences\* and all the other branches of learning. English became the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education”.

He concludes with his incisive observation on the imperialist's projection to replace the language of the people by their own language.

“So what was the colonialist imposition of a foreign language doing to us children? The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction

or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonising nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised.”<sup>17</sup>

Therefore in the light of such colonising impact decolonisation is anticipated and is treated as ‘an act of exorcism for both the coloniser and colonised.’ And ‘for both parties it must be a process of liberation: from dependency: in the case of the colonised, and from imperialist, racist perceptions, representations and institutions ...in the case of coloniser.”<sup>18</sup>

Samia's observation on this scholarship of decolonisation can't be disputed where she detest politics of vengeance. But, she is skeptical in her approach and believes that there can't be also reconciliation with the Western mind because they renounced old categories like racism and apartheid. The real challenge is to contest the domination in other avenues away from politics and also to create strong alternative with a sense of indigenous values and confront them philosophically.

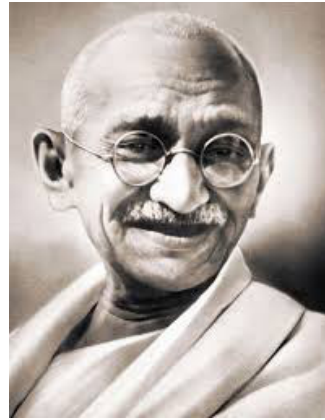
The issue of decolonisation of the mind has become a prominent area of discussion. Over the years many new categorisation have been devised and developed to understand post colonial society and the West–East debate. In the post-colonial India, decolonisation of Mind has not been seriously debated, least to say steps taken to recreate alternative. English not only dominated but also expanded as a mode of education. The English elites have turned it into the language of modernity, primary to higher education, university debates and discourse, made it an essential ingredient of urbanisation and also a language of commerce and culture.

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17. Ibid.

18. Mehrez, Samia (1991), 'The Subversive Poetics of Radical Bilingualism: Postcolonial Francophone North American literature' in Lacapra, D (ed.) *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, Ithaca, Cornell university Press, p 258.

One could cite the reasons within the Indian society's status quo on the linguistic question. The rich diversities of indigenous languages and dialects which though is a matter of rejoice are considered as a burden. We have been acting linguistic status quoist and giving more space to English as a bridge between Indian language even after seven decades of independence. Given that there is no dearth of classical texts in Indian languages and that should have been a



*Mahatma Gandhi*

matter of curiosity for the Indian readers. There is no effective centre or mechanism to translate the classics and contemporary writings from one language into another. Linguistic ghettoisation is a reason for the present crisis, which is not only a linguistic, but also a cultural suicide. The strong hold of English is like a psychological transformation of Indian mind which realised its necessity to survive in 'modern Indian society', or to put in other way masses who never acceded to colonial effort to introduce English have increasingly surrendered to it. Where are efforts and who is doing? These two questions embolden an answer for the contemporary crisis, which is deconstructing and compromising our mental autonomy and communitarian culture. However, this should not be treated as a separate question, and it is linked with a larger issue of our concern and desire for *Swaraj in Idea*. This phrase, coined by an Indian thinker Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, finds mention much earlier than the issue of decolonisation of the mind became an academic debate. J N Pieterse and Bhikhu Parekh preferred the new term, *i.e.*, 'decolonisation of imagination' over *Swaraj in Idea*<sup>19</sup>. The year 1931 assumes significance for two great lectures on this line of thought, one by Mahatma Gandhi and another by K C Bhattacharya. On October 20, 1931 Mahatma Gandhi delivered a lecture at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, where he

19. Pieterse, J N; Parekh, Bhikhu (1995) "*Decolonisation of Imagination : Culture, Knowledge and Power*", London, New Jersey, Zed Books.



*K. C. Bhattacharya*

criticised the colonialists for destruction of Indian education system. He said that the beautiful tree of education was cut down by the Britishers who made India more illiterate than it was hundred years ago<sup>20</sup>. Gandhi, of course, attracted the attention of press in London but back home the issue had not been responded to by his people in course of the freedom movement. The social philosophy of the freedom movement which he redefined too lacked the concern for European domination in culture and intellectual discourse besides politics. Gandhi limited decolonisation to vocabularies and mode of struggle which suited the colonialists more than anything. While Gandhi wanted Swaraj by giving moral defeat to the imperialist forces which in fact was a noble idea, but it had not let the colonialists to lessen the atrocities on Indians. However, this is another debatable point since cultural nationalists in India were more inclined to the revolutionary movement. With the decline of revolutionary movement, Gandhi rose to scene and acquired hegemony, making the movement a bit too political. In the same year Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya (1875-1949) delivered Sri Asutosh Memorial Lecture organised at Chandernagore by Charu Chandra Roy.<sup>21</sup> This was the most outstanding theorisation of decolonisation and his speech was both a latent critique of the freedom movement which had ignored and sidelined the cultural dimension while indoctrinating Satygrahis and emphasised merely on mode of struggle. Bhattacharya begins his speech by making a distinction between political Swaraj and Swaraj in idea:

