

MINDS WITHOUT FEAR

Philosophy in the Indian Renaissance



NALINI BHUSHAN
JAY L. GARFIELD

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*To my beloved grandparents
Lala Indersain Chandhok
and
Sushila Indersain Chandhok,
Arya Samajis and Freedom Fighters
—N.B.*

*and
To Blaine Garson,
whose constant support and faith in
this project made it possible.
—JLG*

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PREFACE

This book is the culmination of a decade of research. It follows by five years our anthology *Indian Philosophy in English from Renaissance to Independence* (2011). We had initially thought to write our monograph first and to follow it with an anthology of selected readings. But we decided that getting material from the colonial period back in print and available to scholars and students was a pressing need, and that our own thoughts were not yet mature enough to undergird a proper monograph. We were right. It has taken us a long time to come to our present understanding of philosophy in this period in India. Indeed, it may be time to revisit the anthology, to update it with material the importance of which we have only lately come to appreciate.

Many people have contributed to our efforts, and we would never have been able to come this far without them. First, we thank the late Govind Chandra Pandey and the late Daya Krishna, two professors of philosophy who inspired the entire project and assisted us at the very beginning. We also thank Rama Rao Pappu, who was always helpful and encouraging. Tapati Guha-Takurta, Rosinka and Amit Chaudhuri, Prabal Kumar Sen, and the late Barney Bate, were invaluable consultants and critics. Peter Heehs helped us to understand the work and importance of Sri Aurobindo, and Margaret Chatterjee provided useful historical context and firsthand reportage. Kapila Vatsyayan and Aster Patel were valuable advisors. We especially thank Arvind Mehrotra, who embraced this project from the start and guided us both to people and to ideas. We can't imagine having done this without him.

We thank the Kahn Institute at Smith College for sponsoring a year-long study of the phenomenon of renaissance in 2011–2012, in which our ideas incubated, and from whose members we received valuable inspiration and critique. And we thank Sarinindranath Tagore for extensive discussion, critique, and co-teaching of this material.

Our work was made possible by many able student research assistants. Thanks to Natalie Smith, Nikila Lakshmanam, Rebecca Alexander, Mary Kate Long, and Ling Ximin for research and editorial assistance. Special thanks to Emily Lawson, whose contributions to this project are enormous. She discovered material we never dreamed of, pushed us in directions we hadn't envisaged, taught us Zotero, managed our library, and improved our prose, exposition, and even our arguments. She was more a colleague than a student assistant, and much of what is good in this book is due to her contributions.

Special thanks to Kavita Datla, Jonardon Ganeri, Peter Heehs, Arvind Mehrotra, Prabal Kumar Sen, David Shulman, and Sarinindranath Tagore who generously read through a late version of the manuscript and made many valuable suggestions for revision. The volume is much better for their critique. All of the problems are our own fault. Thanks also to Rick Millington, for his unwavering faith and support.

We thank the collection of Vivan and Navina Sundaram for permission to reproduce Amrita Sher-Gil's *Self Portrait as Tahitian* on the cover of this book.

Some of this book has appeared in earlier versions elsewhere. Parts of chapter 1 appear in "Whose Voice? Whose Tongue? Philosophy in English in Colonial India" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2008) and parts of chapter 5 are drawn from "Pandits and Professors: The Renaissance of Secular India" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2009). We thank the *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research* for permission to use that material. Parts of chapter 8 are drawn from "Swaraj and Swadeshi: Gandhi and Tagore on Ethics, Development and Freedom" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2015). We thank the University of Hawaii Press for permission to use that material. Parts of chapter 10 appear in "Bringing Brahman Down to Earth: Lilāvāda in Colonial India" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2015) and in "Indian Philosophy Meets Western Science: Consciousness and Causality in the Colonial Indian Academy" (Bhushan, 2016). Parts of chapter 11 appear in "K. C. Bhattacharyya's Epistemology of the Subject" (Garfield, 2017) and in "Self and Subjectivity in Colonial India" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2017). Parts of chapter 12 appear in "Toward the Development of a Cosmopolitan Aesthetic" (Bhushan, 2009).

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Introduction

Sheldon Pollock, in his influential essay, “The Death of Sanskrit” (Pollock, 2001) wrote the obituary for Sanskrit literature, declaring it to have finally died in the mid-eighteenth century at the dawn of British colonialism, replaced by vernacular languages. While Pollock does not argue that Indian philosophy died at this time, others have drawn this conclusion. Their complaint, as we shall see, is that this work was discontinuous with “authentic” Indian traditions, and this at least in part because it drew on European sources, and because it was written in another “vernacular”—English. As a consequence of this neglect, we will argue, entire generations of Indian philosophers have been lost to contemporary students of philosophy. An entire region of philosophical activity has been lost to the history of world philosophy. And the role of philosophy in the formation of India itself has been occluded, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the dynamics of the independence movement and of Indian culture. We will show that philosophy was alive and well during the colonial period.

Who should care about a cadre of long-forgotten colonial philosophers? Anyone who cares about the history of philosophy. The community of philosophers we address in this volume comprises some of the finest minds of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anyone who cares about the Indian independence movement and about the formation of Indian national identity should care as well. Philosophy—both public and academic—was central to the formation of India as we know it. Anyone who cares about cultural encounter and about how globalization constitutes modern hybrid cultures should care. For in this period, philosophy flourished in India not despite, but because of the fecund interaction of classical Indian and European ideas. Anyone who cares about colonial intellectual life should care. This colonial academic community suffered from colonial oppression, from the disparagement of their own work, and from their own anxieties about the academic enterprise in which they labored. Nonetheless, the philosophy they produced, ironically, derives much of its strength from the cultural fusion that colonial milieu made possible, and it warrants our admiration and serious attention. Finally, anyone who cares about

the impact of language on philosophy and about the politics of language should care. For in colonial India, Indian philosophy was written for the first time in the English language, a language that was necessarily politically fraught. Nonetheless, that language at the same time made possible the intercultural dimension that enriched the Indian philosophical tradition and that it made it possible to articulate it in a global context.¹

A. Raghuramaraju, an eminent philosopher at the University of Hyderabad, in a series of books (2006, 2009, 2013) has explored the impact of colonialism on Indian philosophy. He argues that the colonial period “damaged [Indian philosophy] at a structural level” (Raghuramaraju, 2006, p. 7). While he resists more pessimistic views that suggest that Indian philosophy either stopped or was irreparably undermined by colonialism, he does argue that the colonial period represents a significant break with prior tradition, and created a philosophy that was intellectually crippled.

I think . . . the most important achievement of colonial intervention in the Indian psyche is that it disturbed its structure and dialogic tradition. I would like to describe this scenario through an episode from the Hindu epic, *Mahābharata*. Contemporary Indian philosophy has become like Jarasandhra’s body after he was slain by Bhima . . . [Bhima defeated] Jarasandhra by tearing him into two and throwing the two parts of the body into opposite directions, which, however much they tried to come together, failed to become one. Like Jarasandhra’s torn body, the various parts of the dialogical tradition in India, following the colonial intervention, have never been able to come together.

. . . To take recourse to metaphor again, the West has amputated its infected arm, but the injured limb of India is still dangling, lacking the

¹ There is an impressive recent body of work addressing parallel issues that arise in Anglophone Indian literature during the British colonial period, and a comprehensive intellectual history of colonial India would require careful attention to this literature and its own relationship to English and to the colonial situation. But our focus here is philosophy, per se. Those interested in the literary world should see (Amit Chaudhuri, 2004), (R. Chaudhuri, 2000, 2002, 2012, 2014), (R. Chaudhuri and Boehmer, 2011), (Mehrotra, 2003), (White, 2013).

This book addresses philosophy written in English in colonial India because of the specific issues concerning language that that body of work raises. It is important to note that philosophy was written during the colonial period not only in classical languages such as Sanskrit, but also in vernacular languages. For instance, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and Bhudev Mukhopadhyay were important philosophers who wrote in Bengali. Their work and that of others writing in local vernacular languages are outside of the scope of this project.

clarity of the amputation, as well as the facility of the pre-fractured part of the body.

—(2006, pp. 7–8)

We agree with Raghuramaraju that the “colonial intervention” was significant and fraught in Indian philosophical history, and with his observation that nonetheless the colonial period was one of prodigious philosophical activity. We disagree, however, that it represents a significant “fracture” in Indian philosophical thought—a transition from “the classical Indian philosophy done in Sanskrit to modern Western philosophy in English” (9), and we disagree that it was characterized by a lack of debate. In this book we present numerous instances of important philosophical debates that arise in this period, both in the academy and in the public sphere. We disagree most profoundly with Raghuramaraju’s view that Indian philosophy underwent a “substantial decline” (p. 1) during the colonial period from which it must recover (although we agree that it is often seen this way).

We are concerned in this investigation to recover the achievements of Indian philosophy under British occupation and to show how Indian philosophy both drew on and contributed to Indian nationalism and global philosophical culture. We also explore the ways in which Indian philosophy during this period was both continuous with its classical and medieval tradition, and at the same time in self-conscious conversation with an international philosophical community, a conversation in which Indian philosophers were very much agents. We will show that this continuity and modernity was achieved through what we will call a “renaissance gesture”—a reach to the past for the materials to be used for the construction of the future, and that this gesture was part of a broader Indian renaissance in which philosophy played a central part.

Chapter 1 explores what we call the “tragedy of Indian philosophy”—the anxiety about writing in English and the denigration we observe even today of Anglophone Indian philosophy. We examine the attitudes and motivations of philosophers working in that milieu in order to understand colonial academic consciousness. Chapter 2 contextualizes the colonial intellectual environment, demonstrating that the apparent discontinuity of the colonial period with earlier Indian intellectual history is only apparent. That appearance, we argue in chapter 3, is a result of the coloration of discourse about language in India by the infamous “Macaulay Minute on Education,” a text we examine closely in that chapter.

Those who acknowledge any creativity in colonial India refer to the “Bengal Renaissance” as its locus. We disagree, and argue that the renaissance in question was a more broadly Indian renaissance. In chapter 4, we explore the very nature of renaissance in order to frame the subsequent discussion, allowing us to understand the efflorescence of Indian philosophical, literary, political, and artistic activity in

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We explain that efflorescence as a particular kind of emergence into modernity, an emergence mediated by the recovery of a golden age. In chapter 5, we show how the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj movements exemplified this pattern and how they engendered philosophical and political activity consistent with it. These religious and social reform movements constitute one aspect of the context of Indian philosophy in this period.

In chapters 6 and 7, we shift our gaze to the political context of Indian philosophy. The struggle for Indian independence necessitated a construction of Indian national identity. The construction of that identity was itself yet another renaissance gesture, reaching in imagination to the remote Vedic past. These chapters show how Indian identity was contested and constructed, and how that process both drew on and generated varieties of Indian nationalism and political philosophy. This political philosophy, we show in chapter 8, is articulated through the exploration of the meanings of two crucial terms—*swaraj* and *swadeshi*—self-rule and self-sufficiency. These terms were contested both in the public sphere and in the academy.

The formation of academic Indian philosophy was grounded in part on this political discourse, in part on the continued pursuit of classical Indian ideas—predominately from the Vedānta and the Sufi traditions—and in part on the engagement with ideas coming from Europe. Many prominent Indian philosophers of this time traveled to Cambridge and to Germany. In addition, a coterie of mostly Scottish missionary philosophers—often also with close Cambridge connections—taught in India. British neo-Hegelian idealism floated to India on both of these streams. This neo-Hegelianism merged easily with both Hindu and Muslim idealist thought, and was transformed in India in conversation with that thought to generate the philosophical movements that dominated colonial Indian philosophy. In chapter 9, we explore the Cambridge connection; in chapters 10 and 11 we examine the ways that classical Indian idealism was reconstructed as a version of realism in response to these ideas.

Aesthetics has always been central to Indian philosophy, and art to Indian culture. The colonial period was no exception. In this period, as we show in chapter 12, debates about art and aesthetics were not only central to academic philosophy but also to nationalist discourse and to the formation of modern Indian art itself. Chapter 13 draws all of this together. We hope that by the end of this book, the reader will agree that Indian philosophy was not dead, but rather flourished under colonial conditions; that it not only flourished, but that it contributed enormously both to the development of world philosophy and to the foundation of independent India. This was a time when philosophy and the arts mattered.

The Tragedy of Indian Philosophy

Colonial Subjection and Contemporary Amnesia

1.1 A Colonial Subjectivity

In a poignant lecture to his students in 1928,¹ Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya argues that the Indian academic community is possessed, as by a ghost, having fallen into an unconscious “cultural subjection.”

When I speak of cultural subjection, I do not mean the assimilation of an alien culture. That assimilation need not be evil; it may be positively necessary for healthy progress and in any case it does not mean a lapse of freedom. There is cultural subjection only when one’s traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture, which possesses one like a ghost. This subjection is slavery of the spirit; when a person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales fell from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth, and that is what I call *Svaraj* in Ideas.

What is this “ghostly possession” of which K. C. Bhattacharyya speaks? Bhattacharyya has in mind a form of imprisonment more subtle than the political subjection to the British; a form so subtle as to be phenomenologically opaque even to the most reflective individual Indian subject. This subjection is accomplished by immersion in broadly Western cultural norms, Western ways of seeing, and Western values and habits of mind, all ingested in a language that is not Indian. Such an immersion produces in the minds that engage with them a certainty that those ideas, those ways of seeing, those practices are their own. This intellectual certainty is reinforced by the degree of felt comfort and familiarity with which the colonial subject inhabits that realm of idea and practice.

¹ Republished as “Svaraj in Ideas” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 103–111).

But this very certainty, Bhattacharyya argues, is illusory—“habits of soulless thinking that appear like real thinking” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 104).

This phenomenology is bound up with language. English was the medium of instruction at the premier Indian schools and universities, including the University of Calcutta, where Bhattacharyya was King George V Professor. All ideas, from abstract physics to notions of nation, self, and culture, were perforce articulated in English. The ideologies embedded in English lexicography, reflecting a conceptual framework forged in classical Greece and mediated by Christianity and the European enlightenment, permeate that articulation. But all of that is background, ingested preconsciously. As Heidegger was to put it in 1948 in his *Letter on Humanism*, “Language is the house of being” (Heidegger, 1998, p. 254). The implicit adoption of this framework leads to its being taken as neutral, self-evidently objective, natural, and universal; all this despite its alien origin and character and its implication in a colonial regime.

Bhattacharyya’s insight is that the predicament of philosophy in colonial India is not political, but epistemological. It consists in the inaccessibility as well as the alien character, of the very norms, ways of seeing and habits of mind that characterize the Indian tradition, resulting in the inability to think authentically or creatively. How could one’s own tradition become opaque to oneself? Only by unconsciously absorbing the habits of mind of another through initiation into its language and ways of seeing. The Indian tradition is alienated by normalizing the colonial tradition; it is rendered opaque by the thoroughgoing socialization into the colonial English way of seeing.² Thus, Bhattacharyya argues, what his colleagues take to be genuine philosophical progress is illusory—“imaginary progressiveness, merely imitative of the west” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 105). This alienation, Bhattacharyya thought, was accomplished by English education. Whether this alienation was as thoroughgoing as Bhattacharyya thought is part of the topic of this book. But, whatever was accomplished by English education, was not accidental; as we shall see in chapter 4, it was accomplished by design.

K. C. Bhattacharyya’s son Kalidas—himself an eminent philosopher of the postindependence period—agrees that the advent of European philosophy in colonial India undermined the Indian philosophical tradition:

Most... who have done philosophy in India since [the coming of the British] have more or less servilely accepted Western philosophy, and that, too, as it was understood by the British thinkers, and granted recognition to that much only of Indianism which was intelligible, in

² It is not for nothing that J. Nehru once described himself as “the last Englishman to rule India” (Lyon, 2008, p. 63).

terms of Western ideas. The rest was rejected as dogmatic, magical, tribal, romantic, speculative and whatnot.

—(Bhattacharyya, 1982, p. 173)

Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), a philosophical contemporary of Bhattacharyya, who was to become better known as poet laureate of India and later Pakistan, voices similar sentiments. In a poem addressed to the students of Aligarh University, warning them of the dangers of the Anglophone education to which that university was dedicated, he writes:

They do not see the truths which are veiled
Whose eyes are laden by slavery and blind imitation,
How are they to revive Iran and Arabia
These who are themselves enchained by western civilization?

—(Sevea, 2012, p. 62).

Whereas Iqbal is worried in this poem about the alienation of Muslim Indians from pan-Islamic culture, Bhattacharyya is concerned more specifically with alienation from Indian culture, *per se*. But their concerns are of a kind. The concern is that enslavement by Western civilization, and condemnation to the status of a mere imitator, as opposed to an original thinker is inevitable once the English language and culture become one's medium of thought. This concern is shared by Hindu and Muslim philosophers and literary and art critics during the colonial period. It also informs the disparagement of the work produced by colonial Indian philosophers, writers, and artists that is common even today. In this volume, we show that this disparagement is unwarranted. Nonetheless, whether or not this anxiety was justified, it sets part of the context for intellectual and artistic life in this period.

Bhattacharyya also considers the programmatic difficulties that beset his philosophical community:

In philosophy hardly anything that has been written by a modern educated Indian shows that he has achieved a synthesis of Indian thought with western thought. There is nothing like a judgment on western systems from the standpoint of Indian philosophy, and although some appraisal of Indian philosophy has been attempted from the western standpoint, there appears to be no recognition yet that a criticism of the fundamental notions of either philosophy is necessary before there can be any useful comparative estimate. And yet it is in philosophy that one could look for an effective contact between Eastern and Western ideas.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 105)

Bhattacharyya is concerned here with the mission of Anglophone philosophy in India. On the one hand, its English character locates it in the same systematic project in which, for instance, his colleagues in Cambridge would have located themselves. On the other hand, its physical location in India, and the identity of its practitioners suggest a comparative project, a project whose contours and presuppositions, Bhattacharyya emphasizes, had been insufficiently theorized. That project, he argues, would require an Indian sensibility and expertise, a sensibility and expertise that had been effectively obliterated by colonialism.

1.2 The Predicaments of Indian Philosophy

Bhattacharyya puts his finger on two important predicaments faced by academic Indian philosophers of the colonial period. First, there is the question of philosophical tradition: is one pursuing Indian philosophy or Western philosophy? Second, there is the question of method: is Indian philosophy the systematic pursuit of philosophical ideas; is it the history of its own embalmed tradition; or is it essentially a kind of comparative philosophy?

In 2006, Daya Krishna, one of the most eminent Indian philosophers of the post-independence period, echoes Bhattacharyya, when he says of Indian philosophy:

Anybody who is writing in English is not an Indian philosopher. . . . What the British produced was a strange species—a stranger in his own country. The Indian mind and sensibility and thinking [during the colonial period] was shaped by an alien civilization.

[The British] created a new kind of Indian who was not merely cut off from his civilization, but was educated in a different way. The strangeness of the species is that their terms of reference are the West. . . . They put [philosophical problems] in a Western way (Krishna, Daya, personal communication).

K. C. Bhattacharyya and Daya Krishna are each concerned both with *philosophy* in colonial India and with *the experience of colonial Indian philosophers*.³ They

³ Daya Krishna's contemporary, Kalidas Bhattacharyya, agrees. He writes:

"Traditional Indian philosophy" is the corpus of philosophical doctrines and dissertations that have been current in India for at least two millenniums and communicated from generation to generation mainly through Sanskrit language . . . The beauty of the whole tradition is that it was a perfectly living widespread study among Indian philosophers till only the other day, till, one may say, a hundred twenty-five years back . . .

(Bhattacharyya, 1982, pp. 171–172)

share a sense of disenfranchisement from their own culture. Daya Krishna describes a gulf between philosophy as it was practiced in India during this period and authentic Indian philosophy:

This picture of Indian philosophy that has been presented by Radhakrishnan, Hiriyanna and others... [each of whom is an *Indian*, writing philosophy in *English* during the colonial period] is not the story of Indian philosophy. We have been fed on the Western presentation of Indian philosophy, which hardly captures the spirit and history of Indian philosophy... If I were not to know Indian philosophy myself, I would say that [their presentation] is wonderful, that it presents it clearly, with great insight and understanding. Now that I know a little Indian philosophy, I say that they did not... They are not concerned with the problems that Indian philosophers were concerned with.

—(Daya Krishna, personal communication)

In this volume, we will argue that KC Bhattacharyya, Kalidas Bhattacharyya, and Daya Krishna were wrong about the state of philosophy under the Raj. But, as is clear from the accounts of many philosophers, including A. C. Mukerji in a presidential address to the Indian Philosophical Congress (Dubey, 1994, pp. 181–182), they are each deeply right about the experience of colonial Anglophone Indian intellectuals. Daya Krishna expresses this sentiment eloquently:

... The deepest anguish of the Indian intellectual is that he is unrecognized in the West as an equal, or as an intellectual at all.

—(Ibid.)

In 1928, Bhattacharyya gave voice to the impossibility in the colonial period of experiencing oneself as a philosopher in one's own tradition. Daya Krishna's own critique of colonial Indian philosophy in 2006 indicates the tragic consequence of this predicament that motivates our current study: even among contemporary Indian philosophers, the achievements and stature of colonial Indian philosophers are seriously underestimated, and their legacy is largely ignored. While some of our contemporaries retain name recognition for some of the major figures of this period, many have no name recognition for many of their principal intellectual forebears. Moreover, most of our contemporaries have read little or none of what was written during this period, despite either their casual acknowledgment of its importance or their facile dismissal of its triviality. And almost none of the most important original work of these philosophers is taught in any contemporary departments either in India or the West.

This failure of recognition leads to an inability to understand the productive dynamics of a cosmopolitan colonial context. These philosophers wrote in a context of cultural fusion generated by the British colonial rule of India. They were self-consciously writing both as Indian intellectuals for an Indian audience and as participants in a developing global community constructed in part by the British Empire. They pursued Indian philosophy in a language and format that rendered it both accessible and acceptable to the Anglophone world abroad. They were not abject subjects; they were intellectual agents. Nonetheless, in their attempt to write and to think for both audiences they were taken seriously by neither. The British regarded them as racially inferior; their subsequent Indian colleagues look back (and down) on them as British imitators. This predicament and this anguish inspire the present volume.

As we suggested above, colonial Indian philosophy is partly structured by the two predicaments noted by K. C. Bhattacharyya. The first is a dilemma. Is philosophy, as pursued by colonial Indian philosophers, Indian, or is it Western? Any Indian philosopher working in a British university in colonized India was trained both in Sanskrit (outside the formal academy) and in English (at school and in the university). When writing in India in English one had to ask oneself in private, as did K. C. Bhattacharyya in public, "What am I doing?" To answer this question either way was problematic. If one took oneself to be pursuing Indian philosophy, was it even possible to do this in the English language, in an academic setting as opposed to a traditional *math*? After all, as Daya Krishna said, Indian philosophy was pursued in Sanskrit.

One might think that this sentiment, whether expressed in 1928 or 2006, is just a reactionary xenophobic attitude toward English, perhaps motivated by colonial antipathy. There is something to this, but the point is not as simple as it might appear. To the extent that this is the point of rejecting English as a vehicle for Indian philosophy, the rejection cannot, as will argue in chapter 2, rest on the fact that English is foreign. India has been very successful at adopting, integrating, making official, and pursuing philosophy in a host of foreign languages. Persian, Urdu, Arabic, and Turkish come to mind immediately (Alam and Subrahmanyam, 2012). And as Shulman (D. D. Shulman, 2012) points out, philosophy was for centuries happily pursued in a variety of Indian vernacular languages. To the extent that English was problematic, it was not because of its foreign origin or its vernacular status, but because of its association with a colonial project.

But there is a deeper reason for this suspicion of English. As Bhattacharyya emphasizes, languages do not travel without baggage. A vocabulary, a set of lexical resonances, a literary history and perhaps even a syntax, subtly encode a way of seeing and taking up with a world. When we learn and use a language, we come to inhabit a particular world. Inasmuch as Indian philosophy is so intimately bound up with Sanskrit and with the vernacular languages that came over time to be

associated with Sanskrit, the modes of seeing and engagement Indian philosophy explores are embedded in those languages. English, according to those who criticize its use in Indian philosophy, has not evolved in that cultural and philosophical milieu, and so encodes very different ways of posing questions, of seeing, and of answering them. So, to pursue Indian philosophy in English may well inevitably be to distort it. As Rabindranath Tagore put the point with characteristic eloquence, in his 1924 lectures in China, “Languages are jealous sovereigns, and passports are rarely allowed for travelers to cross their strictly guarded borders.”

The setting is also important. Traditionally, at least since the demise of the great universities of Nālandā, Vikramśīla, and Taxśīla, Indian philosophy was not advanced in universities but in religious *maths* or in the *madrasas* of the Mughal empire. So, to extract the practice from its context might be seen as an act of bad faith, a cultural betrayal. On the other hand, to leave philosophy in the *math* would be to accede to the claim that it is, after all, academically irrelevant, also an act of bad faith, and a betrayal of a different kind. So, for a host of reasons, any colonial Indian philosopher writing in English had reason to worry about whether he was doing authentic Indian philosophy.

Suppose, on the other hand, that one answered the “what am I doing?” question by saying “Western philosophy.” Things are no better. In the colonial context, this could lead to one being regarded as a toady of an imperial power, as doing nothing for one’s own culture and constituency, and as reinforcing an unjust regime. Moreover, given the pervasive racism of the colonial period, the presumed civilizational superiority of Europe and the fact of rootedness in Indian, as opposed to European culture, there was always going to be the suspicion, no matter how sophisticated the argument or the writing was, that any work by an Indian scholar on Western philosophy was in the end, second rate, or at best second hand.⁴ So, whether one conceived of oneself as doing Indian or Western philosophy, a colonial Indian philosopher would appear to be condemned to a failed professional project. This is the first predicament.

The second of the two predicaments structuring Indian philosophy in this period—that concerning method—gets at the very nature of the enterprise of Indian philosophy. Is Indian philosophy the systematic pursuit of truth, as Western philosophy takes itself to be? Is it on the other hand a comparative project, born of the fortuitous juxtaposition of two great cultures, as for instance, the first King George V Professor of Philosophy at Calcutta, Brajendranath Seal, took it to be? Or, is it an essentially historical project, the curatorship of a classical and dead tradition, as for instance, the Royal Asiatic Society took it to be? By the time the nationalist movement took shape, none of these answers could be satisfactory.

⁴ For instance, the most authoritative history of British neo-Hegelianism, that by the Indian philosopher Hiralal Halder (Halder, 1927a), although published in England, is read and referenced only in India.

Suppose, for instance, that Indian philosophy was represented as a disinterested pursuit of truth, knowledge, and the good. After all, this is how philosophy as a discipline is typically regarded.⁵ In the colonial context, in which the identity of Indian philosophy as Indian was essential both for its practitioners and for European Indologists, this would have been a non-starter. For to adopt this position would have been to abandon the essential anchor of Indian philosophy in the history of the orthodox and heterodox traditions, and of the scholastic commentarial and debate tradition in terms of which it understands and defines itself. To see Kant and Gangeśa, for instance, as dialogical partners in a single grand philosophical discussion might be genuinely cosmopolitan, and indeed intellectually laudable on some dimensions, but it would also be to give up on the identity of Indian philosophy as such, as a particular tradition of text, commentary, and interlocution. Moreover, this move would be to abandon its own self-ascribed teleology/soteriology of Indian philosophy as a “pathway to *mukti*,” (as R. Tagore titled his presidential address to the first meeting of the Indian Philosophical Congress) or as a vehicle to liberation.⁶

Taking the program of Indian philosophy to be comparative is no less problematic. While on the one hand, this might achieve, at least the objective of generating greater respect for Indian philosophy among the Europeans (which was Seal’s hope when he wrote, “comparison implies that the objects compared are of coordinate rank” (Seal, 1899) quoted in (McEvelley, 2002, p. 9), it is necessarily to objectify and to fix the tradition on a slide under a microscope not its own. James Mill’s *History of British India* (1817) is a perfect example of this strategy. The comparative vantage point is doubly problematic. Professor A. C. Mukerji of Allahabad, even during the colonial period and in the heyday of comparative philosophy, was to criticize this practice as inevitably degenerating into a search for superficial similarities and differences, like an undergraduate “compare and contrast” assignment become mission statement. (Mukerji, 1938, pp. 5–6) Daya Krishna, writing long after independence, near the twilight of comparative philosophy, was to observe that such comparison always in fact takes for granted the vantage point of the dominant culture.

The contradiction lying at the very foundation of “comparative studies”
is sought to be glossed over by the appeal to the universalism of all

⁵ Let us leave aside the vexed question of whether this would in fact characterize Western philosophy, and take that self-representation of the Western tradition for granted as a benchmark, if not as reality.

⁶ While we will see that this conception is itself contested within the academic community, it is at least rhetorically controlling in the colonial period.

knowledge and the identification of the knowledge with the privileged “we” from whose viewpoint all “other” societies and cultures are judged and evaluated. The roots of this “privileged position” have generally lain in the political and economic power of the society of which the “viewer” happened to be a member. The anthropological studies from which most “comparative studies” have arisen were, by and large, an appendage of the extension of political and economic power of some countries of Western Europe over the globe during the last 300 years or so.

—(1989, reprinted in Bhushan and Raveh, 2011, pp. 59–60)

So to take contemporary Indian philosophy to be essentially comparative would be both to trivialize it and to turn it into a mere object of the European intellectual gaze.

The third way of conceiving the project of Indian philosophy—as historical—might seem more attractive. After all, the distinctive character of Indian philosophy is located in its history, and if the mission of an Indian philosopher working under the hegemonic conditions of colonialism is to preserve the purity, authenticity, and quality of the tradition, why not focus on the history of philosophy as the core of that mission? To reduce Indian philosophy to its history, however, as is in fact done by most European Indologists not only during the colonial period but in the present day, even in leading textbooks of Indian philosophy, is to treat the tradition as dead, and as irrelevant to contemporary concerns. Who, if that were the best understanding of that tradition, would take it as a serious study of more than curatorial interest?⁷

1.3 The Predicaments of Indian Philosophers

The career of R. D. Ranade is instructive. After a long career addressing pre-Socratic Greek philosophy he turned to a study of Upaniṣadic philosophy. This work is justifiably highly respected, demonstrating the same extraordinary philosophical precision, erudition, and philosophical insight he had brought to his study of the Greeks. Despite its quality and importance, however, Ranade’s corpus is generally read as history of philosophy, and not as philosophical in its own right, addressing, but not contributing to Indian philosophy. On the one hand, Ranade’s career is an example of remarkable success, including the establishment of one of

⁷ The most recent—and otherwise excellent—survey of Indian philosophy (Gupta, 2012) devotes all of 17 pages in a book of over 300 pages to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with attention only to K. C. Bhattacharyya and Sri Aurobindo, ignoring all other figures who wrote during this period, and all topics save the exposition of the Absolute.

the premier philosophy departments in the British colonial world, and the production of a massive and diverse corpus of high quality philosophical work. On the other hand, at no point was he recognized for what he was, a creative philosopher. Instead, he is regarded as an imitator (for his work on Greek philosophy), a historian (of Indian philosophy), or saint.⁸

This bittersweet survey of Ranade's career leads us naturally to two further questions: Is authentic Indian philosophy spiritual in character or can it be secular? And, must Indian philosophy remain firmly fixed on tradition, or can it engage with and participate in modernity? Let us begin with the first: is Indian philosophy secular or spiritual in character? Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Rabindranath Tagore most prominently argued for its essentially spiritual character, and for this spiritual character as constituting the distinctive contribution of Indian philosophy to the global philosophical enterprise. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, on the other hand, rejects this essentialism about Indian philosophy altogether.⁹

We begin with the question about the relation between the spiritual and the secular. Radhakrishnan, the second president of the Republic of India, and for decades the principal face of Indian philosophy in the West, writes in the introduction to what was for long a standard textbook, *Indian Philosophy*, "Philosophy in India is essentially spiritual. It is the intense spirituality of India, and not any great political structure or social organization that it has developed, that has enabled it to resist the ravages of time and the accidents of history" (S. Radhakrishnan, 1923, pp. 24–25). For both Radhakrishnan and Tagore, the ultimate goal of philosophical inquiry is not truth, but liberation, a goal that at least rhetorically, sets it apart from its Western counterpart.

Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949), a Bengali polymath, whose illustrious international career spanned economics, philosophy, aesthetics, and political and social science, argues forcefully against this tendency to essentialize Indian thought as religious. He reacts principally against Western Indology when he writes in his *The Futurism of Young Asia*:

They compare the superstitions of the Orient with the rationalism of the Occident, while they ignore the rationalism of the Orient and suppress the superstitions of the Occident.

—(Sarkar, 1922, p. 14)

⁸ Ranade retired from the University of Allahabad to found his ashram, still very much alive at Nimbal, and to devote himself to spiritual practice and teaching. While once known as the Socrates of Allahabad, his most enduring reputation is as the sainted Gurudev Ranade of Nimbal.

⁹ Again, we leave aside the fascinating question of whether or not Western philosophy has a spiritual dimension, taking its self-avowed secularity for granted as a rhetorical fixed point.

He takes Max Müller in particular to task as an exponent of this essentialism:

Max Müller wrote *India: What Can It Teach Us?* The main trend of his thesis was to indicate that India can teach nothing but “sublime” speculations of an otherworldly character, the psychology of the soul, the ethics of retreat from the struggles of life and the metaphysics of the Infinite.

—(Sarkar, 1922, p. 6)

Sarkar insists instead on the strong secular, rational, this-worldly character of most of Indian thought, grounded in its material culture and nonreligious literary traditions. In his discussion of Indian art and aesthetics, in particular (to which we turn in chapter 12), Sarkar is keen to emphasize the homologies between Indian philosophical thought and art and the thought and art of the secular West.

But once again, despite the popular appeal of the spiritualist reading, and the apparent sober cogency of the secular, neither answer to this question is entirely comfortable. To read Indian philosophy as essentially spiritual is to relegate it to the domain of religious studies, and to make it irrelevant to anyone not sharing the alleged spiritual tradition within which it develops. After all, why should a Jew worry about the transubstantiation of the Host? But to read Indian philosophy as unproblematically secular, as Sarkar wishes to do, is to wrest it out of the context of its development, and to occlude too much of its literature. In the colonial context, in particular, this universalism would appear to be the abandonment of one of the wellsprings of Indian national identity. So, whether one takes Indian philosophy to be spiritual or secular, one finds oneself in a professionally unstable position.¹⁰

Let us now turn to the final question that sets the historical context for many of the perplexities we have been addressing: Does colonial Indian philosophy constitute a vehicle for Indian modernity, or is it a late stage in the history of a great Indian tradition? Spiritualism is associated in this matrix with tradition, and secularity with modernity. Seeing Indian philosophy as nothing but history marks its identity with tradition, while both comparison and creativity associate it—albeit in different registers—with modernity. Indian essentialism can be seen as one more way of locating Indian philosophy in tradition while to see the activity of Indian philosophers as continuous with that of their Western colleagues is to see them as modern actors in a global academy.

¹⁰ As we will see in chapter 7, this issue plays out somewhat differently in Hindu and Muslim philosophical communities.

As we will argue in the remainder of this book, this complex, self-conscious confrontation of Indian culture with modernity in the context of colonialism structures what we will call the “Indian Renaissance,” in the context of which this philosophical activity occurs. How does one act on a modern stage while remaining faithful to an identity grounded in a tradition? This opens a further question in the Indian context: which tradition? For Indian philosophy was pursued in the renaissance period by Muslim as well as Hindu philosophers. While, as we will see, their respective programs were related to one another, their historical touchstones were divergent, and these communities did not communicate with one another.

Like European modernity, this Indian modernity arose from a renaissance moment—and indeed a moment thematized by its participants in those terms. That renaissance, as we will see in chapter 4, like the European renaissance (and like so many other moments regarded as renaissances) centrally involved a “back to the future” trope. A past was to be reconstructed or resurrected and the imagined future was to be constructed on its foundation. But in this case, although many of the modernist ingredients are European, the past is Indian, and the mortar in which the ingredients are ground is that of colonial India, in which these ingredients are each redolent with political as well as philosophical and material implications.

But this modernity was highly unstable. The mixture of nostalgia and progressiveness, of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, of religion and reason, of colonial consciousness and national awareness could not easily be reconciled. This already complex mixture was further complicated by the question of language, including tensions between English, Indian vernacular languages, and the traditional languages of Sanskrit and Persian. Moreover, the relationship between Hindu and Muslim philosophical traditions and the ways in which they informed civil society and academia could be highly combustible. Professional identity for those who went to work in suits and ties—even taqiyahs, turbans, kurtas, and dhotis—as opposed to religious robes, required choices, and those choices came with painful consequences. One significant consequence was the denigration of Indian philosophy, *per se*. At the end of his career, in an address to the Indian Philosophical Congress, A. C. Mukerji gave eloquent voice to this pain:

I am fully aware of the general attitude of scorn and contempt, of distrust and discouragement, that has brought discredit upon the contemporary Indian thinkers from within and outside India; but I shall not enquire into the nature and cause of the circumstances responsible for this growing volume of suspicion. Of one thing, however, I am pretty sure and it is this that the adverse critics have neither the inclination nor the courtesy of spending on the Indian attempts a hundredth part

of the time and attention they devote to the study of the currents of foreign thought.... I for one do believe that the philosophers of contemporary India have already given sufficiently convincing evidence of the virility and strength of Indian thought which, given favourable atmosphere, would gradually develop into world views of far-reaching consequences....

—(1950, reprinted in Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 456)

The “scorn and contempt” to which Mukerji refers derive from those who read the work of this period through the lenses of the predicaments scouted above. The work of Indian philosophers during this period was and is often regarded as a second-rate imitation of European philosophy. It is often dismissed as irrelevant because it is merely Indian or as inauthentic because it is novel. When it taken seriously, it is often taken to be a mere history of ideas. When it is not, it is dismissed as mere spiritual mumbo jumbo unworthy of philosophical attention or as artificial reconstruction ripped from its religious context. Most tragically, this was not only the view of European colleagues, but, as Mukerji reveals, internalized in the colonial consciousness even of the practitioners most injured by it. The immorality of ignoring Indian philosophy to which Mukerji gestures in 1950 is the mirror image of the unspirituality Aurobindo identifies when he speaks of the “impoverished soul” of Europe and modernized India in 1918 (Bhushan and Garfield 2011, p. 44). Each trades on the Kiplingesque dichotomy between India and the West. And the discomfort to which Mukerji gives voice in 1950 is identical to that which Daya Krishna articulates in 2006. This book is an inquiry “into the nature and cause of the circumstances responsible” for the suspicion and scorn to which Mukerji refers and into the other consequences of the tensions generated by the colonial predicament.

But Indian intellectual culture was not always so vexed. For centuries, India was in dialogue with the West, and indeed with other Asian cultures. For centuries, languages came to India with immigrants and were adopted as vehicles for literature, philosophy, religion and administration. India’s dialogues and linguistic practices were not always so fraught. To understand the predicament that simultaneously stimulated a renaissance in Indian philosophy worthy of admiration and study and stigmatized that philosophy so severely and with such persistence, we need to look deeper both into Indian intellectual history (which we do in chapter 2) and into the circumstances of colonial rule (which we do in chapter 3).

Looking Backward

Reason, Cosmopolitan Consciousness, and the Emergence of Indian Modernity

In this chapter, we examine the relationship between the Indian intellectual tradition and language, and in particular the role of vernacular languages—as opposed to Sanskrit and non-Indic languages such as Persian or Arabic—in scholarly discourse. We also address the historical context for the period on which we will focus, constituted by a long history of the openness of Indian thought to, and its dialogue with, foreign thought. Finally, we are interested in the degree to which Indian philosophy was tied to religious practice, and the degree to which it was a secular endeavor. We will see that the tensions scouted in the previous chapter were simply not salient or interesting in earlier eras. For this reason, the predicaments faced by colonial intellectuals simply do not arise in earlier periods; the fact that they do arise in the colonial period therefore demands an explanation specific to that period. In this chapter, we draw heavily on the recent scholarship of Shulman (2012), Alam and Subrahmanyam (2003, 2012), and Kinra (2010), who have illuminated important antecedents of colonial India, and whose accounts provide context for, and important contrasts to the situation of the philosophers in the colonial period.

2.1. The Vernacular and the Secular in Early Modern Indian Literature

In a careful study of early Indian modernity, Shulman (2012) explores the poetic literature of South India from the twelfth through the eighteenth centuries. While Shulman examines the role of the thematization of the imagination in the development of renaissance sensibility in Indian thought, we are more interested in his documentation of the fact that while much of the sophisticated, philosophically rich literature he addresses is written in Sanskrit, much of it is not. Shulman

shows that while all of the scholars who composed this literature were adept in Sanskrit, many of them chose to compose in a prakrit. Philosophically rich poetry written in Tamil, Kanada, Telugu, and Malayalam lives side by side with Sanskrit literature, and is not deprecated as second rate, or as unworthy of study.

In *More Than Real*, Shulman presents the twelfth-century Tamil story of Pūcalār of Ninravūr, in which, he emphasizes, the importance of inner experience and visualization as opposed to outer form as the core of creativity (whether devotional or poetic) (2012, pp. 4–6).

I am about to tell you the story of Pūcalār of Ninravūr and his imaginative act: the same Pūcalār who wanted to raise up a shrine for the god who burned the three cities of his enemies and, lacking all means, did indeed build a beautiful shrine in his mind, knowing that working with his inner feeling would be best. . . . His greatest wish was to do something that would serve the worshippers of the god. Looking for a way to give to them, he had the idea of building a temple where the god with the Ganges in his hair could live. At first he wasn't worried about the fact that he had no wealth. He searched everywhere, . . . for resources—and came up with absolutely nothing. . . .

Then he realized that he would have to build the shrine in his mind. He began to collect within his awareness all the resources he would need. . . . Mentally he sought out carpenters and masons. . . . In his passion, he worked steadily, not even closing his eyes at night. . . . He gave it shape and precisely measured form in his mind. . . . He put the finial in place and had everything plastered white. . . .

...

At the auspicious moment, Pūcal installed Shiva in the temple he had built in his mind. For many days he worshipped him there until at last he merged into the shadow cast by the golden anklets that dance in the golden hall.

—(2012, pp. 1–2)

The point of this story of the creation of an imaginary temple is both metaphysical and aesthetic. As Shulman notes (2012, p. 8), it also connects to the philosophy of language, implicating language as a bridge between an originary inner world and a secondary outer. The story is obviously deeply philosophical. But it is written in Tamil, not Sanskrit. This very fact suggests that the identification of Sanskrit as the unique medium of even classical philosophy is at least neither universal nor eternal in Indian thought. The extensive Tamil *bhakti* poetic tradition dating at least from the seventh century C.E. confirms this comfort with

vernacular languages as vehicles for serious religious, philosophical, and literary production.

Shulman notes that in the fifteenth century the poet Annamayya composed important philosophical verse in Telugu (2012, pp. 147–148). The subject of the text Shulman translates is metaphysical, comparing the ontological status of the object of imagination with that of the object of perception. We are aware of no critique of the fact that this highly respected poet is composing his philosophical text in a prakrit language. Shulman speculates that the rise of this philosophically rich prakrit literature is tied to the increased power, wealth, and influence of non-Brahmin castes in the new South Indian states of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the accompanying “proto-modern sensibility” (2012, p. 152) developing in these new classes. Following this speculation, we might also see the poetry that these scholars produced as an early stratum of a new secular philosophical literature, a literature that floats somewhat free from the doctrinal specificity of particular philosophical schools, and adopts a viewpoint and an approach that appeals to a wider non-Brahmin audience.

2.2. From Poetry to Prose: The Case of the *Karaṇam* in South India

This pattern of literary production is further contextualized in the work of Rao, Shulman and Subrahmanyam (2001), whose work inspires this section. Their history of the *karaṇam* scholars provides further confirmation of the development of a modern secular sensibility in fifteenth- through eighteenth-century South India. In this period, we have one of the earliest instances in India of the establishment of a literate community independent of the traditional caste system and of specific doctrinal affiliation. This community propagates a secular, narrative, prakrit prose literature that transcends specific linguistic boundaries and for the first time produces genuine history aimed at a broad literate audience. Rao, et al. characterize this social class as follows:

The *karaṇam* communities embody a considerable extension of graphic literacy, as distinct from the sophisticated oral literacy characteristic of all traditional cultural media in the south. Moreover, prose is now privileged over verse. . . . This is the period in which prose comes into its own in Telugu, Tamil, and the other languages. . . . The *karaṇam* tends to know more than one language, can read in different scripts, and in particular has access to trans-local universalist (“imperial”) languages such as Persian and Sanskrit. . . . The *karaṇams* stand in an ambiguous relation, at times replete with tensions, with kings or other rulers. . . . They

write in the absence of a single overarching royal system, and their own ethical universe reflects a trans-local imagination.

—(2001, pp. 20–21)

Let us draw attention to six salient aspects of the *karaṇam* class emerging from this description: a graphic culture; a specific literary form addressed to a scholarly elite; a polyglot culture; expertise in secular, translocal languages of rule; a sometimes tense and ambiguous social position vis-à-vis political power; and a cosmopolitan ideology. Together, these aspects constitute a *weltanschauung* that is strikingly modern, but at the same time strikingly Indian, perhaps the roots of the specifically Indian modernity we introduced in the previous chapter.

If the *karaṇam* community is a cultural antecedent of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectual class, the philosophers of the colonial period would hardly be breaking with Indian tradition—even Indian scholarly tradition—in writing for one another and for a broader literate audience in a “prakrit” like English, and in responding to literature written in English or German. That ground would already have been broken by *karaṇams*, who, like the colonial Indian intellectuals who would succeed them, had one scholarly eye on vernacular literature and another on the Sanskrit tradition.

Moreover, the adoption by the colonial scholars of a specifically graphical mode of production, when seen against the background of their *karaṇam* predecessors in Vijayanagara, is not new or Western but rather the continuation of a pattern of scholarly production already well-established in India. For this reason—although one might look to the traditional Sanskrit *pandit* as the antecedent to the colonial philosophy professor, or look to the colonial *pandit* as the successor of the *karaṇam*—in fact, the *karaṇam* is in some ways a closer antecedent to the colonial philosopher than is the *pandit*.

The apparently banal fact that the colonial scholars *wrote* is important. While the scholar in the *math* certainly reads texts, he (and again, it was always “he”) did not necessarily write or compose new texts. Scholarly production by contemporary practitioners of philosophy in the *maths* was oral, often involving memorization, recitation, and debate, but—although there were periods of literary efflorescence in the premodern period, such as the Navya Nyāya movement we address below—it did not always require the publication of new scholarly material. It was through the writing of the Anglophone philosophers that the Indian philosophical tradition advanced, professionalized, and engaged a more global philosophical community.

One might well wonder about how the texts of the *karaṇams* circulated. As we will see, there are important contrasts between this class of scholars and the class to which we will turn next—the Mughal *munshī* of North India. Each provides interesting antecedents to modes of production and circulation of colonial Indian philosophy as well as their cultural roles. But they are different

precedents. Many professors in colonial universities published much of their best work in very local venues, that is, university journals or magazines that did not circulate beyond the walls of the universities. This is an odd publication pattern by contemporary standards. One possible antecedent of this pattern is the publication pattern of the *karaṇams*.

Indeed, as Shulman clarifies (personal communication), “Most of the *karaṇam* prose texts (as distinct from *kavya* texts) seem to have been in-house texts meant for other *karaṇams*, perhaps also for educating and training younger *karaṇams-to-be*. . . . [M]any of the ones we have today survived in single manuscript copies. They did not apparently aim at larger audiences.”¹

Philosophers in the postcolonial period, such as Daya Krishna and Kalidas Bhattacharyya, as we saw in the previous chapter, simply assume the essential Sanskritic medium of Indian philosophy. As we have seen, however, many of those who were practicing Indian philosophy even during the late medieval period, never took Sanskrit as the essential medium. They are, to be sure, conversant in Sanskrit, and with a Sanskrit philosophical and literary tradition; but they choose to advance that tradition by composing in vernacular languages. That choice is entirely unremarkable in twelfth- through fifteenth-century India. In this respect as well, the *karaṇam* provides a model for colonial intellectual modes of production.

It might be natural to think that it is the foreign origin of English that disqualifies it as an Indian scholarly language. But that cannot be so. If that were, one would expect a similar resistance to Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. Persian, at least, is an important medium for the *karaṇams*. But all of these languages become important languages of administration in the Moghul courts; and as we will see when we turn to the *munshīs*, below, all become important languages of literature, art, theology, and philosophy.² The origin of Daya Krishna’s counter-narrative is what requires an explanation.

¹ Shulman also points out that “within this category there is a sub-category of *karaṇam* prose texts in Tamil and Telugu . . . which were commissioned by colonial agents like MacKenzie and thus may have new contexts for use, different from those of the earlier *kāfiyat* texts. It’s possible that commissioned texts of this sort based themselves on early manuscripts containing partial histories of the locality.” (personal communication)

One should thus not infer from the mere fact that people were trying to record, in Telugu or Tamil prose of a particular kind, that there was a serious demand for this work, or that it circulated broadly. Like the colonial philosophers who were to follow, the *karaṇams* perhaps saw their clients as their institutional employers, and wrote directly for them, even if their texts sometimes attracted a larger audience. The *karaṇam* was commissioned by a local ruler or administrator; the professor by a university.

² Indeed, works of Sanskrit philosophy, including the Upaniṣads, the *Ramāyana*, and the *Gītā* are translated into Persian and Arabic during the Mughal period, and philosophical discussion of these texts would have been conducted primarily in Persian or Turkish at the courts of emperors Jehangir and Akbar, as well as at more minor regional courts that functioned as interfaces between the imperial administration and local communities.

On the other hand, one might think that English is disqualified because of its status as a “language of command” (Robertson, 2003, p. 30). But this would also fail as an explanation. To be sure, English, in the precolonial context, was a language of administration and rule, and a language that, as we note in the previous chapter, encodes a nonlocal, transnational sensibility. But so was Persian. So, when K. C. Bhattacharyya laments the fact that he works in English, and is thereby alienated from Indian culture, or when Muhammed Iqbal warns his students against its pernicious effects (preferring Persian or Arabic), it cannot be just the fact that English is a foreign language of administration that worries them. After all, the *karaṇam* scholars writing in Persian or Arabic did not express any alienation from their own culture.

Moreover, Rao, et al. note, “[the *karaṇam* prose] is a worldly-wise, self-confident, robust prose meant for a self-selecting audience that values the written word” (2001, p. 125). They could as well have been writing about R. D. Ranade, A. C. Mukerji, Ras Bihari Das, or a host of other Indian philosophers of the colonial period, all notable for their elegant style and confidence in philosophical English. Rao, et al. also note that “lexically, borrowed Persian terms mingle with semantically displaced Sanskrit loans twisted in unusual directions. Administrative terminology, a shared lexicon, which also cuts across linguistic borders to appear in Marathi and Tamil texts of the period, colours the discourse” (2001, p. 125). We could say the same of philosophical writing in the colonial period. Persian, of course, is gone, but English, German, and Sanskrit can often be found on a single page, and a peculiar English born of Sanskrit characterizes texts such as Bhattacharyya’s *Subject as Freedom* (1930).

Nonetheless, the tensions we introduced in chapter 1 also find precedent in the *karaṇam* situation as scouted by Rao, et al. The *karaṇam* were working to carve out an autonomous intellectual space that could speak to and inform both power and a growing public sphere. On the other hand, they were working for royal courts and were responsible to them. Philosophers in colonial universities, we will argue, were also engaged in constructing an autonomous intellectual space with political significance. They, too, however, were both employees of a state without legitimacy, with allegiance to a nationalist movement aimed against that very state. Ambiguity and tension would hardly be unsurprising; what requires explanation is the felt discomfort with language in the colonial period.

Perhaps the most significant cultural contribution of the *karaṇam* class to South Indian culture was its cosmopolitan and secular outlook. The *karaṇam* as we have already noted, are a polyglot lot, and so are reading literature from a wide variety of sources, reflecting a number of cultural frameworks. Moreover, as Rao, et al. emphasize, the *karaṇam* are writing the manuals of statecraft from which the rulers and administrators of the Vijayanagara empire are learning their jobs. That empire, through much of this period, is trading and negotiating

extensively with European, African, Persian, and Javanese interlocutors. Unlike mere chroniclers (including their Spanish and Portuguese colleagues) who “produce history as official or the semi-official ‘biography of the state,’” Rao, et al. point out that the *karaṇam* were free to write history and to speculate philosophically with great autonomy, and so produced history and speculation that reflected a broader outlook. Rao, et al. argue that “[the *karaṇam*] is also, perhaps, surprisingly, ‘secular’ in outlook—once again in marked contrast to his contemporaneous historians from other cultures” (138–139). This secularity is in evidence both in the range of topics addressed and their collective outlook, which is not beholden to any specifically religious tradition. Alam and Subrahmanyam note the *karaṇam* interest in factuality and in motivation and political context in their historiography, contrasting this approach with the poetic and religious “histories” common elsewhere in the Persio-Arabic world at the time.

This combination of cosmopolitanism and secular pragmatism is very much in evidence in the philosophers of the colonial period, and is also among their most important contributions to Indian colonial culture. These philosophers were reading literature from India, Europe, and Asia; they were publishing not only in India, but abroad, and were writing in English in part to join a global community of philosophers of which they saw themselves as members. Rather than chronicling local Sanskrit lore, they engaged in a broad conversation with a range of interlocutors. And their writing floated free from religious traditions and practice. The secularity that India enjoys today is in large part due to the self-conscious secularity of this academic community. Once again, though it might be tempting to see cosmopolitanism and secularity as the gifts to an insular peninsular culture from their British patrons, the example of the *karaṇam* should convince us that this was a perfectly Indian outlook.

There is one further ironic analogy between these two communities that we cannot pass without comment. Just as Rao, et al. are forced to write precisely because so many have denied that groups like the *karaṇam* were actually writing history, we feel compelled to write this book precisely because so many deny that groups like the colonial Indian philosophers were actually writing philosophy. Just as Rao, et al. characterize their project as one that “recovers as history a significant body of literature from late medieval and early modern South India” (2001, p. 3), we have characterized our project as one of the “recovery” of Indian philosophy as a significant intellectual contribution to Indian culture and to the discipline of philosophy more broadly.

2.3. The Case of the *Munshī* in Mughal India

Like the *karaṇam* of South India, the *munshīs* of the sixteenth- nineteenth-century Mughal world of North India played a crucial role in the mediation and

dissemination of literary culture and literate sensibility. The *munshī* were in effect the north Indian counterparts of the *karaṇam*. While, just as in the case of the *karaṇam*, we are not claiming that university professors of the colonial period were latter-day *munshīs*, we do note that the *munshī* class provides a cultural model that represents in many respects an antecedent for the class constituted by educated Anglophone elites in the colonial period. The case of the *munshī* provides additional cultural precedent for the formation of the professional academic community in India. They are often referred to as clerks or secretaries, but had a much larger role than this, operating as multilingual intermediaries between courts, business interests, and others in the polyglot and only partially literate Indian milieu.

Kinra (2010) emphasizes the sophistication and the intellectual versatility of the *munshī*:

Certain skills [were required of the *munshīs*] like penmanship, accounting, the ability to write stylized prose and to traffic in . . . coded language were obviously a critical component [*sic*] of any imperial *munshī*'s basic professional toolkit. But even in medieval royal advice books . . . a much broader spectrum of qualities like social etiquette, diplomatic savvy, political discretion, a literary flair, scholarly erudition, and even mystical sensibility came to be associated with truly great *munshīs* and *dabīrs*.
—(p. 530)

It is clear that the *munshīs* were more than mere clerks. They were important intellectuals who not only served their clients, but also pursued and advanced learning. So, when we say that the *munshī* class is a recognizable antecedent to the colonial professorial class, we do not mean to say that the colonial intellectuals were clerks, but rather that they have precedent as intellectuals even in premodern Indian society, and more specifically, as intellectuals who operated in a secular sphere in a vernacular medium. Kinra points out both the secular character of their work and the consistency of this secular intellectual occupation with private piety, another configuration we will see duplicated in the professoriate we address. In a case study of the *munshī* Chandar Bhān (whose text on the craft of the *munshī* was to be used as a training manual by the East India Company), Kinra writes:

Chandar Bhān sees no conflict between pride in this Brahmanical heritage and his family's affinity for either the Indo-Persian ecumen or Mughal administrative service. Quite the contrary, Chandar Bhān seems to have viewed his caste status less in terms of ritual purity than in terms of a general commitment to intellectual excellence. He notes that even though Brahmans as a class "engage in various worldly professions," what sets them apart is that they have "retained the ability to discern visible and

hidden meanings” and continue to live “in conformity with the ways prescribed for them in reliable ancient books.” His understanding of Brahman-ness thus definitely had a “traditional” component, but it was not so restrictive that a mere interest in Persian literature, expertise in Sufi mystical idioms, or Mughal service could threaten it.

—(536)

We will see a similar pattern when we encounter such figures as K. C. Bhattacharyya, A. C. Mukerji, R. D. Ranade, and Muhammad Iqbal, each of whom combined lives as professors in secular universities, engaged with literature external to their own religious traditions, but who also maintained religious identities in their private lives.

Like the *karaṇam*, the *munshīs* were instrumental in disseminating literate culture in India. In this role, they functioned as important social intermediaries. On the one hand, they mediated between the court culture—not only the culture of the Mughal capital, but also that of the many regional subsidiary courts that availed themselves of the services of *munshīs*—and the culture of everyday Mughal subjects, whose interactions with the government they enabled. This mediation was not merely clerical, though that itself was culturally significant. The *munshīs* were also productive *līterati*. They wrote not only textbooks on the essential aspects of their immediate professional craft—accounting, letter writing, calligraphy, protocol, and so on—but also produced literary translations, poetry, autobiography, and other literature, in short, a “rather full cultural curriculum” (Alam and Subrahmanyam, 2012, p. 316) that prescribed the knowledge expected in the sciences and humanities of an educated Mughal subject, and all of this in Persian.

The masters of the Iranian classics obviously found an appreciative audience even among the middle-order literati in big and small towns, as well as among village-based revenue officials and other hereditary functionaries and intermediaries. All Mughal government papers—from imperial orders to bonds and acceptance letters—that a village intermediary wrote were in Persian. Likewise, there was no bookseller in the bazaars and streets of Agra, Delhi, and Lahore who did not sell manuscript anthologies of Persian poetry. *Madrasa* pupils were in general familiar with the Persian classics, and Persian had practically become the first language of culture in North India.

—(Alam and Subrahmanyam, 2012, p. 317)

These speakers of the language of *Vilayat—Iran*—are Indian. For them, Persian is comfortably appropriated as one more Indian language. Kinra notes this ease with Persian:

...[T]he spread of Persian literacy in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Punjab went well beyond the imperial bureaucracy, and was by no means exclusive to a few token Hindus. . . . Chandar Bhān's . . . correspondence . . . speaks volumes about the wide pool of talented Hindu intellectuals and service professionals among whom the vast majority saw Persian as a relatively unproblematic, neutral language of everyday correspondence, literary expression, and social mobility.

—(Kinra, 2010, p. 538)

Many of their intellectual successors in the colonial period were speakers of the language of the *firangi*—English. That language, as well, was to become “a language of everyday correspondence, literary expression and social mobility.” Whether it was also either “neutral” or “unproblematic” remains to be seen. Nonetheless, their appropriation of that language as one more Indian language hence has a clear precedent in Indian cultural and intellectual history.³

On the other hand, the *munshīs* came to mediate the important interactions between the Mughal court and the host of *firangi* interlopers in India, most significantly in the end, that with the British East India Company. In this capacity it became necessary for them to master the languages of the West as well, including most prominently Portuguese and English. The mastery of these languages became indispensable tools for these professionals and increased their cosmopolitan access and outlook. At the same time, the East India Company was explicitly aware of the importance of the *munshīs* in this cultural exchange. Indeed, the company commissioned a translation into English in the late eighteenth century of the seventeenth-century Persian *munshī's* manual *Inshā'i-Harkaran* by the Hindu *munshī* Harkaran (Alam and Subrahmanyam, 2012, p. 313).

This cultural and linguistic facility was no accident. The training of *munshīs* was centered in *madrasas*—academies. Under Akbar, these became the liberal arts colleges of India—the predecessors in many respects of the Presidency universities to be established in the colonial period. Hindu, as well as Muslim students, attended these *madrasas* and studied Persian, literature, poetry, and the various sciences and arts needed by a literate professional in Mughal court culture. As we will see in chapter 3, when Thomas Macaulay considered the issue of the language in which colonial instruction was to be conducted, he opted for English rather than Persian, Arabic, or Sanskrit. He rejected the language, not

³ Of course there is a political difference, one that we have yet to explain: the former was treated as unproblematic and perfectly Indian, and a sign of an admirable cosmopolitan status, while the latter became explicitly problematic, and a sign of a kind of inauthentic and alienated identity.

the curriculum or the purpose of the Mughal *madrasa*. Macaulay's "new class" was not as new as it might appear.

The *munshī's* cultural and linguistic facility engendered—even as it contributed to the unification of Indian culture in a Persian framework—a cosmopolitan and indeed modern sensibility. This sensibility enabled the Mughal literati—including those in remote villages—to envision a horizon in which Mughal India was but one region among many. Not only was this horizon inhabited by subcontinent neighbors, but also by remote lands and remote cultures, such as those of *Vilayat* and the Portuguese and English *firangi*. This was enabled as well by the important fact, noted by Alam and Subrahmanyam (2012, pp. 319–336) that *munshīs* were travelers, not incidentally, but professionally. Their travels brought them into contact with the manifold subcultures of India, and also of course with foreigners. They learned and they communicated, spreading this transcultural knowledge throughout India and establishing this cosmopolitanism as an element of Mughal Indian cultural consciousness. Alam and Subrahmanyam also note in their discussion of the travelogue of the seventeenth-century *munshī* Nek Rai (329 ff) that the narrative and descriptive elements of *munshī* literature were able to capture the imagination of readers, as well as display a sense of particularity and irony with regard to local customs that contributed to a modernist, cosmopolitan outlook.

The ubiquity of Persian in *munshī* culture we have noted takes us further toward the colonial situation than does the linguistic culture of the *karaṇam*. The *lingui franci* of the *karaṇam* included not only Sanskrit and Persian, but also the South Indian vernaculars. While a *munshī*, on the other hand, would of course be fluent in one or more vernacular languages, and would have studied Sanskrit, these were not the languages in which his professional life was conducted. In the *munshī* class, therefore, we find a clear precedent for an educated community of scholars whose primary medium of communication and of literary production is the language of administration of India—in that case, Persian.

To sum this up, analogies between the role of Persian in the Mughal period and the role of English in the colonial period, and more importantly, between the roles of the Persian-speaking literati of the Mughal period and their Anglophone counterparts in the colonial period, including the philosophers with whom we are concerned, are striking and manifold. First, neither language is vernacular and neither language is Sanskrit. This is important, as so much of the narrative of Indian philosophy is framed in terms of the dichotomy between Sanskrit and prakrit. Persian, like English, stands outside of this dichotomy: they are each neither vernacular nor classical in the sense that Sanskrit and Arabic are classical.

Second, both English and Persian are foreign. In each case a language from outside the subcontinent becomes Indian *lingua franca*. In each case, mastery of

this language is a necessary condition of status and power—the mark of education and culture, and the entry point to a more global civilization. And each language is essentially the language of administration, the discursive lever of power. Each language, despite (or even because of) its primary association with governance ends up permeating Indian culture from the *darbar* to the *dhaba*. Each, despite its foreign origin, therefore becomes in the end, Indian, and in the process irreversibly inflects other Indian languages and Indian culture.

Not only do Persian and English inflect Indian culture to similar degrees and in similar ways, and not only are those in whose mouths and minds they come to be at home so culturally alike, they also develop analogous roles in cultural representation. Alam and Subrahmanyam note the infusion of “Perso-Islamic expressions” (2012, p. 318) into Indian vernaculars. Anglo-Christian expressions similarly infuse Bengali and Hindi in the Company and colonial period even as Bengali and Hindi expressions migrate into English.

More significantly for our purposes, local texts and traditions were written in Persian *and* Sanskrit classics were translated into, commented on and read in Persian (2012, p. 318). Persian hence became an accepted metalanguage of Indian philosophy and culture for the literati, effectively, if not displacing Sanskrit, living alongside it as a medium of sophisticated scholarship. Developing a global scholarly distance, and establishing scholarly credibility requires the move to Persian in the Mughal period. And there is no evident anxiety about this shift in register. As we will see, English later assumes this role of scholarly metalanguage. Indian texts and traditions in the colonial period are described in English; Indian classics are translated into, commented on and read in English. English, if not displacing Sanskrit, comes to live alongside it as a medium of sophisticated scholarship. For a colonial Indian academic, the establishment of scholarly credibility requires the move to English.

Finally, Alam and Subrahmanyam note the ease with which the *munshī* inhabits Persian. Speaking of Nek Rai, who we encountered earlier, they write:

We have seen how comfortably he straddles a diversity of cultural and literary heritages... [He] is of course aware that he is not a Muslim, and that the story of Rama is a part of his own heritage, but he is equally comfortable with chishti saints and their shrines. The term “composite culture” has been much used and abused in recent years, but arguably one can find it in the life and education of such a *munshī*.

—(2012, p. 337).

We will see, especially in chapters 9 through 12, the parallel ease and comfort with which Indian intellectuals of the colonial period inhabit English in their scholarly writing. The elegance of BK Sarkar, A. C. Coomaraswamy, Jawarahlal

Nehru, or A. C. Mukerji's prose is striking, indeed enviable. R. Tagore, we might remember, won the Nobel Prize for literature not for his Bengali poetry, but for the English version of *Gitanjali*.

This effortless dwelling in the *vilayat/frangi* tongue, common to Persian- and English-speaking Indian intellectuals, contrasts remarkably with the colonial narrative of discomfort and anxiety about English—the narrative not only of Bhattacharyya and Daya Krishna noted in chapter 1 above, but also of R. Tagore, when he proclaims (in English, after winning the Nobel) his own incompetence in English:

That I cannot write English is such a patent fact that I never had even the vanity to feel ashamed of it. If anybody wrote an English note asking me for tea, I did not feel equal to answering it. Perhaps you think that by now I have got over that delusion. By no means. That I have written in English seems to be the delusion.

—(A. Chaudhuri, 2003, p. 106)

The shift in linguistic register—similar to that accomplished with such ease by their Persophone forebears—is anxiety-provoking for the Anglophone intellectual. And that anxiety is our subject matter. Contrast the assessment of Alam and Subrahmanyam of the impact of Persian on the intellectual sensibility of the seventeenth-century intellectual with Daya Krishna's reflection on the impact of English on that of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectual:

...[T]he Persian language itself plays a key role in [the *munshī's*] view of the world. It is through this language, its metaphors and possibilities, that he accedes to and imagines the world around him. The philosophical universe within which he conceives of all matters—including issues of social and religious conflict—is impregnated with Persian, and with all the richness of the “secular” tradition that the Indo-Persian represented by the seventeenth century. It is in this sense that we must understand what it meant to become, and to be, a *munshī* in the later Mughal world.

—(Alam and Subrahmanyam, 2012, p. 338)

Daya Krishna, on the other hand, said:

What the British produced was a strange species—a stranger in his own country. The Indian mind and sensibility and thinking [during the colonial period] were shaped by an alien civilization.

[The British] created a new kind of Indian who was not merely cut off from his civilization, but was educated in a different way. The

strangeness of the species is that their terms of reference are the West.... They put [philosophical problems] in a Western way.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 13)

So, what did the British produce, and how did they produce it? Why did these Indians take themselves to be strangers? What was alien? English language and civilization came from outside, but so did Persian and *vilayat* civilization. The history of India is a history of such assimilations. What is *new* about this “new kind of Indian”? Not that he is shaped by a foreign language, a foreign culture, or even a foreign ruler. We have seen how Indian culture was in fact shaped by such languages, cultures, and rulers. Was he really educated in a different way? We have seen that the *madrassa* is not so different from a Presidency university. And what is so different about the “language, ... metaphors and possibilities, ... the philosophical universe ... and ... the ‘secular’ tradition that the Indo-Persian represented” and “the terms of reference ... [of] the West?” Why is one said to have enriched Indian civilization, and the other said to have impoverished it? Nothing we have seen so far accounts for the difference between these two metanarratives.

