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The Ever Present „Other“

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There is no question that current debates concerning civilizational phenomena are playing on the background of Western modern modernization; some civilizations are regarded as engaged in efforts to extricate themselves from and even retard modernization – this would be the case with Mid-Eastern civilization (composed of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), while others are moving at full speed to catch up and even surpass the West and hence enter “world history” as equals – the cases of China and India. No doubt, in all cases there are admixtures of tradition and novelty, the latter being Western modernity while the former a search for roots in order to have a revolution that recoups the past. There are various ways that an invading power, including colonial ventures, attempt to legitimate their presence to themselves, to the colonised, and the ways that the colonised interpret and resist such legitimations. The essay is a comparative explication of such ways and their failures. The essay shows the modern Western colonization of the parts of Asia, specifically of India, and compare the ontological, metaphysical and cosmological contexts between the West and the East. Such comparisons will show to what extent and why the „other“ is always present and cannot be completely incorporated into the colonizing civilization.

Keywords: colonization, legitimation, comparative philosophies, religions and concepts of humanity; resistance, physical destruction, cultural destruction.

Introduction

It is too late to start with some beginning of a “pure” civilization in order to compare it to other civilizations, specifically in light of colonial and post-colonial discourses. But what can be done is to accept contemporary intersection of discourses and through them to disclose the differences in ontological and metaphysical – even cosmological – understanding. This should account why colonialisms failed to subjugate the “other” and the ways the other became “located” in colonial contexts but without complete success. Such lack of success will be seen

in contemporary efforts by the others to reclaim their traditions by disclosing their roots in a very different ontological and cosmological consciousness. Given this requirement, the methodological problematic facing civilizational and cultural researches is very old and very recent. It seems that any method we propose will have to belong to a specific culture and therefore could not be applicable to other cultures. If we are shaped by our own claim of cultural immersion that defines everything, even the method, and at the same time claim that the method is universal, i.e. unbound by culture, then our claim is

a contradiction. In addition, such a thesis does not allow the researcher to “get out” of her own culture to see its symbolic designs and their meaning unless such a researcher has a broader awareness - which is her civilization. (Mickunas, 2019).

Given this, there might be a methodology available through the currently unavoidable phenomena of much broader and more pervasive civilizational awareness: current civilizations intersect one another at various levels, making visible what each cultural mode of expression traces of the other at the level of civilization. This is to say, we are no longer capable of being restricted to one civilization since we have already incorporated the cultural means of the others that trace their civilizational consciousness. In this sense, we do not deny that we belong to a culture, but we also recognize that cultures belong to civilizations and their intersections. Hence, we shall not borrow a method from any civilization nor from the cultures of civilizations. Due to the current global interconnections the cultures already trace their own and different civilizations - in transition. Whether we do or do not accept theoretically our own inherence in a culture, we find ourselves in-between civilizations. This means that the self constitution of awareness of current civilizations, even if not recognized positionally, is in-between, in transition. Whether one belongs to Mid-Eastern, Greco-Roman, Mayan, Chinese or Indian civilization, one has already recognized, at the cultural level, ones being in transition between them. This transition, and at times confrontation, is currently the unavoidable methodological consciousness. Any other

way would be inadequate with respect to the phenomena of our current global encounters. The focus must be on modes of awareness in order to note how such modes either deny or attempt to subsume the other modes, and how both attempts fail, leading to different understandings and inevitable mixtures with the “others”. (Mickunas, 2002).

In order to understand such differences and mixtures, it is advisable to discover the broadest, and most pervasive compositions that, as modes of awareness, are traceable in and through cultural symbolic designs, and social relationships. Such compositions will comprise civilizational architectonic to the extent that the latter cannot be denied without circularity; in its very denial, it will affirm itself. Such architectonic, as will be seen, cannot be a generalization from cultural or social parts, since these, in their multiplicities and even oppositions, cannot be understood in any sensible way within their own parameters. This is to say, they trace their sense from a more pervasive composition of modes of awareness - the architectonic of a given civilization. There are symbolic deviations from a given architectonic, but precisely such deviations indicate its significance. Whether members of societies or cultures think of their civilizational architectonic or not is irrelevant. They, nonetheless, adhere to its modes of awareness. We must note, at the outset, that “modes of awareness” at the most basic level are coextensive with “civilizational architectonic.” In other words, whether we speak of civilizational formations as constituting the ways that cultures and societies are organized, or whether we speak of transcendental

awareness, we are saying the same thing. Such architectonic is, in all cases, the way the cosmos and reality are understood and taken for granted. This understanding pervades and is expressed through cultural symbols. (Mickunas, 2002)

Contexts of Interpretation

Sociologists, specifically those who have historical orientation, are prone to claims that the current upsurge of search for national or even ethnic identities, are temporary. Nationalities that claim to be based on ethnicity, are a recent product of the modern West and, as all other temporal entities, are doomed to vanish. Yet such claims fail to account for the surge of nationalisms and their insistence on reclaiming their own identities. No doubt that the sociological understanding is relevant, but only at a surface level. After all, such a search for identity is not possible without a more fundamental level of civilizations such that each is recognizable in its identity only in relation to and different from others. Even such notions as “nationalism” or “ethnicity”, used in the West by sociologists and anthropologists, might be an interpretation within modern West. In brief, a specific civilization contains various nationalities and ethnic groups in a way that both are aspects of one civilization and can be understood within its context. This then requires the placement into civilizational context even the Western secular civilization with its scientific and political enlightenments as one among other civilizations. No theory based on this civilization can be privileged as a standard for the others. Thus one major