“We speak today of Swaraj or self determination in politics. Man’s domination over man is felt in the most tangible form in the political sphere. There is however a

20. Dharampal (1995) *“The Beautiful Tree”*, Goa, Other India Press.

21. The speech was published by *Visvabharati Quarterly* 20, 103-114 (1954).



subtler domination exercised in the sphere of ideas by one culture on another, a domination all the more serious in the consequence, because it is not ordinarily felt. Political subjection primarily means restraint on the outer life of a people and although it tends gradually to sink into the inner life of the soul, the fact that one is conscious of it operates against the tendency. So long as one is conscious of a restraint, it is possible to resist it or to bear it as a necessary evil and to keep free in spirit". He clarifies that the same is not true about cultural subjection. He argues, "cultural subjection is ordinarily of an unconscious character and it implies slavery from the very start." He then makes a categorical difference between assimilation of cultures and cultural subjugation. He says, "when I speak of cultural subjugation, I do not mean the assimilation of an alien culture. That assimilation need not be an evil; it may be positively necessary for healthy progress, and, in any case, it does not mean a lapse of freedom. There is cultural subjection only when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is suppressed without comparison and competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost." He describes this phenomenon as 'slavery of the spirit'. And, "when a person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales free from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth and that what I call *Swaraj in Ideas*."

In the process of colonial hybridisation in India, a new class of people emerged who were defined as Indian only in colour but English in taste and thought. Such people were comfortable and felt happy while remaining disconnected with our culture and legacies. They defined their self in the mirror of Europe. Such people slowly started dominating our culture, education and dialogues. Bhattacharya pronounces that they willingly disavow Indian culture. Describing about it he says, "many of our educated men do not know and do not care to know much of this

indigenous culture of ours, and when they seek to know, they do not feel, as they ought to feel that they are discovering their own self.” Further, he says that there can be ‘no vital assimilation of the imposed culture’.

The western culture has been imposed on our system through narrative and counter narratives both emanating from the West. This domination took the shape of hegemony, however, not for the entire masses but a principal class of educated people and it has been they who praise the West rather than judge them from their own wisdom. Bhattacharya says:

“There is no gainsaying the fact that this Western culture – which means an entire system of ideas and sentiments – has been simply imposed on us. I do not mean that it has been imposed on unwilling minds: we ourselves asked for this education and we feel, and perhaps rightly, that it has been a blessing in certain ways. I mean only that it has not generally been assimilated by us in an open-eyed way with our old-world Indian mind. That Indian mind has simply lapsed in most cases for our educated men, and has subsided below the conscious level of culture. It operates still in the persisting routine of their family life and in some of their social and religious practices which have no longer, however, any vital meaning for them. It neither welcomes nor resists the ideas received through the new education. It dares not exert itself in the cultural sphere.”

Those who tirelessly pleaded utility, greatness and friendliness of the Western culture could not realise that even after its impact on our educated people the influenced mind could not yield anything great in the knowledge system of the world which includes, art, literature, science, humanities and culture. Bhattacharya poses the question before them , “One would have expected after a century of contact with the vivifying ideas of the West that there should be a vigorous output of Indian

contribution in a distinctive Indian style to the culture and thought of the modern world, --contribution specially to the humane subjects like history, philosophy or literature, a contributions such as may be enjoyed by our countrymen who still happen to retain their vernacular mind and which might be recognised by others as reflecting the distinctive soul of India. Barring the contribution of a few men of genius, -- and genius is largely independent of the times, -- there is not much evidence of such creative work done by our educated men.”

He portrays his deep concern for the people who have just bought and uncritically accepted the western culture and their judgments about our own culture, traditions and world views.

“We speak of world movements and have a fair acquaintance with the principles and details of Western life and thought, but we do not always sufficiently realise where we actually stand today and how to apply our bookish principles to our situation in life. We either accept or repeat the judgments passed on us by Western culture, or we impotently resent them but have hardly any estimates of our own, wrung from an inward perception of the realities of our position.”