2.4. Reason and Secularity: The Court of Jehangir and the Age of Reason

One might at this point propose that what really distinguishes philosophy in the colonial period as Western is its obsession with reason, its secularity, and its willingness to take seriously arguments from any source. In Anthony Flew’s now infamous words:

[P]hilosophy as the word is understood here, is concerned first, last, and all the time with argument. It is, incidentally, because most of what is labeled *Eastern Philosophy* is not so concerned—rather than any reason of Western parochialism—that this book draws no materials from any source east of Suez.

—(Flew, 1971, p. 36)

Flew is not alone in the prejudice that Asian “philosophy” is not concerned with argument, but aims rather at some kind of mystical transrational insight; nor are Western orientalist the only purveyors of this myth. Even S. Radhakrishnan, as we noted in chapter 1, promulgates this myth of the sublime East. But this is just a myth. As historians of Indian thought from Dasgupta (Dasgupta, 1922) to Sen (A. Sen, 2005) have pointed out, the tradition of rational argument is old in India. The tightly reasoned philosophy of the colonial period, we will see, is continuous with

this tradition. Only the supposed dichotomy between the spiritual East and the rational West is new.

Let us turn to the Mughal court, the center of power and culture in the era of the *munshī*. Akbar (reign 1556–1605) is justly celebrated for his tolerance, secularism, academic reforms, and encouragement of liberal scientific inquiry. The interreligious debates at his court exemplified this spirit. Alam and Subrahmanyam draw our attention to the continuation of this tradition in the court of Jehangir (1605–1627). Jehangir was continuing a courtly tradition initiated by his father, and the most natural context in which to set his debates is that of the enlightened Mughal imperial court. But there is a much older Indian tradition that cannot be ignored as a context for these debates—the tradition of intersectarian debates evident from the turn of the first millennium that gave rise to Indian logic. The history of Indian philosophy is the history of *purvapākṣas* getting their comeuppance, and this history determines the style of so much Indian philosophical *śāstra*, *bhāṣya*, and *ṭīkā*. With this context in view, Akbar and Jehangir, enlightened rulers though they were, were not introducing rational argument to the Indian philosophical and religious scene; they were merely bringing it to the palace. It is one more episode in a long history of rational debate.⁴

The topics of debate in the Mughal court were typically theological. But the tenor and method of debate was philosophical. The questions posed, the positions juxtaposed, and the arguments advanced would be immediately recognizable to a contemporary Western philosopher of religion (including Sir Anthony Flew). For instance, Alam and Subrahmanyam record debates on the following topics: the literal versus figurative understanding of the attributes of God (2012, pp. 279–280); the coherence of the Trinity as an account of a single individual (2012, pp. 289–290); the question of whether a single substance can have both divine and human essence (2012, p. 292); the nature of the sacrifice of the crucifixion (2012, pp. 293–294); the possibility of miracles (2012, pp. 283, 300).

As Alam and Subrahmanyam note (2012, pp. 281–282), the goal of these debates seems to have been less the quixotic attempt to convert either the Mughals or the Jesuits, but to explore the points of theological and philosophical disagreement and agreement. Each side was concerned to gain a genuine understanding of the philosophical outlook of the other as well as an understanding and appreciation of material culture and art. As a consequence, one of the salient characteristics of these debates is the degree to which the parties took one another seriously. This is evident not only in the records of the debates that come down to us, but also in the fact that each party took pains to learn the languages

⁴ It is this tradition of debate that Raghuramaraju (2006) identifies and takes to have been erased in the colonial period, but which we think was very much continued in that period.

and to translate the texts of the other. Once again, we note, these Indian philosophical debates took place not in Sanskrit, but in Persian.

This commitment of the Mughal court to serious engagement with a goal of genuine understanding has a clear origin in Akbar's reign. This commitment is genuinely cosmopolitan. As one of Akbar's *munshīs* puts it,

...the Darius of the times [i.e., Akbar], king in appearance and reality, on account of his love of knowledge and his excessive generosity towards the people, expressed the desire to have the secrets of religions and accounts of rulers of every land and the revelation of the mysteries of all eminent philosophers continuously described in his court.

—(Alam and Subrahmanyam, 2012, p. 269)

Akbar also insisted on a scientific approach to European geography and history. He was conscious of the status of his kingdom not as the center of a universe with a minor periphery, but as one kingdom among many, representing one culture among many. This sense of place in a larger world and commitment to intellectual interaction with that world hence has a long trajectory in precolonial Indian history. Akbar was concerned to get European history right on its own terms, with a historiography based on European sources written by scholars conversant with Latin, Greek, and Portuguese. Once again, languages are not stigmatized, but recognized as essential scholarly and administrative tools, and those who learn them are valorized, not deprecated.

Philosophy in Mughal India was not restricted to the court. There was a vital, progressive research program continuous with the classical Sanskrit schools in such traditional centers of learning as Varanasi and Navadīpa. Ganeri (Ganeri, 2011) explores in great detail the development of theories of reasoning in this scholarly community during the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries. He documents both the progressive nature of the research programs active in Varanasi and their openness to outside influences, including, provocatively, new European philosophy, sometimes assimilated in Varanasi within only a few years of publication in Europe.

Ganeri points out that the French philosopher and student of Gassendi, François Bernier, translated the works of Gassendi and Descartes into Persian and communicated them to the Benarasi pandit Kavindra Sarasvatī, “an important intermediary between the Sanskrit intelligentsia and the Moghul court” (Ganeri, 2011, pp. 14–16). If this is right, Gassendi's and Descartes' work was available in Persian (and possibly Sanskrit) in India before it was published in French! Once again, Ganeri emphasizes the regular circulation of ideas and texts between Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit and the collegiality of Hindu and Muslim philosophers, as well as a genuinely cosmopolitan sensibility.

We have been emphasizing up to this point the role of non-Sanskrit languages in precolonial Indian philosophical discourse. But Sanskrit was also alive and well as a philosophical language in this period (Ganeri, 2011). In fact, the Navya Nyāya movement that dominated this period of philosophical activity was primarily a Sanskrit-based movement, although, like most philosophy at this time, its texts were often translated into Persian and other Indic languages. Navya Nyāya, as its name suggests, was focused on epistemology and the philosophy of language, and developed from earlier Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika in dialogue with new atomisms arriving from Europe. The fact that this new movement represents a continuation of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition is significant for our purposes. On the one hand, it is fiercely analytical and secular. Ganeri draws our attention to the commitment of philosophers such as the Jain scholar Yaśovijaya Gaṇi to neutrality between sects and to reason as the arbiter of philosophical ideas (2011, p. 33). On the other hand, it is historically grounded. It thus provides a conceptual bridge to the analytical approach to Advaita Vedānta we will see in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to which we turn in chapters 10 and 11.

The analytical treatises composed by philosophers in the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries also develop, as Ganeri argues, a new precise technical Sanskrit philosophical vocabulary that frames much Indian thinking about knowledge, inference, and justification well into the twentieth century. (See Ganeri, 2011, chapter 15.) This new language represents yet another stage of the evolution of philosophical genre from the poetic to literary prose into a technical scholastic literature. This genre therefore represents a progressive development of an originally Indian tradition in polyglot dialogue with the West. This is yet another precedent that normalizes the philosophy of the colonial period as an Indian cultural phenomenon.

Moreover, just as Shulman (2012) notes that the renaissance of late medieval/premodern South India was mediated by a new thematization of the imagination as an object of contemplation, study, and theorization, Ganeri's history suggests to us that the renaissance of early modern India was mediated by a new thematization of *reason* as an object of contemplation, study, and theorization. It is not that nobody imagined anything before the twelfth century, nor that nobody reasoned before the fifteenth. But in each case, we see a sudden advance in research, literary production, and cultural sensibility driven by an explicit thematization of cognitive activity. This second episode is of special interest to us because it enables the kind of self-reflective philosophical activity that allows the distinctively twentieth-century involution of philosophy as a study of its own practices—an involution we see both in India and in the West, but in India, driven by Indian dynamics on its own terms, and not an import.

Ganeri concludes that “early modernity in India consists in the formation of a new philosophical self, one which makes it possible meaningfully to conceive of

oneself as engaging the ancient and the alien in conversation” (2011, p. 244). This is an astute observation. Once again, we see the pattern of intellectual engagement and of self-representation that characterizes colonial Indian philosophers anticipated in their precolonial forebears. Their analytical engagement with the ancient, and their self-conscious interaction with European ideas is not a new, un-Indian development wrought by British rule, but a continuation of an Indian philosophical practice of cosmopolitan, progressive thought grounded in tradition, in dialogue with modernity.

Ganeri’s observation, however—as well as our discussions of the *karaṇam*, the *munshīs*, and the court of Jehangir—also establishes an interesting disanalogy between the pre-British philosophical sensibility in India and the colonial sensibility. In pre-British India there was no sense that Indian philosophy was “pure” of foreign influences. The dichotomy of *deśī/videśī* did not structure Indian thought about philosophy in the pre-British period, and the predicaments that so vexed colonial Indian philosophers could hence not be framed. These predicaments, however, as we have seen, erupt with considerable force in the colonial period. Why? We propose that this is not because of a radical first-order discontinuity between the precolonial and colonial intellectual worlds, but rather because of the establishment of a specific metanarrative of Indian intellectual history, one grounded in a fantasy of purity and authenticity co-constituted by European orientalist and Indian nationalists, each for their own reasons.

This narrative of linguistic and philosophical purity has India hermetically sealed for centuries, its traditions preserved without dilution and articulated in the holy language of Sanskrit. All of this changes, on this view, with the arrival of European powers. As a consequence, a radical discontinuity is attributed to thought and culture in the colonial situation. This narrative demands interrogation. Our attention to the debates about language in colonial India in chapter 3 addresses certain aspects of that narrative. Others come in for question in subsequent chapters.

In this volume, we propose an alternative narrative of continuity in scholarly practice between the classical, the early modern, and the colonial. On the narrative we suggest, the very characteristics often identified as *videśī* in colonial Indian philosophy are as *deśī* as one could ever want. The use of English—an administrative language of foreign origin—as a scholarly metalanguage and as a pan-Indian lingua franca in which Indian scholars comfortably dwell has a clear precedent in Persian, which played precisely this role for centuries of Mughal rule, both within Mughal dominions and in the South Indian kingdoms at their borders. Similarly, the fact that colonial Indian philosophers moved so easily between Indic languages and multiple European languages, including English, Greek, Latin, and German has a clear precedent in the Mughal court and in the culture of the *munshī*.

The claim that colonial India gave birth to a secularity in what were always “spiritual” traditions is also belied by the history of philosophy from the late medieval period on. The *karaṇam* of South India, the philosophers of the courts of Akbar and Jehangir, and the *Navya Nayāyika* philosophers of Varanasi, while no doubt religious in their private lives, all had clear secular aims and methods in their professional lives. They were also committed to the use of reason in philosophical debate and indeed thematized that use as a philosophical topic in its own right, without waiting for the arrival of epistemology from Great Britain. But the fact that they did not need missionaries to bring them epistemology does not mean that these philosophers were hermetically sealed in a subcontinental philosophical bell jar. Just like their colonial descendants, these philosophers were open to texts and ideas from overseas as well as from distinct Indian traditions.

The view that philosophy only came to be written in scholarly prose in the British period and hence that the professionalization of philosophy is a British import is also false. As we have seen, from the time of the *karaṇam* on, Indian philosophy was regularly composed in prose treatises in technical language, and often in foreign or prakrit languages. This literature was typically addressed by intellectuals to intellectuals. Moreover, in both precolonial and colonial India, philosophy had both a professional and a public audience. Just as in the case of the *karaṇam* or the *munshī*, colonial philosophers shaped public discourse, public opinion, and public taste.⁵ This class is not, therefore, new in this respect either, but is a continuation of an Indian tradition of a class of intellectuals who function as cultural intermediaries, bringing the ideas of high culture into contact with middlebrow taste and opinion.

In the process, this class produced not an entirely *new* philosophical self, but continued the evolution of the self-consciously late modern philosophical self that Ganeri demonstrates developed in modernity, a self that developed in sequel to the early modern sensibility Shulman detects in South India. This self may well have taken itself to be strangely discontinuous with its own culture and with the Indian philosophical traditions that preceded it. But, as we argued above, that sensibility may itself constitute false consciousness, and so may need a careful historical explanation, an explanation to which we now turn.

⁵ Philosophy always mattered in India; if there is a discontinuity in this respect in the colonial period, it is that it began to matter politically as well, an issue we will address directly in chapters 5–8.

The Company and the Crown

Macaulay's India?

Something changed. While we have seen modernity presaged in the precolonial period, in South India, in the Mughal courts, and even in conservative Benares, modernity in its full flower really comes to India with British occupation. Its dawn occurs well before the assumption of Crown authority after the war of 1857. As we will see, the form in which this modernity materializes, and the vehicle for its introduction will explain the disanalogy between the sensibility of the colonial Anglophone Indian scholar and the precolonial Persophone scholar. Modern India, with its promise and its anxieties, comes into existence as a consequence of a string of events brought into focus by the Minute of Thomas Macaulay.

3.1. The Context of the Minute

Macaulay, famously and infamously, argues for the creation of “a new class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (“Minute on Education,” 19.8). Whether he accomplished this task alone, or at all, is a matter of some controversy; but it is hardly controversial that he created at least in the historical imagination a new class of some kind. Those who disparage the philosophy of the colonial period, as well as much of its art, literature, theater, and other cultural production, often do so on the grounds that it was the product of this class. And curiously, it is those who take themselves to be of this class who first articulate both the myth of the purity of the Indian philosophical and cultural tradition, and express their own sense of discontinuity with that tradition. Each of these metanarratives is a colonial construction; neither is consistent with the historical record; each is, however, historically effective in constructing “the strange species” to which Daya Krishna refers (see chapter 1).

In this chapter, we explore the roots of this distinctive modernity in Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Education" and the context in which it was written. We are interested in excavating from that infamous text a sense of the particularity of the introduction of English, and the respect in which this new Indian language differs in valence from earlier foreign-born Indian languages. In order to understand this, we pay close attention to the arguments Macaulay offers for the systematic replacement of Sanskrit and Persian (to which he persistently refers as "Arabic") with English in Indian education and administration. While Macaulay's position and ideology are often characterized as brute retrograde colonialism, there is a subtlety and power in his arguments as well as in the ideology that motivates them that merits attention. It is the content of these arguments and that ideology, no less than the alleged role of the "Minute" in effecting the passage of the English Education Act of 1835, that determined the fate of English and the Anglophone Indian over the next century and a half.

The immediate context for the Minute is the debate about the implementation of the education clauses of the East India Company Act of 1813, also known as the "Charter Act." In that Act, Parliament enjoins the Company to provide education to Indian citizens. In 1835, the debate concerned the choice of the linguistic medium in which the Company would provide that education. From 1813 to 1835, the Company followed the lead both of English Orientalists and the East India Company Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, committing to a continuity between Mughal and British rule. They therefore financed and administered academies in Sanskrit in Benares and in Persian in Calcutta, educating its administrators in these classical languages of law, administration, philosophy, and literature.

This policy reflected both a degree of respect for classical culture and a frankly practical motivation to develop administrative and business competence in the languages of India. Macaulay's Minute was penned from Calcutta where he was a member of the Council of India and President of the General Committee of Public Instruction. The Minute presents his advice to Governor General Bentinck regarding the decision whether to continue education in Persian and Sanskrit or to switch to English. Macaulay, as we shall see, argues for the use of English in all education financed by the Company on grounds no less enlightened, and no less practical than those that motivated Hastings' policy.

There are three curious features of the Minute worth noting at the outset. First is the complex relationship between Crown and Company. In 1835, Britain as a nation had no state interest or legal authority in India. The East India Company was a private merchant house, albeit a merchant house with its own army.¹ Nonetheless, the debate about its corporate policy was undertaken by Parliament, and the language of that debate anticipated British rule.

¹ At some points, the largest standing army in the world at the time.

Another curious feature of the Minute is that although in much popular imagination it is the decisive blow in favor of the new educational policy, it is in fact written some months after Bentinck had decided in favor of English, and indeed, most of its recommendations were not in fact implemented. It is at best a bit of rhetorical cover for a more modest adjustment in linguistic policy. Finally, it is worth noting that despite the reputation of the Minute as a work of individual genius, it is in fact a bit of a pastiche, adopting not only the ideas of others, but often their very words without attribution. Cleverly, Macaulay manages to adopt ideas and phrases from protagonists of virtually every position in play in the language debate, setting himself up as an ally of each of the warring parties. The remarkable success of this improbable rhetorical strategy is the real mark of Macaulay's genius. We now turn to a close reading of the sections of the "Minute" relevant to our purposes.

3.2. Reading the Minute

§1 is a preamble, noting the context for the discussion. The argument begins in §2. Macaulay notes that the previous Act requires that

A sum is set apart "for the revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of the knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories."

We pause to note several important issues already raised by this brief quotation of the Act of 1813. It is important for any understanding of Macaulay's subsequent argument that these are the issues on which he chooses to focus at the outset. First, literature is the topic at hand. The question then arises: what literature is to be revived and promoted? One might have thought—and it had hitherto been assumed—that the literature in question would be Indian literature. Macaulay will call this assumption into question. Second, the Act is aimed at the support of the "learned native." Once again, one might have thought—and it had hitherto been assumed—that the "native" in question was "learned" in a particular respect, namely, the classical traditions of India. Macaulay will call this assumption into question as well. Third, the Act mentions the promotion of science. Just what sciences are to be promoted and in what way is also contentious.

Finally, the Act mentions that this education is to be undertaken in "British territories." We pause only to note that until 1857, there were no British territories in India (whatever else might have been the case in Australasia to which

Macaulay casually compares India as a British possession), despite the fact that the Company and its officials regularly wrote of India as its “possession” or “dominion,” appointed a governor-general, ran a court system, and generally acted as an imperial power.² So, in the Minute, Macaulay is in the business not only of designing British education, but also of designing British rule.³ The two enterprises are inextricable. Macaulay continues:

It is argued, or taken for granted, that by “literature,” the Parliament could have meant only Arabic and Sanskrit literature, that they never would have given the honourable appellation of “a learned native” to a native who was familiar with the poetry of Milton, the Metaphysics of Locke, and the Physics of Newton; but that they meant to designate by that name only such persons as might have studied in the sacred books of the Hindoos all the uses of Cusa-grass and all the mysteries of absorption into the Deity.

—(§1)

Here we see the first of several quotations without attribution. Macaulay is quoting a letter from Ram Mohan Roy to Lord Amherst of December 11, 1823, in which he argues for modern European education in India (*Selections from the educational records of the government of India.*, 1960, pp. 98–101). Macaulay’s quotation is a deft reminder of his alliance not only with his commercial colleagues, including James Mill, Trevelyan, and Hobhouse, but also with well-known upper-class progressive Hindus like Ram Mohan Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore, both of the reformist Brahmo Samaj, a movement we discuss in detail in chapter 5.

There is indeed something self-evident about the position Macaulay ascribes to his contemporaries’ reading of the Act. One might have reasonably assumed that when thinking about “learned natives” of India, the British Parliament, perhaps informed by the great scholars of the Royal Asiatic Society and the Bengal Society, would have been concerned to support classical Indian learning as an enlightened policy of governance. One might also assume a respect for classical languages, like that accorded in British universities to Greek and Latin (as indeed was the case both for William Jones and Lord Hastings), and it would have been odd for Parliament to have presumed in the Indian intelligentsia familiarity with British poetry, philosophy, or science. The target of Macaulay’s attack is no straw man. The attack begins with an analogy:

² Legally, the Company operated only on letters patent as a *diwan* of the Mughal emperor.

³ Indeed, Macaulay, shortly after completing the “Minute,” drafted the Indian penal code, a comprehensive legislative achievement that remains largely intact today. His claim to the status of the architect of modern India hence has some merit.

Suppose the Pacha (sic.) of Egypt, a country once superior in knowledge of the nations of Europe, but now sunk far below them, were to appropriate a sum for the purpose of “reviving and promoting literature, and encouraging ‘learned natives’ of Egypt,” would anybody infer that he meant the youth of his pachalic to give years to the study of hieroglyphics, to search into all the doctrines disguised under the fable of Osiris, and to ascertain with all possible accuracy the ritual with which cats and onions were anciently adored? Would he be justly charged with inconsistency, if, instead of employing his young subjects in deciphering obelisks, he were to order them to be instructed in the English and French languages, and in all the sciences to which those languages are the chief keys?

—(§1)

This is more than mere rhetorical flourish. Macaulay is here constituting a new political “natural kind”—what we would call now the “developing country.” He is doing so in the context of a clear vision of modernity as involving the march of science. He is also arguing for the obligation of the rulers of these developing countries to bring to their subjects that which makes modern development possible, viz., European science, and therefore the languages in which that science is prosecuted. This is, in Macaulay’s voice, no parochial argument advanced by an English colonial official, pertaining to an English possession, but rather a universalist argument, appealing to any rational administrator or ruler, including an enlightened Pasha.⁴

Macaulay is disparaging the past and its study in favor of the future and its enablement. But he is also blithely comparing without argument Sanskrit and Persian to hieroglyphics, and more importantly, the content of its literature to rituals for the worship of cats and onions. So, the demands of universalism and reason may not be as strict as they appear. Cool reason, in Macaulay’s hands, may find an ally in caustic innuendo. Be that as it may, we emphasize here that Macaulay’s argument suggests a model of modernity for India that is reasonable, and which in fact prevailed, a modernity mediated by English and the importation of European learning, and a model that was endorsed by many educated Indians of his own time. But for all that, this need not have been a rupture. As we have seen, modernisms and importations are nothing new in Indian intellectual history.

Sections 3 and 4 need not detain us long. In §3, Macaulay argues that shifting from Persian and Sanskrit to English would in fact require no new Act of

⁴ This argument is not surprising given Macaulay’s broader liberal, secular, and modernist social and political commitments, his background in the British abolitionist movement and his alliance with Bentham and JS Mill in matters concerning social policy and penal reform (Clive, 1973, pp. 452–454).

Parliament in virtue of the mention of the promotion of science in the original Act, a promotion which, he argues, would be impossible in the Indian languages. This argument is noteworthy in one respect, and that is the foregrounding of European science in the curriculum as opposed to classical Indian learning and privileging the European tradition over any Asian rival.⁵ Ayurvedic medicine, then, is not medicine, but superstition. In §4 he replies to the argument that there is an implicit promise in the 1813 Act to continue education in the classical languages, arguing instead that it is always permissible to reverse an obviously failed course of action, given that the purpose of the Act is to benefit Indian society and British administration. It is this goal of benefit—of “utility”—that is central to any reasonable program, a view articulated by Macaulay’s senior colleague in the Company, James Mill. This argument is reasonable, however, only given the premise that education in Persian and Sanskrit is an inevitable failure.

In §5, Macaulay briskly sets aside the Indian vernacular languages as fit vehicles for education.

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India, contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them.

From our vantage point, this is a rather remarkable claim (one which, as we will see, John Stuart Mill and Lord Auckland were to reject as a matter of final policy). As we saw in the previous chapter, India had produced by this time an impressive body of vernacular literature on a number of topics. Macaulay was probably ignorant of this literature. In any case, he uses this common perception of the status of vernacular languages to motivate an interesting bit of sociolinguistic engineering, a kind of trickle-down that was envisioned by Anglophile and Orientalist alike, from the vocabulary and practice of the educated class to the vernacular languages. This view was by no means unanimous, but was clearly dominant in the Company, and curiously has a clear precedent in the enrichment of vernacular literature by the Persophone *munshi*:

It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher

⁵ The argument is noteworthy in one more respect as well. It owes a good deal to Ram Mohan Roy’s agitation for education in the modern sciences and gains plausibility from the enormous demand for English education as evidenced in enrollments in English academies in Madras and the Hindu College in Calcutta, an argument that, we will see, is revived about a half century later by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in the establishment of Aligarh University.

studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.

Hence the need to choose a nonvernacular language as the medium of educated discourse. At this point, the only question is, which nonvernacular language? Lest one become indignant at this colonial administrator's dismissal of Bengali (or for that matter Hindustani or Urdu) as a language fit for learning or administration, recall that this preference for an elite language over vernaculars as a vehicle for scholarship and administration in India is hardly a British invention. The introduction of Sanskrit a few millennia earlier set the precedent, and the entrenchment of Persian, Turkish, and Arabic under the Mughals confirmed it. The only novelty in Macaulay's program is the specific language. He turns to this question in §6:

What then shall that language be? One-half of the Committee maintain that it should be the English. The other half strongly recommend the Arabic and the Sanscrit. The whole question seems to me to be, which language is the best worth knowing?

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole of the native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.

Macaulay's confession of ignorance here is disarming. It is not meant, as one might expect, to be a disqualification from the debate at hand. Quite the contrary, it is the supreme qualification. For Macaulay represents himself here not as the expert witness in the matter, but rather as the disinterested, dispassionate, and rational judge.⁶

The echo of his senior colleague James Mill's carefully distanced and "objective" *History*, written in proud ignorance of Indian languages by one who never visited India is clear. Like Mill, Macaulay, recognizing own ignorance, defers to

⁶ The Scottish missionary Alexander Duff adds a religious argument as well: "In the very act of acquiring English, the [child's] mind, in grasping the import of *new terms*, is perpetually brought in contact with the *new ideas*, the *new truths*, of which these terms are the symbols and representatives; so that, by the time that the language has been mastered, the student must be *tenfold less* the child of pantheism, idolatry and superstition than before" (Duff, 1889, p. 544).

the “Orientalists,” the relevant experts. His is the voice of reason. On the other hand, this voice of reason is remarkably silent regarding its sources. And sources are important, especially to someone who was to become such an eminent historian. Certainly, no names are named, no texts cited. Macaulay leads us to believe that he is citing Oxbridge scholarship. In fact, his most direct source is Ram Mohan Roy. Macaulay the anti-intellectual British administrator hence makes bedfellows both with imagined professors of Sanskrit and with a vernacular-promoting Bengali religious reformer.

Macaulay takes two distinct turns in this discussion. First, having earlier characterized English as the language of the future, he now turns to the past, finding that even on that score, “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole of the native literature of India and Arabia.” So, while remaining firmly instrumental in the valuation of knowledge, Persian and Sanskrit are devalued not only with respect to their use in the future, but also as repositories of knowledge of the past.

But things get more interesting. Macaulay subtly shifts ground from the instrumental to the intrinsic when he writes, “the intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is, indeed, fully admitted by those members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education.” Once again, the voice of reason is silent regarding in what this intrinsic superiority could consist, or regarding the evidence for it. One might have assumed that the answer to the question, “which language is the best worth knowing?” would have rested solely on grounds of utility as one would expect from a friend and colleague of John Stuart Mill. But here the register changes. We are now comparing the intrinsic value of Western learning and language to that of Indian learning and language.

Macaulay addresses this issue implicitly in the next paragraph:

It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. In every branch of physical or moral philosophy, the relative position of the two nations is nearly the same.

While Macaulay teases the reader with a brief suggestion that Indian poetry might be ranked on a par with English, he quickly retracts even that concession. But more important, he shifts the ground on which judgments of “intrinsic value” are to rest. Following his Utilitarian allies, it is the more “useful” literature such as history that is to be compared. While we should recall that Macaulay has admitted his complete ignorance of the relevant languages, he does confidently assert (on the authority of James Mill) that Indian history is of negligible value. We must assume that he is completely ignorant of the historical literature, for instance, of the South Indian *karaṇam*. But we can also safely assume that even had he known of this literature, his judgment would have been swayed more by the opinions of British Orientalists who had little time for vernacular literature, or by those of Hindu Anglophiles, who had little time for *any* Indian literature. These interlocutors provided him with all the ammunition he needed.

In §7, Macaulay briskly dismisses Indian vernacular languages as suitable media for education. In doing so, he is taking sides without real argument in a rather complex debate, inasmuch as vernacular education was an important part of the Fort William Curriculum (the foundation of the training program for employees of the East India Company, and also the core of missionary training at the time), and vernacular publication was widespread in colonial India. Nonetheless, there was a consensus—although not unanimity—to which he could refer on the question of vernacular education: that while the vernaculars might eventually be rendered suitable for education, this required their enrichment by more scholarly languages.^{7,8}

⁷ Rao, et al. note that the occlusion of indigenous Indian historiography is mediated in part by a decision by British scholars regarding where to look for it, a decision reflecting a distinctively British view of the nature of “high culture,” and with it a reflex disparagement of vernacular literature. They write, “When nineteenth-century British historians addressed the issue of the possible existence of an ‘indigenous’ historiographical tradition in India, before the epoch of the East India Company, their natural tendency was to seize upon the tradition of ‘chronicle writing’ in Persian that had existed in India from at least the time of the foundation of the Sultanate of Delhi” (2001, p. 209). This of course reflects the prejudice that serious history would be imperial history. Similarly, we note, that when Macaulay writing for the East India Company or even his Orientalist opponents in the Bengal Society sought serious Indian literature of any kind, they immediately looked for Indian Latin or Greek, namely Sanskrit, and ignored all vernacular contributions.

⁸ The popular view of Macaulay as colonialist bigot has him hostile to Indian vernacular languages. This is far from the truth. While he was dismissive of the classical Indian languages, he encouraged the development of the vernaculars. He was later to support vernacular education with enthusiasm, once convinced that the vernaculars were capable of expressing the ideas of modern science. Lord Curzon, later in the nineteenth century was to lament the ascendancy of English to the detriment of the vernaculars, blaming this on “the cold breath of Macaulay’s rhetoric” (quoted in Clive 1973, p. 416). But even this is unfair as a reading of Macaulay’s position, though it does represent the consequence of the policy of Anglicization Macaulay so vigorously supported as an intermediate step in Indian education.

The only question in the Council of India and in the Committee on Instruction was “which languages?” The Orientalists argued that the affinities of the vernaculars to Sanskrit and Persian argued for those languages; the Anglicists argued that those languages themselves were sufficiently degenerate that those very affinities argued for the use of a new language. English had already been established as the language of Company administration and of the High Courts (Clive, 1973, pp. 351–352). The continuity between Company and Mughal policy regarding the use of a *vilayat/firangi* tongue as the language of the Court need hardly be noted.

Macaulay, presupposing the inadequacy of the vernaculars, begins his argument for English by noting (again, without argument) its obvious superiority to all alternatives:

The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands preeminent even among the languages of the west. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence; with historical compositions, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equaled; with just and lively representations of human life and human nature; with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence and trade; with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or expand the intellect of man. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together.

Having noted that the claims on behalf of English “are hardly necessary to recapitulate,” Macaulay follows his own advice, and does not do so, his rhetoric substituting for argument. He reminds us of the glories of the English language. But of course this is not a complete comparative argument without a demonstration of the deficiencies of both Indian vernaculars and the classical Indian languages. To be fair, he could always rely on the judgments of Whig Orientalists and influential Bengali Anglophiles if he needed to complete the comparative argument, but those opinions would hardly be dispositive. He immediately supplants this enthymeme with an argument grounded in more familiar Utilitarian foundations.

Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia,—communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

There are five related points in this compressed passage. First, “English is the language spoken by the ruling class.” Macaulay, of course, refers to the British. While he is right *de facto*, it is worth pointing out once again that *de jure* the Company was a private trading corporation that had derived its licenses from fealty to the Mughal Court in Delhi. The language of the *de jure* ruling class was, in fact, Persian. Macaulay has his eye more firmly on the future than on his present. Second, English is the language “spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government.” This is also a curious and circular justification. Given that Bentinck had only within the last two years replaced Persian with English in the high courts and administration by decree (Clive, 1973, pp. 351–352), the fact that English was the language of Indian barristers and clerks was itself the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy, not an argument in favor of its presence in these venues.

Third, English also “is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East.” Once again, a Utilitarian justification emerges. India was, in Macaulay’s vision, and in the vision of his employer, first and foremost an economic zone. The function of Indian subjects was to facilitate its profitability, and English was the most efficient linguistic vehicle by means of which they could fulfill that function. This, too, is an argument from an anticipated future, and an argument in which the role of Indian “subjects” is conceived from the point of view of the Company, not from that of those who are to be educated.

In fact, the primary motive for English education, as Evans shows (Evans, 2002), was not any ideological commitment to the English language, to Western culture, or to any abstract value, but rather crudely economic. Bentinck was sent to India by the Board of Governors to cut costs. In one of the first great documented exploitations of a globalized labor market through outsourcing, Bentinck hit on the idea that Indian clerks and administrators would work more cheaply than their British counterparts. In order to lower labor costs, he first made English and administrative training available to Indians as well as Englishmen, and then

magnanimously gave Indians *preference* for positions at the Company schools and for employment. English was conceived as a vehicle not for the transmission of culture but for the depression of wages. Given that the real audience for this Minute was the Board of Governors in London, these arguments would have had real rhetorical force, despite their logical inadequacy.

Fourth, “It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia,—communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire.” Here, at least, we have a claim that is largely factually true (despite the fact that the “Indian empire” is still only anticipated). But true premises do not a sound argument make. The fact that English settlers in South Africa and Australia speak English might be vaguely relevant to the fact that English settlers in Bengal speak English, but would have been of little relevance to the linguistic practice of the average Bengali. Macaulay is imaginatively (in a great Indian tradition harking to Pūcalār of Ninravūr, encountered in chapter 2, with whom he no doubt would have loved to have been compared) spinning an Empire into being. Like Pūcalār, he was successful.

Macaulay concludes that, “of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.” Well, in a colony in which it had been established as the language of rule, of justice, of commerce, and of international relations, yes. But to argue from the facts on the ground to this conclusion is to argue in a very tight circle; a circle that, nonetheless, would have been very persuasive with the Board of Governors to whom Macaulay reported.

In §8, Macaulay asks whether the Company is therefore responsible to teach English. Adopting (without acknowledgment) an argument advanced by Ram Mohan Roy in a letter to Lord Amherst (Clive, 1973, p. 350) as *ad hominem* against Orientalist arguments for the greater usefulness of Sanskrit and Persian, he argues instead that the responsibility of the Company as a *souzerain* in India is to teach not these classical languages, but English:

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages 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 patronise sound Philosophy and true 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 boarding school,—History, abounding with kings thirty feet

high, and reigns thirty thousand years long,—and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

There are three important arguments implicit in this section. First, following Ram Mohan Roy, there is the point about a ruler's obligation to its subjects. India already had Sanskrit and Persian competence. The British came with something better to offer, and it is a ruler's duty to provide its subjects with what they do not already have, especially if it is better. Roy and his colleagues founded Hindu College two decades before the Minute as an English-speaking institution, and English academies had sprung up all over Madras for precisely this reason. Aligarh was to follow only a few decades later, at the insistence of Indian Muslims, albeit with English benefactors.

Second, there is a nice egalitarian point to be made. Macaulay was an enthusiast of Trevelyan's reform of the Fort William policy, according to which Indian and English students were accepted on an equal footing, and positions in the Company administration were allotted based upon results at the College. Even though this apparently egalitarian policy was crudely mercenary, it was a genuinely egalitarian approach to education.⁹ To implement that policy, however, the language of instruction could only be English. Finally, English was to be the vehicle of modernity, repository of a literature concerned with truth, not fable, science, not myth.¹⁰

In §9, Macaulay confirms the power of English as a vehicle for progress and modernity through two potent examples. He first asks whether as England itself moved into modernity, its progress would have been best served by a return to Latin and Greek, the most obvious analogs of the classical languages Sanskrit and Persian. Given the essential role of the modern language at home, it stands to reason, he argues, that English could play the same salutary role in India. Macaulay's fundamental hostility to highbrow classical studies is certainly in the background here, as he argues not only in favor of English, but for the suppression of the classical languages. He also adduces the example of Russia, to which, he argues somewhat less plausibly, civilization was brought only through the import of French and English.

Macaulay then turns from an argument based upon utility as judged from the standpoint of the British to considerations based upon the desires of the Anglophile Indian. He offers three arguments for this conclusion: one grounded

⁹ Again, this is not surprising. Macaulay's sentiments throughout his political career, both in England and in India were more egalitarian than elitist, contrary to current popular belief.

¹⁰ Macaulay's persistent confusion of tales regarded by Indians as myths with versions of history or geography is the legacy of James Mill's *History of British India*, an egregiously misleading history with disproportionate influence at the time.

on the need for stipends for students of classical languages; one grounded in petitions for compensation for injury done by education in classical languages; and one grounded in the lack of demand for literature printed in Persian and Sanskrit.

In § 10, Macaulay points out that while students pay to study English, they are paid to study Sanskrit and Persian:

This is proved by the fact that we are forced to pay our Arabic and Sanscrit students, while those who learn English are willing to pay us. All the declamations in the world about the love and reverence of the natives for their sacred dialects will never, in the mind of any impartial person, outweigh the undisputed fact, that we cannot find, in all our vast empire, a single student who will let us teach him those dialects unless we will pay him.

I have now before me the accounts of the Madrassa for one month,—in the month of December, 1833. The Arabic students appear to have been seventy-seven in number. All receive stipends from the public. The whole amount paid to them is above 500 rupees a month. On the other side of the account stands the following item: Deduct amount realized from the out-students of English for the months of May, June and July last, 103 rupees.

For Macaulay, the market is decisive. As Melville puts it so pithily in *Moby Dick*, “there is all the difference in the world between paying and being paid.” The fact that students are willing to pay to learn English shows that they want to learn English. The fact that students expect to be paid to learn Persian and Sanskrit shows that they do not want to learn these languages. As Macaulay’s Orientalist adversary James Princep pointed out (Clive, 1973, p. 374), this argument is not straightforward. For one thing, those paying to study English were doing so not out of a desire for English, per se, but as an investment in a future ruled by the British, anticipating future profits from their linguistic facility. On the other hand, those in the Madrassa and the Benares academy were following a long-standing *Brahmācārya* tradition in which students devote full time to studying under the patronage of a teacher or *math*. If this is so, nothing whatsoever follows from these facts regarding the desire for English. Macaulay is alive to this criticism:

I have been told that it is merely from want of local experience that I am surprised at these phenomena, and that it is not the fashion for students in India to study at their own charges. This only confirms me in my opinion. Nothing is more certain than that it never can in any part of

the world be necessary to pay men for doing what they think pleasant and profitable. India is no exception to this rule. The people of India do not require to be paid for eating rice when they are hungry, or for wearing woollen cloth in the cold season. To come nearer to the case before us, the children who learn their letters and a little elementary Arithmetic from the village school-master are not paid by him. He is paid for teaching them. Why then is it necessary to pay people to learn Sanscrit and Arabic? Evidently because it is universally felt that the Sanscrit and Arabic are languages, the knowledge of which does not compensate for the trouble of acquiring them. On all such subjects the state of the market is the decisive test.

This reply is patently question-begging. But this is only the first of Macaulay's arguments, and we must grant that a certain class of Indians in the early and mid-nineteenth century did want instruction in English, and was attracted to English culture and fashion. (Indeed, J. S. Mill, who shared Macaulay's conviction that education in English would be a benefit to India, also urged that given the Anglophile sentiment already evident in urban Bengal, it would be more effective to "encourage" than to "impose" English as a medium of education.) Macaulay now turns to an event that he takes to be decisive.

I have been used to see petitions to Government for compensation. All these petitions, even the most unreasonable of them, proceeded on the supposition that some loss had been sustained- that some wrong had been inflicted. These are surely the first petitioners who ever demanded compensation for having been educated gratis, for having been supported by the public during twelve years, and then sent forth into the world well furnished with literature and science. They represent their education as an injury which gives them a claim on the Government for redress, as an injury for which the stipends paid to them during the infliction were a very inadequate compensation. And I doubt not that they are in the right. They have wasted the best years of life in learning what procures for them neither bread nor respect. Surely we might, with advantage, have saved the cost of making these persons useless and miserable; surely, men may be brought up to be burdens to the public and objects of contempt to their neighbours at a somewhat smaller charge to the state. But such is our policy. We do not even stand neuter in the contest between truth and falsehood. We are not content to leave the natives to the influence of their own hereditary prejudices. To the natural difficulties which obstruct the progress of sound science in the East, we add fresh difficulties of our own making. Bounties and

premiums, such as ought not to be given even for the propagation of truth, we lavish on false taste and false philosophy.

By acting thus we create the very evil which we fear. We are making that opposition which we do not find. What we spend on the Arabic and Sanscrit colleges is not merely a dead loss to the cause of truth; it is bounty-money paid to raise up champions of error.

—(§§ 12–13)

The petition in question is certainly remarkable. A group of graduates of the Sanskrit academy find themselves unemployable by a Company that first educated them in Sanskrit and a classical curriculum, and then required proficiency in English and mastery of a modern curriculum as condition of employment. Macaulay feigns sympathy, arguing that by offering scholarships to study Sanskrit, the administration lured these students into a useless education, and worse, taught them nothing but falsehood hence adding to their misery “fresh difficulties of our own making.”

An analogy might be worth considering. Macaulay’s alma mater, Trinity College, Cambridge, offers scholarships to talented students of classics. They spend years studying, supported by “bounties and premiums” fantastic myths of Gods and heroes, fabulous accounts of wars and of monstrosities. When they graduate, this education does not qualify them for positions requiring proficiency, say, in mathematics or science. It does, however, qualify them for positions teaching the humanities. Fortunately, England offers such positions, and they are adequately compensated. Perhaps the petition to which Macaulay refers is occasioned not by the nature of the education offered to the *Brahmacāryas* in question, but by the lack of opportunity provided by a frankly mercenary administration. Although one cannot fault Macaulay’s eloquence on the point, or deny that the classical education provided by the Company did not prepare students for the posts it offered, it was not the study of Sanskrit that injured them.

Finally, as Macaulay points out (§14), the Company prints thousands of copies of books in Persian and Sanskrit at considerable expense, but fails to sell any. The failure of this market, in the context of a thriving Bengali market for English literature, he argues, bespeaks the lack of interest in these languages.

Macaulay then dismisses (§15) the argument that Sanskrit and Persian are necessary because of the fact that the Hindu and Muslim legal codes are written in these languages.¹¹ Macaulay notes, however, that these codes were already being

¹¹ Indeed, the great orientalist William Jones began his study of Sanskrit in order to gain knowledge of the Hindu legal code, in part to place the Company on an even footing with Hindu pandits in the courts.

translated into English. Second, future legal codes were to be composed in English (and were to be composed by Macaulay himself), rendering these languages obsolete in the courts. Once again, this is more a report of a self-fulfilling prophecy enabled by Bentinck's replacement of Persian with English in the high courts.

A more interesting and revealing argument emerges in §16, where Macaulay takes on the argument for the teaching of Sanskrit and Persian on the grounds that they are the languages of the sacred texts of India. As such, this argument goes, they are central to religious practice and to Indian culture.

But there is yet another argument which seems even more untenable. It is said that the Sanskrit and Arabic are the languages in which the sacred books of a hundred millions of people are written, and that they are, on that account, entitled to peculiar encouragement.

—(§15)

Macaulay's reply touches on several issues. First, he argues that the demand for neutrality with respect to religion in fact counts against this position, as to teach these languages on religious grounds would amount to the encouragement of these religions.¹² Second, he argues, these texts themselves are so degenerate as to be unworthy of study in the first place. It is here that Macaulay's anti-intellectualism is most apparent.

But to encourage the study of a literature admitted to be of small intrinsic value, only because that literature inculcates the most serious errors on the most important subjects, is a course hardly reconcilable with reason, with morality, or even with that very neutrality which ought, as we all agree, to be sacredly preserved. It is confessed that a language is barren of useful knowledge. We are to teach it because it is fruitful of monstrous superstitions. We are to teach false History, false Astronomy, false Medicine, because we find them in company with a false religion.

—(§15)

Macaulay then, in a clever *ad hominem*, turns the tables on the Orientalist scholars who supported the Madrasa and Sanskrit academy on the grounds that they promoted an understanding of Indian culture, and a bulwark against Christian missionary activity:

¹² Macaulay was above all a secularist. It was his fervent hope that weaning Indian intellectuals from Sanskrit would have the effect of diminishing their faith in Indian deities and their devotion to Hindu religious practice. His antipathy to Christian religion matches this hostility to Hinduism.

We abstain, and I trust shall always abstain, from giving any public encouragement to those who are engaged in the work of converting natives to Christianity.

—(§15)

And he closes with yet another unattributed quotation from Roy (Clive, 1973, p. 350), enlisting the alliance not only of the Anglophiles among the Company cadre, but also of Anglophile Indians:

And while we act thus, can we reasonably and decently bribe men out of the revenues of the state to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass, or what text of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat?

—(§15)

This common cause with Anglophile Indians is reinforced in the final argument Macaulay considers and refutes. So in short space, Macaulay has allied himself with evangelicals, secularists, and Hindus. He then notes that certain critics of the introduction of English argue that “no native of this country can possibly attain more than a mere smattering of English” (§17). In response, Macaulay makes short work of what he portrays as a frankly racist argument, and notes that

There are in this very town natives who are quite competent to discuss political or scientific questions with fluency and precision in the English language. I have heard the gentlemen with a liberality and an intelligence which would do credit to any member of the Committee of Public Instruction. Indeed it is unusual to find, even in the literary circles of the continent, any foreigner who can express himself in English with so much facility and correctness as we find in many Hindoos.

So, not only are Sanskrit and Persian useless, harmful and “nauseated by” Indians, they will become obsolete in short order. Moreover, English is easy to learn, desirable, and indeed desired, useful to Indians, who by learning it themselves become useful to the Company, and indeed is the language of the future—of a modern India—just as it was the language of modernity the world over.

The Minute is best remembered for its most oft-quoted line in the summing up section §18, which most clearly expresses Macaulay’s vision and the goal of Company education, the line that so animates both K. C. Bhattacharyya and Daya Krishna:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.

3.3. A New Class?

This idea of a class of interpreters should strike us as familiar. We have already seen in the *munshī* a class of just such interpreters, and in fact the class who for two centuries mediated between the Mughal Court, their subjects and even the *frangi* settlers. The goal of the Minute and of the replacement of Persian and Sanskrit with English was hence not the creation of a new class (“a *new* kind of Indian . . . a *strange species*” in Daya Krishna’s words). Instead it was the continuation of that class, and indeed the continuation of the use of a foreign nonvernacular language, along with its foreign reference points, as the language of that mediation.¹³

Recall the analysis of Rao et al. of the *karaṇam* and Alam and Subrahmanyam’s analysis of the *munshī*. In each case, we encountered a polyglot intellectual whose primary linguistic medium was an elite foreign language. In each case, the client was the ruler or a minister. The role of the *karaṇam* and of the *munshī* was that of cultural mediation. In neither case do we find the kind of anxiety about a “burden of Persian,” a “burden of Sanskrit,” a “burden of Turkish,” or “a burden of Arabic” to parallel what Spivak has memorably called the “burden of English” (Breckenridge and van der Veer, 1993 ch. 4). Neither the choice of one language over another nor the perpetuation of this class of interpreters in the colonial era can explain either the discomfort or the sense of alienation that strike so many as the consequence of the Minute and the policies it inspired. We must look further to explain these.

Given the manifold similarities between the class that has come to be called “Macaulay’s children” and these earlier classes of upwardly mobile Indian intellectuals, we would expect to see a parallel comfort with English, which might

¹³ Ironically, Macaulay continues in the very next sentence to say, “To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.” Once again, we note the presumption that the vernaculars require “enrichment,” a presumption that we have seen is not borne out by reality. On the other hand, Indian modernity did result in the absorption of European reformist ideas and their expression in Hindi, in the Arya Samaj movement, as we shall see in chapter 6. The irony here is that by enriching these languages so as to enable them to express the ideas of modern science in the hope of retaining allegiance to Britain, these languages inevitably became vehicles for expressing modern liberal philosophy, and so became the vehicles for the nationalist resistance movement that ended British rule.

appear to play the role that the South Indian vernaculars on the one hand, or Persian on the other, played in the analogous contexts in the immediately previous centuries. But we do not. Those who voice the anxiety pin the blame on the foreignness of English and on its association with power, and in the specifically philosophical context, on its nonclassical status. But none of this can be right, given the analogies we have been discussing. This calls for a new analysis of the particular circumstances of the colonial period that blocked the approbation of the very literature to which it inevitably gave rise.

Here we might take a cue from Jawarhalal Nehru, who in his monumental *The Discovery of India* (1946)—a book to which we will give more attention in chapter 6—remarks on a respect in which the British were unique as immigrants to India. Nehru notes that the British never came to India to settle as Indians. Despite over two centuries of presence through Company or Crown, they left India as they arrived, as *videshi* settlers, businessmen, administrators, and finally rulers. But never *desi*. There were individual exceptions, but it is noteworthy that the epithet for such rare individuals was “gone native.” To “go native” was to fall from a norm.

This was different from the status of their predecessors as subcontinental powers, the Mughals. The Mughals freely intermarried even at the royal level. Ethnic disparagement was rare, and their courtiers were Hindu as well as Muslim. While their language may have come from abroad, they, and it, became firmly Indian. While Persian was a court language, Sanskrit and the vernaculars were never suppressed. So, what might be different about English and what might account for the anxieties it occasions is neither its origin nor its association either with power or the secular, but rather a decision by the English to themselves remain foreign and aloof. The adoption of English by Indians then became a subtle alliance with that decision, an alliance that could not but be uncomfortable. This adoption, as Clive (1973, pp. 414–415) notes, also served to detach educated Indians from their rural compatriots.

Not only British colonialists, but also many Indian intellectuals, mobilize the very dichotomy on which Macaulay insists in his *Minute*—the dichotomy between Western and Oriental learning, with each suitably essentialized. The *Minute* is thus not a mere report or advocacy of a minor administrative policy. Instead, it articulates a determinate vision of the relationship between the Occident and Orient. On this view, Indian learning constitutes a hermetically sealed intellectual tradition, one linked inextricably to Sanskrit (on the Hindu side) and to Persian and Arabic (on the Muslim side).

Macaulay takes for granted, as do his interlocutors, the distinctiveness of the Indian tradition. Macaulay’s immediate concern is about its *value*, not its distinctive character. The *Minute* therefore does more than merely establish the primacy of English as a discursive instrument in India. It also entrenches a specific

narrative about the relationship between the Indian and Occidental intellectual traditions, a narrative that in fact frames our project.

On this narrative, once academic philosophy adopted English as its mode of expression, and once Western texts entered the university syllabus, the pure classical Indian tradition was lost. On this view, the colonial period, and in particular the post-Macaulay period, represents the erasure of authentic Indian philosophy, and at best its replacement with a pale substitute. But this conclusion depends not on history, but upon a narrative, and that narrative, more than the imposition of English, is Macaulay's legacy. The narrative of a pure philosophical tradition and its sudden discontinuity in virtue of interaction with the West is undermined by intellectual history. The idea that suddenly Indian philosophy becomes diminished by interaction hence only arises once the dichotomies inscribed by the Minute take hold in the collective intellectual consciousness of colonial India; neither this diminishment in virtue of interaction nor a sudden discontinuity in the tradition is a historical given. Nonetheless, this tale of decline and discontinuity becomes the dominant metanarrative of this community.

When we turn to the *practice* of philosophy, as opposed to this metanarrative, we discover a case of mistaken paternity. While the philosophers of this period saw themselves as Macaulay's children—and have been typically so regarded by their successors—they may in fact be better styled as those of John Stuart Mill. Mill argued against Macaulay that while the infusion of English into India was necessary and desirable, it would be impossible to replace languages such as Sanskrit and Persian, and counterproductive to do so. In a minute to the East India Company on the subject of "Native Education" on September 29, 1830, he writes:

The report which you have furnished to us in the letter, of the result of the measures for the education of the natives, already sanctioned by us, has afforded us the highest satisfaction. The experiment of establishing seminaries for giving instruction to the people of India of a higher kind than any which they previously possessed, has been successful in a degree not merely equal, but superior to our most sanguine expectations. The great and rapidly increasing efficiency and popularity of these institutions not only affords complete proof, that their establishment was called for by the state of public feeling, and by the circumstances of the times, but also conveys the gratifying assurance that the higher classes of our Hindu and Mahomedan subjects are ripe for a still further extension among them of European education, and European science and literature.

—(quoted in Zastoupil and Moir, 1999, pp. 360–362)

The "seminaries" to which Mill refers educate in Indian languages. Mill expresses both his satisfaction with the quality of education provided in these languages, and

his conviction that the education that their students receive will induce them to further their learning in English. Mill's concern was with the "intellectual and moral improvement" of Indian culture, and he was convinced that this was best accomplished by the gradual and natural infiltration of English and Western civilization into that culture, not the replacement of Indian civilization with Western civilization, or of Indian languages with English. Mill urged that English should be adopted in India not by force but by a more organic diffusion, that the educated class to be created must necessarily be fluent in Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian as well as in English. Finally, he urged that the connection of English education and Company employment was pernicious, contributing to the development of clerks, not of scholars. And it was to Mill, not to Macaulay, that Lord Auckland and later Curzon turned for guidance in the development of Indian education (Clive, 1973, p. 386).

The younger Mill, through his influence on Lord Auckland's alternative—and more administratively efficacious—minute, and the compromise it represented, kept classical learning alive and encouraged its interaction with English literature and European science. Mill and Auckland respected the orientalist and Indian languages and thought sufficiently of them to see the need for their preservation and encouragement. They also saw the benefits of the "engraftment" policy that dated from the time of Hastings. More to the point, they saw British rule in India developing a class of cosmopolitan intellectuals comprising not only "learned natives" but also learned Englishmen. It is to this class that the philosophers in the Anglophone universities belong. As we will see, while they published in English, they were trained in classical languages; while they were thoroughly conversant with Western philosophy, its history and its current state of play, they were also thoroughly immersed in the classical Indian tradition, and aware of its mediation by modernity.

Two decades after Macaulay's Minute, in the wake of the war of 1857, similar sentiments in the Muslim community animated the Aligarh Movement and the founding of Aligarh University as an Anglophone university for Indian Muslims. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) envisioned a university set up on the lines of Cambridge as the vehicle for the modernization and uplift of the Muslim community.¹⁴ The commitment to English as a medium of instruction set Aligarh

¹⁴ Although this may not have been its intent, or even an anticipation, the introduction of English as a medium of instruction in Indian higher education had significantly different consequences for the Hindu and Muslim communities. In 1835, English displaced vernacular languages across the board. But, prior to the introduction of English, Persian had been the language of administration. As a consequence, Muslims had dominated the upper echelons of civil service from the Mughal times to the reforms. The displacement of English ended this advantage. Far more Hindus than Muslims entered the university system, as many Muslims continued the tradition of home or madrasa education. Hindus hence gained far greater access to English and hence to the levers of power and wealth. Hindus quickly replaced Muslims in government and in commerce, and indeed this is part of the motivation for the Aligarh movement we have just been discussing. We will return to this differential effect in the context of a discussion of nationalism in chapter 7.

apart from the other important Indian Muslim university of the colonial period, Osmania University in Hyderabad, which adopted Urdu as its medium. While Aligarh taught Urdu, Persian, and Arabic as second languages, and supported the translation of Western and Arabic texts into Urdu, it remained resolutely Anglophone and Anglophile.¹⁵

Sayyid, following in the footsteps both of Roy and Macaulay, argued that English was the language that offered the greatest opportunities for advancement to Muslims, both in the service of the Raj and more globally.¹⁶ He writes in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, “there is but very little difference between a man ignorant of English and a beast” (December 30, 1882, p. 1430, quoted in Jaina, 2006, p. 42). He also argued that there was simply no interest among educated and aspiring young Muslims to learn the classical languages or Urdu. Indeed, Sayyid’s inaugural address for the Muslim Aligarh Oriental College could have been delivered by Roy himself (or even by Macaulay):

... [The college seeks to enable Muslims] to dispel those illusory traditions of the past which have hitherto exercised a baneful influence on our race, to reconcile oriental learning with Western literature and science, to inspire in the dreamy minds of the peoples of the East the practical energy which belongs to those of the West, to make the Mussalmans of India worthy and useful subjects of the British Crown, to inspire in them that loyalty which springs not from servile submission to a foreign rule but from genuine appreciation of the blessings of good government.

—(Jaina, 2006, p. 37)

In 1886, when Allahabad University opened its own Faculty of Oriental Studies, Sir Sayyid remarked in yet another echo of Roy and Macaulay that “an oriental faculty can do no good, can secure no advantage to the public... It will only waste the time of those who may unfortunately fall into its snare” (December 30, 1882, p. 1430, quoted in Jaina, 2006, p. 42).¹⁷

In this chapter we have been exploring a narrative about the relationship between the East India Company, the British Crown, and the language of rule, and in particular, the impact of language policy on colonial India. We have

¹⁵ Sayyid Amir Ali (Jaina, 2006, p. 27) suggests that “an anonymous Englishman” (perhaps the orientalist TW Arnold, a mentor to its faculty or Theodore Beck, its first principal) proposed English as the medium. But the decision was clearly Sayyid’s.

¹⁶ Sir Sayyid was an advocate of Urdu education early in his career, but decided on English as a better medium in virtue of the superior access it provided Muslims to advancement in the civil service.

¹⁷ This despite the fact that British orientalists were encouraging Hindus and Muslims alike to preserve their classical cultures and languages, and flocking to Aligarh and Osmania in order to study Oriental languages.

suggested that the standard narrative of colonial intellectual history is inadequate: in subsequent chapters we will see that it occludes both agency and complexity. A new narrative that makes sense both of the continuities between classical and modern Indian thought and of the innovations introduced in the colonial period through the kind of cosmopolitan engagement that has always characterized Indian life is in order.

That account requires a bit more context. To complete that context, we consider in chapters 4, 5 and 6 the creative construction of a new sense of Indian national identity, each of which bypasses Macaulay and the colonial period to affirm a connection to a classical, progressive past. The Macaulay narrative explains purported Indian inauthenticity through the creation of a class of alienated Indian intellectuals; the Millian reality, on the other hand, led to the emergence of a cosmopolitan intellectual class, whose language was English, but whose sensibility was Indian. As we will see, the tension between this reality and that narrative generated constant anxiety about language and identity.

This anxiety was productive: it gives rise to new narratives—narratives constructed not by the English, but by Indians. These imaginative narratives, as we will see, present an account of Indian authenticity through the demonstration of the affinity of contemporary India to its past. They thus form the cultural context in which colonial philosophy flourished. We begin with the mobilization of the trope of renaissance as a mechanism for modernist appropriation of the classical, and then turn to the visions of Indian national identity enabled by that trope.

On the Very Idea of a Renaissance

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in India were regarded by Indian intellectuals, as they are by contemporary historians of India, as a renaissance period.¹ Indeed, this very term was used as early as 1918 by Aurobindo Ghosh. Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1950)—later and better known as Sri Aurobindo—was educated in English, with first-class honors in classics from Cambridge. He began his professional life in India as a professor of French and English literature at Baroda College, moved into politics, drifted into terrorism, and in prison developed into a major religious leader and philosopher. His influence on subsequent Indian philosophy cannot be overstated. Aurobindo asks whether there is a renaissance in India, and if so, in what sense.

There is a first question, whether at all there is really a Renaissance in India. That depends a good deal on what we mean by the word; it depends also on the future, for the thing itself is only in its infancy and it is too early to say to what it may lead. The word carries the mind back to the turning point of European culture to which it was first applied; that was not so much a reawakening as an overturn and reversal, a seizure of Christianized, Teutonized, feudalized Europe by the old Greco-Latin spirit and form with all the complex and momentous results which came from it. That is certainly not a type of renaissance that is at all possible in India. There is a closer resemblance to the recent Celtic movement in Ireland, the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force

¹ It is common to refer to the cultural phenomenon we discuss in this chapter as the “Bengal renaissance.” While it is true that a good deal of the relevant activity occurred in Bengal, not all of it did, and that by a long shot. By restricting one’s attention to events in Bengal, one misses the broader patterns of ferment and innovation that characterize Indian life during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Just as Burkhardt spoke of the “Italian renaissance,” whereas now we speak of the “European renaissance,” we prefer the broader and more accurate term “Indian renaissance.”

for a great reshaping and rebuilding: in Ireland this was discovered by a return to the Celtic spirit and culture after a long period of eclipsing English influences, and in India something of the same kind of movement is appearing and has especially taken a pronounced turn since the political outburst of 1905.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 39)

Aurobindo strikes several notes relevant to the use of the rubric of renaissance for thinking about this period in Indian intellectual history. For one, the use of the term immediately suggests a similarity between the eruption of artistic and intellectual creativity in India at this time and that of fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Europe. As Aurobindo notes, there may not be as much in common between these periods as some would have it. On the other hand, he may well underestimate what there is, a possibility he himself acknowledges when he says that “it is too early to say to what it may lead.” He does, however, suggest another model, that of the Celtic movement also often known as the “Irish Renaissance,” which he characterizes not as a return to a classical period for inspiration, as he takes the European renaissance to have been,² but rather a “reawakening” of something fundamental to that culture. These are, to be sure, different senses of “renaissance,” but they are not mutually exclusive. We shall have reason to take them both seriously as we ask, with Aurobindo, just whether, and in what sense, there was a renaissance in India.

This inquiry is fraught with a further ambiguity to which we must be sensitive. No matter what sense of “renaissance” we have in mind, it is one thing to ask whether it is useful to us as historians of Indian culture to apply this term to this period, and quite another to ask why and how its participants applied the term to their own intellectual and artistic life and experience. The answers to these two questions may turn out to be very different.

It is dangerous to define a term used as broadly in historiography and popular culture as “renaissance,” and we do not propose to do so. Rather, we identify a number of what we call “renaissance tropes,” and to use this cluster of rhetorical tropes to examine the contours of the intellectual life that nurtured the philosophers in whose work we are interested. Some of these tropes are internal—that is, tropes mobilized by participants themselves during these periods. Some are external—ex post facto characterizations of these periods.

Moreover, the use of the term “renaissance” is also perhaps problematic in this context because, as we also argue, this is a period of a dawning of particular

² Here we leave aside another question—does Aurobindo accurately characterize the European renaissance as an “overturn and a reversal”? It might be more accurate to say that it is an attempted recovery of Roman civilization.

kind of *modernity*, and with the accelerated interaction with England and the West, there is a notable forward-looking character to Indian politics, art, and philosophy. Nonetheless, while this modernity inflects the Indian renaissance and gives it a distinctive character, it does not cancel the set of renaissance tropes we identify in the thought and social movements of this period. So, while this is indeed a period of modernity, it is a distinctively *renaissance* modernity.³

4.1 The Master Trope

We begin with what we call “the master renaissance trope.” Renaissance periods, properly so-called, involve the invocation by those participating in them of a (real or imagined) “golden age,” the recovery or re-establishment of which is the goal or hallmark of the relevant period. In general, this recovery involves a supposed degenerate age and the disparagement of its literature, culture, or achievements as demanding the recovery in question.⁴ In the European renaissance, the age to be recovered was the age of the Roman republic, and medieval Arabic and European scholasticism was rejected as a mediation between the new culture and the old. We also see this at work in R. Tagore’s appropriation of Kalidas, the classical poet, in a reach past the tradition of medieval *kavya* literature, taking him to be the appropriate poet of the real for a modern consciousness. In the Jeffersonian renaissance in America, it was the Athenian democratic state to be recovered, and the intervening monarchies and empires to be rejected. The reversal Aurobindo has in mind is a reversal in just such a supposed process of cultural degeneration.

Now, Aurobindo denies that this trope of recovery was mobilized during the Indian renaissance. But he was wrong about this, and indeed the irony is that he deployed this trope perhaps more explicitly than any other figure early in the Indian renaissance. For Aurobindo’s philosophical program was precisely to recover a Vedic Indian philosophical past as a vehicle for a national spiritual awakening, and to elide the intervening scholastic Indian philosophical traditions. Indeed, Aurobindo’s success in this more traditional renaissance gesture is instrumental in the structuring of much Indian philosophical work during this period.

³ As Sarkar (S. Sarkar 1997) notes, there was in Bengal a counternarrative to that of renaissance—a representation of this time as a period of *kaliyuga*, or a dark age of monotonic decline. But this was hardly a dominant view.

⁴ We emphasize the “supposed.” Just as in the case of medieval Europe, there need be no actual “dark age,” only a rhetorical designation of such an age intervening between the equally imputed “golden age” to which the renaissance gesture is directed.

Note that in this context, there is really no tension between the model of renaissance as a journey back to the future and the idea of a reawakening of a national essence. While the Irish renaissance to which Aurobindo refers may have been explicitly conceived in the latter register, the Indian renaissance could comfortably be taken in both ways. First, as we shall see, there is a self-conscious reach to the classical past in literature, art, religion, and philosophy. Second, there is an explicit deployment of the language of national essence.⁵

We might ask as well, before exploring the sense in which we have a renaissance period on our hands, “what is at stake when we ask whether it is a renaissance? Why should we care about the application of this term?”⁶ Again, we note the ambiguity in method in this context. It is one thing to ask why we, in writing about this period, care about the use of the term, and another to ask why the term was adopted by those in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India to talk about their own period. Let us begin with the latter perspective.

Aurobindo, despite his problematizing the applicability of the term, ends up endorsing its utility. In doing so, it is fair to say that he is responding to at least two historiographical pressures. First, he is explicitly drawing on the “back to the future” trope, comparing the embrace of Rome in the Italian renaissance to an embrace of classical India as an inspiration for the intellectual and artistic ferment in which he was a principal. Aurobindo is drawing on the prestige of the Italian renaissance, elevating what might be seen as a local flowering of ideas into a historical period, and one deserving of approbation. Second, by reference to other movements, such as the Irish renaissance, movements that also draw on the renaissance trope for these very reasons, Aurobindo, in the company of such British anticolonial agitators as Annie Besant, is forging a kind of solidarity with anticolonial movements that promise a kind of independence on grounds of intellectual and moral desert.

The contemporaneous use of this term—Aurobindo was hardly alone in using it—was hence rhetorical as well as descriptive. At Cambridge he might have encountered Jacob Burckhardt’s (1818–1897) writings on the European renaissance, and he certainly shares a great deal of Burckhardt’s perspective.

⁵ This is visible not only in the rhetoric of A. K. Coomaraswamy in his theorization both of Indian art and identity (Coomaraswamy, 1910), a theme repeated by Nehru in *The Discovery of India* (Nehru, 2004), but also in representations such as Abanindranath Tagore’s iconic painting *Bharat Mata*. We will consider these deployments of this trope in chapter 6. In this context, we might also note the two great religious revival movements that swept India during this time—the Brahmo Samaj in Bengal and the Arya Samaj in the Punjab. Each of these as well deplored the degenerate effects of “medieval” Indian scholasticism, urging a return to a purer form of spiritual practice, truer to the “authentic” roots of Vedic India. We will explore all of this below, and we return to these movements in more detail in chapter 5.

⁶ We thank Paul Alpers for forcing us to think hard about this question.

Burckhardt, commenting on the significance of the appellation in the European case, writes:

... [B]oth what has gone before and what we have still to discuss are coloured in a thousand ways by the influence of the ancient world; and though the essence of the phenomena might still have been the same without the classical revival, it is only with and through this revival that they are actually manifested to us. The Renaissance would not have been the process of worldwide significance which it is, if its elements could be so easily separated from one another. We must insist upon it, as one of the chief propositions of this book, that it was not the revival of antiquity alone but its union with the genius of the Italian people that achieved the conquest of the Western world.

—(Burckhardt, 1944, p. 171)

Aurobindo's own education was (European) classical. The impulse to gild fin de siècle India with the glow of Roman antiquity would have been natural to him, as would the vehicle of its resurrection in Italy, with which he would also have been well acquainted in Cambridge. Aurobindo joins Burckhardt in drawing the straightforward analogy of classical revival and is doing so in the language and spirit of European romanticism. The rhetorical force of that loan comes from the union Burckhardt and Aurobindo see as necessary between the appropriation of the classical and the "genius" of the appropriator. Aurobindo hence borrows the attribution of special genius to sixteenth-century Italy as a characterization of nineteenth-century India, valorizing at one instant both India's past and present, and insisting on a parallel position of "worldwide significance."