caution: any attempt to “export” a civilization by any means would be a presumption that only “we” know how the rest of the world should live. Even the much lauded “modernization” and even the more famous “postmodernism” should not be given any precedence, since they might be only one type of modernization and quite different from other types. There are good indications to support this position. In China, Confucian teachings were modernizing and Taoism was its postmodernity; Islam was modernizing, and Sufism was its inherent postmodernism. Each modernization claims to have found some universal set of standards which include all humanity: thus modern West proposes “universal human rights”, based on universal humanism and secularism, Islam offers universal Sharia under one Calif, each having their own postmodern extensions. In brief, each civilization “fractures” into various cultures which become symbolic designs tracing the presence of a more basic awareness: civilization. (Mickunas, 2012).

As mentioned above, a civilization can be invaded leading to a question: what becomes of the defeated tradition?. Here, it is necessary to explicate the various modes of invading the “other” and the modes of “legitimation” of it – even if such modes do not involve colonialism. One form of such an invasion is “glory” and might involve a destruction of the other. The “glory” might be used to legitimate a conquest of others, since the request for conquest is done “for the greater glory of god”. We shall see such legitimation by glory in major colonial ventures. Meanwhile, there is a death of a tradition by violence: one culture conquers

another and suppresses it completely, specifically if the conquering culture has a monopoly of text production. One example is what happened to Medetiranen culture after Doric invasion. Worldviews, values, truths here belong to the sphere of myths. What we know about the old culture comes from archeology, such as the palaces of Crete or the ruins of Troy. But the contents of their way of life are given us in Greek mythology. We have to guess, surmise, infer by indirection to get some diffused notion of the *chthonic* goddesses and gods. The very term *chthonic* is already a demeaning word: goddesses and gods of the dead, of the world of shades, of the underworld. It is a world that we can imagine, dream about, but not access. The maternal, as the underworld, is regarded here, as conquered. It lives in shapes of monsters and Minotaurs. This life of the other, nonetheless, exercises a power that the conquering tradition cannot help but borrow in order to preserve its own vitality. This borrowing appears in numerous revitalizing rituals, wherein the conquering tradition must increase and invest energies to maintain the vigilance against those powerful foes, the demons to be suppressed, expiated, and yet demons that inhabit every image and dominate the recesses of the psyche. We shall see such demeaning in modern colonization by the West of the others, such as India, or Meso-America. In the latter case, the texts and icons of this civilization were burned and destroyed, and what we know of it, was transmitted in a different form and context by the invading civilization. We are left with *Popol Vuh*. . But the invasion was regarded by the West as a benefit to the

indigenous populations: bringing higher civilization, and the “true” religion for the salvation of the heathen. In principle, the sacred images and rituals were located not only at the lower region, but as the forces against Christian divinity, to be guarded against, uprooted, and fought. Such forces are always there and as the “other” had to be incorporated in the colonial tradition: the cunning, less than human, demonic, but necessary presence in order to maintain the colonial use of power.

Here, we can formulate the first rule of colonialism: **a suppressed tradition fades out and its presence in the texts of the conqueror spells the death of its unity, since it will be framed by a context alien to it. In brief, its survival will be located in an alien context.**

Another, and perhaps more dramatic example of the conquering culture appears in the confrontation of Rome with the Celtic and Druidic traditions. Rome tolerated the myths of others, as long as the others obeyed the secular goddess - Rome itself. Yet this tolerance had a limit. Britain was conquered by Claudius, well educated and most tolerant emperor - at least in comparison to others, such as Nero or Caligula. Thus what happened is not a result of excesses of a power hungry and deranged personality, but one that expressed the best in the character of Roman culture. Claudius' edicts were simple: myths, which promoted the practice of human sacrifice and head hunting, have to be eradicated, because they are inhuman, false to the nature of persons, and to the laws of peoples (*jus gentium*). Thus the eradication of the Druids began, ending with their de-

struction. After Rome accepted the cult of Christianity, the latter completed the task; it was better equipped than the Romans at extermination. Except for few archeological traces and few medieval Sagas, which are less than what is left of pre-doric world, we know nothing apart from the Mists of Avalon.

These examples allow us to formulate the second rule of colonization: **A complete and irrevocable suppression, leaving almost no traces, presupposes that the new tradition has a total control of the production and preservation of texts.**

The principle issue of this type of interpretation is this: in case of the confrontation of the Doric with the early Medetiranian, the Doric culture had only a rudimentary literary culture. Thus, a partial merger of motifs was possible in the medium of more tolerant and less controllable oral tradition. But in the case of the clash between Rome and the Celts, the latter had no literary tradition, while Rome had a highly developed one which had a grammatical and syntactical permanence that allowed what is possible and what is not. The same happens if the suppression is done by conquest, specifically in conquered places. Nothing was left after the conquest of Byzantium by Turks, i.e. by Islam, although the literatures survived outside the region, some in Russia, some in the West. Similar case could be made for the *reconquista* in Spain, whose literatures survived in Islam outside of Spain. Yet the suppression of the culture locally was as radical as it could be.

A more complex case, where the other retains power in very fascinating ways, is present in the confrontation of different

civilizations which possess literary traditions. One main example, in the Western world, is the case of Christianity: first by the breakdown and a conquest of Rome by Mid-eastern civilization and its cultures, initially Judaism and Christianity, and then the rejection in Rome of its own literary tradition, and that means of the Hellenic tradition. Christianity rejects and suppresses paganism, and more precisely the literary traditions of Hellenism which were more than pagan. That this literary tradition was subsumed under the title “paganism” shows the virulence of this suppression. We surmise that large amount of texts, of which we know only the titles, are lost forever.