No society can progress and can remain original if it imitates others and feels euphoric by blindly following ideas that originated in a totally different cultural atmosphere. It should be the objective of education system to evolve according to our needs and genius privileges both for present and posterity. It should be able to generate, to develop, to add new ideas with reason and universal appeal. Such an idea will thereby illuminate other societies too having universal appeal. It is with the destruction of beautiful tree and imposition of an education system merely with an Indian frame we have been self sabotaging it. In the field of natural science and mathematics genius can be produced with strenuous efforts, inspiring systems and minimum facilities. While that achievement is and should be laudable, they give the nation prestige, the

real challenge remains unaddressed *i.e.* the discovery of the soul of the nation. The discovery of India is not the task, rather a mission to defeat the danger of national conceit which gets the support from those who interpret idea of India to kill the self and soul without any remorse or repent. They are the educated people who hold the upper echelon of our opinion making system, academic and political titles, who are loath and have surrendered to whatever the western thought whether good or bad, fresh or rotten produce in economics, social sciences and philosophy. They take shelter in the synthesis between the East and the West, clearly ignoring the fact that West has never accepted this synthesis in true sense. The West has always been reluctant, has never obliged and convinced its masses about the greatness or even the utility of Indian philosophy. The slogan of universalism is a mask to surrender before the West and accept them uncritically. The education system built on this premise is confusing and unphilosophical, creates a detachment from the past. Bhattacharya fears this and observes that:

“Our education has not so far helped to understand ourselves, to understand the significance of the past, the realities of the present and our mission of the future. It has tended to drive our real mind into the unconscious and to replace it by a shadow mind that has no roots in our past and in our real present. Our old mind cannot be wholly driven underground and its imposed substitute can function effectively and productively. The result is that there is confusion between the two minds and a hopeless Babel in the world of ideas. Our thought is hybrid through and through and inevitably sterile. Slavery has entered into our very soul.”

Bhattacharya rightly accepts that we have weakened our vernacular, which might be due to backdoor entry of English and shift of genius from vernacular to English. He confesses that he himself would be not proficient had he been asked to present the same ideas in Bengali. He says that complexity of linguistic problem needs to be resolved and

considers that would be the first genuine step towards Swaraj in India as he states:

“The hybridisation of our ideals is evidenced from the strange medley of vernacular and English in which our educated people speak to one another. For the expression of cultural ideas especially we find it difficult to use pure vernacular medium. If I were asked, for example, to conduct today’s discourse here in Bengali; I have to make a particularly strenuous effort. ...if the language difficulty could be surmounted, it would mean a big step towards the achievement of what I have called Swaraj in Idea.”

However, ignoring this, our modernists and lazy intellectuals fail to realise that ideas are no merely essays or speeches. An idea can be effective that transcends the limits of time and geography if it contains ideals along with it. Ideas internalise aspiring ideals of the society thus it makes an impact and defeat resistance with the support of the common will and consent of the people. Idea develops as a thought and when it engages ideals it becomes a concept. An idea conceptualised and nurtured in a particular civilisation or nation can’t be translated with the same essence in other social, cultural communities and civilisations. They can be contextualised but that is merely the nearest solution. Sometimes when basic presumptions of the two civilisations fundamentally differ or stand opposed to each other than even the contextualisation creates more problems than symmetry. European civilisational impact also led to varying conceptual uses in India. It can be best exemplified and understood with the use of two words which deliver two entirely different meaning for Indians and Europeans. They are religion and dharma.

“All vital ideas involve ideals. They embody the entire theory and an insight into life. Thought or reason may be universal but ideas are carved out of it differently by diverse cultures according to their respective genius. No idea of one cultural language can exactly be translated

into another cultural language. Every culture had its distinctive 'physiognomy' which is reflected in each vital idea and ideal presented by the culture:

“it is possible for a foreigner to appreciate the literature of a country, but it is only to be expected that this mind would react to it differently from the mind of a native of the country. A Frenchman, for example, would not, I imagine, appreciate Shakespeare just as an Englishman would do. Our education has largely been imparted to us through English literature. The Indian mind is much further removed by tradition and history than the French and the German mind from the spirit of English literature, and yet no Indian, so far as I am aware, has passed judgments on English literatures that reflect his Indian mentality.”

“the most important contribution of ancient India to the culture of the world is in the field of philosophy. It is in philosophy, if anywhere that the task of discovering the soul of India is imperative for the modern India : the task of achieving, if possible, the continuity of his old self with his present day self, of realising what is nowadays called the Mission of India, If it has any. Genius can unveil the soul of India in art, but it is through philosophy that we can methodically attempt to discover it.”

Bhattacharya concludes with a practical suggestion that no idea can be effective unless it possesses constitutive power that originates through its ability to convince the large masses, and secondly by combining pragmatism and idealism. The Swaraj of Ideas can only be achieved once we rebel against the imposed ideals and ideas and self created social and cultural barriers. It can only be possible once we resolutely begin our mission to resurrect our originality and progressively define our self.

“in politics our educated men have been compelled to realise by the logic of facts that they have absolutely no

power for good, though they have much power for evil, unless they can carry the masses with them. In other fields there is no such realisation of this circumstance. In the social sphere, for example, they still believe that they can impose certain reforms on masses – by mere preaching from without, by passing resolutions in social conferences and by legislation. In the sphere of ideas, there is hardly yet any realisation that we can think effectively only when we think in terms of indigenous ideas that pulsate in the life and mind of the masses. We condemn the caste system of our country, but we ignore the fact that we, who have received Western education, constitute a caste more exclusively and intolerantly than any of the traditional castes. Let us resolutely break down the barriers of this new caste, let us come back to the cultural stratum of the real Indian people and evolve a culture along with them suited to the time and to our native genius . That would be to achieve Swaraj in Ideas.”





