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1 Postcolonial Critique of Reason *Spivak between Kant and Matilal**

The paper ponders the location of Gayatri Spivak in the discursive space between Kant and Bimal K. Matilal (but she is also dislocated by her own enactments, disavowals). So it wonders what a postcolonial critique of reason would look like. In the chapter on philosophy, Spivak (1999) develops a sustained critique of just this kind by decoding the works of the 'Three Wise Men of Continental Europe' (Kant, Hegel, Marx), pointing, via the European impact on the Third World, to the ultimate 'foreclosure: [in the fashion of] the native informant'. But the paper detects another triangular imaginary of reason—this time without an apex, and with limited strategies, each deconstructing and challenging the other. Kant is thus important in spite of his own cosmopolitheia, Matilal for his rational realism of 'moral love'. What both fell short of was a genuine critique of the rational, and therefore also of one of its unfortunate beneficiaries, the postcolonial 'informant'; and this critique is Spivak's 'gift'.

I

I take it that the *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* combines a double move and forges a dialectic of two distinct projects, one regarding the critique of reason and the other a critique of postcolonialism,

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each checking the other. Reason stands its ground, but only just; postcolonialism, or, better, postcoloniality as a discourse and a genre of postcolonial modernity, fares no better. In fact, the argument is that there has been a flow-over—a complicitous link between European ethico-political tracts and what passes today as postcolonial discourse. Kant's puritan rationalism (from the theoretical legislation of the understanding in the first *Critique*,¹ the practical legislation of reason in the second *Critique*, through to the teleological and super-sensible judgement of the third *Critique*), along with Hegel's culture of reason, are being interrogated as precursors to the imperial (exclusive-inclusive) judgement and mirror of alterity.

Kant is bent on forging a decisive rupture between 'having feeling' and what it takes to make moral and aesthetic (sublime) judgements (which, in turn, help the agent will an action or 'pleasure' into life). Spivak captures this 'foreclosure' perspicuously in this sentence: 'The raw man has not yet achieved or does not possess a subject whose *Anlage* or programming includes the structure of feeling for the moral';² he has not even fallen between the wedges of the *Critiques* (as the under-caste in an hierarchized order might be thought to be; he is not yet ready to be 'cooked'³ by culture). Would it be that the moral incentive of pure practical reason, that gives us moral laws, is forever debarred to them, and also to their gods/goddesses?

It should be said, however, that Kant, to his philosophical credit, did reconcile himself to the possibilities of native Australian or Fuegian and hunter people, such as Hottentots, the Tungusi or most of the American Indian natives, East Indians, Chinese and Japanese, being gradually drawn into the cosmopolitan network through engagement in trade, cultural exchange and even friendly skirmishes with neighbouring territories. Kant chides the 'inhospitableness' of seafaring traders and colonial administrators alike when confronted by natives in their own territories: their conduct is contrary to natural right. The authorization of a foreign newcomer does not extend beyond the search for commerce with the inhabitants. In other words, while hospitality is a right of the foreigner and a duty of the inhabitant, it is also a duty of the

cosmopolitan to respect the right of the inhabitant to the lawful possession of *his* goods and territory, for only through such commercial relations will all people be eventually drawn closer to a cosmopolitan constitution.⁴ The doctrine of ‘native right’ if heeded would have protected the Aboriginal Australians from being declared non-existent in their own land—by the Common Law doctrine of *terra nullius*, as happened through the colonial lens informed by John Locke’s dictum of ‘no-labour no-property’.⁵ Kant rebuked this in his cosmopolitheia, even though this is not quite the reflective Kant of the *Critiques*.⁶

II

This line of interrogation is painstakingly and meticulously carried out by Spivak in her opening chapter on ‘Philosophy’ (to which alone my remarks must remain confined). The postcolonial discontent with the construction of reason, to a certain extent, is taken as the prior step in the longer journey of questioning a certain type of ‘postcolonial reason’ that has emerged, not necessarily from the ashes of the prior *destruktion* (in the Nietzschean-Heideggerean sense) of the purer logical metaphysics of reason. But it has arisen from the supposed vanquishing of the entire orientalist-colonial enterprise, and the preoccupations with the innocence of the colonized, and with rampant nationalism, the ruse of the nation-state, class-consciousness (at the expense of caste and other internal differentiations), and hybridity. This latter type of narrowly structured critique is what postcoloniality does, and does rather well, much of the time. The analogy here is with the rise of *historical reason*—for instance, in Dilthey’s work—which poised itself against the ahistorical, abstract and categorical, that is, unrelativized universalism, deaf to the existential, embodied and broader experiential movements of lived history. But soon enough an over-nuanced Hegelian noumenology of reason in history led to historicism, a totalizing grand narrative born of the historicization of reason, or the reading of an inexorable transcendental telos in the march and productions of history. It took a Marx to stand Hegel on his head and invert the order, although the reified