The suppression was well defined by the apologists, the early church fathers and the early councils before Christianity became secular power. The acts of destruction followed - most significant among which was the burning of the library of Alexandria. This is to say, in order to root out Hellenism, it was not enough to destroy the temples. A literary tradition had to be destroyed. Therefore, the burning of libraries, books, and the producers of books became an enduring tradition. The end of this destruction is marked by the forced expulsion of philosophers and Hellenistic scholars from Athens and other capitals of Justinian. They went to Persia, and via this exodus the cultural heritage of Hellas could have its renaissance in Medieval scholasticism and later in European Renaissance. Plato was back on the scene. The suppression of other literary traditions – at times called heretical – is a characteristic Christian attitude toward other literary traditions.

This attitude, having become a tradition, can be adopted and extended by cultural influences. Thus, in the twentieth century the Russian Revolution engaged in the destruction of texts as well as the writers of them; Nazis did the same, and Chinese cultural revolution repeated this Christian tradition. In this sense, 20th century has seen some of the most archaic methods to deal with literary traditions that are regarded as condemnable, false, against the interests of “history”, the “people”, or some invented “purity of a race”.

Let us return to the other modification, i.e. a confrontation of two traditions that are literary, yet incapable of complete colonial destruction. This is the case at another level when Christian efforts to destroy completely the Greco-Roman tradition had to “internalize” some of the latter. How does the supervening tradition “stores” suppressed texts, or what is suppressed in texts, for further use? This is possible due to the fact that in a given literary tradition there is a split up into rivals among texts. Thus, in the West, the initial rivalry is between Middle Eastern cultic texts and philosophy/science. The latter was the Hellenic civilization which also dominated the Roman empire. Here, (1) political and legal tradition and power separated itself from other literary traditions. In the Roman empire one could follow any literary tradition as long as one recognized that the political and juridical tradition existed separately and needed no justification from any other tradition. (2) the literary tradition of philosophy internalized mutual rejection, although not suppression of other truths. We love Plato

and Aristotle, but we love wisdom more, and hence can argue against either or both. (3) a new morphology emerged: uncommitted reports of all kinds of facts, events, and opinions. The Hellenic tradition, and through it the Roman empire, internalized diverse literary traditions which became a topic of “histories.” What these histories required is a new “art” to manage them, and thus to have a unified literary tradition; the latter became philology. The modern Renaissance, as universal wisdom, originates with the ancient art of grammar – the philological hermeneutics. Here, the ideal of humanity and empire became identical and Claudius, who went after the Celts, was its exemplary expression.

Having become Mid-eastern, Rome’s church fathers rejected the Hellenic tradition, although they were educated in it. By winning, they had to use the techniques of the conquered, and the technique was the art of grammar to be applied to the scriptures. The second move was determined by the principle of *hairesis*. But to identify a heresy one needs logic to show the difference between true and false. Technology for this was offered by classical philosophy – such as modified Aristotelian categories. The result: rigid system of dogmas. In this context, most of the philosophical heritage, that found its way in Christian heritage, appear in disguise. What happens to this heritage is well exemplified in Slavic literature; there no sources were available to make comparisons, and hence all the traces of Hellenic tradition were regarded as authentic ideas of church fathers. Yet these very ideas had the power to initiate a Renaissance.

Here, a new system was developed that became a tradition. A set of texts in writing was developed by highly educated persons. These texts were also designed to eliminate heresies and thus to determine rigid standards for all aspects of life. Compared to Hellas, this was archaic, since its center had one eminent text, purportedly reporting an eminent event: The New Testament as the Eminent text is constantly appealed to as the final arbiter of all other claims. This means that the text becomes dominating and exclusive. Yet, as just pointed out, it already incorporated the logic of philosophers both as rigorous means of thinking and as heresy. And this arrangement lends power to the suppressed tradition, leading the oppressive tradition into a crisis. The crisis was well accentuated with Reformation. Luther accused the Catholic church for placing philosophy – paganism and secularism – next to the eminent text, the New Testament. The latter is the only source of truth and can neither be legitimated by philosophy, nor does it need logic to prove the truths of the eminent text.

We can now formulate the third rule of colonialism: **If a conquering literary tradition suppresses another strong literary tradition, then it is forced to incorporate the conquered tradition and attempt to use it against the conquered tradition. Yet the very use can turn gainst the conquering tradition and thus create a crisis.**

Comparative Civilizations

Some of the more interesting elements in civilizational modes of awareness are cultural formations and dramatically accentu-

ated activities. Even when cultures speak in moralizing terms, they are framed in symbolic story and mythical designs and the dramas enacted in them. It ought to be clear that symbolic designs and dramatic actions are only partial expressions of civilizational architectonics. It is possible to analyze such partial components, and even to find efforts to unify them with other components, in order to offer a theory of civilizations. But what is of note is that such efforts and theories are equally symbolic designs and comprise another partial expression of a specific civilization. Thus, while respecting the works of such notables as Dumont, Eisenstadt, Weber, Gebser, Toynbee, Nelson, Kavolis and others, we also should point to some reservations with respect to their theories. First, all are close adherents of the modern Western categories, used as a methodical network for the analyses of all civilizations, and second, each takes one civilization as a “norm” or a “standard,” and regards others as abnormal deviations. Even various theories, such as sociology, psychology, literature, economy, are symbolic designs and express a specific civilizational architectonic. A good example points to cross-disciplinary connections which might be relevant only to symbolic designs of one civilization. Thus, the Freudian division of the human phenomenon into *Id*, *Ego*, *Superego*, reflects the Western modern social division of humans into three classes: lower-working, middle-managing, and higher-ruling. Just as *Id* strives toward *Ego*, the working class strives toward the middle class. Yet through such theories and their various inter-disciplinary connections, even civilizational theories that purport

to unify other theories, there appear the phenomena of awareness as specific civilizational architectonic – in this case, Modern-Western.