Burckhardt also emphasizes the role of a new subjectivity in constituting the Italian renaissance, "that man became a spiritual *individual* and recognized himself as such" (1944, p. 81). This new subjectivity is made possible by a paradoxical recognition of continuity enabled by a kind of historical distance. On Burckhardt's view, the renaissance Italian comes to see himself as Roman. The long view of history allows a kind of distancing. The remote past is idealized, illuminated, and appropriated; the more proximal is represented as a dark age, and is rejected as an inauthentic superimposition on an identity that links one most authentically to one's kindred spirit of the more remote, but, at the same time now immediately available, golden age.

Aurobindo and his contemporaries easily adopt this perspective. Just as the Italian with the benefit of sufficient historical distance sees that the superimposition of alien barbarian culture led to an extended dark age from which he emerges only by shedding that false European consciousness through the enlightened appropriation of his Roman identity, the Indian, with equivalent distance comes

to see that decline of Vedic culture as occasioned by the superimposition of Afghan, Persian, and finally European civilizations. He, too, sees the recovery of his authentic identity in an enlightened appropriation of his classical self. In each case as well, this involves a special hermeneutical attitude, a rejection of centuries of scholasticism for a supposedly direct return to classical texts themselves. In the European renaissance this leads to the reformation; in the Indian renaissance it leads to Ramakrishna and the Samaj movements. Aurobindo writes:

Now that the salvation, the reawakening has come, India will certainly keep her essential spirit, will keep her characteristic soul, but there is likely to be a great change of the body. The shaping for itself of a new body, of new philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political, social forms by the same soul rejuvenescent will, I should think, be the type of the Indian renaissance,—forms not contradictory of the truths of life which the old expressed, but rather expressive of those truths restated, cured of defect, completed.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 41)

Here Aurobindo states the master trope clearly, emphasizing its subjective, indeed, spiritual dimension. The Indian renaissance, like its Italian cousin, is not only a rebirth of something old, mediated by a peculiar cultural genius, but also a recovery of a national spiritual essence and way of life.

We have seen what is at stake in the use of the term “renaissance” for those involved in the Indian renaissance. But why do we, over a century later, use this term to refer to this period? After all, most of us would regard the entire enterprise of periodization of history, valorization of selected periods, and essentialization of kinds of movements with a postmodern scorn. And properly so. These are the tropes of historiographers gone by. There are, however three reasons to hold on to this language, at least for now.

First, we recognize a historiographic solidarity with Indian intellectuals of this period. How else to describe that movement? The most obvious is not “modernity,” as for instance, current historians of the European renaissance prefer to describe it. Modernity, as we have seen, came to India in relevant forms well before this period. This is, to be sure, a moment in modernity, but it is only a moment in a larger process of modernization. The only other way to capture succinctly what is unique about this moment of modernity would seem to be “colonial.” But that gets the agency wrong. The cultural flourishing that forms the cradle of the philosophical work in which we are interested is created by, directed by, and reflects the sensibility of Indian agents, not Englishmen. The renaissance trope recognizes that and values it.

Second, while we might want to jettison the self-conscious period valorization that is part of the valence of the term, the use of “renaissance” does allow us to collect a set of tropes that cluster nicely and tend to capture a number of historical moments that have earned this appellation. We think that we can better understand the period and the shape it gives to philosophical thought by appeal to this cluster of tropes. The confirmation is in the *kheer*, of course, and whether we explain very much using this trope remains to be seen. But we think we do.

Finally, as we have seen, this is the term adopted by intellectuals of that period, and indeed it captures something of their own sensibility and subjectivity, even if it does so in a self-deceptive way at times. We are concerned to represent that sensibility and subjectivity as a way to contextualize and to understand their philosophical ideas and practice. It is therefore useful to keep this framework explicit in our thought, and we do so by retaining the term with an awareness of its resonances for them, of its utility for us, and of its limitations.

The Indian renaissance comes to the Muslim community about one-half century after it does to the Hindu community. As we will see in chapter 5, Ram Mohan Roy, in founding the Brahma Samaj in the 1820s arguably initiates the renaissance in Bengal, with an insistence on a return to the Vedas and Upaniṣads, skipping over generations of commentarial literature. Dayanand Saraswati does him one better in the Arya Samaj, skipping the Upaniṣads as well. The Muslim renaissance gets going in the 1880s, with Sir Sayyid Ahmed Kahn as its principal initiator. In this stage of the renaissance, we also see repeated instances of the reach to past as a vehicle for the construction of an Islamic future. Sayyid himself urges a return to an “original” reading of the Quran as natural and rational. Muhammad Iqbal argues that we should ignore all of the Greek-inspired Arabic commentary that so dominates Islamic thought in favor of a return to the Quran itself and that the “new Sufism” of India is in fact degenerate and advocates a return to an earlier, more authentic Arabian version of Sufi ideology. We will examine these gestures in detail in chapter 9.

4.2 Other Renaissance Tropes

4.2.1 Self-conscious Cultural Innovation

In addition to the master trope of the reach back to the future, we offer a nonsystematic list of other renaissance tropes. To begin with another trope noted by Burckhardt, there is always in a renaissance period a kind of intellectual self-consciousness involving a sense of doing something at once entirely new, but continuous in a validating way with something old. This trope of self-conscious cultural innovation is in evidence in virtually every period to which the term “renaissance” applies. For instance, in the Maghreb renaissance of the early

twentieth century, Arab scholars were very consciously incorporating modern science and political and military doctrine into Islamic thought, but were referring to the “golden age” of Islam as the precedent for an Islamic culture preoccupied with such apparently mundane matters as science and statecraft.

In colonial India, examples of this trope are too numerous to count. Perhaps the easiest place to see this at work is in the construction of the two Samaj movements that provide much of the context for the broader cultural phenomenon of the renaissance. The Brahma Samaj was a self-consciously modernist movement, rejecting such practices as idolatry, child marriage, sati, purdah, etc. on the grounds that they are outdated and debilitating cultural practices, and replacing them with an ideology and worship pattern new in India and reflecting a global modernity, with churches, an English liturgy, and a spirituality referring to reason rather than scripture. On the other hand, the Brahma Samaj constructed the practices it rejected as medieval accretions whose elision allowed it a more direct access to an “authentic” Hindu spiritual wellspring. Ram Mohan Roy, the progenitor of the Brahma Samaj, mentions sati, caste, and the institution of child marriage as examples of such accretions.

In the Arya Samaj we encounter a similar pattern, albeit with differences in doctrinal detail. There was a strong new emphasis on social service and modern education, and the rejection of caste; but, once again, a validation of this modernism as a rejection of an inauthentic scholastic tradition that obscures the true meaning of Vedic sources. We will explore these movements in more detail in chapter 5.

4.2.2 Tradition and Modernity

This trope of innovation naturally gives rise to a second renaissance trope—that of a tension between the modern and the traditional. For as we have seen, it is essential to renaissance modernities that they are validated by appeal to tradition. Nonetheless, that appeal involves a systematic denial of the authenticity of much of an intervening commentarial tradition, often one that those most associated with that tradition would regard as its essence. This tension is in evidence in the dialogue between A. K. Coomaraswamy, Sri Aurobindo, and Swami Vivekananda about the place of tradition in modern India.

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) was born in Sri Lanka to a Sri Lankan father and an English mother. He is in many ways one of the most iconically cosmopolitan and modern figures in the colonial Indian world. In a protean career in which he starts out as a gemologist and ends up as one of the world’s foremost aestheticians and historians of Indian art, and curator of Asian art at the Boston Museum, Coomaraswamy contributes to our understanding of Indian dance, writes significant political philosophy, and contributes important art criticism to *The*

Modern Review, the most influential venue for Indian intellectual discourse in the colonial period. Despite the modernity of his career, Coomaraswamy is a defender of tradition. Here he worries about the impact of ideas tainted by a legacy of imperialism on the stability of the Indian cultural core:

Our struggle is part of a wider one, the conflict between the ideals of Imperialism and the ideals of Nationalism . . . we believe in India for the Indians . . . not merely because we want our own India for ourselves, but because we believe that every nation has its own part to play in the long history of human progress, and that nations, which are not free to develop their own individuality and own character, are also unable to make the contribution to the sum of human culture which the world has a right to expect of them.

—(Coomaraswamy, 1981b, p. 2)

Coomaraswamy takes this nationalism as demanding a preservation of Indian tradition, and hence as the principle that determines the necessity of a resistance in Indian thought to modernity and the importance of maintaining traditional modes of thought and aesthetic production.⁷

Aurobindo, on the other hand, responds with more nuance to the worry about the corruption of the Indian tradition by modernity:

For whatever temporary rotting and destruction this crude impact of European life and culture has caused, it gave three needed impulses. It revived the dormant intellectual and critical impulse; it rehabilitated life and awakened the desire of new creation; it put the reviving Indian spirit face to face with novel conditions and ideals and the urgent necessity of understanding, assimilating and conquering them.

(1918, reprinted in Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 48).

While Aurobindo is clearly cognizant of the dangers to Indian culture of uncritical assimilation of the European model, he remains optimistic. Aurobindo also imagines a future for India as a modern nation, not as a premodern diorama. Later in this essay he says:

India can best develop herself and serve humanity by being herself. . . . This does not mean, as some blindly and narrowly suppose, the rejection

⁷ These are also the ideas that motivated that other icon of Indian cultural conservatism in the context of his own strikingly cosmopolitan engagement with modernity, MK Gandhi, as we shall see in chapters 7 and 8.

of everything new that comes to us...[that] happens to have been first developed or powerfully expressed by the West. Such an attitude would be intellectually absurd, physically impossible, and above all unspiritual; true spirituality rejects no new light, no added means or materials of our human self-development. It means simply to keep our center . . . and assimilate to it all we receive, and evolve out of it all we do and create.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 64)

This is provocative stuff. Against the narrow nationalists and cultural isolationists Aurobindo urges that the rejection of Western ideas simply because they are Western, or foreign, is itself “unspiritual,” and by implication, on their own terms, un-Indian. Cognizant of a long history of cosmopolitan consciousness in India and openness to the trade in ideas as well as goods with other cultures and nations, Aurobindo rejects the easy dichotomy between East and West, and between the modern and the traditional. He develops, in this essay and in others to be addressed in chapter 7, an account of a distinctively Indian modernity—what he was to call an “Indian renaissance” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 39–65) built on an assimilation of ideas drawn from a variety of sources by a community rooted in a classical, but never hermetically sealed, culture. In Aurobindo we see neither an insistence on the uniquely spiritual character of Indian civilization nor a refusal of its spiritual heritage and classical cosmopolitanism, but rather a determination to bring that spiritual heritage into a modern manifestation.

Aurobindo was not the only major religious leader and philosopher who was concerned to transcend these divides. Swami Vivekananda (né Narendranath Datta 1863–1902), who so memorably addressed the first Parliament of World Religions in 1893, after building his reputation as a Hindu leader in the United States, delivered a series of lectures in London in 1896 in which he modernizes the fundamental Vedānta idea of *māyā* for his Western audience, in the course of articulating an Indian spiritual interpretation of everyday life.

In these lectures, Vivekananda never *denies* the religious origin of the concept of *māyā* in Indian philosophy, and in Vedānta in particular, any more than any sane Western philosopher would deny the origin of the concept of a soul in Judeo-Christian theology. But just as many Western philosophers address the concept of a self in a secular vein, Vivekananda urges that we can take *māyā* from its original religious context and treat it as an empirical or conceptual phenomenon in a secular philosophical voice. As he says, “*Māyā* . . . is a simple statement of facts” (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 290). The example he offers here is straightforwardly psychological in character: the familiar existential fact of the simultaneous awareness and denial of our own mortality.

In his discussion of *māyā*, Vivekananda emphasizes both the progressive character of his thought about *māyā* and the continuity of his own thinking with the Vedānta tradition, explicitly disavowing any fossilization of that tradition. In Vivekananda's thought, like that of Aurobindo, we see a deliberate effort to rethink the dichotomies of India and the West; of spiritual and secular; history versus creativity; tradition and modernity. In doing so, Aurobindo and Vivekananda, despite their religious garb and allegiance to the classical Vedānta tradition, were forging a modernity not in the mold of European modernity, but in dialogue with it; a modernity distinctively Indian in character. We will return to the relation between Vivekananda's articulation of *māyā* and Aurobindo's response in terms of *līlā* in chapter 10.

4.2.3 The Sacred and the Secular

The tension between tradition and modernity in turn often implicates a third trope, that of the secularization of society in a renaissance moment. In the Italian renaissance, for instance, we see in the Galileo affair the challenge to Thomistic church doctrine based on an appeal to Greek epistemic standards, including the primacy of mathematics and rational inquiry. While Galileo's followers are happy to disparage the "dark ages" and return to the source of the Western tradition, his opponents regard this as an attack on tradition itself. And the success of this renaissance is now widely regarded as the triumph of the secular over the sacred as the domain of the arbitration of knowledge. In the Indian renaissance context, this debate has a slightly different flavor.

The precise targets of secularization in the Indian case depend on region and culture. Let us consider the attack on idolatry. Just as Catholic scholasticism was regarded at the dawn of the European renaissance as the heart of Christianity, the complex of idol worship attached to temples was considered—and indeed in much of India still is—the heart of Hindu religious practice. The Arya Samaj attacked this as an inauthentic, primitive, contaminating accretion on a pure form of ancient Indian religion, and represented itself as a return to that pure past.

Despite the explicitly religious character of Dayanand Saraswati's movement, its central tenets and the communities it generated are remarkably secular in character. For instance, among the ten central principles of Arya Samaj we find "to do good to the whole world is the chief aim of the Samaj," which grounded a commitment to philanthropy; "readiness to accept the truth and to discard the untruth," a commitment that led to an emphasis in Arya schools on science and secular learning; "modern socialism," a commitment to building schools, hospitals, widow retraining programs, and other progressive social welfare programs. These commitments to socialism and democracy were later to be taken up by Dr. Ambedkar as the central

principles of the Indian constitution (Vable, 1983). While it might seem paradoxical that a renaissance ending in secularity is driven by a religious movement, this is not unusual. We see the same thing in the Maghreb renaissance in which progressive Islamic movements led to greater secularity while claiming a return to a more authentic Islam, and even the European renaissance involves a reimagining of Catholic religious life and thought by ecclesiastical scholars.

In philosophy in India, we find the same phenomenon at work in the revival of classical Vedānta. The rhetoric of this revival, in the hands of Ramakrishna (1836–1886) and his followers, as well as those of Aurobindo, all adverted to the restoration of the pure form of this philosophical position, unsullied by centuries of scholastic commentary. Both the Ramakrishna school—represented most prominently by Vivekananda—and Aurobindo present a strikingly modern version of Vedānta. Aurobindo replaces the apparently idealistic construct of *māya* with that of *līlā*, play, or manifestation, developing a more this-worldly form of Vedānta. In each case, we find an explicitly religious movement displacing prominent scholastic interpretations in a gesture toward a golden past that ends up modernizing and secularizing the tradition. As Vivekananda might have put it, this, too, is renaissance. As we will see, this trend continues in academic philosophy in the work of such figures as A. C. Mukerji.⁸

4.2.4 Intercultural encounter

In representing historical moments as renaissances, historians also deploy the trope of understanding these periods in terms of intercultural encounters. Whether we are speaking of the Italian renaissance, the Harlem renaissance, the Jewish renaissance in Spain, or the Indian renaissance, we find a sudden infusion of or fascination with ideas from a different culture. These ideas get taken up, reworked, assimilated, and generate new cultural forms in the renaissance culture. In Italy, the infusion came from classical Greece and Rome via the Arabs. In Harlem, a rebirth of African and African American arts forms also, mediated by increased literacy and wealth, integrated literary and musical forms drawn from the white world into the African American community. In Spain, Arabic poetic forms revolutionized Jewish poetry.

In India, we find ideas taken up from the British, but also from Europe more broadly, and, in virtue of the China trade, ideas from East Asia. British political thought infuses the Indian independence movement; British literature gives rise in Bengal to the first Indian novels; Toru Dutt brings French poetry to the Indian scene (R. Chaudhuri, 2014b). European realism informs Ravi Varma; German

⁸ We will discuss Aurobindo and Vivekananda in more detail in chapter 10, and A. C. Mukerji in chapter 11.

lithography revolutionizes printing; Japanese techniques infuse Bengal school art. And a rapid diffusion of European philosophy changes the language and terms of debate in Indian philosophy, changes we address in chapter 9. This is but one more respect in which the appellation “renaissance” is appropriate to this time and place.

4.2.5 The creation of cultural elites

When we examine periods characterized as renaissances, we find that they inevitably involve transformations in the social and economic structures and organizations that mediate cultural production and consumption, and that issue in the creation or expansion of cultural elites.⁹

In the European renaissance, the diffusion of cheap codex books through new print technology generated an upsurge not only in literacy but also in the rapid diffusion of ideas, issuing in the expansion of a class of intellectuals. In colonial India, we see this very much in evidence. Here, as well, printing technology is implicated, not only—although importantly—in the diffusion of books in English and learned languages such as Persian and Sanskrit. (Indeed, more books were published in a twenty-year period in Calcutta than in the entire period of the European renaissance (Darnton, 2009).¹⁰

This connection between the material conditions of cultural production and the constitution of elite culture has a curious manifestation in the career of Raja Ravi Varma of Kerala. Varma is easily the most popular painter India has ever produced. In his heyday, his work was celebrated for its depiction of classical Indian themes using the techniques of modern European representational oil painting, and regarded as a clear instance of renaissance production, exploring and reviving the classical through the adoption of the techniques of the modern. His oils were collected and displayed by British and Indian elite patrons of the arts.

⁹ This is one reason that we find contemporary cultural critics referring to a “local food renaissance” in North America. At first, one might be surprised by this use of the term. But the traction it has gained invites us to ask just why this social movement is so comfortably described in this language. One reason is surely this: not only do those who use this term note the development of new foods or ways of eating; they are pointing to such phenomena as the resurgence of local farmers’ markets, local sourcing by restaurants, community-supported farms, and artisanal production of cheeses, beer, and so forth. The food produced and consumed so locally and the products of the new traditional artisans, on the other hand, are expensive, appealing to the wealthy, and doing little for social justice. They are, however, instrumental in creating a new cultural elite, that of the “foody.” Renaissance has clear material and organizational implications, which, despite their innovation, may not be altogether progressive.

¹⁰ Thanks to Arvind Mehrotra for calling this fact to our attention.

More important to his cultural success was Varma's adoption of the oleograph technology that permitted the mass production and cheap distribution of his art. This move from a mode of production conducive to elite status to one conducive to popular status significantly undermined his cultural standing. We hence see that his status thus depended not only on his artistic genius, subject matter and ideology, but also on the transformation he wrought on the means of production and distribution of fine art in India.

This transformation of the material and social conditions of the production and consumption of art led to a salient debate in India about the status of fine art and about the proper mode of integration of the traditional and the modern in the context of renaissance. The decline in Varma's reputation and the controversy among the elite art critics and aestheticians of the time regarding the probity of European technique itself as a mediator of Indian visual culture become central to the development of modern Indian aesthetics, demonstrating the importance of such elites in a renaissance period.¹¹

So, when we talk about the cultural history of India from the war of 1857 to the final achievement of independence in 1947, what term best describes this complex phenomenon? We have argued that "modernity" on its own does not do the trick. Indian modernity begins much earlier, and conditions, but is not coeval with this distinctive moment. And to call it "colonial" suggests a lack of agency that is simply not evident. While the use of the term "renaissance" might seem historically outdated, implicating a methodology of periodization and an idolatry of an already problematized interpretation of a particular moment in the history of Italy, it actually has real historiographic advantages. First, it unifies a cluster of loosely connected phenomena and tropes associated with a wide range of moments described as renaissances. Second, the term was very much a part of the self-consciousness and the debates of those active in the Indian renaissance. Using that term helps us to understand their perspective on this *Lebenswelt* even as we try to forge our own. An important aspect of this renaissance *Lebenswelt* is the secularization of society. In the Indian context, a great deal of this secularization, paradoxically, was achieved through explicitly religious movements, which in turn inspired social and philosophical developments. The most prominent of these were the Arya and Brahmo Samaj movements, to which we now turn.

¹¹ See chapter 12, section 3 for more detail.

Reform Movements

From Universality to Secularity in the Brahmo and Arya Samaj

Indian philosophy has always been expressed in a scholastic framework in which most treatises represent themselves as commentaries on religious texts. In the colonial period, while this association with the religious remains, there was a twist. In this context, as religion moved from the *math* to the chowk, religious reform movements provided the impetus and context for much philosophical activity, and as these reform movements themselves became increasingly, perhaps paradoxically, secular, they carried philosophy along with them in this secular direction. The two principal religious reform movements of this period emerged in the mid-nineteenth century, about a half-century apart, on opposite ends of the subcontinent, and on opposite ends of the class spectrum. In Bengal, Ram Mohan Roy inaugurated the Brahmo Samaj in 1828, while in Gujarat and Punjab, Dayanand Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj in 1875. Each was to define important aspects of Indian philosophy, self-consciousness and cultural development in the pre-independence period. One survives today.

Each of these movements had one eye on Indian tradition and one on Western-inflected modernity; each in its gesture to the Indian tradition self-consciously reverted to Vedic literature as authoritative, and explicitly rejected the intervening millennia of commentary in a classic renaissance trope. In each movement, both vernacular Indian languages and English displaced Sanskrit as the medium of religious and philosophical discourse. Each—centering reason and progress in its ideology—rejected idolatry, caste, sati, and other practices regarded as superstitious, as merely ritual or as cruel. And each gave rise to impressive bodies of philosophical reflection and to prominent actors important not only in the intellectual sphere, but in the independence movement as well.

The Brahma Samaj facilitated the flowering of literature and art in Bengal, but now is no more. The Arya Samaj, on the other hand, while less influential in “high culture,” was responsible for considerable social reform, education reform, and the mobilization of a large body of the middle classes in the independence movement, and remains active to this day. It is interesting that it is to the work of Dayanand Saraswati, and not to that of his fellow Bengalis in the Brahma Samaj that Aurobindo turns when he explains the roots of the Indian renaissance, and its prospects for the future, this despite the odd fact that so many continue to refer to this period as that of the “Bengal Renaissance”:

Among the great company of remarkable figures that will appear to the eye of posterity at the head of the Indian Renaissance, one stands out by himself with peculiar and solitary distinctness, one unique in his type as he is unique in his work. It is as if one were to walk for a long time amid a range of hills rising to a greater or lesser altitude, but all with sweeping contours, green-clad, flattering the eye even in their most bold and striking elevation. But amidst them all, one hill stands apart, piled up in sheer strength, a mass of bare and puissant granite, with verdure on its summit, a solitary pine jutting out into the blue, a great cascade of pure, vigorous, and fertilising water gushing out from its strength as a very fountain of life and health to the valley. Such is the impression created on my mind by Dayananda.

—(Aurobindo, 2003, p. 662)¹

We first turn to the Brahma Samaj movement, then to the Arya Samaj before considering the respective roles these two movements played in the renaissance.

5.1. Brahma Samaj

The Brahma Samaj was the creation of Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833). Roy was a prodigious scholar, fluent in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindustani, and English. He is often credited with launching the “Bengal Renaissance” through his introduction of English ideas and literature into India and his determination to integrate Western and Indian religious and philosophical practice. His literary corpus is enormous, comprising translations into vernacular Indian languages

¹ Aurobindo is also alert to the role of such literary figures as Michael Madhusudhan Dutt and Bankim Chatterjee in the renaissance, but refers specifically to Dayanand Saraswati as its principal intellectual inspiration.

and into English, as well as essays on religion, philosophy, law, and popular customs. Roy interacted easily with the English and traveled in England and Europe, ending his life in Bristol.

Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj as a response to failure on the one hand to establish Unitarianism as an Indian religion, and on the other hand to reform Orthodox Hinduism in Bengal to reflect the modernism that so animated Roy's own vision of India. Unitarianism was simply not sufficiently Indian to take root; the Hindu establishment was not all that interested in radical reform. Roy's response was to create a new religion with Indian roots and a Unitarian spirit. To get a feel for the complex interweaving of tradition and modernity Roy envisioned, and of the determined reach to a classical past to validate and ground his reforms, it is useful to reflect on the structure of early Brahmo Samaj worship services:

Two Telugu Brahmins used to recite the Vedas in a side-room, screened from the view of the congregation, where non-Brahmins would not be admitted; Utsavananda Vidyabagish would read texts of the Upaniṣads, which were afterwards explained in Bengali by Pandit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish, followed by the singing of Govinda Mala.

—(Sastri, 1974, p. 4)

So at the outset, Brahmo Samaj acknowledged the importance of caste and established a religious form that was calculated not to offend a Brahmin sensibility. On the other hand, there was no use of idols or images in this service, and most radically, they used the vernacular as a medium of instruction in the service itself. The use of the Upaniṣads as opposed to subsequent sastra or ritual literature grounded all of this in the Vedic "golden age" to which the renaissance gesture points. Communal singing at the end, following a vernacular sermon imported distinctively European elements into the ritual mix, and emphasized the importance of the participants' understanding of, and not simply being present for the service.

Theologically, Brahmo Samaj was quite radical in an Indian context. For one thing, it was resolutely monotheist, rejecting the entire orthodox Hindu pantheon as superstition. Moreover, the unique deity that replaced that splendid committee of aesthetically rich figures was immaterial, abstract, and beyond any human perception. Idolatry was hence also banished from the scene. And Brahmo theology was represented as rational, not revealed, looking more like a kind of deism or Unitarianism than a revealed religion. For this reason, it was to the Upaniṣads, with their philosophically rich and abstract characterization of reality and its divinity, and not to later commentarial texts, that Roy turned for a scriptural basis.

Roy translated parts of the principal Upaniṣads in 1816, followed in 1817 by his *A Defense of Hindu Theism* and *A Second Defense of the Monotheistical Systems of the Vedas* (Roy, 1885) in order to demonstrate their freedom from idolatry, their rationality, and the abstract nature of the deity they present.² In the preface to his translation of the *Īśa-upaniṣad*, Roy attributes idolatry to the bad faith of Brahmin priests, contrasting it with the “pure” worship presented in the Vedic texts:

Many learned Brahmans are perfectly aware of the absurdity of idolatry, and are well informed of the nature of the purer mode of divine worship. But as in the rites, ceremonies, and festivals of idolatry, they find the source of their comforts and fortune, they... advance and encourage it to the utmost of their power, by keeping the knowledge of their scriptures concealed from the rest of the people. (Preface to the Translation of the *Ishopanishad*).

—(Roy, 1885, p. 44)

The Brahma Samaj rejected idolatry and polytheism from its beginning, and especially the practice of *sati*—the immolation of widows on their husbands’ pyres. Roy himself campaigned strenuously both in India and in England for laws banning the practice, but also in this context, more broadly for the rights of women in polity, religion, and inheritance. These initial reforms presaged more extensive reform under the subsequent administrations of Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) and Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884).

Roy blended modernism and tradition; India and Europe; the sacred and the secular; the legal and the scriptural; and English with Indian vernacular and classical languages. This complex integration facilitated his efforts to reform and to modernize. It also complicated his relationship with both his Indian and British constituencies, illustrating in a graphic way the predicament of the colonial intellectual. Roy presented himself to Hindus as a purist, preserving the tradition of the Vedas and Upaniṣads against the corruption of Hindu theology, philosophy, and practice by the scholastic and Brahminical traditions. But he also presented himself to the British as a reformer, as an Indian Luther, returning a debased Hinduism to its proper form. Writing to the missionary Alexander Duff (1806–1878), he says:

As a youth, I acquired some knowledge of the English language. Having read about the rise and progress of Christianity in apostolic times, and

² It is interesting to note that it is Roy’s translation of the Upaniṣads that made its way to Concord, and was read by Emerson and Thoreau. Indian philosophy was hence brought to North America through a transmission from one Unitarian to another.

its corruption in succeeding ages, and then of the Christian Reformation which shook off these corruptions and restored it to its primitive purity, I began to think that something similar might have taken place in India, and similar results might follow here from a reformation of the popular idolatry.

—(Collet, 1900, p. 110)

The custom of *sati* was widespread in Bengal in the early nineteenth century and was generally recognized as ritually obligatory in the Hindu community. It was the first major social target of Brahmo revisionism. The Brahmo intervention, ultimately successful, was highly controversial, both among Indians and among the British themselves. Roy's campaign against *sati* provides a useful prism through which to view the tensions involved in the binaries we note above.

Roy's campaign is grounded on impressive statistics collected by the British administration. Between 1815 and 1818, at least 2,365 widows were burned alive in India, of whom 1,528 died in Bengal itself (Sastri, 1974, p. 31). The British responded to these facts by issuing regulations designed to reduce or eliminate the practice. These regulations predictably aroused the ire of the orthodox in India, and were also criticized by certain British colonial figures as unwarranted interference in local customs and religious practice. It was into this controversy that Roy inserted himself and the Brahmo Samaj. Roy argues in his counterpetition of August 1818 first that "these instances... are murders according to every Shastra, as well as to the common sense of all nations" (Quoted in Sastri, 1974, p. 31).

Here we see Roy joining a scriptural claim with a universalist moral claim, arguing for an approach to Vedic hermeneutics through moral reasoning that transcends a specifically Indian context. Roy then challenges the presumption of female inferiority in understanding, resolve, and trustworthiness and the assumption that they are driven by passion rather than reason. "The accusation or their want of virtuous knowledge is an injustice" (Quoted in Sastri, 1974, p. 33). Here his arguments are in general modern and empirical. However, he complements the empirical with the reference to the Upaniṣads: "Moreover, in the Vrihadaranyak Upaniṣad of the Yajur Veda, it is clearly stated that Yajñavalkya imparted divine knowledge of the most difficult nature to his wife Maitreyi, who was able to follow and to completely attain it!" (Quoted in Sastri, 1974, p. 32). In 1829, Lord Bentinck finally, in response to Roy's campaign—a campaign involving not only the publication of tracts, but also public action at funerals—banned *sati* in India.

Roy also argues that the real reasons for *sati* are not to be found in religion or in tradition, but rather in the inequality between the sexes in marital law and in inheritance and property law. All of Roy's arguments are strikingly modern. He

appeals to a universalist sense of human rights and gender equity, to a gender-neutral conception of property rights, and to a supremacy of secular over religious law. In a series of articles in the *Kaumudi*, his Bengali journal, as well as in his court and parliamentary submissions, Roy argues that it is the prospect of destitution following widowhood that leads women to *sati*, and the fact of arranged child marriages and the ban on widow remarriage that issues in the disempowerment of women within marriage, leading them to be more susceptible to pressure to commit *sati*. At the same time, he argues that Hindu law itself, although it does not prohibit polygamy per se, does prohibit both the varieties of polygamy then practiced and as well as *sati*, positioning his modernism within the context of the Hindu tradition, and arguing that that tradition is consistent with a modern outlook.

Roy hence establishes the Brahma Samaj as a new religious movement poised between the sacred and the secular. It is genuinely religious, with many of the trappings of a traditional religion, including ritual, prayer, congregational institutions, and theological doctrine. But it is also committed to the advancement of a number of modern, secular values, including prominently the advancement of the rights of women, but also the advancement of universal education, the integration of science and liberal democratic theory into religion, and the abolition of religious ideas regarded as antithetical to modernity, including caste, child marriage, and idolatry. Roy's philosophical legacy includes not only his introduction of the renaissance gesture to nineteenth-century India, but also his introduction of a universalist moral discourse to Hindu theology and a modernist sensibility to Indian religious culture. The impact of these ideas, as we will see, was far-reaching, not only in the domains of philosophy and religion, but also in law, education, politics, and national consciousness more generally.

Five years after Roy's death in Bristol in 1833, the Brahma Samaj attracted its most influential family of patrons when Debendranath Tagore converted to Brahmaism, bringing the influential Tagore family into the Samaj. The Tagores were wealthy and cultured pillars of Bengali Bhadrakalok society, and their entrance into the Brahma Samaj increased the prestige and influence of that organization and provided them with a more effective platform for disseminating their views. The entrance of the Tagores onto the Brahma stage turned out to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, they brought their considerable wealth that was of use in the establishment of institutions, such as magazines and schools, as well as the prestige that led to the public approbation of the movement. On the other hand, their leadership ensured the restriction of Brahma activity to a Bengali elite—to a group to which we would now refer as the 1 percent—and its irrelevance to the lives and thought of most Bengalis. This may well be one of the reasons for its small numbers and eventual decline and disappearance.

Following Roy's lead, the Brahmo Samaj over the next four decades established a number of schools, including several for women, devoted to a modern secular education, many in English medium, some in Bengali. None lasted for long, however, and the number of schools established belies the fact that rarely were more than two open simultaneously. All were rather small, and taught the children of the Brahmo upper class. The Samaj also established a series of short-lived magazines and journals, again both in English and Bengali. These tended to rise and fall with the doctrinal schisms that constantly split this already small community. Schisms reflected such issues as the infallibility of the Vedas (a position initially championed by the elder Tagore, but which found little favor with the next generation); the role of Christian ideas in the Samaj; the admission of women to Samaj services; and child marriage. The last, as we shall see, proved perhaps most decisive in the demise of the Brahmo Samaj. These repeated schisms and fractures and the inability of the movement to grow substantially reflected its status as a kind of Victorian drawing room movement that aspired to be a major social and religious force, but which could never appeal much beyond a particular intellectual social circle in a wealthy and insular upper class.

In 1866, Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884), whose influence in the Samaj came to eclipse that of the Tagores, led a significant split in the movement. Ironically, one of the issues that animated this split was Sen's strident advocacy of the rights and place of women, and in particular, his opposition to child marriage. Sen also broke with Debendranath Tagore over the missionary nature of the Samaj. He had a vision of a national movement, and toured India promoting the Brahmo Samaj; the Tagores saw the Samaj as an essentially Bengali religious institution, with no need to expand into other regions of India. Other issues between these two rivals for the leadership of the Samaj included the probity of intercaste marriage and the interfusion of Christian ideas into Brahmo theology. Sen pushed for the development of a more universal religion, freed from the trappings of Hindu ritual and social practice. The Tagores, in the interest of a religion reflecting Indian national identity (or at least that identity that they recognized) urged a more Hindu version of Brahmo Samaj (including, for instance, caste marks and prohibitions on intercaste marriage). Keshub Chandra Sen was a modernizer and synthesizer; Debendranath Tagore was a conservative.

Sen might well have carried the day, and might have carried the Brahmo Samaj into national relevance were it not for the cruel irony of his central place in the 1878 scandal known as the "Cuch Behar Marriage Controversy." This scandal and its aftermath represent a fine case study in the complex interaction between the Bengali *Badhralok* and the British administration in Bengal, and of the divided loyalties to which this class was subject as it represented at the same time the vanguard of Indian modernism and cosmopolitanism and the thin end of the British wedge of colonial cultural domination. The British resident in the

remote and somewhat conservative princely state of Cuch Behar attempted to modernize the state by arranging a strategic marriage for the young crown prince of Cuch Behar with a suitable bride from a progressive, urbane Brahmo family. The Governor of Bengal agreed with this plan and settled on Keshub Chandra Sen's then thirteen-year-old daughter as the ideal princess.

Sen initially resisted, in virtue of his longstanding opposition to child marriage, but the offer of a replica of Buckingham Palace in the Himalayan foothills led him to see his duty to advance this cause, an insight aided, he said, by divine revelation. The marriage and the scandal it occasioned—in a movement so resolutely opposed to this kind of procedure—discredited both Sen and the movement. Brahmo Samaj never recovered. This final evidence of the loyalty of this class to the British colonial administration and not to Bengal or indeed to its own stated values was simply fatal. The movement slowly fizzled over the next few decades. In 1872, between all factions of the Brahmo Samaj throughout India, there were just over one hundred Samaj centers. By the end of the century there were virtually none. Even at its peak, however, its membership was counted in the hundreds, not the thousands; it was always splintered; it rarely ventured beyond the upper class.

Nonetheless, the Brahmo Samaj has an important legacy and an influence in Indian philosophy in the preindependence period, and it owes that legacy to the Tagore family. Rabindranath, although not a professional philosopher, was one of the most prominent philosophical thinkers in India in the first half of the twentieth century. He imbibed Brahmo ideas, and, in particular, advocated Sen's universalism. Rabindranath was committed to realizing that universalism through a creative synthesis of ideas drawn from various traditions and to the rejection of caste and other oppressive practices. These ideas permeate Rabindranath's own thought about the relationship between religion and philosophy and his critique of nationalism, to which we will return in the next two chapters.

5.2. Arya Samaj

Just as the Brahmo Samaj was declining in influence, a second—far more successful—reform movement, the Arya Samaj, was rising across the subcontinent in Punjab under the leadership of the religious visionary Dayanand Saraswati (1824–1883). Dayanand grew up in an orthodox Hindu family in Gujarat. Dissatisfied with Hindu orthodoxy, and eager to evade an arranged marriage, he left home and lived the life of a mendicant for some years, wandering India. At some point he developed a coherent religious and social ideology grounded in a set of principles aimed not only at a more rationalist view of religion but also at a proto-socialist view of political economy.

The contrast between these commitments and the capitalism of the landlord class comprised by the Brahmo Samaj was evident. Dayanand advocated individual freedom of belief and conscience as well as democracy in the Samaj and in social policy. The emphasis on the democratic as opposed to the elite set the Arya Samaj apart from the Brahmo Samaj. Like the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj was monotheistic, and, like the Brahmo Samaj, embodied the renaissance trope of reaching back beyond the scholastic period to the Vedic golden age in its interpretation of scripture. Unlike the Brahmo Samaj, however, it broke explicitly from Brahmanical injunctions regarding caste distinction (including Brahmin authority in scriptural exposition and ritual) and gender distinction, giving it a much more egalitarian, and indeed, more revolutionary flavor. Like the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj was universalist, a religion grounded in reason and open to anyone. The Arya Samaj, however, gave this universalism a bit more of a social-activist edge in its principles, articulated in Dayanand's *Satyarth Prakash* (1875). The sixth, for instance, enjoins "action on behalf of the good of the entire world." The seventh advocates action on behalf of social justice and the ninth advocates collective progress, not individualism.

While the Brahmo Samaj was a welcome partner in Anglo-Bengali social circles, and garnered respect and recognition from administrators and missionaries alike, as well as from certain orthodox Brahmin circles, the Arya Samaj was an object of suspicion. First of all, the Brahmo Samaj presented itself as a specifically Indian religious movement, and as a national religious movement. This self-presentation domesticated it. The Arya Samaj, on the other hand, presented itself as an international religion, and as a religion committed to definite social and political ideals. For this reason, it fell afoul both of the orthodox Hindus and the British. The former saw heresy; the latter, sedition. The charge of heresy was aggravated by the practice of *suddhi*, or deliberate religious conversion, practiced with great success by the Arya Samaj. The charge of sedition—against which such figures as Lajpat Rai (1865–1928) argued—gains plausibility from the large numbers of independence activists who emerged from the Arya Samaj, including Rai himself. Rai writes:

The *Vedas* teach us all about the ideals of individual and social conduct, of social governance, and of political philosophy. If professors in Government Colleges [that is, the British colonial universities] who teach or recommend to their boys books like Mill's *Liberty* or *Representative Government*, Bentham's *Theory of Legislation*, Bagehot's *Physics and Politics*, Spencer's *Man Versus the State*, are not regarded as political agitators, there is no reason why the Arya Samaj, which preaches Vedic ideals of social reconstruction and modes of social governance, should be regarded as a political body.

—(Rai, 1965, p. 171)

Unlike the Brahma Samaj, whose history is one of steep decline after a promising beginning, the Arya Samaj expanded rapidly in India and in the Indian diaspora, and continues to be a large and vibrant religious and social movement. The Arya Samaj was established in Bombay in 1875, and by 1880 seventeen new branches were established in Punjab, the United Provinces, and Rajasthan. The first Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School opened in 1886, with an enrollment of over five hundred students. By the mid-1890s there were over 90,000 Arya Samajis with sabhas throughout India and a girls' high school in Punjab. The Arya Samaj also spread in the diaspora, with a branch established in Mauritius 1898, followed by branches in Fiji, British East Africa, South Africa, Dutch Guyana, and Singapore. By 1930, there were nearly one million Arya Samajis.

By the time of independence in 1947, there were 179 schools and 10 Arya Samaj colleges in British India as well as religious training centers and industrial arts training centers, a highly unusual combination, revealing a remarkably broad vision of the mission of education. Today, the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic Educational System (DAV) comprises 667 schools and colleges including 461 high schools and one university. In fact, the DAV schools produce more top students in Year X and XII examinations in India than any other school system. The displacement of missionary schools at the top of the ladder is one of the great achievements of this Indian religious movement. These schools, unlike those envisioned both by Macaulay and Roy, taught not only in English, but also in both local vernacular languages, and in Sanskrit, with the explicit mission not of Anglicizing the Indian educated classes, but of forging an educated class of self-consciously Indian citizens, one fit for a cosmopolitan modernity. The memorandum of association of the Anglo-Vedic Colleges lists as the purpose of the Arya Samaj educational system:

1. To establish in the Punjab an Anglo-Vedic College Institution which shall include a school, a College, and Boarding house, as a memorial in honor of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, with the following joint purposes, viz:
 - a) to encourage, improve and enforce the study of Hindu literature.
 - b) to encourage and enforce the study of classical Sanskrit and of the Vedas,
 - c) to encourage and enforce the study of English literature, and sciences, both theoretical and applied.
2. To provide means for giving technical education in connection with the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College Institution as far as it is not inconsistent with the proper accomplishment of the first object.

—(Rai, 1965, p. 138)

This emphasis on education—not merely in doctrine but in practice—is matched by an extensive medical and charitable arm of the Arya Samaj. Lajpat Rai notes that “outside Christian circles, the Arya Samaj was the first purely Indian association to organize Orphanages and Widows’ Homes” (Rai, 1965, p. 129). The Arya Samaj was also the first non-Christian organization involved in famine relief, intervening in a series of Indian famines, not only establishing hospitals but also assisting with the ritually problematic task of the disposal of the dead. These activities realize what we have called the egalitarian ideals of Dayanand Saraswati, and must in part account for the growth and vitality of this movement. It never could be accused of being an elitist or a purely theoretical venture.

This emphasis on social action as opposed to mere worship or scholasticism in the very principles of the Arya Samaj represented a break from all previous Indian religious traditions. This radicalism in action is matched by radical religious ideas and practices. While the Arya Samaj, like the Brahmo Samaj, offered innovative reinterpretations of the Vedic texts that provided the foundations for these antischolastic movements, the former, unlike the latter, matched these interpretations with novel ritual practices. These included a complete rejection of caste and associated practices and ideologies of purity: the Arya Samaj confers the sacred thread not only on boys of a certain caste, but on everyone, including women and the untouchables, and all other adherents to the creed, inviting conversion by untouchables and others, both inside and outside of the Hindu fold. It is true that Brahmo ideology advocated significant reform of traditional Hindu practices, such as the abolition of *sati* and (for some) the abolition of child marriage. The Arya Samaj went one step further, developing a liturgy and set of practices that was inclusive, and developing institutions that embodied its ideology of reform and inclusion.

All of this had political implications, and indeed implications for the colonial situation. Arya was a unifying, not a divisive movement, and a movement that ran contrary to the stratification of Indian society that was essential to colonial infrastructure. It was a movement that promised and delivered social mobility and generated aspirations for independence, with a particular vision of national identity. It is not surprising, therefore, that some of the most important political philosophers to emerge on the Indian scene in the pre-independence period were Arya Samajis, chief among them Lajpat Rai and Mulk Raj Anand, each of whom contributed importantly to Indian philosophy, as well as to politics.

We have already noted that Aurobindo Ghosh, not generally associated with Arya Samaj, and himself a member of the community that gave rise to the Brahmo Samaj, refers to Dayanand Saraswati as the chief progenitor of the Indian renaissance. Aurobindo was thinking explicitly about the *idea* of renaissance in this context. He notes not only Dayanand’s originality and creativity,

but also the fact that that creativity drew explicitly and consistently, on classical, indeed Vedic, sources. Dayanand also rejected the commentarial tradition in favor of direct engagement, and he did so in the service of the construction of new modernity, and with it a new Indian consciousness that made national identity possible.

5.3. Back to the Future

Whatever differences we find between these two Samaj movements, at bottom they are manifestations of a single gesture, what we have called “the master renaissance trope.” Each reaches back to a golden age—in this case, the same golden age—as a foundation for a future, and each, in doing so, disparages and disowns the cultural forces that led to the eventual decline of the ideas it recovers. But each is also concerned to create a particular kind of modernity on the foundation of this classical tradition. That modernity must simultaneously be distinctively Indian and cosmopolitan; it must be simultaneously religious and secular; and it must sustain, in this context, a vision of national identity sufficient to underwrite a claim to independence in a colonial context.

The Brahma Samaj movement accomplished this through an integration of modernist European theology with a specific reinterpretation of the Upaniṣads, and an embrace of English language and culture infused, in its later stages, with Brahmanical rituals and social forms. The Arya Samaj movement did so by integrating classical scholarship and vernacular culture, Indian learning and European science, and through the adoption of a progressive social action platform. Each contributed important strands to Indian philosophy. In particular, through the production of a cadre of public intellectuals such as Roy, Tagore, Anand, Sen, and Rai, and through the establishment of secular educational institutions, philosophy as an activity moved from the *maths* and into the public domain.

It is worth reflecting both on what these movements accomplished, and on how they arose. Both Ram Mohan Roy and Dayanand Saraswati began their careers with theological preoccupations and ended up as public philosophers whose influence and concerns transcended their respective religious communities. Each advanced arguments and positions not to a congregation of coreligionists, but to a general public; each took his ideas not to have merely liturgical significance, but also to have broader social impact. In these origins, philosophy moved into the public sphere. And each of these movements was not only conceived in philosophy but gave birth to prominent philosophers, who drew theoretical inspiration from the movements themselves. The Brahma Samaj produced the first president of the Indian Philosophical Congress. The Arya Samaj

was a significant influence on Aurobindo, one of the most important philosophical figures of the preindependence period. So, the Samaj movements not only exemplify and advance the renaissance as such, but also directly mediate the emergence of modern Indian philosophy. Without taking them as context, it is hard to see the pattern of Indian philosophical thought in this period.

In chapter 3, we noted that the introduction of English as a medium of education by Bentinck, Macaulay, and Mill had unpredictable consequences, including the shaping of the Samaj movements and their eventual impact. We now begin to see the contours of this complex causality. When Ram Mohan Roy, already fluent in Persian, Sanskrit, and Bengali, learned English and gained access to English scholarship and Orientalist literature, he also came to understand both the linguistic poverty of Indian vernacular languages and the gulf in learning created by the distinction between Sanskrit and Persian culture on the one hand, and vernacular culture on the other. English drew attention to these phenomena, provided an unexpected bridge as a language both scholarly and vernacular, and English scholarship provided a model for a translation program that would enrich the vernaculars and close this cultural gap.

So, when Roy chose to translate the Upaniṣads, he did so not only into English, but also into Bengali, making holy scriptures, heretofore only accessible to the Sanskrit-literate elite, available to the literate middle class of Bengal, and extending the vernacular in the process. Keshub Chandra Sen wrote almost exclusively in English. The principal languages of Brahmo Samaj were Bengali and English, never Sanskrit or Persian. Recall that Macaulay had wanted to displace the vernacular languages and Persian in favor of English, and it was Mill's program of preserving vernacular education alongside English education that carried the day. The consequence is that a movement like the Brahmo Samaj could appeal to educated persons in both English and a vernacular Indian language, thus allowing it to move from the purely sacred sphere into a more secular public sphere. This also allowed the movement to grow nationally—for the new Brahmo communities of Madras did not speak or read Bengali. English had become the *lingua franca*, and hence a vehicle for national unification.

Dayanand Saraswati's choice to *write* in Hindi also reflects the decision to advance Mill's program over Macaulay's and Roy's program of *translation* into vernacular languages. By writing in Hindi, a vernacular language spoken by a broad range of north Indians, Dayanand both avoided the elitism of Sanskrit and the foreign tongue of English. Nonetheless, when it came time to establish educational institutions and publication projects, English was the medium of education and a principal medium of Arya Samaj publication and doctrinal dissemination. The choice to teach in English was a choice for a practical modernity, for cosmopolitan consciousness, for secularity, and for pan-Indian universality, and hence for national identity. Both of these distinctively Indian movements,

each of which had a critical role to play in the genesis of the independence movement, was hence, in an ironic twist, made possible in large part by the colonial project of the dissemination and legitimation of English, and in doing so helped English make the transition into a new Indian vernacular language and language of learning.

We might well say that the most important impact of the two Samaj movements is that they bestowed on colonial India the gift of the secular. But what is that gift? To be secular is, in the first instance, to be concerned with the temporal, the present, as opposed to the transcendent. In both Roy and Dayanand, we see this adoption of religious ideas for immediate social action and attention to then current issues. In the second instance, to be secular is a matter not so much of time, but of space, to be the kind of activity or discourse that takes place in a public, nonreligious sphere. That locus might be as mundane as a coffeehouse full of enthusiastic students, or as rarefied as a university lecture hall. But importantly, it is *not* a temple or a monastery.

This is not to say that every philosopher who worked in the preindependence Indian academy or public sphere owed intellectual allegiance to one or the other of these movements; far from it. Many worked out very different philosophical agendas. It is, however, to say that these movements legitimized and demonstrated the possibility of the practice of philosophy as a secular activity in India. That activity was undertaken by people in *mufti*, not in robes, by the laity, not by *sannyasis*. This establishment of a secular space for philosophy may be the most important legacy of the Brahmo and the Arya Samaj.

India Imagined

Contested Narratives of National Identity

The master renaissance trope we identified in chapter 4, and the ramifications of which we discussed in the previous chapter, is incomplete without a master narrative. After all, if we are to take a present moment as a recovery of a golden past and a step to a glorious future, there must be a sense of the identity of that whose past, present, and future are at issue. The Samaj movements provide a connection to the past, but given both the plurality of religious traditions in India and the heterodox character of the Samaj movements themselves, they could not provide a criterion of national identity. But neither could either of the major religions themselves, each in virtue of the claims of the other. The most obvious candidate, then, is the nation. In the colonial context, however, that candidate is also problematic. If it exists at all, it exists either in the context of a colonizing power, delivering the wrong history to justify the renaissance gesture, or only as an idea, perhaps too thin a reed to support a sense of history.

Nonetheless, the nation is necessary, and we find in the Indian colonial context a variety of creative, competing narratives of Indian national identity, each with a claim to account for the unity of Indian history in the context of which renaissance is intelligible. Many explicitly involve the master renaissance trope, identifying a golden age and drawing a clear historical line (different lines in different cases) to the present and on to the future. Others, as we will see, challenge this approach. And, as we will also see, some prominent Indian intellectuals challenged the entire colonial industry of national narrative production.

In chapter 4 we encountered one such narrative—that constructed by Aurobindo—according to which Indian national unity is fundamentally philosophical or religious in character. Ironically, Aurobindo was not the only classicist to construct a narrative of Indian national identity, and classical narratives of identity could serve colonialists as well as revolutionaries. Even before Aurobindo was conscious of himself as Indian, the British whose manners his

family adopted had constructed their own classical narrative of Indian identity, one designed not to ground a revolution, but to justify a rule.

6.1. Imperialists and Orientalists: The British Narrative

James Mill, in his magisterial (and infamous) *History of British India* (1817–1848), had to determine the referent of India in order to write its history. This is not a trivial matter now, and was far from trivial then. Now, the subcontinent is divided among six or seven nations, depending on how you count. At the time of the British arrival, counting the nations on the subcontinent was well-nigh impossible. The Mughal empire was in decline, with its periphery unclear, surrounded by kingdoms, federations, and city-states enjoying various degrees of autonomy, patronage, integration, and a sense of themselves as political entities. Nobody would have taken seriously the idea that the subcontinent of India, however delimited, constituted a single nation.

But to rule India was the task, and so India required invention as a nation, if only as a subject nation. Nations have histories as well as boundaries, and Mill provided India with both. The boundaries set the colonial conquest agenda. The history justified it; but a history, if it is to justify subjugation, must demonstrate the need for the constructed nation to be rescued from darkness by the enlightened colonial power. Mill argues in the *History* that Indian culture and technology had always been entirely degenerate and primitive before the arrival of the British, and that British civilization alone is responsible for any recent progress in Indian education, public life, and material conditions.

A second British narrative—which also ends in a degraded Indian—was provided by the scholarship of erudite and well-meaning British orientalists. Based on their estimation of the Sanskrit classics they were reading, and the model of Greece and Rome in the West, scholars such as William Jones (1746–1794) constructed an elegant narrative of cultural and social decline from a distant age of Indian greatness to the then present state of degradation. Whereas Mill develops his narrative from the safe distance of India House, and recuses himself from actual contact with India, the Orientalists plunged deep into Indian culture and its classical languages. Nonetheless, each method delivered the result that India was, when the British arrived, in deep need of European salvation. We have seen that Macaulay used both narratives to justify colonial administration and the denigration of Indian culture.

The Mughal empire is a curious aporia in British narratives of Indian history. On the one hand, the East India Company operated under a Diwani—a concession—granted by the Mughal emperor, and the fiction of Mughal authority throughout the subcontinent justified British taxation and administration in

the territory they controlled. So, part of the narrative of Indian identity had to include Mughal sovereignty and so the political continuity of the Mughal court with Indian rulers stretching back as far as the archeological record could go.

This archaeological record, as Keay (Keay, *Archæological Survey of India*, and National Culture Fund (India), 2011) has shown, was carefully constructed by the Archaeological Survey of India, a survey directed to the use of material artifacts monuments, inscriptions, and classical art to reconstruct the cultural and political history of India. The result of this approach, and in particular its emphasis on a narrative model appealing to a single cultural history, is an image of a single civilization, uniting the subcontinent, with a single history that can be told retrospectively by those with the mastery of the appropriate scientific method.

On the other hand, given the Vedic and Sanskrit construction of Indian identity by the classical British scholars and hence a Hindu representation of the Indian essence,¹ the Mughals would have been regarded as alien invaders—Turks and Persians—with no claim to Indianness. Read in this way, they were in no position to grant British rights; on the other hand, as post-1857 rhetoric would confirm, they could safely be regarded as a hostile force from which the British could rescue the “real India.” Given this awkward tension, best not to mention them at all. And the British chose the best narrative strategy, recognizing the legitimacy of the Mughals as rulers, but real Indian identity as grounded in Ashoka’s empire as revealed by the archeological survey. While this political narrative may not be entirely coherent, we will see that they were not alone in this decision. Many Indian nationalists followed them. Any unity in this context must be constructed, even if that construction represents itself as discovery.

6.2. A. K. Coomaraswamy: Hybrid Heritage, Split Narratives

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy is not only the father of Indian art history but also an important voice in Indian philosophy and nationalism. Of mixed English and Sinhalese heritage, Coomaraswamy spent much of his life in North America. Nonetheless, his self-representation was always as Indian, an identity he self-consciously articulated. As we will see, the ambiguity of his own identity is mirrored in his ambivalence between two radically distinct accounts of Indian nationality.

¹ There is another side to this story that must be mentioned as well. The Archeological Survey devoted special attention to Buddhist sites, such as Sarnath, Sanchi, Bodh Gaya, and Amaravati. Nonetheless, these were seen as falling in the same cultural orbit as the Hindu tradition, and were certainly not associated with any foreign influence, as were Muslim monuments.

In his many art historical essays, Coomaraswamy constructs and defends an account of Indian identity strikingly continuous with that of British curators and classicists. He also emphasizes the use of art historical material and the analysis of monuments, sculpture, painting, and other high art forms, as well as the craft tradition, to recover Indian history and the essence of the Indian nation (Coomaraswamy, 1910). While it must be said that Coomamaswamy's analyses of these artifacts is far more sophisticated than that of many of his British contemporaries, and his narrative more nuanced, we nonetheless find yet another account of Indian national unity and identity grounded primarily in the high arts.²

Coomaraswamy, when he shifts ground from art history to the field of philosophy and ideology, offers an alternative, more poetic, narrative to his own art-historical account, in which spiritual ideology and a spiritualized geography take center stage. This philosophical approach contrasts starkly with his material approach to national unity. In "Indian Nationality," for instance, we encounter the rather astonishing assertion that

The fact of India's geographical unity is apparent on the map, and is never, I think, disputed. The recognition of social unity is at least as evident to the student of Indian culture.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 69)

Coomaraswamy refers to Ashoka, Akbar, and Vikramāditya as rulers who grasped these essential facts. Now, it is patently obvious that neither the geographic nor the social unity of the Indian subcontinent has been widely recognized, then or now, and the unity achieved under these three rulers was the unity of conquest, not of culture or geography. One might as well say that the unity of Asia is as apparent on the map as its cultural unity, and cite Genghis Kahn as one who recognized this obvious truth. Note for instance, the rhetorical question Coomaraswamy poses a few pages later: "Can we think of India as complete without Ceylon?" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 70).

Setting aside the creativity of this account of national unity, we note two strands of the narrative. While Coomaraswamy sees them as mutually reinforcing, they are not entirely consistent with each other. The first focuses on social unity.

² One respect in which Coomaraswamy's analysis is more nuanced than others is his careful attention to Mughal painting and its relationship both to Persian and to Rajput and Kangra painting traditions (Coomaraswamy, 1910 Ch. 8, §4). Coomaraswamy is a consummate scholar of Indian art and of the methods of art history and as he reconstructs the history of the development of miniature styles in India and the complex interplay between imported and indigenous representational techniques and traditions, he offers a place on the Indian historical stage and in Indian identity to Muslim Indians as well.

Coomaraswamy sees Indian national identity as constituted by a shared spiritual heritage and outlook—one that he claims transcends differences between specific religious traditions, shared by Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. This narrative strand assigns a unity to the nation despite, or perhaps comprising its superficial plurality of customs and languages.

Coomaraswamy characterizes this unity out of plurality through the metaphor of pieces of a puzzle that interlock to form a coherent whole.

The diverse peoples of India are like the parts of some magic puzzle, seemingly impossible to fit together, but falling easily into place when once the key is known; and the key is that realization of the fact that the parts do fit together, which we call national self-consciousness.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 71)

This is a metaphor of social unity. This social metaphor requires the second narrative of history and unity—the geographical. When Coomaraswamy turns to the theme of geographical unity, however, it is not the unity of the cartographer, but a spiritualized geography he has in mind, in which the relevant geographical features are the seven rivers mentioned in the mantra *Om Gangē cha Yamune chaiva Godāvarī Saraswatī Narmade, Sindhu Kaverī, Jalē smin Sannidhim Kuru* (Ibid., p. 70). In this account, the “apparent” geographical unity is one apparent not to one who surveys the atlas and discovers the obvious continuity between Burma and Ladakh, but to someone who sees more deeply, and recognizes that this land is constituted by the shared spiritual life of Sinhalese and Pathans.

These two interlinked narratives share a spiritualized historicism with the art historical narrative, but do not rely so explicitly on material culture. Like that narrative, they make room for cultural diversity, but force that diversity into an overarching unity. And once again, it is noteworthy that this highly artificial unity is presented as self-evident, just awaiting discovery. This narrative of identity grounded in spiritual unity is not unique to Coomaraswamy. As we shall see, Swami Vivekananda uses a similar strategy to formulate a rival narrative.

6.3. Vivekananda: Vedic Spiritual Unity

Swami Vivekananda rose to prominence in India and overseas as a result of his dramatic appearance at the first Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893. He was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) and was designated by Ramakrishna as his primary missionary. Vivekananda’s articulation of Ramakrishna’s ideas was strikingly modern, and striking as well for its explicit

social engagement and involvement with the Indian independence movement. In that context, he was a prominent theoretician of Indian identity, developing an account that, like Coomaraswamy's, was highly spiritualized, but even more radical in that it floated free of any material or geographical anchors, identifying Indian national identity specifically in terms of spiritual ideology. As a consequence, it was also less ecumenical in its vision than that of Coomaraswamy, and indeed, for that reason has recently been appropriated in the service of the Bharatiya Janata Parisad as a legitimator of Hindutva as national policy.

Aurobindo approvingly, and indeed accurately, characterizes Vivekananda's account of Indian identity as follows:

... [T]he visit of Swami Vivekananda to America and the subsequent work of those who followed him did more for India than a hundred London Congresses could effect. That is the true way of awakening sympathy,—by showing ourselves to the nations as a people with a great past and ancient civilization who still possess something of the genius and character of our forefathers, have still something to give the world and therefore deserve freedom,—by proof of our manliness and fitness, not by mendicancy.

—(Aurobindo, *Karmayogin*, 28 August, 1919, no. 10, reprinted in vol. 2 of *Complete Works*, p. 441)

Here in the invocation of a “great past and ancient civilization” we see once again the construction of Indian identity in terms of continuity with an ancient golden age. But it is not the material products or the location of that age that matter, but “the genius and character of our forefathers.” This is who Aurobindo identifies as Indians, and this is what he takes India to be able to “give the world.” Finally, the dessert of freedom is grounded in this identity, and hence in a spiritual vitality, characterized as “manliness and fitness,” not in a concrete heritage or social or geographical unity. It was important to both Vivekananda and Aurobindo that Indian spirituality be understood not in terms of passive retreat from the world, but in terms of active engagement with it. This was, of course, the moment of the independence struggle, and so however spiritualized an account of identity is, that account had to subserve the independence movement or it would have been of no use at all.

Vivekananda puts his view this way in a lecture delivered in Colombo in 1897:

If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi* [*Holy Land*], to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards

generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality—it is India.

—(Vivekananda, 1944, p. 4)

Note first that, like Coomaraswamy, while Vivekananda begins to ground identity in a land, that land is not characterized physically or geographically. It is not obvious on a map. Instead it is characterized by its holiness. It is not demarcated by any geographical features, but by purity, calmness, and spirituality. It is more like Blake's Jerusalem than any physical Jerusalem. In another lecture in that series, Vivekananda says:

This is the ancient land where wisdom made its home before it went into any other country, the same India whose influx of spirituality is represented, as it were, on the material plane, by rolling rivers like oceans, where the eternal Himalayas, rising tier above tier, with their snowcaps, looks as it were into the very mysteries of heaven. Here is the same India whose soil has been trodden by the feet of the greatest sages that ever lived.

—(Vivekananda, 1944, p. 101)

Now, here we do get “rolling rivers” and the snowcapped Himalayas. But even here, these are not physical rivers, or the Himalayas we trek; these are the eternal abodes of the gods, more involved with “the very mysteries of heaven” than with global warming or the boundaries of nation states, and the soil is important only as that trod by sages. This is not Coomaraswamy's geography, but a mythic geography reflecting spiritual vision. While in Coomaraswamy's hands, geography suggests spirituality, in Vivekananda's geography is nothing more than a metaphor for spiritual ideas. Vivekananda's point is that India is special in being the source of these ideas. Indian identity is hence not straightforwardly geographical, but spiritual.

Here first sprang up inquiries into the nature of man and into the internal world. Here first arose the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the existence of a supervising God, an immanent God in nature and in man, and here the highest ideals of religion and philosophy have attained their culminating points.

Our sacred motherland is a land of religions and philosophy—the birthplace of spiritual giants—the land of renunciation, where and where alone, from the most ancient to the most modern times there has been the highest ideal of life open to man. This is the motherland of philosophy, of spirituality, and of ethics, of sweetness, gentleness, and love. These still exist, and my experience of the world leads me to stand

on firm ground and make the bold statement that India is still the first and foremost of all the nations in the world in these respects.

—(Vivekananda, 1944, p. 101)

The reference to a personal, even emotional spirituality is pure Ramakrishna. But Vivekananda turns it to more political ends. This is, once again, not simply an account of an actual unity, but of a potential unity grounded in an actual national religious essence. Vivekananda urges a need for a unity of spiritual purpose, one grounded specifically in Hindu ideas.

National union of India must be a gathering up of its scattered spiritual forces. A Nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune.... The common ground that we have is our sacred traditions, our religion. That is the only common ground... upon that we shall have to build.

—(1944, p. 151)

So far we have been surveying a set of increasingly spiritualized narratives of Indian identity grounded in geography, each creative and reconstructive in its own way, and each grounded in a vision of the culture of classical India. In Vivekananda's narrative, we see a kind of apogee of this trend. We now turn to a very different spiritual narrative, one at the same time more secular and cosmopolitan, and that takes as its reference point for Indian culture not only the high culture of a classical age, but also the folk culture of its contemporary village life.

6.4. Tagore: Creating Aesthetic Unity

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) was the son of Debendranath Tagore, one of the founders of the Brahmo Samaj. He was a prolific poet, composer, playwright, novelist, essayist, painter, and philosopher. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his poem cycle *Gitanjali*. Tagore was also innovative in education, founding Visva-Bharati College (now University) at Shantiniketan, in West Bengal as an experimental college devoted to Indian learning and arts with a student-centered curriculum. Visva Bharati University remains an excellent center of higher education, especially in the arts and humanities.³

³ Vishwa Bharati was also home to many influential Indian artists, including Nandalal Bose, Binod Bihar Mukerjee, and Abanindranath Tagore, furthering Tagore's vision of aesthetics as the heart of Indian unity.

Tagore's narrative of Indian identity is structured by the resolution of a cascade of interlocking dichotomies. These include those between the secular and the sacred; the analytic and the poetic; the classical and the modern; high culture and folk culture; nativism and cosmopolitanism; and most of all, tradition and modernity. His synthesis of these pairs of opposites generates a narrative that locates India as a distinctive cultural space, but one essentially in dialogue with modernity and a global community. Tagore is concerned with the project of independence. But unlike Coomaraswamy, Aurobindo, or Vivekananda, he is no nationalist, at least not in any ordinary sense of that term. Indeed a deep suspicion about the very notion of the Nation animates much of his thought.

Tagore's integration of the secular world with the sacred is always mediated by the aesthetic. First and foremost, Tagore is a *bhadralok* aesthete, steeped in music and poetry and most of all in a sensibility that suggests that civilization is defined artistically. So when he conceives the sacred, it is not in terms of Hindu orthodoxy, but of a more globalized romanticism that encompasses Goethe as much as it does Kalidas. When Tagore considers the secular, it is similarly aestheticized, a world conceived as experienced, and as experienced through the senses of one properly attuned to it. The resolution is achieved in the aesthetic space that is at the same time empirical and transcendent. In *Creative Unity* (1922), he puts it this way:

The consciousness of personality, which is the consciousness of unity in ourselves, becomes prominently distinct when colored by joy or sorrow, or some other emotion. It is like the sky, which is visible because it is blue, and which takes different aspect with the change of colours. In the creation of art, therefore, the energy of an emotional ideal is necessary; as its unity is not like that of a crystal, passive and inert, but actively expressive.

....

Therefore it is, we feel, that this world is a creation; that in its centre there is a living idea that reveals itself in an eternal symphony, played on innumerable instruments, all keeping perfect time. We know that this great world-verse, that runs from sky to sky, is not made for the mere enumeration of facts— . . . it has its direct revelation in our delight. That delight gives us the key to the truth of existence.

—(Tagore, 1994, pp. 506–507)

This approach to the dialectic of the sacred and secular, sublated by the aesthetic, is an important ingredient of Tagore's conception of Indian identity, an identity grounded in the commonality of aesthetic experience. For like Aurobindo, Coomaraswamy, and Vivekananda, he takes that identity to be in part spiritual. What it is to be Indian is to respond to the sacred in a particular, Indian, way—

perhaps in one of a family of Indian ways. Tagore conceives of the positive content of nationality to be a resonance among the diversity of aesthetic responses it enables in peoples, and hence the diversity of approaches to reconciling this dichotomy in a corresponding variety of aesthetics attitudes. This is the root of creativity and the route to truth.