Marxian categories of class and social structures have tended to abet rather than subvert the hegemonic colonial theories of global modernity. Marxist historians have been no less guilty of many of the historicist assumptions they set out to critique.

Perhaps, and I think this is the central argument of the chapter in question, the critiques and intervention of postcolonial reason in due course overturn the noble intentionality born of insufferable colonial conditions and help subvert the originary impulse, with a view to opportunistically mining a cultural identity, producing a discourse of reified ethnicity and ethics, and indeed triggering the ultimate 'foreclosure: [in the fashion of] the native informant', in the many incarnations. Four centuries of European impact on the subcontinent, in complicity with the 'Three Wise Men of Continental Europe', have prepared this ambiguous but unstable space. And as Spivak candidly notes, this 'estrangement and foreclosure' are now being relayed as varieties of 'fundamentalism', a 'return of the repressed', noting here, as a prime instance or suspect, the uncritical Northern enthusiasm for the Third World 'to speak up as an authentic ethnic fully representative of his or her tradition'.⁷

Of course, this is not the first time that we hear of such damning critique and routing of postcolonial pioneers: criticisms have been mounting from different quarters, from writers as diverse as Ashis Nandy (with his most powerful 1983 assault, *The Intimate Enemy*), McClintock (1992), Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (1997), O'Hanlon and Washbrook (1992), joined recently by Dirlik (1997), Figueira (2000), Yadav (2000)⁸ and others. What they have in common is their patent discontent with the tendency of the postcolonial discourse and its harbingers to exploit the self-positioned-pretence status of marginalization, identification with the colonized and oppressed, and retreat into a rarefied form of postmodern abstraction. This tendency has been marked mostly in First World professional networks of cultural theorists and unfortunate readers, while remaining disengaged from challenging issues of neocolonialism, the emergence of global capitalism, and the continuing problems of the Third World social, political and cultural subordination.⁹ The 'Third World' is no uniformly monolithic territory in which

the oppression of the indigenous people, gender subjugation, and the production of dominant local colonial subjects (or today's neocolonialists) have been the same everywhere, and whose remnants now float about transmigratorily in ethnic and minority clusters in the First and Second Worlds. If the celebrated 'postcolonial critics' have not occupied the empty space vacated by the masters, then they have created new space elsewhere, in the art of 'ideological posturing, reifying critical jargon, and strategies of self-representation'.¹⁰

Indeed, at least two or three among these writers have not been sparing of Professor Spivak's apparently co-opting the voice of the 'theoretically mute subaltern' and (with Said) at playing 'victimization by proxy',¹¹ if not engaging in a wilful academic conspiracy to re-assert with aplomb Brahmanical (Sanskritic) domination of the forever oppressed dalits, outcastes, yadavs, and tribal and aboriginal groups of India. Spivak can defend herself against these charges, if they are serious at all.

However, what I wish to highlight here is that in Spivak we have by far the most disarming and scholarly analysis tracing the conditions for the possibility of the much disparaged *postcolonial* rationalism emerging out of movements of thought, textured ideals, and cultural presuppositions that were being chiselled elsewhere and that had ostensibly little direct connection with the machinery of colonialism and the political subjugation of the 'other worlds'. Did Kant dirty his hand as a colonialist? Was Marx's critique of the 'Asiatic Modes of Production' ever used by the colonizers in the way that, let us say, James Mills' *History of British India* was? Or was Marx even writing history, or for whom, when he argued for the necessity of political economy?¹² And which company men read Hegel's triadic logic of 'Indeterminacy, Determinacy, and Self-Determination', mirroring the triadic structure of the 'Concept in Universality, Particularity, and Individuality' (*Philosophy of Right*) which became a basis for his commendation that the enslaved beauty of history, that is, India, with its treasure and wealth should surrender herself to the masters of history, to whit, to the English Lords, 'for it is a necessary fate of Asiatic Empires to be subjected to Europeans; and China will, someday or other, be obliged to

submit to this fate’?¹³ And yet these ideographs are not outside the formation of the postcolonial discourse—almost exactly as the alienated Marx jumps out of the *Verneinung* (appropriation by ‘denegation’) of Hegel.

