

**Rethinking Colonialism and Colonial Consciousness
The Case of Modern India**

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I

Theorising Colonialism

Colonialism has been one of the most significant phenomena in the history of humankind in the last three hundred years or so. Its importance can hardly be overstated. Yet, as many have said before, it has not been adequately theorised.¹ There is of course a great deal of material on the histories, the effects, and the political resistances to colonialism.² Reading them, however, merely increases the puzzlement about colonialism: though it seems to be at the root of all the ills of the modern world, what is not clear is how or why that is the case. Perhaps, that has to do with an *implicit consensus* shared by many: everyone appears to know what it is and most agree about its immoral nature. Colonialism emerges as a self-clarifying and a self-explaining phenomenon. If it is self-luminescent and so manifest an evil, why did many people in the Metropolis argue both about the nature of the phenomenon and its moral status for centuries on end?

This question becomes even more complex, if we look at the participants in this debate. Liberal theorists like John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and revolutionaries like Karl Marx found colonialism a positive event in world history; among those who opposed it, there were conservative political thinkers like Edmund Burke.³ Today, however, there is a reconfiguration of this constellation: liberals, leftists and radicals are unanimous in condemning colonialism; those who dare speak about its 'positive' aspects are the conservatives and those from the extreme right.⁴ One cannot explain this state of affairs by drawing attention to the shifting nature of political labels like the 'left' and the 'right'. If a political theory that criticises Fascism does a volte-face a century later to celebrate it as a 'liberation movement', such a situation does not say much about the shifting nature of political labels as it throws doubt on our understanding of Fascism.

Consequently, on what grounds can one determine whether the ethical and political stance one assumes with respect to colonialism is adequate? We believe that both the refusal of the Marxist theories to assume an ethical position and the nature of moral criticisms that exist today are symptomatic of our lack of clarity about the nature of the phenomenon. Often, criticisms of a coloniser's specific action replace an ethical criticism of colonialism.⁵ Ethical objections to the role of either the British Crown or the activities of the British East India Company do not allow for an automatic extension. That is, such arguments are not criticisms of the project of colonialism in general or of the colonisation of India, unless one can show what is unethical about the project itself. What *is unethical* about a project that, among other things, industrialised the colonies, established courts of Law, laid railroads, and introduced scientific education, modern medicine and parliamentary democracy there? As long as we do not address this issue properly, there are no obvious reasons to assume that the earlier generation of thinkers were wrong. Today, it is not clear how or why colonialism is an evil or from where it draws its evil strength. In other words, we lack an adequate understanding of colonialism. At least, that is partly what we want to suggest in this paper.

How does one show that something (in our case, substantial knowledge about colonialism) is absent? Based on what we know about colonialism, if we could reasonably expect the absence of a phenomenon and yet notice evidence for its presence, we would be justified in claiming that we do not know much about colonialism. We believe we do have such a candidate: *colonial consciousness*.

Colonialism generated a particular way of looking at the world in both the Metropolis and the colonies. Using the word 'colonial consciousness' to indicate this particular way of looking at the world for now, we would like to suggest the following: if colonialism were to belong to the past, then we would expect colonial consciousness to be absent from the descriptions of the modern world. If we find indications of its presence, clearly, we need to rethink the claim that colonialism is a phenomenon in the past.

Lines of Continuity

India has been independent for nearly sixty years. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that there would be no lines of continuity between the way the British described India and the way the post-independent generations look at India (both in India and in the West within the same time frame). Of course, we are not talking about descriptions of all kinds of facts about the people, the country or its weather, where the absence of continuities would indeed be astonishing. Instead, we are talking about the continuities in fundamental and structural descriptions: India is corrupt, caste-ridden, immoral, and so on. As any student of contemporary India knows, such continuities are present. Surely, there is something wrong with such lines of continuity.

Many argue that if something is wrong with this situation, it has to do with the Indian society itself. That is, they ask whether there would have been such lines of continuity, if there were no 'truth' to the British portrayal of Indian history, traditions, and culture. This stance makes use of the 'fact' of continuity to suggest that the British descriptions are *'true'*. The contemporary experience of Indian culture and society appears to lend truth-value to the colonial descriptions of India.

However, the above stance assumes that the contemporary experience is itself unproblematic. What happens if this is not the case? Do the lines of continuity indicate that these experiences themselves are still colonial in nature? Such a question would throw doubt upon the 'factual nature' of the British descriptions of India, and suggest that these descriptions could be *'untrue'*. Consequently, it would also challenge the 'truth' of some of the contemporary descriptions of India. That is, the lines of continuity do not function as evidences to the 'truth' of the colonial description; instead, they raise questions about the nature of contemporary experience.

Such a questioning is possible only if one assumes that the way people describe the world depends non-trivially upon the structure of their world. A colonial Indian subject is

likely to describe his world differently when compared to an intellectual born after the event. This assumption is a part of our understanding of colonialism. Should there be no difference between the colonial descriptions of India and the modern-day ones, it can only mean one of the two things *both of which* show the inadequacy of our understanding of colonialism. Either there is nothing ‘colonial’ about British descriptions of India; or, if there is, the colonial ways of describing the world persist even after ‘colonialism’ has allegedly ended. In both cases, our notions of the relation between colonialism and the colonial consciousness, and thus our understanding of colonialism itself, are due for a revision. Is colonial consciousness absent from the descriptions of modern India? If present, what are its implications for our understanding of colonialism? We will investigate these questions in this article.

The Structure of the Article

Let us state upfront what we want to argue: colonial consciousness is very much alive and kicking. *It permeates descriptions of India both as their assumption and as their conclusion.* We hope to provide evidence for the existence of such a logical fallacy (called *petitio principii*) in the contemporary descriptions of India in the following way. In the next section, we will identify one of the strands, which is recognizably a part of colonial consciousness. This strand is about the superiority of the colonising culture. In our case, it means the claim that the British (or Western) culture is superior to the Indian culture. In the third section, we show how this claim is a *result* of a portrayal of the Indian society, both colonial and modern. To do this, we undertake a brief interdisciplinary survey, ranging from political theory to ethics, but from within the confines of a single argument. In the fourth section, we show how the claim about the superiority of the colonising culture is not only the result but also the *presupposition* of such portrayals. *We suggest that this is what colonial consciousness is.* In the fifth section, we explore the cognitive benefits of our characterisation. We will show that this enables us also to raise and answer the thorny issue of the extent to which the colonised themselves are ethi-

cally responsible for the phenomenon that colonialism is. That is to say, we show why blaming the ‘big bad wolf’, the British in our case, just will not do. Further, it will also help us appreciate just what is wrong with colonialism and why. In the process, we will also understand the earlier generations better: is colonialism an educational project or not? Even though we will not be able to explicate the precise relationship between colonialism and colonial consciousness, we will take the first step in showing why a theory of colonialism should include an understanding of the colonial consciousness. Such a step, we hope, will also throw new light on the nature of the so-called ‘post-colonial studies’, which is popular in some academic environments today.