# III

## Universalism *versus* Provincialism

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The expansion of imperialism has largely proceeded through its three principal agents-military, religion and an array of thinkers, all wedded together by a common aim of exploitation and appropriation. Their approaches and methods though, with regard to colonies and subjects differed from each other. A symbiotic relationship between variations of colonialism helped them to determine their policies and to deal with rising upheavals and dissatisfactions. This process also entailed the evolution of Western Social Sciences. During its formative days, this particular discipline was part of the Empire's project but later on, it created a semi-autonomous space for itself. It proved beneficial and also corresponded with the new emerging image of the West.

Colonialism in its early phase developed a theoretical and moral justification in the pretext of a 'civilising mission' of people who according to its advocates, were like 'savages', 'barbarians' and lacking any civic and cultural values. However, India for them in this regard was fundamentally different from their other colonies. Colonial powers gradually discovered the richness of Indian culture and its contributions in all walks of life. Many Westerners in fact, were genuinely enamored by the Indian philosophy and culture. It generated a sense of enquiry in

the colonialists and thereby a systematic attempt to know the 'Orient' was initiated. This led the foundations of Orientalism. In the beginning it worked on the premise of negating anti-Indian agenda propagated by the missionaries and colonialists. But later, it turned out to be a tool for appropriation of Indian philosophies without giving them due place in the discourse. It also cultivated a sense of 'Otherness' which in fact is an inbuilt phenomenon of the European sociology and culture.

No Semitic idea can free itself from the creation of 'Others' and avoid the subsequent conflicts. All dialogues within it eventually lead to contestations for dominations and hegemony. This has been the fate of the Semitic civilisation of the West. The very idea of the 'Other' itself is a product of racial theory, its presuppositions drawn from discriminatory foundations of modernity.<sup>22</sup> This is just a superficial assessment. Even if we assume that Europe may liberate itself from racism, apartheid, colonialism and neo-colonialism, it cannot escape to produce the notion of 'Otherings'. Europe's imagined identity has always been propagated in contrast to the 'Other World' which has been identified with different names in the post-colonial world like Third World, developing countries, ex-colonies, members of the commonwealth etc. Orientalism has in no way helped to generate a civilisational debate between Europe and India. It would be misnomer even to talk about East and West here. India is of course, a representative nation of the East, but it also has its own civilisational trajectory that places the nation in a privileged position more than any other nation state of the East or the West. It is a civilisational nation and bearer of one of the richest and oldest civilisations of the world. Its contributions in the fields of science and technology, civil polity, culture, philosophy are unparalleled – a status that is unacceptable to Western schools of thought, be it Orientalism or Post Modernism.

Western scholars' emphasis has been on the policy and politics of India covering the last three to four hundred years which makes it as contemporary with the post Enlightenment Europe. In the last few

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22. Gilroy, Paul (2000) *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Harvard, Harvard University Press.

hundred years, India's social structure witnessed fragmentation and infection of reactionary customs like untouchability. This has been the biggest curse on our civilisational journey, besides centuries of political colonisation aided by the religious aggressiveness of Christian missionaries. British rule led to complete stagnation of Indian cultural and intellectual evolution. Yet colonialists could neither fulfill their dream to wiping out Indian culture nor could they achieve much success in their mission of conversion. An evidence of this annoyance can be found in the missionary report from Bengal of May 1817 "still everyone gladly receive a Bible, and why? –so that he may lay it up as a curiosity for a few piece; or use it for the waste paper such it is well known has been the common fate of these copies of the Bible....some have been bartered in the markets, others have been thrown in snuff shops and used as wrapping paper."<sup>23</sup>

It is a reflection of resilience of the Indian people who even at the worst phase of history refuse to compromise or surrender to alien forces whether political or religious. But the seductive degradation of caste division into a discriminatory order gave a fragmented image of Indian society and Orientalism and post colonial studies both used them as their content to discuss India. The first victim in this context was the philosophy which took a back seat; thereby, India's civilisational history has been squeezed into only a few hundred years by the colonisers.

Edward W. Said traces the origin of the concept Orientalism and says, "The Orient was almost a European invention...Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisation and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other....The Orient has helped to define Europe its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilisation and

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23. The Missionary Register, May 1817 quoted by Bhabha, Homi. K(2016). Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse. In Nayar. Pramod K(ed), *Postcolonial Studies: An Anthology*, West Sussex, Wiley Blackwell, p 59.

culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.<sup>24</sup> He further observed that the relationship between Orient and Occident, “is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony”<sup>25</sup>

Orientalism went through three stages. In the *first* stage there was recognition about the existence of Indian philosophy. It confirmed them that India was neither history-less nor culture-less. However, this phase witnessed contrasting approaches, glorification of Indian philosophy and condemnations, both at the same time by Europeans.