Again, Spivak locates the attempted perspective of the ‘native informant’—undyingly reborn as the postcolonial critic—already at work in the morphology and philology of the Enlightenment. And here we are walked through Hegel’s library reading of the ultra-classical Hindu text, *Srimadbhagavadgita*, on which he penned a supplemental reading (as he was commenting on the translation issued in German by Humboldt) intended for his implied native informant. This latter ‘contemporary receiver’ may have taken another two hundred years to report back, but he did—in the many Indian ‘nationalist’ reproductions of the *Gita* and its a metonymically Hinduized ‘Hegel’ who is refracted into the colonial subject, as in the indigenous transcreations of Balgangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose, S. Radhakrishnan, Kosambi, following Sardesai and Bose (who substitute ‘Marx’ for the timely shift of the receivers to the lower strata, caste groupings of Indian society).¹⁴

III

Here enters Bimal Krishna Matilal, whose work in Indian philosophy and ethics is enlisted in dialectic tension with Spivak’s own reflections, especially in a deconstructive reading of the *Gita* and, through this, of the whole battery of fantasmatic reading of the philosophy—*darsana*—of India. Here is what Spivak notes about the late Spalding Professor in Oxford (who is otherwise better known for his work on the Indian school of realist logic and language, *Nyaya*, renowned for retooling ‘the science of reasoning’ in the classical Indian system): ‘Matilal’s work attempts ... to deconstruct the opposition between colonialists and nationalists, as well as between developmental realists and mystical culturalists, by pointing at what he perceived to be a “dissident voice” within the text. I must contrast this to my own position as well.’¹⁵ Spivak notes candidly that, in his disciplinary

approach, Matilal came increasingly under the spell and influence of Anglo-American analytical philosophers (Quine, Strawson, Williams, Nagel). This is largely true, even though, while remaining an avowed (navya-naïve) realist, much like the classical Buddhist thinker **Nagarjuna**, Matilal always veered towards a 'minimalist' or middle point, in ethics as in epistemology, to avoid the pitfalls of the extremist and absolutist positions. He was even attracted by the Buddhist rational dialectic of *prasaṅga* (*reductio*, a sort of precursor to scepticism and deconstruction alike).¹⁶ As to the 'dissident voice' in the text, as Spivak notes, Matilal locates it in the critical tradition within Brahmanical orthodoxy itself. But Matilal is not interested in the politics of identifying which particular caste, or class, or recalcitrant group this voice bellowed out from, and whether there might be a commensurable relationship between caste and *karma* (as Max Weber had come to believe in his detached study of India).¹⁷

Rather, Matilal draws out the unsparingly sharp arrow of rational criticism, as he finds it, running through the wisdom tradition of India, from classical antiquity to later *dharma* (moral-legal) and philosophical treatises. In a short but forceful essay titled, 'Dharma and rationality',¹⁸ the one-time student of Sanskrit *pandita* tradition in Calcutta illustrates, through stories and episodes from the Vedas, Upanisads, **Mahabharata** (in which the **Gita** is an epiphanic book) and the **Ramayana**, the linkage he sees between tradition and reflective philosophy—'the intellectual connection' as Amartya Sen puts it¹⁹—or simply '*dharma*-ethic and the search for a rational basis'. These latter comprise exegetical devices, rules, reflections and sustained arguments proffered as justification for certain courses of action over against other available choices, or prescriptions and imperatives, which are utilized to resolve moral dilemmas at the individual but also at wider social and cultural levels. It is the genius of Matilal that he could convert a rationalist to become a better linguistic and moral rationalist! But the point of this reiteration here about the pre-eminence of reason informed by perception and testimony in the (classical) Indian context, whether Hindu or Buddhist, is not really to boast that we (back in the hoary subcontinent) had 'our Kant' and 'our Hegel', and our

inbred rationalists aeons before civilization dawned in Europe (or America). It is more that even an inkling of this awareness, and how criticism might be effected from within the tradition, with virtues and values or resources for which colonial heritage is not the super-bazaar, is remote in the constitution of the postcolonial advocates.