In his address to the Indian Philosophical Congress, “Pathway to *Mukti*,” Tagore addresses yet another dichotomy. He writes:

Plato as a philosopher decreed the banishment of poets from his ideal Republic. But, in India, philosophy ever sought alliance with poetry because its mission was to occupy the people’s life, but not merely the learned seclusion of scholarship.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 153)

There are two points to note here. First, is the synthesis of the apparent dichotomy between the poetic and the philosophical. This has several dimensions, not only unifying the analytic and the aesthetic, but also creating a bridge between high and low culture. This bridge is reinforced at the end of the essay by Tagore’s quotation of a Baul song as a philosophical text addressing yet another dichotomy by asserting the unity of the divine and the secular, introducing it by saying “truth is neither in pure *vidyā* nor in *avidyā*, but in their union.” (The tantric imagery reinforces this theme of the reconciliation of spirit and body and related dichotomies.):

It goes on blossoming for ages, the soul-lotus in which I am bound, as well as thou, without escape. There is no end to the opening of its petals, and the honey in it has such sweetness that thou like an enchanted bee canst never desert it, and therefore thou art bound as I am, and *mukti* is nowhere.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 164)

Tagore develops an account of Indian spiritual identity not in terms of a single religious tradition, but rather in terms of a synthesis of aesthetic sensibility and a more general spiritual outlook than any that emerges from a single one of India’s religious traditions. This is expressed in the desire for *mukti*, or liberation (although the nature of that liberation and of the bondage from which it is a liberation are left deliberately vague).

In *Creative Unity*, Tagore is concerned to divorce this synthetic model of Indian spiritual identity from any specifically Indian nationalism, that is, any account of what a political state must be like. On Tagore’s view, cultural identity and political organization are entirely independent matters:

When the spread of higher ideals of humanity is held not to be important, the hardening method of national efficiency gains a certain strength; and for some limited period of time, at least, it proudly asserts itself as the fittest to survive. But it is the survival of that part of man which is the least living. And this is the reason why dead monotony is the sign of the spread of the Nation. The modern towns, which represent the physiognomy due to this domination of the Nation, are everywhere the same from San Francisco to London, from London to Tokyo. They show no faces, but merely masks.

—(Tagore, 1994, p. 548)

Tagore's distrust of the nation reflects his distrust of international modernity, including both its leveling tendency and, more importantly, its abstraction from the concrete realities of human life to create a faceless uniformity in human culture.⁴ But this rejection of the global urban mask of modernity is not a cultural isolationism or a rejection of modernity per se, but merely of its technocratic and political aspects. Unlike Coomaraswamy or Vivekananda, Tagore sees Indian cultural identity as primarily connected laterally to other cultural identities with which it is in dialogue, and not simply a modern descendent of an imagined pure archetype. Tagore is engaged with a global literary and artistic world, and with a pan-Asianism that takes him to Japan as well as to Europe and the United States, and for all of his vituperation against cities, his own sensibility and artistic vocabulary are drawn from his home in Calcutta.⁵

Tagore's distinctive kind of cosmopolitanism is in evidence in remarks such as:

The peoples, being living personalities, must have their self-expression, and this leads to their distinctive creations. These creations are literature, art, social symbols and ceremonials. They are like different dishes at one common feast. They add richness to our enjoyment and understanding of truth. They are making the world of man fertile of life and variedly beautiful.

—(1994, p. 548)

While he brings the aesthetic sensibility of a cosmopolitan urban Bengali to the problem of defining India, he does not define India in terms of the sensibility of

⁴ In this respect, the affinities of Tagore's thought to Gandhi's—despite their dramatic differences in other respects—is evident. Of course, Tagore's rejection is primarily aesthetic and spiritual; Gandhi's more a matter of political economy and morality. See section 5 of this chapter.

⁵ Although his agrarian romanticism leads him to locate his utopian university in Shantiniketan, in rural West Bengal.

that class, but rather calls our attention to the diverse springs of Indian identity in its varied folk culture, a folk culture he valorizes not merely for its tie to tradition or for its color, but because it takes us to an “understanding of truth.”

The drive to represent India through the reconciliation of these dichotomies animates Tagore’s own enormously varied oeuvre. He is best known in Bengal for his theatrical compositions that reach back for their poetic and thematic vocabulary to the *mahākavya* tradition of classical Indian literature, calling to mind such figures as Kalidas. But at the same time, their immediate topicality and the musical idiom rooted in folk and then contemporary Bengali music represents an important synthesis of tradition and modernity. His *Gitānjali* unifies his own vision of Indian spirituality and a modernist poetic sensibility. Tagore’s voice is significant in the colonial context because of his insistence on these syntheses and on the essentially cosmopolitan character of Indian culture. As we will see in chapter 12, this vision is enormously influential in debates about art that themselves turn out to be central to the Indian cultural renaissance.

6.5. Gandhi: The *Hind* in *Hind Swaraj*

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) is widely regarded as the father of independent India. Gandhi was born in Gujarat, and studied law in England, where he also encountered the English vegetarians, the philosophy of John Ruskin, and theosophy, each of which was to prove influential in his synthesis of Hindu and Jain ideas with these European views in his own complex doctrine of self-mastery, nonviolence, and commitment to collective living. After a brief, unsuccessful practice at home, he moved to South Africa, where he rose to prominence as a leader of a civil rights movement for Indians under apartheid. Though his success was mixed, he was heralded as a potential leader of resistance to British rule. When he returned to India in 1915, he quickly assumed leadership of the Indian National Congress and of the independence movement more generally.

While Tagore sees strength and reality in Indian diversity, Gandhi sees weakness and superficiality in difference, and seeks a deeper unity. In singing *Vande Mataram*⁶ he hears a deep spiritual and political identity linking all Indians. Political questions and a political imperative drive Gandhi’s conception of Indian identity as well as his need for a political rhetoric of identity to underpin the Quit India movement. For Tagore, spiritual identity was antithetical to nationalism for Gandhi, spirituality provides the only legitimate ground of nationalism.

⁶ *Hail the Motherland*, the informal anthem of the nationalist movement.

Gandhi's own imagination of Indian identity is both agrarian and primitivist. He sees a "real" India in the village, and is deeply suspicious of the urban. Unlike Tagore, he is also not merely wary of—but is actively hostile to—the modern.⁷ *Hind Swaraj* is perhaps the most relentlessly antimodern, antiurban philosophical text composed in the twentieth century. (See chapter 8 for the details.) Gandhi's agrarian primitivism is not historical but normative; not only sociopolitical, but also spiritual. He is convinced that Indian forms of social life and production (most famously of the handspun, handwoven fabric known as *khadi*) conduce not only to material well-being and social equity, but also to a deep personal and political self-realization. Spinning, in Gandhi's narrative, is meditation; it is simultaneously social reorganization and political action.

Gandhi is also, despite his Hindu orthodoxy, deeply Jain in his sensibility, reflecting his Gujurati upbringing. He adopts both the Jain commitment to multiperspectivalism and the Jain insistence on nonviolence as a non-negotiable foundation of human life. Although any appreciation of Gandhi's thought as a whole requires attention to the plethora of influences he absorbed, including Ruskin, Tolstoy, and even Marx, his account of Indian identity remains determined by his Hindu orthodoxy tempered and filtered by his Jain social heritage. So, for Gandhi, while a plurality of perspectives on reality must be recognized and respected, those multiple perspectives are in the end but perspectives on a single underlying reality.⁸ That unity is realized in the ancient social and material realities of the Indian village, at least as they are imagined in a Gandhian idyll. These are realities of face-to-face personal relations unmediated by complex social and political institutions or legal superstructures, in which all difference can be reconciled in conversation under the local pipal tree.

Gandhi hence sees Indian national identity as constituted along two axes. First, it is constituted by a shared religious and spiritual vision, albeit a vision he acknowledges is refracted in a multiplicity of ways by the various specific religious traditions in India. He is committed to the view that that plurality is only an apparent diversity, a surface phenomenon, masking a deep identity of religious conviction.⁹ Second, Gandhi takes national identity to be constituted by a shared form of life whose home is in the village and the *panchayat* governance

⁷ See chapter 7 for a more extended journalistic correspondence between Tagore and Gandhi on nationalism.

⁸ Hence his broad tent vision of the Indian National Congress, his faith in a pluralistic state, but in the end, his inability to bring to fruition the Hindu-Muslim unity he sought.

⁹ This vision is shared, as we will see in chapter 7, by his Muslim colleague Abdul Kalam Azad, who declares himself a Hindu in virtue of being an Indian Muslim, much as Gandhi declared himself a Muslim in virtue of being a good Hindu.

system.¹⁰ These two dimensions are each realized in Gandhi's political goal of self-determination captured in the phrase *Hind Swaraj*. We explore Gandhi's political philosophy and its connection to these spiritual ideas in more detail in chapter 8.

While the Gandhian vision may look quixotic, we must remember that of all of the competing narratives of Indian identity during the anticolonial struggle, this may be the one that held the hearts and minds of the largest segment of the Indian population. Indeed, it may have been the operative narrative in securing Indian independence. Gandhi, that is, put the *Hind*, the emphasis on *Hindustan* (and all that represented, and with all of the problematic facets of that representation) in the demand for *Hind Swaraj*. But, as a matter of political tactics, this freedom could not have been achieved without the leadership and somewhat different vision of his co-Congressman Jawarhalal Nehru.

6.6. Nehru: A Quest for Civilizational Unity

Jawarhalal Nehru, the scion of a prominent Kashmiri family in Allahabad (1889–1964) was the first prime minister of independent India and father of Indira Gandhi who was to become prime minister as well. Nehru was a leader of the Congress Party, and, despite many disagreements in matters of strategy, he was always very close to M. K. Gandhi. Nehru was responsible for much of Indian postindependence policy. Nehru, like Gandhi, was called to the bar in England. But unlike Gandhi, temperamentally he was more a historian than a philosopher, more a policy wonk than a popular leader.

Nehru develops his own narrative of Indian identity in his masterwork *The Discovery of India* (Nehru, 2004), of which he writes, “this book was written by me in Ahmadnagar Fort prison during the five months, April to September 1944” (Nehru, 2004 p. xiii). Rarely were five months of confinement put to better use. In *Discovery*, Nehru articulates a vision of national unity complete and continuous since the Indus Valley civilization, a unity that he represents not only as continuous, but also as progressive until the advent of British rule.

Nehru's narrative is both historical and cultural. It is also deeply personal, representing both Nehru's own embrace of his Indian identity and the identity he takes himself to embrace. Describing his dramatic rail tour of India between 1936 and 1937, Nehru writes:

¹⁰ In the context both of genuine religious plurality and indeed of communal tension, as well as the context of increased urbanization, this construction of national identity was bound to be contested.

Thus I saw the moving drama of the Indian people in the present, and could often trace the threads which bound their lives to the past, even while their eyes were turned towards the future. Everywhere I found a cultural background which had exerted a powerful influence on their lives. This background was a mixture of popular philosophy, tradition, history, myth, and legend, and it was not possible to draw a line between any of these. Even the entirely uneducated and illiterate shared this background. The old epics of India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* and other books, in popular translations and paraphrases, were widely known among the masses, and every incident and story and moral in them was engraved on the popular mind and gave a richness and content to it.

—(Nehru, 2004, p. 61)

Here Nehru emphasizes that the historical narrative he offers is not only an objective record of India's past, but also the subjective understanding shared by all Indians, and the understanding that they themselves take to guide them "towards the future." Nehru's mixing of the personal, the historical and the mythic mirrors his own presentation of Indian self-understanding as a blend of these elements. Nehru takes the continuity he sketches to be almost perceptible, with physiognomy itself providing evidence for the truth of the claim of continuity he advances:

Sometimes, as I was passing along a country road, or through a village, I would start with surprise on seeing a fine type of man, or a beautiful woman, who reminded me of some fresco of ancient times. And I wondered how the type endured and continued through the ages, in spite of all the horror and misery that India had gone through.

—(2004, p. 62)

Nehru opens the narrative by extolling the civic virtues of the Indus Valley civilization, the period that he takes as the dawn of Indian history. Here we see him constructing the link between that civilization and his own home, Ananda Bhavan:

Between this Indus Valley civilization and today in India there are many gaps and periods about which we know little. The links joining one period to another are not always evident, and a very great deal has of course happened and innumerable changes have taken place. But there is always an underlying sense of continuity, of an unbroken chain which joins modern India to the far distant period of six or seven thousand years ago when the Indus Valley civilization probably began.

—(2004, p. 67)

Nehru takes this continuity to survive the predations of Mahmud of Ghazni and centuries of Mughal rule but to have been broken by the British. It, he argues, justifies, and explains the fact of Indian identity and hence the claim to independence. While this is a narrative of cultural continuity, it is not a narrative of cultural purity. It is central to Nehru's vision that India, however continuous her history, has always been culturally pluralistic:

We might say that the first great cultural synthesis and fusion took place between the incoming Aryans and the Dravidians, who were probably the representatives of the Indus Valley civilization. Out of this synthesis and fusion grew the Indian races and the basic Indian culture, which had distinct elements of both. In the ages that followed there came many other races: Iranians, Greeks, Parthians, Bactrians, Scythians, the Huns, Turks [before Islam], early Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians; they came, made a difference, and were absorbed. India was, according to Dodwell, "infinitely absorbent, like the ocean."

—(2004, p. 67)

Nehru here is emphasizing not only plurality but also the fact that although India repeatedly absorbed—either through invasion or immigration—hosts of foreigners, all of these newcomers eventually became Indian. As we will see, this contrasts dramatically with Nehru's view of the coming of the British, the first invaders (as we note in chapter 3) to remain forever foreign. The invasion of the Mughals, Nehru argues, while also the entrance of a foreign power to the subcontinent, produced not a colonial rule, but a hybrid culture, in which the Mughals were Indianized even as India was Persianized. As Nehru puts it, their cohabitation issued in a "common culture" (Nehru, 2004, p. 285). Nehru writes of Akbar: "[His] success is astonishing, for he created a sense of oneness among the diverse elements of north and central India." Despite *prima facie* barriers to national unity, including those between Hindu and Muslim, ruler and ruled, Nehru writes, "these barriers did not disappear, but in spite of them that feeling of oneness grew" (2004, p. 291).

Nehru's narrative is one of continuous unity and of steady cultural and material progress in India from the Indus Valley civilization through the Mughal empire. This contrasts dramatically with that of James Mill, which is a narrative of continuous degeneration due to persisting superstition and indolence. Both lament the state of India in the colonial period. But while Mill sees a steady decline over the past millennia, to be arrested and reversed by British rule, Nehru sees a precipitous collapse caused by the arrival and predations of the British.

The establishment of British rule in India was an entirely novel phenomenon for her, not comparable with any other invasion or political

or economic change. . . . every previous ruling class, whether it had originally come from outside or was indigenous, had accepted the structural unity of India's social and economic life and tried to fit into it. It had become Indianized and had struck roots in the soil of the country. The new rulers were entirely different, with their base elsewhere, and between them and the average Indian there was a vast and unbridgeable gulf—a difference in tradition, in outlook, in income, and ways of living. . . . India did not come into a world market, but became a colonial and agricultural appendage of the British structure.

—(2004, pp. 328–329)

Nehru points directly both to the East India Company and succeeding British imperial policy, and indicts both British administrations on several counts. First, they established themselves as an essentially extractive enterprise, systematically, and often illegally, stripping wealth from India and shipping it back to Britain. Indeed, Nehru argues, the British industrial revolution was largely financed by stolen Indian wealth (2004, p. 320). The result was often devastating poverty in areas that had until then been prosperous, and widespread famine in areas that had previously been fertile. The first great Bengal famine, for instance, was caused in large part by the forced substitution of indigo, cotton, and opium for food crops (Nehru, 2004, p. 323).

Second, Nehru argues, the British, through trade policy and legislative practice in India, systematically weakened and even destroyed Indian commerce and industry, while strengthening British competitors. This was achieved in large part by forcing India to open its markets to cheap British products, while allowing only Indian raw materials into Britain. The result was the destruction of the Indian merchant and middle classes and the further draining of wealth from the subcontinent (Nehru, 2004, p. 328).

Finally, Nehru points out, British colonial policy was explicitly directed at the fractionation and the subordination of India, followed by the forced abdication of Indian rulers in occupied territory. The policy of first installing resident advisors in Indian courts, then declaring the rulers incompetent, and then annexing their kingdoms to British India, Nehru argues, not only eliminated Indian rule in India, but created a patchwork that destroyed Indian unity. So, while Mill sees the British riding to the rescue, civilizing and bringing progress to a degenerate civilization, Nehru sees them as plundering, destroying, and impoverishing a once progressive and unified nation (Nehru, 2004, pp. 331–340).

Nearly all our major problems today have grown up during British rule and as a direct result of British policy: the princes; the minority problem; various vested interests, foreign and Indian; the lack of industry

and the neglect of agriculture; the extreme backwardness in the social services; and, above all, the tragic poverty of the people.

—(2004, p. 333)

For Nehru, the denouement of this narrative can only be irreconcilable conflict. As he puts it, “between Indian nationalism and an alien imperialism there could be no final peace” (2004, p. 401). The narrative Nehru was to articulate in *The Discovery of India* animated the Congress Party and the independence movement as a whole. It provided a powerful basis for the claim that India was, despite its subjection to the British empire, first and foremost a single nation with a claim to an identity. This narrative grounded that identity both geographically and culturally. More important, perhaps, that identity was characterized as identity in diversity—not a specifically Hindu identity, nor a linguistic identity; not a homogeneity on any dimension, but rather a continuity of practice, unity, and rule, disrupted by colonialism, but recoverable in principle.

6.7. Lajpat Rai—A Pluralist Nationalism

Lajpat Rai (1865–1928) is usually thought of exclusively in political terms, not as a great narrator of the Indian nation. But his narrative is distinctive, important, and was so regarded by the British themselves during the period of their rule. Let us begin with a story. A few years ago, we found ourselves in the library of Cambridge University seeking rare books from the Indian renaissance period. The rare book room held one of two copies of Rai’s *Young India* permitted to be printed in England before the book was banned. We requested the volume and were informed that we would not be permitted to see it as it was seditious. We remonstrated that while the book may have been seditious when published in 1917, when advocating Indian independence was illegal, surely, now, over sixty years after Indian independence the book must be safe to read. An hour or so later, a librarian informed us that after having reviewed the book, he had determined that it would be possible for us to read it.

We relate this episode not just for its amusement value, but because of all of the narratives of Indian identity we survey, Rai’s drew the censor’s ire. The fact that the book was censored may seem odd from a contemporary vantage point, as it is more an investigation of the varieties of nationalism and the relationship between ruler and ruled than a call to arms.¹¹ Its censorship shows just how dangerous it was in 1917 even to discuss nationalism or to reflect publicly on the role of the British in India. It required great courage even to think and to publish the ideas we address in these chapters, let alone to act on them.

¹¹ See chapter 7 for Rai’s taxonomy of nationalism.

Lala Lajpat Rai was active in the Indian National Congress during British rule and for a time was deported by the British for his activities. Rai fused Arya Samaji ideas with Marxist political economy; was committed to Gandhi's *satyagraha* campaign and the Quit India movement. He was a theoretician, a pragmatist, and an activist, who died due to a beating received at a protest of the Simon Commission.¹² While in exile in the United States, he associated with members of the Young Ireland movement (also in exile) and developed as a result a global sense of the struggle against British colonial power.

Rai, decades before Nehru, tells a story of ancient civilizational roots for contemporary India, and of continuity from time immemorial. Rai's narrative, like Nehru's, is self-consciously inclusive, accommodating Hindu and Muslim India alike. But, while Nehru's focus is explicitly cultural and geographic, Rai's is more explicitly political in character, and while Nehru was to indict the British for the economic mismanagement of India, Rai indicts the usurpation of political independence and colonial rule. At the beginning of his narrative, Rai writes:

... This much can be said with certainty, that centuries before the birth of Christ India possessed a marvellous civilization, a wonderful literature, a well-organized social system, a conception of government based on law and on the legal rights of subject *inter se* as well as against the ruling monarch.

—(Rai, 1917, p. 1)

In this discussion, Rai cites H. H. Wilson's (1786–1860) note on Mill's *History of British India*, siding with the British orientalists against the British imperialists. Rai takes on board Wilson's view of classical Indian civilization according to which ancient India was progressive and democratic, anticipating the European enlightenment by centuries. Rai himself argues specifically that India was politically independent up to the twelfth century (the period of first Turkic invasion), and that Indian rule was not feudal, but fully democratic. Indeed, he asserts, following Rhys Davids—another eminent British orientalist—that Chandra Gupta Maurya's government possessed “almost every form of governmental activity known to modern Europe” (1917, p. 3). Rai hence, reflecting his Arya Samaji roots, and the commitment of the Arya Samaj to democratic principles, develops a political narrative of national identity that locates democratic practices as part of Indian culture from the very beginning.

We leave the question of the accuracy of this historical account of Indian politics to the historians. The important point here is that this narrative of Indian identity is explicitly political, not nearly as culturally, religiously, or geographically

¹² The Simon Commission was an entirely British committee assigned to draft the plan for the governance of India.

grounded as those we have hitherto encountered. It is a narrative designed as a foundation for political action. And, paradoxically, the political institutions to which Rai refers to justify Indian independence from European rule are precisely those valorized by the British themselves (and, as he points out, known as Indian at least to the more scholarly British).¹³

When Rai turns to the transition to Muslim India, he writes—again, long before Nehru was to express similar sentiments¹⁴—of the difference between the Turkish and Persian invasions of and rule over India, and the British invasion and rule. Rai emphasizes the fact that while the Turks and Persians came from outside of India, they came to be Indian:

The Muslims, who exercised political sovereignty in India from the 13th up to the middle of the 19th century A.D. were Indians by birth, Indians by marriage, and Indians by death. They were born in India, they married there, there they died and there they were buried.

—(1917, p. 9)

On the other hand, unlike Nehru, Rai emphasizes not only the cultural, but the political integration of the Muslim invaders into the Indian milieu:

Every penny of the revenues they raised in India was spent in India. Their army was wholly Indian. They allowed new families from beyond the borders of Hindustan to come and settle in India, but they very rarely, if at all, employed people who were not ready to stay in India for good and to make it their home. Their bias, if any, against the Hindus, was religious, not political. The converts to Islam were sometimes treated with even greater considerations than the original Muslims.

—(1917, p. 9)

We see here that the integration of the Mughals into India is not portrayed as accidental, but as deliberate and explicit, a matter not of custom but of policy. The Muslims came to stay, and ruled as Indians, not as outsiders. This contrasts, he argues, with the attitude and, more importantly, the explicit purposes and policies, of the British:

¹³ In the next chapter we will see that Aurobindo, at about the same time, develops a very similar rhetorical strategy in the pages of *Bande Mataram*, charging the British with betraying their own values and failing to see the ways in which India in fact respects them.

¹⁴ As we note above, Rai's book was banned on publication. We do not know whether illegal copies circulated in India or England, and so we do not know whether Nehru had access to it. In any case, he does not refer to Rai in *The Discovery of India*.

History does not record a single instance of India being ruled from without by a people of purely non-Indian blood and in the interests of another country and another people, before the British.

—(1917, p. 11)

And so the indictment Rai develops of British rule is neither cultural nor linguistic, but political. The British, he argues, subverted a political legacy that was intact since ancient times, and the nationalist movement is therefore, first and foremost, a political movement.

Rai's pluralism is not merely historical, embracing different religious and ethnic constituencies in the Indian nation, but is also politically strategic. On the one hand, he notes the religious dimensions of nationalism and the construction of Indian identity in terms of ritual and the imagery of Hindu deities, and in particular through the reinterpretation of images of goddesses such as Durga as icons of "mother India." These narratives, he argues, are central to the mobilization of folk culture in the independence movement.

[The process of transfiguration of the Hindu deities] started with Bankim Chandra who interpreted the most popular of the Hindu goddesses as symbolic of the different stages of national evolution. . . . This interpretation of the old images of gods and goddesses has imparted a new meaning to the current ceremonialism of the country, and multitudes, while worshipping either Jagatdhatri or Kali, or Durga, accost them with devotion and enthusiasm with the inspiring cry of "Bande Mataram!" . . . And the transfiguration of these symbols is at once the cause and the evidence of the depth and the strength of the present movement. This wonderful transfiguration of the old gods and goddesses is carrying the message of new nationalism to the women and the masses of the country.

—(1917, pp. 144–146)

Rai, on the other hand, notes not only the religious, but also the more philosophically abstract and sophisticated role that the revival of the Vedānta school of philosophy plays in the narrative of Indian identity, and indeed discusses both Vivekananda and Aurobindo—two principals in that revival—at length in this context.¹⁵ Of Vedānta, he writes:

¹⁵ It is noteworthy that as early as 1917, Rai identifies Vedānta as central to the articulation of Indian national identity. We will see in chapters 9 and 10 that Vedānta in fact was at the heart of much nationalist discourse, and a principal force in academic philosophy. The preoccupation with Vedānta joins the academic, religious, and nationalist concerns that dominate Indian intellectual life in these decades.

“It [neo-Vedantism] demands... a social and economic and a political reconstruction such as will be helpful to the highest spiritual life of every individual member of the community. The spiritual note of the present nationalist movement in India is entirely derived from this Vedantic thought.”

—(1917, p. 148)

Once again, though, he does not take the narrative of Vedānta as the principal Indian ideology to be historical. Instead, rather like that of an identity defined in relation to a deity, he finds it strategically useful. Such a narrative, he argues, creates, rather than represents, national unity.

Rai contrasts these religious and philosophical nationalisms with more modern and international forms, including those advocating violent resistance, religious reform movements, such as the Arya and Brahmo Samaj movements and the Ramakrishna mission, and, of course Gandhian movements. He celebrates this diversity, saying, “complete unanimity in principles and methods can only be expected of a collection of machine-made clogs of wood” (1917, p. 141). This pluralism in the service of national unity contrasts dramatically with the more radical pluralism that undercuts any pretense of national identity or unity advocated by the final voice we encounter in this chorus, that of Benoy Kumar Sarkar.

6.8. Sarkar and the Critique of National Essence

Benoy Kumar Sarkar, who we met in chapter 1, is one of the intellectual titans of the Indian renaissance period, sadly neglected today, although his influence on social and political thought during his lifetime was profound. He was professor of economics at Calcutta University, but also contributed to fields as diverse as metallurgy, aesthetics, art history, political theory, history, and, most important, sociology and comparative anthropology. He lectured widely throughout the world in English, French, German, Italian, and Bengali in venues such as Berkeley, the University of Iowa, Columbia University, the University of Pittsburgh, Amherst College, Case Western Reserve University, Clark University, the Academie des Beaux Artes, the Association Française Des Amies De L’Orient, the University of Berlin, and the Deutsche Gessellschaft. He contributed not only to scholarly journals in a number of fields, but also to the popular press, including the *New York Times* and the *Modern Review*.

Sarkar is at pains in *The Futurism of Young Asia* (1922) to demonstrate the similarities between Indian development and that of other Asian countries. He explicitly adopts the renaissance trope in his characterization of the situation of India in the early twentieth century. Here note both the reference to the

reclamation of a golden age from a period of decline and the explicitly modern terms in which both the golden age and the present are cast:

The philosophy of *Vedanta* is not now the gospel of dreamy inaction and invertebrate mysticism that it was alleged to be. The genuine idealism of the *Upanishads*, *Gita*, *Vedanta*, etc, viz., transcendentalism based on (and in and through) the positive energistic romanticism, has now been inspiring the life and activity of the Indians. The age of pseudo-Vedantism is gone; the spirit of the originators, creators, and pioneers of India's greatness has "come back." There has thus been initiated a *real* renaissance in modern India.

—(Sarkar, 1922, p. 167)

The affinity to Aurobindo's announcement of a renaissance is intriguing, but, as we will see, the modernism and internationalism that will characterize Sarkar's thought are very different, and Sarkar's hostility to the spiritual will set him apart. Sarkar's account of national identity, unlike those of Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Tagore, Gandhi, or Rai, rests on material culture, including a history of technology and craft. He indicts Western misapplications of the comparative method in the social sciences as a relentless search for difference and essence that inevitably mischaracterizes cultures in terms of these spiritual categories. Nevertheless, Sarkar sees the modern social sciences, such as anthropology and social history as "the only antidotes to . . . subjective race-psychologies" (Sarkar, 1922, p. 15), that is, spiritualized ethnic essentialism, and the inevitable hierarchies these engender.

Hence, despite the references above to Vedānta and classical Indian scriptures, Sarkar argues against any spiritualist account of Indian identity. He argues that Indian history is a history of military prowess, political dynasties, and technological development. The narrative of continuity with the past he proffers is one not significantly different in form from that any materialist social scientist would develop of any culture. Its only particularity is its locus. It is in this specific sense that he is an internationalist, as opposed to a pure nationalist. There is no narrative of Indian essence here, or of anything special to the Indian context. Nonetheless, Sarkar's vision of the predicament of Asian cultures generally and of its solution requires of each its own nationalism, albeit a nationalism of a generic sort.

Sarkar hence sees colonialism in entirely material and political terms as a European war against Asian progress. As we will see, Sarkar's peculiar understanding of Gandhian philosophy is underpinned by this agonistic reading of the colonial situation. Sarkar regards 1905 as a watershed year for all of Asian national histories. It is the year of the Japanese naval defeat of Russia, as well as the publication of *Hind Swaraj*, events Sarkar links not only in terms of their

catalysis of political ferment, but also in their message: The Japanese showed that Asians were superior militarily to the West; Gandhi showed that Asians are superior morally. The Japanese showed that industrial self-sufficiency is possible for Asian countries, and empowering; Gandhi showed that individual, social, and economic self-sufficiency are similarly empowering.

Given Gandhi's own frank antimodernism, Sarkar's reading of Gandhi as a great modernist, following in footsteps of Mill, and working for material revolution is intriguing. The way he frames Gandhi in Indian and world history is worth noting:

Young Asia wants Eur-America to understand... that today the "ideas of 1789" and 1848, the socialistic economics of Karl Marx and Louis Blanc, the philosophic radicalism of John Stuart Mill, the nationalistic idealism of Joseph Mazzini, the Bolshevistic politics of Lenin and Trotsky are not more active in the West than in the East as liberalizing forces, and finally, that spiritual fathers of the New Orient like Sayeed Jamaluddin of Persia (the inspirer of Pan-Islam), Kang Yu-Wei (the Saint John the Baptist of Chinese Constitutionalism), Prince Ito (the Bismarck of modern Japan), and Mohandas Gandhi (the Napoleon of Revolutionary India) have achieved as great a result in making the world tend towards and aspire after political emancipation, economic freedom and social justice as would be possible for the greatest and ablest Western agitator, propagandist, organizer or statesman under the same *milieu* of alien rule or "sphere of influence" and foreign exploitation.

—(Sarkar, 1922, p. 175)

Note the surprising juxtaposition of the spiritualist exponent of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* not only with Napoleon with whom Sarkar equates Gandhi, but also with leaders such as Ito, Lenin, and Trotsky. Indeed, Sarkar's reading of Gandhi and his role throughout *The Futurism of Young Asia* is idiosyncratic and tactical. The important lesson is that these figures are united in Sarkar's mind by their modernism, their commitment to political emancipation, and their commitment to revolution in the service of an egalitarian order, an order to which Sarkar refers as "race-equality." The narrative of India's past in terms of politics and material development is hence neatly continued into the future in the same terms. Nevertheless, this view, like that of Lajpat Rai,¹⁶ leaves behind the overtly spiritual accounts of figures as diverse as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and even Nehru.

In this chapter we have surveyed a range of narratives of Indian identity and history. Each of these forges a distinctive account of the continuity of Indian

¹⁶ Who Sarkar disparages as a mere talker, as opposed to Gandhi the activist.

history and of the role of that continuous history in determining Indian identity. In turn, each of these implicates a distinctive account of how that identity is to be realized in the future through national development and distinctively Indian philosophical thought. We have emphasized both the drive to construct such narratives in the colonial context, and the diversity of the narratives so constructed. As we work to understand the nature both of Indian philosophical activity in this context and the metanarrative about that activity, it will be important to see how that philosophy and its reception are conditioned not by a single image of what it is and must be to be Indian, but by this multiplicity of images.

Anticipating India's Future

Varieties of Nationalism

In the previous chapter, we considered a variety of ways in which India was imagined in the colonial period. In each case, the theoretical gaze was toward the past, constructing a sense of Indian identity through a narrative leading from a real or imagined past to the then present. Whatever the contests regarding the details of these narratives, their aim is the same: the identification of a proto-nation called “India,” continuous with a past, with a legitimate demand for recognition and independence.

This very aim indicates the incompleteness of a task ending at this point. For it is one thing to assert a national identity, and another to sketch the future of a nation as yet to come into existence and to forge a method for its realization. That is the task of nationalism, and it is to that future-oriented task to which we now turn. The political context of philosophy in this period is set as much by the program for the future as it is by the imagination of the past; moreover, to articulate a theory of nationalism is itself to engage in political philosophy. In the Indian colonial context, this issued in a diverse set of political philosophies, each with immediate, concrete implications.

7.1. Varieties of Nationalism: A Taxonomy

Lajpat Rai, who we encountered in the previous chapter, provides in *Young India* a taxonomy of Indian nationalisms. This taxonomy may strike a contemporary reader as strange, as it carves up the conceptual territory in an unfamiliar way. Rai, however, was an influential voice in Indian nationalism, and the framework and vocabulary he uses became standard in Indian nationalist discourse. Familiarity with his way of seeing things makes the entire nationalist discourse easier to read, but there is another reason to take Rai seriously. His framework,

however odd it might appear at first, is actually philosophically interesting. The joints at which he carves nationalist theory are reasonable and bear reflection.

Rai distinguishes several kinds of nationalism:

extremism;
the advocates of organized rebellion;
terrorism;
advocates of constructive nationalism;
moderates.

Each of these in Rai's complex system divides into further subclassifications, most of which need not concern us. The overall view of the nationalist movement Rai develops, however, gives us a window into the way that Indian nationalism saw itself, and into the internecine debates through which the movement was defined. No proponent of any of these varieties of nationalism is willing to accept British rule; the distinctions concern method and timing.¹

Rai distinguishes several varieties of extremism. They have in common a commitment to the illegitimacy of British law in India and a refusal to recognize the fact of British authority even as a target of resistance. The extremists in this sense—including prominently Bal Gangadhar Tilak, exiled for a period in Burma, and Har Dayal who led a Young India contingent in exile in San Francisco, where they encountered the Young Ireland exiles—simply take the British to be what we would now call “illegal aliens” in India, to be deported, not to be recognized as a political force.

One can see the justice of the commitment to the illegitimacy of British rule. After all, the British administration was only in India because of the failure of a private corporation to maintain the authority it had stolen from the government that had chartered it. Despite this manifest illegitimacy, however, as a matter of social fact, British presence was in this period simply taken as *fait accompli*. It was so taken not only by those who welcomed it, but also by the majority of those who opposed it. Because it was so often taken as *fait accompli*, the view that the British administration was not even a government was seen by many as extreme, and despite its sound moral credentials, the view of Tilak and others had relatively little traction in the independence movement.

The second kind of nationalism Rai identifies is “terrorism.” Now, we might think that terrorism is a version of extremism, or even more extreme than

¹ On the other hand, there was also a prominent and influential loyalist movement in India that stands opposed to all of these forms of nationalisms, namely, the Aligarh movement initiated following the 1857 war of independence. We will consider this movement below.

extremism, given its commitment to violence, including violence directed at civilians. But Rai considers it philosophically more moderate, for one important reason. Terrorists, unlike extremists, took the British to be a governing force. Although on their view, opposing this force justified violence and terror, they recognized the enemy as a government, and took their struggle to be war, not simply a police action to control immigration. In this sense, Rai argued, whatever their tactics might suggest, they were more moderate than the extremists. Aurobindo (at least in his earliest political incarnation (Heehs, 2008) (King, 1994) is the central example of a terrorist. The important point to note here is that for Rai, methods have nothing to do with the classification of nationalist positions; it is rather their philosophical commitments regarding the nature of the nation and its relationship to the colonial predicament.

Rai's third category is "constructive nationalism." The principal constructivist movements are the Arya and Brahmo Samaj movements. One might think that the term "constructive" is meant as a term of approbation, particularly as Rai himself was an Arya Samaji. Nonetheless, in Rai's scheme it is a more ambivalent technical term. Rai uses "constructive" to indicate that nationalists of this stripe eschew an immediate drive for independence in favor of constructing a nation they take not to exist at present, or, at any rate, to be not yet ready for independence. Rai therefore sees constructivism as an inherently conservative force in the spectrum of nationalist positions.

Despite seeing them as conservative in this sense, the Samaj movements, he argues, are properly understood as nationalist. They represent a view of India as a nation, but it is a view of an India to be achieved, not one recognizable in the colonial context. Here is how Rai draws the contrast between these constructive versions of nationalism and the more radical versions. Of the extremists and terrorists he says:

These nationalists . . . maintain that the first condition of life,—life with respect and honour, life for profit and advantage, life for progress and for advancement,—is political freedom. Life without that is no life. It is idle therefore to think of matters which are manifestations or developments or embellishments of life.

In [the radicals'] opinion, it would be best for their people to remain uneducated, rather than be educated only for the benefit and use of their masters.

—(Rai, 1917, p. 159)

Here Rai emphasizes that the principal criterion distinguishing the first two kinds of nationalism—the two more radical forms—from the nationalism of the Samaj movements is the emphasis on the primacy of political as opposed to

social or economic freedom, or of quality of life. These latter benefits, according to the radicals, flow from the establishment of national independence; they do not serve as its conditions, as the constructivists would have it. Moreover, he notes that according to the radical nationalists, programs for social uplift, religious reform or education are positively pernicious in a nationalist movement as they distract from the main goal and divide the community:

Similarly they think that all the schemes for social reform, for sectarian advancement, for commercial interests, are nothing more than so many devices for dividing the nation and keeping them engaged in never-ending internecine quarrels. They consider this to be a misplaced dissipation of energies and a misuse of opportunities. They wish that every man and woman in India should for the present think of nothing else but political freedom. The first thing is to get rid of the foreigner.

—(1917, p. 160)

Rai writes of the constructivists that they are:

... those who want independence, but not at *once*. They would rather consolidate the nation, raise its intellectual and moral tone, increase its economic efficiency, before they raise the standard of revolt. [...]

Nothing can be achieved without the help of the people. We must have the people "with us," say they. And in order to win the people to our side, we must show them conclusively that we have their interests at heart, that we love them perhaps more than we love ourselves, that we are disinterested and public-spirited and that we are in every respect better and more honorable than the foreign rulers. Our moral superiority over the agents of the foreign government must be ever present in the minds of the people in order to enable them to support us and back us in the coming political struggle.

—(1917, pp. 171–173)

The important issues for the constructivists, Rai notes, are first, the need to make a case both for nationalism itself and the struggle for independence, and a case for the right to lead such a movement; and second, the need to construct a viable nation to lead forward. For this reason, unlike radicals of either stripe, the constructivists emphasize a nationalism of nation-building through such vehicles as education, social reform, and religious reform. This is not a struggle for independence *per se*, but in their view, for the preconditions of independence.

Constructivism in this sense was also a major strand of Muslim nationalist thought. In particular, Abdul Kalam Azad, who at one point was president of the Indian National Congress, and who remained a close ally of Gandhi, advocated

this position. In the Muslim context, constructivism was often associated with debates about education and the need to develop British-style Muslim universities in India as a basis for national development. We will return to Azad's position in the context of Muslim debates below.

One might think that Rai would include the Congress and Gandhian Satyagrahis among the constructivists. After all, they, like the Samajis, worked for religious reform, and eschewed violence. Nonetheless, Rai classifies them under a final category, for which he reserves his scorn—the moderates. The moderates share with the constructivists a commitment to service and to social reform. But their commitment stems from a very different philosophical foundation. Rai writes:

A great many Congress leaders are true patriots, but they have such an abnormal love of peace and luxury, that they cannot even think of methods which might even remotely result in disturbances of peace, in riots, and in disasters. Hence their detestation of the extremists' methods and their distrust of carrying on a propaganda among the masses. They would proceed very, very slowly.

—(1917, pp. 178–179)

The moderates, Rai worries, are almost not nationalist at all. They are committed to a set of ideals, such as pacifism or egalitarianism, that are neutral between nationalism and colonialism. To the extent that the moderates are committed to the nationalist struggle, it is only because the British do not share these values, and that these values would be better cultivated in an independent nation. Their nationalism is hence accidental, rather than essential, and subordinate to the pursuit of their core values. Hence Rai's suggestion that they are under no pressure to advance the national struggle.²

² One is reminded here of Martin Luther King's indictment of moderate whites in the context of the civil rights struggle in the United States sixty years on:

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride towards freedom is not the White Citizens Councillor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says, "I agree with the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action." ... Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

—(King, 1994)

Rai's taxonomy comprises all those one might call "nationalist"; but, it does not comprise all principals in colonial Indian debates about nationalism. In particular, two groups stand outside this debate, each critical, albeit in different ways, of the nationalist movements as a whole. On the one hand, the Aligarh Movement was closely aligned with British rule, and its partisans supported a continuation of British rule over India, as a successor regime to the displaced Mughal empire. We will discuss this movement below. On the other hand, theorists such as Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal (also addressed below) were critics of nationalism, *per se*, arguing that India's duty was not to become one more nation-state, but rather to lead a fight for the elimination of the nation-state altogether. We set these positions aside for now, and turn to some of the principal nationalists Rai had in mind, and a closer examination of their views.

We begin with an unlikely pair: two non-Indians who certainly thought of themselves as Indian, one an emigrant to America, and one an immigrant from England. A. K. Coomaraswamy, if we follow Rai's classification, is a moderate—although he never thematizes his own affiliation in his own work. Annie Besant—a leader of the Theosophical Society during this period—acknowledges Rai's taxonomy, and works, perhaps unsuccessfully (Kumar, 1981), to reconcile the moderate and extremist camps. We then turn to a terrorist—Aurobindo Ghosh—before returning to the moderate camp and the theory of M. K. Gandhi. We will then consider the sometimes interacting, sometimes orthogonal debates in the Muslim intellectual community itself.

7.2. Aesthetic Nationalism: A Manifesto

As we noted in the previous chapter, A. K. Coomaraswamy was concerned to construct an account of Indian national identity grounded in aesthetic continuity and in an archeological record grounded in the Ashokan period. Coomarasawamy therefore builds his nationalism on a foundation of Indian art and the Indian craft tradition. *Swadeshi* (loyalty to goods from one's own land) was an idea

King was, of course, deeply influenced by Gandhi. In that context, it is interesting to note that Gandhi is one of the targets of Rai's critique of moderation. It is the fact that Gandhi foregrounds not nationalism, but "passive" (nonviolent) resistance or satyagraha as itself the goal of the movement that leads Rai to regard him as a moderate in this pejorative sense. Gandhi, to whom Rai refers as "the great Hindu Passive Resister" (1917, p. 180) after all, was fond of reminding his audience that the term *swaraj* denotes primarily self-mastery, not independence, and that his struggle is a spiritual one before it is political. For Rai, as a constructivist, the social, the economic, and the political constitute the domain of true nationalism.

already in circulation in nationalist discourse; Coomaraswamy's contribution was to link art and *swadeshi* and to make artistic taste and production instruments of nationalist purpose.

In "Art and Swadeshi" (Coomaraswamy, 1910), originally published in the Central Hindu College Magazine circa 1909, Coomaraswamy laments the decline in the quality of Indian craft as well as the redirection of Indian taste to European kitsch. He sees these two developments as closely tied to each other in virtue of the fact that the reconstructed taste displaces traditional Indian craft with the imitation of European production. Coomaraswamy argues that this is a direct consequence of colonialism, both in virtue of the creation of India as a market for British products, and in virtue of the valorization of a European way of life and sensibility as a mark of culture.

Coomaraswamy therefore argues that the road to national status goes not through politics or economic development, but through the reinvigoration of the Indian artistic and craft scene and the cultivation of authentic national taste. He writes:

Try to believe that this callousness of ours, this loss of the fine taste that belonged to classic and mediaeval culture is a sign of weakness, not a sign of strength. Try to believe in the regeneration of India through art, and not by politics and economics alone. A purely material idea will never give to us the lacking strength to build up a great enduring nation. For that we need ideals and dreams, impossible and visionary, the food of martyrs and of artists.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 118)

Coomaraswamy argues that nationalism demands a nation worthy of creation. That in turn demands an artistic tradition worthy of a nation. Therefore, the revival of art is an ineliminable instrument to any kind of nation building. This is not a mere chauvinism about Indian art, or a claim that art is a necessary embellishment of a nation that can be independently constructed or imagined. It is instead a claim that the cultivation of art is the core of any construction of national identity and any struggle to achieve that identity. He says:

... Learn not to waste the vital forces of the nation in a temporary political conflict, but understand that art will enable you to re-establish all your arts and industries on a surer basis, a basis which will bring well-being to the people themselves; for no lovely thing can be produced in conditions that are themselves unlovely.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 119)

As Coomaraswamy theorizes *swadeshi*, it is not the sacrifice of the pleasure of European goods and taste in the service of nationalism; it is rather an exuberance of national identity that is itself a goal worth achieving.

Swadeshi must be something more than a political weapon. It must be a religious-artistic ideal. I have heard nationalists exhort each other to sacrifice, in using *Swadeshi* goods. To think that it should need to be called a sacrifice!

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 120)

There is something stirring about the elevation of art to the center of nationalist consciousness and activity. Coomaraswamy's essay ranks as a piece of rhetoric with other great art-driven manifestos of this period across the globe such as those of the Italian Futurists. Of course, this version of nationalism could never really form the core of a successful independence movement; India was not liberated by painters and sculptors, or even by art historians.

Nonetheless, the frank and unapologetic recognition of the centrality of art and of taste not only in *swadeshi*, but in the Indian philosophical imaginary, is important. This kind of artistic rhetoric was not at the center of the French or American revolutions, or indeed of any major European nationalist movement. While art is often taken as a cultural epiphenomenon in the European world, it is at the center of Indian thought. We will return to this point when we examine the great art debates in colonial India in chapter 12.

Why call Coomaraswamy a moderate? Recall that as Rai characterizes moderation in this context, the hallmark of a moderate is that he or she proposes a view of the nation that does not entail a demand for independence, per se; instead, the moderate focuses on cultural authenticity and the development of cultural identity, not primarily on political rights. Coomaraswamy's aesthetic vision fits this definition perfectly, and his absence from the specifically political scene reflects that ideology.

7.3. Besant's Spiritual and Activist Nationalism: Political Theosophy

Annie Besant (1847–1933) is another fascinating and complex figure in the history of Indian nationalism and in the evolution of Indian nationalist philosophical thought. An Irish woman born in England, the second half of her life establishes her—at least in her own view—as just as Indian as any of her Indian-born colleagues. Besant is at once political agitator, journalist, collaborator in the translation of classical Sanskrit texts, educator, and art critic. She is directly

involved in the origins and leadership of the Indian National Congress and of the Central Hindu College that was to become Benares Hindu University.

Besant was born in London, the daughter of a scholarly father who seems to have instilled in her, despite his death early in her youth, a love of classical scholarship, including philology and philosophy. Besant was impressed early with the Irish struggle for independence and was an enthusiastic member of the Young Ireland movement. She theorized Irish nationalism in the context of the injustice of British colonialism and in the context of what she saw as the very distinctive Irish religious and cultural identity, grounded in an ancient Catholic and Celtic spirituality, in contrast to British commercialism.

After the dissolution of an early marriage, Besant left Catholicism to become a central figure in the British atheist movement under the tutelage of the atheist leader Charles Bradlaugh, who introduced her to the work of Thomas Malthus and the campaign for population control. Besant remarks on the harmony between Malthus' views and those of the Utilitarians. She urges the importance of these views for understanding the relationship between population and poverty, as well as the relation between religious commitments regarding procreation and the perpetuation of poverty. She campaigned at this time not only for Irish independence but also against the role of religion in British public life. Other important intellectual influences on Besant during her British years included A. Comte, J. S. Mill, Matthew Arnold, and H. L. Mencken.³

Besant's assessment of Bradlaugh forms a kind of blueprint for her own self-construction. Besant notes that Bradlaugh was an explicit defender of Indian rights in English public life long before the Indian independence movement materialized. Bradlaugh also employed Besant on the staff of the radical magazine *The National Reformer*, initiating her long journalistic career that continued in her career in India. Besant lectured frequently in England on topics as varied as atheism, the status of women and ethics, and, she published essays on the French Revolution. We see in her English career, as we will see in her Indian career that concerns us more directly, a union of intellectual and political concerns and an involvement both with high scholarship and public action.⁴

³ Bradlaugh, who appears to have been the great love of her life, also introduced her to Indian religion in a lecture in which he compared Krishna to Jesus (Besant, 1908, p. 136). Bradlaugh was elected to parliament, but had difficulty assuming his seat due to his atheism, securing his seat through the support of John Stuart Mill, support which ironically cost Mill his own seat in the next election (Thomas Macaulay was also an ardent opponent of religious requirements on service in Parliament.) Her involvement both in Bradlaugh's political activities and in the struggle against religious requirements for public service compounded her commitment to political action as an effective instrument for justice (Besant, 1908, p. 179).

⁴ Besant was also willing to take great personal risk for her political views. At one point she was forced to go to court to defend her guardianship of her own infant daughter against the charge that her atheism and Malthusianism made her an unfit mother.

In 1875, Besant began reading the work of Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society and in 1890 joined the society. Of her transition from atheism to Theosophy, the religion that was to provide the context for her subsequent thought and action in India, she writes:

... the position of the *philosophical* atheist is so misunderstood that it is the more necessary to put it plainly, and Theosophists, at least, in reading it, will see how Theosophy stepped in finally as a further evolution towards knowledge, rendering rational, and therefore acceptable, the loftiest spirituality that the human mind can as yet conceive.

—(Besant, 1908, p. 140)

Besant's rationalist approach to religion and religious approach to rationality in Theosophy has intriguing affinities to Dayanand Saraswati's own rationalist reconstruction of Hinduism in the Arya Samaj, and may be an important factor in her success in cementing relations with Lajpat Rai in the early years of the Congress.

In 1893, Besant moved to India as an officer of the Theosophical Society, whose headquarters was in Madras. Although she returned to England often to campaign for India and to lecture on Theosophy, India was to remain her primary residence for the final four decades of her life. She began studying Sanskrit, and was listed as co-author of a translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* by the eminent Benares philosopher Bhagavan Das in 1904. She also developed a distinctively Hindu version of Theosophy. She became active in the movement for advanced Indian education, founding, along with Bhagavan Das, the Central Hindu College in Benares in 1898 with the intention of creating a national Hindu University. By 1907, Besant assumed the presidency of the Theosophical Society following the death of Madame Blavatsky. Besant continued her journalistic career in India, purchasing and managing *The Commonweal* and *New India* in Madras, and using each as an organ for the advocacy of Home Rule, a metonym for Indian independence.

Besant also took a central role in the Indian independence movement, founding the Home Rule League in 1916 and assuming the presidency of the Indian National Congress in 1917. She was an associate both of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Dadabhai Naoroji, to whom she dedicates her 1915 book, *How India Wrought for Freedom* (Besant, 1915). The move to the Indian National Congress was hardly accidental. We noted above the natural ideological affinity between Theosophy and the Arya Samaj, a movement to which many early congressmen belonged.⁵

⁵ But Besant herself notes another curious connection: the founding meeting of the Congress was held in 1884, by seventeen men en route from a Theosophical Society meeting (Besant, 1915, p. 1). Jawarhalal Nehru himself had a Theosophist tutor in his youth (Taylor, 1992).

Besant's nationalism also has much in common with that of Coomaraswamy. Like Coomaraswamy's, it is grounded both in a sense of Indian spiritual history and in a narrative of continuity with a classical past; like Coomaraswamy's, it is grounded in a focus on the arts as the repository of this continuity; like Coomaraswamy's, it is located in the context of a more general anticolonialism. But it is distinctive in several important respects. First, while Coomaraswamy turns primarily to Buddhist art history as his touchstone, Besant turns to Theosophy, absorbing a Hindu spiritual history into the Theosophical narrative. While neither adopts an orthodox reading of the Hindu tradition, their respective heterodoxies are quite different from each other, and Besant's, with its paradoxically more Hindu inflection, sits more easily with the Congress.

Second, while Coomaraswamy writes primarily for other academics, Besant writes primarily for a more general intellectual and political audience, and so her ideas percolate more directly into both popular and political discourse. Third, while each theorizes Indian nationalism in the context of colonialism, Besant, with her background in the Irish independence movement, sees that colonial struggle more immediately as an international struggle against British hegemony, and so is able better to articulate its rhetoric in England, and is able to join more immediately with those such as Lajpat Rai, who developed their own nationalism in conjunction with the Young Ireland movement.

Besant's nationalism finds its voice in her distinctive conception of "Home Rule," with a notion of home that is decidedly two-dimensional. She shares the first with Coomaraswamy, namely, the historical dimension. In *India Wrought For Freedom*, she writes:

India is continuous, with a history running backwards to the most archaic times . . . and she has a literature which also runs backward, claiming an antiquity not yet acknowledged in the West: Vedas, Institutes (*sic.*), Puranas, Epic Poems. . . *It is on this literature and on the past embodied in it that the foundation of Indian Nationality is indestructibly laid.* The National Self-consciousness strikes its roots deeply into this rich soil, and whatever may contribute to its later growth. . . the Nation's Life and Unity are rooted here.

—(1915 pp. i–iii)

Here Besant constructs identity on the foundation of this literary tradition; moreover, she locates national self-consciousness in awareness of this tradition. This might seem at first an elitist conception of national consciousness, comprising only the attitudes of the literati. But attention to the second dimension of Besant's conception of the nation, or home, dispels this interpretation. For, unlike those such as Tagore, who draw a clear distinction between the

bhadralok and rural cultures of India (a distinction Tagore sees as a problem to be solved), Besant sees a seamless continuity between the perspectives of these apparently different segments of society. She sees this continuity as mediated both by normal social interaction between the urbanite and his or her village home and by a healthy vernacular press.

We have seen that, in India, the villages and the towns occupied to each other a position the reverse of that occupied by their congeners in the West. Separated in the West, they were closely blended in the East, and the members of the highly educated professional classes constantly speak of “my village,” the village whence they came, the village of their ancestors. However slowly, the thoughts of the educated filtered into the villages and awoke in the peasantry the slumbering memories of their immemorial Past. Under the influence of those who had made in 1884 the scheme of the National Congress in Madras, and had brought it into being in 1885 in Bombay, the peasants began to discuss their grievances, and later to meet in conferences among themselves; vernacular newspapers, edited by one of the Intelligentsia, slowly reached the village, and a villager, able to read, would be surrounded by his fellows, and read out the contents, to start fruitful discussions. News of outer doings passed from village to village in the strange eastern way, and the thought atmosphere changed. . . . Thus was the seed in the villages sown which sprang up as the agitation for home rule in 1915 when Mr Gandhi said of myself: “She has made Home Rule a mantram in every cottage.”

—(Besant, 1926, pp. 156–157)

A number of themes central to Besant's nationalism—a nationalism that was to inform the ideology of the Congress directly—emerge in this brief passage. First, Besant, unlike Macaulay, sees the educated Anglophone class not as a separate class of Indians suitable to serve the English administration and to mediate between the British government and an alien peasantry, but rather as integrally involved with their own rural roots, a view shared by Gokhale (Besant, 1915, p. 418). They may be more educated, and they may be Anglophone, but they are not, in her view, for that reason, nationally alienated. Being educated, and speaking English, on Besant's view, is a perfectly good way of being Indian.

Second, despite her foregrounding of a highly sophisticated Sanskrit literature as the foundation of Indian self-consciousness, Besant, like Nehru, regards a kind of “slumbering memory” of that literature as part of the consciousness even of an illiterate peasantry. Third, Besant (like J. S. Mill and unlike Macaulay) sees Indian vernacular languages, vernacular literacy, and a vernacular press as central to mediating that national unity. It is in part for this reason that we find

that much of her nationalist effort is spent on the establishment of Indian vernacular schools and universities.

Finally, national politics for Besant does not comprise only the “high” politics represented at the national or even provincial level, but local politics as well. Concern for local matters is not in her view derivative of national consciousness but is rather its manifestation in the Home. Home Rule is rule at Home at each level of analysis. Nationalism, on this view, is manifested not only in great continent-wide movements, but also, and perhaps even essentially, at the local level. Even Gandhi, Besant remarks, notes the affinity of his own views to those of Besant.

Besant negotiated the language debates in colonial India with nuance and sophistication. A native speaker of English and a student of Sanskrit, Besant actively promoted publication and teaching in vernacular languages (Bate, 2013). Besant, as we noted above, followed J. S. Mill closely in many matters. One of these was the importance of liberty, and she took it as incumbent on the English to promote liberty and not colonial domination in India. But she also followed Mill in her advocacy both of English language education and of vernacular literacy. The first she saw as a way of transmitting English learning and values to India; the second as a way of forging national unity and maintaining cultural integrity.⁶ Besant was no Orientalist glorifying Sanskrit as the only language of Indian civilization; she was not a Anglophile like Roy or Sayyid, convinced that only English could civilize India; nor was she a romantic champion of only vernacular languages. Besant was aware of the dangers of promoting any language as a *lingua franca*, and happy to defend each as legitimate in its own sphere.

Besant’s negotiation of the controversies regarding language in Indian nationalist theory was matched by her negotiation and resolution of a major ideological split in the Congress movement, that between the moderates led by Gopal Krishna Gokhale and the extremists led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who had marched out of the Congress in 1907 before being exiled to Burma. Besant brought Tilak back to the Congress in 1915, forging a unity among those agitating for home rule, despite their differences in approach, summed up in the slogan “association with Government where possible, and opposition to it if necessary” (Taylor, 1992, p. 303).⁷ Besant was no extremist: she certainly recognized the

⁶ As we will see, the issue of Urdu has a special resonance in the Muslim community, given its association as a vernacular language with a specifically Muslim identity. The establishment of Osmania as an Urdu medium Muslim university and of Aligarh as an explicitly English medium Muslim university indicates the poignancy of this issue in that community.

⁷ According to Kumar, who himself refers to her as a “moderate extremist” and as a “radical,” in view of her socialist roots (Kumar, 1981, pp. 125–126), her bridging attempts were short-lived, and in the end both sides rejected her.

fact of British rule. But she was also no moderate; she did not draw the conclusion from the *fait accompli* that this rule was in any way legitimate. Besant saw her own views as transcending a divide that she regarded as merely tactical.

Besant is important historically because of her role in Theosophy and in the Congress, and because of her role in the establishment of Indian higher education. But she is not only of historical interest. She is an eminent theorist of Indian nationalism, developing a historical and synchronic conception of the nation, a conception alive to the role of language in national identity and to the roles of diverse constituencies. She situates that nationalism in the context of other global nationalist movements. Her thought draws together philology, history, political philosophy, and economics, giving her account a texture and complexity that defies easy summary.

Besant's efforts also tie together not only a remarkable range of individuals involved in the Indian nationalist movement, but also a range of intellectual streams. She brought the Home Rule movement to the populace at large. As Ramaswami Aiyar put it, remarking on Besant's importance to the Indian independence movement, "to none of us had come the vision of going to the villages, of speaking to the people at large, of making them realize what they could do, and what it was their duty to do" (Taylor, 1992, p. 294). Through her scholarship and academic activities, she forged an important link between the academy and the political movements of the day.⁸

7.4. Terrorism and the Trinity: Aurobindo's Vision

While Aurobindo Ghosh may be best known now in his spiritual avatar as Sri Aurobindo, he was better known to the British and to many of his compatriots as the escaped terrorist, Aurobindo Ghosh, eventually living much of his adult life just beyond British jurisdiction in French Pondicherry. Aurobindo's nationalist views were developed principally in the newspaper *Bande Mataram*, where he rose quickly from occasional contributor to editor before it was closed after two years of publication by the British and he was jailed for conspiracy in the Alipore affair.⁹

Aurobindo, like Besant, saw Indian nationalism in the context of global struggles for independence and against colonialism. In *Bande Mataram*, he connects

⁸ Another important aspect of Besant's legacy in India and in world philosophy is her adopted son and pupil Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986). He, however, eschewed all political involvement, and unlike Besant, was a committed internationalist.

⁹ A group of Bengali activists were charged with tossing a bomb at a local magistrate in 1908. Aurobindo was charged in the affair, but not convicted.

Indian aspirations and tactics, including demands for self-rule and the use of boycotts to those of *Sinn Fein*, and links the Indian independence movement not only to the Irish movement but also to Chinese resistance to British mercantile advances, and even to the American independence movement a century and a half earlier (*Bande Mataram* 1 June, 1907). Nonetheless, he also Indianizes his call for independence, connecting it directly both to Indian history and religious traditions and to the unique contribution he takes India to be able to make to world history. He refers regularly to J. S. Mill in his argument for liberty,¹⁰ and castigates John Morley, the Secretary of State for India and the self-styled “Friend of India,” an ally of many moderates, for his betrayal of Millian principles when Morley argues for continued British sovereignty over India. Aurobindo also sees the importance of Indian independence in the context of a global progress toward international justice, and in terms of India’s contribution to global culture.

In an editorial in *Bande Mataram* from July 3, 1907, Aurobindo argues for the value of *swaraj* on several grounds, including not only its value to Indian national independence per se, but also the value of Indian self-determination and development for global civilization:

... [W]e advocate the struggle for *Swaraj*, first, because Liberty is in itself a necessity of national life and therefore worth striving for for its own sake; secondly, because Liberty is the first indispensable condition of national development intellectual, moral, industrial, political (we do not say it is the only condition) and therefore worth striving for for India’s sake; thirdly, because in the next great stage of human progress it is not a material but a spiritual, moral and psychical advance that has to be made and for this a free Asia and in Asia a free India must take the lead, and Liberty is therefore worth striving for for the world’s sake. India must have *Swaraj* in order to live; she must have *Swaraj* in order to live well and happily; she must have *Swaraj* in order to live for the world, not as a slave for the material and political benefit of a single purse-proud and selfish nation, but as a free people for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of the human race.

Aurobindo agrees with Besant in seeing education as a vehicle for nationalism. He writes scathingly in *Bande Mataram* about the British management of education as a political tool, and in particular of the proscriptions in the Risley

¹⁰ We will see that reference to Mill and a reliance on modern European political philosophy is not unique to Aurobindo and Besant. Azad and Iqbal each, in different ways, takes these thinkers as political touchstones.

Circular.¹¹ But more to the point, he argues forcefully for the development of an Indian educational system that will teach Indian culture and values and form the foundations of a genuine nationalism. In a *Bande Mataram* article on political action by students in Tanjore against the Risley Circular, Aurobindo writes:

Now that we have realised that to help the growing race consciousness in India we must have a system of education consistent with the traditions of the people and calculated to foster that spirit of Nationalism which alone can make a nation great, it is the duty of every Indian to help the inauguration of such a system of education and place it on a firm footing. The duty becomes all the more sacred in the face of the powerful opposition that such a system of education is sure to encounter at the hands of the bureaucracy whose interests are likely to be injured by it.

—(*Bande Mataram*, June 26, 1907)

Here we see Aurobindo, like Besant, placing education at the foundation of the independence movement.¹²

Aurobindo is contemptuous of moderate nationalism on several grounds, some practical and some theoretical. He argues that the kind of nonviolent accommodation favored by the moderates is insufficient to bring about significant change given the commitment of the English to rule India and their disdain for Indian leaders and politics. Aurobindo specifically rejects the moderate premise that the central goals of the *swaraj* struggle are such things as individual liberty, peace, prosperity, and so on, as opposed to full independence. He also rejects the premise that anything of national importance can be secured without full political independence.

In this sense, Aurobindo can be seen as aligned with the extremists. But Aurobindo goes further, and is a bona fide terrorist in Lajpat Rai's sense. For Aurobindo does not regard peace itself as an end, or peaceful action as the only legitimate means for achieving national independence. Aurobindo, like the extremists—but unlike the moderates—sees British rule as entirely illegitimate, and itself an act of injustice and violence. While all of the activity he expressly advises may be nonviolent, he reserves the right to resist violent injustice with violence, and believes that the possibility of success in the nationalist struggle

¹¹ This circular prohibited the teaching of political science and all political activity by students in Indian schools and universities.

¹² As we will see below, the same strategy is adopted by Abdul Kalam Azad and the founders of Osmania University. The Aligarh movement as we shall see later, despite its loyalism, also recognized education as a central political activity.

requires the background threat of violence if it is necessary. This conjunction of a pragmatic defense of the violent option and an argument for its legitimacy places him firmly in the terrorist camp. (See “The Morality of Boycott,” *Bande Mataram* May, 1908.)

Aurobindo sees the nationalist struggle as driven by three strategic principles he defines as “the trinity” of nationalism: *swaraj*, *swadeshi*, and boycott. In an article entitled “The Question of the Hour,” he writes, “On one thing only we must lay fast hold, on the triple unity of *Swadeshi*, Boycott and *Swaraj*. These must be pursued with unremitting energy, and so long as we hold fast to them, we cannot go far wrong” (*Bande Mataram* 1 June, 1907). He argues that commitment to any of them in the colonial context demands commitment to the other two. Aurobindo understands *swaraj* in a purely political sense, as the rule of India by Indians. Unlike Gandhi, he never adverts to the second meaning of that term—individual self-mastery—let alone prioritize it.¹³ By *swadeshi*, Aurobindo, like Coomaraswamy, means more than just the patronage of only Indian manufacture: he has in mind instead a commitment to a form of life grounded in one’s own culture. In the case of India, this involves an education that is Indo-centric, a focus on Indian values and tastes, and on Indian religious and philosophical traditions. Boycott is the refusal to patronize not only the goods sold by the colonial oppressor, but also the boycott of institutions, values, and ideas.¹⁴

Aurobindo argues that *swaraj* is impossible to achieve—and even if achievable would be empty—without *swadeshi*. It would be impossible to achieve simply because the mechanism of colonial control in an industrial age is not force of arms directly, but economic force. The imposition of British trade controls, he argues, are what impoverish India, and make it economically dependent on Britain. Only an insistence on *swadeshi* in everyday life can break the cycle of economic dependency and impoverishment that entrenches colonial rule. That is the practical side. But for Aurobindo, the theoretical side is equally important: even if, per impossibile, *swaraj* could be achieved without a prior commitment to *swadeshi*, that *swaraj* would be empty. It would be empty because for Aurobindo *swadeshi* comprises not only the material domain but also the intellectual, artistic, and spiritual domain: it is not only Indian cloth and soap that is to be preferred to cheaper English alternatives, but also Indian art, ideas, and religious insight. Gandhi put the point in *Hind Swaraj* in a way with which

¹³ See chapter 10 for Gandhi on *swaraj*.

¹⁴ It must be said that despite his own insistence on the mutual dependency between these three, Aurobindo is regularly in violation of the third, as is evident even in his own articulation and defense of nationalism on straightforwardly Millian grounds, and his regular citation of English poets and political theorists even in his own nationalist writing.

Aurobindo would agree in this context. To desire self-rule but to adopt English tastes, manners, and ideas would be to want “the English rule without the Englishman” (Gandhi, 1962, p. 27).

There is one important respect in which Aurobindo eschews a thoroughgoing *swadeshi*. He writes, and *Bande Mataram* was published, in English. There is a practical reason for this: to adopt any Indian vernacular would be to regionalize one’s audience. Persian and Sanskrit were always elite languages, and Persian by this time, in any case, had virtually disappeared from the subcontinent. English had become the lingua franca of India. But there is more to it than this, and here we see that Aurobindo not only fits the description of a “Macaulay child,” but also to some degree sees himself as addressing an audience comprising principally other Macaulay children. Aurobindo’s political vision, however, is drawn in large part from John Stuart Mill—who he quotes with approval—and even from Mill’s disciple Morley—for whom Aurobindo’s contempt derives precisely from his betrayal of Millian ideas. To a great degree, Aurobindo is, in this phase of his career, “Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”¹⁵ And *Bande Mataram* is addressed to others like him.