The *second* stage is marked by its silent appropriation of Indian philosophy to articulate modern European thoughts. However, this discrimination with the Indian thoughts and philosophy has continued in modern times too. This is highlighted by J. J. Clarke who says that, “Eastern ideas have been used in the West as an agency for self criticism and self renewal, whether in the political, moral or religious spheres”<sup>26</sup>.

And the *third* stage advocated strong urge for dialogue between the two. Two reasons can be ascribed to it, firstly the un-sustainability of Orientalism to hold it as ‘Others’ and the challenges emanating from European scholars particularly Post-structuralists Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Secondly, Indian academics accelerated the interest in comparative studies. Thus the parameters no longer remain unalterable. Neither Orientalism nor the Post-modern studies lead to a larger civilisational question. Post Enlightenment/Renaissance, Post-colonial and Post-modern studies have great resemblances. All of them particularly avoid the fundamental question, *i.e.* paradigm of the western civilisation. They though want debate with ancient Indian philosophy but confine and assign it to the three hundred years intellectual and philosophical productions.

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24. Said, Edward. W (1978) *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, pp 1-2.

25. *Ibid.* p 6.

26. Clarke, J.J. (1997) “*Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought*”, London, Routledge, p 27.

According to Said, Orientalism is a created body of theory and practice, is a style of western scholarship that has been used by its practitioner as a tool to dominate, restructure, particularise and divide oriental things into components that can be more easily managed or manipulated. This is done with an intention of exerting hegemony based on the assumed superiority of the European ideas over the backward ideas and practices of the Orient. This Western style of scholarship represents a long history of western domination and exploitation of oriental cultures”<sup>27</sup>

Said himself a Palestinian, however, could not free himself from western parameters and biases. He uses some of the philosophical notions of Michel Foucault, the French Post-modern or Post-structuralists, and Nietzsche, a German philosopher, to develop his own theory.<sup>28</sup> Carl Olson criticises Said for depending on Western philosophy ‘to construct his argument, and not something from the East’ and therefore he ‘indirectly confirms the prejudice of the members of ‘so called’ Orientalism about the East.’<sup>29</sup>

Said’s concept of culture is highly western biased and based on the western experiences of cultural wars and religious persecutions. He conceptualises culture in term of power relationships. The dominant culture identified with the state becomes tyrannical.<sup>30</sup> Here Foucault too considers culture as a repressive means to power.<sup>31</sup> The ontology of culture in Indian philosophy is to reach the highest stage of harmony between men and nature with universe. It is opposite to what Foucault or Edward Said presumes. Their concept of culture has been derived from the religious impact on society and world views. Indian concept of culture is privileged with autonomy and is not a static concept. It has great capacity of assimilation. Therefore its hegemony is not based on

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27. Olson, Carl(2002) *“Indian Philosophers and Post Modern Thinkers: Dialogues on the Margins of Culture”*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press. p 16.

28. Ibid. p 18.

29. Ibid. p 18.

30. Ibid. p 18.

31. Foucault, M (1977) *Power/ Knowledge* , In Gordon, Colin(eds)(1980) *POWER/ KNOWLEDGE: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* Michel Foucault, New York, Pantheon Books, p 142.

domination or repressive power but on moral and humane strength which it carries.

Said further argues, “It also means that culture is system of exclusions, legislated from above but enacted throughout its polity, by which such things as anarchy, disorder, irrationality, inferiority, bad taste, and immorality are identified, then deposited outside the culture and kept there by the power of the state and its institutions.”<sup>32</sup>

Indian culture primarily based on secular pronouncement of the Vedas: *Ekam Sataym Vipra Bahuda Vadanti* (truth is one there multitudes of manifestations) this variation presumes critical assessments and interpretations. Indian philosophy is negation of binary and therefore it does not produce ‘Otherness’. Therefore, the two fundamental ideologies which dominate the world’s discourse today, *i.e.* ‘secularism/multiculturalism’ and ‘nationalism’ cannot be defined by the western meta-narrative. It is the tradition of Indian secularism that is actually based on diversities of thoughts, believes, respect for each other sentiments and privileging each other by sacrifices. In Indian civilisation secularism has evolved as a Way of Life - no finality, no uncriticality is its basic principles.

The nations of Europe dominated by Semitic Christianity profess a belief in tolerance. It is considered part of Modernity. Indian Modernity is far richer than the Western Modernity in philosophical sense. Any attempt to redefine or widen the base of these concepts without Indian intellectual traditions and cultural heritage is meaningless. As Ronald Inden rightly says that, “the agency of Indology and the capacity of Indians to make their world, has been displaced in those knowledges on the other agents”<sup>33</sup>.