To be sure, Matilal was troubled by the continuing domination of classical (Benthamite-Millian) Utilitarianism in western ethics and marketplace morality, which, ironically, had held sway in the postcolonial ('post-independent' is the only term we knew then) world at large: this accounted for the elite control of India's social goods, the low morale of its intelligentsia, and the corruption in modern Indian practices at all levels—he more than once opined.²⁰ Pluralistic ideals are not for him incompatible with rational decision-taking, and would be a sure antidote to the more monistic Utilitarianism.

I also seriously think that implicit in Matilal's reduction of the colonizer/nationalist, colonial/postcolonial dichotomy is the belief that the postcolonial scholar (writer and reader) barely makes it her or his task to go back further than the cartography of colonial history and experience in their search for other responses or models of communal harmony and alternative identities, as if the four centuries of a universalizing hegemony reduce into pale dimness some two millennia of richly diverse and pluralistic ethical and social explorations.²¹ 'Did Indians of the just bygone era, including Gandhi, produce any compelling texts or major ideas?'—as he cynically marvelled at modern South Asianists who studied everything from voluminous colonial census figures, imported theosophy, to popular celluloid frames from Bollywood. Like Kant and Hegel's 'mistaken' readings, postcolonial discourse runs the danger of misreading its own territory, and emulsifying itself into yet another master narrative.

Or consider another possibility. In conjoining postcoloniality with market-driven and consumerist irrationality, there is an inevitable compromise and complicitous partnership with the very discourse the displaced radicals were supposed to dislodge. It would be like returning to 'orientalist science' all over again,

except that this occurs after the supposed liberatory event. One other possibility is that we have not yet reached the articulateness, preciseness, clarity and grounding of postcolonial *reason* that we could, and ought to, by seizing the moment as did Kant and Dilthey and perhaps Habermas (with his tin-man of instrumental reason) in their own times; or the corollary, that we in the early twenty-first century are too late for the paradigms of reason visited in the far and near past, and too early for the new horizon of reason after postcolonialism and all other post-discourses; and hence the vanishing away of the present from under our gaze. This new possibility within the 'boundlessness' and 'bounty' of reason remains programmatic, and in order to, as it were, push it beyond its transcendental limits we may have to risk a journey further back than Kant, or Nagarjuna, and Matilal too, further than any of the critics may have dreamt of.

In conclusion then, on the one side, we have poised Kant, the father of speculative reason and of the conceptual conditions for the possibility of imperialism that affected colonialism as an anthropological reality. On the other side is poised Bimal K. Matilal, the Indian philosopher *par excellence*, whose early death prematurely set back the project of the possibility of reason that combined the best of the west's own discovery and journey into rationality and the negative logical dialectic alongside the promising supplement of moral reason in the epic *Mahabharata* and in the Buddha's noble questioning of the reward-centred Brahmanic sacrificial ethos. Both together would set aside the worst aspects and deleterious excesses of reason in taking wrong-headed turns in the east as in the west. Note that both speak from transcendental possibilities to application on the ground below (the sublime flight of the third *Critique* notwithstanding).

Now, I insist on locating Professor Spivak between Kant and Matilal. (But also, I suppose, dislocating by her own enactments, disavowals and reservations already noted.) What exactly do I mean? I, of course, do not mean location of her culture, or that there is a Kant-Matilal hybridity at work here, for that would be anathema. Rather, I think of it as a triangular imaginary of reason without an apex, and limit strategies, each deconstructing and

affirming the other. But again, why do I think Kant is important too, especially in Spivak's *Critique*? I wish simply to reiterate that, if Kant would say the project of culture (*Cultur*) is to initiate people into humanity, civil society, and faith, Matilal would reply that the European, by Kant's own cosmopolitheia and the *Srimadbhagavadgita*'s realism of 'moral love', has yet to be initiated.²² And a supplement to this: if Kant wants to set limits to reason and yet see it as free (the precondition for the well-being of the 'human race'), Matilal would beg to free the limits and allow reason some scope to develop itself in analytical and phenomenological spaces across the borders of culture, history, and moral pluralism, albeit moderated by applied concerns, but with neither a necessary moral author of the world supervening (but rather through 'exceptionalist regulator')²³ nor the objectively necessary point of view ('from nowhere'). **What** both fell short of was a genuine critique of the rational, and therefore also of one of its unfortunate beneficiaries, the postcolonial 'informant' (who is only a 'native by **proxy**').