In light of such issues, our understanding of modern Western colonialism, using the above explicated “rules” of oppression, will shift to ontological, metaphysical and cosmological domains which no specific theory can embrace, but yet every theory will respect. The reason for such a move is necessary because the mentioned scholars of comparative civilizations rest their claims on the great variety of multi-disciplinary social-cultural phenomena, without noting that such phenomena are variants of the most basic awareness comprising civilizational architectonic. At this level, it is possible to avoid the charge that any comparison is a translation and thus interpretation. (Mohanty, 1992) If that were the case, then we would revert back to Western modern/postmodern multi-discursivity, resulting in “my discourse says this and yours states something else”.

Methodological grounding of comparative studies of civilizational colonialism and its failures is best accomplished by an explication of ontological, metaphysical and cosmological awareness. The latter is not some universalization from particular cultural symbols, but, without any critical reflection, is transparent through them. Since modern Western ontology, metaphysics and cosmology comprise the basis of this civilization, and since it is proliferated as globalization and, at the outset, as colonization, it is necessary to outline its architectonic. Its limits will appear in its difference from the “other”, such as

Indian civilization. This claim should not be confused with some notion of a priori positing of a hypothesis; all hypotheses assume an a priori of their own civilizational architectonic of ontology, metaphysics and cosmology. In this sense, the disclosing of such architectonic is a way of providing both mutual comparisons, differences and the ways that each civilizational architectonic shows mutual limits.

Most diverse theoretical trends in contemporary West have defined the nature of reason – indeed its very essence – to be instrumental, named ideologically as “pragmatic”. (Habermas, 1970). Given this pervasive claim, we are compelled to reflect from it and to decipher the birth of modern Western civilization that would comprise the conditions for the final emergence of this type of rationality. The following discussion will focus on the arguments intended to decipher the ontologically understood “nature” of things and humans, arguments which will lead to the basis of technological and, in the final analysis, power conceptions. And the basis emerges from the classical problematic with the debate concerning the priority given either to the holistic-qualitative conception and awareness of reality, where things are experienced within the limits of their essential differences, or to the atomistic-quantitative ground where all things are aggregates of “smallest” material parts. The latter is a postulation of an ontological assumption in face of a classical dilemma concerning “parts and wholes.” The problem of the whole and parts is concerned with the question of the ontological priority of the whole over the parts, or of the parts over

the whole. This question includes the issue of the attributes of the parts and the whole: does the whole possess attributes of its own, as a whole, or do its attributes equal the sum of the attributes of the parts? The modern resolution of this issue comprises the ground of instrumental reason and indeed of technological conception of the environment and – finally – of the human.

Modern thinking takes for granted that the basic ontological given is “atomistic”, that is the universe is composed of the smallest parts, while the whole is a sum of such parts, leading to the conclusion that the qualitative characteristics of the whole which humans perceive do not belong to the atomistic-objective reality. Thus, the wetness of water is not a characteristic of oxygen and hydrogen, but a subjective “appearance”. This suggests that if the whole is a sum of parts, then there is no unity of a whole; everything is an aggregate of material parts in space and time. The modern Western cosmology is simple and primitive: space is defined by things being one next to the others, and time is a sequence of things one after the other. This conception of the cosmos can extend to the “beginning” and from now to the future, but it is a condition for the understanding of everything as having a cause. We can calculate sequences of causes one after the other and thus be in a position to speak of present conditions and future results. The consequences of this ontological decision were well developed by Galileo in natural sciences, and accepted by Descartes as the ground of his subject/object dualism.

The access to the objective reality is not perceptual but based on the subject’s pos-

tulation of mathematics as a basic method to construct reality. This suggests that the selection of mathematical metaphysics as a method is done on the basis of a will to control, to master the environment. It is quite clear that if we know how to define something mathematically, we also know how to make it. Metaphysics in the mathematical form as a method is, in principle, technical. It contains rules of construction and resultantly such rules can be applied on anything in a way that the very application will force the thing to assume mathematical requirements. Since it is already assumed that the basic ontological constituent is an atom, a part, a building block of everything else, then the proper approach to such constituents is quantitative. The result is a most convenient conjunction of metaphysics and ontology where metaphysics determines the structure of ontological reality. But this metaphysical method, and this ontological base take for granted that there are no essential distinctions, no qualitative differentiations among the objects composed of the “atomic” parts.

The next step introduces a question which is concerned with the “realization” of the mathematically calculated material parts. This is to say how do these quantitative, ideal manifolds can become thing-like, real? Precisely when the ideal, mathematical factors can be used for the possibility of the production of the calculated entity. Since mathematical procedures are at base “technical,” then, when applied to a quantitatively conceived reality, the same procedures are productive of reality. This means that mathematical definitions are both productive and causal. Obviously,

this procedure requires human physical intervention in the reified nature. This is the ground for the modern assumption of the “labor theory of value”. Reified nature is mechanical and has no value; thus the modern subject, by remaking the environment into his “products” gives nature its value. The result is a causal-conditional conception; if we arrange the material aggregates in a particular way, then we shall get a predictable aggregate as a result.