Post-modern philosophy talks of deconstruction and reconstructions but there are great similarities among the philosophers, like Derrida,

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32. Said, Edward (1983) *The World the Text and the Critic*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press. p 11.

33. Inden, Ronald. B (1990) *Imagining India*, Cambridge, Blackwell Publications, p 2.

Levinas and Foucault. All of them virtually reject the presence of 'Self' which is in diametric contrasts to Indian philosophy. They are by far philosophical interpreters, challenging the universalisation of the Western thought and meta-narratives created by their predecessors. But they completely ignore the universalism of the Indian philosophy, which essentially promotes diversity and expands democracy from political to spiritual life. Olson says "hermeneutical dialogue can serve as a means to respond to the challenge posed by Post-modern thought to both East and West."<sup>34</sup>

Dialogues in terms of Orientalism or Post modern philosophy would hardly bare any fruit. They only get further legitimised. There is need to question their basic assumptions and compare the cultural historiographies of India and the West. However, this comparison should not be fragmented in between three hundred years intellectual outputs of social and cultural status of a society but by analysing the unbroken chain of Indian and Western civilisation. The best solution in this regard is the initiation of civilisational studies that transcends limits of time and observe all the ups and down.

The end of the British colonial rule in 1947 could not end the colonial culture in India which has sustained through institutions, political process and in the shadow of the European thought. It was a continuation of the old pattern of governance, thought process and self-definition. The mirror of Europe continued to make Indian imagine their self. Here the role of the political leadership assumes significance. The people who manned the power were visionaries but were fragmented in their approach to decolonisation. Nehru's particularism was reflected in his endorsement of European modernity not only in political system and institutions but also in education and culture. The government had not shown even little inclination to change the education policy, replant beautiful tree which perished during the colonial regime. Of course many new innovative ideas of Europe needed to be domesticated. But the

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34. Olson. Ibid, p 11.

system of education repackaged the colonial pattern and made no effort to Indianise education in the country. Indian authors uncritically bought and followed the European definitions of progressiveness and backwardness. The government could have used the potentialities of millions of freedom fighters who had been trained and indoctrinated during the anti-colonial democratic struggles, to reshape India's intellectual destiny. They became almost unemployed and their energy was wasted. European Political modernity which was undoubtedly indispensable to an extent due to catastrophe of the Partition and lack of adequate resources but the process to infuse Indian ideas and values remained uninitiated. It was a kind of complete integration of political and cultural philosophies of the West. Therefore, even symbolic changes were not made. It is a mystery that the 22 photographs in every chapters of the constitution depicting Indian cultural and civilisational traditions and their heroes were missing when the constitution was finally printed.<sup>35</sup> The neglect of indigenous Indian system of education and values has persisted all these years. Even the change of leadership seemed insignificant in transforming the nation's destiny. It is best exemplified in the editorial observation of *The Guardian*, a British newspaper, after the Indian Lok Sabha elections of 2014. The editorial of the paper stated, "Today, 18 May 2014, May will go down in history as the day when Britain finally left India. Narendra Modi's victory in the elections marks the end of a long era in which the structures of power did not differ greatly from those through which Britain ruled the subcontinent. India under the Congress party was in many ways a continuation of the British Raj by other means. The last of midnight's children are now a dwindling handful of almost 70-year-olds, but it is not the passing of the independence generation that makes the difference."<sup>36</sup>

The newspaper has not been wrong to assess that the set of leadership which had taken the reins of the government struggled not against ruling party in power for decades but the political and intellectual class which has been dominating. The emphasis laid by the Rashtriya Swaymsevaka Sangh

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35. Navjyoti Singh interview with Udayan Bajpayee. *Samas*, Vol.9, 2015. I am thankful to Abhay Kumar Dubey of CSDS to draw my attention to this interview.

36. *India's Another Tryst with Destiny*, editorial, *The Guardian*, London, 18 May 2014.



(RSS) on acknowledging India's legacies, neo historicism and defining India's Self in the context of its civilisational trajectory of thousands of years haven't meaningfully materialised. They have been reflected more as programmes and part of speeches less in articulated and thematic intellectual production. Nevertheless, the conviction and alternative narratives have kept the flame alive and have thrown challenges to the small Anglicized elites and academics who shared the Western values and their world views as gospel truth of modernity, civilisational and economic progress. This intellectual class has labored to justify their understanding of universalising Europe as against post colonial view of provincialised Europe<sup>37</sup> "a relatively small English-speaking elite whose attitude toward the masses was alternately benevolent and exploitative but never inclusive"<sup>38</sup>. These movement and deliberations against Euro-centric policies and philosophy has been identified as nationalist narrative which helped to mobilise Indian languages (which has been described since colonial period as vernacular) intellectuals and infused confidence among them. However, much derided by influential elites and their political patrons and foreign partners as well whose 'willful narcissism'<sup>39</sup> has not been unknown to the world. Another great contribution of the nationalist stream has been by reasserting the sense of pride among masses and contempt for European cultural aggression. It was part of both cultural literacy as well as decolonised discourse.