II

One of the striking things about the British rule in India is *its success* in developing certain ways of talking about the Indian culture and society. The British criticised the Indian religions, the Indian caste system,⁶ the Indian education system,⁷ practices like *sati*,⁸ the Dowry system,⁹ untouchability, and so on and so forth. They *retold* the Indian intellectual history by describing it as indigenous responses to some of the ills that they, the British, saw in the Indian society and culture: for example, Buddhism, as it emerged out of their reconstruction, was a revolt against Brahmanism and the caste system.¹⁰ Many Indian intellectuals made British criticisms their own: the *Arya Samaj*, the *Brahmo Samaj*, and the many Hindu reform movements exemplify this trend. What makes this way of talking a success is that it defines even the contemporary discussions about India. These have not transcended the terms of the debate set by the British.

To demonstrate the truth of the above statement, let us begin by noticing that one looks at colonisation *as though* it was a contest between the coloniser and the colonised about

their respective strengths. The colonisation of India by the British expresses the British superiority and, by the same token, the weakness of the Indian society.

This appears to be a thread present in the implicit consensus about colonialism because many explanations for this weakness float around. (a) India was never a nation before the British made her into one; (b) the weakness of the Mogul rule in India; (c) the caste-ridden, and the divisive nature of the Indian society; (d) the absence of a centralized state and the presence of multiple small kingdoms, (e) because of which the British policy of 'divide and rule' was successful. There are many more than these five, but this list should suffice. "How could a few thousand conquer a nation of millions, if we were not weak?" This is how Mahatma Gandhi as well as the Indian Independence Movement formulated the problem. Indian Nationalist thought crystallized around the certainty that colonisation expressed the weakness of Indian society and culture and the strength of the British.

However, the above perception does not emerge from a scientific study of colonialism but from the *rhetorical force* of another question: "if colonisation is not an expression of weakness, what else is it? An expression of strength?" Even though every historian can routinely assure us that 'higher' civilizations can be conquered and overrun by 'barbarians', the studies of colonial history do not appear to have moved away from this rhetorical question. On the contrary, they try to provide 'insights' into the Indian weakness, and tell us what the latter were. Of course, the strengths of the coloniser appear obvious. There is the emergence of the natural sciences that predates colonialism; and then there is the industrial revolution that postdates colonialism. The *popular consciousness* has telescoped both these events into a single state of affairs: the scientific, technological and the military might of the West. The consensus (more or less) is that colonialism expresses the 'weaknesses' of the colonised and the 'strengths' of the coloniser.

In such a case, colonialism becomes analogous to a contest between two *theories* like, say, the Aristotelian theory and that of Galileo. One has won out proving the other as false

or *passé* thereby. In other words, *colonialism expresses the civilizational superiority of the West*. To what extent is this belief present in the implicit consensus about colonialism? We would like to argue that it is omnipresent. Even though most intellectuals would deny holding such an opinion, one can show why many are logically compelled to subscribe to it. By drawing on examples from different domains of study of modern India, we shall show that the consensus is broader and more deep-rooted than one imagines.

III

The Politics of Corruption

According to Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index* 2002, India ranked behind Columbia, Argentina, and Honduras and occupied the 73rd place in the list of least corrupt countries.¹¹ In 2005, India slides to the 92nd position. Columbia now occupies the 56th position, whereas Argentina (98) and Honduras (109) move further down the scale. In India, the newspapers are full of stories about corruption¹² and everybody knows somebody who is 'on the take'. It is almost axiomatic that every politician is corrupt.¹³ The same applies to almost everyone in the government services – from the high-ranking officer to the lowest of the door attendants.¹⁴ All state-owned enterprises (from electricity to the telephone) appear to suffer the same fate. Banking and Insurance sectors owned by the state seem to join the queue as well.

This is what is visible in the media. Very little is written about the business-to-business corruption, where an entire hierarchy demands suitable homage from their suppliers, mostly small-scale businesses themselves. If one includes 'greasing palms' to get seats in 'fully booked' theatres, private hospitals, on trains and private airlines, or to gain entry into the educational institutions to this list, one is probably talking about the corruption of 20% or more of the Indian population. If we also consider the black market, it is anybody's guess

as to how many Indians are corrupt.¹⁵ In short, corruption is as ubiquitous as the air we breathe in India and in most big cities, as we know, that air is polluted. The media does not stop clamouring, the citizens do not stop complaining, yet there is still no solution in sight. Of course, many commissions have been set up to investigate corruption. The problem is that the commissions set up to punish the corrupt end up becoming corrupt themselves.

Gunnar Myrdal, a developmental economist, was one of the first writers of international stature to raise the issue of corruption in the context of the Asian economies. He identified corruption as one of their main hindrances to economic growth. Since then, we have had many proposals¹⁶ to understand corruption: from the claims that it is a regrettable but an inevitable phase in transitional economies,¹⁷ through its positive contributions to the growth of economies¹⁸ to its debilitating effect on society.¹⁹ While some argue that corruption is a result of British colonisation,²⁰ there is enough material to suggest that the British encountered corruption before they established their rule over India.²¹ In fact, one of the typical lamentations in the nineteenth-century Britain was the corrupting influence of the 'Orient' upon young and impressionable minds.²² Even if these analyses remain fragmentary, in some senses at least, they remain tied to the larger issue of the relation between development of societies and the nature of corruption.

In the last two decades or so, economic theories of political corruption have come to occupy the centre stage.²³ With the growing realisation that political corruption is not limited to countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America but is also prevalent in the Western democracies, the quest has been to find a suitable general 'theory' of political corruption. Though laudable, this quest pushed the broader issues into the background without tackling them. It has done that by circumscribing the phenomenon narrowly as political corruption, viz., the corruption of the public officials. Even here, the focus is on explaining how corruption could take hold among the public officials.²⁴ These explanations are just about as adequate for our purposes as an explanation of homicide is adequate to understand genocide.

When we talk about corruption in India, we are not talking about the actions of some individuals, which make sense on the assumption that they deviate from the standards upheld by the rest. Instead, we are talking about a widespread *social phenomenon*²⁵ that differs from the talked-about political corruption in the way a fight between two individuals differs from a war between two nations.

Be it as that may, we are merely interested in indicating how one talks about corruption in India today. The analyses do not progress beyond the repetition of “platitudes” both regarding its origin and about combating it.²⁶ What one hears on the streets, how the elites talk about it,²⁷ what the scholars write about it²⁸ and what the villagers say about the local bureaucrat²⁹ are almost identical in nature: “we need a strong moral entity to root out corruption”. In a situation when such an entity itself is corrupt, the question, of course, is *Quis Custodiet ipsos Custodes?*

If corruption has known a *phenomenal growth* since Independence,³⁰ it can only mean that the social fabric or the social structure enables such a rapid growth. The Indian soil, so to speak, must be very conducive to the growth of “a cancer that eats into the innards of the country”. Indian society hosts this cancer, and its immunological mechanisms are ineffective in fighting it. If the people of India constitute the cells of the country and if ‘corruption’ is the disease, the only possible immunological mechanisms are the social and moral principles, of course. When is a person a fool not to take bribes? In a situation where everyone else is corrupt, of course. That is to say, it must be a *successful* social strategy: because everyone else is corrupt, it pays to be corrupt oneself. That is, in today’s India, *it is rational to be corrupt*. If the Indians become corrupt so massively, so quickly and so easily, what does it say about their morals or their society? Let us postpone the issue of morality for the moment and focus on the nature of society.