Ironically, instead of functioning as a mediating class as Macaulay envisioned, Aurobindo and his associates became, as Mill had hoped, “fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.” The unanticipated consequence was that he chose to convey knowledge of the grounds of revolution against the English, rather than the means of collaboration with them. Under Aurobindo’s editorship and through his pen, *Bande Mataram* wielded English senses of justice, nationalism, and patriotism as weapons against English rule.

In the pages of *Bande Mataram*, Aurobindo cites Mill on liberty and Shakespeare on patriotism, arguing that England applied a double standard, demanding political liberty, free trade, and patriotism for England, but—despite regarding India as an integral part of the British Empire, and despite a professed desire to export English values and civilization to India—denying precisely these central values to Indians. Indeed, he argues, they criminalize Indian patriotism, free speech, demands for political liberty and choices regarding trade. In a *Bande Mataram* editorial entitled “Law and Order,” Aurobindo writes:

The Government of India is up and doing to restore law and order in the land. What is this law? What is this order which seems to have disappeared from our midst and which the bureaucracy is calling back with deportation and prosecution and almost daily ordinances and ukases?

¹⁵ Aurobindo did live in England for over two decades.

The Britisher's word is law, his very presence and existence in the land a signal for the suppression and suspension of manly or patriotic activities. Reconciliation with foreign despotism is perfect order. Doing the Britisher's bidding is law. . . . It is criminal to insist on the undoing of bureaucratic actions. To cry "Thy will be done" is loyalty and patriotism. To wish for our eternal serfdom is prudence and peacefulness. To think ourselves irremediably unfit is wisdom and moderation. To imagine ourselves a nation is madness. To love our country is superstition. To work for its emancipation is treason. To harbour any such sentiment is sedition. Thus the new nationalism is subversive of law and order, religion and morality, justice and fair play, obedience and discipline. The law again is that some shall sow and others reap, that some shall buy and others sell, that some shall bleed and others fatten, that some shall order and others obey, that some shall rule and others submit, that some shall teach and others learn. The new nationalism with its boycott and *Swadeshi*, national education and *Swaraj*, seeks to invert this order and needs to be put down. It is here in our non-conformity to the bureaucratic conceptions of our duties that law and order have been disturbed and not in Eastern Bengal and Rawalpindi as they have been trying to make out.

—(*Bande Mataram* 6 June, 1907)

The critique is sharp, articulate, and difficult to gainsay, and the ad hominem strategy of using English political theory against English rule is powerful. Speaking directly to the irony involved in the professed English goals of exporting English values to India while systematically suppressing their expression, Aurobindo writes in an editorial, "Legitimate Patriotism":

Lord Minto has given us the historic expression "honest *Swadeshi*," and it was reserved for an Anglo-Indian publicist to startle the English-knowing world by an equally significant expression, "legitimate patriotism." Honesty, legitimacy and other kindred words of the English vocabulary are being newly interpreted by the Anglo-Indian bureaucrats and publicists. . . .

If you give preference to the indigenous products of the country and ask your friends, relatives and countrymen to do the same, you are dishonest. This is stretching the meaning of honesty to suit the moral sense of our alien and benevolent despots. Today we hear from another Anglo-Indian circular, the *Daily News of Calcutta*, that there is such a thing as legitimate patriotism. We have looked up the dictionaries to profit by the enlightenment so kindly vouchsafed to us, but we have

failed in our efforts. According to Webster, patriotism covers all activities to zealously guard the authority and interests of one's country and we are at a loss to understand how what the Indians have hitherto done or proposed to do to ensure the authority and interests of their country can be stigmatised as illegitimate. We on the contrary believe, and that according to the best authority, that the patriotism which has hitherto wrested from Mr. Morley only an expanded Council with an official majority and a comic advisory Board of Notables, falls far short of the standard of lexicographers. Patriotism will never rest satisfied till it has recovered the authority of the country, however much the Anglo-Indians try to twist its meaning and implication.

If it is patriotic for an Englishman to say, as their greatest poet has said, that this England never did nor shall lie at the proud feet of a conqueror, why should it be unpatriotic and seditious for an Indian to give expression to a similar sentiment? If it is highly patriotic for a Roman "to die in defence of his father's ashes and the temples of his gods," why should it be madness and senseless folly for an Indian to be stirred by a similar impulse? If "self-defence is the bulwark of all rights," as Lord Byron has said, why should an Indian journalist be charged with an attempt to incite to violence when he asks his countrymen of East Bengal to defend the honour of their women at any cost? If Campbell is right in saying that virtue is the spouse of liberty, why should an Indian be exposed to the menace of siege-guns when entering on a legitimate and lawful struggle for the recovery of his lost freedom? If each noble aim repressed by long control expires at last or feebly mans the soul, why should not our countrymen benefit by the advice of Goldsmith and begin to chafe at the attempt to prolong this alien control? If Tennyson is justified in taking a pride in his country which freemen till, which sober-suited Freedom chose, where girt with friends or foes a man may speak the thing he will, where freedom slowly broadens down from precedent to precedent, why should it be criminal on the part of an Indian to imagine a similar future for the land of his birth? ... What is then legitimate patriotism, pray? Our contemporary has given us no light on the point. We suppose it means a blind loyalty to the alien government, a helpless acquiescence in its most despotic measures, bowing our knee to every Anglo-Indian, especially to the dicta of the Editor of the *Indian Daily News* and the *Englishman*. If we do not accept the ethics of the British and Anglo-Indian press which calls the present patriotic movement immoral and ascribes it to the want of moral training in our schools and colleges, we may be guilty according to Anglo-Indian jurisprudence but the higher tribunal to whom alone all

oppressed peoples look up, knows their hearts and shapes their destinies accordingly.

—(*Bande Mataram*, June 27, 1907)

It is fascinating to compare Aurobindo's eloquent and learned prose during this period with the Macaulay *Minute on Education* we discussed in chapter 3. Macaulay, as we saw, was addressing both an educated Anglophone Indian audience and an English audience, with references to Ram Mohan Roy tossed in to guarantee his Indian bona fides. The construction of this common international class with common reference points served to bolster his claim to solidarity and to common cause. Aurobindo is up to much the same thing, although laced with irony and in a mirror image: with literary and philosophical reference points firmly in England, writing in English, he is addressing that same class. Just as Macaulay invoked Roy—an Indian—as an ally in Anglicizing India, Aurobindo invokes the Englishmen Mill, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Campbell as allies in arguing for Indian independence.

In each case, there is an implicit confidence in a unitary Anglophone audience receptive to the argument. Aurobindo reinforces this rhetorical gesture, both identifying with England and repudiating English domination, demanding that England respect the same aspirations in India it cherishes at home in his citation of Shakespeare (from *King John*). Later, he quotes his contemporary, the poet Wilfred Blunt, who urges that English values and history demand the end of colonial rule. In each case, Aurobindo taps into values on which he can count his English readers to endorse as their own, and as those they explicitly claim to be communicating to India. At the same time, Aurobindo addresses the class Macaulay hoped to create in India; he addresses that class with confidence not only in its existence but also in its sharing of values with the *English* class that gave birth to it.

Aurobindo challenges his reader, and in this case, explicitly his moderate nationalist reader—but implicitly also his English reader—to think.¹⁶ Returning to Morley, his *bête noir* of this period, he writes:

... [h]ave we not heard of the common English labourer who on being harangued eloquently by a Moderate missionary about Indian grievances asked him bluntly if he was really relating the true state of affairs, and on being answered in the affirmative told the missionary without much ceremony that a people who could submit to such

¹⁶ Compare to Hannah Arendt's discussion of thinking and of the imperative to think in precisely this sense in her essay "The Life of the Mind" (Arendt, 1978) and of her argument in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, (Arendt, 1963) that Eichmann's greatest failing was his failure to think.

wrongs and could think of nothing better than the sending of representatives to England to plead for their removal, fully deserved to be ruled by an arbitrary despotism? Unknowingly perhaps he was summarising the verdict of the civilised world on Indian politics. The money-making middle class in England say the same thing, and further strengthen their argument with the interesting inquiry, "What is to become of our boys if we leave the management of India in your hands?" The man from the Continent or America asks plainly, "How can the whole three hundred million of you be kept under by 70,000 tommies?"

Ought not all this to give our Moderate friends furiously to think? We can appreciate the humanity of their desire to emancipate the country without dragging her through the red horror of a revolution. But let them reconsider how best to achieve this end. Surely their failure to obtain anything worth having after thirty years of patient supplication culminating in the supreme tragedy of the refusal of John Morley, the one man of whom they had expected more than of any other—even to listen to their prayers with any seriousness, ought to impel them to some introspective inquiry regarding the soundness of their political faith. We also invite their thoughts to the changing attitude of England and of the whole world towards India since the declaration of the Boycott and the rise of the new party. We conjure the Moderate to spend his best and sincerest thoughts on these two most vital topics; and once he has begun to *think*, we know the days of his creed are numbered, and there can be but one party in India, the Nationalists.

—(*Bande Mataram*, 11 July 1907)

In urging the moderate to think, he has in mind precisely what Arendt was to mean by that term: a stepping back, a careful, reflective consideration of what one is doing, of what one's values are, and of what it would be to act in accordance with them; a refusal to accede thoughtlessly to what one would have to regard as immoral on reflection. And he has the same moral consideration in mind: the intuition that evil in this case is not brought about by malice, but by the refusal of moderate nationalists to take seriously the evil of colonial domination. K. C. Bhattacharyya—who we encountered in chapter 1 and to whose work we will return in chapter 8—also argues that thinking in this sense can be an antidote to colonial domination.

While Aurobindo sees reasoning, journalism, public boycott, and *swadeshi* as potential stimuli to such thought, he, unlike Gandhi and other moderates such as Gokhale, does not retain much hope for that strategy. This is the ground of his

identification with the terrorists and of his ultimate disdain for the moderate faction of Congress. In his essay, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance,” (*Bande Mataram*, 1907) Aurobindo considers three possible strategies for attaining *swaraj*: petitioning, self-development, and organized resistance. Aurobindo argues, contra Coomaraswamy and Gandhi, that political freedom is the principal, not an ancillary goal of the nationalist movement:

Political freedom is the life-blood of the nation; to attempt social reform, educational reform, industrial expansion, the moral improvement of the race without aiming first and foremost at political freedom, is the very height of ignorance and futility.

—(*Bande Mataram* 266 quoted in Heehs, 2008, p. 117)

Here and in “Shall India Be Free?” Aurobindo argues that political freedom is not to be achieved as the consequence of self-development, as Gandhi, for instance, would have it, or as the gift of the colonial master as other moderates might see it. Instead, he argues, it is the foundation of self-development and of freedom from the damage wrought by colonialism. In this sense, he is allied more with Tilak and Rai. But his distinctive position and the basis of the real break with Gandhi lies in his critique of the idea of passive resistance and of the renunciation of violence:

To submit to illegal and violent methods of coercion, to accept outrage and hooliganism as part of the legal procedure of the country is to be guilty of cowardice, and, by dwarfing national manhood, to sin against the divinity within ourselves and the divinity in our motherland. The moment coercion of this kind is attempted, passive resistance ceases and active resistance becomes a duty. (6th article)

—(*Bande Mataram* 294, quoted in Heehs, p. 118)

Aurobindo asks what passive resistance is good for. For Gandhi, it is a moral imperative, and it by itself is a mandatory component of human development; for Aurobindo, it is at best an instrumental good, to be adopted if effective, discarded if ineffective. Aurobindo also raises the question of the relation between individual and political *swaraj*. For Gandhi, individual *swaraj* is the principal goal of the national struggle; political *swaraj* without individual *swaraj* would be pointless. For Aurobindo, on the other hand, political *swaraj* is the primary goal. Gandhi is a spiritualist in the context of a nationalist struggle; Aurobindo, at this point in his career, is a nationalist who sees spiritual struggle as secondary. He is also a creative political philosopher with clear views about rights, the nation, and the structure of colonial oppression.

7.5. The Pragmatic Voice: Nehru's Middle Path

Indian nationalism, despite the contest for its definition, found its realization through the achievements of Jawarhalal Nehru. His political acumen and vision enabled Gandhi's charismatic leadership to bear the fruit of Indian independence. It is therefore worth a brief examination of Nehru's own construction of nationalism, even if it is not as philosophically theorized as those of the other figures we consider in this chapter. We might expect to find Nehru, as a Congress leader, satisfying Rai's description of a moderate. We do not, however. Nehru, if we are still to use Rai's framework, must be seen as forging a kind of middle path between the extremist and the constructivist positions. When he writes, "For any subject country national freedom must be the first and dominant urge; for India, with her intense sense of individuality and a past heritage, it was doubly so" (Nehru, 2004, p. 44), Nehru articulates the central thesis of what Rai calls "extremism," but with a psychological or historical grounding. He is an extremist insofar as he rejects the legitimacy of British rule and regards the struggle for immediate independence as constituting the heart of Indian nationalism.

But Nehru is also a bit of a constructivist, insofar as he argues that the struggle for independence must begin by constructing the social, political, and economic conditions that would make a nation possible, and insofar as he thinks that those conditions are not present in colonial India. As a leader of the Congress party, he attends constantly to the basis of Indian poverty and disunity, and devotes a great deal of energy to social, economic, and educational reform. He would never agree with a pure extremist that attention to these needs is a distraction or is divisive, undermining the effort for national independence. Instead, he always regarded this kind of work as central to the independence struggle.

Moreover, Nehru's nationalism is fused with his internationalism. Nehru's vision for India is not simply independence; that would be consistent with a splendid postindependence isolation. Instead, he consistently advocates (as we will see does R. Tagore) for an India deeply embedded in a web of international relations. Indeed, one of his arguments for nationalism is that only an independent India can be an effective actor on the international stage. He contrasts India with Europe to illustrate this point:

Unlike the aggressive nationalisms of Europe, [Indian nationalism does] not seek to interfere with others, but rather to cooperate with them to their common advantage. National freedom [is] the essential basis of true internationalism and hence is the road to the latter, as well as the real foundation for cooperation in the common struggle against fascism and Nazism.

—(Nehru, 2004, p. 524)

Nehru hence represents a pragmatic voice in Indian nationalism. He is less a theoretician than a politician, but a politician deeply involved in an movement guided by theoreticians.

7.6. Nationalism Contested: The Tagore-Gandhi Correspondence

The colonial debates about Indian nationalism were explicit and public. They set the terms for a broad discourse about nationalism and national identity, a discourse that involved academics, political figures, and the educated public at large, and that informed political action. One striking instance of the explicitly public nature of these debates is the interchange between Tagore and Gandhi, conducted through a series of open letters and rejoinders in their respective journals, *Modern Review* and *Young India*. In this case, the debate is not between different versions of nationalism, but rather between nationalism and an alternative: whereas Gandhi, however moderate he might have seemed to such figures as Aurobindo or Rai, argued for Indian nationhood, Tagore argued against the very idea of the nation-state, and so against nationalism in any form. We begin with an open letter by Tagore nominally addressed to Gandhi's long-time associate, the Reverend Charles F. Andrews:

We, in India, shall have to show to the world, what is that truth, which not only makes disarmament possible, but turns it into strength. That moral force is a higher power than brute force, will be proved by the people who are unarmed. . . . The destiny of India has chosen for its ally, *Narayan*, and not the *Narayansena*—the power of soul and not the power of muscle. And she is to raise the history of man, from the muddy level of physical conflict to the higher moral altitude. What is *swaraj*? It is *maya*. However we may delude ourselves with the phrases learnt from the West, *swaraj* is not our objective.

—(Gandhi, Tagore, and
Bhattacharya, 1997, p. 55)

Here, Tagore begins in what sounds like a Gandhian vein. He agrees with Gandhi that the central quest for India is a quest for truth, and even that truth is the foundation of strength. This could be a line in a Gandhian essay on *satyagraha*.¹⁷ He even moves on to a discussion of nonviolence as moral force and the contrast between what Gandhi called “soul-force” with material force. But then Tagore

¹⁷ We will address Gandhi's theory of *satyagraha* in detail in chapter 8.

turns the tables. He is not defending Gandhi's *swaraj* at all but rejecting it, characterizing it as *maya*, as illusion. Moreover, in a startling moment of irony, Tagore accuses Gandhi, in virtue of his advocacy of nationalism even in the guise of *swaraj*, of being a European in a dhoti (of proposing English rule without the Englishman). Tagore continues:

Our fight is a spiritual fight, it is for Man. We are to emancipate Man from the meshes that he himself has woven around him,—these organizations of National Egoism. The butterfly will have to be persuaded that the freedom of the sky is of higher value than the shelter of the cocoon. . . . And then Man will find his *swaraj*. We, the famished, ragged ragamuffins of the East, are to win freedom for all Humanity. We have no word for Nation in our language. When we borrow this word from other people, it never fits us. . . . I have seen the West. I covet not the unholy feast, in which she revels every moment, growing more and more bloated and red and dangerously delirious.

—(Gandhi et al., 1997, p. 55)

Once again, Tagore sets up the irony by endorsing all of Gandhi's major philosophical premises. The fight against the British, he agrees, is a spiritual, not a political or military, fight. It is a fight for human dignity, something one might even legitimately call *swaraj*, if one does not interpret that term politically. While agreeing with all of these premises, Tagore draws very different conclusions. Although India may have a global historical mission to be addressed in the struggle against colonialism, he argues, India's struggle ought not be the struggle for a nation. Tagore, astonishingly, claims that there is no word for nation in any Indian language, and argues that nationalism must be an idea borrowed by Gandhi and his colleagues from the "bloated and red and dangerously delirious" West. Tagore continues with a direct critique of Gandhi's central methodology of political struggle—noncooperation:

The idea of non-cooperation is political asceticism. Our students are bringing their offering of sacrifices to what? Not to a fuller education but to non-education. It has at its back a fierce joy of annihilation which at best is asceticism, and at its worst is that orgy of frightfulness in which the human nature, losing faith in the basic reality of normal life, finds a disinterested delight in an unmeaning devastation. . . . No, in its passive moral form is asceticism and in its active moral form is violence. The desert is as much a form of *himsa* as is the raging sea in storms, and they are both against life.

—(Gandhi et al., 1997, pp. 57–58)

The context of Tagore's critique is important. At the time of this letter, Gandhi was encouraging noncooperation in the sphere of education following the Risley restrictions. Large numbers of Indian students, at Gandhi's urging, left the schools in an extended protest. Tagore here argues that this was not only ineffective, but self-destructive. Noncooperation, he urges, simply harms the participant, not the target. But more important, he charges Gandhi with a kind of blindness: of rejecting overt violence because of the harm or injury (*himsa*) it involves, but refusing to see the harm that is attendant upon any confrontation, even one in which the aggression is passive. Tagore hence develops an internal critique of Gandhi's grounding of noncooperation in the doctrine of *ahimsa*, arguing that noncooperation does not avoid harm, but simply replaces one kind of harm with another.

Tagore then turns to a critique of the idea of nationalism, *per se*. He first denies, without argument, the claim that status as a nation-state is a prerequisite for India having a global voice. His central argument, however, is that nationalism itself is morally misguided, in virtue of being a kind of egoism instantiated in racial exceptionalism. Again, he begins with premises he shares with Gandhi—that the only legitimation for national struggle could be spiritual. But he then argues that the only legitimate spiritual grounds are universalist, and could never underwrite the distinctions among people necessary for a narrow nationalism. Tagore continues:

Therefore I feel that the true India is an idea and not a mere geographical fact. . . . India will be victorious when this idea wins victory—the idea of “*Purusham mahantam aditya-varnam tamasah parastat,*” the Infinite Personality whose light reveals itself though the obstruction of darkness. . . . This Infinite Personality of man is not to be achieved in single individuals, but in one grand harmony of all human races. The darkness of egoism which will have to be destroyed is the egoism of the People. The idea of India is against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others, and which inevitably leads to ceaseless conflicts. Therefore my one prayer is: let India stand for the *cooperation* of all peoples of the world. The spirit of rejection finds its support in the consciousness of separateness, the spirit of acceptance in the consciousness of unity.

—(Gandhi, et al., 1997, p. 61)¹⁸

¹⁸ Note how radical Tagore's view is. It is not the “League of Nations” internationalism to which Nehru subscribes, but a wholesale rejection of the moral legitimacy of the nation-state, an idea more in line with those of Toshtoy or even Kropotkin. We will see this idea as well in the work of Iqbal in the next section of this chapter.

Gandhi replies to this plea for internationalism and cooperation with a spirited defense of noncooperation and of nationalism. He begins with a defense of the school boycott, tying it not specifically to the teaching of politics, but to English as the medium of education, and this medium to a kind of national degradation.¹⁹ On this understanding, the boycott is necessary, not because it resists without doing harm, but because it boycotts an institution that is essentially harmful, and harmful because of its choice of an essentially oppressive linguistic medium. In a sidelong reference to the Tagore character Nikhil in Tagore's *Ghaire Baire* (*Home and the World*, 1916, made into a film by Satyajit Ray in 1984), Gandhi argues that the harms of the introduction of English penetrate even the sphere of family life, agreeing with K. C. Bhattacharyya (see chapter 1) that the language itself is a form of enslavement:

The Poet does not know perhaps that English is today studied because of its commercial and so-called political value. Our boys think, and rightly in the present circumstances, that without English they cannot get Government service. Girls are taught English as a passport to marriage. I know several instances of women wanting to learn English so that they may be able to talk to Englishmen in English. I know husbands who are sorry that their wives cannot talk to them and their friends in English. I know families in which English is being *made* the mother tongue. Hundreds of youths believe that without a knowledge of English freedom for India is practically impossible. The canker has so eaten into the society that, in many cases, the only meaning of education is a knowledge of English.

All these are for me signs of our slavery and degradation. It is unbearable to me that the vernaculars should be crushed and starved as they have been.²⁰

—*Young India*, June 1, 1921, in (Gandhi, et al., 1997, pp. 64–65)

¹⁹ Ironically, Gandhi is writing this critique of the use of English in English. Once again, our attention is drawn to the predicament faced by nationalists who reject the use of English in the colonial period. If they want their critique to find an audience, English is necessary. Every other language is associated with a local or a specifically religious community.

²⁰ The philosophical and historical problem of English as a lingua franca continues to be an issue today (Bhushan and Garfield, 2009b). All of the figures we consider in this volume wrote in English, whether or not it was a source of anxiety for them. English is still—perhaps even to a greater degree—the lingua franca of India. While politicians and literati might occasionally inveigh against it for populist or elitist reasons, respectively, English has, for better or worse, become an Indian vernacular language. Indeed, more people speak English in India than in any other country: Indian English has become standard English. To learn English in India today is not to be degraded; it is to learn a national tongue that has also become an essential life skill on par with learning arithmetic or computer literacy.

Gandhi then makes explicit the connection between boycott and his own method of noncooperation and the relation of this method to the *ahimsa* that Tagore criticizes. Finally, he connects this notion of nonviolence to the very notion of patriotism that Tagore accepts. But Gandhi defends nationalism in this context, arguing that only an independent India can contribute meaningfully to the world in the very way that Tagore envisions India contributing:

Non-cooperation is the nation's notice that it is no longer satisfied to be in tutelage. The nation had taken to the harmless (for it), natural and religious doctrine of Non-cooperation in the place of the unnatural and irreligious doctrine of violence. And if India is ever to attain the *swaraj* of the Poet's dream, she will do so only by Non-violent Non-cooperation. Let him deliver his message of peace to the world, and feel confident that India, through her Non-cooperation, if she remains true to her pledge, will have exemplified his message. Non-cooperation is intended to give the very meaning to patriotism that the Poet is yearning after. An India prostrate at the feet of Europe can give no hope to humanity. An India awakened and free has a message of peace and goodwill to a groaning world. Non-cooperation is designed to supply her with a platform from which she will preach the message.

—(Gandhi, et al., 1997, pp. 67–68)

Tagore responds to this argument by returning to the broader question of whether there is a principled distinction between foreign and home rule once one has taken the nation for granted:

Alien government in India is a veritable chameleon. Today it comes in the guise of the Englishman; tomorrow perhaps as some other foreigner; the next day, without abating a jot of its virulence, it may take the shape of our own countrymen. However determinedly we may try to hunt this monster of foreign dependence with outside lethal weapons, it will always elude our pursuit by changing its skin, or its color. But if we can gain within us the truth called our country, all outward *maya* will vanish of itself. . . . The idea that our country is ours, merely because we have been born in it, can only be held by those who are fastened, in a parasitic existence, upon the outside world. But the true nature of man is his inner nature, with its inherent powers.

—(Gandhi, et al., 1997, p. 71)

Who, one might ask, wrote these lines? Depending on the context, they could easily be ascribed to Tagore or to Gandhi, in part because they share so many

premises, but in part, because these premises can be used to defend such contrary conclusions. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi argues that the Englishman is an accidental feature of foreign rule—that foreignness resides in the language and consciousness imposed and then internalized in a colonial context, not in the facts of nativity. There he is concerned to argue that personal *swaraj* is prior to and the precondition of national *swaraj*. Tagore agrees that the personal is political, and that it is prior to the public. But again, he parts company when it is time to draw the conclusion. He argues that inasmuch as *Indian* rule (think about Mughal rule) could be as foreign as any British rule, that it is not *rule* or even *who rules*, that matters as much as spirit, and that nationalism itself is what generates the sense of separatism that makes rule itself, and the invidious distinction between the domestic and the foreign, possible.

Gandhi's reply is to shift ground from *swaraj* to *swadeshi*. He argues that the distinction between the foreign and the domestic—whatever its historical basis—matters in the present circumstances, and that it matters morally. He affirms his agreement with Tagore once again that spiritual liberation is the most important goal, but argues once again that it is impossible to achieve without attention to one's home community:

I do want growth. I do want self-determination. I do want freedom, but
I want all of these for the soul. . . .

...

It was our love of foreign cloth that ousted the wheel from its position of dignity. Therefore I consider it a sin to wear foreign cloth. I must confess that I do not draw a sharp or any distinction between economics and ethics. Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and therefore sinful. Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral. It is sinful to buy and use articles made by sweated labor. It is sinful to eat American wheat and let my neighbor the grain dealer starve for want of custom.

—(Gandhi, et al., 1997, pp. 89–90)

Gandhi here shifts focus. Tagore is concerned with the danger of the egoism of nationalism, and in *Home and the World* attacked the effects of *swadeshi* on local minority communities, the Muslims in particular. Gandhi instead addresses the international context, and moralizes *swadeshi* and by implication *swaraj*, raising them above these mundane considerations. Moreover, Gandhi argues, coming back to the original point at issue, whatever the goals are of a colonial struggle, they cannot be achieved without national freedom. Defending Indian

nationalism—not nationalism per se—Gandhi argues that to take Tagore’s antinationalist position is simply to surrender all Indian values and aspirations:

A drowning man cannot save others. In order to be fit to save others, we must try to save ourselves. Indian nationalism is not exclusive, nor aggressive, nor destructive. It is health giving, religious and therefore humanitarian. India must learn to live before she can aspire to die for humanity. The mice which helplessly find themselves between the cat’s teeth acquire no merit from their forced sacrifice.

—(Gandhi, et al., 1997, p. 91)

This is but one instance of the public debates about nationalism in colonial India. It is noteworthy not only for its protagonists, and for the way in which different philosophical conceptions of the nation and its relation to individual liberation are deployed, but also for its attention to the language issue with which we began this study, and which frames so much of the metadiscourse about Indian philosophy and intellectual history more generally. We will see this attention to language as well as the broader question of the appropriateness of Indian nationalism as an idea reflected in debates pursued in the Indian Muslim community.

7.7. Parallel Contests: Debates about Nationalism in the Muslim Community

Up to this point we’ve been considering nationalist discourse only as it was articulated in the Hindu community. But nationalist ideas and nationalist debates cross communal lines in colonial India. In this section, we explore debates about Indian nationalism in the Muslim community. We will see that Hindu and Muslim nationalisms interacted in complex ways. While prominent Muslims were active in Hindu dominated fora, such as the Indian National Congress, there was an autonomous conversation about nationalism among Indian Muslims that reflects the very different history and sensibility of that community.

The broader historical context for Muslim nationalism is set by at least three distinct anxieties. The first is anxiety about the position of Muslims in India following the dissolution of the Mughal Empire (as well as the collapse of other Muslim-ruled kingdoms). That empire enshrined a kind of Muslim political hegemony in the subcontinent, hegemony that was suddenly lost as it crumbled and the British colonial regime assumed authority. The second is anxiety about identity: the international movement to restore the caliphate following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and consequent

pan-Islamism raised questions about the place of Islam in the modern world and about the place of Islamic communities in multicultural or secular states.

The third anxiety concerns language. Muslim debates about nationalism are structured in part by the fact that during British occupation Muslims constituted a relatively economically and politically disadvantaged minority with a distinctive language, Urdu. As a consequence, the question about the economic, religious, cultural, and political future of Muslims in India is also a question about language. We have already explored the problematic status of English as at the same time a lingua franca in India and the language of a colonial overlord. In the Muslim community there is an additional problem: English displaced Persian as a language of rule, and so replaced Muslim administrators with more Anglophone Hindus.

Nevertheless, it is not Persian, but Urdu, that is the vernacular rival of English for Muslims, and that language is not associated with a geographical community, like Bengali or Punjabi. Nor is it a language that was ever proposed as a pan-Indian language, like Hindi; it is associated predominantly (although not exclusively) with the Muslim community. Muslims who objected to English hegemony and to English education hence were not fighting for the reintroduction of vernaculars in general, nor for the preservation of Persian, but rather for the elevation of Urdu and for its use in education and in government. Others in that community, however, argued for the retention of English as a neutral broker and as a vehicle for Muslim progress in particular, and for cosmopolitan, secular Indian modernity in general. Debates about language were hence also debates about the degree to which Muslims were to be a distinct community as opposed to integrated members of a unified Indian nation.²¹

The Muslim community, like the Hindu community, was riven by philosophical and political dissension. It never constituted a monolithic bloc. Within the

²¹ This split was reflected in part in the establishment of the Urdu medium Muslim Osmania University in Hyderabad and the English medium Muslim university at Aligarh. Osmania was founded by the educational reformer Sayyid Hussain Bilgrami and the Nizam of Hyderabad. It was founded to provide a modern but Muslim education, in Urdu, with a curriculum designed on English lines, albeit with prescribed courses on Islam. While neither Osmania nor those involved with its establishment were advocates of home rule or independence, they were, within the context of colonial India, partisans of a separate Muslim identity (either within India or in a separate Pakistan) and of the advancement of Urdu as a vernacular and a public language.

Part of the brief of Osmania University was the translation of Western scientific and philosophical texts into Urdu. (See Datla 2013 for an excellent discussion of the founding of Osmania University.) Following the Khilafat movement, however, and under the inspiration of Khilafat enthusiasts and pan-Islamist Muhammad Ali, Osmania began to develop its own textbooks on Islamic and Indian history that advocated a more pan-Islamic line. Nonetheless, as the Congress gained ascendancy and the noncooperation movement developed, Osmania moved in more secular, as well as less communal, nationalist directions.

Muslim community, we can distinguish four principal approaches to nationalism. The first, the Khilafat movement, favored independence from Britain and integration into a pan-Islamic caliphate. The second, associated with Abdul Kalam Azad, allied itself with the Congress and favored a secular Indian independence, albeit with a special role for the Muslim community. The third, associated with the Aligarh movement, favored continued British rule, or at least close association with the British Empire. Finally, philosophers such as Mohammed Iqbal agree with Tagore in a rejection of nationalism altogether. These debates, although not always represented in academic settings, refer to important philosophical ideas, and constitute a public philosophical discourse.

The Khilafat movement, although hardly universal in the Turkish or Arab world, and unpopular in Shia Persia, was immensely popular among certain segments of the population in India. For many, union with a global Islamic world offered a kind of nationalistic hope that involved emancipation from both British and Hindu domination. We also see in this movement a distinctively Muslim renaissance gesture of the kind we discuss in chapter 4. The caliphate, like the Ashokan Empire that preceded it, or the mythical Vedic period of ancient history, represented in the Muslim imaginary a kind of golden age to which return seemed possible. Moreover, the goal of the universal caliphate had legitimate roots in the Quran. The Khilafat movement, at least initially, inspired not only Muslim intellectual and religious leaders, but also a broad swathe of the Muslim community, and even gained the support of Gandhi and other Hindu leaders for a short time. On the other hand, as the movement declined internationally, it lost influence even in India and was not much of a force after the 1920s.

Abdul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) was an early adherent of the Khilafat movement, but left it for a more a more secular vision and joined the Congress party, in which he rose to leadership. He was home-schooled by his father in the traditional Islamic style in both Persian and Arabic; he studied English at the urging of Sir Sayyid. From the age of fifteen, he taught philosophy and logic. In his youth, he experienced a major religious crisis; he abandoned his commitment to the most orthodox forms of Islam, and renamed himself *Azad* (free). He then met first Aurobindo and then Gandhi en route to a political career in the Congress.

Azad initially argued for the Khilafat on religious grounds, on the basis of orthodox Quranic interpretation. Importantly, however, he argued for it on political grounds as well. Azad argued that Muslims could never enjoy political autonomy either under Christian or Hindu rule. He writes, “there can be no greater cause for shame for Muslims than to devise a new path by bowing before the political teachings of others” (*Al-Hilal* 1912, reprinted in Azad 2002, p. 14) and “we need neither carry a begging bowl before the moderate Hindus nor the extremists among them. . . . It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to keep away

from those who create disturbance in the country, be they Hindu anarchists or criminal gangs, and if possible, try to resist and repulse them" (Azad, 2002, p. 17).

Nonetheless, Azad soon became disillusioned with the Khilafat version of Islamic nationalism. He was convinced both that it was politically unrealistic in a global sense, given the unlikelihood of any restoration of the caliphate in Turkey, and that it was impossible to unite the various Muslim communities the world over under a new caliph. Azad joined the Congress partly on the strength of Gandhi's support for the Khilafat movement,²² and became convinced that the immediate duty of Muslims was not to separate from the rest of India, but to resist British rule and to ensure political autonomy within India. He joined the Noncooperation and later the Quit India movements. In 1927, he writes in *Al-Hilal*, the journal of Muslim political thought of which he was editor:

The fundamentals and beliefs on which stand this modern nationalism are guided by the following important principles [of which we consider only two here]:

1. When a group of people settled within a contiguous geographical area, living together on the basis of homogeneity of race or homeland or social life, consider themselves to be members of one nation, they do constitute a nation, and nobody has the right to refuse to accept their identity.
2. Every nation has the natural birthright to be free and to settle all its affairs according to its own will and pleasure. No other nation has the right to interfere in it.

...

These fundamentals of the nation, nationality and national right were, in fact, the products of the same elements of human freedom and rights which had been born out of the era of new civilization of Europe, and which had been proclaimed by Voltaire, Rousseau and the Encyclopaedists of France. The concepts of the rights of a nation and nationality began with the question of humanity and human rights.

—(Azad, 2002, pp. 245–246)

Azad emphasizes in this context that religion is no part of national identity, and that it is a Muslim's duty to defend his nation. He argued for the latter position

²² Gandhi's early support for the Khilafat movement provided an entrée for many Indian Muslims to the Congress party.

once again on specifically Islamic grounds. He pointed out that it is a Muslim obligation to submit to just rule in a country in which one finds oneself, so long as that rule is not inimical to religious practice.²³ He also pointed out that it is a Muslim obligation never to submit to the rule of an invader, and argued that Britain counted as an invader in this context.²⁴

In allying himself with the Indian National Congress, Azad worked closely with Gandhi and Nehru. He rose to the presidency of the Congress at age thirty-five, and cited Quranic precedent as justification for cooperation with a friendly non-Islamic government (Douglas, Minault, and Troll, 1988, pp. 223–225). In this phase of his political career, he argued consistently that the interest of Indian Muslims was best served by a secular state (albeit one in which particular regions were reserved for Muslim majority rule) instead of by a religious Pakistan. He argued that religion is not a basis for national identity but rather that part of the purpose of the nation is to protect religious practice, and affirmed his confidence that secular India could do so successfully (a position that Nehru was to adopt as well). Perhaps most important, Azad grounds his nationalism not on a religious foundation, and not on an Indian foundation, but on the secular foundation of the modern European discourse of human rights and individualism that he studied at Cambridge,²⁵ thus integrating Western political philosophy with an Islamic understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state.

The third voice in the Muslim debates about nationalism emerged from the Aligarh movement. This movement, under the leadership of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, represents an important strand of Indian Muslim nationalist thought. Sir Sayyid began his career with the East India Company and studied Western science, philosophy, and Christian theology.²⁶ He argued that continued British rule in India was an unalloyed blessing, preserving the rights of Muslims in a Hindu majority nation, bringing European science and technology to India, and introducing European modernity, including political philosophy, economics and multiculturalism to India.

Sir Sayyid's nationalism is a British nationalism, reflecting a sense of Indian identity as a member of the British Empire, seeing the British as the successor of the Mughals and so—on the linguistic front—English as the successor of Persian. His antipathy to the Congress reflects his unease with the struggle for

²³ That is, that India was and could continue to be a *dar-ul-aman* or *dar-ul-zimma*, a land of security or a land of protection.

²⁴ In this respect, as we will see, Azad diverges from Sir Sayyid, who saw the British not as invaders, but as protectors. Thus, while they agree on Islamic doctrine, they disagree in politics.

²⁵ We discuss the Cambridge connection in detail in chapter 9.

²⁶ There is some debate regarding just how much Western material Sayyid read, and apparently reason to believe that his son actually wrote the work attributed to Sir Sayyid on Western subjects (Kavita Datla, personal communication).

independence (Douglas et al., 1988, pp. 125–127). Sir Sayyid argued for a renaissance of Islam in a British India, with the new empire providing the atmosphere in which genuine modern scholarship can recover and disseminate classical Arabic and Persian learning. This new empire, unlike a caliphate, would establish a clear demarcation of spiritual and temporal authority in the European spirit, reflecting the sensibilities of Enlightenment political philosophy, a sensibility Sir Sayyid shared with Azad, despite their disagreements regarding implementation.

The establishment of Aligarh Muslim University in 1875 was an explicitly Anglophile gesture at a time when anti-British agitation was common. Its mission was to provide a cosmopolitan Islamic education to prepare Muslim youth for life in a globalized academic and commercial world. Aligarh taught in English, and included among the classical languages on offer not only Arabic, Persian and Greek, but also Latin, Sanskrit, and Pali. Aligarh was not simply an academic institution: just as Ram Mohan Roy envisioned the English medium Hindu College as a training ground for Bengali leaders in what was yet to become a colony, Aligarh was seen as a training ground for the future leaders in a British India, restoring the tradition of Muslim participation in political affairs.

The fourth voice in the Muslim conversation about nationalism is Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) who in many respects is the outlier in this discourse. Iqbal may be the most influential Muslim philosopher in India. He like Sir Sayyid, was an Anglophile, and shared with him a love of European philosophy and a pluralistic, liberal sense of modernity. He shared Sayyid's view that modernity required a cosmopolitan approach to learning and an assimilation of Western political views. Iqbal was also deeply influenced by European political philosophy.²⁷ But, whereas Sayyid's Anglophile tendencies led him politically to a pro-British stance, Iqbal joined Tagore in a thoroughgoing critique of nationalism, playing Rousseau to Sayyid's Mill. His initial critique of nationalism, however, ultimately led to him to a different nationalism, a commitment to the establishment of Pakistan.

Iqbal derived his principal philosophical inspiration from a variety of sources. Rumi and Ibn Al-Arabi were critical poetic roots; his principal philosophical inspiration, however derived from the neo-Hegelians, as well as from Arnold, Tolstoy and from Nietzsche. So, while a modernizer in some respects, he is importantly postmodern in others, and in particular in his

²⁷ Iqbal's program in metaphysics and epistemology, as we will see in chapter 9, is built on a creative synthesis of Islamic and European philosophy, with an emphasis on Islamic ideas of consensus and a hermeneutic approach to the Quran and Hadith that systematically pares away what Iqbal considered culturally or historically particular doctrines from those he sees as more universal and essentially Islamic.

suspicion of the value of the state and of its role in European society. Indeed, the modern thinker to whom he owes the most may well be Rousseau (Sevea, 2012). Iqbal opposed the enthusiasm for the Khilafat, opposed the Quit India movement, opposed unity under the British, and, initially, opposed the creation of Pakistan.

Like Tagore, Iqbal adopted a romantic position according to which all forms of the nation-state were to be eschewed, seeing nationalism as the cause of the European wars, as divisive and as oppressive. He offers impassioned critiques of nationalist movements, and associated nationalism and the idea of the nation-state with imperialism and the concentration of power. In his early period, he also argued that the nation-state is incompatible with Islam: if the state is secular, it constitutes an illegitimate rival authority over life; if it is Islamic, it is not really a nation-state, but a religious organization with no independent interest in secular law. Like Tagore, Iqbal offers no concrete proposal for the future of Indian polity, speaking instead only of the need to develop communities (Sevea, 2012).

As we have seen, every strain of Muslim nationalism present in colonial India, with the exception of the Khilafat movement, draws on early modern European political thought to some degree. The goal of each approach is to theorize the legitimacy of government, although there are a diversity of views as to the source of that legitimacy and regarding the proper form of that government. In each case, liberal political thought is brought into dialogue with explicitly Islamic thought about the relationship between religion and the state. Divergences reflect varying positions regarding the propriety of non-Islamic rule over Muslims, and varying degrees of trust in the willingness of non-Muslim majorities to preserve Muslim rights.

We have already discussed Tagore's debate with Gandhi on the merits of nationalism. Iqbal debated the same issue, also publicly, with Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957), a Sufi scholar who was active in the independence movement and an opponent of partition and the creation of Pakistan, in a series of articles and ripostes in the popular press. Madani argued that Islam was consistent with nationalism; Iqbal argued that it was not, in virtue of the fact that Islam already contains a complete political and legal philosophy constituting a polity inconsistent with any secular state. This very commitment to the supremacy of Shariah and to the political dimensions of Islam, however, eventually led Iqbal into an alliance with Muhammad Ali Jinnah and to advocacy of Pakistan.

The problem of Pakistan—a nation-state distinct from India; not part of a pan-Islamic caliphate, but nonetheless Islamic—looms over all Muslim discourse about nationalism. The nationalist ideology that animated the argument for Pakistan was not simply grounded in the view that in practice to live as a minority in India was hazardous, as evidenced by the relative disadvantage of the

Muslim community, the domination of the independence movement and political institution by Hindus, and by the majoritarian tendencies of Hindu administration. Instead, it was argued that Islam itself demands that Muslims live in a state ruled by Muslims and by Islamic law. Islamic nationalism in the Pakistan movement hence constituted a repudiation of secularism and of multiculturalism.

Iqbal, in a series of letters to Jinnah,²⁸ articulates this philosophical foundation for Pakistani nationalism. The first consideration is the inconsistency of Islamic law with a pluralistic secular state:

Happily there is a solution [to the problem of Muslim oppression in India] in the enforcement of the Law of Islam and its further development in the light of modern ideas. After a long and careful study of Islamic Law, I have come to the conclusion that if this system of Law is properly understood and applied, at last the right to subsistence is secured to everybody. But the enforcement and development of the *Shariat* of Islam is impossible in this country without a free Muslim state or states.

—(Iqbal and Jinnah, 1963, p. 18)

The second reason for Pakistan, according to Iqbal, is that Islam is, and always has been, a progressive, socially democratic system. So, he argues, an Islamic renaissance is possible, by resurrecting the classical culture of democratic Shariah in the modern age. Iqbal writes, “for Islam the acceptance of social democracy in some suitable form and consistent with the legal principles of Islam is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam” (Iqbal and Jinnah, 1963, p. 19). Moreover, Iqbal argues, the secular socialism of Nehru and the Congress, to which he refers as “atheistic socialism” (Iqbal and Jinnah, 1963, p. 19) is inconsistent with Islam. He concludes that the only solution to the problems of Muslims in India is “a separate federation of Muslim provinces” (Iqbal and Jinnah, 1963, p. 24).

As we have seen, however, the drive for Pakistan was never universal among the Indian Muslim community, and it is not even clear that it was ever a majority movement. The diversity within Indian Muslim nationalism was determined by distinct understandings both of Islamic political philosophy and of the proper approach to integrating Islamic ideas with those deriving from modern European political theory. But philosophy does not by itself determine history. The concrete and often accidental facts on the ground have a say as well.

²⁸ The leading exponent of Pakistan came to be Muhammed Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), leader of the Muslim League and the first President of Pakistan. But Jinnah was a lawyer and a politician, not a philosopher or even a theorist of nationalism.

Specific divisions in the Congress movement, conflicts between specific Muslim and Hindu leaders and British policy conspired in the end to make Pakistan inevitable, but we should not see the drive for Pakistan on either of these grounds as emblematic of a unanimous Muslim nationalism. On the other hand, it is important to note the differences in nuance between Hindu and Muslim nationalisms, as well as the diversity within each community. In each case, we see nationalism as part and parcel of renaissance thought, constructing contested visions of a future animated by contested visions of the past and contested understandings of the relationship between past and future forged in a present whose complexity was overdetermined by internal social dynamics, development, and the colonial context.

7.8. Coda: Nationalism and the Metaphysics of Freedom

We have spent so much time discussing nationalism here because it is impossible to divorce colonial Indian nationalism from colonial Indian philosophy. Nationalist theories and nationalist movements formed a crucible in which a fusion of classical and modern political philosophy was transformed into action. The colonial situation also constitutes a catalyst to the development of Indian political philosophy in this context. Nationalist discourse is the mirror image of the discourse of identity; the latter looks to the past to imagine what India is; the former to the future to imagine what India must become.

As we will see in the next chapter these nationalist discourses force anyone who wishes to legitimize a struggle for freedom to inquire into the grounds of that struggle and into its goals. This inquiry is itself philosophical, asking about the grounds of Indian claims to freedom, and about the very nature of the Indian nation itself. Nationalism thus inspires philosophers to revisit and to reimagine the philosophical landscape they claim as their heritage in order to valorize it, and to choose how and to what degree to engage with traditions they regard as alien. We now turn to a consideration of the issue on which one of the central philosophical theorizations of Indian political freedom was constructed, the idea of *swaraj*.

Theorizing *Swaraj*

Politics and the Academy

8.1. *Swaraj* in Ideas

Gandhi brought the terms *swaraj* and *swadeshi* to center stage in colonial Indian discourse. These two words have both descriptive and evaluative content. On the one hand, they denote independence and native character; on the other, they suggest freedom and independence at both the individual and collective level. They served to unify metaphysical and political thinking about India and Indianness. While many academics and activists adopted these terms in their framings of the Indian independence struggle, consensus on their interpretation was hard to come by. A full answer to the question about the meaning of these two terms and their relation to each other in Indian political life requires that we attend with some care to discussions that were occurring in disciplines seemingly very far afield: archaeology, art history, religion, philosophy, and modern Indian history.

We saw in chapter 1 that K. C. Bhattacharyya articulates for his students the kind of *swaraj* worth fighting for, a freedom from the subtle subjugation by ideas and language at once foreign but experienced as one's own. Since Macaulay's "minute," all ideas, from abstract physics to notions of nation, self, and culture, were inevitably articulated from an orientation that promotes itself as neutral, self-evidently objective, and universal, despite its particularity. Immersion in that conceptual scheme, he argued, leads those subjected to it to adopt those practices and perspectives as their own in their own quest for neutral, objective, universalist maturity. This intellectual certainty in the fact of a freely chosen realm of ideas and practices is reinforced phenomenologically in the degree of felt comfort and familiarity with which one inhabits it. But this very certainty, argues Bhattacharyya, is illusory, and represents the deepest form of false consciousness.

... [W]e ourselves asked for this education, and we feel, and perhaps rightly, that it has been a blessing in certain ways. I mean only that it has not generally been assimilated by us in an open-eyed way with our old-world Indian mind. That Indian mind has simply lapsed in most cases for our educated men, and has subsided below the conscious level of culture.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 104)

Bhattacharyya argues instead that this education was something no Indian could confidently claim as his or her own (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 386). According to his diagnosis of the epistemological predicament of the colonial Indian subject, this educational system alienated Indians from the norms, ways of seeing, and habits of mind necessary for “an authentic intellectual life” (Shah, 1984, p. 473). Thus, what was taken to be genuine cultural progress during that time was a sham, or, in Bhattacharyya’s words, “imaginary progressiveness” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 105). What was taken to be genuine reform was rote imitation, and imitation is the very antithesis of freedom, as it stands in the way of creativity and fresh thinking, which must always be particular, contextually grounded, and differentiated.

It is in philosophy, or by philosophizing, in the sense described above, that Bhattacharyya sees the route to an authentic self-understanding and hence the route to freedom from cultural subjection and a “slavery of the spirit” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 103). The kind of *swadeshi* that is worth having, then, for Bhattacharyya, is one that trades in *desi* ideas. These are not merely ideas that happen to be Indian, but ideas that have been subject to doubt, to searching critical appraisal in light of multiple perspectives and orientations, and then found to be worth keeping. Ideas that are the result of such scrutiny, whatever be their historical or cultural origin, would be one’s own, *swadesh*. Bhattacharyya’s reflections have their roots in Gandhi’s own use of the terms *swaraj* and *swadeshi* in Indian political and philosophical discourse. As we will see, Bhattacharyya was not alone in theorizing these terms. But before we turn to others’ approaches to the articulation of the meanings of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* it is useful to begin with Gandhi’s own thought about these matters.

8.2. Gandhi’s *Swaraj*

Gandhi’s twin terms *swaraj* and *swadeshi* encapsulate both his ethical/political theory and his approach to a new economics of postcolonial life. *Swaraj* means self-mastery or self-rule, and both the *swa* and the *raj* are nicely ambiguous. The first can denote either the individual or the national subject; the latter either

spiritual self-control (that is, autonomy) or political rule (that is, autonomy). Gandhi was happy to play on this ambiguity and to argue that *swaraj* in the political sense is subordinate to and dependent on *swaraj* in the personal sense.

Swadeshi is also a nicely polysemic notion. The *swa* remains ambiguous in the familiar way. But how could *deshi* be read? Its primary sense involves the products of one's own land—a kind of “buy Indian” campaign—and indeed, that was a large component of *swadeshi*. The most prominent example concerns the campaign to buy Indian *khadi* instead of Manchester. But just as there is a spiritual as well as a temporal side to *swaraj*, there is a temporal and spiritual side to *swadeshi*. A commitment to valorizing and practicing one's own traditions, speaking one's own languages, and realizing one's own ideologies and forms of life is also *swadeshi*. This commitment in part—but only in part—motivates the material side, which has as its most direct goal the protection of the welfare of native industries, handicrafts, and livelihoods, though also, importantly, the forms of social organization they entail. For Gandhi, this commitment to valorize also entails a commitment to resist—to resist traditions, languages, ideologies, and forms of life alien to one's own culture. Resistance becomes a way of preserving one's own culture, and a way of preserving oneself from cultural heteronomy.

Gandhi's *swaraj-swadeshi* complex involves both ethical/political and economic dimensions. Ethically and politically, Gandhi calls for a kind of spiritual self-mastery, and for a materially self-sufficient social order governed at home, according to authentically national principles. Given the critique of modernity and capitalism that grounds this position, and in virtue of what Gandhi regarded as the impossibility of achieving either *swaraj* or *swadeshi* in the framework of modernity, this also demands, according to Gandhi, a premodern mode of production, consumption, and economic order. We now turn to the deeper motivations for this position, a position in social philosophy that turns out to be quite radical.

In *Hind Swaraj* (1909), Gandhi rails against such apparently innocuous targets as doctors, lawyers, and ordinary household machines. Many contemporary readers of these screeds react in shock and surprise, seeing this as a wholesale attack on anything new, and suspecting that Gandhi may have been nothing more than a slightly cracked Luddite. Why reject the good offices of those who might cure disease, or protect one from tyranny? Gandhi's critique does not, as one might be inclined to think, rely on the fact that these people take fees. He supports the right to earn a livelihood. Nor is this a wholesale rejection of anything mechanical. Why rail against power looms, but avail oneself of a spinning wheel? Against railroads, but not bullock carts? What is the fundamental principle that guides Gandhi's critique?

When Gandhi approaches machinery and technicians of all kinds, he does so with an eye to the way that they organize life, to the way that they occlude

that process of organization, and especially to the degree to which they make life opaque to those who live it. Consider the power loom or the locomotive engine. Gandhi emphasizes that each regulates the lives of those who live in their context. Their very production requires armies of regimented labor, concentration of capital, and the minimization of expenses through a competitive labor market pitting workers against one another. Each requires labor to attend and operate the machine on regular cycles, regimenting the lives of those who use them. Each contributes in turn to the maintenance and intensification of the socioeconomic order that gives it birth. (See also Bhushan and Garfield, 2015 and Sahasrabudhey [2002], pp 176–177, 179–191 for a similar analysis.)

Machinery has begun to desolate Europe. Ruination is now knocking at the English gates. Machinery is the chief symbol of modern civilization. It is a great sin.

The workers in the mills of Bombay have become slaves.... It would be folly to assume that an Indian Rockefeller would be better than the American Rockefeller. Impoverished India can become free, but it will be hard for an India made rich through immorality to regain its freedom.

—(Gandhi, 1962, pp. 102–108)

Moreover, these processes of regimentation are taken for granted, accepted as natural, and fade into the background of consciousness, just as Bhattacharyya argued that the regimentation of thought by foreign education fades into the background. There is hence a tacit, but inevitable process of occlusion of the social violence done by this machinery, machinery that arrives with the promise of liberation from toil. Finally, the machinery itself is opaque to those who use it. Nobody who drives a locomotive, rides in a train, sells tickets, works at a power loom, or buys Manchester has a clue how these machines actually work or could build one. That is the province of distant experts. The abstraction of the knowledge essential to production and its alienation from those most immediately involved in that production is complete.

The situation is very different for one involved with a bullock cart or a spinning wheel. These can be produced by ordinary people on their own time from locally available resources, using knowledge freely available in the communities in which the machines function. They can be used by individuals on their own time, with their own ends. And those who use them can simply see how they work. There is no abstraction, no alienation, and no reordering of society or redistribution of wealth and power built into these technologies, technologies though they may be (Sahasrabudhey, 2002, pp. 180–181). Gandhi's critique is

hence not a critique of the machine per se, but of the opacity and alienation built into the modern incarnation of machinery.

This makes sense of the otherwise bizarre attacks on doctors and lawyers. For these professions, in modernity, as opposed to their premodern antecedents—*ayurvedic* healers and *panchayat* elders—trade on specialized knowledge and enframing structures of power akin to those induced by power machinery. The medical establishment, with its machinery of public health officials, hospitals, and medical boards, regiments not only the production of doctors and their practice but also access to medicine and to knowledge about illness and cure. The practice of medicine becomes opaque to patients, and the knowledge required in order to maintain health becomes increasingly abstracted and unavailable. As Gandhi argues:

Doctors have almost unhinged us. . . . Their business is really to rid the body of diseases that might afflict it. . . . I over-eat. I have indigestion. I go to a doctor, he gives me medicine. I am cured. I over-eat again, and take his pills again. . . . A continuance of a course of a medicine must, therefore, result in loss of control over the mind. [. . .]

Hospitals are institutions for propagating sin. Men take less care of their bodies, and immorality increases.

—(Gandhi, 1962, pp. 63–64)

The legal establishment mystifies and regulates conflict and relations not only between individuals and the governments that structure their lives, but also between private individuals. Lawyers replace the dialogue with the lawsuit, the infraction with crime, justice with punishment. Here is Gandhi again:

. . . [L]awyers, as a rule, advance quarrels, instead of repressing them. Moreover, men take up that profession, not in order to help others out of their miseries, but to enrich themselves. [. . .]

It is wrong to consider that courts are established for the benefit of the people. Those who want to perpetuate their power do so through the courts. If people were to settle their own quarrels, a third party would not be able to exercise any authority over them. . . . The parties alone know who is right. We, in our simplicity and ignorance, imagine that a stranger, by taking our money, gives us justice.

—(Gandhi, 1962, pp. 59–61)

Whether it be a doctor or a lawyer, a mediator who arrives as an ally in fact alienates the patient or client from his or her own life and interests.

This focus on alienation and opacity also illuminates Gandhi's apparently simple and straightforwardly romantic attachment (reflecting the influences of Tolstoy and Ruskin) to the village as the appropriate forum for human relationships. One might wonder what is wrong with a city, per se. After all, they offer so much. Once again, while it might appear that Gandhi is simply rejecting whatever is new, he is not. Gandhi saw that like certain machines and certain professions, cities implicitly and inexorably regiment life. Cities, like machines, occlude from ordinary individuals the processes that structure their lives; they render the levers of control over one's life inaccessible, even invisible; and in the end, cities make life itself incomprehensible. Gandhi makes a similar point with respect to the modes transportation characteristic of modernity.

If we are to do without the railways, we shall have to do without the tramcars. Machinery is like a snake-hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery there are large cities; and where there are large cities, there are tram-cars and railways; and there only does one see electric light. . . . I cannot recall a single good point in connection with machinery.

—(Gandhi, 1962, p. 110)

For Gandhi in 1909, then, the problem with modernity is neither strictly political nor economical. As would Bhattacharyya in the 1930s, he saw that the real problem is epistemological and phenomenological. This is why Gandhi's call for *swaraj* and *swadeshi* constitutes a radical critique of modernity. Modernity and the gifts it promises inevitably alienate us from our own lives, from our own fellows, and hide that very alienation in the ribbons and bows of efficiency, rationality, wealth, and progress.

The problem of modernity is therefore a moral problem only in a derivative sense. Where we sought the self-mastery and freedom modernity promised, we lost the self-mastery and freedom that was once available to us, articulated in such profound texts as the *Gītā*, a mastery and freedom grounded in real *jñāna* and rendered impossible in the modern context. For this reason, Gandhi, for all of his stature, stands alone among the other figures in Indian intellectual life, in his opposition to a genuine renaissance. While he embraces the renaissance gesture of deference to a golden age, he does so not in order to create a version of modernity, but rather to forestall it. Nonetheless, as we shall see, his colleagues in the nationalist movement were happy to adopt and to reinterpret these two critical terms in the service of a genuine renaissance project. Gandhi hence deserves the title "father of the nation" albeit via a deviant causal chain. The key to that reappropriation, ironically, lies in the thought of Rabindranath Tagore.

We have seen in the previous chapter that Tagore and Gandhi disagreed about *swadeshi*. It is less widely appreciated that their disagreement—fundamental as it was—was grounded in even more fundamental agreement about general principles. Tagore agrees with Gandhi that national unity and freedom are spiritual, rather than political goals. He also agrees that a substantial engagement with specifically Indian philosophical, religious, artistic, and social traditions is the essential vehicle for the recovery of personal and political freedom. For each, this set of commitments is the basis for their critique of British rule, not the mere fact that the British are not Indian. But whereas this spiritual understanding of independence unites them, the conclusions they draw from this understanding divide them.

Tagore, like Bhattacharyya, rejects the negative side of Gandhi's *swadeshi*. Whereas Gandhi adopts an essentially parochial reading of values and institutions, with its rejection of all things foreign, and an essentially conservative view of identity, Tagore is instinctively cosmopolitan and progressive. A great deal of his critique of Gandhi's views of development rests on his view that Gandhi—despite his protestations to the contrary—never took economic considerations seriously as ethical—as having value in their own right.

The critique has two points: first, Tagore—despite his more general critique of the nation-state as such—regarded it as a duty of the extant nation to promote the material well-being of its citizens. To the degree that this requires the adoption of new, modern, or even foreign methods or forms of organization, this at least *prima facie* legitimizes those interventions. While Gandhi dons the mantle of poverty as a virtue, for Tagore poverty is by itself a problem. Second, Tagore regarded ideas and values as transnational: he appreciated Japanese art, English poetry, Chinese calligraphy. On his view, national growth required not insulation from the world, but integration into it; not the adoption wholesale of a foreign imposition, but the willingness to import what is worthwhile and to export one's own values in return.

We have in Tagore and Gandhi two distinct conceptions of freedom. Gandhi's freedom, which is at its core self-mastery, involves a renunciation of the material and political attractions of modernity as well as global entanglement, and the adoption of a simpler, more local, agrarian life. Tagore's freedom is entirely different. Tagore is after freedom from poverty and isolation, freedom to engage with others, and other cultures, freedom to create. Whereas Gandhi sees modernity as antithetical to freedom, Tagore sees it as a vehicle to that goal.

Recall that Gandhi's primary concern is epistemological: a concern about the opacity of the modern world. Opacity and its deleterious consequences are exacerbated in the Indian colonial context by the wholesale imposition of Western cultural practices, languages, and norms, themselves constituting additional opaque layers. The goal for Gandhi is to replace that opacity with transparency. In practical terms, this entails a shift from the complex specialized and regimented life of modernity to

a simpler, premodern life. The renunciation of modernity is therefore mandatory if any kind of a meaningful, autonomous life is to be recovered.

Tagore, on the other hand, does not see opacity, per se, as a problem for colonial India. Certainly, opacity is sometimes problematic. For instance, the opacity of a folk or classical tradition to the young who have been alienated from it is a problem. But here it is the alienation, not the opacity that is at stake. Tagore's deepest concern is not an epistemological gap but a material lack. Tagore cares in the first instance about poverty and the absence of choice it engenders. He sees an adequate standard of living and personal liberty, and the opportunity for creativity as the most fundamental human rights. Once poverty is eliminated, the citizenry can be trusted to choose their own lives, to create their own future, supported by trust in one another, in a government that respects their individuality and presumably in a progressive economic order that facilitates material, social, and artistic development. Tagore writes, in his essay "Nationalism,"

In America national habits and traditions have not had time to spread their clutching roots round your hearts. . . . But in this present age of transition, when a new era of civilization is sending its trumpet call to all peoples of the world across an unlimited future, this very freedom of detachment will enable you to accept its invitation and to achieve the goal for which Europe began her journey but lost herself midway.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 33)

Tagore's own romantic vision is that of a nation working in harmony, creatively united not by an abstract nationalism but by the concrete individual interests and goals of materially secure, freely developing individuals. For Tagore, then, specialization and expertise, and the division of labor modernity occasions, do not necessarily lead to alienation, or to an incomprehensibly complex life. Instead, the developments such a social order makes possible can in fact lead to a simpler life, and a life that facilitates greater understanding and contemplation of that which is worth understanding, precisely because one need not be concerned with, for instance, how one's sewing machine or medicine works. These matters can be entrusted to the relevant experts, whose expertise frees one to write poetry, to paint, to read or to write philosophy, or even to play cricket.

Let our life be simple in its outer aspect and rich in its inner gain. Let our civilization take its firm stand upon its basis of social cooperation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict. How to do it in the teeth of the drainage of our life-blood by the economic dragons is the task set before the thinkers of all oriental nations who have faith in the human soul. It is a sign of laziness and impotency to accept conditions imposed upon us by others who have other ideals than ours. We

should actively try to adapt the world powers to guide our history to its own perfect end.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 35)

Tagore therefore sees *swaraj* in terms of human rights as we would recognize them today, and, like Bhattacharyya, *swadeshi* in terms of a healthy respect for one's own cultural traditions and heritage in the context of global interchange. Gandhi, on the other hand, sees *swaraj* in terms of spiritual or yogic discipline and *swadeshi* as an isolation from that global interchange.

We can put Tagore's point in another way, though, and putting it this way identifies a real tension in Gandhi's view, one to which we adverted earlier. This is a tension that, if faced, may indicate that the view is ultimately unstable, or even incoherent. We can look at this from the standpoint of *swaraj* first. Gandhi must be able to argue for *swaraj* as an ideal. His argument for its importance rests on fundamental claims about human beings as free, as self-determining. And these are conceptions of human beings that derive not from the *Gītā*, but from Rousseau and Locke. These ideals of freedom are ideals of opportunity for self-development, and indeed a great deal of Gandhi's own antimodernist rhetoric, paradoxically, concerns the way the mechanization of life and abstraction of knowledge impedes self-development for most of us. This is indeed one of Gandhi's deepest insights.

But in the end, Gandhi's rural utopia, as Tagore points out, sabotages the kinds of development many would most desire. For many in colonial India, self-development was not to be found in cleaning toilets or spinning cloth; many Indians wanted more for their children than rural poverty; and many thought that what is distinctive about the human community is the possibility of intercultural communication and discussion. As we have seen, India was always cosmopolitan. What is one to do who finds medicine to be her calling, or the study of French literature? Or philosophy? Tagore and Bhattacharyya urge one to follow that calling, Gandhi to renounce it.

This brings us to a difference between Bhattacharyya's conception of *swaraj* and Gandhi's, and we can now see that Bhattacharyya is more aligned with Tagore than he is with Gandhi. Bhattacharyya, as we have seen, neither takes *swaraj* to be the extreme rejection of all ideas from outside, nor takes *swadeshi* to be cultural isolationism. Rather, on his view, each involves the critical engagement with all possible ideas, and the embrace of the possibility of progress, grounded in one's own cultures and values, but open to the appreciation of those of others:

It is wrong not to accept an ideal. . . simply because it hails from a foreign country. To reject it would be to insist on individuality for the sake of individuality and would be a form of national conceit and obscurantism.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 108)

But equally,

The form of practical life in which an ideal has to be translated, has to be decided by ourselves according to the genius of our own community. A synthesis of our ideals with Western ideals is not demanded in every case. Where it is demanded, the foreign ideal is to be assimilated to our ideal and not the other way.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 107)

On this account, self-mastery is the ability to imagine, not to restrict, a range of possible futures for oneself; nationalism is the commitment to develop, not to isolate one's own country, to advance its culture in dialogue with, not as an alternative to, the ideas and products of others.

This alternative approach to *swaraj* and *swadeshi* makes room for material development, but also for genuine human development, insofar as human development is facilitated by, rather than impeded by, open cultural exchange. It recognizes, as does Tagore in *Home and the World*, that Gandhian *swadeshi* comes with enormous costs, and that—just as Gandhi argued that freedom is not material but spiritual—these costs are not only material, but are spiritual as well. They involve the stultifying of intellectual, artistic, and material development for anyone who seriously buys into them.

It is central to Gandhi's conception of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* that each represents the realization of fundamental human rights. The problem is that it is hard to get a discourse of human rights off the ground without the individualism, universalism, and progressivism that characterize modernity. From the perspective of Tagore or Bhattacharyya, Gandhi seems to have sawn off the branch on which he needs to stand. It is no accident that Tagore, a scion of the Brahmo Samaj, might advance this critique of Gandhi. As we have seen in chapter 5, the Brahmo Samaj was always a cosmopolitan movement drawing freely from Western as well as from Indian traditions and always a modernist movement. Though, as we have seen, the Brahmo and Arya Samaj were different from each other in important respects, they shared this progressivism and cosmopolitanism.

8.3. *Swaraj*, Democracy, and the Renaissance Trope: Lajpat Rai's Modernism and Bhagavan Das's Traditionalism

Two of the most influential figures in the *swaraj* and *swadesi* movement and in the Indian National Congress in the first three decades of the twentieth century were Lajpat Rai (1865–1928), “The Lion of the Punjab,” and Professor Bhagavan Das (1869–1958) of Benares. While each concurred with Gandhi

in providing an essentially spiritual foundation for *swaraj* and *swadeshi* as pillars of Indian nationalism, and while each drew on Gandhi's vision of a lost golden age of Indian spiritual perfection as a vehicle for linking the glorious past to the anticipated future, they could not be more different in their approaches to this project. While Rai sees *swaraj* and *swadeshi* through the two lenses of the modernist Arya Samaj and Marxism, Das grounds his vision firmly in an antimodernist Gandhian orthodoxy. This tension indicates the difficulties of the renaissance project in the context of nation building, but also the diversity of views that contributed to that project, albeit under a single banner.

In a series of speeches and articles Rai articulates his own sense of *swaraj* and *swadeshi*. As we will see, while he joined Gandhi in the Indian National Congress, his interpretation of these key terms is somewhat different from that of the Mahatma. Rai adopts a less spiritual and psychological reading in favor of a more political one.