The roots of Euro-centric mindset of political and intellectual class can be traced to the nature and discourse of the freedom movement. Anti colonial movement in India has passed through many phases and the political and intellectual discourses too changed accordingly with the arrival of new hegemonic leadership or idea. The first broad opposition to the colonial narratives began even before the birth of Indian National Congress. The characterisation of this early period of opposition was the

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37. The phrase was used by Dipesh Chakravarty for the title of his book, *Provincializing Europe: Post Colonial Thought and Historical Differences*.

38. Chakrabarty, D. (2001) "*Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*", New Delhi, Oxford University Press.

39. This phrase was originally used by Frantz Fanon.

articulation of anti imperialist programmes through a balance between empirical facts and normative objectives. As early as in 1867 Dada Bhai Naoroji stripped out the moral basis of colonialism by discarding its economic policy as the 'drain of wealth' in his book *Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India*. He further wrote in 1880, "it is thoughtless and pitiless action of the British policy; it is pitiless eating of India's substance in India and further pitiless drain to England, in short it is pitiless perversion of Economic Laws by the sad bleeding to which India is subjected that is destroying India". Theorisation of attack on economic plunder was a great contribution of Naoroji and further expanded by R. P. Dutta and M. G. Ranade. Gopal Krishna Gokhale through his articulation and sound knowledge of facts and figures made a trenchant economic critique of the colonial state. He without any fear reviewed the colonial fiscal policy while tearing apart the colonial argument of surplus budget in his first budget speech in the Imperial Legislative Council. He questioned the morality of surplus budget when country was passing through trying times coupled with the heavy burden of taxes<sup>40</sup>.

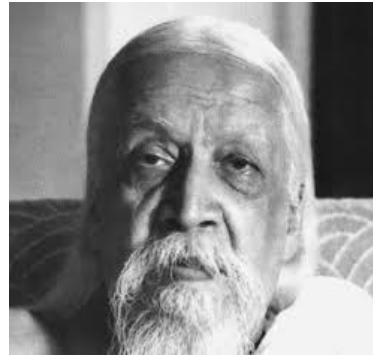
However, the Congress politics during Gandhian era went through fundamental change. The empirical and normative positions also changed. There was a sense of rejection to essentialising the elements of Indian culture as a movement's intellectual discourse. The movement remained ideologically fragmented despite Gandhi's hegemony. The fragmentation and sidelining of revolutionaries gave Britishers an opportunity to deride and marginalise them by vilifying them through their propaganda.

The disunity and infighting between Marxists, Socialists and Gandhians on ideological lines confused the cadres and they remained oblivious to the continuous British attack on India's Cultural Self. While Britishers faced strenuous challenge from Gandhi's programmes, they were more comfortable to deal with it than the revolutionaries who proved highly difficult to contain as they always questioned the colonial existence. The cultural elements introduced by Sri Aurovindo, Bipin

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40. For full speech see Batabyal, Rakesh (2007) *The Penguin Book of Modern Indian Speeches: 1877 to the Present*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, pp 82-83.

Chandra Pal, Balgangadhar Tilak and people like Rajnarayan Basu etc. The narratives of the nationalist press predominantly Indian languages press, like Jugantar, Aaj, Amrit Bazar Patrika, Kal, Bhal, Swadesh, Modern Review, Indian Review, The Arya, Hindu Patriot, Tribune etc narratives were broadly inclusive and tried to give cultural basis to nationalism and the freedom movement.



*Sri Aurobindo*

While Gandhi did introduce phrases, concepts and modes rooted in the cultural philosophy of India and were critical of the Western civilisation, he could not mobilise the Congress to empower the nation's Self. This is a reason that the colonial movement despite its great role and impact on politics as well as human psychology crippled the identity of India. Another reason assigned to it was - unlike the revolutionaries and cultural nationalists of Lal-Bal-Pal era, the leadership of Congress had friendly relations and socialisation with the colonial administration and elites. Nehru was the foremost among them and he had also not hid his mutuality with the Empire's servants. Nehru's leadership in the post independent India was another reason for patronising the colonial system and traditions. There were occasions he faced challenges and his cultural philosophy was contested but he used the state power and European intellect and skills of propaganda to defeat and marginalise the cultural nationalists even inside the Congress.