It is in social groups that one learns to be corrupt. If ‘being on the take’ is a successful social strategy, then it follows that the social group from which an individual learns this

must itself *embody* this strategy. That is, the social group must itself be corrupt. However, corruption is not limited to any one particular social group in India, no matter how one defines the constitution of such a group. If ‘corruption’ cuts across all social groups present in the Indian society, it follows, the nature of the ‘society-at-large’ must be responsible for this situation: the Indian society corrupts every one of these groups. Such must be the nature of this society that it teaches the individual to *learn* to be corrupt in his goings-about with fellow human beings. That is, in some appropriate sense of the term, *the social structure must itself be corrupt*.

The Sociology of Corruption

If much of the Western description makes the caste system synonymous with the Indian social structure, caste itself appears as ubiquitous to the Indians as the very air they breathe. From politicians to political pundits, from the pimps to the Prime Minister – all seem to belong to the caste system. Most intellectuals, from the extreme right to the extreme left, have firm moral opinions on the subject. Quite a few theories float around as purported explanations of the caste system. Some see a deformed class-relation in it, others a fossilised coalition of associations.³¹ Some see hygienic principles operative in the caste system,³² yet others some transaction rules.³³ Some call it racial segregation, whereas others see in it the propensity of human beings to maximise fitness through extended nepotism.³⁴

Whatever one’s thoughts on the subject, most intellectuals appear to agree that the caste system is an obsolete form of social organisation. The index of its obsolescence is the hindrance it offers to everything that is desirable: progress, economic development, social equality, justice ... As many people think, it is the bane of Indian society and culture. The caste system appears to epitomise everything that is bad and backward.

Why does it so stubbornly refuse to disappear? How could one eradicate this social and cultural impediment to progress? The existing answer, in both theory and practice, is

surprisingly simple: the caste system persists because of ‘prejudice’ and that is what one should remove. About what kinds of prejudice is one talking? Let us run through some of them quickly: the prejudice of ‘untouchability’; the prejudice that the accident of birth condemns one to servitude; the prejudice that the Brahmins belong to a superior ‘caste’ because of ‘*Karma*’... Not only is this a well-known list, so also are the anecdotes that accompany it. These are the horror stories of discrimination against the ‘Harijans’ by the upper-caste groups: denial of basic human rights to some people, refusal to allow the lower-caste groups to enter the temples or the refusal of the upper-caste groups to partake food and water with lower castes, etc. As this anecdotal discourse progresses, it transpires that the caste system is virtually synonymous with untouchability, moral discrimination, the denial of human rights, and so on. That is, these (and allied) prejudices are instilled in people from their birth, and the caste system is kept alive through practising these prejudices. Very simply: *caste system is a set of immoral practices.*

Let us get some grip on the *extent* of the immorality of the caste system by comparing it to other large-scale (immoral) phenomena we know. For example, discrimination against the minorities in the US is not a social organisation, even though it is a social phenomenon. The apartheid regime was both the policy of a government and a regime imposed on society, but it was not a social structure. Fascism was a political movement (and a state form) but it was unstable. Caste system is, in some sense, all of these and much more. It has survived onslaughts from Buddhism, the *Bhakti* movements, colonialism, capitalism, the Indian reformers, current Indian legislation, and the Western theorists. Clearly, we have a unique, *sui generis* phenomenon on our hands. It is more evil than colonialism and the concentration camps, more widespread than ethnic discrimination, and has a longer history than slavery.

While one might be willing to grant that the practices (like those indicated above) are immoral, it might not be obvious why the caste system becomes an immoral *system*. The

answer is simple: *'caste' is an ordered and structured system*. Any social organisation is an ordered and structured entity, and the caste system is a social organisation. The immorality of this social organisation consists in the fact that it imposes immoral obligations in an ordered and systematic way. That is to say, caste system is an immoral social order in this double way: not only does the practice of caste discrimination violate certain moral norms but also, as a social order, *it makes immorality obligatory*.

When is someone, anyone, immoral? The answer is obvious: only when one willingly chooses to act in an immoral way. That is, the action has to be voluntary and must be the result of a choice in the presence of relevant alternatives. The caste system might impose immoral obligations, but each individual can choose not to obey them. From Buddhism to the *Bhakti* movements illustrate this. From this, it follows that those who are within the caste system – and remain within it – are immoral in a systematic way. Under this condition, except for the individual heroes who have opted out, *all other Indians become immoral*. (After all, caste division is present among the Christians, the so-called 'Harijans', and is recognised in the schedules of the Indian Constitution.) If one takes the stance that the caste system is the embodiment of corruption, then one is arguing that Indians are either immoral or intellectually weak. It also suggests that the Indian 'culture' and 'religions' are immoral as well. In this way, the talk of the 'masses' mimics how the intelligentsia talks about caste and corruption: Indians are immoral and corrupt. This tale carries a sting in its tail: if corruption and caste are rational and successful strategies of social survival, the 'norms' that generate such strategies must themselves be immoral. That is to say, the inescapable conclusion is that the *Indian ethics must itself be corrupt*.

The Ethics of Corruption

Let us begin with an example chosen randomly from the colonial descriptions of India:

... (C)ould I transplant my reader ... to the purely native circle by which I am surrounded ... and could he understand the bold and fluent hindostanee which the Hindoo soldier speaks, he would soon distinguish the sources of *oriental licentiousness, and how unprincipled is the Hindoo in conduct and character.*

In nothing is the general want of principle more evident, than in the total disregard to truth which they show; no rank or order among them can be exempted from the implication. The religious teachers set the example, and they are scrupulously followed by all classes. Perjury and fraud are as common as is a suit of law; with protestations of equal sincerity will a witness stand forth who knows the falsehood of his testimony, and he who is ignorant of what he professes to testify. No oath can secure the truth; the water of the Ganges, as they cannot wash away the filth of lying and deceit, so they cannot preserve the court of law from being the scene of gross and impious contradiction. No task is so difficult as he who would elicit truth from the mouth of a witness. *Venality and corruption are universal;* they are remarkable, too, for their ingratitude. (our emphases.)³⁵

Such formulations in “bold and fluent” English are not a part of our world anymore. Today, we have to analyse writings for their logic to find out the implications. Consequently, equally randomly, we have chosen articles from two domains: cultural psychology and ethics.