In a letter to *The Indian Review* (vol. 7, pp. 333–336, 1906) he writes:

For me the words *swadeshi* and patriotism are synonymous though I do not maintain or insinuate that those who are free traders are not patriots. . . . The *swadeshi* ought to make us self respecting, self reliant, self supporting, self sacrificing, and last, but not least, manly. The *swadeshi* ought to teach us how to organize our capital, our resources, our labor, our energies and our talents to the greatest good of all Indians, irrespective of creed, color or caste. It ought to unite us, our religious and denominational differences notwithstanding.

—(Rai, 1966a, p. 105)

There are several issues raised by this passage. While Rai shares with Gandhi an anticommunist sentiment, we also see the advocacy of muscular nationalism and an emphasis on *swadeshi* as an engine of economic organization. In this way Gandhi's conservative notions are turned into socially progressive ones. Rai makes this social and political edge even more explicit when in that same essay he writes:

It is commonly supposed that there are two sides to the *swadeshi* movement, one the political and the other the economic. Pure *swadeshi*, as some of the Anglo Indians choose to call it, is an economic movement and they profess to have a great sympathy for the same. Boycott of foreign made goods is held to be a political weapon upon the uses and ethics of which there is a great divergence of opinion.

—(Rai, 1966a, p. 103)

Where Gandhi regards *swaraj* and *swadeshi* as essentially spiritual or phenomenological, Rai ignores these inner dimensions entirely, emphasizing the political and economic.

In his presidential address to the All India *Swadeshi* Conference in Surat, Dec. 1907, Rai writes:

The extraordinary outburst of feeling for individuals which has found expression during the last two years throughout the length and breadth of our country is undoubtedly a striking and new spectacle. . . . It is one indication of the growing consciousness of national unity. India was hitherto said to be only a geographical expression. It has now begun to aspire . . . to a unified political existence and to a place in the comity of nations. The congeries of nations that are said to inhabit this vast territory have after a long period of disunion and disorganization begun to realize that after all they are one people, with one common blood running through their veins, with common traditions, a common history, and a common faith in the future. It is true that communities are divided from communities, sects from sects and provinces from provinces by differences of religion, language and customs. The wave of western civilization, however, with its unifying influences, is leveling down these differences and creating a community of interests and feelings which is a precursor of a new dawn in our life. Sometime ago people began to look back and find that, with all their differences, they were after all the branches of a common tree, descendants of a same stock, inheritors of the same civilization, and, with local differences, practically speakers of the same languages. Even Mohammadans, taken as a whole, could not say that in their traditions, languages, and customs, they had nothing in common with the Hindus. This looking backwards made them compare their present position with the position of other people in other parts of the world and led them to look forward. This has awakened the national consciousness.

—(Rai, 1966a, pp. 144–145)

Here Rai draws together a number of themes central to the Indian renaissance under the umbrella of *swadeshi*. First, we see the construction of Indian national unity, a unity constructed historically, culturally, and geographically. Second, we see a cosmopolitanism and a welcoming of Western political ideas (an idea that would be anathema to an orthodox understanding of *swadeshi*). Third, we see the gesture to the past as a guide to an Indian future. Fourth, this renaissance is realized in a new awakening, shared by all—or at least most—Indians, including both Hindus and Muslims, an awakening that is, despite differences in detail, a single phenomenon.

Rai's embrace of Western ideas in the service of Indian modernity is even more explicit in an article published in *The Tribune* in 1923, entitled "The immediate need for *Swaraj*":

Is there not force in the contention that once the capitalist and bourgeoisie (or, say the capitalist, the landlords and the middle classes) capture power, it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the masses consisting of the ordinary ryot, the laborer, the small peasant-proprietor, and the untouchable, to come into their own? Shall the government of an Indian bureaucracy be more efficient, liberal and progressive than that of the present bureaucracy of British officials?...

I am afraid it is impossible to give a positively negative answer to these questions... [W]e believe that the continuance of the present system of government and any delay in claiming immediate *swaraj*, is likely to deepen the slave psychology we have come to be possessed of. Because we believe that once a people on the way to nationhood become conscious of their degraded political position, any further acquiescence by them in the continuance of it is impossible. Foreign rule saps the moral foundation of the subject people. It unfits them for thinking independently. It destroys their self respect and their power of initiative; it prevents them from expressing themselves freely; it bars all kinds of effective organization, and fosters habits of dependence.... A nation can afford to have for a time an efficient administration, but a servile state is fatal to healthy growth of life. Organized and legalized anarchy is worse than an unorganized and spasmodic one.

—(Rai, 1966a, pp. 131–132)

Note the clear Marxism at work in the above paragraph. If one were to begin with a capitalist model for India, as proposed by the British, it would be impossible for the peasant or the working class to achieve a measure of autonomy. Moreover, while Rai concurs with Gandhi's conclusions regarding the moral imperative for *swaraj* and with his view that there should be an inner dimension to *swaraj*, he argues for this based not on Gandhian but on Marxian principles, drawing on an analysis of alienation and economic subjugation. This is hence a modernist rather than an antimodernist version of even the spiritual dimension of *swaraj*. It is also worth noting here the remarkable affinity between Rai's analysis of the psychological dimensions of subjugation on the one hand and *swaraj* on the other to Bhattacharyya's analysis of the same. Each of them focus on the creation of a "slave mentality" grounded in the normalization of an adoption of an alien intellectual framework, a phenomenon any Marxist would characterize as false consciousness. Rai's Marxist analysis is tempered by a note of pragmatism:

Just now we have two masters, *viz.* the foreign capitalist and the Indian capitalist. Surely it will be better to get rid of the former and educate our people to settle with the latter. We shall have to wait for long if we aim at displacing both simultaneously. By that time we may be thoroughly demoralized and lose even the little power of initiative and independent action we still possess.

—(Rai, 1966a, p. 135)

Note that this is not an abandonment of Rai's Marxist analysis or commitments, but rather a subordination of class struggle to nationalist struggle. Rai, as we note above, sees *swaraj* and *swadeshi* as the most important immediate goals of Indian national renewal. His ground for this conclusion is different, however. That ground, while Marxist and distinctively modernist, nonetheless supports the goal of an interim independent, but capitalist India, which, Rai hopes, will evolve into a socialist India.¹

We have yet to explore the links between Rai's nationalism and Marxism and his earlier ideological and religious roots in the Arya Samaj. We now turn to that connection, which, we will see, is close indeed. In his 1912 essay, "The Mission of the Arya Samaj," Rai writes:

The movement of the Arya Samaj . . . has a double mission. It is humanitarian as well as national. The Arya Samaj is humanitarian in so far as it aims to make men and women better. . . . The Arya Samaj believes that the Vedic religion offers the best solution of the world's difficulties . . . as such the mission of the Arya Samaj is worldwide and makes no distinction between one nationality and another. But intimately and inseparably connected with this mission is the task of reforming and regenerating the people who have from times immemorial believed in the teachings of the Vedas and in whose veins courses the ancient blood of the rishis that formulated and developed the Aryan civilization, which is at once the wonder and glory of the world. These people are the Hindus, and the Arya Samaj, as such, has special obligations towards them. In this sense the mission of the Arya Samaj is "national."

—(Rai, 1966a, p. 187)

Here we see a counterpoint to the modernism we find in Rai's Marxism, and a clear embrace of the renaissance gesture so characteristic (as we saw in

¹ It is ironic that his prediction was incorrect by about 180 degrees, with Indian independence achieved under a Nehruvian socialism, only to migrate toward a fully capitalist economy under the leadership of Manmohan Singh five decades later.

chapter 5) of Dayanand Saraswati's thought. Rai takes the Vedic root of the Arya Samaj, not the writings of Marx, to be the foundation of Indian social reform, and classical "Aryan civilization" to be the "wonder and glory of the world." In this earlier piece we do not see the internationalist rhetoric of the Marxist, but rather a "special obligation" to India, and indeed, specifically to the Hindus. The creative tension between Rai's early allegiance to the renaissance strategy and to the religious foundation of Indian culture on the one hand, and his later revolutionary Marxism on the other, is perhaps only partially mediated in his 1920 essay "Towards Freedom," where he writes:

What is progress? Progress is nothing but progress toward freedom. Your ancestors have taught to you the lesson that freedom is taken away the moment you have the feeling of dependence.... Freedom must come from within. Freedom must come from the within of the Mother of India. Freedom won't come from without. Freedom won't fall from the heavens. Freedom will rise goddess-like from our earth; and we shall rise, and with our own hands we shall offer flowers and we shall worship her.

—(Rai, 1966a, p. 9–10)

Rai here, in more poetic than systematically philosophical language, grounds his conception of freedom—of the goal of the nationalist struggle—firmly in the spiritual and in the historical-mythical conception of India. Freedom on this view comes not only from within, but from within the vast soul of "Mother India." Nonetheless, Rai understands its absence not as some kind of alienation from this history, but rather as dependence, and in this case clearly dependence on England and English rule. While freedom may be spiritual the problem of regaining it is firmly political. This account has the nice consequence of simultaneously grounding the independence struggle in Indian spiritual history and demanding that it be prosecuted through direct political action in defense of the legacy due in virtue of that national identity. This is the rhetoric both of renaissance and of renaissance unfinished.

We see a similar vision, grounded not in the ideology of Arya Samaj, but rather in an orthodox Hindu register (inflected by his theosophy) in the work of Rai's younger contemporary, the academic philosopher and political activist Bhagavan Das of the Benares Hindu University:

The immense advance made by the country under the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi in purification of heart, in courage of conviction, in peaceful, dignified, undefending resistance of wrong and shaming of the soul of the wrongdoers, this advance, indispensable to the success

of the congress movement, requires more and more to be steadied and confirmed and protected against backsliding, by a clear vision of the goal, a clearer knowledge of the aim that the country is striving to achieve.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 87)

Here Das emphasizes Gandhi's own individual purification as the vehicle for national awakening and progress. Nationalism here is conceived primarily as a spiritual, not as a political, phenomenon, and emphatically not as a manifestation of modernity, but as a return to a romanticized vision of a classical Indian way of being. In particular, as Das emphasizes, this is not to be (as, for instance, Rai would have it) the adoption of a Western political model in India, a tendency that Das, like Bhattacharyya, characterizes as a kind of intellectual slavery and a pollution of Indian cultural identity:

Some of us are therefore very anxious that while we are trying hard to get rid of what has been called slave-mentality (i.e., the tendency to slavishly imitate the west and to regard its ways as the best) in respect of the other aspects and departments of individual and communal life – we are very anxious that we must not suffer from the very climax and culmination of that “slave mentality” in respect of the political department of our life....

... If we import the parliamentary system direct and wholesale, then at least some of us fear greatly, we shall import with them the corresponding abuses and horrors in a more virulent form than they possess there. Imported epidemics rage more fiercely in fresh fields.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 92–93)

Das rejects British subjection as an alien imposition, and as antagonistic to Indian national identity; but he rejects democracy as well. The contrast with Rai could not be more plain. Rai's Marxism and easy comfort with Western models of economic and political organization is anathema to Das, who grounds his opposition to the import of Western political ideas and forms of social organization in language reminiscent of *Hind Swaraj*:

Swaraj means “self government.” But there are two selves in every individual, as well as in every Society and Nation: a higher self and a lower self; a selfish self and an altruistic self; the elements of virtue and the elements of vice. Government by the higher self only is true self-government. Government by the lower self is the same thing as government by another; for this lower self is the worse of foreign tyrants; and all foreign

government is, of necessity, and, either frankly or hypocritically tyrannical, because it is government by a selfish self...government of one race, or nation, or class, by another race, or nation, or class, which keeps itself apart, socially and biologically, can never be government by the higher self, however much it may pretend to be such....

... To secure true Self-government, true *Swaraj*, means, then, to secure the government of a people by its own higher self; and that means, to ensure purity and wisdom of head and heart in its legislators by wise election.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 93)

Government is here characterized not in political terms, or as a political goal, but rather in the terms of spiritual development—of an individual and of a people. This is a platform not for coexistence with British rule, but for its abolition. But neither the reasons for the evil of colonial rule nor the anticipated self-rule to follow it are characterized politically. The issue is ethical, albeit in a specifically religious register. And that argument is grounded in classical, not in modern civilization. Das emphasizes this point explicitly near the close of this essay:

The *principle of election* is wholesome, and in accord with the traditions of India. It is embodied in the republics of the Buddhist and pre-Buddhist days and in the village *panchayats* which are continuously living on into the present day. But the manner of its expression was and is different from that followed in the west. Here, the trusted of the people gradually and almost imperceptibly grew into that position, and came to be recognized as such, more or less unobtrusively, in the course of years, and therefore with certainty as to their character.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 97)

Democracy in any form recognizable to a Western political theorist here is rejected in favor of consensus recognition of the wise as leaders; centralizing authority in national government is rejected (as Gandhi would argue it ought to be) in favor of local rule by *panchayats*. The nationalist struggle in Das's view is not the struggle to establish a modern Indian state continuous in some way with a classical Indian philosophical/religious heritage, but rather to return to a pre-modern India, to reestablish that very heritage.

We see in the tension between Rai and Das the tension between the India envisioned by the Samaj movements, and by other, even more secular modernists such as B. K. Sarkar on the one hand, and the orthodox Gandhians on the other. Their views, although yoked in opposition to British rule, in a rearview mirror gaze toward an idealized past, and in their appeal to classical religion and philosophy as the

foundation for a postindependence state, diverge wildly when it comes to envisioning that state. One sees a modern, democratic socialist India, the other a classical India as a federation of villages under enlightened *panchayat* leadership.

These competing conceptualizations of Indian polity lead in many ways to tensions in postindependence Indian society between secularists and traditionalists, but that is not the topic of our present study. We are concerned instead with the ways in which these theoretical accounts frame political philosophy during the colonial period. We now turn from these epistemological, ethical, and political theorizations of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* to a very different approach to grounding that discourse, equally influential in the preindependence period: art and aesthetic theory.

8.4. *Swaraj* and *Swadeshi* in Art

Debates about aesthetic matters and about the role of art in *swaraj* and *swadeshi* were at the center both of Indian philosophical discourse and at the center of much nationalist discourse. John Keay (2011) argues that the Indian Archeological Survey was instrumental in the construction of both a British and an Indian imaginary of Indian history, and in setting art and art history at the basis of that imaginary. The archeological survey, in part because of the accident of Sir Alexander Cunningham's early discovery of the ruins of Sarnath, Sanchi, and Amaravati, determined that the identity of India was forged by the emperor Ashoka (third century B.C.E.). And indeed, the Ashokan period was the last time before British rule that the entire subcontinent was unified under one government. This allowed a geography according to which India could be understood territorially as a unity from Cape Comorin to Kashmir, and from Rajkot to Rangoon. It also allowed a history according to which an authentic unity, demonstrable in the archeological record, although interrupted and disrupted at various historical epochs, was now, under imperial rule, restored. Moreover, it established cultural unity represented in the visual arts as a criterion of identity. Ashokan Buddhist art became normative early on, but as additional art historical and archeological research continued, Hindu art became part of the grand narrative as well. The continuity of style and representational conventions identified by the art historians of the survey came to be the determinant of the continuity of Indian civilization.

As we saw in chapter 6, A. K. Coomaraswamy adopted this approach to the construction of national identity through art history and adapted it in the service of the independence movement. For Coomaraswamy, the boundaries Cunningham defined of legitimate British rule also defined the boundaries of the nation to be. So much for the geography, itself vouchsafed by evidence from art history. But the

second criterion, that of common culture, was also taken by Coomaraswamy to be guaranteed by art. In “Art and *Swadeshi*” he writes:

Swadeshi must be more than a political weapon. It must be a religious—artistic ideal. . . . But let us not love art because it will bring to us prosperity; rather because it is a high function of our being, a door for thoughts to pass from the unseen to the seen, the source of those high dreams and the embodiment of that enduring vision that is to be the Indian nation.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 120)

Just as the cultivation of art can be the foundation of revival, Coomaraswamy warns that its debasement in popular culture and in commercialism can spell the ruin of Indian civilization. In “*Swadeshi* True and False” he issues a jeremiad against this tendency:

We, who think that we are educated and progressive, we, who attend conferences and sit on legislative councils, who are rulers of states, or earn more princely incomes in courts of law, we ourselves have despised and hated everything Indian, and it is by that hatred that we have destroyed our industries and degraded the status of our artisans. And when at last our pockets were touched—then so far from realizing what we had done, we set ourselves to form *swadeshi* companies for making enamel cufflinks (with pansies on them), for dying yarn (with German dyes), or making uncomfortable furniture (for Anglo Indians). We never thought that the fault was in ourselves. We lived in caricatured English villas, and studied the latest fashion in collars and ties and sat on the verandahs of collectors’ bungalows and strove to preserve our respectability by listening to gramophone records of London music halls instead of living Indian singers—we learned to sit on chairs and eat with spoons and to adorn our walls with German oleographs and our floors with Brussell’s carpets: and then we thought to save our souls by taking shares in some *swadeshi* company by making soap.

True *swadeshi* is none of these things: it is a way of looking at life. It is essentially sincerity. Seek first this, learn once more the art of living and you will find that our ancient civilization, industrial no less than spiritual, will rearise from the ashes of our vulgarity and parasitism of today.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 9)

One might think that true freedom (*swaraj*) consists in education, power, and choice. Coomaraswamy rejects that vision here, arguing that freedom is

derived instead from an authentic relation to one's culture and history (*swadesh*), and that that *swadeshi* is in turn grounded in an authentic aesthetic sensibility. This is a considerably rarified version of any Gandhian conception of *swadeshi*. Aesthetic cultivation, then, is central to the cultivation of identity and freedom.

Therefore, Coomaraswamy argues, the great vehicle for the achievement of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* is the art school and the revival of the ancient craft traditions that define Indian culture. This is politically significant, and the significance only grows, as we shall see in chapter 12, as art and debates about authenticity in Indian art move to center stage in succeeding decades. The British East India Company had established several art schools in major centers in India. The goal of some of these schools was primarily to train young Indian artists in a genre of European representational art that came to be called the "Company School" in order to educate Indian artists in more "civilized" artistic technique, and to provide decorative art for the homes and offices of British colonialists in India. Coomaraswamy regards these schools as destructive to Indian culture, precisely because they distract from, rather than enhance aesthetic *swadeshi*. Other schools, however, endeavored to develop Indian artistic technique and to bring it into modernity.

In an address delivered to the Royal Asiatic Society in London, commenting probably on the Bombay school, in which the European tendency was particularly pronounced, he argues that European teachers have failed to appreciate the history and nature of Indian art and that by teaching European aesthetic theory and painting technique, they are actively contributing to the destruction of Indian culture:

How should the unfamiliar dialect be approached by one who would interpret it to others? One method would be to examine the interpretation, put upon its phrases by living or departed members of the same race, whose whole mental atmosphere and traditional culture are identical with or similar to those of the artists to be studied. The character of modern Indian education in English in India, has, however, been such as to deindianize the minds of those who might otherwise have been able to comment in English upon Indian art as envisaged by a really Indian mind: and on the other hand, so far as I am aware, some extraordinary oversight has prevented any European writer from seeking assistance in Sanskrit writings on the theory of aesthetics, or even in a study of the *silpa* sastras.

—("On The Study of Indian Art," Coomaraswamy, 1910, p. 48)

The Calcutta School, on the other hand, drew Coomaraswamy's praise:

The work of the modern school of Indian painters in Calcutta is a phase of the national awakening. Whereas the ambition of the nineteenth century reformers had been to make India like England, that of the later workers has been to bring back or to create a society in which the ideals expressed and implied in Indian culture shall be more nearly realized.

—(“The Modern School of Indian Painting,”
Coomaraswamy, 1910, p. 116)

Coomaraswamy draws these threads together in a reply to the then principal of the Bombay School, Cecil Burns:

I have said that the true work of schools of art today is to gather up and revitalize the broken threads of Indian tradition...like all true education in India, this work must be done by Indians. It is a question of national education. This question, touching as it does the vital base of the whole of Indian life, is of more importance than any political or economic reform. Rather than the achievement of any measure of progress in those directions, I would see Indians united in the demand for the complete and entire control of Indian education in all its branches, and determined that education shall produce Indian men and women—not mere clerks, or makers of pretty curiosities for passing tourists.

The one great question is this: - “is the compelling movement within the country, which we call Nationalism, strong enough for the Herculean task before it, the conversion of a generation of parasites into a nation of orientals? Every word of the answer to this question will be faithfully recorded in the progress or decline of Indian art.”

—(“The Function of Schools of Art in India:
A Reply to Cecil Burns,” 1909, pp. 44–45)

Coomaraswamy, drawing on the ideology introduced by the Archeological Survey, hence places Indian art at the center of debates about nationalism. Progress in Indian art is progress in the achievement of true *swaraj* through the achievement of true *swadeshi*. The decline of classical Indian art is therefore also the loss not only of Indian culture, but of Indian freedom. Coomaraswamy argues that true *swadeshi* is achieved through the cultivation of Indian arts continuous with the classical tradition grounded in the Ashokan period, and in the permeation of Indian consciousness by that artistic tradition. This distinction animates his condemnation of the Bombay school for encouraging art that slavishly imitates European models and hence undermines Indian identity, unlike the more Indian Calcutta art school, to which we return in more detail in chapter 12.

8.5. Flushing the Toilets: Swaraj without *Swaraj*

The philosopher, novelist, and activist Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), like Lajpat Rai, emerged from the Arya Samaj. His contributions to the freedom movement were primarily literary, but he has also contributed a great deal to Indian arts and aesthetic theory. Anand's concern throughout his literary oeuvre is for the need to understand and to improve the lives of those at the lowest strata of Indian life. He emphasizes that any political or social action that ignores those at the bottom is pointless. At the end of what is probably his best-known novel, *Untouchable* (1935), which is at its core about freedom, Anand raises Tagore's question to Gandhi: Does spiritual liberation alone do anything for those who are materially oppressed?

Our hero, Bakha, an untouchable, a day in whose life Anand chronicles in painful detail, is leaving the rally just addressed by the Mahatma. Bakha considers the three solutions he has encountered to the problem of untouchability. One possibility is conversion—the adoption of the alien Christian religion.² A second is the Gandhian solution of *swaraj* for the untouchable within the bounds of the Indian context: the cultivation of respect instead of contempt for the degrading work of sweeping toilets, but not its abandonment. But Bakha has heard about a third route to freedom: that of “the poet,” and it is clear that Anand has Tagore in mind here: import the flush toilet.

“That machine,” he thought, “which can remove dung without anyone having to handle it, I wonder what it is like?”

Anand has a firm eye on the achievement of genuine freedom that bypasses the ideologies that framed so much of the independence movement, in favor of attention to the material conditions of life. He urges the betterment of the lot of those oppressed by colonial rule and by traditional Indian society alike through technological progress.

As the brief Indian twilight came and went, a sudden impulse shot through the transformations of space and time, and gathered all the elements that were dispersed in the stream of his [Bakha's] soul into a tentative decision: “I shall go and tell father all that Gandhi said about us,” he whispered to himself, “and all that that poet said. Perhaps I can find

² The option of conversion as an escape from untouchability and in general from caste oppression was not only offered by Christian missionaries. The lawyer and architect of the Indian Constitution, himself an untouchable, B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) led a mass conversion of untouchables to a new form of Buddhism as a mechanism for escaping untouchability. The Ambedkar Buddhist movement survives to this day.

the poet some day and ask him about his machine.” And he proceeded homewards.

—(Anand, 1986, pp. 156–157)

Anand neither insists on a spiritual *swaraj* nor on an ideologically nativist *swadeshi*, nor even, as does Coomaraswamy, on material continuity with Indian practice. Anand instead extends Coomaraswamy’s emphasis on material culture, understanding *swaraj* as independence grounded in material self-sufficiency and in modern technology.

Indian discussions of nationalism, of *swaraj* and *swadeshi*, as we have seen, often have a strong nativist and essentialist strain. There is a concern to determine what it is to be authentically Indian, to preserve an Indian history and to build a distinctively Indian national identity grounded in that history. That is in part what it is to engage in a renaissance. On the other hand, as we have also seen, Indian identity never was pure, and was often conceived in terms of its relation to other cultures and other peoples and in terms of its own internal diversity. Many of the ideas that animate Indian nationalism themselves are drawn not from classical Indian sources, but from a cosmopolitan engagement with modern European thought.

We have also seen that Indian nationalism and discourse about Indian identity refer not only to art and politics, but also to a tradition of philosophical reflection. While the nationalist discourse takes that reflection in an explicitly political direction, that political discourse—and even discourse about the arts, as we will see in chapter 12—is grounded in extensive metaphysical and epistemological reflection. Indeed, as we will see in the next three chapters, many of the figures we have already encountered in the context of political theory were themselves important contributors to the revival and extension of Indian metaphysics and epistemology.

We will see in these chapters how the engagement with Western philosophy enriched and informed Indian philosophical speculation, and how Indian philosophers united Indian and British idealism in the neo-Vedānta movement. This complex philosophical movement, with roots in the Vedas and Upaniṣads, in Islamic thought and in British neo-Hegelianism, underpins modern Indian aesthetic theory as well as emerging Indian conceptions of national identity and the political theory that animated the Indian independence movement. We now turn directly to the engagement by Indian philosophers with European philosophy and the impact of interaction between Indian and British philosophers on the development of modern Indian philosophy.

The Cambridge Connection

Idealism, Modernity, and the Circulation of Ideas

It is a mistake to think that this exhortation to conquer matter and assimilate it, is new to Indian philosophy and is an importation from the West. ... But it is on the other hand to be ungrateful to the West to say that Western thought has no part to play in this change of tone and stress in the philosophies of the contemporary thinkers. It helped and would help in future, too, to bring into prominence those idealistic systems which preached not an escape from the world but its transformation into spirit.

—(Raju, 1953a, p. 441)

One of the more curious facts about late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century world intellectual history is that the global advance of science and its apparent threat to tradition is almost always met by the rise of idealism as a strategy for reconciling these forces in modernity. One might not expect a thesis that denies the reality of the external world to be the rhetorical weapon of choice at this historical juncture, but a quick glance around the world shows that one would be wrong. In the United States, the Transcendentalists adopted a potpourri of Indian and Western views to articulate a vision of a world constructed by mind (Versluis, 1993); in China claims to Western civilizational superiority were met by the resurrection of Buddhist Yogācāra (Makeham, 2014); in Europe, Hegel and Fichte ruled philosophy; in Britain the neo-Hegelians dominated Scotland, Oxford, and Cambridge; and in India we see the rise both of neo-Vedānta in its various forms and a new Sufi idealism.

The rise of idealism in India at this time, therefore, is neither unique nor independent of global intellectual currents. The one respect in which the Indian situation is unique is that here, more than anywhere else in the world, we see a distinctive set of versions of idealism articulated in a self-conscious dialogue between European and Asian philosophical ideas, mediated often by direct interaction between British and Indian philosophers.

In this chapter, we explore the variety of idealist positions articulated in India as a response to the interaction between neo-Hegelian philosophy and the Vedānta and Islamic traditions. We begin in Oxford and Cambridge with attention to the work of James Stirling, T. H. Green, Edward Caird, and F. H. Bradley, whose tradition inspired prominent Indian idealists. We then turn to the direct impact of Cambridge philosophy on the Indian scene. We will discuss the important role of Scottish missionaries who taught philosophy in Indian universities and who mediated this influence, such as A. C. Hogg, W. Hastie, and W. S. Urquhart. We will attend to teaching lineage, where we will encounter J. M. McTaggart and A. N. Whitehead as principal figures. We will explore the ways in which Cambridge was emulated in India. We then consider the Indian views—Muslim and Hindu—that emerged from this interaction.

9.1. Cambridge and India: British Neo-Hegelianism

German idealism, as articulated by Kant and Hegel (and to a lesser extent Fichte and Schelling) was a reference point for much of the most important academic philosophy in colonial India;¹ but most Indian philosophers² approached German idealism through the mediation of the British neo-Hegelians, and often through the presentation of that tradition by India's great historian of Western idealism, Hiralal Halder (1865–1942), whose work *Neo-Hegelianism* (1927) provides the narrative of the movement that informs most Indian engagement with it. We begin in Scotland and England, and attend to Halder's reading of that tradition. British neo-Hegelianism is not entirely an Oxbridge affair: its roots are in Scotland, and a great deal of the transmission of British neo-Hegelianism is due to Scottish missionary teachers.

James Hutchison Stirling (1820–1909) of Edinburgh initiates the neo-Hegelian movement in the United Kingdom. Although denied the chair in moral philosophy in Edinburgh by a letter from John Stuart Mill, who disapproved of the teaching of Hegel, Stirling published important early work in English on Hegel, including *The Secret of Hegel* in 1865. Stirling explicitly thematized the apparent conflict between science and religion in the context of philosophy precipitated by the rise of evolutionary theory and the increasingly comprehensive reach of the physical and biological sciences in the nineteenth century. He argued that both empiricism and positivism were attempts to reconcile these two sources of knowledge, but that each of them fails. Hegel, he argues, provides the route

¹ A more direct discussion of Kant's influence is to be found in chapter 10.

² With notable exceptions, such as K. C. Bhattacharyya and S. Vahiduddin.

to a synthesis of the transcendental viewpoint provided by religion and the empirical standpoint of science.

In developing this reading of Hegel, Stirling unwittingly provides the foundation for an Indian appropriation of Hegel in the more realistic traditions of Vedānta as well as in the experiential tradition of Sufism. He reads Hegel as concerned with the concrete reality of life, and with the task of showing how that life is ordered by conceptual activity. This yields an idealism that takes seriously the fact that the highest representation of reality is to be found in the absolute idea of totality, but an idealism that also takes seriously the empirical reality of the world that idea orders. Stirling puts the point this way:

Many people, doubtless, from what they hear of Hegel, his Idealism, his Absolute Idealism, &c., will not be prepared for this. They have been told by men who pretend to know, that Hegel, like some common conjuror, would prove the chair they sat on not a chair, &c. &c. This is a very vulgar conception, and must be abandoned, together with that other which would consider Hegel as impracticable, unreal, visionary, a dreamer of dreams, “a man with too many bees in his bonnet.” Hegel is just the reverse of this; he is wholly down on the solid floor of substantial fact, and will not allow himself to quit it—no, not for a moment’s indulgence to his subjective vanity—a moment’s recreation on a gust—broom-stick—of genius.

—(Stirling, 1865 p. xlix)

Stirling, according to Haldar, shows that “it is the plain man innocent of philosophy, not Hegel that lives in an unreal world of abstractions” (Haldar, 1927, p. 6). Haldar’s point is central to understanding the modern Indian engagement with idealism, whether in its European or Indian avatar. Idealism in this context is not contrasted with realism, but rather is presented as a version of realism. Idealism, according to Haldar, is the doctrine that the empirically real is only real for us to the degree that it constitutes a systematic unity, and that unity can only be imposed by the structure of conceptuality. In the Hegelian system, that structure culminates in and is determined by a single concept, the absolute. The absolute, in turn, subsumes all more particular concepts as its determinations in a cascade that concludes with the absolutely concrete. Reality, therefore, is ideal in that it is entirely comprised by the absolute idea. Nonetheless, it is real in that all that the absolute idea comprises is concrete.

Stirling sees Hegel as completing Kant’s project. Kant develops a transcendental idealism in which the categories that structure thought are psychological; that is, they are specific to human thought. While they have a kind of empirical reality themselves, they have a contingency from a transcendental point of view

despite their necessity as the conditions of the possibility of judgment. Hegel, according to Stirling, subsumes the categories as necessary determinations of the single idea of the absolute. Reason, rather than the understanding—the idea, rather than mere concepts, however pure—becomes the determinant of reality. Haldar puts it this way:

The categories, for [Stirling], are neither twelve in number nor subjective. They are in Stirling's words, "the universal principles of reason which constitute the diamond net into the invisible meshes of which the material universe concretes itself."

—(Stirling, 1865, p. 95)³

So, in one sense, we see Hegel as read by Stirling to be more idealistic than Kant: That which Kant takes to be the foundation of the ideal status of the world, Stirling takes Hegel to show to be itself merely ideal. In another sense, however, Stirling, in his interpretation of Hegel, is less idealistic. He draws no distinction between the ontological status of the physical and that of its transcendental conditions. Haldar expresses Stirling's view as follows:

From beginning to end, Hegel is wide awake and thoroughly realistic. He never says that the world in which we live is not as real as it seems. His contention is that it is *more* real than it is taken by the realist to be. The physical is, in its last interpretation, spiritual without ceasing to be physical.

—(Haldar, 1927, p. 14)

This shows why it makes sense to use idealism—at least this kind of Hegelian idealism—as a vehicle for showing how science and idealist religion can be reconciled. Stirling's spiritualization of the physical allows him to leave science in place but yet to see all that it delivers as in the absolute sense merely ideal. In the Indian context, the scientific articulation of the spiritual, we will see, allows Vedānta or Sufi conceptions of the absolute to remain in place, with science providing the analysis of the world of appearance.

There is a political dimension to this as well. Stirling was—as were many, though not all, of his British and Indian followers—profoundly anti-democratic. He grounded this suspicion of democracy in his Hegelian philosophy. Haldar puts Stirling's point as follows:

³ While we have no evidence that Stirling was acquainted with Indian thought, his "diamond net" certainly evokes the Indian image of the net of Indra, often deployed in idealistic contexts.

All sound political principles must be determined by the fundamental fact that individuals can realize their ends only in fellowship and cooperation with each other, which involves their subordination to the whole, the state to which they belong. This means that “in a state *there must be a principle of central authority.*”

—(Haldar, 1927, p. 16)

We will see that especially in the context of colonial Muslim political thought, this neo-Hegelian anti-democratic doctrine played a significant role in the communalization of Indian politics, grounding opposition to the majoritarian democratic policies of the Indian National Congress.

Thomas Hill Green (1836–1882) casts a long shadow on Indian metaphysical thought, but he was particularly attractive to many Hindu philosophers. This is in large part because his political and ethical thought—in particular, his view, articulated in his *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation* (Green, 1911) that moral rights take precedence over legal rights—was so congenial to a liberal nationalistic movement. On the Muslim side, his religious philosophy, particularly his identification of the human relation to God as a relation to self was congenial to Sufi-inspired thought about subjectivity, and appears in the work of Iqbal.

Green brought neo-Hegelianism to Oxford, in doctrine though not in name. While his thought bears a clear Hegelian stamp, and while he is clearly read in India—through Haldar—as neo-Hegelian, he does not mention Hegel directly in his most important work, *The Prolegomena to Ethics*, and mentions him rarely elsewhere. Green opens the *Prolegomena* with the following question: “Can the knowledge of nature be itself a part or product of nature?” (Green and Bradley, 1906, p. 13)

Green argues, in good Hegelian fashion, for a negative answer to this question on the grounds that knowledge itself is what gives nature meaning. Green’s point is that nature—or the empirical world—can only be understood as a network of phenomena standing in determinate relations to one another, themselves subsumed under higher categories. This relational or categorical structure, however, he argues, cannot derive only from the things themselves, but must involve a relation to a subject that itself stands outside of nature and is the source of those relations.

Green’s metaphysical view did not receive universal assent in India. Haldar himself is critical, arguing that Green fails to provide a sufficiently rigorous account of relations to make his theory plausible⁴ (Haldar, 1927, p. 35). Green opens his discussion of ethics by characterizing the domain as

⁴ A. C. Mukerji, on the other hand, in his effort to develop a more modern Vedānta, is, as we shall see in chapter II, more sympathetic to this picture.

... governed by the consciousness of there being some perfection which has to be attained, some vocation which has to be fulfilled, some law which has to be obeyed, something absolutely desirable, whatever the individual may for the time desire; that it is in ministering to such an end that the agent seeks to satisfy himself.

—(Green and Bradley, 1906, p. 184)

The idea that moral life is given its point and structure by the unifying principle of an ideal of self-realization, which is the only objective goal of action, is Hegelian in spirit. This formulation is also strikingly similar to the way that Aurobindo characterizes the objective goal of human life in *The Life Divine* in 1939 (Aurobindo, 1977) as the transcendence of finite human consciousness and value in the service of the achievement of suprahuman status. This affinity is reinforced by Green's religious doctrine that God is manifest only in concrete humanity, and that we only succeed in manifesting God when we achieve human perfection.⁵ Green puts it in this way in words that could be written by Aurobindo himself:

[Self-consciousness] is an element of identity between us and a perfect Being, who is in full realization what we only are in principle and possibility. That God is, it entitles us to say with the same certainty that the world is, or that we ourselves are.

—(Green and Toynbee, 1886, p. 85)

While Green's ethics are perfectionist, and while, in neo-Hegelian fashion, he also argues that ethical categories only make sense in the context of a social milieu, he develops on this basis an argument for a robust sense of individual human rights. This account is not a familiar liberal democratic account, but foregrounds the moral over the legal and the political, and so represents a foundation for revolution against immoral legislative and political institutions consistent with a broadly Hegelian perspective. For this reason it was attractive to those involved in the nationalist movement, although not necessarily to loyalists.

Edward Caird (1835–1908), also a Scott, assumed Green's mantle at Oxford upon Green's death. He was the teacher of John Watson (1847–1939) and John Stuart Mackenzie (1860–1935), each of whom is also influential on Hiralal

⁵ The Indian moral philosopher M. Hiriyanna's (1871–1950) interpretation of classical Indian ethical thought reflects Green's viewpoint. Drawing on Śāṅkara, the *Vaiśeṣika sūtra* and the *Gītā*, he also argues that the end of morality is the complete realization of the possibility of perfection in the self, and sees that goal as an objective goal for any consciousness. Hiriyanna also sees the self as essentially embedded in a social matrix, with self-realization and social perfection as inseparable aims (Hiriyanna, 1975).

Haldar, A. C. Mukerji and others. While Caird shares Green's generally neo-Hegelian perspective, he is critical of Green's purely negative approach to consciousness: whereas Green argues that consciousness is entirely external to the world of experience and discursivity, Caird argues that even Green's assertion that it is external is evidence that it can be positively characterized and known.

This emphasis on the possibility of the reflective knowledge of consciousness by itself is taken up, as we will see in chapter 11, by Bhattacharyya in his own exploration of the possibility of self-knowledge, as well as by A. C. Mukerji. Haldar recognizes that it is Caird who shifts neo-Hegelianism beyond the strictures of Kant's proscription on knowledge of the self, and so opens the possibility of a fusion with the Vedānta tradition that so valorizes self-knowledge even if the self has a peculiarly transcendent status. (Haldar, 1927, p. 77)

Caird's version of neo-Hegelian idealism also has affinities to Aurobindo's version of Vedānta, which emphasizes the world not as an illusion but as a manifestation of Brahman. Caird writes:

If it is possible for us to carry back the world of experience to conditions that are spiritual, there seems to be nothing that should absolutely hinder us from regarding the world positively as the manifestation of spirit and from reinterpreting the results of science by the aid of this idea—however difficult it may be to realize satisfactorily such an idealistic reconstruction of science.

—(Caird, 1879, p. 561)

This provides a natural connection to the *līlāvāda* version of Vedānta that we will see Aurobindo defending in chapter 10. It also connects that project directly to Stirling's concern with the reconciliation of science and religion that motivates the resurrection of idealism as a version of modernism.

Haldar recognizes explicitly the significance of the distinction between Green's and Caird's idealisms: whereas Green reduces the world to mere idea and privileges consciousness as the origin of the relations he takes to constitute reality, Caird emphasizes the reality of the empirical world as we find it and takes spirit to be that which is manifested in that material world. For this reason, while Caird and Green are each monists, the monism of Caird makes possible both the knowledge of the self and the affirmation of the reality of the complex empirical world. We will see Haldar's approval of this version of neo-Hegelian theory taken up in the approval of a more realistic version of Vedānta not only by Aurobindo, but also in P. T. Raju's important discussion of the varieties of neo-Vedānta (Raju, 1953a).

Caird also figures as an unwitting mediator between an important strand of idealist Scottish theology and Vedānta, a mediation in which missionaries, such

as Alfred George Hogg (1875–1954) and William Spence Urquhart (1877–1964), who taught at Madras Christian College and at Scottish Church College in Calcutta, respectively, also played crucial roles. In his 1891–1892 Gifford lectures at St Andrews, Caird the theologian discusses the relationship between the divine and the world in terms of manifestation. The terms in which he does so are strikingly akin to those we find in realistic Advaita Vedānta of this time, to be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Caird refers to the goal of human life as the attainment of divinity on this earth:

... [I]f the consciousness of objects and also the consciousness of the subject are illusive, insofar as they are separated from the consciousness of God, yet they are the necessary expressions of that consciousness. The unity reveals itself in the diversity, and cannot be divorced from it. Hence, in the theoretical sphere, we are obliged to reinstate the finite as the manifestation of the infinite; and, in the practical sphere, we have to recognize finite ends as elements in the infinite good, or forms in which it has to be realized. It is thus only that we can understand how the same teacher, who seems to bid us avert our eyes altogether from Earth and look only to heaven, was he who turned all nature into a parable of the kingdom of God.... It is as if he were constantly saying, “separate nature and man from God, and they become less than nothing, worse than non-existent: refer them both to the divine, regard nature as the garment of deity, and man as the son of God, and they become as real as God Himself.”

—(Caird, 1899, pp. 162–163)

These words resonate with Aurobindo’s account of the relation between Brahman and the empirical world in *Life Divine*.

The universe and the individual are necessary to each other in their ascent. Always indeed they exist for each other and profit by each other. Universe is a diffusion of the divine All in infinite Space and Time, the individual its concentration within limits of Space and Time. Universe seeks in infinite extension the divine totality it feels itself to be but cannot entirely realize; for in extension existence drives at a pluralistic sum of itself which can neither be the primal nor the final unit, but only a recurring decimal without end or beginning. Therefore it creates in itself a self-conscious concentration of the All through which it can aspire. In the conscious individual Prakṛti turns back to perceive Puruṣa, World seeks after Self; God having entirely become Nature, seeks to become progressively God.

—(Aurobindo, 1977, p. 50)

Another theme running through Caird's metaphysics and theology that finds echoes in Indian neo-Vedānta is the interpenetration of the ideal and the real, an idea we will see not only in Vivekananda and Aurobindo, but also in Tagore, Mukerji, S. S. Sastri, V. S. Iyer and P. T. Raju among others as a way of naturalizing the idealism of Vedānta. Caird builds on this idea to develop a more explicitly theological account of morality.

... [T]he ideal reveals itself in and through the real; or, to put it more accurately, ... the ideal reveals itself as *the reality* which is hidden beneath the immediate appearance of things.... In ... complete devotion..., man becomes, what is his innate vocation to be, the organ and manifestation of God. From this principle it necessarily follows that the idealizing process which death sets on foot and by which the individual is lifted out of the limitations of mortality, is no mere visionary or poetic exaggeration, but only a recognition of the inmost truth of things.

—(Caird, 1899, pp. 229–230)

No survey of the British Neo-Hegelian influences on colonial Indian philosophers would be complete without mention of Francis Herbert Bradley (1846–1924).⁶ The outlines of Bradley's monistic idealism are well known. Both his monistic identification of appearance and reality and his absolute idealism resonated immediately with Indian thought both on the Vedānta and on the neo-Sufi sides of the Indian philosophical divide. Bradley's identification of thought, feeling, and will as a triune identity with self and hence of reality would have been again immediately familiar to anyone operating in the framework of *sat-cit-ānanda*, the Vedānta unity of truth, consciousness, and bliss.

Bradley was widely respected in India. He was either read in *Appearance and Reality* (Bradley, 1930) or through Haldar's excellent exegesis in his *Neo-Hegelianism*. There (pp. 255–256) Haldar remarks that Bradley is an improvement on Hegel, cleaning up some difficulties in Hegel's theology through his insistence that the absolute and consciousness must be regarded as distinct entities. This understanding of neo-Hegelian philosophy is more akin to the nondual Advaita Vedānta that emphasizes the reconciliation of difference in non-duality than to a straightforward monism, which fails to recognize difference in the first place, and was very influential in the development of Indian idealism.

We have lingered over the British neo-Hegelian tradition. This is because, as Raju notes in the passage we quote in the epigraph to this chapter, the story of

⁶ This is not to say that others, such as Pringle-Pattison, Bosanquet, Whitehead, John Laird, and McTaggart were not important—but we will have a chance to examine their specific impact on particular philosophers below.

the development of idealistic thought in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India is a story of cultural interaction. It is neither a simple exegesis of classical Vedānta or Islamic thought (depending on the philosopher) nor a mere imitation of European thought. It emerges instead from a creative, cosmopolitan engagement with philosophical thought both in Europe and in Asia, and it is impossible to understand its content without attention to the details of the European side of the equation. Attention to this interaction also reminds us of the concrete details of the transmission of these ideas to India both by Indians who studied in the United Kingdom and by Scotsmen, themselves often orientalists or missionaries, who brought these ideas to India.

9.2. Evangelizing for Hegel: Scottish Missionaries to India

In this section we focus on a special breed of missionary in India: the hybrid that we will call the philosopher-missionary. These missionaries were typically trained in the United Kingdom in philosophy and taught philosophy in colonial Indian universities. Some were attached to missions before they arrived; others were academics who returned to the United Kingdom to receive missionary training after a teaching stint in India. We are interested in this category of missionary for three reasons: first, they are the professors of many of the Indian (Hindu and Muslim) students who will become the distinguished philosophers of their time; second, as philosophers by training who happen also to be missionaries, their primary loyalty is to philosophy, and therefore to the argument in support of their position, even if their ultimate goal is often to show the superiority of Christianity. Third, like the more obviously Indian philosophers whose work is the focus of this book, these missionaries are philosophers in India, engaging both with Indian and Western philosophy, and doing so in a self-conscious dialogue between traditions.⁷ The community of missionary philosophers is thus a curious mirror-image of the community of indigenous Indian academic philosophers; perhaps more accurately, they are inextricably entangled members of a single community to which some members might nonetheless deny them admission.

In what follows we will look at the work of two of the most influential philosopher-missionaries in colonial India—A. G. Hogg in Madras and W. S. Uruqhart

⁷ Indeed, the surprisingly thoughtful *Indian Missionary Manual* (Murdoch, 1889) admonishes aspiring missionaries not only to learn vernacular languages and local customs so as to facilitate sermonizing, but also to take an interest in classical languages and the philosophical systems of India in order to immerse themselves in the rich culture into which they are about to enter. The noted missionary Alexander Duff also advocated the study of English by Indians, and of Indian culture and history by missionaries. (Duff, 1889).

in Calcutta—and trace some of the important connections between their work and those of the students who were inspired by them to develop their ideas further and to respond to their arguments with searching critique. Just as Scots dominate the British neo-Hegelian scene, we find that Scots dominate the academic missionary scene in India.

Alfred George Hogg (1875–1954) was trained in philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, under the great historian of philosophy Andrew Seth Pringle Pattison (1856–1931), about whom we will have more to say below. In India, Hogg became professor of philosophy at Madras Christian College and, famously, the teacher of Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, one of India's best known philosophers from this period, who also was to become the second president of independent India.⁸ Hogg was elected president of the Indian Philosophical Congress in 1935 (while his student, Radhakrishnan, was elected earlier, as its third president, in 1927).

Hogg's most significant influence on idealist philosophy in India derives from his work *Karma and Redemption* (1909) whose subtitle, "An Essay toward the Interpretation of Hinduism and the Re-Statement of Christianity" characterizes the hermeneutic methodology he preferred—that of selective contrast—rather than one of straightforward comparison (or, for that matter, simple dismissal, based on theological doctrine). Selective contrast, as opposed to comparison, involves the reflective assessment of contrasting ideas and arguments relevant to a particular doctrine rather than merely noting similarities and differences. In a 1904 letter, Hogg puts it this way: "I feel that if Christianity is to conquer India the old doctrines must go first and new ones – like the old and yet Indian in color—must take their place" (reprinted in the introductory essay to the 1970 version of *Karma and Redemption* by Eric J. Sharpe, p. x).

The genesis of the book is significant: it first appeared as a series of essays in the *Madras Christian College Magazine*, and was a response to an essay by Subrahmanya Sastri in the same magazine, entitled "Hindu philosophy," in which Sastri argued that on the Indian view there was no mystery of unmerited suffering in virtue of the Hindu belief in the doctrines of karma and rebirth. As a consequence, he argued, neither justification for such suffering, nor, apparently, social or moral action is required. This therefore constituted a challenge to Christianity and the philosopher in Hogg accepted this challenge in the essays he wrote for the magazine.

The details of Hogg's view about the possibility of synthesis are interesting. They are, however, less important than is the fact that Radhakrishnan read the exchange between Sastri and Hogg in the pages of the magazine. Radhakrishnan,

⁸ And, in another generation, also the college of one of this book's authors (Nalini Bhushan).

who was then Hogg's student of philosophy, challenged Hogg's view in his doctoral dissertation entitled "The Ethics of Vedānta and its Metaphysical Suppositions." In this dissertation, he developed his own version of idealism, which we address in the next chapter.⁹

This exchange also calls our attention to a practice of sustained critical discussion between ethnically British and ethnically Indian philosophers in India regarding issues raised by both traditions. The circulation of ideas (also represented in a more explicitly theological register in Ram Mohan Roy's engagement with Christianity) between these communities is more representative of the history of Indian philosophy during this period than is a description in terms of hegemonic imposition of a Western canon.

There is at least one more connection that bears mention in this narrative of the circulation of ideas. We noted earlier that Hogg was the student of Pringle-Pattison at Edinburgh and was instrumental in bringing Pringle-Pattison's Hegel scholarship to India. Pringle-Pattison's legacy in India as a historian and interpreter of European philosophy is on par with Haldar's own historical legacy in that same period. There were legions of students of philosophy in India learning about Kant, Hegel, and the British neo-Hegelians through Pringle-Pattison's textbook. In addition, and more to the specific point that interests us here, if we look carefully at Pringle-Pattison's conception of philosophy, we see that it is a conception driven by his idealist sympathies. For him, philosophy is, at its core, "against treating parts as wholes, against isolating parts from their connections" (Pringle-Pattison, 1907, p. 169).

The idealist conception of philosophy defended by Pringle-Pattison (and taken up as well by Hogg) is also articulated by K. C. Bhattacharyya in his well-known essay "The Concept of Philosophy" (reprinted in Bhushan and Garfield 2011). This essay is typically read, and, indeed, revered, for what it says about subjects and objects, and about grades of consciousness. It is therefore also typically taken as a shortened version of K. C. Bhattacharyya's book *The Subject as Freedom* (K. Bhattacharyya, 1930) to which we will turn in chapter II. We, however, suggest a different reading of "The Concept of Philosophy." In the opening sentence, Bhattacharyya identifies the goal of this essay: "An explication of the concept of philosophy appears to me more important than the discussion of any specific problem of philosophy" (K. Bhattacharyya, 1930, p. 517).

Bhattacharyya is concerned here not with the concept of the subject, consciousness or freedom, but with the concept of philosophy itself. His view is that one needs first to know what philosophy is in order to be able to approach

⁹ To complete one epicycle in this complex orbit, Radhakrishnan was later to lecture in the United Kingdom and the United States, discussing Indian idealism with British and American philosophers on their respective home turfs.

successfully particular problems from a philosophical perspective. This essay may therefore be seen as developing a notion of content that is distinctly philosophical, rather than a particular philosophical theory, whether it be of the subject, or of consciousness, or of object, truth or spirituality, although these are discussed by him in the different sections of his essay. What is philosophy, then, for Bhattacharyya?

... [P]hilosophy... is not only not actual knowledge, but is not even literal thought; and yet its contents are contemplated as true in the faith that it is only by such contemplation that absolute truth can be known.”

—(K. Bhattacharya, 1930, p. 518)

This understanding of philosophy as essentially idealist traces directly to Pringle-Pattison.¹⁰

Whereas Hogg came to India as a specialist in European philosophy and developed a genuine interest in Indian philosophy once he landed in Madras, W. S. Urquhart (1877–1964) came to India from Scotland as an orientalist scholar, and a specialist in Vedānta. His PhD thesis was *Pantheism and the Value of Life – with Special Reference to Indian Philosophy*. Urquhart was principal and professor of philosophy at the Scottish Churches College in Calcutta, and eventually became professor of philosophy at the University of Calcutta.

Urquhart was a colleague and teacher of many of the central figures in Indian philosophy in this period. In his book, *The Vedānta And Modern Thought* (Urquhart, 1928), more than in any other work of a philosopher-missionary, we find strategies that are similar to those of many of the Indian philosophers we have been studying. For instance, although he shares the view, prevalent at the time that “contemplative passivity... [is] a characteristic of the Indian attitude” (1928, p. 4), he looks for a more active reading of Vedānta. His own view is that

Reality is reached, not by turning away from experience, but by fuller and more reverent study of the facts with which it supplies us, just as in ethical endeavor the ideal is approached through the fulfillment of ordinary duties. There is much truth in Prof. Bertrand Russell’s saying that “in contemplation we start from the not-Self, and through its greatness the boundaries of the Self are enlarged.”

—(Urquhart, 1928, p. 121)

¹⁰ Pringle-Pattison’s own book *Hegelianism and Personality* (1893) also inspires Haldar’s essay of the same name; Pringle-Pattison is cited regularly by Mukerji in his own discussions of Hegelian idealism and the nature of self.

Urquhart explores Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta at some length, deepening his analysis in dialogue with the work of major Indian thinkers of his own period. For instance, in his discussion of the role of *māyā* in Śaṅkara's thought, he begins with the following careful gloss: "*Māyā* is the principle of individuation and the fullest explanation we can give of the visible universe in all the variety of its 'names and forms' and the opportunities it presents for the existence and responsible activities of mankind" (Urquhart, 1928, p. 129). He continues by underscoring the dual direction of its activity, this time using the language of P. N. Sen in *Philosophy of the Vedānt*:

Māyā is the divine power which manifests itself in various ways, but the nature of its operation has this constant characteristic that it brings about diversity (*bheda*) out of unity (*abheda*); the opposition which it sets up between the subject and object may be compared to the action of a magnetic pole which lets off opposite kinds of magnetism at the two poles of a magnet.

—(P. Sen, 1900, p. 116)

According to Urquhart, Śaṅkara's concept of *māyā* should be understood in metaphysical rather than mystical terms as a "principle of individuation," a principle whose activity in the universe is explained by an analogy that is delivered to us by science: the operation of a magnet. This already suggests a more realistic attitude toward the very notion of *māyā*, one that is at odds with a more illusionist attitude. Urquhart writes, "There is a wealth of significance in the concept of *māyā* which the English word 'illusion' does not by any means fully express, and the precise degree of suitability which attaches to the translation requires considerable investigation" (Urquhart, 1928, p. 130). In taking this route, he parts company with an eminent historian of philosophy of his day, Professor S. N. Dasgupta, who writes: "In Sankara the word *Māyā* is used in the sense of illusion, both as a principle of creation, as a *śakti* (power) or accessory cause, and as phenomenal creation itself, as the illusion of world-appearance" (Dasgupta, 1922, p. 470).¹¹

Urquhart's colleague W. Hastie (1842–1903) is also important to the history of Indian philosophy in this period because of his impact on two indigenous

¹¹ We will see in chapter 10 that Swami Vivekananda, like Urquhart, adopts a realistic attitude toward *māyā* in his lectures on *Jñāna Yoga*. It is also interesting that Urquhart even considers in this connection a different notion of divine activity than that of the labor of constructing the world of appearance, namely, that of divine play or *līlā*. He refers specifically to the work of R. Tagore with his focus on "the idea of creative imagination" (Urquhart, 1928, p. 134). This is but a passing reference; Urquhart goes on to discuss the notion of *avidya* (ignorance) in connection with *māyā*; While *līlā* does not make another appearance in Urquhart's work, the interpretation of Vedānta along these lines becomes central to the philosophical program of Sri Aurobindo.

Indian philosophers: the young Narendranath Dutta (soon to become Swami Vivekananda) and Professor Hiralal Haldar. Hastie earned his MA in philosophy under Edward Caird. He was a Kant scholar, producing the first translation into English of Kant's "Religion within the Bounds of Reason" and also translating *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. He wrote extensively on church history and theology, and a series of essays on Hindu idolatry. Hastie may have been responsible for introducing Narendranath Dutta to Sri Ramakrishna, the founder of the global Ramakrishna mission and one of the great religious reformers of the colonial period¹² (on a school field trip), although this cannot be confirmed. He is noteworthy for the transmission of enthusiasm for Caird's work to Haldar, an enthusiasm that Haldar transmitted in turn to a generation of successors.

This Anglo-German version of idealism brought to India by Scottish missionaries was to merge in complicated ways with both Muslim and Hindu versions of idealism. In the next section of this chapter, we turn to the Muslim case. The interaction between European and Indian Muslim idealism was mediated not only by Scottish missionaries, but also by Indian Muslim scholars who traveled to and studied in England and Germany. These academics, upon their return, taught at and led Aligarh and Osmania Universities. They all studied at Cambridge, and that connection will turn out to be important in several respects.

9.3. Cambridge in India: Idealist Islam and the Aligarh Movement

Colonial Muslim universities constituted a distinct academic community in India. The trajectories of Islamic and Hindu philosophy during the colonial period barely intersected. In order to understand this phenomenon, we must begin by appreciating the distinct impact of two momentous events in the nineteenth century: the educational reforms following Mill and Bentinck's implementation of Macaulay's minute and the war of 1857.

The most significant consequence of the educational reforms was the ascendancy of English as the medium of instruction at premier universities, and the role these universities attained as pathways to government service, to power, and to wealth. The impact of this transformation, both on the culture of the upper classes and on the mechanisms of social mobility was not uniform: in fact, it substantially disadvantaged Muslims and resulted in an inversion of previous power and wealth relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities (Prasad, 1946),

¹² Possibly a teacher of Paramahansa Yogananda, who was the first great missionary bringing Hindu teachings to the United States.

(Datla, 2013), (Sevea, 2012b), ('Azīz Aḥmad and Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1967), (Jaina, 2006).

The adoption of English displaced Persian—not Sanskrit or any vernacular language—in administration and education. Since Persian was a language spoken and written predominantly by a Muslim elite, members of this class were suddenly disenfranchised. As a consequence, as we saw in chapter 3, since Hindus, particularly in Bengal, were quick to adopt English and attended university in much greater numbers than Muslims, Hindus quickly displaced Muslims in administration, education, and in all fields that represented pathways to economic success and political power.¹³ Until 1835, Muslims outnumbered Hindus in government service, but with the displacement of English by Persian, Hindus rapidly came to outnumber Muslims in the service (Jaina, 2006, p. 67). The phrase “the backward Muslim” became common currency.

This situation was exacerbated by the 1857 war and its aftermath. Although opposition to the British in that war crossed communal lines, the role that the Mughal emperor played (however unwittingly) as its figurehead, as well as the role that the Sikh army played in assisting the British in the siege of Delhi, resulted in a perception that the Muslim community was particularly responsible for the rebellion and that non-Muslims were especially loyal. This perception generated a particular suspicion of Muslims among British administrators and further excluded them from the corridors of power.

It is against this background that we must understand the role of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Kahn (1817–1898) and the university he founded at Aligarh. Although Sayyid (despite his central role in the development of Muslim education) never held a formal academic post, and never published an academic philosophical text, he was very much a philosopher. Sayyid plays a role in the Islamic community startlingly parallel to that played in the Hindu community by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and bids fair for the title of the father of the Islamic Renaissance in India. Like Roy he is a committed modernist, but builds his modernism on the foundation of a classical renaissance gesture. He advocates a return to what he regards as an “original” Islam, which, like Roy’s “original” Hinduism, is not universally recognized—either by religious Muslims or by scholars of Islam—as authentic, given that it is highly inflected by modern philosophy and science. This innovative renaissance attitude carries over to his reading of Sufism, *per se*. He regards more recent Indian Sufism as degraded, and champions an earlier, more Arabic version of that system.¹⁴

¹³ See (Datla, 2013) for an excellent discussion of the language issue and its relevance to Muslim politics and to the development of Muslim academic institutions, particularly of Osmania University.

¹⁴ Although again, the accuracy of his exegesis is not a matter of universal assent, and some see him as inventing an entirely new Islam. See Sevea (2012, p. 100).

There are important differences between the outlooks and influence of Roy and Sir Sayyid, differences the importance of which will be apparent in the discussion that follows. Roy was politically and intellectually progressive, defending democratic ideals and social liberalization. He was also an avowed universalist, searching for a religious philosophy that would unite India and indeed the world. Sayyid, on the other hand, was socially and politically reactionary, anti-democratic, and royalist. He was also resolutely communalist, seeing his allegiance as first and foremost to the Muslim community and seeing Muslim interests as in competition with those of other communities. The Aligarh movement, therefore, although academically progressive, and although it facilitated the advancement of Muslims, was not a natural ally of either the Brahmo or Arya Samaj movements, or of the Indian National Congress.¹⁵

Sir Sayyid, born into a family that served the Mughal court, received a traditional Muslim education at home. He joined the East India Company in 1839, and was a loyal company employee for decades (Aḥmad 1967). After the 1857 war, he became concerned about the position of Muslims in Indian society, and in particular about the threat of Hindu majoritarianism and the threat of unequal access to education. In his early career, Sayyid was deeply influenced by Sufism. His early education immersed him in classical Persian and Arabic poetry, philosophy, and literature. This classical training led him to reject the nineteenth-century Indian neo-Sufism that surrounded him as overly Hindu-inflected. In a typical renaissance gesture, Sayyid argued that the correct Sufism for modernity was classical Arabic Sufism. The commentaries he wrote during this period welded a valorization of mystical insight and the unity of the self with God to a rationalism grounded both in classical Islamic neo-Aristotelian philosophy and in modern science.

Sir Sayyid founded the British Indian Association in 1868 to enable Indian students to travel to England for education. He availed himself of this scheme and travelled to England in 1889 in order to learn about modern education. Sayyid was enamored of what he saw in Cambridge, and returned to India with a plan for Muslim regeneration through the establishment of a Cambridge in India, for Muslim students in particular. This is the genesis of the Aligarh Muslim University, and the source of the role that Cambridge and Cambridge philosophy played in the colonial Muslim imaginary.¹⁶

¹⁵ Jaina (Jaina, 2006, pp. 58–59) notes that this difference may simply reflect the difference in political and social climate of Roy's Bengal and Sir Sayyid's United Provinces. Roy is writing during the early days of the Company, and Sayyid in the environment of the Rebellion; Roy is writing prior to the decline of Muslim influence in India, Sayyid is reacting to it.

¹⁶ It was not only Sir Sayyid—the advocate of Anglophone education for Muslims—who was enamored of the Oxford-Cambridge system of education. Sayyid Husayn Bilgrami, the founder of Osmania College, dedicated to Urdu medium instruction for Muslims, writes in his essay on the

Prior to the establishment of Aligarh, Sir Sayyid was also active in the agitation for the primacy of Urdu over Hindustani or Hindi as an Indian national language. His concern was not narrowly linguistic, but reflected his anxiety about the disenfranchisement of the Muslim minority due to the replacement of Persian by English, and the consequent ascendancy of Hindus in government service and education, an ascendancy he saw as inevitably accelerated by the spread of Hindi as a national vernacular. He even translated classical Indian texts, Elphinstone's *History of India*, some works of Max Müller, Mill's *Political Economy* and Darwin's *Origin of Species* into Urdu (Jaina, 2006, p. 178).

As we saw in chapter 3, Sir Sayyid's trip to England changed his attitude toward language dramatically. Sayyid abandoned his commitment to Urdu and became a staunch promoter of English. He left Sufism behind for a more radically modern rationalism, grounded in a particular reading of the Quran. Always an Anglophile, he became politically a staunch British loyalist, arguing on Islamic grounds that since India was a land of protection (*Dar al-Amn*), as opposed to a land of war (*Dar al-Harab*), Muslims owed loyalty to their rulers despite the fact that those rulers were infidels. In fact, the leaders of the Khilafat movement all came from Aligarh.

The Anglophilia and loyalism that Sir Sayyid brought to the Aligarh movement were also explicitly defensive of Muslim community interests. As Hindus gained more power and wealth in Imperial British India, Sayyid worried that majoritarian forces would permanently reduce Muslims to the status of an oppressed and destitute minority. He saw their best hope for protection from this fate in the preservation of British rule, opposition to democracy, and a clear alliance of the Muslim community with British rulers. In an obvious homage to Macaulay, Sayyid is quoted as saying that the aim of Aligarh was

... to form a class of persons, Muhammedan in religion, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, and in intellect.

—(De Bary, 1958, vol. II, p 49)

While this strategy worked to Aligarh's benefit, it also served to deepen the gulf between perceived Hindu and Muslim interests, and set a large segment of the

Muslim University that Muslims "must build our own new *Alma Mater* on the lines of the venerable seats of learning that have made Oxford and Cambridge famous all over the world. The nucleus... exists... at Aligarh College... We have three European Professors living within the college bounds... Let their number be increased until we have a competent European Professor for every branch of Western learning that we wish to cultivate" (Bilgrami, 1925, p. 182). Bilgrami was a powerful advocate for separate Muslim education, and for many of the same reasons as Sayyid, but also a powerful advocate for vernacular education as a way of empowering the general Muslim public. He was, like Sayyid a British loyalist, and in fact a passionate fan of Queen Victoria, to whom he wrote paeans.

Muslim intelligentsia against organizations such as the Indian National Congress, creating the rift that was eventually to lead to partition. The early professoriate at Aligarh was entirely English, and the English administration supported the Aligarh movement with enthusiasm. Cricket was even introduced as a Cambridge-inspired medium to build esprit de corps and relations between students and faculty.

After the founding of Aligarh, Sir Sayyid's approach to Islam and modernity also changed. As we saw in chapter 4, the Muslim renaissance in India began later than the Hindu renaissance initiated by Roy, only gathering steam in the 1880s. Sayyid's own intellectual evolution was part of this movement. In his writings and speeches of this period, Sayyid, foregoing his earlier Sufi mysticism, but still in a gesture to the past, focused directly on the Quran. But he now argued that the Quran is a fundamentally scientific text, completely consistent with, and providing a natural foundation for, modern science. He hence advocated Western education not only for its own sake, or as a vehicle to political power and wealth, but also as a medium for the expression of Islam. He viewed Aligarh and its curriculum as a natural integration of the Islamic and Western scientific traditions, just as Cambridge integrated the study of Christian theology and modern science.

Nonetheless, while there are elements of Sir Sayyid's program that might be counted as progressive, in particular, his integration of modern science with Islamic thought and his willingness to countenance English as a medium of instruction even for religious subjects, in another respect he was profoundly conservative. Jaina puts the point this way:

Sir Sayyid was not a progressive educationist. The objects which Sayyid Ahmad set before himself consisted in creating "mutual understanding" and "co-operation" between the Muslims and their colonial masters, fostering loyalty and devotion among the Muslims towards the British and creating "loyal" and "qualified officials" for the British colonial machinery in India. Thus, in the last quarter of the 19th century when the nationalist sentiment had been generated among the intellectuals, the establishment of the cultural domination of the British ran counter to the needs of the time. At the beginning of the 19th century when Raja Ram Mohan Roy, coming under the influence of a higher European culture, came forward to propagate European education for a struggle against ignorance and stagnation of old feudal India he was progressive. But in the last quarter of the 19th century, the propagation of English education, combined with the cultural domination of the British, was reactionary.