NOTES

1. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press 1999), p. 10, for it is the ground that pure reason sets down in order for the operation of aesthetic and moral judgment.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

3. This is not a term Kant uses, but a metaphor that may have been suggested to her, as Spivak notes rhetorically in the footnote, from the Vedic idea of the higher priest caste cooking the world in/as sacrificial fire. *Ibid.*, p. 14n 21).

4. Immanuel Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace* [8: 359] and 'Public Right Section III. Cosmopolitan right' in *Metaphysics of Morals*, reproduced in Kant, *Practical Philosophy: The Cambridge Edition of Kant*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), see also p. 490. Kant is writing this around 1795 by which time the British East India Company had collapsed and the Home Office had moved to bring India under British sovereign rule. I have developed this mild-mannered defence of Kant elsewhere (Bilimoria 2002). The 'dogmatism' of *Perpetual Peace* aside, Rudolf A. Makkreel suggests that there is a forceful analogy

here with the limits to 'public rights' that Kant outlines in the *Critique of Practical Reason*; see Makkreel (1995: 123–37).

5. John Locke, 'True End of Civil Government', *Second Treatise of Government*, p. 113.

6. Purushottama Bilimoria, 'The Enlightenment Paradigm of Native Right and Forged Hybridity of Cultural Rights in British India', *South Pacific Journal of Philosophy and Culture* 5, 2002, pp. 6–49.

7. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 60; for the Lacanian-Freudian signification of 'Foreclosure', see Dina Al-Kassim's essay in this volume.

8. Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress', *Social Text* 31/32, 1992, pp. 84–97; Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan, 'The Third World academic in other places or, the postcolonial intellectual revisited', *Critical Inquiry* 23, 1997, pp. 596–615; Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbook, 'After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, 1992, pp. 141–67; Arif Dirlik, *Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (New York: Westview Press, 1997); Dorothy Figueira, 'The Profits of Postcolonialism' (review essay), *Comparative Literature* 50(3), 2000, pp. 246–54; Bibhuti S. Yadav, 'Mispredicated Identity and Postcolonial Discourse', *Sophia* 39(1), (2000), a dedicated symposium on 'subalternity', with response by Ken Surin.

9. Figueira, 'The Profits of Postcolonialism', pp. 248–52).

10. *Ibid.*

11. Figueira projects Deepika Bahri's trope of 'victims by proxy' damningly on Spivak and Said. *Ibid.*, p. 249).

12. 'These narratives—Kant's cosmopolitheia, Hegel's itinerary of the Idea, Marx's specialist homeopathy—neither inaugurated nor consolidated a specifically scholarly control of the matter of imperialism', in Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, pp. 8–9. See also Spivak's disagreement with Jameson on the precise reading of this supplement, and her complaint that, far from providing a theoretical explanatory model for the slow rise of capitalism in Asia, as Marxists scholars have often averred, the AMP should be the basis of critiques for creation of a universalized 'Asia' in the European concatenation. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–102.

13. Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* 1, 14: 179; and *Philosophy of Right*. Also cited in K.L. Mehta, 'Heidegger and Vedanta: reflections on a questionable theme', in Graham Parkes (ed.) *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, pp. 15–46..

14. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 50.

15. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 46.

16. For scholarly discussion of Matilal's interest and bibliography, see P. Bilimoria and J.N. Mohanty, *Relativism, Suffering and Beyond: Essays in*

Honour of Bimal K. Matilal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) and his own masterly work *Perception: An Essay in Indian Analytical Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

17. Max Weber, *The Religion of India* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press 1967, p. 144).

18. B.K. Matilal, 'Dharma and rationality', in Jonardon Ganeri (ed.) *The Collected Essays of Bimal Krishna Matilal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, ch. 5); see also his *Logical and Ethical Issues in Religious Belief* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1982), ch. 4.

19. Amartya Sen, 'Address', delivered on the occasion of a Commemoration of Bimal Krishna Matilal at All Souls College, Oxford, 6 June 1992.

20. Oxford notes, but there are suggestions in his writings as well; see editor's introduction to *Collected Essays* for references in the essays.

21. See last section, on pluralism, in 'Dharma and Rationality'.

22. A bit like the response Gandhi made to the question: 'What do you think of Western civilization?' 'I think it would be a good idea!'

23. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p. 58n71.



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