Richard Shweder, a professor in Chicago, is a cultural psychologist. He sets out to trace the evolution of morality cross-culturally. In the course of conducting a cross-cultural research into the growth of moral awareness, Shweder and his co-workers developed a questionnaire supposed to test the presence of moral notions among their subjects.³⁶ The contrasting cultures are the Indian and the American; the interviewees are both children and adults. From the list of the cases that Shweder uses, here are the first five *moral infringements* – in the order of perceived ‘seriousness of breach’, as judged by Hindu Brahman eight-year-olds:

1. The day after his father's death, the eldest son had a haircut and ate chicken.
2. One of your family members eats beef regularly.
3. One of your family members eats a dog regularly for dinner.
4. A widow in your community eats fish two or three times a week.
5. Six months after the death of her husband, the widow wore jewellery and bright-colored clothes (P.40).

It is important to note that, in India, while there was a consensus between the children and the adults regarding the first two cases (ibid. 63), there was a lack of consensus only among children regarding the last three cases. Keeping in mind that these violations are *ordered* in terms of the 'perceived seriousness of the breach', we further come across (ibid. 40):

8. After defecation (making a bowel movement), a woman did not change her clothes before cooking.
13. In a family, a twenty-five-year-old son addresses his father by his first name.

The fifteenth breach is more interesting:

- A poor man went to the hospital after being seriously hurt in an accident. At the hospital they refused to treat him because he could not afford to pay (ibid.).

We can, presumably, grant the veracity (or the factual truth) of these statements. We can grant too that many Indians (both children and adults) would probably consider such actions not just as '*paap*' but also as '*mahapaap*'. The Americans do not think the way the Indians do (ibid. 43-44). They find that what the widow eats and how she dresses do not belong to the ethical domain. Neither do they find anything objectionable to a son addressing his father by his first name. Nor do they find it necessary to change one's clothes after defecation. However, they find it morally objectionable that the poor man did not get treatment in the hospital because he could not afford to pay.

Do the Indians really think what the widow eats, and what she wears, etc. are ethically more important than whether a poor man gets treated in a hospital or not? If they do,

how did the Indian culture ever manage to survive a couple of thousand years, when governed by such ‘norms’? Do these questions really capture the ethical notions of the Indians? If the answer to the last question is in the positive, as the authors believe, one can fairly say that the Indians are moral imbeciles. Shweder probably thinks that as well, because he comes to their defence by providing a “reasoned defence of family life and social practice”, albeit in the form of an “ideal” argument structure. How does it look?

The body is a temple with a spirit dwelling in it. Therefore the sanctity of the temple must be preserved. Therefore impure things must be kept out of and away from the body. (ibid. 76-77.)

Though meant as an ideal argumentation structure, this argument itself is anything but ‘ideal’. If the body is pure requiring preservation and eating meat or going to the barber makes the body impure then all such activities are ‘immoral’. Yet, none of the participants thinks that either eating meat or going to the barber is immoral. If that is the case, one cannot call a conjunction of these two events as immoral either, unless the Indians are unable to think logically. That is, a logical fallacy is involved in making such a claim. Be it as this may, Shweder’s defence is not at issue. What is at issue is the fact that he wants to provide a defence at all. This situation, where an American intellectual feels the need to provide a ‘reasoned defence’ of the native moral notions, generates an implied conclusion that throws an unflattering light upon his subjects: Indians are moral cretins.

In the journal *Asian Philosophy*, an Indologist and a philosopher, Van Den Bossche and Mortier team up to tell us something about Indian ethics by analyzing a Jain text (The *Vajjalaggam*, VL for short).³⁷ Composed anywhere between 750 and 1337 CE, the author of this text is a Jain poet – a certain Jayavallabha by name. This ‘ethical’ text, Van Den Bossche and Mortier tell us, belongs to the *Subhashita* literature and is a challenge of sorts:

One problem with the study of Indian ethics is that the ancient Indians themselves did not make a clear-cut distinction between the ‘moral’ and other spheres. They did not have a word for our term ‘ethics’ at all (P.85).

The Ancient Greeks introduced not only the word ‘*ethica*’, but also gave us many substantial treatises on that subject, including Aristotle’s *Ethica Nicomachea*. If the Indian text, composed around 650-1200 years ago, does not even have a word for the phenomenon called ‘ethics’, how could it be an ethical tract at all? After all, the

text does not contain one single general rule stated in the prescriptive mode. General rule of conduct may easily be derived from various statements, but it is significant that the rules are not formulated as such. ... The statements are written in the evaluative rather than the normative mode (ibid. 95).

If there are no normative rules in this particular text, it is not a deficiency of this text alone. As noted already, Sanskrit, the language of this text, does not even have a word for the domain, namely, the ethical. Consequently, the authors do not study it as an ethical text but ‘as a socio-ethical document’, which gives a “mosaic-like picture of feelings, attitudes and thoughts of different authors of *ancient India*.” (ibid. 87; our emphasis.)

A question arises though: how can one speak about ‘Ancient’ India, when talking about a text composed during the ‘Middle Ages’? Here, the reader has to assume that ‘antiquity’ is *civilizational*: compared to the ‘Ancient Greeks’ (of about 2500 years ago), the Indian civilization of about 700 years ago is more ‘ancient’ (i.e. more primitive). Of course, this claim is not explicit but, especially in light of their eloquent conclusions, it is the only possible interpretation.

Although VL exemplifies reflective ethical thinking, it contains no explicit propositions that argue for or against one type of virtue theory or another and it even sometimes lacks the terms necessary to formulate them. In this respect, the writings of the Greek and Roman virtue theorists are undoubtedly more reflec-

tive than what is found in the VL. Yet, *this is a difference of degree, not of kind*. The writings of the Greeks and the Romans in turn contain little reasoning about ethical language when compared to modern and contemporary moral philosophy. (ibid. 96-97; our emphasis.)

Contrary to what our authors claim, however, there are *both* a difference in degree and differences in kind: the former when one compares the Greek and Roman ethics with contemporary moral philosophy; the latter when one compares Indian writings on the subject with either of the two.

Even though VL ‘embodies’ ethical thinking, it does not argue for any kind of ethical theory. In fact, it lacks the words necessary to conduct an ethical discussion. The absence of terminology to talk *about* ethics differentiates the Indian traditions from the Greek culture. That is to say, there is a difference *in kind* between the Greek ethics and the Indian ethics: one had the words to talk about it, whereas the other does not. Further, this difference has some significance regarding the ‘reflective’ thinking that VL is supposed to exemplify. How is it possible to reason and think about ethics, when one does not even have the words in which to do so? Obviously, one cannot. That is, there is a *second kind* of difference too, a consequence of the first: Indian culture did not have the ability to reason and think *about* ethics. (That is why VL provides “a mosaic-like picture of feelings, attitudes and thoughts”.) There is also a *third kind* of difference. We can understand that better if we realise what the *degree* of difference between the Ancient Greeks and the contemporary moral philosophy consists of: the latter is ‘*more*’ reflective than the former. If the ‘ancient’ Indian culture did not have the terms in which to think about ethics, why did her intellectuals not feel the need to *create* such terms (as late as in the thirteenth or fourteenth century)? One presumes that the Indian thinkers did not feel the need to create such terms simply because there was no need for it. This then is the third kind of difference. Why would there be no need to think

about ethics? The choices are not many: there is no ethics in India to think about. Here is a *fourth kind* of difference: Indian ‘ethics’ is non-existent.