—(Jaina, 2006, pp. 58–59)

While it is true that, like Ram Mohan Roy who translated the Upaniṣads into English and wrote commentaries on them to make them familiar to an English audience, Sir Sayyid wrote commentaries in English on the Quran and on Muslim literature, aimed at both a British and an Anglophone Muslim audience.¹⁷ But this was not, Jaina points out, a progressive gesture at this historical moment, and so Sayyid's approach should not be assimilated to Roy's. Roy was progressive because at the time his creation of the Brahma Samaj was a move to transform a conservative and insular Indian culture by bringing it into modernity. Sayyid, in the context of imperial rule, was a conservative precisely because his reforms were intended not to advance India but to preserve British rule in order to safeguard Muslim culture.¹⁸

Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), regarded both as a poet laureate of India and of Pakistan, and as one of the founders of Pakistan, despite being best known for his Urdu and Persian poetry and political advocacy on behalf of a Muslim state, is also one of the central philosophers of the Indian renaissance, and a direct conduit bringing neo-Hegelian ideas from Cambridge to India. Like Hiralal Haldar, Iqbal studied under T. W. Arnold, who was then chairing the philosophy department at Government College in Lahore. Iqbal went from Lahore to England, where he first studied law at Lincoln's Inn¹⁹ before enrolling at Trinity College, Cambridge. At Trinity, Iqbal studied under James Ward, Alfred North Whitehead, and John M. E. McTaggart from 1905–1908, before moving on to Munich where he earned his PhD, studying Hegel and Nietzsche. His dissertation contrasted Persian and Indian idealism, initiating his philosophical program of drawing European and Islamic idealisms into dialogue. Iqbal describes the program of that dissertation as follows:

I have endeavored to trace the logical continuity of Persian thought, which I have tried to interpret in the language of modern philosophy. . . . I have discussed the subject of Sufism in a more scientific manner, and have attempted to bring out the intellectual conditions which necessitated such a phenomenon. In opposition, therefore, to the generally accepted view I have tried to maintain that Sufism is a necessary product

¹⁷ "The need of the hour is for the translation of western works which described the discovery of and improvements in the arts and sciences as well as descriptions of the laws and systems of government and virtues and vices" (quoted in Sevea 2012, p. 80). Sevea notes that according to Sayyid, "the basis for shaping a Muslim renaissance lay in the work of Bacon, Shakespeare and Locke rather than Muslim education" (quoted in Minuault and Lelyveld, 1974, p. 156).

¹⁸ For an extended treatment of the history of the early years of Aligarh University and of Sir Sayyid's intellectual development, see Lelyveld (Lelyveld, 1978).

¹⁹ Also the legal alma mater of Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

of the play of various intellectual and moral forces which would necessarily awaken the slumbering soul to a higher ideal of life.

—(Iqbal, 1954)

This program of interpreting a Sufi-inflected understanding of an original Islam through the lens of European idealism was to occupy Iqbal in his metaphysical thought. Here is how Iqbal understands that Sufi perspective in his dissertation, an understanding that does not change in his later work:

This extraordinary vitality of the Sufi restatement of Islam, however, is explained when we reflect on the all-embracing structure of Sufism. The Semitic formula of salvation can be briefly stated in the words, “transform your will”—which signifies that the Semite looks upon will as the essence of the human soul. The Indian Vedāntist, on the other hand, teaches that all pain is due to our mistaken attitude towards the Universe. He, therefore, commands us to transform our understanding—implying thereby the essential nature of man consists in thought, not activity or will. But the Sufi holds that the mere transformation of will or understanding will not bring peace; we should bring about the transformation of both by complete transformation of feeling, of which will and understanding are only specialized forms

—(Iqbal, 1954, p. 82)

The pantheism of early Sufism led Iqbal both to his integration of Sufi and Hegelian ideas in his own idealism and to his aesthetic sensibility (to which we will turn in chapter 12).

Upon his return to India, Iqbal taught philosophy at Lahore Government College for a few years and practiced law at the same time. He also assessed MA examinations in philosophy for Allahabad and Punjab Universities. During this period, Lahore was a major intellectual hub, a center of Arya Samaj activity, a center of Muslim intellectual life, a center for Urdu poetry and of nationalist activity. It is in this context that Iqbal both matured as a poet of international stature and as a philosopher, developing a distinctive version of idealistic Islam, a distinctive aesthetic theory and a decidedly Islamist political philosophy.

Before we turn to these strands of Iqbal’s philosophy, it is worth noting that like Sir Sayyid, and indeed like virtually every Indian philosopher we encounter during this period, Iqbal is a renaissance philosopher. But unlike Sayyid, Iqbal is anti-nationalist. Nonetheless, he predicates his philosophical ideas on the need to leap back over Greek—that is, Aristotelian and neo-Platonic—influences on medieval Islamic philosophy to read an authentic, unpolluted Quran, and—like Sayyid—to leap back over modern Indian Sufism to an older, Arabic form of

that philosophical movement. Only these original forms of Islamic philosophy are suitable as the foundation for an Islamic renewal and a truly modern Islam, on his view. Iqbal argued that while Greek philosophy expanded the Muslim intellectual world in the medieval period, this expansion came at a cost: the essence of the Quran was lost. The reason for this, according to Iqbal, is that the Quran emphasizes the epistemic value of sensory knowledge, and the need for immediate, nondiscursive acquaintance for genuine knowledge, whereas Plato and his Arabic followers emphasize the rational and discursive and disparage the sensory. For this reason, Iqbal turns to the Quran itself and to classical Sufism for a theory of immediacy, albeit with a neo-Hegelian twist.

Javed Majeed in his masterful study of Iqbal's philosophy (Majeed, 2009) notes that in his philosophical and poetic work, Iqbal takes the idea of *khūdī* and its correlative *be-khūdī* (generally translated as "self" and "selflessness") as fundamental. Iqbal, he argues, reinterprets them in several ways, even inverting the valence of the terms in the service of an Islamic idealism with a Hegelian sense of the Absolute. This reading, he argues, is also inflected by McTaggart's mysticism and insistence on an immediate ineffable sense of identity of the particular with the universal (Majeed, 2009, p. 21).

While *khūdī* in Persian, Majeed notes, generally has a negative valence, connoting selfishness, or egoism, and *be-khūdī* connotes its morally salutary contrary, Iqbal valorizes the idea of self, interpreting *khūdī* in several ways, and in each case, taking it to be ultimately identical to a personal God modeled on Hegel's Absolute. In the first place, *khūdī* is seen as the personal self, cultivated through aesthetic and religious experience and through personal reflection. It is an achievement, not an atavistic given. In the second place, it is an aesthetic self, the subject of aesthetic appreciation and of the contemplation of beauty. Third, it is cultural identity: in the case Iqbal addresses, one's self, or identity as Muslim, or the collective self or identity of the Muslim world.

Be-khūdī, by contrast, is not the antithesis of *khūdī*, but always another way of expressing it through identity with the Absolute. In the personal sense, it expresses the complete annihilation of the sense of self in the realization of identity with God, the identity of the particular self with the universal self of which it is mere manifestation.²⁰ In the aesthetic sense, it is the abnegation of personal

²⁰ The affinities of this view of the self as divine and Aurobindo's account of the unity with Brahman in *Life Divine* are intriguing. This affinity has been noted by several commentators. P. T. Raju (Raju, 1953) points out that each is critical of the pessimism and passivity implicit in illusionist versions of idealism, with Aurobindo criticizing *Māyāvāda* and Iqbal Indian Sufism. Rafique (Rafique, 1974) notes that Iqbal in his dissertation argues that both Indian and Persian mystics fell under the spell of Vedānta. Iqbal and Aurobindo each criticize asceticism; each is a spiritualist but not a material evolutionist. Aurobindo argues for a modern reconstruction of the *Gītā*; Iqbal for a modern reconstruction of Islam.

taste and self-awareness in the complete absorption of aesthetic experience and the identification with an objective standard of beauty. In the political sense, it is the recognition that one's own identity is determined by and is but a manifestation of a larger identity. In each case, the apparent opposites are not alternatives, but are sublated in a higher understanding, and in each case the realization of that identity is a deeply personal experience not instilled by reason, but by realization. Iqbal's debts to Sufism and to McTaggart's mystical neo-Hegelianism are evident.

Despite his valorization of an "original" Islam, Iqbal is concerned with the future of the Islamic world. He hopes for the construction of a new Islam grounded in the ancient texts, but aimed toward the future. In his lectures *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013), delivered in Madras,²¹ Hyderabad, and Aligarh, Iqbal defends not only the centrality of mystical experience to knowledge but also the consistency of the Quran with modern science, and the need to reconstruct Islam in a synthesis with Western philosophy and modern science. Citing William James, Freud, and Whitehead, Iqbal argues that mystical experience is like any other experience, and gives us empirical information about the world. Just as the senses connect us causally to the sensible, the mystical connects us causally to the suprasensible. He also argues for the central role of philosophy and reason in religious experience:

To rationalize faith is not to admit the superiority of philosophy over religion. Philosophy, no doubt, has jurisdiction to judge religion, but what is to be judged is of such a nature that it will not submit to the jurisdiction of philosophy except on its own terms.

...

Thus in the evaluation of religion, philosophy must recognize the central position of religion and has no other alternative but to admit it is something focal in the process of reflective synthesis. Nor is there any reason to suppose that thought and intuition are essentially opposed to each other. They spring up from the same root and complement each other. The one grasps Reality piecemeal, the other grasps it in its wholeness. The one fixes its gaze on the eternal, the other on the temporal aspect of Reality. The one is the present enjoyment of the whole of Reality; the other aims at traversing the whole by slowly specifying and closing up various regions of the whole for exclusive observation.

—(Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013, p. 2)

²¹ Where, at the time, the great neo-Vedāntin philosopher of science S. S. S. Sastri was professor of philosophy, and quite probably in attendance in what might have been a rare meeting of Hindu and Muslim philosophers during this period.

Just as he argues that the reality of the self depends upon the reality of the Godhead of which it is a manifestation, Iqbal follows Whitehead in arguing that matter is not ontologically fundamental, but is a manifestation of conscious experience, thus defending idealism over realism. In this context, he cites Einstein and Russell against naïve materialism, valorizing science as a ground of idealism in virtue of Einstein's insistence on the observer-relativity of space and time. Iqbal argues—not entirely persuasively—that the theory of relativity demonstrates a kind of Hegelian pansychism (which he also attributes—again, not entirely persuasively—to the Quran), according to which every atom possesses some degree of consciousness and according to which increasing levels of complexity constitute increasingly conscious selves. (Again, the kinship to Aurobindo is intriguing.) We thus see in Iqbal's interpretation a creative synthesis of Western science, Islam, and neo-Hegelian idealism.

Throughout these discussions, Iqbal cites *surahs* of the Quran, arguing for their consistency with the modern doctrines he defends. One of the most extended discussions in this context is that in which he argues that the Quran anticipates Henri Bergson's analysis of time and the essential temporality of self-consciousness. Iqbal concludes these lectures with the observation that while Islam and European philosophy each have developed sophisticated versions of idealism, idealism never became part of the European cultural sensibility, whereas, he argues, it is central to Muslim sensibility. Modern Islam must therefore be both scientific and idealist. The continuity with Cambridge idealism and the Sufi sensibility is palpable. In Iqbal we do not see an imitator of British idealism nor a mere commentator on Sufi mysticism; instead, we see a creative philosopher drawing on multiple philosophical traditions.

We now examine some of Iqbal's lectures in more detail. Iqbal's renaissance gesture involves a return to an Islam he imagines to have predated the impact of neo-Platonism and Aristotelianism in the medieval period. He claims that the Greek influence redirected a Quranic model of knowledge as mediated by perception (including intuition) in favor of a speculative, rationalist model of knowledge. The recovery of an original Islam, in his view, thus requires a rejection of a classical distortion:

As a true disciple of Socrates, Plato despised sense perception which, in his view, could yield only opinion and no real knowledge. How unlike the Quran, which regards "hearing" and "sight" as the most valuable Divine gifts. This is what the earlier Muslim students of the Quran completely missed under the spell of classical speculation. They read the Quran in the light of Greek thought. It took them over 200 years to perceive—though not quite clearly—that the spirit of the Quran was essentially anti-classical, and the result of this perception was a kind of

intellectual revolt, the full significance of which has not been realized even up to the present day.

—(Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013, p. 3)

This emphasis on perception, however, is no empiricism. For Iqbal, following Hegel and McTaggart, sees the particular object of perceptual consciousness as always pregnant with the universal; sees the finite object of knowledge as always subordinate to an infinite of which it is a part. Here he rejects both Kantian and Aristotelian-Islamic formulations of the limits of human knowledge:

Both Kant and Ghazālī failed to see that thought, in the very act of knowledge, passes beyond its own finitude. The finitudes of nature are reciprocally exclusive. Not so the finitude of thought, which is, in its essential nature, incapable of limitation and cannot remain imprisoned in the narrow circuit of its own individuality. In the wide world beyond itself nothing is alien to it. It is in its progressive participation in the life of the apparently alien that thought demolishes the walls of its finitude and enjoys its potential infinitude. Its movement becomes possible only because of the implicit presence in its finite individuality of the infinite, which keeps alive with it the flame of aspiration and sustains it in its endless pursuit.

—(Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013, p. 5)

Iqbal's Hegelian idealism emerges most directly in his discussion of the failure of philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Iqbal objects to these arguments in the first instance because of their method: knowledge of the absolute, he argues, must be the immediate experience of identity with it, in which the duality between the individual and the whole, between the mundane and the divine is eradicated. This entails an idealism in which the entire world is the creation of the Divine mind. Iqbal writes:

And the reason for [the failure of the ontological and teleological arguments for the existence of God] is that they look upon "thought" as an agency working on things from without. This view of thought gives us a mere mechanician in the one case, and creates an unbridgeable gulf between the ideal and the real in the other. It is, however, possible to take thought not as a principle which organizes and integrates its material from the outside, but as a potency which is formative of the very being of its material. Thus regarded, thought or idea is not alien to the original nature of things; it is their ultimate ground and constitutes the very essence of their being. . . . The true significance of the ontological

and the teleological arguments will appear only if we are able to show that the human situation is not final and that thought and being are ultimately one. This is possible only if we carefully examine and interpret experience, following the clue furnished by the Quran which regards experience within and without as symbolic of a reality described by it.

—(Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013, p. 25)

We can set aside the arguments for the existence of God that occasion these reflections. Iqbal is arguing that to see thought as standing over and against the world is to create a duality between subject and object that makes knowledge and experience inexplicable. The nonduality that he suggests is at the same time idealist in that it identifies the world with thought and, naturalist, in that it locates thought in the world. In this dialectical understanding we hear echoes of Stirling. In an argument against materialism, after citing Einstein and Russell as opponents of materialism, Iqbal concludes with this reference to Whitehead:

In our own times Prof. Whitehead—an eminent mathematician and scientist—has conclusively shown that the traditional theory of materialism is wholly untenable. It is obvious that, on the theory, colors, sounds, etc., are subjective states only, and form no part of Nature.

In the words of Prof. Whitehead, the theory reduces one half of Nature to a “dream” and the other half to a “conjecture.” The physics, finding it necessary to criticize its own foundations, has eventually found reason to break its own idol, and the empirical attitude which appeared to necessitate scientific materialism has finally ended in a revolt against matter.

—(Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013, p. 27)

Iqbal’s second argument for idealism, offered in the context of his defense of Bergson’s analysis of the phenomenological basis of temporality, draws explicitly on both Islamic sources and on the idealism of Haldane.

It is obvious that motion is inconceivable without time. And since time comes from psychic life, the latter is more fundamental in motion. No psychic life, no time: no time, no motion: thus it is really what the Ash’arite call the accident which is responsible for the continuity of the atom as such. . . . In modern times we find it worked out on a much larger scale in Hegel and, more recently, in the late Lord Haldane’s *Reign of Relativity*, which he published shortly before his death. I have conceived the Ultimate Reality as an Ego; and I must add now that from the Ultimate Ego only egos proceed. . . . The world, in all its details, from

the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego, is the self—revelation of the “Great I am.” Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego.

—(Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013, p. 57)

Iqbal’s discussion of idealism and Islam and the connection between European and Islamic articulations of idealism concludes with an argument for the special place of Islam in the evolution of idealism. Here Iqbal identifies the distinctive character of Islamic thought and consciousness and the way idealism has informed Muslim ethical and political sensibility:

Humanity needs three things today—a spiritual interpretation of the universe, spiritual emancipation of the individual, and basic principles of a universal import directing the evolution of human society on the spiritual basis. Modern Europe has, no doubt, built idealistic systems on these lines, but experience shows the truth revealed through pure reason is incapable of bringing that fire of living conviction which personal revelation alone can bring. This is the reason why pure thought has so little influenced men. . . . The idealism of Europe never became a living factor in her life, and the result is a perverted ego seeking itself through mutually intolerant democracies whose sole function is to exploit the poor in the interest of the rich. . . . The Muslim, on the other hand, is in possession of these ultimate ideas on the basis of a revelation, which, speaking from the inmost depths of life, internalizes its own apparent externality. With him the spiritual basis of life is the matter of conviction.

—(Iqbal and Sheikh, 2013, p. 142)

Here we see the grounding of Iqbal’s political theory in his Islamic idealism. Iqbal is no democrat, no secularist, and no nationalist. Like Tagore, he rejects the idea of the nation-state as an artifact of a particular moment in European modernity, with no legitimate application in Asia, and to the Muslim world in particular. As we saw in chapter 7, he is a pan-Islamist, not a nationalist.²²

This discussion would be incomplete without a brief discussion of the work of Sayyid Vahiduddin (1909–). While Professor Vahiduddin never studied in England, he is an important Muslim critic of the approach of Sayyid and Iqbal to

²² Another prominent Muslim intellectual who studied in Cambridge was Abdul Kalam Azad, who we encountered in chapter 7. Because he is more associated with nationalism than philosophy proper, we do not discuss him in this context.

Islamic modernism and revival. Vahiduddin completed his undergraduate studies at Osmania University, and completed his PhD at Marburg after study at Berlin and Heidelberg. Vahiduddin's work focused on Nietzsche and the existentialists. He spent much of his career at Osmania, where he was professor of philosophy, teaching at Delhi University and the Indian Institute of Islamic Studies after retirement.

Professor Vahiduddin is sharply critical of the reconstructionist program of Sayyid and Iqbal. Each of them, he argues, attempts to modernize Islam by eviscerating its content. Where they wish to abandon literal talk of heaven and hell, for instance, in favor of a psychological reading of reward and punishment, Vahiduddin insists on a literal reading of the afterlife. He criticizes their reduction of a personal God to a Hegelian absolute, and the replacement of the concrete with the ideal and abstract. Most fundamentally, Vahiduddin objects to the attempt to rewrite Islam as a religion with a basis in reason rather than revelation, emphasizing the centrality of the revelation of the Quran to Muhammad as a foundation of Islamic faith. In short, Vahiduddin rejects the entire program of rewriting Islam in order to make it modern in favor of a serious return to fundamental Islamic teachings as the basis for a modern life. He opens his direct critique of Iqbal and Sayyid as follows:

Islam's experience of the world cannot be isolated from its experience of God. . . . This is strikingly illustrated in its creedal formulation where the affirmation of God is preceded by the rejection of all that is not God and followed by a commitment to a human bearer of a divine message. In fact, the simple and almost naïve formulation of the creed involves a profound metaphysical movement, the negation of all that pretends to be what it can never be, the affirmation of the sole authentic divinity and the commitment to a human person who shows us the way.

—(Vahiduddin, 1986, p. 61)

Vahiduddin remarks that the approach of Sayyid and Iqbal "is more Hegelian than Islamic" (1986, p. 63). He is critical of the idea that the relationship between the finite person and God can ever be thought of as identity, or that religious experience reveals the divinity of the person, as Iqbal suggests. Instead, the relationship to God articulated in the Quran, he argues, is a relationship between a finite consciousness and a distinct infinite consciousness. He complains that these philosophical reconstructions of Islam inspired by Western idealism thus inevitably distort it at its root, asserting that "Islamic thought of the future must develop on the experience which is considered divine revelation" (1986, p. 65). He then charges that

Iqbal, in his enthusiasm, has over-emphasized certain aspects of Islam and has developed views which are out of context with Islamic thought. . . . It is not fair to see the Prophet's prayer as a quest for a rational foundation, since prayer itself is a swing of the spirit beyond rationality.

—(1986, p. 67)

While Vahiduddin allows that archaic scientific claims in Islamic thought can be revised in light of modern science, fundamental religious and philosophical doctrine is not to be revised in order to make it modern, not to be read through European lenses, but rather to be adopted as the foundation of a distinctively Islamic engagement with modernity. He writes, "Islamic thought cannot be expected to move in sterile conformity. It may unfold in fresh direction without foregoing unity in substance and spirit, and without denying history" (1986, p. 68). A bit later, Vahiduddin, in a discussion of the relation between philosophy and theology, chides the reformers with a reference to Kant:

[Kant] observed that the view according to which philosophy is the handmaid of theology can be accepted provided we know whether she is the handmaid who goes before the Queen with a torch in hand showing the light, or whether she is the one who goes behind holding the apron. Philosophical thought. . . can never serve as a substitute for faith.

—(1986, p. 74)

Despite his critical response to the reformers' more philosophical, more scientific Islam, Vahiduddin shares with them a commitment to an idealistic reading of the tradition grounded in Sufism, and an understanding of religious experience as a kind of mystical experience of an absolute reality, although he criticizes Iqbal roundly for his misunderstanding of the Sufi tradition (Vahiduddin, 1986, pp. 159–160). Vahiduddin refers to Sufism as "an authentic Islamic manifestation, with its roots in the Quran and the original experience of the Prophet" (1986, p. 242). Vahiduddin's endorsement of Sufism is predicated on its promise of an immediate relationship to God and to other persons, unmediated by reason, based entirely in faith. The reality to which Sufi experience gives access is a spiritual, not a physical reality, and is the reality toward which religious experience is directed. In Vahiduddin, we hence see agreement that the Sufi tradition is that best suited for a confrontation with modernity; but, unlike the more synthetic, science-inflected vision shared by Sayyid and Iqbal, his vision of Islamic modernity is strikingly faith-based.

While Sayyid's, Iqbal's and Vahiduddin's perspectives and goals are very different, their preoccupations and many aspects of their philosophical lives are

curiously in harmony. In each we see the renaissance sensibility so characteristic of Indian philosophy; in each we see a foundation in Sufi idealism and a mission to modernize Islam in the direction of that idealism, but in the company of modern science and Western philosophy. And in each we see a peculiar connection to Cambridge, albeit in Vahiduddin's case, a connection that takes Cambridge more as a foil than as a source of ideas.

These are far from the only important figures in Muslim idealism in India, and indeed the Muslim philosophical community constitutes a dense web of relations. We have not considered Ali Khan Al-Mulk, who worked with Sir Sayyid to found Aligarh, Shibli Numani, another student of Arnold's and mentor to Abdul Kalam Azad or Chiragh Ali, the political philosopher and associate of Sir Sayyid and Azad, among others. But we hope that this account demonstrates the importance of a fusion of neo-Hegelian thought and Islamic idealist thought in the production of a distinctive brand of modern Indian Islamic idealism.

An exception to this idealistic trend is Syed Zafarul Hasan (1885–1949), longtime professor and chair of the department of philosophy at Aligarh Muslim University. Hasan earned his BA and MA at Allahabad, during the time when R. D. Ranade chaired that department. He was the first Muslim from India to earn a PhD at Oxford (he also earned a DPhil at Erlangen) and was, despite the contrary view of his teacher, the Scottish idealist J. A. Smith, a confirmed realist.

Hasan specialized in the history of Western philosophy (including medieval Arabic philosophy), and did not write about or cite Indian sources. He wrote a number of books on major figures in the history of Western philosophy, including Spinoza, Descartes, and Kant. But his most important philosophical treatise is *Realism: An Attempt to Trace its Origin and Development in its Chief Representatives*, published by Cambridge University Press (1928). Just as Haldar's book was the most encyclopedic work on neo-Hegelianism, Hasan's was the most definitive historical treatment and defense of realism of its time. The book is in part a comprehensive history of the doctrine of philosophical realism, and in part an impassioned defense of that doctrine. Hasan's engages critically with Laird's *A Study in Realism* (1920). Laird was widely read in India by philosophers of all stripes. While Hasan agrees with Laird's realism, his methodology is far more Kantian. Philosophically, he has even more affinity to G. E. Moore, whose views he cites with approbation. But once again, his methodology is very different, relying on transcendental arguments rather than a straightforward defense of common sense.

Throughout *Realism*, Hasan takes the social and collective nature of epistemic activity as the fulcrum for his realism. His defense of realism and his historical account thereof is wide ranging. He discusses not only the early modern European philosophers but also Hegel and Bosanquet, Husserl, Ernst Mach, G. E. Moore, Roy Wood Sellars, Cook Wilson, and a host of other philosophers of his time.

Throughout, Hasan emphasizes that philosophy itself is impossible without assuming the truth of realism, and so that even the activity that leads to the defense of idealism itself depends upon realism. We will see in chapter 11 a curious mirror image of his position that a defense of idealism presupposes realism in the work of his contemporary A. C. Mukerji, who argues that to defend realism one must be an idealist. Despite this apparent antagonism, however, each is following a neo-Kantian strategy to reconcile these apparently contradictory perspectives.

Hasan opens *Realism* with a dramatic statement of the conclusion and an anticipation of the strategy he uses to defend realism:

That the external world is real and is directly revealed to us by means of our senses, is one of the most fundamental and deep-rooted convictions of man, a conviction on which all the developed forms of distinctively human consciousness are based. The scientific consciousness expressly builds itself upon this foundation, the artistic consciousness assumes its validity, the moral consciousness would be impossible without it, and the religious consciousness would not be unless it had this conviction. The sense of the real and its insufficiency is the presupposition of all that is a yearning for the ideal. These consciousnesses are the forms of this yearning. Moreover they are outgrowths of social consciousness, and social consciousness is not possible without this conviction—without the belief in an external world of things and men which is common to all. It is so deep-rooted that man has seldom doubted; those who, like Descartes and Hume, have attempted to do so, have failed in the attempt and have had to confess their failure.

—(1928, p. 1)

Here Hasan announces a pair of realist convictions regarding the reality of the external world and the directness of our perceptual access to it. That is, Hasan sees realism not only as a metaphysical doctrine about the reality of objects outside of thought but also as an epistemological doctrine about the way that we know them. In particular, he attacks representationalism as the first step down the road to idealism. He argues that instead, perception must be understood as direct.

Hasan proceeds by offering a series of transcendental arguments: first, he argues that it is the necessary condition of the possibility of science; he also argues that it is a necessary condition for the possibility of art and aesthetic experience; the necessary condition of the possibility of ethical thought; and even that it is the necessary condition of the possibility of religion. Most surprisingly, he argues that realism is the transcendental condition even of idealism. This use of the Kantian strategy reflects Hasan's understanding of Kant's position as not

only a transcendental idealism, but also and most importantly an empirical realism. Here is Hasan's first transcendental argument for realism:

If we do not make the distinction of appearance and reality in the *sensa* we shall be compelled to make them all appearance. With this direct perception disappears, as in Locke. But with direct perception go not only the secondary but also the primary qualities, and with qualities the existence of things, as Berkeley showed. And with the disappearance of things disappears a common world. But a common world of self-existing things is the presupposition of all communion with our fellow beings as well as of science, art, morality, and religion. We cannot seriously doubt the fact of communion. We must therefore allow objective validity to all that is involved in it. And the independent existence of things, the directness of our perception of them, and the distinction of appearance and reality in our *sensa* are involved in it.

—(1928, p. 10)

Hasan's point is that even to defend a doctrine such as idealism, or indeed to engage in *any* discourse, we must presuppose the meaningfulness of our language and hence the reality of the community of language users. This argument anticipates ideas developed later by such philosophers as Wittgenstein and Wilfrid Sellars. (Indeed, later in the book, Hasan cites the elder Roy Wood Sellars with approval.) Moreover, we must presuppose not only the external reality of our fellow human beings but also the fact that we are directly aware of them and not merely aware of representations of them. For if we were merely aware of representations, the ability of the community to institute norms would be undermined. But if we are aware of our fellows, we are aware of the external world as a whole, and if aware of the external world as a whole we are directly aware of the objects and properties in it. Hasan's critique of Locke's representationalism is that by detaching us from the external world and making our knowledge of it purely inferential, it loses its power to constrain thought. Hasan advances this argument further:

Again, the validity of direct perception is guaranteed by the knowledge of the particular. Knowledge is direct contact with reality. Hence the feeling of certainty incident to it which distinguishes it from opinion. Now reality in a broader sense may be regarded as comprehending both the universal and the particular. Thought is the faculty of the former; And *Anschauung*, sensibility, perception that of the latter. Without perception therefore there can be no knowledge of the particular, the existent, the real. Indeed to be in existence primarily means to be an object and consequently an object of sense knowledge, in favor of the

knowledge of the universal, rational knowledge. For thought without sense is inconceivable. It is the faculty of the universal and no doubt the universe is essentially different from the particular—its mode of being is not existence but subsistence, and it does not depend for its being on the particular. But we are so constituted that the universal becomes intelligible to us only through its coming down to existence—through its presence in the particular. Thought cut loose from sense loses its meaning for us.

—(1928, pp. 11–12)

In this second transcendental argument, Hasan argues that the direct perception of real objects is a necessary condition even of inference, thus directly undercutting any form of representationalism. His point is that inference presupposes meaning, and meaning demands a tie of our language to reality, and that tie in turn must be established through direct perception. So, if we only knew things through representation, in virtue of the need to infer from representation to objects in order to gain exact knowledge of the external world, we would have no knowledge of the external world at all. Realism, he concludes, is hence a transcendental condition of any knowledge.

This argument again is obviously Kantian. And Hasan acknowledges this, commenting on it with a careful analysis of Kant's transcendental idealism and its implications for empirical realism focusing on the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories and the Refutation of Idealism in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1928, pp. 14–16 n. 2). Hasan, after an intriguing discussion of the role of forces in reality in which he follows Schopenhauer, argues that realism is also a necessary condition of the distinction between truth and falsity, and hence of all epistemic activity:

Besides the independent reality of things and their nature and the directness of perception, this theory is also in consonance with the distinction of appearance and reality in *sensa*. Reality is apprehended when the power of sense finds its normal realization; appearance when it finds one abnormal or defective. But how is its normal realization to be determined? . . . We must estimate sense or thought itself. We must experiment whether a sense, *e.g.* the sight, apprehends all the distinctions others apprehend. If yes, it is normal; if not, not. The same holds of thought. And this is the method man actually always employs; even the physiologist, *e.g.* the eye-doctor employs it.

—(1928, pp. 21–22)

That is, the external world must be taken for granted and our knowledge of it must be direct if we are even to draw the distinction between veridical and

nonveridical access to it. If we cannot distinguish between veridical and non-veridical access to the world, we can make no sense of knowledge, no sense of concepts, and no sense of conscious life at all. But in order to draw this distinction, we must be able to compare our senses and our reasoning with that of others; and so, we must take others and the objects of their sense and thought for granted as real. It is not our purpose to provide a summary of this entire book, or an assessment of Hasan's project. We do note the creativity of his work, and the sophistication with which he deploys Kantian arguments in dialogue with the most important philosophers of his time.

Hasan was a historian of Western philosophy and a philosopher of great stature. It appears, however—despite the affinities of his own perspective to the realistic reading of idealism developed at the same time by A. C. Mukerji and Ras Bihari Das that we will encounter in chapter 11—that he had little influence in Indian philosophy, even within the community of Islamic philosophers. Neither he nor his colleagues refer to one another. Nonetheless, he stands as one of the early twentieth century's important historians of Western philosophy and defenders of philosophical realism. Near the end of his career (1949) in a manuscript that was lost and published in 1988 by the Institute of Islamic Culture in Lahore, *Philosophy: A Critique* (Hasan, 1988), Hasan reflects skeptically on the entire discipline of philosophy, comparing it adversely to the empirical sciences, which, he argues, are the locus of the true realistic spirit. His work also demonstrates the cosmopolitan consciousness characteristic of Indian philosophy of this period. He is very much aware of philosophical currents in Great Britain, the European continent, and in North America, and chooses to publish his work with Cambridge University press, acting in a global philosophical scene.

9.4. Parallel Play: Idealism in Islam and in neo-Vedānta

In the epigraph that introduces this chapter, P. T. Raju emphasizes both the role that British idealism played in the formation of Indian philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the active role that Indian philosophers took in developing modern versions of classical Indian traditions in dialogue with British philosophy. As we have been emphasizing throughout this book, this should not be surprising. Indian philosophy was never hermetically sealed from the rest of the world, and this period is no exception. And Indian philosophy has always been dialogical and creative; this period is no exception to that pattern either.

We do find in here, though, a phenomenon to which we have already drawn attention: a dissociation of the Hindu and Muslim philosophical communities, despite the fact that each finds itself in dialogue with English and German philosophy, and despite the fact that each is developing modern, realistic versions of

idealism. In this chapter, we have devoted most of our attention to the Muslim community, in part because of the very direct connection to Scotland, Cambridge, and the neo-Hegelian philosophy imported from those sites. In the next chapter, we will consider the ways in which these same ideas filtered into neo-Vedānta. In that case, the idealism we find is not always directly inspired by neo-Hegelian philosophy, though neo-Hegelian, Kantian, and other European idealist currents are apparent throughout. Like their Muslim colleagues, we will see that neo-Vedāntins are concerned with the relation between science and spirit and with the project of forging a version of idealism consistent with a robust realism about the external world.

The educational trajectory of the non-Muslim students of philosophy, while similar in some respects to their Muslim counterparts, was strikingly different in others. While many students did travel abroad to study philosophy at Edinburgh, Cambridge, London, and Oxford, the largest proportion of Hindu students received their Kant and Hegel, their Bradley and Caird, from the professors who taught them in the universities within India itself at Madras, Mysore, Allahabad, Calcutta, and Lahore. We have already alluded to some reasons for this difference in the previous section. Muslim students were not enrolling in the major universities in India in proportion to their numbers in the general population, and this was especially so in philosophy and the humanities more generally.

Those Muslims who had learned sufficient English to study in these English medium universities were in a class that could enable them to go abroad rather than register at the Indian universities for their education; the others who were inclined to theology and philosophy were either home-schooled or went to Islamic schools, learning in Urdu and Persian. In addition, Muslim students often found their own views incompatible with the new ones with which they became acquainted. On the other hand, it appears that the Hindu students were better able to find opportunities for the expression and contribution of their philosophical views in the space of contemporary ideas and argumentation to which they were exposed. We now turn to the case of Hindu philosophy and its interaction with neo-Hegelianism.

There are three main topics that receive their (and thereby our) attention. The first is the interpretation of the varieties of idealism that are to be found in Vedānta philosophy. As we will see, the manner of accommodation of the real world within the idealist perspective is a matter of intense debate. The second is the apparent challenge that science poses to traditional philosophical and religious views in that period more generally. We have already encountered this concern in the context of the British neo-Hegelians and Indian Muslim intellectuals. It is shared by their Vedāntin counterparts, who wish to take the results of science seriously and explore the extent to which scientific explanations succeed at giving one a complete account of the world of experience.

The third is the self and its relation to the empirical world on the one hand and to the Absolute on the other. Indeed, if there is one philosophical issue that is central to the concern of Hindu academics of this period, it is the nature of the relation of the Self or *Ātman* of the Upaniṣads to cosmic consciousness, or *Brahman*. As we will see, for many, though not all, of the Vedāntin philosophers, neo-Hegelian ideas provide a promising modern vehicle for pursuing their investigations of these three topics. We explore these topics in greater depth in the context of our discussion of the work of two prominent idealists of the early twentieth century, K. C. Bhattacharyya and A. C. Mukerji in chapter 11. Here we offer a brief vignette to illustrate the neo-Hegelian influence on certain corners of the Vedānta world, a vignette in which Bhattacharyya also features.

The first foreign-returned Vedānta philosopher to make a mark in this period was P. K. Roy (aka Ray—1849–1932). Roy studied in London and Edinburgh, graduating in psychology from Edinburgh. He was professor of logic and philosophy at Presidency College, Calcutta from 1876 (the philosophy department itself was founded in 1868). Roy was the first Indian to serve as its Principal, from 1902 to 1905. He taught a generation of students at Presidency College, including Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who would go on to become the first president of Independent India in 1947.

Roy's contribution to idealist philosophy at Presidency College is captured in a fascinating symposium on idealism in 1918 (Halder and Bhattacharyya, 1920) that featured talks by two well-known philosophers: K.C. Bhattacharyya and H. Halder (each of whom was also named to the King George V Chair). The symposium brings Roy and Bhattacharyya together to comment on Halder's paper, "The Absolute and the Finite Self" (Halder, 1918), which had been recently published in *The Philosophical Review*. Halder, in that paper and in his PhD dissertation *Hegelianism and Human Personality* (Halder, 1910), argues for a distinctive version of Hegel's doctrine of the relation between the Absolute and finite human consciousness, as well as a distinctive doctrine of the locus of value.

He argues that "a conception of the Absolute which is violently opposed to the conclusions of science and the sober commonsense of practical men must, at once, be rejected as such, however plausible and unanswerable may be the arguments urged in its behalf. A theory that is not congruous with well-verified facts is worse than an idle dream" (Halder, 1899, quoted in Halder, 1910). Following Green and McTaggart (though differing slightly from each), Halder argues that, consistent with our experience and the best science, a plurality of individual consciousnesses have an ontological primacy, with the Absolute existing as an unity differentiated into these selves. Value, for Halder, arises at the level of morality, an institution recognized as binding by communities of selves. We can see here that Halder is working with Hegelian ideas, mediated by neo-Hegelian developments, but working out his own view in that intellectual milieu.

Bhattacharyya and Roy each take issue with Haldar's own formulation. Bhattacharyya chides him for deviating too far from Hegel. By privileging the individual in ontology and the moral in axiology, Bhattacharyya argues, Haldar opens the door to a relativism that Hegel is concerned to forestall. Bhattacharyya notes the primacy of religious consciousness in Hegel's system, and argues for the need for an apologetic relation to a monotheistic framework for consistency with the system; he also notes that for Hegel, genuine value proceeds from the religious to the moral and that the Absolute is the self-conscious origin of consciousness, and not an abstraction from individual consciousness. Bhattacharyya's touchstones in his comments include not only Hegel, but also Green and Royce.

Roy as commentator situates this debate as one between different possible positions on the relation between the finite self and the Absolute, agreeing with Bhattacharyya that Haldar is no orthodox Hegelian, but mapping out a space of positions in which Hegel's, that of the neo-Hegelians, Bhattacharyya's, and Haldar's positions are each points. Here is how he contrasts Haldar and Bhattacharyya:

According to Royce and Haldar, each finite self has a purpose of its own in the eternal plan of the Absolute and all the finite selves are related to and supplement one another in an eternally fulfilled social life. . . . All the individuals taken together constitute an eternal community, each fulfilling a purpose in the eternal plan of the Absolute Individual who dwells in each and connects them all.

According to Bhattacharyya [in contrast] each individual self attains its infinite reality by the realization of the Absolute in the form or symbol by which the individual chooses to realize the Absolute. . . . The relation between an individual self and the symbol of the absolute it chooses does not imply any relation to other individuals or to any community to which they all belong. The relation is purely individualistic, i.e., of the one finite individual to the Infinite Absolute Individual. Bhattacharyya calls this relation religion and the process of realization a *sādhana*. . . . This probably means that the individual self loses its individuality and becomes absorbed in, or identical with, the Absolute.

—(Haldar and Bhattacharyya, 1920, pp. 25–26)

Roy frames this debate as one concerning the relative ontological status of the individual and the Absolute. On Haldar's account (and, he notes, that of Royce), the individual, despite its essential membership in a community that constitutes

the Absolute, is autonomous and primary. For Bhattacharyya on the other hand, the individual is a mere “symbol” of the Absolute. Moreover, for Haldar, value is moral value, grounded in the community, and admitting of variation, whereas for Bhattacharyya, value is religious and necessarily unique.

Three issues are worthy of note regarding this debate. The first is that this debate about Hegelianism is happening in India, and is conducted by indigenous Indian philosophers. The goal is not to connect these ideas to Vedānta or to any other Indian philosophical system (despite the snatches of Sanskrit quoted for exegetical purposes), but to take versions of Hegelianism seriously in their own right, and indeed—unlike their Muslim colleagues—to do so in the context of Hegel’s own Christian theological frame. Second, Haldar is taken for granted by these major figures in Indian philosophy as an important instance of a neo-Hegelian philosopher, not as a rapporteur of events in Europe or England. Third, despite the obvious points of contact between this discussion and discussions of neo-Hegelian philosophy among Muslim philosophers, neither side takes note of the work of the other. They engage in parallel play.

9.5 Conclusion: Idealism and the Renaissance

It is time to take stock. We have been exploring the various forms in which idealist thought in England and the continent were appropriated and transformed in the Indian context. One might think that this appropriation of European ideas represents a discontinuity in Indian philosophical history, or an adulteration of a “pure” or “authentic” Indian philosophical tradition. As we will see, this would be a misreading. We have already noted that the idea of a “pure” tradition is a fantasy, and that Indian philosophy, like the rest of Indian culture, just like any major world culture, evolved in constant dialogue with its neighbours. This attention to European ideas is hence continuous with a tradition of cosmopolitan engagement. Indian identity is forged not in opposition to the rest of the world, but in dialogue with it, and the Indian renaissance, while directed explicitly toward the recovery of an Indian past, recovers that past not in order to withdraw from a global circulation of ideas, but rather in order to build a future engagement with a global community. The Cambridge connection is an integral part of this cosmopolitan renaissance gesture.

In the next chapter, we will focus on specific versions of Vedānta idealism that emerged in colonial India. We will begin our investigation by addressing the work of Swami Vivekananda and his own modern interpretation of Vedānta as mediated by Swami Ramakrishna. We will see how this line of interpretation takes us from Vedānta metaphysics into the philosophy of science. We then turn to Sri Aurobindo, whose *līlāvāda* will serve as a counterpoint to Vivekananda’s *māyavāda*. We will

close this discussion with attention to the work of the prominent academic philosophers—Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Ras Bihari Das, and S. S. Sastri—who took up the Vedānta framework developed by Vivekananda and Aurobindo and used it to prosecute a rigorous academic program in epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of science.

Māyā versus Līlā

From Śaṅkaracārya to Einstein

We saw in the previous chapter that Indian metaphysicians and epistemologists turned to a variety of idealist traditions to develop a modern Indian metaphysics. The traditions to which individual philosophers turned varied, but included British neo-Hegelianism, Sufism, and Advaita Vedānta. This strategy, however well motivated, was fraught with risk, for idealism itself could easily be seen as a retrograde and not a modernizing philosophical position. In this chapter, we will explore how this strategy played out in the case of Vedānta. At the core of this Indian classical tradition is the doctrine of *māyā*—the doctrine that the world is, au fond, a grand illusion, and that reality is to be sought in the transcendent. Neo-Vedāntins faced the following dilemma: to remain faithful to this tradition was to risk leaving Indian philosophy in antiquity, at best one more diorama in a contemporary museum of premodern human history; on the other hand, to modernize Indian philosophy by mitigating its idealism could do serious violence to the core of Vedānta.

To navigate between Scylla and Charybdis required the articulation of a transcendental idealism that could be the same time an immanent materialism, an ideal of human life that could be lived in the actual world, and also recognizably continuous with the Indian Vedānta tradition. In the end, as we shall see, two approaches to this problem structured Indian neo-Vedānta in the colonial period. On one approach, *māyā* itself was reinterpreted in a more realistic way; on the other, *māyā* was replaced with the other Vedānta construct *līlā*—play, or manifestation. These two approaches successfully resolved this dilemma, and in that process enabled the secularization of an originally religious tradition.

Although much of the philosophical work of articulating a modern form of Vedānta was accomplished by a group of eminent academic philosophers, the project is arguably initiated by two much more public figures, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. While Aurobindo is most directly associated with the *līlāvāda*

interpretation and an explicit critique of *māyāvāda*,¹ we will see that Vivekananda, while using the rhetoric of *māyāvāda*, is already adopting a perspective that leads in the *līlāvāda*, or this-worldly direction. We will then attend to the impact of this realistic turn on academic philosophy in the work of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Ras Bihari Das, and finally to that of S. S. S. Sastri, who brings neo-Vedānta into dialogue with twentieth-century philosophy of science and with physics.

10.1. Māyā and Līlā

From the beginning, Advaita Vedānta employs both the language of *māyā* and of *līlā*. Both terms, for instance, figure in Śaṅkara's *kārikās*. The term *māyā* connotes measurement as well as magic, or illusion. So, when the world is represented as *māyā*, it is represented as a magically created illusion, no more real than the snake for which the rope is mistaken; it is the necessarily failed attempt to take the measure of reality, and not reality itself. Śaṅkara does insist that the world is illusory in this sense, and *māyāvāda* has been the dominant strain in Advaita metaphysics since his time. It is no surprise therefore that the rubric of *māyā* dominates even the early twentieth-century Vedānta rhetoric of Swami Vivekananda.²

Nonetheless, Śaṅkara also introduces the term *līlā*. In classical Vedānta thought, *līlā* answers an important question: Why did *Īśvara* create the world? To appeal to a motive would be to presuppose a need, and hence an imperfection; to appeal to a purpose would be to presuppose a duality, in virtue of the need for an unrealized goal beyond *Īśvara* himself. But to regard the act of creation (or for that matter, the acts of sustenance or of destruction) as accidental would be to regard *Īśvara* as a bumbling fool. The obvious solution is to take the creative, sustaining, and destructive acts of Brahma, Vishnu, and Śiva as mere sport, or play—*līlā*. In this sense, these acts are not purposeful but are yet intentional; not necessary, but good fun. They are represented as the overflowing into action of divine joy (Isaeva, 1993, Mahadevan 1960).³

¹ See Sen, Nikam, Chaudhuri, and Malkani, "Has Aurobindo Refuted *Māyāvāda*?" (in Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 595–629).

² Śaṅkara's philosophy is interpreted in many ways, both classically and in the modern period, ranging from thoroughgoing idealism to a hard-core realism, from dualism to monism. We consider only the readings that are influential in the colonial period.

³ Seen in this way, *līlā* accomplishes a secondary religious and philosophical purpose. It infuses an aesthetic dimension into the fabric of the universe, a dimension that, we will see, in chapter 12, becomes critical to the development of modern Indian philosophy. The world, *ab initio*, is a site of *ananda*, of bliss. As an artistic creation, it is already suffused with *rasa*, or aesthetic quality, and cannot be understood even metaphysically without being understood aesthetically. Art, therefore, becomes not an incidental human activity, but rather a central arena in which we partake of the divine activity of creation—of the manifestation of *sat*, *cit*, and *ananda* in the temporal realm.

Inasmuch as the central insight of Advaita Vedānta is *advaita*, or nondualism, *māyā* and *līlā* can be seen as two alternative ways of developing this insight. While *līlā* can be understood as a virtual synonym of *māyā*—that is, we can understand manifestation as involving a kind of illusion as when, for instance, an actor manifests as a character and we fail to see the actor as an actor—in the Indian philosophical vocabulary these terms have had very different connotations (as is evident both in Aurobindo’s own work to which we turn in a moment, and in the response to his work in modern India). *Līlā* has a realistic implication: the actor embodies the role; *māyā* has an idealistic implication. In the magic show, the dismemberment of the lovely assistant by the magician is mere appearance. (The exploration of the various permutations of *māyāvāda* and *līlāvāda* would take us far afield, and this distinction will do for present purposes.)

Until the early twentieth century, *māyā* is dominant. It expresses the idea that there is ultimately no duality in reality because all apparent duality is just that—mere appearance. To take a stock Vedānta example, when we approach a mirage expecting water, we find that there is no actual water, only an appearance. To understand the experience of a mirage as involving two things—water and its appearance—is to succumb to the illusion of duality; there is nothing beyond the appearance. Our experience of the world, according to Vedānta, is just like that, appearance with nothing beyond it; to take there to be anything beyond is to be seduced by *māyā*. *Māyāvāda* establishes nonduality by removing one of the dual poles, namely, the world beyond appearance.

This is all right as far as it goes, so long as one is metaphysically content to reject the entire phenomenal world, including the empirical human subject, as illusory.⁴ One might be content to reduce one’s own existence to cosmic illusion, but the doctrine of *māyā* raises further problems. As Bannerjee puts it:

The Absolute Spirit is said to *appear* quite unaccountably as the world of plurality, and not to truly *create* it or *transform* Himself into it. But how can the Absolute Spirit *appear* falsely as a diversified material world and to whom should He appear as such? ... The appearance of the Absolute Spirit as a plurality of finite spirits and a world of finite transitory phenomena experienced by them is, therefore, regarded as *inexplicable*.

—(Bannerjee, 1944, p. 276)

The point is this: The doctrine of *māyā*, while it secures nonduality, does so at the price of mystery. Not only do we need to swallow the inconceivability of our

⁴ As we saw Haldar note in the previous chapter, if one wishes to harmonize with science, this might not be a great strategy.

own nonexistence despite our conviction to the contrary (or even despite our conviction in favor of this doctrine, which would implicate our existence as subjects of that conviction), but we must accept that the very existence of the supposedly explanatory illusion is itself inexplicable. Sri Aurobindo put the point this way:

The theory of Illusion cuts the knot of the world problem, it does not disentangle it; it is an escape, not a solution. It effects a separation from Nature, not a liberation and fulfillment of our nature.

—(Aurobindo, 1977, p. 419)

But suppose one wanted to take the world seriously, while retaining the Advaita insight. *Līlā*, if adopted as an ontological option, as opposed to a mere divine psychology, offers hope. On this understanding, the world is not the illusion that emerges when we take the measure of a nondual reality; instead, it is the manifestation of that reality, its play in space and time. Just as when we watch a dancer perform the role of Kṛṣṇa in a Bharatnatyam performance we do not see two personae—the dancer and the Lord—but a dancer playing the Lord, when we encounter reality, on this metaphor, we encounter not reality and its manifestation, but reality manifested—or played out—as a universe.

Banerjee explores this rich analogy between performance or art and the manifestation of the universe as divine *līlā* with particular clarity:

A true sportsman and a true artist give expression to their inner joy and beauty and power and skill in various outward forms with perfect freedom and self-consciousness, without any motive, without any sense of want or imperfection, without any concern about consequences. . . . A true sportsman thus becomes a creator of beauty and he imports his own inner joy into the hearts of the spectators. A true artist's action is also of similar nature. . . . His aesthetic consciousness is embodied in his artistic productions. . . .

In such cases we find a type of actions, which are essentially distinct from our ordinary voluntary actions, but in which, nevertheless, there is manifestation of free will, dynamic consciousness, creative genius, wisdom and knowledge, power and skill, all these being merged in or unified with a sense of inner joy and beauty. According to the *līlāvādins* actions of this type may give us a clue, however imperfect, to the nature of the divine self-expression. . . .

[The perfect artist—*Brahman*] may be described as a *rasa-rajā*—Beauty personified, or as self-conscious and a self-determining Beauty.

Whatever he perceives is beautiful; whatever he thinks is beautiful;
whatever he does is beautiful.

—(Bannerjee, 1944, pp. 278–279)

There is, on this view, no duality between creator and creation, as the creation is the creator as he chooses to manifest himself. As we will see in section 3 of this chapter, Aurobindo's genius was to elevate this second interpretation of Vedānta to a point where it could serve as a foundation for modern Indian philosophy. But we first consider Vivekananda's modernist reinterpretation of *māyā*, an interpretation that moves it from idealism to realism, while retaining much of its religious and phenomenological force.

10.2. The Reformed Māyāvāda of Swami Vivekananda

The dominant Advaita school of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was that of Sri Ramakrishna and his Calcutta *math*, most eloquently articulated by his student Swami Vivekananda. *That Advaita was māyāvādin* through and through. Nonetheless, as a close reading of Vivekananda on *māyā* reveals, in the end he takes *māyā* to indicate *a particular kind of illusion*, and not the illusion of the existence of an actually nonexistent world. He is a realist in the end, even if he is also *a particular kind of idealist*. His metaphors, however, are the metaphors of *māyā*. When he asserts the refrain, "This, too is *māyā*," he indicates illusion and not reality, an appearance to be rejected. When, as we shall see later in this chapter, Ras Bihari Das follows him in announcing the falsity of the world, we see the impact of this metaphor of illusion so long dominant in Vedānta, but once again, read in a decidedly realist and modern register.

Vivekananda, in language reminiscent of Śaṅkara, declares frequently that the world is entirely *māyā*. But a lot hangs on the way the term is used. In a set of lectures delivered in London in 1915, called "*Jñāna-Yoga*," Vivekananda sets out his program with remarkable clarity. At the outset, it sounds like we are headed for a serious idealism:

Great is the tenacity with which man clings to the senses. Yet, however substantial he may think the external world in which he lives and moves, there comes a time in the lives of individuals and of races when, involuntarily, they ask, "Is this real?"

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 271)

But Vivekananda quickly dispels any notion that he is about to give a purely negative answer to this question. He reads Vedānta as identifying illusion not as an alternative to reality, but as a mis-taking of it. He writes:

Two positions remain to mankind. One is to believe with the nihilists that all is nothing, that we know nothing, that we can never know anything either about the future, the past, or even the present.... I have never seen a man who could really become a nihilist for one minute. It is very easy to talk.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 272)

Vivekananda emphasizes that his Vedānta is far from idealist, however committed he may be to the thesis that our reality is pervaded by illusion. Consider these remarks:

Death is the end of life.... Saints die and sinners die, kings die and beggars die. They are all going to death, and yet this tremendous clinging on to life exists. Somehow, we do not know why, we cling to life; we cannot give it up. And this is *Māyā*.

The mother is nursing the child with great care; all her soul, all her life is in that child. The child grows, becomes a man, and perchance becomes a blackguard and a brute, kicks her and beats her every day, yet the mother clings to the child.... She thinks that it is not love, that it is something which has got hold of her nerves, which she cannot shake off; however she may try, she cannot shake off the bondage she is in. And this is *Māyā*.

We are all after the Golden Fleece. Everyone thinks that this will be his. Every reasonable man sees that his chance is, perhaps, one in twenty millions, yet everyone struggles for it. And this is *Māyā*.

Death is stalking day and night over this earth of ours, but at the same time we think we shall live eternally. And this is *Māyā*.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 287)

In the first two paragraphs, Vivekananda emphasizes the affective dimensions of *māyā*. He characterizes *māyā* first in terms of the blindness of instinct, an instinct that makes no sense given reality, but which nonetheless possesses us. The irrationality to which Vivekananda adverts, embodied in the clinging to life or to others, and the blindness to that dimension of our own psychological lives—brought home in the example of the mother—he argues, lead us to inhabit a world divorced from reality, an illusory world. But that illusory status does not entail the nonexistence of a material world, only the falsification of its nature.

In the second two paragraphs, Vivekananda turns to the more explicitly cognitive dimensions of *māyā*. He begins with the unreasonable illusions regarding

the prospects of success in accordance with which many people conduct their lives. As Vivekananda puts the point succinctly, “*Māyā* is a statement of the fact of this universe, of how it is going on” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 288). In endorsing *māyāvāda* as an understanding of Vedānta, Vivekananda is thus not asserting an illusionism; nor is he abandoning the central idea of Vedānta. Instead, he is developing a materialist interpretation of Vedānta according to which *māyā* denotes an actual characteristic of our actual (although deceptive), experience of an actual world; it is subjective deception, not cosmic illusion, in which *māyā* consists.

The central insights of Advaita Vedānta are, first, that the world we see is entirely illusory, and that the reality that lies behind it is inexpressible, uncharacterized Brahman; second, that ultimate reality is nondual; but third, especially for Śaṅkara, that the relation between *māyā* and *tattva* is itself nondual; that *māyā* is *tattva* misconceived, dualistically apprehended. Vivekananda preserves the core of these insights. He argues that the world we inhabit is illusory—it appears to exist in one way, but in fact exists in another. We deceive ourselves about those around us, about our own emotions, about our prospects, and about our mortality. Just as Śaṅkara argues, Vivekananda takes the source of that illusion to be the mind.

Vivekananda also argues that the world that lies behind the one we thus fabricate is one we never apprehend in everyday life, although we can know it to be real. This serves the same function as the *nirguna Brahman* of classical Advaita: it is a cognitively inaccessible transcendent reality, which we falsify by cognitive superimposition. And finally, Vivekananda argues that the reality we thus falsify is not ontologically distinct from that world we fabricate in its place. The world of *māyā* he characterizes is simply reality misperceived. But none of this is idealistic in the sense that it denies the reality of the world. If anything, it is a phenomenology of illusion. This modernization of Vedānta is what allows it to mark both the continuity of Indian philosophy during the colonial period with its classical past, and the progressiveness of that tradition.

Vivekananda focuses on our tendency to be deceived into thinking that what we experience is real. Aurobindo, we will see, focuses on our failure to see that the reality we inhabit has a deeper dimension, as a manifestation of a reality to which we have no everyday access. In each case, we see in the hands of these public intellectuals—leaders of the popular revival of Vedānta—a modernization of this idealist system through a reinterpretation as a kind of realism. In each case, we find preserved the central insights of nonduality and of the primacy of a deeper reality to which we have only extraordinary access. Aurobindo, however, completes the realist project in Vedānta, by no longer treating everyday life as illusory.

10.3. From Māyāvāda to Līlāvāda: The Project of Aurobindo's *The Life Divine*

Inder Sen (Indra Sen, 1903–1954) characterizes Aurobindo's problematic as follows: "His *leitmotif* and the first formulation of the philosophical question is, 'How is divine life, a full life of the Spirit, possible on Earth? How can Spirit be reconciled to Matter?'" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 596). This gets things exactly right. *The Life Divine* is aimed at the metaphysical and epistemological reconciliation of mind and matter, knowledge and ignorance. Bannerjee (1944) commenting on the term *līlā* in this context, says:

... The perfectly free and delightful, sportive and artistic, self-expression of the One in the many, of the Infinite in the finite, of the Eternal in the temporal, of the Absolute in the relative, is called by the Vaishnava devotees, his *līlā*.

—(1944, p. 277)⁵

A comparison with Augustine is instructive. Aurobindo, like Augustine, is concerned with perfection, and its relation to imperfection. Their respective conceptions of perfection, and hence of the reconciliation of it with its opposite, however, are entirely different. Augustine's perfection is of the omniscience-omnipotence-omnibenevolence variety; Aurobindo's is the perfection of self-understanding and joy in life. Augustine's perfection is the necessary, but humanly impossible perfection of God; Aurobindo's, the anticipated and possible perfection of human life. Augustine's is, however problematically, already, and essentially, realized; Aurobindo's is the cosmic *telos*. Perhaps most important, the dialectic instituted by Augustine's thought demands distance between the perfect and the imperfect (hence free will, the serpent, and the fall, which insulate God from evil, ignorance, and responsibility). The dialectic instituted by Aurobindo, in contrast, demands the unity of the perfect and the imperfect through sublation in the historical, ethical, and aesthetic processes of involution and evolution. The mystery to be solved then, in Aurobindo's words, is this:

How did an illimitable consciousness and force of integral being enter into this limitation and separateness? ... It is the mystery not of an original Illusion, but of the origin of the Ignorance and in-conscience and of the relations of Knowledge and Ignorance to the original Consciousness or Super-Conscience.

—(Aurobindo, 2006, p. 498)

⁵ This connection of the term *līlā* to Vaishnava thought is worth further comment, and we will return to this connection below.

Aurobindo raises two central philosophical problems in this passage. The first concerns the metaphysical relation between the reality of the totality of an unlimited being and its instantiation in finite particulars. On the one hand, the requirement that reality must be an infinite unity appears inconsistent with the reality of its many particular parts; on the other hand, without these parts, there is no way for this reality to be manifest at all.⁶ The second concerns the epistemological relation between the consciousness to which we aspire and our present cognitive status. We are unable to conceive of the epistemic perspective to which we aspire, while at the same time conscious of it as the intentional object of legitimate aspiration. While Aurobindo casts all of this in the language of creation and evolution (and through the tantric imagery of *śakti*), the fundamental problem he addresses is that of the relation between the finite and the infinite as it manifests in each of these domains.

Let us crystallize this problem further, so as to feel its irresistible pull on philosophical thought. We can always, on the one hand, as Kant and Hegel, or, for that matter, Śāṅkara emphasize, conceive reality as an unbounded whole, and we must think of ourselves as parts thereof. But on the other, we are always conscious of our particularity and limitation and so think of ourselves not as moments in a cosmos, but as independent original existences. These ontological perspectives, as we saw in the previous chapter, are in tension and demand unification. On the epistemological side, we are always committed to the views we in fact hold, and to their warrant. Nonetheless, no matter how committed we are to a view we endorse, we are also always conscious of our own limitation, and so of a higher epistemic standpoint from which what we take to be knowledge is exposed as error. These perspectives as well are in tension and demand unification.⁷

Aurobindo's resolution of these tensions—the project of *Life Divine*—is distinctive in its creative blend of ideas drawn from Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and ideas derived from neo-Hegelianism. Vedānta motivates the project through the conviction that the solution is to be found in a kind of nonduality of the mundane

⁶ Here we hear echoes of the neo-Hegelianism we scouted in the previous chapter, although Aurobindo himself read neither Hegel nor the neo-Hegelians. Their ideas, however, permeated the intellectual atmosphere of Cambridge and later of India.

⁷ The moral and aesthetic domains give rise to parallel tensions. As Kant noted, we are forced to think of ourselves as biological organisms governed by the inexorable laws of a causally closed nature; as moral agents, we are forced to conceive ourselves as free. This is an apparent duality that demands reconciliation, but whose poles each resist treatment as mere illusion. As aesthetic subjects we are simultaneously aware of the particularity of our taste and aesthetic response and of the universality of claims to beauty. This requires us, as K. C. Bhattacharyya so perceptively put it in his essay “The Concept of Rasa” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011), which we discuss in chapter 12, to be simultaneously engaged with and detached from the object of aesthetic experience. In the more contemporary literature, Nagel addresses a parallel tension between the first person and the impersonal perspectives in *The View From Nowhere* (Nagel, 1986).

and the transcendent; nonetheless, as we will see in our exploration of his conception of manifestation or *līlā*, Aurobindo was convinced that the then dominant interpretation of this tradition is untenable. Vedānta also delivers to him the insight that the world we experience, conditioned by our own sensibility and conceptual framework (*saguna*), is nondifferent from the reality we also must think as transcendent of those conceptual categories (*nirguna*).

Vedānta is not the only well from which Aurobindo draws. Sāṃkhya is the origin of Aurobindo's conception of evolution. From Sāṃkhya, and in particular from the primordial principles of *prakṛti* and *puṛuṣa*, Aurobindo also draws his conception of the regulative and causal roles played by the idea of progress in human history. This idea of progress is inflected by Aurobindo's absorption of then-current British ideas of progress and evolution, inflected by neo-Hegelianism. He thus reconstructs Sāṃkhya through the framework of dialectical progress through sublation. This Hegelian reading of Sāṃkhya structures his account of the unity of apparent contradictories in higher moments of understanding. The consequent dialectical understanding of knowledge and reality in turn allows Aurobindo to reconcile the metaphysical and epistemological oppositions he takes to structure our lives and to imagine transcending them in a life divine.

10.4. Aurobindo's Critique of Māyā

At the core of *The Life Divine* lie two chapters (II: 5 and 6 on cosmic illusion) in which Aurobindo considers and refutes the hypothesis that the phenomenal world is a grand illusion. He sets up the *māyāvāda* hypothesis as follows:

The cosmic Illusion is sometimes envisaged... as something that has the character of an unreal subjective experience; it... may be... a figure of forms or movements that arises in some eternal sleep of things, or in a dream consciousness, and is temporarily imposed on a pure and featureless self-aware Existence; it is a dream that takes place in the Infinite.

—(Aurobindo, 2006, p. 377)

He points out the role of stock analogies such as dreaming or hallucination in classical arguments for this version of Vedānta idealism. Aurobindo then, taking this analogy seriously, argues that it fails as an account of ordinary experience. First, he argues, while dreams may contrast with waking life, that mere fact of contrast is insufficient to justify distinguishing them as unreal as opposed to real; for all we know, dreams and waking life could be equally real, though different in other respects, or even equally unreal (Aurobindo, 2006, p. 378). After all,

mirages and water, to take another stock Indian example, are both real. But one is a real liquid and the other a real refraction pattern. Similarly, mirages and water in works of fiction are equally unreal. Nonetheless, within those fictional realities, they differ in ontic status. Second, he points out, dreams and waking life are in fact very different, and in specific ways: dreams lack the continuity, coherence, and stability that characterize waking life. So, proposing the dream state as an analogy for waking life seems at least unmotivated, and at worst misleading (Aurobindo, 2006, pp. 378–379).

The most significant critique Aurobindo develops of the metaphor of *māyā* is the third: Aurobindo argues that even if we set aside the first two difficulties, the dream analogy fails utterly to establish the unreality of the world; in fact, if it establishes anything, he argues, it is instead, the reality of the world. This critique is important not only because of its depth, but also because it constitutes the foundation for Aurobindo's alternative *līlāvāda*.

Aurobindo points out that dreams are in fact real: they are real dreams. So, to argue that the phenomenal world is a dream is not to argue that it is unreal in the first place; it is only to characterize the mode of its reality. In this context, Aurobindo notes that psychology, in particular, psychoanalysis, takes dreams seriously as real phenomena to be explained and that can explain other psychic phenomena (Aurobindo, 2006, pp. 379–385). He concludes that “the dream analogy fails us altogether, and is better put out of the way; it can always be used as a vivid metaphor for a certain attitude our mind can take towards its experiences, but it has no value for a metaphysical inquiry into the reality and fundamental significance or the origin of existence” (2006, p. 385).

Aurobindo then offers a parallel critique of the metaphor of illusion, arguing that it is no more useful metaphysically than the dream metaphor:

The familiar existence of mother-of-pearl and silver, turns also, like the rope and snake analogy, upon an error due to a resemblance between a present real and another, an absent real; it can have no application to the imposition of a multiple and mutable unreality upon a sole and unique immutable Real.

—(2006, p. 387)

Here and in his subsequent discussion of a number of other putative metaphors for *māyā*, Aurobindo emphasizes the pervasive disanalogy between a case in which one real entity is mistaken for another, or one possible property is misattributed instead of another, on the one hand, and the case of *māyā*, in which something entirely unreal and impossible is supposed to be projected, on the other. He concludes that the metaphor of cosmic illusion is unwarranted and misleading as a metaphysical image. Instead, he urges, to the extent that any of these metaphors is

useful at all, they force us to take seriously the reality of the world.⁸ Taking its reality seriously, Aurobindo urges, should lead us to inquire not into the mystery of its appearance, but rather into that of the precise nature of its reality.

Aurobindo offers a second line of critique, arguing that even if these metaphors could be made to work in some sense, they would still not solve the problem that *māyā* is introduced to solve, namely, to explain the relation between the manifold nature of experience and the unity of being as such. We begin with the assumption that *Brahman* (the Absolute) is real. If the phenomenal world is a product of *māyā* rather than of *Brahman*, the question then arises, “Is *māyā* also real?” This is a difficult question for the *māyāvādin*. If it is real, then it seems that we are committed to a fundamental duality, that of *Brahman* and *Māyā*. But if it is unreal, then it cannot be causally efficacious in generating the world of appearance. A traditional response is to conceive of *māyā* as both real and unreal.⁹ Aurobindo agrees that *māyā* is real in some sense. But in that case, we need an account of the nature of its reality, an account not forthcoming from this analysis.

There is a deeper, internal problem for *māyāvāda* here: whether we conceive *māyā* as unreal or as real in some sense, we must ask, “Why does *māyā* mediate between us and the ultimately real *Brahman*?” Nothing in the theory of *māyā* explains this. This strikes at the heart of the *māyā* metaphor, for that metaphor is posited as an explanation, as an account of why a nondual reality appears dualistically. But if the theory itself requires a totally inexplicable explanans, it is no explanation at all.

Third, Aurobindo poses an insoluble dilemma for *māyāvāda*:

[If] *Brahman* is the sole Reality, and if he is not the percipient, who, then, perceives the illusion? Any other percipient is not in existence; the individual who is in us, the apparent witness, is himself phenomenal and unreal, a creation of *Māyā*. But if *Brahman* is the percipient, how is it possible that the illusion can persist for a moment, since the true consciousness of the Percipient is consciousness of self, and awareness solely of its own pure self-existence? If *Brahman* perceives the world and things with a true consciousness, then they must all be itself and real, but since they are not the pure self-existence, but at best are forms of it, and are seen through a phenomenal Ignorance, this realistic solution is not possible.