As we see in the case of renovation of the Somnath temple soon after independence became the bone of contention as well as debate on cultural, civilisational legacies and secular ethos between the stream represented by the Prime Minister Nehru on the one hand and Dr Rajendra Prasad, the President of India, K. M. Munshi, N. V. Gadgil on the other. The dormant force of cultural nationalism became active and sidelined Nehru's poor logic and his oft repeated concern for India's image in the

West. Dr Rajendra Prasad described the Somnath temple as a symbol of national faith and said, “By rising from its ashes again, this temple of Somnath is to say proclaiming to the world that no man and no power in the world can destroy that for which people have boundless faith and love in their hearts... Today, our attempt is not to rectify history. Our only aim is to proclaim anew our attachment to the faith, convictions and to the values on which our religion has rested since immemorial ages”<sup>41</sup>.

This was perhaps the last and final attempt by the cultural nationalists inside the Congress to prevent seductive degradation of elements of culture in nationalism-secularism discourse. Nehru had to retreat and the Somnath temple was rebuilt. Munshi wrote to Prime Minister Nehru on 24th April 1951– “the Collective Sub-Conscience of India” favored the reconstruction. This is a very significant observation. However, Nehru created a hybrid of the Marxist and Euro-centric intellectuals and they together crushed alternative voices within Congress.

There is no doubt that colonial reminiscences and impact of Western hegemony remained unchanged even after the independence. As D. A. Low has argued that, “the process of contraction of England did not just entail the saga of independence’ it also left behind successor politics with innumerable British –type institutions.”<sup>42</sup> Academic institutions played negative role and the hybrid intellectuals tried to reconstruct the nation’s Self which neither represented our cultural civilisation nor could convince the masses. Such discourse had negative impact but masses commitment to the core idea of India remained steadfast despite interruptions by the imposed debates. The colonial rule or their intellectual and political heirs in the post independent India failed to colonise the mind of the Indian masses. Their best efforts could remain confined to the willing educated and rich class of Indian society. This rootlessness has no moral appeal. As Prof. Manindra Thakur rightly observes, “with the expansion of modernity the subjects born on the soil of Europe became synonym of knowledge system in our universities.” However they, despite the

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41. Sinha, Rakesh “Renovating the Idea that is India”, *The Pioneer*, Feb 27, 2001.

42. Low, D.A(1991) “*Eclipse of Empire*”, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p 14.

support of the network of institutions and new technologies, “could not remove the traditional system of knowledge of India from the collective conscience of the masses. This still exists in the consciousness of common man.”<sup>43</sup>

The challenge of decolonisation needs to be rearticulated. In political discourse to social sciences and literature to philosophy we failed to contextualise our traditions and intellectual legacies. In post-independent India, it remained an oft-repeated academic jargon; nothing more has been achieved since then. As Namvar Singh says, “the question relates directly to the release of creative energy and at this point, I humbly beg to submit that among Indian writers after independence, the attitude of militant decolonisation that was to be seen in the writers of an earlier generation has grown feeble and slack.”<sup>44</sup> A benign credit must go to Gandhi and Deendayal Upadhyay for bringing the decolonised ideas into general discourse. For instance, they were among the first Indian thinkers who categorically rejected Right-Left division as unsuited to Indian political and social ecology. But the dominant section of Indian politics, literary figures and social scientists failed to realise their responsibilities to unburden India from the Western impact its appropriation and condemnation. There are very few exceptions to it works done by Dharampal (1983) can be counted as one such. Since then it has been polemically treated and exhausted by basing it in some political and semi-intellectual speeches and writings. The concept of decolonisation is not static its form and shape changes accordingly with the transformation in world community. What was perceived in the 1950’s and 60’s cannot be true for 2020 and 2040. Initially decolonisation was constructed as a means of discourse and change in



*Dharampal*

43. Thakur, Manindra “Bhartiya Darshan ki Jagah”, Jansatta, 15 Sep 2010; Thakur is an Associate Professor at JNU.

44. Singh, Namvar (1992) “Decolonising the Indian Mind”, *Indian Literature*, Vol 35, No 5 . p 151.



*Deendayal Upadhyaya*

the Indian historiography. However, they are still meaningful but not the end point. India has to come out from the psychological prison of the West. Many people hold the view that more and more study of the ancient and glorification or empirically interpreted texts would challenge the Western hegemony. This was only true till a few decades ago but their utility remained undiminished, they can't be the only

weapon to de-hegemonize Western power. Indian scholars have to engage with the present too and that from Indian perspective which is a very old civilisational country. This can only give constituting power, the power to impact the western mind. Modernity and Post-modernity all such stages are merely a mirage to protect the Western civilisation from self condemnation. Every crisis generated by the Western civilisation leads to create a new set of institution and next stage of philosophy also takes birth. It can be traced since the days of Reformation and Enlightenment of the West. Our task is to rebel against our own mind which has become habitual to criticise the West but work in its framework. The answer to the question about what will we be our tomorrow and how will we play the role in cultural and civilisational upliftment of the human society unfolds the stages and the task of decolonisation.