The result of modern ontology, metaphysics and cosmology is power in the form of control and mastery. The latter appears in numerous expressions, from Descartes’ conception of science as a means for the practical controls of “nature” through Bacon’s unabashed pronouncements of science as an instrument of human domination of nature. If there is still something that escapes human understanding and power, then the human is still in an inferior position to nature. Only when all the secrets will be deciphered and ruled by humans, then he will be totally autonomous and all his surroundings will be remade in accordance with human wants and ultimately will. It is important to note that for Bacon the “secrets” of nature will not be disclosed by careful and direct perception, but will be “tortured” out of nature by using the instruments of inquisition. The terms “mastery,” “control,” “work,” etc., comprise a syndrome dominating what could be called “the underside” of modern civilization. The increasing control and power leads to the modern notion of “progress” such that every achieved product, a machine, a computer, becomes means for “improved” products and the latter become means

for more improvements – ad infinitum. The conclusion: the purpose of progress is progress. The latter is a global promise to “develop” and “improve” everyone’s material well being – of course everyone must submit to the power of monological ontology-metaphysics-cosmology of modern West and “to join world history”. *The conceptions of “progress and “development” are ontological and metaphysical legitimation for the claim of the “burden of the West” to civilize the others, to lift them out of ignorance and superstition – to draw them into “world history”.* The latter is based on modern Western civilization as progress. (Mickunas, 2012)

The Others

“What happened” lamented Churchill, “that a naked fakir chased us out of India”? This astonishment reveals a fact that all the efforts to subdue and incorporate the other into a colonizing monologue is, in principle, impossible. To understand the case of colonial India, we must first disclose the very different ontology, metaphysics and cosmos which constantly explode that of the modern West. The difference between the Western, specifically the British-empirical civiloization and India is this: the focus of the West is on “things” or “objects”, separate from each other and closed within themselves. As discussed, for modern West the universe is a sum of things, regardless of how well divided into the “smallest” things, called the atoms, arranged in a linear time and deployed in a space with locations for things. For India, meanwhile, the “things” are a momentary conjunction of cosmic

playful energies, constantly exploding and recreating different momentary formations. In brief, things are “cosmic” and cosmos consists of erotic energies, playful time and space, dancing galaxies and divinities, all intertwined and mutually alluring. And this is the essence of the confrontation between India and the colonizing British empire.

Before addressing metaphysics, ontology and cosmos, it must be pointed out that various terms such as “religion”, or “doctrine”, or even “theory”, are of little importance for India and belong, just as Hinduism, to colonial interpretation. What is important is “correct practice”, *orthopraxy*. What person does rather than what he believes is the final criterion. One can be a democrat, an atheist, a communist, a magician without being judged concerning his character. His actions, as *karma* lend him a specific recognition. (Staal, 1989). This claim is completely dependent on the presence of traditional eminent texts, such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* which are the educational backbone of the population. They do not offer a specific position but are composed of strands which form an interplay without a claim that this or that strand is of essence. There is no way to study a particular “doctrine” by excluding others. This also relates to activities: one may start as a guru, shift to trade, secular politician, while fusing all those strands only to recreate them into a saintly writer. Thus, there is no one claim as to the authors of the two mentioned eminent texts. (O’Flaherty, 1980). The intertwining, and retwining is general/local in the sense that the texts are understood in their variety of strands which immediately involve the

local stories of some region to become intertwined with the grand texts as a strand in them. This is known as an intertwining of the great and the local. (Redfield, 1955). From this it should be obvious that *no action or event can be explained in a causal sequence, since the latter is a momentary continuity, incomprehensible without the woven tapestry.*

Another, equally significant, although hardly noticed, feature denying causal sequence is the way the stories are recounted. Our Western metaphysics asks “why” and “what” implying a thing and its cause. If we survey the telling of the eminent stories of India, we find a prevalent question *katham/katha: how*. Thus one asks “how” the eminent texts became popularized, or “how” is this great tradition transmitted, and one always find a strand in retelling which involves and shifts other strands. “How” explication is much broader than all other forms of asking, not because it forms a ground, but sets all other forms of asking adrift without an anchor in a play without substantial players, since they too are in transition. Perhaps this play of interplaying plays is quite obvious in the case of *Ramayana*.

The *Ramayana*, as *adikavya*, or the first poem, of traditional description is at least 2500 years old. The story is present in many languages, including Tibetan, Laotian, Javanese, Chinese, Malaysian and Sinhalese, enjoying a popularity stretching over south and south-east Asia. All efforts to trace the original, in its oral presence, are to no avail, even though the *transcreators* of the English critical edition of the *Ramayana* insist that the version from south India

is the most pure and free of corruptions, while the northern version is more shallow and even vulgar. As is the case with all “original” texts, this does not point to the location of origin of the story, even if some attempt to locate it in the Koshala-Magadha region of central India before the rise of Buddhism and the Magadhan empire in 600 BC. Were made. Thus it is difficult to locate the *Ramayana* in terms of an ethnic or even national group, given its lack of specific origin within India and its popularity throughout southeast Asia. Rather, the text becomes located under colonial impact with an emergence of postcolonial modern nationalisms. *Ramayana* takes on the color of a national epic; in the language of the dominant elite, it becomes part of national heritage, national tradition. This is intrinsic to the construction of nationalism itself, which creates for itself a sense of an enduring deep past from time immemorial and surviving as historical essence through centuries or, to speak with stories of Indian time, through *Yugas* (eons).