If these *differences* separate Indians from their Greek (or Roman) counterparts, the Indian thinkers are at the lower rung of the moral ladder even if they come after the Greeks by almost a thousand years. Such a civilizational ladder has to look thus: the Indians (of about a thousand years ago) at the bottom; the Ancient Greeks (of more than two thousand five hundred years ago) above them; and contemporary moral philosophy occupying the top. From the point of view of contemporary virtue ethics, if we believe our authors, Indians are either intellectual imbeciles or immoral or both.

Indians are intellectually weak and fundamentally immoral. These have been the colonial descriptions for the last couple of hundred years, as the following randomly chosen voices from the past testify.

In 1790, Dr. Claudius Buchanan, a missionary attached to the East India Company, arrived in Bengal. Not long after his arrival, the good doctor stated, “Neither truth, nor honesty, honour, gratitude, nor charity, is to be found in the breast of a Hindoo.” In the words of Charles Grant (1746-1823), the Chairman of the East India Company: “We cannot avoid recognizing in the people of Hindustan a race of men lamentably degenerate and base ... governed by malevolent and licentious passions ... and sunk in misery by their vices.” Upon his arrival in 1810, the Governor-general Marquis of Hastings opined “... the Hindoo appears a being merely limited to mere animal functions, and even in them indifferent ... with no higher intellect than a dog ...” In a review of *The Life of Robert Lord Clive*, we find:

(Lord Clive) ... knew that the standard of morality among the natives of India differed widely from that established in England. He knew that he had to deal with men destitute of what in Europe is called honour, with men who would give any promise without hesitation, and break any promise without shame, with men who would unscrupulously employ corruption, perjury, forgery, to compass

their ends. His letters show that the great difference between Asiatic and European morality was constantly in his thoughts.³⁸

Such thoughts *also* reappear in today's experience, whether of the caste system or of corruption or of Indian ethics. When the contemporary academics pontificate or the intelligentsia moralizes, the voice does indeed change but not the message: Indians are imbeciles and immoral.

IV

This message does indeed belong to the realm of possibility. It is logically possible that the Indian society and culture are immoral. It is also possible that Indians are intellectually deficient. However, paradoxically, these very same descriptions *also deny* this possibility but do so in a perverse way.

The notion of immorality could mean two things: either one violates some moral principle or one follows an immoral injunction. Keeping this in mind, and assuming that corruption is a socially successful strategy, let us notice that because the Indians choose and pursue this strategy, they have to think and act rationally. This is an obvious conclusion since it is rational to pursue a socially successful strategy. Because we are talking about corruption as a social phenomenon and not as isolated cases of human weakness, we need to ask questions about the conditions of its possibility and the conditions of its reproduction. The minimal requirement for both is that those who take the bribes do keep their word and deliver the goods. In the absence of legally enforceable contracts, corruption can flourish in a society only on condition that there is *impeccable integrity* among the corrupted. This integrity is of an 'impeccable' sort because (a) there are no other 'witnesses' to the act of corruption outside the participants and (b) there is no need or possibility for any kind of legal mechanism to enforce the 'agreement'. Corruption as a social phenomenon is possible if and only if both

parties impeccably observe the ethical rule of keeping the promises. That is, the so-called 'honour among thieves'³⁹ is an indispensable condition for corruption to become a widespread *social phenomenon*. In other words, an 'ethical integrity' of a *perverse sort* (among the members of a society) is a presupposition for a description that transforms an entire society into an association of immoral people.

What kind of perversity is involved? Such a people choose to obey the immoral obligations imposed by the social order that the caste system is alleged to be. Again, obedience *to obligations* tells us that these people are ethical as well. The Indians are immoral not because they violate moral obligations but because the obligations they obey are immoral in nature. The *perversity* is obvious: Indians are immoral because they consistently *obey* immoral *obligations*.

Such descriptions as those we have seen, then, carry two messages. There is a surface message that transforms Indians into imbeciles and immoral people. There is a deeper message that presupposes their rationality and ethical ability. Alternately put, the meta-message about the rationality and morality of a people contradicts the object-level message that says just the opposite. In other words, even though the message is that the Indians are intellectually deficient and immoral, the meta-message affirms that the opposite is the case. The confluence of these two messages does not carry any plausibility whatsoever.

Nevertheless, these descriptions appear 'empirically true' to those who reiterate them endlessly. Both Indian and Western thinkers unhesitatingly, if unreflectively, endorse them. In this sense, it must somehow appear 'plausible' to them. How can we make sense of a situation where an *inherently implausible* message (because it carries two contradictory messages simultaneously) assumes the status of an empirical truth?

To the students of history, the answer is obvious. It has to do with how these descriptions emerged in the first place and what happened to them subsequently.

Let us remember that the earliest descriptions of India were those that the travellers and the missionaries provided. They were framed within an explicit theological framework, namely that of Christianity. According to this framework, the heathen religions dominated the Indian culture. 'Heathendom' named the sway that the Devil held over people. Without the intervention and revelation of God, human beings were easy prey to the machinations of the Devil and his minions, and they were easily seduced away from worshipping the true God. In this process of seduction, the priests of the Devil played a major role: they were accountable for the ills of a people the way the Western culture is held accountable for the evils of the modern day world today. Indian religions were 'heathen' religions, the people worshipped the Devil, and the Brahman priests played a central role in the degeneration of religion. Because there is an intimate relation between 'being moral' and having the 'true religion', it was obvious that heathen religion implied the corruption of morals. Put succinctly: immorality always accompanied false religion.

Over a period of centuries, this theological framework used in the description of Indian society, her people and culture, solidified into a conviction that became a part of the commonsense in the West.⁴⁰ The possibility of proselytizing the Indians came from the same Bible: the very corruption of a people not only expresses the need but also indicates the possibility for conversion. In worshipping the Devil, human beings are expressing their hunger to worship the True God. Their straying from the true path indexes their ability to walk the same. These theological conclusions were part of the 'ethnographic descriptions' of India for centuries on end.

For the subsequent generations of intellectuals, these theological conclusions took the status of empirical truths and premises. The Indian culture and society of their day were obviously corrupt. However, this corruption also taught the truth that the Indians were capable of learning. That is, they could be educated and civilised. The 'civilizing mission' of the Western culture requires a literal interpretation, if we are to understand the liberal and Marx-

ist theorists of the earlier period. Centuries of such ethnographic descriptions of India schooled these generations. Their point of departure and their theoretical frameworks were built upon the conclusions arrived at by their previous generations.

Consequently, the civilizational superiority of the Western culture became their *premise*. In describing India, they appealed to their commonsense. Centuries of descriptive straightjacket forced them to select and present ‘facts’ in some particular way. Over time, these became the facts of our political and social sciences.

To the Christian missionary, it was obvious that the Devil and his minions or his ‘priesthood’ (viz., the Brahmins) misguided the Indians. If one was ‘secular’, one merely secularised these explanations and sought the cause in either the ‘evil conspiracy’ of the Brahmins and/or in the civilizational inferiority of India. Consequently, it was the task of the Christian West to bring either the true religion, or civilization or both to the shores of India. Both these ‘explanations’, whether religious or secularized religious, were the presuppositions and not the results of any ‘scientific’ (or otherwise) study of Indian civilization and culture. To the Christians, the truth and the concomitant superiority of their religion were contained in the Bible; to those who secularized this belief, this truth was ‘borne’ out by the event of colonisation. In short, its familiarity masks the inherent implausibility of the message. Further, the way the paradox is resolved is also very familiar: the very corruption of Indian ethics indexes the ability of the Indians to learn, the way their seduction by the Devil expresses their hunger to worship the true God.

When such presuppositions direct the framing of a description, the results are predetermined. The story confirms what one already knew. This is what the logicians call *petitio principii*: the fallacy of assuming the truth of what one wants to prove.

In this sense, this ‘truth’ about the ‘White Man’s Burden’ underpins, sustains and confirms both the British descriptions of India and the contemporary discourses about India, whether in India or in the West. The criticisms of the kind we read, whether on caste or

on corruption, are moral in nature. Without exception, they make use of the western normative ethics for their moral criticisms. However, doing so *necessarily* involves making *factual* claims about the absence of ethical thinking in the Indian traditions. One cannot escape this necessity by any kind of protest because the kind of necessity involved is *logical* in nature. Anyone who formulates *moral* criticisms of caste and corruption is *logically compelled* to deny the presence of 'morality' in the Indian traditions. This is what the British said about India. This is what the Indians believe to be true. This is how Indians experience themselves and their culture.

Colonial Consciousness

This then is colonial consciousness. It is not merely the belief in the civilizational superiority of one particular civilization. It is also a belief that functions both as a cognitive premise (whether as a suppressed premise or as an explicit one) and as a logical conclusion of the descriptions of the colonised and, as such, is a massive exercise in *petitio principii*. *Colonialism involves creating and sustaining such a consciousness.*

The European culture mapped aspects of the Indian culture on to itself in order to understand and explain the latter. This is an anthropological *trivium*. However, to the colonial consciousness, the theoretical explanations are integral parts of the framework of civilizational superiority.

The first striking thing about these purported explanations (be they about caste, corruption or ethics) is that they trivialize the experiences. By virtue of this, experiences are transformed. What does the transformation consist of? Such explanations redescribe experiences by twisting or distorting them. By doing so, they deny experiences. What happens when the experiences are trivialized, distorted, and then denied? They also deny access to one's own experiences.

Who or what is denying the access to one's own experience? It is not a theory, but a theorizing of the experience of another culture. One's experiences are being trivialized, denied, distorted and made inaccessible by someone else's experience of the world.

In that case, colonialism is not merely a process of occupying lands and extracting revenues. It is not a question of encouraging the colonized to ape the Western countries in trying to be like them. It is not even about colonizing the imaginations of a people by making them dream that they too will become 'modern', developed and sophisticated. It goes deeper. Colonialism denies the colonized peoples and cultures their own experiences; it makes them aliens to themselves; it actively prevents descriptions of their own experiences except in terms defined by the colonizers. This situation makes colonialism intrinsically immoral. The colonial consciousness is not only an expression of the phenomenon that colonialism is but also its integral part. In that case, colonial consciousness itself becomes immoral. Colonialism is also immoral because it creates an immoral consciousness.

V

Colonialism as an Educational Project

The above characterisation of colonialism requires some qualifications, lest it appears as a form of 'nativism', i.e., a celebration and glorification of things native. Let us provide that by noticing that many earlier writers looked at colonialism as an educational project. Why and what did they see in colonialism that they perceived a pedagogical project or process in it?

Let us begin by specifying what education does. It modifies experience by introducing certain frameworks for description. These frameworks either form experiences or introduce modifications in such a way that the earlier experiences are no longer accessible to the experiencing subject. The early experience of a child, as shaped by the naïve physics or naïve biology, is no longer accessible to it as it grows old and learns physics and biology in the

classroom. This scientific knowledge shapes or forms its subsequent experiences of the world.

In a way similar to the educational process, colonialism comes between the colonised and his experience of the world. The terms of description of the coloniser intervenes and directs the reflections of the colonised about his experiences. In this sense, *structurally speaking*, colonialism *resembles* the process of education. Apart from the structural similarity between these two processes, education and colonialism, there is an additional reason why many described colonialism as an educational project. As we have already seen, the belief in the civilizational superiority contains two messages: an object-level claim about the cretinism and the immorality of the colonised and a meta-message that affirms their ability *to learn*. Consequently, it is understandable why many from the earlier generations saw colonialism as a pedagogical process that enabled the natives to learn.

However, what distinguishes education from colonialism is the nature of the framework that intervenes between experience and its articulation. In an educational process, the framework is justified and justifiable on cognitive grounds alone. The criteria of rationality, which evolves over time, allow us to make the best choices at any give moment regarding education. In this sense, what makes colonialism immoral is not just the fact that it robs people of their experience of the world but that it does so using the framework that is unjustified and unjustifiable.

Furthermore, colonialism does not introduce such a framework explicitly. It creates such a framework over a period in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Unlike the education process, there are no criteria of rationality using which one might modify the framework. Therefore, not only does the coloniser *impose* such a framework, he also needs to sustain it in a non-rational way. Consequently, the imposition and sustenance of such cognitive intermediaries between the colonised and their experience of the world requires resorting to *violence*. This tells us why colonialism is additionally immoral: it denies the colonised their experience

of the world by imposing unjustifiable frameworks of description through violence. To rob human beings of their own experiences of the world in this way is not to treat them as human beings. Such a phenomenon contravenes all notions of agency, whether moral or otherwise. This makes colonialism immoral.

Discussions about the immorality of colonialism have not progressed much beyond an appeal to some form of utilitarian calculus: the positive as against the negative effects of colonialism upon the colonised.⁴¹ Such discussions are neither satisfying nor convincing given the absence of anything that remotely resembles an acceptable utilitarian calculus. In the characterisation we have provided, we can see why colonialism is intrinsically immoral. It actively prevents the colonised from accessing their own experience of the world by using force and violence.

Freedom from such a framework, the freedom to access one's own experience of the world, requires displacing the colonial framework. However, such a displacement cannot occur unless one becomes aware that it is preventing one from accessing one's experience. Such awareness comes through a pedagogical process; it requires education. One has to become critical of the colonial consciousness, and this involves rational scrutiny of the nature of the imposed framework. In doing so, one is forced, as it were, to examine the nature of the native framework critically as well. Such an educational process has two implications, which are of some importance to our purposes.

Firstly, one cannot combat colonialism through violence; only non-violent attempts to access one's experience can 'fight' colonialism. In this sense, the only appropriate resistance to colonialism can be a (non-violent) moral and pedagogical act. Secondly, one cannot make a naïve return and embrace the displaced native framework. The transformed nature of one's experience, as well as the necessity to reflect critically both upon nature of the native framework and the fact of its displacement, rule out a naïve return to a 'pre-colonial' world. It is thus that colonialism forever alters the social and cultural world of the colonised.