The text is performed as ritualistic recitation, formal, community story-telling by professionals, as varying forms of dances, dramatic arts, shadow play, puppet play, festivals (*Ramanujan*). The spoken or performed text has its life in its enactment, and not as a book. In this sense the “text” is equivalent to an aesthetic cosmos, articulated in numerous ways and media. Printing in India is only around 150 years old, and much of oral tradition is preserved through mnemonic devices devised from the Vedic period. The *Ramayana* did exist as copy, as manuscript which was copied from region to region, but the written text

itself not only included contextual interpretations but also was continually overtaken by new tellings, variations and, as mentioned, local stories. In oral rendering, the storyteller interactively works in the local context of the telling, spices the story with familiar, intimate references which relate to the immediate life of the listeners. Stories linked to the *Ramayana* proliferate, repeat, and many tellings counter others; each performance is, in literal terms, a new telling since it cannot exactly reproduce an earlier one. Thus, the *Ramayana* is transformed every time and the text is available only in its transformation. As a continually performed text, it is not an epic distanced from contemporary life; its power in contemporary social life is very evident in the way the *Ramayana* has been used by the Hindu nationalists.

Rama the divine hero of the epic and Ravana, the demon whom Rama kills, are both equally revered; in fact, in southern India, Ravana emerges as female deity signifying the dark, vital power which is absolutely necessary to maintain the cosmic rhythm of light and darkness. Thus the text contains in itself self-demolishing elements which point to its unusual resilience. Many variations are counter stories and in opposition to the Hindu movement which made Rama into a propaganda figure. The tribal members in Maharashtra devised a new telling in which a lower caste who is killed by Rama becomes the hero. In the versions of *Ramayana* sung as songs by women in Andhra Pradesh, the songs all center not around the Rama/ Ravana battle but around Sita, her meeting with Rama, her relationship with Ravana. One

factor common to most performance is its fragmentary nature, since most of the time only a part of the story is performed. In this sense, the whole text is present as a background of suggestion, allusion, which the presentation of any part may elaborate. Thus songs, classical dance, miniature painting, sculpture, temple art, all present scenes from the *Ramayana* and not the whole text. The first film made on the *Ramayana* was Lankadahan, the burning of Lanka, in 1917. It depicts the monkey Hanuman, the powerful helper of Rama, burning down the city of Lanka over which Ravana rules. Complete readings of *Ramayana* do take place, for instance, the professional storyteller in the famous Hanuman temple, Sankat Mochan, in Benares, takes over 700 hours in two years to complete a single telling. In the case of the festival of Ramlila, the whole city of Benares is turned into a stage; each locality simultaneously presenting different sections and strands of the *Ramayana*. Thus as Ravana is abducting Sita on one location, Rama is planning battle to win Sita back in another, Hanuman crosses the sea to reach Lanka, Ravana's kingdom, and so on. These presentations rob the story utterly of its linear narrative value since the context of the audience deprives the performance of its linear sequence: struggle, climax and resolution. As mentioned above, *this node of understanding abolishes the understanding of events as causally connected*. Everything happens all at once; it is impossible now for Ravana to carry Sita away without evoking his eventual defeat by Rama; it is impossible for Hanuman to make a quiet entry into the story as mere helper without the anticipation that he

would jump over the ocean and find Sita before anyone else.

If experience can be a valid guide, then it is obvious that "life" is continuous living and dying, continuous transformation of what a person is, continuous dissolution of one set of actions to which an "identity" is attached in favor of different set of actions, having different identity. Thus, such identities come and go on the background awareness that everything changes – any identity is a mere symbol that signifies nothing, or at best it is *maya*. In this context, Buddhism does not offer life after death, some heaven of bliss, but an escape from both, life and death, a discovery of an awareness that does not belong to this duality. With the dissolution of this duality, there is also an abandonment of such notions as the beginning and the end of life. As Zen interprets, this continuous "impermanence" of everything undergoes "arising and ceasing" (*shometsu suru mono*). (Mickunas, 2018). This avoids the ancient Indian traditions of "reincarnation" of some life in a different form, and "transmigration" of souls from one real place to another. Such a transformation presumes that despite "another life" the soul is the same.

To wish to continue as the same, as having a continuation, is a "thing" ontology of the West, not present to Indian experience. To realize the "arising and ceasing" is at the same time, to recognize the "law" of everything, the *Dharma*. At this level, Buddha, the awakened one, equals the realization of this *Dharma*. This realization is not some personal or humanistic "salvation" but a cosmic awareness wherein all is in constant passing, including divinities,

despite their apparent “eternal” continuity. Such awakening also reveals that beneath arising and ceasing there are no permanent things, no substances, no laws governing all phenomena; even if one were to conceive of laws, one would have to recognize that they too come and go, indeed, in their very coming they are also going, passing: at base, there is nothing – sometimes called by Buddhists “the great death.” The latter is one way of liberating oneself from the constant living and dying in a very unique way: the realization that in the final analysis what shows up as nothing, is equally a realization that the immediacy of constant living and dying is equally nothing; thus living this realization is *Nirvana*. This realization allowed Buddha to abandon his ascetic contemplation and to turn toward direct-lived awareness in this very happening of life and death. There is nothing mysterious about this realization; this is how arising and ceasing opens a realization – an awakening – to our own continuous participation in the cosmic play of energies, with nothing to hold onto.