The Coloniser and the Colonised

Colonialism, however, requires *collusion* between the two parties: the coloniser and the colonised. In that case, to the extent it makes sense to speak of moral responsibilities for the event, it appears as though both are responsible. However, such a stance is likely to raise hackles. How could one suggest that the victim of a crime is morally culpable as well? Is the raped guilty of the act or just its victim?

This is not a good analogy because we are suggesting something different. We would like to say that the coloniser and the colonised are morally responsible, but *in two different ways*. The coloniser is responsible for *actively initiating* the process that prevents people from accessing their own experiences. The colonised is morally responsible for *propagating* and *perpetuating* the same process; but he does that in a different timeframe.

To the students of political history, it is obvious how the coloniser is morally responsible: he imposes his assumptions on the colonised, and by actively inserting these between the colonised and their experiences, he prevents the latter from accessing their own experiences. It is an active insertion by the coloniser because he has to displace the native frameworks forcibly and, therefore, through violence. It is also active because the displacement of one framework by the other does not take place on cognitive grounds and on cognitive merits, but occurs through force and implemented through coercion.

Colonial consciousness does not just involve subscribing to the truth of an isolated statement about civilizational superiority. Rather, it requires commitment to a theoretical framework that structures how one experiences the social and cultural world. Such a framework intervenes between oneself and one's experience, and forms one's understanding and articulation of what one sees in the world. To get a flavour of the way this framework functions, consider *how* Sir Babington Macaulay defends the need for introducing the English education system in India.

It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information that has been collected to form all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy the relative position of these two nations is nearly the same ...

The question before us is merely whether ... we shall teach languages [Sanskrit and Arabic] in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronize true philosophy and sound history, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier ... astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English public school ... history, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long ... and geography, made up of seas of treacle and butter.⁴²

Underlying this defence of a particular education system is a framework that weighs not just the relative merits of two educational systems but also the two civilizations in an absolute way. The colonial consciousness imbibes *this framework* about civilizational superiority. This framework filters and articulates the experience of the world.

Consequently, the notion of ‘internalisation’ of the coloniser by the colonised is crucial to get a grasp on the cultural psychology of the colonised, but we will focus purely on the relevant cognitive aspects. The framework that the colonised insert generates a set of psychological attitudes and feelings,⁴³ which are required to keep it in place: the feeling of shame about their own culture, the conviction that they are backward, the desire to learn from the coloniser, etc., are fundamental in this regard. Equally important is the cognitive form in which the coloniser has described the colonised. It has the appearance of a ‘scien-

tific' theory, adorned with plausible-looking 'explanations' surrounded by the fact of colonisation itself. Colonisation functions as the *evidence* for the explanation about the backwardness of these societies and cultures. The differences between the cultures are theorised as lacunae; the *differentia specifica* of the Western society and culture become the *summum* of human achievement. The colonised take over these theories and their tropes⁴⁴ and adorn them endlessly with details. The Indian intellectuals and reformers enthusiastically embrace the criticism of the 'Brahman' priesthood, which was a reformulation of the Protestant criticism of the Catholic Christianity, as a 'scientific' criticism of the 'caste system'.⁴⁵ How is it possible to have a firm moral opinion on the caste system, when no-one understands what that system is? This question hardly troubled the British; it hardly troubles the Indian intellectuals. While it made sense for the Western theorists to speak of the need for a secular state because of their specific histories, how could one simply take over the terms of the debate and 'apply' them in India? The contemporary discussions on 'secularism' miss their point and purpose, but that does not seem to distract the proponents in the debate.⁴⁶ The most basic cognitive weakness in the venture is that the colonised have little or no understanding of the relation between the Western theories and the culture of their origin. As indicated already, the Western cultural experience of India has assumed the status of a 'scientific framework' to describe Indian culture and society. The colonised are morally culpable because they propagate and sustain a framework, which prevents them from accessing their own experiences.

In this process, one *accepts* that the *European cultural experience* of India is the 'scientific' framework for the Indians to understand their own culture. However, this very acceptance prevents them from accessing their own culture and experience. Consequently, they are unable to either articulate or understand their own experiences. They deny their experiences while futilely busy trying to make alien experiences their own.

The hybridity of the Colonized

Sociologists and anthropologists have often spoken of ‘syncretism’ – the evolution of mingled cultures from two or more parent cultures – when referring to the phenomenon of mixed cultures. In postcolonial studies, however, one uses the term ‘hybridity’ while referring to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation”.⁴⁷ Ashcroft suggests that “hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen as the characteristic feature and contribution of the post-colonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary categories of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth”.⁴⁸

The term ‘hybridity’ has been most recently associated with Homi Bhabha.⁴⁹ By emphasizing the interdependence of the coloniser and the colonised, he tries to disclose the contradictions inherent in the colonial discourse. It also highlights the colonizer’s *ambivalence* regarding his position towards the colonized ‘Other’. He sees hybridity as a transgressive act, which challenges the colonizers’ authority, values and representations, and thereby it constitutes an act of self-empowerment and defiance. This ‘mimicry’ disrupts the colonial discourse by doubling it. Hybridity, Bhabha argues, subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures; it is an act of self-empowerment by the colonized within the framework of colonial power. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the entry of the formerly excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse. The dominant culture is contaminated by the linguistic and racial differences of the native self. Hybridity can thus be seen, in Bhabha’s interpretation, as a counter-narrative, a critique of the canon and its exclusion of other narratives. In other words, the ‘resistance’ of the colonised takes the form of ‘mimicry’. The colonised imitates the colonizer and thus challenges the authority of the coloniser. However, Bhabha focuses his attention only on the impact of the mimicry of the colonized upon the colonizer. What additional things could we say if look at the colonised assuming that he is a ‘mimic-man’?

If the colonised is expressing his 'resistance' through imitation, it follows logically that this 'mimicry' is *not authentic*. Imitation is the 'camouflage' (Bhabha draws upon Lacan here) that hides his true intention, which is to express resistance. He needs to hide it, furthermore, because he is unable to express it openly. This inability, however, is *moral* in nature: he does not have the moral courage to express his resistance openly but needs the act of imitation as a subterfuge. He is, in short, *a moral coward* as well. In other words, there is duplicity, deceit and cowardice involved *even* in the process of imitation. Writing such a resistance into the heart of the colonised is to write *immorality into his core* and transform him into a fundamentally inauthentic and unethical being. Is this not what the coloniser also said? The native is not to be trusted under any circumstance, including and especially when he tries to imitate the master.

Such logic also provides us with a psychological profile for the 'mimic-men'. How does inauthenticity and immorality constitute the core of the 'hybrid'? The 'camouflage' that Bhabha talks about is either 'natural' (the way the chameleon naturally disguises itself) or it covers up the 'something else' in the colonized. However, Bhabha conceives 'hybridity' as the contrast set for 'essentialism'. Consequently, there is nothing else (the 'true' or the 'essential' colonized) to contrast with the 'camouflage'. The hybrid functions by *disguising his intention*: it is 'natural' for the hybrid and the 'mimic-man' to be inauthentic and immoral. It is 'natural' not in the sense that it is a biologically acquired property through the mechanism of natural selection but a socially learned one. The 'mimic-men' learn that it pays to indulge in 'mimicry'.

Following Homi Bhabha's logic, the 'hybrid' is not only inauthentic and immoral, but also a voyeur. That is to say, the "mimic-men" are not able to reflect on their experiences; typical of these hybrids and "mimic-men" is their inability to access their own experience. When we say 'their own', we do not suggest anything more than the following: typical of the hybrid is his inability to access his experience. They continue with their mimicry and

act as though they are still the colonized. Even when the hybrids become the ‘dominant culture’, they are unable to unlearn what they learnt when being colonized. Instead, they continue with the same practice that paid dividends once. In other words, he is a voyeur, someone who gets his kicks by trying, futilely and perversely, to make someone else’s experience his own. That is, he simply assumes *as true* that the western cultural experience is the only framework available to formulate the problems facing the Indian culture; assumes as true that the western cultural experience is also his experience of his culture. *When he ‘looks’ at his culture he merely sees a variant of the western culture.* Colonisation creates *generations* of such hybrids. In their turn, the hybrids breed to bring forth their look-alikes.

This is what happens when the “mimic-men” breed and branch. They not only breed more hybrids but, in the process, also conjure forth their opponents. Such men, according to Bhabha’s own logic, have inauthenticity and immorality inscribed in their hearts. They do indeed mimic the west: inanely, incessantly, thoughtlessly and immorally.

These reflections tell us not to use ‘hybridization’ as a catchall phrase. It is trivially true that human cultures have evolved in mutual interaction. There is nothing gained by saying that all cultures in the world are ‘hybrid’ in nature. If we make such a statement, then we are required to distinguish between *different kinds of hybridity*: the hybridity of the contemporary western culture is different from the hybridity of post-independent India. However, once we say this, we also say that boundaries are needed. One might want to ‘wish away the boundaries’ the way Nederveen Pieterse wants to.⁵⁰ One can do so only if one does not realize that all we get is an amorphous whole, if all boundaries are done away with.

Post-colonial thought, as a genre of thinking, becomes ethically suspect. It celebrates ‘hybridity’ by transforming the colonized into an immoral creature. ‘Subversion’ becomes a legitimate strategy because of the nature of colonial principle of exclusion. Even if we assume that such a principle is immoral, what moral justification is there for using ‘forgery’ and ‘mimicry’ as ‘subversive’ strategies? The only justification we can think of is this: the colo-

nized are justified in their immorality because the colonizers are immoral. That is to say, the immorality of the other becomes a justification for one's own immorality. Apart from implicitly defending this principle, the post-colonial thinkers go further: while the immorality of the 'colonizer' lies in the principles and the nature of his regime, the immorality of the colonized becomes his 'ontological property'. Let us put this conclusion in the starkest of terms: *the colonized people are immoral creatures, whereas what is immoral about colonialism is its regime.* The post-colonial thought endorses what the colonizer said about the colonized; only it now tries to 'justify' this description. Both the colonials and the post-colonials agree that the Indians are immoral and untrustworthy. One calls it 'immoral' and criticizes it; the other calls it 'subversive' and celebrates it. One criticizes immorality and the other justifies it. Both, however, accept the colonial descriptions of the colonized. This precisely is what colonial consciousness all about. The post-colonial thinkers of today, it appears, are standing in for the masters from yesterday.

Colonialism and its Strength

We can also appreciate the truth in the perception that colonialism expresses the 'strength' of the coloniser, if we keep the structural similarity between colonialism and education in mind. It is a contest between two frameworks, which are used to access and describe experience: the colonial framework and those of the colonised. Even though one has not displaced the other because of cognitive superiority, the fact of displacement remains. If one abstracts the *process and nature* of such a displacement from the event, but merely looks at the result instead, the conclusion is anything but startling: colonialism has indeed dislodged the native frameworks. In a contest between 'theories', one has won albeit not on cognitive grounds. However, if one merely focuses on the victor and calls the other vanquished then, indeed, colonialism indexes the 'weakness' of the native framework.

In sum, there are several advantages to our proposal. It is able to capture the truth in several perceptions while showing us where they go wrong. It is able to develop the beginning of an ethical critique of colonialism while indicating that the lines of responsibility go both ways. Finally, it is able to do all these without appealing to *ad hoc* hypotheses.

Conclusion

We can now appreciate what colonialism is, and how it generates and sustains colonial consciousness. The framework about the civilizational superiority comes between the colonised and his experience of the world, a framework shared by the coloniser. These characterizations help us grasp some of the attitudes of the thinkers from yesteryears, while appreciating where they went wrong. They also tell us that these attitudes have not disappeared but continue to guide theorising in an implicit way.

¹ See Ronald J. Horvath, "A Definition of Colonialism." *Current Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1972): 45-57 ; Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997); and the preface to Melvin Page and Penny Sonnenburg, Eds., *Colonialism: An International Social, Cultural and Political Encyclopedia*. (California: ABC-Clio, Inc., 2003). David Washbrook in Sugata Bose, "Post-Colonial Histories of South Asia: Some Reflections," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38(2003), pp. 133-146, pp. 135-6. Definitions of the term often focus on the contingent circumstances rather than the nature of the phenomenon, e.g., "the imposition of white rule on alien peoples inhabiting lands separated by salt water from the imperial centre." Rupert Emerson, "Colonialism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 4(1969), p. 3.

² For overviews of the different approaches to colonialism, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Cal.: University of California Press, 2005); Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Cal.: University of California Press, 1997), 1-57.

³ Barbara Arneil, "Trade, Plantation, and Property: John Locke and the Economic Defense of Colonialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55(1994), pp. 591-609; Shlomo Avineri, ed., *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: India in British Liberal Thought* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴ As Rupert Emerson noted in the late 1960s: "In the past, if colonialism was not praised or at least indifferently accepted as a fact of nature, the attack was not ordinarily directed against it as an institution but against particular abuses or practices. Now the entire range of colonialism is condemned out of hand." The Bandung Conference of 1955 laid down that "colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should speedily be brought to an end." Emerson, "Colonialism," p. 4.

⁵ For interesting examples see Alice L. Conklin, "Colonialism and Human Rights, A Contradiction in Terms? The Case of France and West Africa, 1895-1914," *The American Historical Review* 103(1998), pp. 419-442. Cooper insinuates that one should not assume that "there is an essence of being colonized independent of what anybody did in a colony" (Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 5). However, in order for us to recognize a phenomenon like colonialism in different parts of the world, this should have some common pattern or structure. To criticize the immoral nature of this phenomenon, one cannot just criticize what anybody did in a colony: some colonial officials abused their wives in the colonies, which was surely immoral, but not related to the nature of colonialism. In other words, there should be a link between the actions in question and the structure of colonialism. Otherwise there is no way of being sure that what anybody did in a colony was also part of colonialism.

⁶ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁷ Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses on Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁸ Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

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