We should introject a cautionary note; it is indeed the case that the constant reminder concerning impermanence of all things is characteristic of Indian tradition in general, but in a cosmic rather than ontological sense. Ontology for West means that natural things, plants, animals, humans, clouds, change, but only phenomenally, since they also have an essential component that remains constant: one is born as human baby, grows, changes weight, height, matures, grows old, but one is still a human, even if an old human. The cosmos, meanwhile, is regarded as a space-time

container for the movement of things “in” such a container. The latter is interpreted by metaphors such as “empty” and the relationships between things is measured by the empty distance between things from here to there, from our galaxy to Andromeda, from earth to moon, from my house to your place. If we relate, we do so as stable things; thus we eat cabbages, bread, bugs, “unborn babies” (eggs) and treat them all as sources of our ability to perform tasks, as “energy.” Above all, everything is a sum of the “building blocks” of the universe. At the outset, India regards the “things” of our environment, and ourselves, as momentary confluences of cosmic “energies” *Shakti*, that are at play *lila*, without any purpose, direction, time or eternity.

To better understand the notion of change – without temporal sequence, the text *Mahabharata* could be of assistance. The text discloses precisely the inextricable inherence of a cosmic dynamics in all events, signified by a main figure – *Draupadi*. The legendary poet, Veda Vyasa, sets a tone for the interrogative exposition, suggesting that the entire texts can be understood if it is to be regarded as an answer to a question: not what or why, but *how did it all come about*. The text starts with a scene where king Draupad is expecting a birth of a son. Instead, a female, Draupadi, is born in full blossom *from her own fire – agni*, and thus discloses the origin of all entities and events: cosmos. After all, she is also the irresistible *kama – eros*, for whose hand numerous warriors strife; she mocks them and plays with their passions, and thus she is *lila – cosmic play*; she has power over their desires and thus is *shakti*; she promises and

withholds, and thus she is *maya* – veil, and she is also *kali* – all dissolving time. While the story is vast, its all pervasive dimensions are cosmic. Whatever appears as a person, a thing, an event is a manifestation of the cosmic energies – *shakti*, their cosmic play – *lila*, their playful passion – *kama*, the momentary appearance of gathered energy at play as things (humans galaxies, trees, planets) – *maya*, and their temporal dissolution, *kali*. Having this awareness that for India “ontology” of things is *maya*, a momentary conjunction of cosmic play of passionate energies, it is possible to note what colonial imposition of Western ontology and linear time-space mean.

Colonial Layer

Indian sculpture was first viewed by the British travellers, for example the figure of goddess Kali, as diabolic, monstrous, demonic, for she is so colossal, so huge and monstrous, terrible, that there is no beauty in her size and numerous arms. The British said that Indians don't have a clue of anatomy, they don't know how to draw and hence render in art the real shape of things. This very judgment immediately reveals the ontological-cosmological difference. The British missed the cosmic in the Indian art and thus measured the latter by Western ontology of “proper things”, while Kali was one form of *shakti*, (energy) present in Hindu mythology and aesthetics as the all powerful *Saguna Brahman* form. As mentioned above, various strands of stories mix, intertwine, form diverse strands and dissolve. Thus Kali is the play of *shakti*, awesome play of *kama*, and a weaver of

temporal appearances of things – *maya*. She is the supreme energy of the universe, the miraculous amalgamation of all powers of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, creation, preservation and destruction. The figure of Kali has been depicted by various forms, its terrible presence was a reminder to the human of his/her temporary cosmic position, and thus a sign of equinimity. In face of Kali, one can do everything, since there is nothing that one can lose that is not being created and lost incessantly. Yet colonial ontology made her into a “distorted figure” of a normal thing – such as a woman or a mother, resulting in a claim that India has no sense of propriety and civilizaed understanding of reality.

The modern West has invented ontology of things, and humans as bodily beings with “internal” subjective features such as feelings and morality, where the body is regarded to be “immoral” and must be hidden, dressed in layers of clothing. In brief, naked body is to be hidden and its open display is immoral, low, uncivilized and even condemned. If there is passion, joy, love, then they must be understood as possession of a subject accessible by various psychological methods, inner reflection, and ruled by moral codes. Meanwhile for India, there are no body which is closed upon itself with its interior states, and there is no universe with empty space and sequential time. Rather, the universe is erotic, playful, energetic, and the human is completely intertwined in such universe without exteriority or interiority; there is no barrier between the passionate, exploding, excessive body, depicted in all sorts of arts and myths, and the cosmic fire and pas-

sion. In other words, the human is dressed in the cosmic eroticism and any barrier would mean a closing off from the cosmos. In this sense, there is no shame or immorality to participate and be coextensive with the playful passionate, energetic universe, its dance and rhythms.

When the British came to India, driven by “moral burden” to civilize the backward world, they encountered a situation that was drastically “shameful”. Curved statues, gyrating their incomprehensible movements, girls dancing in temples with suggestive gestures, people bathing in the holiest river naked, and scantily clad men and women – the latter in rainbow colored saris exposing their brown skin – sights that make any gentleman’s civilized eye wince. What can one do but endure those sights to fulfill one’s “civilizing duty.” How to accomplish this duty is quite obvious: dress the natives not only in cheap khaki produced in growing sweat shops in England, but above all in British moral metaphysics requiring a psychological subject incased in a physical body. The subject must be in charge of and ashamed of its naked body. The swaying gait, the cosmic body rhythm, had to become “serious” and upright and the swaying dances of the temple goddesses were reduced to alluring street girls for a price. The straight and upright body had to assume a functional, lineal time and three dimensional space to fit productive requirements of the empire. The play of cosmic *kama* that connected all to all, became a libidinal drive deemed to be a source of subjective energy required and harnessed for the production of surplus value for the empire. The cosmic body excess, the ex-

ploding *shakti* energies, visible with every sculpture, became a surplus labor power. The Shiva lingam, as an exploding universe, became a hard phallus signifying an engineering shaft on which turns the productivity of the entire empire. The pliable and graceful bodies became hard. Thus, India was on the way to be civilized and properly dressed. The indelible scars left by colonialism and the efforts to restore Indian tradition through aesthetics ran into a cultural wall, including the metaphysics of morality, such that to create art works expressing the cosmic dimensions of playfulness, cosmic fire and passion, are regarded as degrading and shameful. Yet such works and, indeed, the traditional shrines full of erotic nexus, such as Khajuraho, became exotic sites for sex voyeurs – the tourists.

As mentioned in the logic of suppression of the other by demeaning and demonizing, we find the same logic in colonialism. The great works of art – their capture of the cosmic dimensions, is regarded as things – naked human sculptures, without moral dress.

For example today, in the art scene in India, all these forms, the *Mithuna* sculptures, (the *kama* in excess) and figures surely took on a major shift in interpretation with the entrance of colonialism. The forms/figures were pushed into the background and also their visage became transformed in meaning. The forms shift from the mythical-cosmic presence to becoming images of material, spatial bodies, with exposed organs. Where once the dynamism and the drives were, to a great extent, impersonal, now they tend to become personal. What once was comprised with a

cosmic nexus and an over abundant force to disclose the all pervasive cosmos, and the display of such arts that comprised *lila play of kamic* passions, explicitly depicting the cosmic union and dissolution, was reduced to bodies in space and time. The colonial period introduced the emotional response to art: the fear, disgust, anxiety and indeed abstract feeling of approval and disapproval of pleasure or displeasure, and degradation to a lowest aesthetic value. The emotional reading of art shifted the gaze away from cosmic passions and their serene appreciation. A few examples of the colonial and contemporary period show that the colonial period indeed brought in the question of morals, moralizing, gender, gendering issues into art. The British even said the sculptures at Khajuraho were extremely indecent, obscene and offensive, specially to find them in the temples that professed to be erected for good purposes on account of religion. Everywhere there are number of female figures who are represented dropping their clothes and thus purposely exposing their persons.

While these image were completely misinterpreted not only by the British during colonial times, but also in contemporary India. This misinterpretation, even by Indians, is present in the vision of oneself as the other – an Indian making a judgment about one's own traditional images in terms of colonial ontology as the "civilized norm". Here a self-understanding subjects itself to become the other, the inferior and hence, having now achieved the status of being civilized and scientifically educated, enlightened, use the same western logic to regard their own art as inferior, lewd, and

morally rotten. A classic example of this is Sudhir Khakar's (1978) work on Indian sexuality. He sees the main psycho-sexual problem in male children as the work of the 'bad mother' or the sexually devouring phallic woman. The Kali spectrum of goddesses, the apsaras, now are reduced to and embody modern aspect of the overwhelming sexual mother. For Khakar the male child feels castrated by his mother – she is the presence of the bad mother, the Kali that looms in front of the male children. Stereotyped notions of the goddess Kali, haunt the European mind; this can be seen in the following observations by Moorehouse (1974): He insists that the very name of Calcutta is derived from the symbol of fear and evil. All representations of Kali are designed to frighten an illiterate and superstitious mind. Obviously, placed in the world of shadows, she haunts the Western mind and must be constantly present in order to be guarded against. The guarding is expressed in extreme case of Western fear of the presence of inescapable, cosmic *kama* – even if it is reduced to sexual allurements. In 1910 Bangalore Nagaratnamma reprinted a classic text of an 18th century poet Muddupalani, titled *Radhika Santwanam* – Appeasing Radhika. The text contained the classical cosmic dimensions of passion, fire, rhythmic balance, playful erotic allurements and energy. This was too much for the colonial rulers who declared the text to be bad for moral health of British Indian subjects. The text must be banned and resultantly, British police commissioner, Cunningham, confiscated all the copies. (Tharu and Lalita 1991). There is hardly any need to mention that "morality" was Christian, as another

aspect used to legitimate the oppression of Indian civilization.

Postscript

Given the metaphysical, ontological and cosmic understanding of two civilizations, one colonizing the other, it should be obvious that the other, for the colonizer, was not only present, but dangerous – the colonizer could not contain the other in its own narrow monologue. Such an inability allowed the “naked fakir” to expel colonialism from India. Let us make this clear: the Western ontology of things in linear space and time, for India, was a momentary confluence of

the cosmic dimensions, a mere appearance of stability, a *maya*, not to be taken seriously. Since for colonial rulers such appearance was the sole reality, for India it could be declared *asat* – non-being. Since it was nothing more than an appearance, its only presence was an attachment to it. But if Indian population refused to be attached to it, then the colonial ontological reality would cease to be. In this sense the movement of non-resistance was premised on the non-being of all “things” British – after all, there is nothing to resist. The Western ontology of “things” was exploded by the uncontainable cosmic awareness and practice of India.

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