—(Aurobindo, 2006, p. 397)

⁸ P.T. Raju makes the same point. (Raju, 1953a, pp. 427–428)

⁹ Again, Raju considers the use of the tetralemma as a device for thinking about alternatives to Śaṅkara’s *māyāvāda*. (Raju, 1953a, pp. 403–404). He argues that Tagore, Rāhākṛishnan, and Bhagavan Das each adopt the “both real and unreal” approach to understanding *māyā*.

Illusion must be someone's illusion, but neither the absolute *Brahman* nor the phenomenal consciousness can be the subject. Nothing, therefore, he argues, is solved by *māyā*. As Aurobindo concludes his refutation, "The theory of *māyā*... does not really solve the problem of existence, but rather renders it forever insoluble" (2006, p. 418). This is why Aurobindo says that taking the entire world of experience to be *māyā* accomplishes nothing so much as rendering it all meaningless and worthy only of escape, effecting "a separation from Nature, not a liberation and fulfillment of our nature" (2006, p. 419). Aurobindo insists that a solution to the problem of existence should account for existence, not explain it away. This is the real point of *The Life Divine* and explains why this frankly impenetrable volume of Vedānta metaphysics has exerted such a powerful influence on modern Indian philosophy.

10.5. Aurobindo's Doctrine of Līlā

What, then, is real? And in what sense is it real? Phenomenal reality is real. That is where we live, and that is where ontology begins. But phenomenal reality is not therefore the measure of all things. As Aurobindo points out (2006, pp. 427–428), it stands corrected both by science and by rational reflection,¹⁰ each of which can correct its illusions and defects and each of which is of assistance in the evolution of our understanding of reality and its nature. This evolution is what makes possible the attainment of the immanent life divine Aurobindo envisions.

At each level of the dialectic of knowledge our apprehension of reality is enhanced and reality is manifested to a greater degree. This demands an account of the now central construct of manifestation. Aurobindo's account is clearly consistent with neo-Hegelian ideas: "All manifestation depends on being, but also upon consciousness and its power or degree; for as is the status of consciousness, so will be the status of being" (2006, pp. 427–428). Manifestation, Aurobindo argues, is always manifestation for a consciousness. To be—even in a Hegelian sense—is to be apprehended, and so all Being is in this sense dependent upon consciousness.¹¹ As a consequence, for Aurobindo, the nature and scope of consciousness is not only of psychological, but also of epistemological and metaphysical significance, determining both the range of objects of knowledge and of beings.

¹⁰ Note that here, in asserting the role of reason and science as correctives to common sense Aurobindo is clearly in the company of other modernist idealists, such as Iqbal and Haldar.

¹¹ This idealism resonates more with Bradley, Schelling, Bergson, and Whitehead, whose thought was current in Cambridge while Aurobindo was studying there than with that of Hegel. Hence the emphasis on consciousness as an ultimate ground of the empirically real.

This reading allows us to make sense of one of the more obscure aspects of Aurobindo's ontology, his account of plunging. Aurobindo poses the question of why there is a material world rather than nothing, or rather even than a world of pure spirit, by asking why consciousness plunges into insentience in its manifestation as matter.¹² It is easy to read this as an extravagant metaphysical presupposition of the literal materialization of the psychic. Aurobindo, however, is arguing that for matter to be a manifestation of being at all, consciousness is presupposed as its ontological ground, and matter must come into existence as its object. The necessary coordination of subject and object entails, he argues, that matter is object-consciousness made concrete. This is hence more a transcendental than an absolute idealism, one that takes seriously the empirical reality of the external world, while insisting on the mind-dependence of ontology.¹³ Aurobindo writes:

This, then, is the mystery,—how did an illimitable consciousness and force of integral being enter into this limitation and separativeness? How could this be possible and, if its possibility has to be admitted, what is its justification in the Real and its significance? *It is the mystery not of an original Illusion, but of the origin of the Ignorance and Inconscience and of the relations of Knowledge and Ignorance to the original Consciousness or Superconscience.*

—(2006, p. 430 emphasis ours)

Aurobindo's solution to this mystery, the mystery of the nature of the manifestation of reality in experience, is *līlā*. It is worth thinking about the etymology of this term. A. K. Coomaraswamy's comments are useful in this context. He locates the first occurrence of this term in *Brahmasūtra II.1.32,33*: *Na prayojanatvat, lokavat tu līlākayvalyam*. ("Brahma's creative activity is not undertaken by way of any need on his part, but simply by way of sport, in the common sense of the word.") The point here is that *līlā* is introduced as a way of accounting for voluntary, but not instrumental, action, action done just for its own sake, but action nonetheless.

In the *jātakas*, Coomaraswamy also notes, the term occurs frequently in the context of the future Buddha's manifestation in virtuous action or miraculous deeds. Of these occurrences, he writes,

¹² The parallel to Iqbal's question about the reason for the existence of the material world is striking, as is the fact that there is no clear intellectual connection between Iqbal and his circle and Aurobindo and those who follow him, save the fact that both studied at Cambridge.

¹³ So, this is more like Schopenhauer's view than like Berkeley's; Aurobindo is effecting a reconciliation of idealism at one level with realism at another. In the end, we will see, Aurobindo's own understanding also resonates with the idealism of Bradley.

The rendering of *līlā* here [in the *jātakas*] and in the Pali Text Society Dictionary by “grace” is far too weak; the grace of the Buddha’s virtuosity [*kuśalam*] is certainly implied, but the direct reference is to his “wonderful works”; the Buddha’s *līlā* is, like Brahma’s *līlā*, the manifestation of himself in act. *Līlā*, therefore, in its classical connotation, is not an *attribute* of the divine, but a *manifestation* of divinity in action. Indeed, this connotation of *līlā*, as manifestation, as opposed to *play*, is reflected in the fact that in the Upaniṣads, the manifestation of the elements in material objects is also *līlā*. “*Yada līlāyata hy arcih*” (As soon as the point of flame burns upward, *Mundaka Upaniṣad* 1.2.2.)

—(Coomaraswamy, 1941, p. 99)

Rendering *līlā* as manifestation by itself does not end the discussion. We are still left with a set of crucial distinctions toward the overcoming of which Vedānta is directed—that between the absolute and the relative; the divine and the mundane; the unconditioned and the conditioned; the unitary and the manifold; the perfect and the imperfect. *Māyāvāda*, Aurobindo argues, attempted, but failed, to reconcile these by denying the reality of one term in each. How does this account of *līlā* as manifestation help to solve the problem that *māyā* left insoluble?

Līlāvāda reconciles these dichotomies, Aurobindo argues, by affirming the reality of the relative, the mundane, the conditioned, the manifold, and the imperfect. But when Aurobindo affirms this reality, he at the same times sees these real phenomena as manifestations of the absolute, the divine, the unconditioned, the unitary, and the perfect. The resolution of the tension and the dichotomy is thus achieved through an account of nonduality in which the apparent opposites are reconciled as identical in the same sense that the dancer and the divinity are one and the same in the *natya*. Just as the dance cannot be performed unless we have an imperfect—all-too-human—dancer, and it is not a successful performance unless the divinity is evoked, imperfection and its metaphysical, moral, and epistemological cognates are necessary for the manifestation of the perfect in reality. Aurobindo puts the point this way: “When we say that all is a divine manifestation, even that which we call undivine, we mean that in its essentiality, all is divine, even if the form baffles or repels us” (Aurobindo, 2006, p. 353).

In Aurobindo’s hands, then, *līlā* replaces *māyā* as a way of making sense of the nonduality at the heart of Advaita. Whereas *māyā*, he shows, promises a resolution of the tensions inherent in the apparent duality of *Brahman* and *lokavyavahāra*, it fails in two respects. First, any resolution is achieved at the expense of denying the reality of the world we inhabit, hence not so much solving the problem of existence as wishing it away. But second, even if we were to accept that solution, all of the problems that originally attended the duality of

lifeworld and ultimate reality reappear for *māyā* itself. Aurobindo puts it this way, as we saw earlier:

The theory of illusion cuts the knot of the world problem, it does not disentangle it; it is an escape, not a solution; a flight of the spirit is not a sufficient victory for the being embodied in this world of the becoming; it effects a separation from Nature, not a liberation and fulfillment of our nature. This eventual outcome satisfies only one element, sublimates only one impulse of our being; it leaves the rest out in the cold to perish in the twilight of the unreal reality of Maya.... Illusionism unifies by elimination; it deprives all knowledge and experience, except the one supreme merger, of reality and significance.

—(Aurobindo, 2006, p. 485)

Līlā, or manifestation, Aurobindo argues, explains both the apparent duality and its ultimate unreality:

All truths, even those which seem to be in conflict, have their validity, but they need a reconciliation in some largest Truth, which takes them into itself; ... all philosophies ... see the Self and the universe from a point of view of the spirit's experience of the many-sided Manifestation and in doing so shed light on something that has to be known in the Infinite.

—(2006, p. 487)

The duality is that of player and role; the dancer is not a *deva*, and we know that. On the other hand, nor is he different from the *deva* we see on stage, and so the apparent duality is unreal. *Līlā* explains this apparent but unreal duality without denying the facts of our ordinary life, which are rejected as illusory in *māyāvāda* but affirmed as an ineliminable aspect of reality in *līlā*. Finally, *līlā* provides an account of why life in the world we inhabit is meaningful; it is in fact divine and therefore is the locus of our potential for transcendence. *Līlāvāda* thus provides a metaphysics consistent both with the Indian philosophical tradition and with modernity, completing the project of naturalizing Vedānta initiated by Vivekananda.¹⁴ Vivekananda and Aurobindo were religious leaders and public intellectuals, not academic philosophers. Nonetheless, their philosophical ideas

¹⁴ Whether the critique of *māyāvāda* Aurobindo mobilizes was the point of his *līlāvāda* or merely an incidental consequence, and indeed whether these two viewpoints can be reconciled in the end, is the subject of the debate held in Amalner in 1950 (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 595–629).

set the stage for the scholarly articulation of Vedānta as a philosophical system capable of synthesizing Indian and European idealisms and as an Indian philosophical system that is at once traditional and modern.

That task was taken up by a series of eminent academics, each conversant both with classical Indian philosophy and with contemporary Western philosophy. We focus in what follows on three of these figures as examples of this project. Here we see the transition from the public debate, prosecuted by prominent religious figures, to an academic discourse prosecuted by professors of philosophy, who took not a general materialistic view of the world as their foil, but specifically the view of modern science. These academics, like Vivekananda and Aurobindo, are concerned to articulate classical Vedānta in a way consistent with modernity. Their task, then, is to bring Śaṅkaracārya into dialogue with Einstein.

10.6. From the Ashram to the Academy

10.6.1 From Theology to Philosophy: The Idealism of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) was educated in India at Madras by missionary, Tamil and Sanskrit scholars (see section 2 of the previous chapter). He became a professor of philosophy, serving at many of the top universities in India, including the Universities of Mysore and Calcutta, where he was appointed the King George V Chair of Philosophy in 1921. Radhakrishnan acquired an international reputation. In 1926, he was invited to Oxford to give the Upton Lectures, published in 1927 as *The Hindu View of Life*, and in 1929 he delivered the Hibbert Lectures at the University of Manchester and University College, London, later published under the title *An Idealist View of Life*. In 1936, Oxford University appointed him to the H. N. Spalding Chair of Eastern Religions and Ethics.¹⁵

Radhakrishnan's early writings were reactions against the view that Vedānta is focused only on the goal of individual self-realization/transformation, without any ethical framework or social philosophy. He argued, demonstrating, contrary to the thinking of both A. G. Hogg and S. Sastri, who, as we note in the previous chapter, were his teachers, that there was in fact an ethics that formed the core of Vedānta. Radhakrishnan's dissertation was devoted to making the argument in support of this position (S. Radhakrishnan, 1908); he continued this focus in other work, including a comparative essay entitled "The Ethics of the Bhagavadgītā and Kant," which appeared in *The International Journal of Ethics* in 1911. Radhakrishnan's

¹⁵ A chair later held by Bimal K. Matilal.

most creative work, however, came later, in the form of the two sets of lectures he was to deliver to his audiences abroad between 1926 and 1929. In this chapter we focus on the second set, the Hibbert Lectures, and in particular on the approach he takes to idealism in the context of modernity and its relation to the claims of science.

Radhakrishnan was preoccupied with the philosophy of religion, and with the problem of understanding the nature of religious experience and religious knowledge in a modern context. He often brings a Christian theological vocabulary to his writing, but his problematic and outlook derives squarely from Vedānta. Radhakrishnan's reference points are many, including the Indian philosophical tradition from the Vedas to the present; the Western philosophical tradition from the pre-Socratics to the neo-Hegelians and Frege; contemporary science, including behaviorism and psychoanalysis in psychology; evolutionary theory; Einstein, Eddington, and Heisenberg in physics, and often Whitehead and Alexander in contemporary metaphysics.

An Idealist View of Life (Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, 1932) begins by considering what Radhakrishnan calls "the modern challenge to religion" (1932, p. 13). The principal challenge he has in mind is that from mechanistic science. In order to understand the challenge as he sees it, we first must consider how Radhakrishnan understands idealism with which, as a good Vedāntin, he identifies the religious outlook. Here is how he characterizes the position:

When we ask with reference to any thing or action, "what is the idea?" we mean, what is the principle involved in it, what is the meaning or the purpose of its being, what is the aim or value of the action? What is it driving at? This idea or value is the operative creative force. An idealist view finds that the universe has meaning, has value. Ideal values are the dynamic forces, the driving power of the universe. The world is intelligible only as a system of ends.

—(Radhakrishnan, 1932, p. 15)

Radhakrishnan here characterizes idealism as primarily a teleological doctrine, but nonetheless one with strong metaphysical as well as ethical content. The idea behind the idealism is a purpose or an intention; but it is a purpose or intention that constitutes the nature of phenomena, just as an intention to act characterizes the nature of an action. Moreover, the purpose in the universe is value-laden and in a broad sense gives meaning to the whole. The tension with science, then, is clear: much modern science presents itself as mechanical, and not as purposive; to the extent that science claims explanatory hegemony, then, it aims to displace the idealistic viewpoint according to which only teleological explanation is ultimately satisfactory. Radhakrishnan continues:

[The scientific] a view has little to do with the problem whether a thing is only a particular image or a general relation. The question of the independence of the knower and the known is hardly relevant to it.

(Radhakrishnan 1932, p. 15)

We see here the clear distinction Radhakrishnan draws between the kind of idealism he defends and that familiar from the more orthodox Vedānta presentation of the problem of the relation between mind and the world. We will see this latter, more epistemological, problem taken up by such Vedānta philosophers as A. C. Mukerji and K. C. Bhattacharyya in the next chapter. Radhakrishnan is original in this tradition in that he is not concerned with whether phenomena are all ideas, or appearances, or even whether they are manifestations of cognition; rather he is concerned with whether they are inherently purposive, and inherently value-laden. He concludes this discussion as follows:

Nor is [idealism] committed to the doctrine that the world is made up of mind, an infinite mind or a society of minds. The idealism in the sense indicated concerns the ultimate nature of reality, whatever may be its relation to the knowing mind. It is an answer to the problem of the idea, the meaning, or the purpose of it all. . . . It finds life significant and purposeful. It endows man with a destiny that is not limited to the sensible world.

(Radhakrishnan 1932, p. 15)

This is hence not an idealism of the kind familiar from the Western tradition. Unlike Berkeley's or Kant's idealism, it is thoroughly teleological in character. But once again, this does not, in Radhakrishnan's view, remove it from the realm of the metaphysical. It is a claim about the nature of reality, and indeed a claim about the nature of human life. Finally, it makes clear claims about a level of reality that transcends the empirical. But the problem remains: if science reveals a world without purpose, and characterizes the person as one more animal among animals, how can an idealistic position such as this, which is committed to purpose and value, be maintained?

Radhakrishnan's solution draws heavily on the work of Bergson and Whitehead.¹⁶ Following their neo-Hegelian insistence that any satisfactory explanation of reality must make it intelligible as a unified whole, Radhakrishnan argues that scientific explanations, while they correct common sense and error, are always local, and can never provide an explanation of the whole, of why the

¹⁶ Here we note the affinities to the thought of Iqbal—despite, once again, no interaction between the very different communities these two inhabited.

world is, or why we should care. After dismissing several attempts to deploy evolutionary theory to plug the gap as insufficiently final, he settles on Whitehead's version of a Hegelian ontology as a means to explicate a version of Vedānta consistent with empirical science. Here is how he puts it:

The relation between God and the world is for Whitehead one of immanence and interpenetration. As all relations are reciprocal, God is immanent in the world, and the world in God. As God transcends the world, the world transcends God. The order and purpose we see in the world is the result of actuality fulfilling the highest possibilities it sees before itself.

—(Radhakrishnan, 1932, pp. 328–329)

As we noted above, Radhakrishnan's language is redolent with the Christian theology not only of Whitehead but of his missionary teachers. We will see in a moment, though, that his reading of that language is not Christian, but Vedāntin. For now, though, note that his resolution of the dichotomy between science and the ideal is to insist directly on their nonduality. The divine is the locus of purpose and value; the mundane the locus of the mechanical and the domain of science. But they turn out to be the same thing, experienced or understood in different ways. The idealism of this position is explicit:

Spirit is the reality of the cosmic process. Nothing of what comes in our personal experience can be predicated with complete truth of the ultimate reality, though no element of this experience is without meaning or value. No element of our experience is illusory, though every element of it has a degree of reality according to the extent to which it succeeds in expressing the nature of the real.

(Radhakrishnan, 1932, p. 334)

The account of this spiritual absolute that is unitary, without characteristics, conscious and yet identical with the material world, is thoroughly Vedāntin. Radhakrishnan writes, "the absolute is reality, consciousness and freedom—*sat*, *cit*, and *ananda*" (1932, p. 16).¹⁷

Radhakrishnan, like Vivekananda and Aurobindo (whatever their differences), is focused on the relation between the absolute and empirical reality. Like all Advaita philosophers, he argues that ultimately that relation must be nondual, and like his modernist contemporaries, he argues that it must be consistent with science and the reality of the world of experience. His distinctive contribution to

¹⁷ Note that here Radhakrishnan interprets *ananda* not as bliss, as it is traditionally understood, but as freedom.

this project is the injection of purpose and value as central to the very idea of idealism. As Raju (Raju, 1953a, p. 396) notes, Radhakrishnan's relationship to Tagore late in his life is evident in their sharing the view that the absolute, however transcendent it might be, is worthy of consideration "only so far as it comes home to our business and bosoms."

10.6.2 False or Real? The Work of Ras Bihari Das

Ras Bihari Das (1886–1945), professor of philosophy at the University of Calcutta, takes Vedānta even further from its religious moorings, locating it firmly as a secular philosophical position. He opens his 1940 essay "The Falsity of the World" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 353–362) with the following remark:

"The world is false." This astounding statement is made by advaitism in all seriousness, and some very sensible people seem to believe it quite honestly. Before one can accept the statement as true or reject it as false, it is necessary that one should understand its proper meaning.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 353)

Das devotes the remainder of this fine essay to exploring that meaning, and concludes with an understanding of Advaita Vedānta according to which it entails no rejection of the external world. Das distinguishes three possible meanings of the doctrine of universal *māyā*: (1) it could be that the world is one thing mistaken for another, like the rope taken to be a snake; (2) it could be that it lacks reality in the real sense of that term—that there is a deeper sense of reality in which the world fails to exist; (3) that the world is mere appearance that there is nothing that really appears, as in a thoroughgoing illusionism (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 358–359). The first two are each plausible readings of the Advaita of Vivekananda; the third is a more orthodox reading of Śāṅkara's view.

Das argues first that *māyāvāda* is simply untenable, on the grounds that genuine illusion presupposes a background of veridical perception; that we can understand the illusion of taking a rope for a snake only because we also have experience of veridical sightings of both ropes and snakes. To take the entire world to be illusory, he argues, would similarly require a context in which we have the experience of veridical understandings both of ordinary reality and of the other reality that is supposed to lie behind this. And this we cannot have (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 353–354).

Moreover, he argues, to take the entire world as false, as on the second alternative, would be to take our experience and even our consciousness of this falsehood to be false, and that would be patently self-defeating. The universality to which *māyāvāda* pretends, he argues, renders it simply unintelligible. This would

even require us to take our own consciousness itself as less than true (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 357). The third view, Das, like Aurobindo, argues, while intelligible as an interpretation of the claim that the world is false, is not intelligible philosophically. The idea that appearance is all there is reduces to absurdity as the only degree of reality left is the reality of appearance, and hence to say that all is appearance is simply to say that that appearance is real. Advaita Vedānta—if it is interpreted as any version of *māyāvāda*—Das argues, is a philosophical nonstarter.

But Das, continuing the tradition of the progressive naturalization of, rather than the abandonment of the Advaita Vedānta tradition, offers a newer reading:

The real problem is to get rid of our worldly interests. And this can not be brought about merely by wishing. We can not give up all interests at once. To give up all interests is incompatible with life itself. We can however lessen our worldly interests by cultivating certain other-worldly or spiritual interests. Our worldly interests diminish with the increase of our spiritual interests and vice versa. Through art, morality and religion we may achieve a chastening of the mind which will enable us to see more reality in spiritual things than in physical matter.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 361)

Das argues that art and ethical reflection bring us into contact with values and a dimension of reality more profound than that we encounter in everyday life, a reality that we can see lies behind and gives meaning to the ordinary world. Here we see not the teleology of Radhakrishnan, but the emphasis on the deeper significance of a value-infused ultimate reality. That reality is not an ontic alternative to this reality, as the idealistic reading of Vedānta would have it; nor is it ontically identical with it, as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, or Radhakrishnan would have it, albeit in distinct registers. Instead it is a dimension of ordinary reality, the dimension of value, the dimension that gives life its point.

Moreover, Das, argues, when Advaita Vedānta is taken in this sense, it makes very good sense indeed. We preserve the nonduality, the sense of the inadequacy of our ordinary understanding of reality, and the insight that that inadequacy is a remediable cognitive failing. But in Das's vision, we go even further than Aurobindo or Radhakrishnan in stripping the doctrine of ontological baggage, and toward modernizing it. He concludes:

The falsity of the world then, according to the advaitists, as far as I understand them, is not a mere theoretical idea but a concept of spiritual valuation which can be realized in full significance only as a result of spiritual discipline. When I do not believe in the falsity of the world, it is not because my understanding is dull, and I cannot follow your

philosophical argument, but because I lack the requisite spiritual culture, or outlook. I can however, well imagine a level of spiritual exaltation from which the whole material world may be realized not only as a thing of no importance but as altogether lost to spiritual sight.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 361–362)

It is worth noting that for Ras Bihari Das the route to that level of exaltation is aesthetic as much as it is intellectual. This aesthetic focus is another hallmark of the Vedānta tradition and marks the *ananda* (bliss) in *sat-cit-ananda*, a theme to which we return in chapter 12.

10.6.3 Vedānta and Modern Science: SS Suranarayana Sastri

Ras Bihari Das was not alone in his adoption of a strongly realistic interpretation of Advaita Vedānta.¹⁸ The prominent philosopher of science, S. S. S. Sastri (1893–1942), in the same year that Das published the essay we have just discussed, published “Advaita, Causality and Human Freedom” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 363–392). In that essay, Sastri, as we will see, mines Vedānta for an understanding of causality compatible with modern quantum physics and a compatibilist account of human freedom. He argues that Advaita presents an account of causation that is nondeterministic and statistical at the empirical level; metaphysically consistent with the quantum theory; and a theory of freedom as possible only at the transcendental level that allows for empirical determinism and moral freedom. Here we see once again both the embrace of Advaita Vedānta as a philosophical framework and an insistence on a naturalistic interpretation of that framework in modern Indian philosophy, one that is not only consistent with science, but which is interfused with contemporary philosophy of physics.

As we have seen, in the colonial context, the assumption that there is a significant challenge posed to religion and philosophy by science was ubiquitous, with a variety of positions defended regarding either their incompatibility or ways of reconciling them. A philosophy professor at the University of Madras, Sastri chose to reconcile Vedānta and science by skeptical philosophical argument, reinforced by empirical theories currently in play. In particular, he undertook a close examination and critique of that central concept in both philosophy and science: causality. In “Advaita, Causality and Human Freedom,” Sastri examines causality as a relational property that is taken to anchor objects in the world in law-governed relations with one other. The nature and reality of causality so

¹⁸ A version of the close analysis that follows in this section is in Bhushan’s “Ancient Philosophy Meets Western Science: Causality and Consciousness in the Colonial Indian Academy,” in *Science and Religion: East and West*, ed. Yiftach Fehige (Routledge, 2016).

hotly debated by ancient Indian scholars was at this time coming under intense scrutiny by physicists in the west, such as Einstein, Schroedinger, Heisenberg, and Eddington. Sastri seamlessly joins these conversations.

Sastri's examination of the cause-effect relation is careful, detailed, and contemporary. In a "back to the future" gesture, however, he poses the problem about causality in the classical Indian way: "Is the Effect part of the Cause (*satkāryavāda*) or separate from it, in effect a new entity (*asatkāryavāda*)?" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 367). This way of formulating the problem allows Sastri to avoid framing the debate as one between Western and Eastern science. Instead, he frames it as a debate between two different camps within the Indian philosophical tradition, the Realists (the Vaiśeṣika School, for instance) and the Idealists (of which the Advaita School was most prominent).¹⁹ Sastri's ultimate goal is to reconstruct and defend the Advaita Vedānta critique of causality for a twentieth-century global audience. In his reconstruction, he freely uses ideas about scientific determinism and indeterminism that were much debated and discussed among physicists in the Western scientific texts of his time.

Scientific indeterminism is of particular interest to Sastri in that it calls into question the generally accepted view of the relation between cause and effect; in particular, the determinate, law-governed nature of the relation that is required to provide in the ideal case the kind of scientific certainty that would in turn render possible error-free scientific predictions. This inclines him to the views of Eddington rather than to Planck:

... despite Planck's emphatic assertion that "natural phenomena invariably occur according to the rigid sequence of cause and effect... [and that] this is the indispensable postulate of all scientific research," we have Eddington's assurance that "Present day physics is simply indifferent to it. We might believe in it today and disbelieve in it tomorrow; not a symbol in the modern text-books of physics would be altered."

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 379)

In this difference in perspective between the Western physicists, Sastri finds a resonance with the classical Indian debate about the reality of causality; and, in the ideas of Eddington he finds a way to articulate and defend a contemporary Advaita position.

¹⁹ Vaiśeṣika realism has had a long and illustrious philosophical history in ancient and early modern India. Ganeri (2011) documents debates about that realism, including reductionist and antireductionist versions that were in active play in seventeenth-century India. Sastri is responding to Vaiśeṣika realism with a distinctly twentieth-century modern sensibility, and, as an Advaita Vedāntin.

Thus, Sastri articulates the fundamental ontological position of the Advaitin as follows: what is real is not reducible to what we happen to believe or disbelieve. In this sense, what is real is “indifferent” to the strength of belief or disbelief. What we see before us—the empirical world as it appears to our senses—is *anirvācya* (indeterminable), that is, not characterizable as real or unreal (*anirvacaniya*). Indeterminacy, then, characterizes all properties and relations in the empirical world: space, time, and causality in particular, are not determinable in any absolute way. Another way of putting the position is to say that these properties and relations are merely phenomenal (appearances). The Advaitin is thus an antirealist—or at least a skeptic, with respect to the causal relation.

But why adopt this antirealist ontological position in the first place? After all, the realists would seem to carry the day, if one’s own daily experience is to be consulted. Indeed, causality seems a central fact of life (in addition to being “the indispensable postulate of all scientific research”). Sastri is acutely aware of this disconnect between the view of Advaita and common-sense realism, and, in particular, of the pull of the belief in the reality of causality during his time. Despite this tension, Sastri creatively joins classical Advaitin arguments against the reality of the causal relation using contemporary examples and language to articulate ancient philosophical skepticism, and in turn joins this skepticism with the more contemporary skepticism of the physicists of his time.

In the first instance, Sastri questions the reality of the causal relation by examining the different ways in which the relation has been defended. For instance, in rendering causality as a determinate relation, it might be argued—putting the notion of general causes to one side—that the cause (as a particular) invariably precedes the effect in time. But it turns out that many other events invariably precede an effect in time, such as symptoms and co-effects, neither of which should be called a cause. As Sastri pithily observes, “Day is not the cause of night. A persistent low temperature symptomatic of tuberculosis is not the cause of the patient’s subsequent decline. We have to introduce further refinements in our understanding of invariable antecedence; and we seem nowhere near success in doing this” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 371).

Now one could try to rule out symptoms and co-effects as causes, by pointing out that the genuine causes are in some important way “helpful” to producing their effect. The presence of daylight is not “helpful” in producing night; nor is the presence of a temperature “helpful” in producing a patient’s death, as it is merely a pointer to, an indicator of, the presence of something that is “helping” to cause the patient’s demise. Here Sastri responds, “But wherein lies helpfulness? And what degree of it is required?” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 372). In a careful analytical argument, Sastri argues that every attempt to separate legitimate causal presence from the illegitimate noncausal hangers-on ends in failure.

Another issue remains untouched: “the ancient bugbear known as plurality of causes. Fire may be caused by a matchstick, or a burning-glass or by a steel or tinder. No one of these is the invariable antecedent of fire, yet each is said to cause fire” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 373). In response to this skeptical argument, one might retreat to the position that even though we speak of a cause as a singular condition, in truth any cause is complex, comprising the entire state of affairs responsible for the occurrence of the effect. But as Sastri points out, the shift from a cause to a causal complex does not solve the problem; for notice that our old problem reappears: how can we distinguish the legitimate members of the causal complex from the illegitimate hangers-on? If we now decree that only proximate conditions can enter into the complex, the move is illegitimate. After all, we are trying to find out what it is that produces the effect, and ruling out the remote conditions seems both *ad hoc* and question begging (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 375). In his essay, Sastri carefully considers additional moves by the causal realist and determinist—each is found to falter in a manner similar to previous moves (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 376–377).

Sastri is finally ready to articulate the Advaitin position. Is causality simply unreal, as is the son of a barren woman? Not so, he responds. The causal explanation is instead an attempt to apprehend—via a rigid and law-governed concept—that which is finite, fleeting, and changing. In this context, where comprehension or understanding is the goal, “the causal concept is an eminently successful attempt at such apprehension. In the nature of things, however, it cannot claim to be more real than what it seeks to comprehend” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 377). This is a subtle and critical point. The idea of a law-governed relation between causes and effects is justified to the degree that it secures for apprehension by us human beings events that are in fact fleeting, changing, and complex. Its utility lies in the realm of comprehension rather than that of truth or reality. We are not justified in seeing it as more than such an attempt.

In what sense is this interpretation of the reality of the causal relation Advaitin? As Sastri points out, the central idea of Advaita—once its idealism is rendered at the same time realistic—is that the world we experience is at the same time a manifestation of, and identical with, the world as it is. It is identical with it in that these worlds are not ontically distinct; it is different in that we experience the world as it is given to us through our senses, and subject to our interests. Causality serves these interests—in particular the interest in explanation and understanding; it cannot pretend to characterize reality independent of those interests on pain of the difficulties scouted above, difficulties made apparent both by classical Vedānta arguments and by modern philosophy of science.

At this stage in his essay, Sastri smoothly segues from an Advaitic perspective on the centrality of causal explanation to the nature of scientific explanation more generally:

Scientific explanations could take us beyond the particular phenomena sought to be known, but not very far; since our particular interests are limited they may and do offer help to satisfy those interests; but if we pressed forward, either because of irrepressible theoretical or satiated and novelty-seeking practical quests, we would find our explanations melting into thin air or doubling back to the starting point. Such an expectation on the part of the Advaitin is justified in a measure by what some modern scientists have to say. The name of Eddington is notorious in this connection.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 377–378)

There are two points to note here. First, Sastri transforms our thinking of the Advaitic notion of causal explanation. He proposes that we interpret the Advaitin as justifying a pragmatic notion of explanation, namely, one that views explanation as tied to our particular interests and our need to satisfy them. In offering this interpretation, we see Sastri, in 1940, as the forerunner of influential contemporary philosophers of science in North America, prominently including Bas Van Fraasen (1980).

In his influential view of scientific explanation, Van Fraasen argues that the goals of scientific explanation are pragmatic and geared to the interests of those who seek it. For this reason, he argues, explanations do not track truth but provide human beings with a comprehension of phenomena that is suited to their level of interest and expertise, and to the overall explanatory goals of a community. Just as Van Fraasen gives human intentions a prominent role in explanation and the positing of theoretical entities, Vedānta gives consciousness a central role in constituting ontology. Moreover, Sastri, in disconnecting causal explanation from truth and ultimate reality, and in tying it instead to the human instinct to comprehend the universe, anticipates this development. On his view, causality is not objectively justified; causal explanation may be judged to fit or not fit—but the direction of fit is not to the world but to our subjective interests.

Second, Sastri sees causal explanation as limited to the realm of the familiar. It is, he argues, in danger of vanishing into thin air if pushed into the service of explaining what lies below or beyond the familiar. Sastri hence astutely aligns Advaitic sensibility not with belief in a mystical reality beyond this realm of *māyā*, but with an understanding of the relation between the manifest world in which causal regularity is framed and the world of quantum physics in which particles are indeterminate and explanation is probabilistic. In this world, human observation causes the collapse of the wave function creating determinacy in reality; it does not apprehend an independent reality that was there waiting to be observed. By the same token, the Advaita account of causality is presented in a new light, as an analysis of the puzzling relation between the microscopic and macroscopic, and between the determinate and the indeterminate.

The project of moving Vedānta from the *math* to the academy initiated by Radhakrishnan, and carried further by Ras Bihari Das is thus completed by Sastri in his union of classical Vedānta and modern physics. We can also see this as the culmination of a larger project initiated by Swami Vivekananda and continued by Sri Aurobindo—the replacement of *māyā* by *līlā* as an understanding of Advaita. Although the language of *līlā* disappears from the work of Radhakrishnan, Das, and Sastri, the spirit of realism that animates their work is clearly part of that trajectory.

10.7. Conclusion

Līlā is not new to India. But there is *Līlā* and *līlā*. Indian popular religious culture has for centuries manifested itself in public festivals, such as *Ram līlā*, in which communities gather in mass performances in which deities and *asuras* are enacted, and attain concrete reality in that enactment (Sax, 2002). These festivals and attendant practices are woven into the fabric of popular culture and constitute a shared understanding of *līlā* as a site of divine manifestation in the everyday world. Recasting the central idea of Advaita Vedānta in this language presents the possibility of linking this *prima facie* abstruse metaphysics to Indian popular culture. Aurobindo may thus have forged, if only in homonymy, a link between the rarefied world of the *math* and the temple and the workaday world of the village and the peasant. This link between philosophy and common life is reminiscent of that to which Tagore alludes explicitly in “Pathway to *Mukti*,” his presidential address to the inaugural session of the Indian Philosophical Congress in 1925:

[The] idea of *mukti*, based upon metaphysics, has affected our life in India, touched the springs of our emotions, and supplications for its soar heavenward on the wings of poesy. We contantly hear men of scanty learning and simple faith singing in their prayer to Tārā, the Goddess Redeemer: For what sin should I be compelled to remain in this dungeon of the world of appearances? . . . Of these men, one may be a carter driving his cart to market, another a fisherman plying his net.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 158)

Tagore and Aurobindo, however much they disagreed about other matters, agreed that Indian philosophy was not the exclusive province of the elite but saturates Indian culture from the academy to the marketplace.

Līlāvāda also reinforces the centrality of aesthetics to Indian philosophical activity in this period. As Bannerjee (1944) notes, and as we have argued, a

fertile *līlāvāda* metaphor is that of the consummate artist manifesting her skill in creation. This suggests an everyday world pervaded not only by a sense of divine action, but also by a divine beauty produced in the play of reality.²⁰ To understand Being, therefore, demands an understanding of beauty; to understand the nature of art and of the creative act is to understand the nature of reality. No wonder that so many Indian metaphysicians of this period are also aestheticians!²¹

Such metaphysical experiments do not come without risk. At the beginning of this chapter we noted the risks associated with modernizing Vedānta idealism. The great risk of *līlāvāda* in particular was a descent of philosophy into a divisive, sectarian, and even communal popular religion. This is because it is easy to convert the idea of divine manifestation into that of the manifestation of a divinity, and once one adopts a nondual, even materialistic metaphysics, the most obvious divinity is the *Brahman* of the Vaishnava sects, whose divine *līlā* is that which brings the world into being. To take this route could be both politically and philosophically disastrous: politically because of its communalist implications; philosophically because of the inevitable reintroduction of duality, illusion, and a difficult-to-sustain theism.

Tagore averts the politically disastrous consequences of bringing theism into Indian poetic modernity even as he advocates the reintroduction of Baul folk songs with a Vaishnavite flavor into the modern Indian aesthetic canon. In a stroke of genius, rather than emphasizing the religious sectarian quality of the songs, he showcases their religious cosmopolitanism. Tagore accomplishes this by juxtaposing the texts of Baul songs with the texts of English poetry, which had the dual effect of rendering the traditional folk songs in a contemporary light as it deemphasized their sectarian aspect.²² In this way, Tagore successfully navigates the risk inherent in giving *līlā* a theistic interpretation.

In the work of Aurobindo, we see an avoidance of the distinctly philosophical risk associated with *līlā*. *The Life Divine* proposes not the life of a divinity, but a divine life for us. Aurobindo urges that the world we inhabit is indeed the manifestation of an ultimate reality, but that reality is not a personal divinity,

²⁰ Another instance of manifestation—this time in the aesthetic realm—is Amrita Sher-Gil’s manifestation of herself as Tahitian in the image reproduced on the cover of the global edition of this book, which we discuss in chapter 12.

²¹ *Līlāvāda* has a political dimension as well. Neither for the purpose of nation building nor for that of constructing a distinctly Indian sense of the modern was a doctrine of the unreality of the world an ideal vehicle. Aurobindo’s genius (and recall that he was, before he took up philosophy, a prominent nationalist) was to see that idealism did not disqualify Vedānta from this role, and that Vedānta could be given a realistic twist. *Līlā* provided the framework and the metaphors that allowed India to construct its ideological identity and its engagement with modernity on its own terms.

²² See his presidential address “Pathway to Mukti” for this juxtaposition (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011).

but consciousness itself; that manifestation is not the projection of one entity by another, but rather the identity of the lifeworld with the spiritual reality that completes its dialectical development. The promise of *The Life Divine* is simply the promise of our own potential realized.

This deployment of Vedānta, in conversation with realism and modern science, is yet another instance of the master renaissance trope we introduced in chapter 4. In this chapter we have seen Indian philosophers reaching to the past—to a philosophical system grounded in the Vedas as articulated by Śaṅkara—in order to engage with modernity. This instance of the renaissance gesture is also cosmopolitan: it involves not only an engagement of a golden past with an immediate present, but also an engagement of Indian philosophy with European science.

In the next chapter we will examine the accounts of human subjectivity developed by A. C. Mukerji and K. C. Bhattacharyya. In each case, we will see a profound engagement with Vedānta in conversation with post-Kantian and neo-Hegelian idealism. The principal ideas of Vedānta that we have explored in this chapter will emerge in the context of the philosophy of mind and epistemology. In particular, we will see Mukerji and Bhattacharyya developing the Vedānta commitments to the primacy of mind and to nonduality in a realist fashion. The articulation of Vedānta we have here introduced provides the context for their program.

The Question of Subjectivity

Neo-Vedānta in Academic Philosophy

11.1. Context

By the 1920s, philosophy in India was conditioned by the two broad intellectual currents we have been exploring, one internal to the academy, and the other deriving from religious movements in the more public sphere. Academically, Kant and post-Kantian German philosophy were at the center of philosophical education, and the impact of British neo-Hegelianism, through the enormous influence of Hiralal Haldar, was widespread. Outside of the academy, Swami Vivekananda and Śri Aurobindo had brought Advaita Vedānta to the center stage. Vedānta had come to represent the entire Indian Hindu philosophical tradition in a way that Nyāya had in earlier times, and the confluence of this Indian idealistic tradition and Anglo-German idealism was a powerful determinant of philosophical speculation.

As we have also seen, this Vedānta was distinctively modern. It was anchored in the Upaniṣads and in the philosophy of Śaṅkara, but articulated in a new vocabulary in the context of science and of the Kantian reconciliation of transcendental idealism and empirical realism. Scholarly interest in the Upaniṣads as a source of modern philosophical speculation, and on the nature of subjectivity in particular, was initiated by Ramachandra Dattatrya Ranade (1886–1957), professor of philosophy at Allahabad University. R. D. Ranade began his career as a mathematician, philosopher of mathematics, and a specialist on pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, focusing on Heraclitus and Parmenides. Ranade then turned to the study of the Upaniṣads, and his *Constructive Survey of Upaniṣadic Philosophy* (1926) was and remains a standard reference work. At the end of his academic career, he retired to an ashram in Maharashtra, and is revered by followers to this day as Gurudev Ranade.

Ranade's approach to the Upaniṣads provides the context for the neo-Vedānta synthesis of Upaniṣadic and European idealistic thought in India. He introduces what he calls a "psychological" understanding of the Upaniṣads, breaking from a

tradition of reading these texts purely theologically. Ranade takes the principal subject matter of the Upaniṣads to be the structure of consciousness and the means for cultivating deeper states of awareness of the relationship between consciousness, the world, and the absolute. Setting mysticism aside in his philosophical exploration, Ranade foregrounds the metaphysical and epistemological bases of self-consciousness, arguing that the self is metaphysically necessary as a foundation of experience, but that because of the necessity of a duality of subject and object in knowledge, self-knowledge can never be knowledge in an ordinary sense. Nonetheless, he argues, all knowledge presupposes an awareness of subjectivity and so demands a special sense of self-knowledge in which subjectivity is present, and constitutes immediate knowledge of *Brahman* or the Absolute, to which the self is nondually related. Ranade concludes, “whether this state of Absolute Monism is to be merely intellectually apprehended, or mystically realized, depends upon whether we are by nature destined to be merely torchbearers or mystics in the spiritual pilgrimage” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 267). The philosophical quest for an understanding of this kind of subjectivity, we will see, frames the more secular projects of A. C. Mukerji (who succeeded Ranade in the Allahabad chair), and K. C. Bhattacharyya.

The move into the academic sphere brought Vedānta into dialogue not only with science, but also with two other important intellectual movements: Anglo-American psychology and European phenomenology, each of which had made its way to the subcontinent. The psychology was that of William James and James Ward. The phenomenology was that of Edmund Husserl. The encounter with psychology forced important questions regarding the boundaries between the domains of philosophical and empirical speculation regarding the mind; the encounter with phenomenology forced parallel questions regarding the boundaries between the first- and third-person perspectives on subjectivity, embodiment, and the mental, and between experience and knowledge.

Taken together, classical Vedānta, European phenomenology, and the new psychology raised what has come to be called, following David Chalmers (1997), the “hard problem,” or what the philosophers we are about to encounter would have called “the old (Upaniṣadic) problem,” the problem of understanding the nature of consciousness or subjectivity itself. This problem animates Vedānta thought from the very beginning. It is also the problem that animates Kant’s first *Critique* and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and is picked up by Hegel’s British disciples. It is equally the focus of Husserl’s *Ideas*, first published in 1913, and is raised repeatedly in James’s *Principles* (1890). The form of the question, as well as the answers proffered, are diverse, but the kinship of the problematic invites a conversation between these traditions.

It is therefore not surprising that the two most prominent academic epistemologists and metaphysicians of the last three decades of the colonial

period—A. C. Mukerji of Allahabad and K. C. Bhattacharyya of Calcutta—were preoccupied with the puzzle of subjectivity and consciousness. Nor is it surprising that each of these, also accomplished historians of Western philosophy, and steeped in the Sanskrit tradition of Indian philosophy, approached this problem with both of these traditions in view. Neither was a comparativist; neither took the history of philosophy, whether Indian or Western, as the focus of his research. Nonetheless, each took these traditions as together constituting the background against which questions were to be raised and solutions considered. In this respect as well, we see in Mukerji and Bhattacharyya a distinctively secular, academic approach to the discipline of philosophy, one more innovative and cosmopolitan in its scope than we might find in their European or American contemporaries (or successors, for that matter).

11.2. A. C. Mukerji (1888–1968)

Anukul Chandra Mukerji was born in 1888 in Murshidabad in West Bengal. He studied philosophy, earning his BA and MA at Central Hindu College (now Benares Hindu University) in Varanasi, where he was a student of the prominent philosophers Bhagavan Das and P. B. Adhikari. Although Mukerji taught and wrote entirely in English, he read both Sanskrit and German and was trained in both Indian and Western philosophy. Mukerji's entire professional career was spent at the University of Allahabad, one of the best institutions of higher learning in colonial India. At the time of Mukerji's appointment in the department of philosophy, the department was renowned for having one of the greatest Indian historians of philosophy (classical Greek and classical Indian) among its ranks, R. D. Ranade, to whom we have already been introduced. Together, the powerhouse trio of Ranade, Mukerji, and his successor, A. N. Kaul were referred to as the Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle of Allahabad. (See Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 455–470). Mukerji was offered, but declined, the prestigious King George V Professorship at the University of Calcutta. He retired in 1954.

Despite a stellar academic reputation during his lifetime, however, Mukerji was and remains unknown in the West; surprisingly, he is little known in contemporary India. This is largely because he, like many of his Indian contemporaries, published almost entirely in local venues. Most of his articles were published in the campus journal *Allahabad University Studies*. Mukerji's two books were published by the Juvenile Press (later the Indian Press) of Allahabad and are currently almost impossible to find, even in secondhand bookstores. Bhattacharyya, by contrast, remains well known and is widely regarded in India today as the only truly great and original Indian philosopher of the colonial period. (This despite the fact that many who revere him have never read his work, and despite

the fact that his texts are only occasionally taught in Indian universities.)¹ During their careers, however, both were prominent, leading two of the most prestigious philosophy departments in India. Mukerji served several terms as president of the Indian Philosophical Congress.

Mukerji's career reflects a constant engagement with the history of philosophy, and his systematic work is always situated both in the Western and Indian philosophical traditions. In Western philosophy his work focuses on the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. But his attention to Kant is informed by a rich reading of Hume, as well as by the commentarial work of figures such as Pringle-Pattison. His reading of Hegel is informed by his immersion in the British neo-Hegelian tradition. He had a particular interest in the work of Bradley, Caird, Green, and Bosanquet. Green's joining of Hegelian idealism to scientific realism was a powerful influence on Mukerji.

Mukerji approached Indian idealism through the Advaita Vedānta school. He focused on the work of Śāṅkara and Yajñavalkya as well as Ramanujan, Vācaspati, and Prabhākara. He also attended to Buddhist idealism, particularly that of Dignāga, Vasubandhu, and Uddyotakara and to its Buddhist Mādhyamika interlocutors, such as Nāgārjuna and his commentator Candrakīrti, as well as to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika figures such as Kanada and Praśastapāda. His scholarship in the Indian tradition—both the orthodox and the Buddhist schools—is impeccable, and his readings are both insightful and critical.

Despite his impressive scholarship in the history of Western and Indian philosophy, Mukerji is not primarily a historian of philosophy. He draws on the history of philosophy as a resource for his systematic thinking about then current philosophical problems, many of which continue to attract philosophical attention. Mukerji was a specialist in the philosophy of mind and psychology. He was a committed naturalist, in that he saw the deliverances of empirical psychology as foundational to an understanding of the mind. He paid close attention especially to the psychologists William James and James Ward. Nonetheless, Mukerji was convinced that psychologism was in the end insufficient as an understanding of subjectivity, and required supplementation by a transcendental philosophy of the pure subject, for which he turned principally to Hegel, Caird, and Śāṅkara as inspirations for his own synthetic view.

Despite the penchant at the time of many young philosophers to use the method of comparison in their work, Mukerji was not a comparativist. While he

¹ It is interesting to speculate on why Bhattacharyya is still so well known while Mukerji has fallen into obscurity. One possibility is simply that Bhattacharyya's location in Calcutta meant that he was part of a large community of scholars who kept one another's names in circulation. Another is that he was fortunate to have two sons, Kalidas and Gopinath, each of whom became a prominent philosopher and each of whom chaired major philosophy departments. Mukerji had fewer students and worked in a smaller community in Allahabad.

was philosophically concerned with the project of comparativism, initiated in India by B. N. Seal, he explicitly rejected it as a method. This put him at odds with Radhakrishnan and with his younger contemporary P. T. Raju, each of whom followed Seal in taking this to be the best avenue for advancing Indian philosophy in a global context. Mukerji instead insisted simply on doing philosophy, and doing it using all available resources, no matter their origin. He never distinguished between Indian and Western sources in a systematic fashion. In short, he was more a crosscultural than a comparative philosopher.

Mukerji wrote two substantial monographs: *Self, Thought and Reality* (1933) and *The Nature of Self* (1938). Each of these develops themes first articulated in a series of journal articles published in *Allahabad University Studies*. These two books can profitably be read as a single two-volume study exploring and defending a naturalistic, Vedānta-inflected transcendental idealism as an account of the nature of subjectivity and of the relation of mind to the world. In each book, Mukerji emphasizes the rational intelligibility of the world and the foundational role that consciousness and self-knowledge play in the edifice of knowledge more generally. Here we focus on the philosophy articulated in this two-volume study, as these volumes present the clearest statement of Mukerji's reconstruction of the history of philosophy, his philosophy of mind, and his account of the interface between epistemology and metaphysics. Along with the philosophy of Bhattacharyya, Mukerji's program is representative of the attention paid to the philosophy of mind in the context of both Indian and Western traditions so characteristic of philosophy in the Indian renaissance.

Both books are animated by a single puzzle that preoccupies both Mukerji and Bhattacharyya (and many of their contemporaries): given that it is (1) manifest that we do know ourselves; (2) necessary that we do so in order for any other knowledge to count as knowledge; but (3) clear that we don't know ourselves as objects, in what sense and how does self-knowledge arise and count as knowledge? Mukerji sees the conundrum posed by this apparently inconsistent triad as the central problem of modern epistemology, as central both to the Western and the Indian problematic, and only soluble by bringing the two traditions to bear on the problem. *Self, Thought and Reality* begins with the epistemology of the world of objects and the relation between knower and known; *The Nature of Self* uses this platform to launch the investigation of knowledge of the subject itself. We begin with the epistemology of the outer.

11.2.1 Self, Thought and Reality

Self, Thought and Reality is organized around three concerns. The first is the relation between idealism and realism: Mukerji argues that they are not in fact rivals, but rather complementary aspects of any plausible philosophical position. Second,

Mukerji is interested in the relationship between correspondence theories and coherence theories of truth and knowledge. He argues that this dichotomy is false as well. Finally, he is interested, as he puts it, in the relation between “being and becoming,” by which he really means the relation between metaphysics and science. These three concerns structure Mukerji’s account of our knowledge of the outer world and frame his inquiry into the possibility of knowledge of the inner.²

Kant’s transcendental idealism is the backdrop for Mukerji’s inquiry. Mukerji introduces the modern problematic concerning knowledge through a reading of Kant’s response to Hume. Part of the originality and philosophical power of this text derives from the fact that Mukerji reads Kant’s critique of Hume not as a critique of empiricism, per se, but of a particular type of realism. He sees Kant as taking aim at two theses advanced by Hume: first, the idea that plurality is ontologically prior to unity; second, that the mind is one object among many that can be studied using the same scientific techniques that disclose the natural world.

Mukerji sees the foundation of Hume’s realism in his commitment to a reductionist program—one he takes to be aligned with the positivism and forms of empiricism fashionable in his own time. He then reads Kant as rejecting that reductionism in favor of a view of entities as constituted as unities in virtue of the synthetic operation of consciousness. Put this way, we can see Mukerji as arguing for the robust reality of the objects of the human *lebenswelt*, as opposed to those who would see them as merely constructions and who look for greater reality in the ephemeral, atomic, and disconnected phenomena that constitute them. Here is how he puts the point:

Our aim, therefore, is to show, in how imperfect a form, that Kant’s answer to Hume has thoroughly undermined the only basis upon which all forms of realism must ultimately stand, and consequently the realistic and empirical philosophies of our time, in spite of what value they may possess for students of philosophy, do not represent a real development of thought. If we attempt a brief formulation of the underlying principle of empiricism it will be found to consist in the assumption that the “unconnected manifold” have a superior reality in comparison to their unity.

—(Mukerji, 1933, p. 20)

This ontological insight is grounded as much in a reading of Bradley and Green as of Kant. Mukerji hence sees another way of posing Hume’s problem

² As we will see, this focus on epistemology and metaphysics and concern for the nature of truth distinguishes Mukerji’s approach to the problem of self-knowledge from Bhattacharyya’s more phenomenological response to Kant. This is so even though their diagnoses of the problem set by Kant’s philosophy, and their instincts for a solution within the Vedānta framework, are the same.

and Kant's response: Hume argues that real entities exist prior to the relations in which they stand, and that they exist independent of those relations. Kant, on his view, sees that things exist only in relation to consciousness in some sense; but Bradley completes this ascent. He does so, on Mukerji's view, by arguing that the identity of any one thing is constituted by its relations to everything else, and hence that relations are essential, or internal, to being, not mere accidents attaching to things that would exist even were they not to stand in those relations. Mukerji hence lines up the distinction between Kantian idealism and Humean realism with the neo-Hegelian distinction between holism and atomism.

Things...do not exist at first in separation from each other so that all connections between them would be mere fortuitous generalizations; on the contrary, their existence has no intelligible meaning except in relation to each other. What we call the real existence of the world is constituted by the various relations, spatial, temporal, causal, etc subsisting between things, and each thing is what it is only through its relations... Green puts the whole position this way: "abstract the many relations from the one thing, and there is nothing. They, being many, determine or constitute its definite unit. It is not the case that it first exists in its unity, and then is brought into various relations. Without the relations it would not exist at all."

—(Green, 1906, p. 33)

Mukerji takes the second issue between Hume and Kant as a debate concerning the ontological role of mind itself. To the question, "does the mind have a special ontological status?" Hume, argues Mukerji, answers "no." Kant, he argues, answers "yes." That is, Hume adopts a psychologistic approach to epistemology, while Kant adopts a normative, transcendental approach. Mukerji defends Kant here, arguing that to be an empirically real object is to be an object for a subject, and that is to be an object whose unity is the consequence of the synthesis of the manifold of sense by the operations of the understanding. To say this, he argues, is not to reject empiricism, *per se*, in epistemology; but it is to reject the demotion of the mind to the status of one entity among others and to refuse to reduce the project of epistemology to the project of understanding the operations of the mind from an empirical point of view. Introspection, Mukerji argues, cannot displace epistemological reflection (a view in which, as we will see, Bhattacharyya concurs). Mukerji characterizes the psychological attitude as follows:

"To the psychologist." [James] tells us, "the minds he studies are objects, in a world of other objects. Even when he introspectively

analyzes his own mind, and tells what he finds there, he talks about it in an objective way." [*Principles of Psychology I*, p. 183]...

When, however, the restrictions of psychology...are removed and the psychological attitude is universalized, we get a metaphysics...as Professor Alexander puts it, "in respect of being or reality, all existences are on an equal footing." And that mind has no privileged place in the democracy of things. And the realistic metaphysics of mind...is only "borrowing a page from psychology." [*Space, Time and Deity I*, pp. 6–9].

The epistemological attitude, on the other hand, is distinct from the psychological...and consists in treating the knowing mind, not as one object among other objects, but as that which is presupposed by everything known or knowable and in treating knowledge not as an attribute of a particular thing, but as the medium through which all objects reveal themselves.

—(Mukerji, 1933, pp. 294–295)

Mukerji forcefully rejects subjective idealism—according to which external objects are unreal—which he takes to be an inevitable consequence of psychologism, and which he associates with Berkeley as well as certain Vedānta thinkers such as Śrīharṣa, as well as Buddhist idealists such as Dignāga and Vasubandhu. Instead, he argues that when each is properly understood, the apparent duality between idealism and realism is chimerical. He argues instead that they are complementary, and even mutually entailing: idealism, he argues, presents an answer to the question, "what is it to be real?" and realism is guaranteed by the fact that although objects exist for us only as they are represented, their existence and character is independent of any particular thought or thinker. And it is science, he argues, that is the measure of the empirically real. Mukerji thus defends both transcendental idealism and scientific realism, so long as each keeps to its respective domain. On his view, things exist independently of us—the core of realism—but our knowledge of them is dependent on the structure of thought, and so they exist for us only subject to the conditions of thought—the core of idealism.

... The first thing which we should make clear in the beginning is that idealism, as we understand it, does not take away in the least the reality of anything which is considered as real by common sense or science. Far from subtracting anything from the common things of the world, idealism adds to the reality of the things, insofar as it alone makes it clear that things have far other aspects of their life than those which are revealed to commonsense or to science.

—(Mukerji, 1933, p. 47)

This synthesis of idealism and realism provides the basis for Mukerji's second synthesis—that of correspondence and coherence. Given the association of coherence theories with idealism and correspondence theories with realism, it is natural to see them as in tension with one another, but also therefore natural to anticipate Mukerji's reconciliation of this apparent dichotomy. A pure correspondence theory of thought and truth would hold that the mind and the world are entirely independent of one another, and that our ideas can be examined to determine the degree to which they correspond, in some way to be specified, with an independently examined world, as Mukerji points out (1933, p. 122). Berkeley puts paid to this naïve idea.

But as a theory of truth, Mukerji argues, correspondence is not bad. The idea that correspondence is the content of truth, he says, makes good sense, but to take it as a test for truth does not.³

The real defect of the correspondence theory consists in not the *definition* but the *test* that it claims to offer of a true judgment. It is futile . . . to attempt to know whether our knowledge at a particular stage is true or not by reference to things external to knowledge. The correspondence can be known only by the amount of harmony that knowledge has so far attained to. The more knowledge tends to be a whole, the greater is our assurance of correspondence; the more there are discords and disharmony in knowledge, the greater is the distance between knowledge and reality.

—(1933, pp. 127–128)

That is, he argues, it is internal to the very idea of the truth of a thought or a sentence that it represents the world correctly. The problem arises when we also take correspondence to provide a criterion of that correctness, requiring the impossible independent access to the representation and to the represented. Instead, he argues, a coherence theory, while it makes no constitutive sense of truth, provides the best possible criterion that we can use in the evaluation the truth of sentences or of thoughts. We take something to be true to the degree that it coheres with the weight of other evidence and other secure views, including our evidence regarding the methods by means of which we test it. We can never escape the web of coherence criterially; but this does not mean that we do not discover the world, and that our criteria are not criteria for accurate correspondence.

Another way to put this subtle point is that the dichotomy between construction and discovery, on Mukerji's view, is also chimerical. One way that Mukerji defends this view is to argue that the very concept of belief presupposes the concept of truth:

³ Note the remarkable anticipation of Davidson's (1984) joint commitment to a correspondence theory of truth and to holism about meaning and justification.

truth is that at which belief aims. But the concept of truth presupposes in turn an objective order of things. So, even to believe that one merely believes—which is to subscribe to the idealistic view—presupposes that the reality in which one believes is independent of that belief—the essential core of realism.

Once it is admitted that the distinction between a true and a false belief is not to be found in the nature of the belief as an event in the mental history of the individual, it is easy to see that what invests it with the logical character is its conformity or otherwise to something beyond itself. That is, the truth or falsity of the belief has to be ascertained by reference to an objective order of things, so that when an assertion is claimed to be true, what is implied is not simply that an individual has somehow or other come to hold a particular belief, but that it has an objective basis in the nature of things. No theory of truth that does not distinguish between these two aspects of an assertion can stand the scrutiny of critical thought.

—(Mukerji, 1933, p. 172)

Here we see Mukerji drawing together the question of the relation between the real and the ideal with the critique of psychologism. Neither epistemology nor the philosophy of mind, he argues, can make do with a naïve naturalism about truth, knowledge, belief, or indeed cognition itself. Each of these involves an ineliminable normative dimension. Mukerji's third concern in this book, as we have noted, is the status of scientific knowledge, and its relation to pure epistemology and metaphysics. It is very important to him that the philosophical and the scientific standpoints are each necessary to provide a complete picture of the world, and that neither—pretensions of some partisans of each to the contrary notwithstanding—can replace the other. Nonetheless, he argues, they must each be regarded as a distinct standpoint, and not as providing distinct worlds. The world whose transcendental conditions we investigate when we do philosophy, the world we experience in everyday life, and the world delivered by the best science are the same world, differently understood. And it is the task of good philosophy to explain why and how this is so.⁴

The resolution of the dichotomies between realism and idealism and between correspondence and coherence take us to Mukerji's resolution of a third apparent duality: that between metaphysics and science. One might be tempted to see

⁴ This anticipates Sellars's view of the relationship between the original, manifest, and scientific images. In keeping with his critique of Hume, we see Mukerji as anticipating and rejecting Quine's own way of naturalizing epistemology, by turning it into a branch of psychology. With Sellars, he would insist on the essentially normative character of epistemological categories, despite the necessity for a psychological science of the beings who deploy them.

Mukerji's opposition to psychologism in epistemology as a deprecation of the epistemic status of science and an elevation of that of metaphysics. Instead, he argues that these two cognitive enterprises stand in need of each other. On his view, transcendental idealism ensures that the world is a systematic unity; its dependence as object on the mind ensures that it is intelligible.⁵

Thus, even empirical science has an a priori basis: science itself and its methodology, he argues, depend upon our conception of what constitutes explanation, and on our transcendental demand that all phenomena can be subsumed by explanation. No metaphysics or epistemology: no science. No science: no confidence in the reality of any objects of knowledge. Even the quantum theory, and the uncertainty principle, Mukerji argues, presuppose transcendental conditions on explanation, the notion of truth, knowledge, and of entities in interaction with one another. So, while scientific revolutions might alter the details of our metaphysical picture, they still presuppose a metaphysics and an epistemology that renders the science itself intelligible.

... The indeterminacy of an entity in certain respects presupposes its determinateness in other respects; in other words, we can conceive arbitrariness in the behaviour of an entity, only insofar as it behaves in perfectly definite ways under other conditions. Absolute lawlessness is inconceivable, either in the world of matter, or in that of spirit.

If then so much be granted, one must give up the idea of constructing physical structures on a non-causal basis. No knowledge is possible without the categories of cause and substance, because they enter into the essence of every conceivable entity, no matter whether we are thinking of energy, mass, wave-function or quantum constant.

—(Mukerji, 1933,)

Anticipating Goodman (1978), Mukerji characterizes science as "drawing world-pictures." The world constrains the content of those pictures; epistemology guarantees that they can be drawn in the first place and constrains their form. The pictures, he insists, are not, simply in virtue of being drawn by us, mere fictions; instead, they are interpretations.

What is called a world-picture is but an extension of the same process of interpretation that begins with identification. Even the things of ordinary commonsense knowledge would not be what they are if the sense-given data had not been interpreted and taken into conceptual

⁵ Here is another anticipation of Davidson, this time of his 1973 essay, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1984).

frames. To feel a feeling and to know it as a feeling . . . are two very different functions of the mind.

The distinction then, between the world of sense-data and world-pictures, we submit, is based on an unreal abstraction.

—(Mukerji, 1933, p. 276)

All of this scientific realism notwithstanding, for Mukerji the most important consequence of all of this, returning to his initial critique of Hume, is that the self cannot be conceived of as a thing among things, or as a substance with attributes, even, as the Cartesian might have it, cognitive attributes. Instead, he argues, the self is that to which all things or substances are related, that in relation to which they can be real, and by which they can be known. Its special place in the world is what grounds the normativity of knowledge and of the scientific enterprise in the first place.

Mukerji closes this first book, and anticipates the second, by examining this special role of the self and our knowledge of that self. In his conclusion, he draws on the Indian Advaita Vedānta philosopher Śaṅkara to understand this. But while one might think that this turn to the East is a turn away from reason and toward mysticism, Mukerji insists that that is inadmissible. The very demand for rational understanding that takes one this far is the demand that self-knowledge be rationally comprehensible.

The relation between dialectic thought and intuition . . . is not, for Śaṅkara at least, one of antagonism. The path to intuition lies through the labyrinth of reasoned discourses, and this explains his invectives against mystical practices, or of mere feeling.

—(Mukerji, 1933, p. 401)

11.2.2 The Nature of Self

In the preface to *The Nature of Self*, Mukerji dismisses mere comparative philosophy:

Comparative philosophy has so far been either predominantly historical and descriptive, or it has contented itself with discovering stray similarities between the Western and Indian thought. No serious attempt, as far as I know, has yet been made to undertake a comparative study for mutual supplementation of arguments and consequent clarification of issues. Yet, this alone can suggest the paths to new constructions and thus help the development of philosophical thought.

—(Mukerji, 1938 p. v–vi)

Mukerji is committed to this project of “mutual supplementation” and he is interested not in comparison but in the “clarification of issues.” This second volume makes good on this promise.

While *Self, Thought and Reality* is preoccupied with the dangers of psychologism, *The Nature of Self* is preoccupied with a series of ways of understanding the threat posed by skepticism. Mukerji takes it to be a necessary truth that we have knowledge, and takes it that since all knowledge is grounded in appearances to the self, is mediated by the mind, and is structured by our cognitive faculties, all knowledge presupposes self-knowledge. Any threat to the certainty of self-knowledge, then, is a threat to all of knowledge. Mukerji’s project in this book is to demonstrate that and how self-knowledge is possible, and how every response to skepticism about self-knowledge can be met.

Mukerji frames the book in terms of what he calls “the egocentric paradox.” He formulates the paradox in terms of the apparently inconsistent triad noted at the beginning of this chapter. On the one hand, the self must be known, and indeed must be known better and more intimately than any object. On the other hand, for anything to be known, it must be an object, and so not a subject. But, the self is that which is always subject and never object. It hence appears that while self-knowledge is the necessary condition of all knowledge, it itself is impossible.

The first approach to resolving this trilemma, already considered and rejected in the first book, is to reject the third claim, through psychologism, a position Mukerji associates in this volume both with the Buddhists and with Hume. On this view, the self is placed on the object side of the divide. While this makes empirical psychology possible, it can never reveal or generate any understanding of the subject, which then must contemplate the objective self, and so remains a failure.

The second approach is that of Caird—the theory of so-called mediated self-consciousness—and rejects the second thesis of the trilemma. On this view, we know the subject in virtue of a thorough analysis of the object, and a transcendental inquiry into the nature of a subject that can construct such an object. Mukerji objects that this falls prey to another form of skepticism. For given the corelativity of subject and object, it is impossible to completely know the object without also knowing the subject. This project hence cannot get off the ground. A Hegelian approach, in which we seek higher categories that can apply not only to objects but also to subjects, Mukerji argues, only gets us more of the same: the self is either recast as an object of knowledge of yet another subjective self, or it must be known in relation either to that as yet unknown self or to an object that remains unknowable so long as the self is not known.

Mukerji considers a number of philosophical maneuvers conducted both in Europe and in India, and concludes that any model that distinguishes the self as

knower from the self as known opens an unacceptable skeptical gap. He is led then to an articulation of Śaṅkara's idea of *svaprakāśa*, or self-illumination, as a model of self-understanding. It is important to see that he does not simply adopt Śaṅkara's own view, but rather takes on an insight shared by Śaṅkara and certain Buddhist philosophers, combines it with ideas drawn from Hegel, Bradley, and Green and develops a highly original synthesis as an account of self-knowledge. While *svaprakāśa* is introduced in the classical tradition as an explanatory primitive, Mukerji modernizes it (anticipating contemporary neo-Husserlian positions according to which consciousness is necessarily self-revealing), arguing that *svaprakāśa* is at bottom not a stipulation, but a theory of consciousness. The account of *svaprakāśa* at which Mukerji aims is an account of pure, unmediated consciousness of self.

It is therefore necessary for him to resolve a metaphysical tension at the outset: Is consciousness prior to, or posterior to matter in the order of explanation? This is another way of putting the question regarding idealism and realism Mukerji addressed in *Self, Thought and Reality*, and his approach here is similar. He argues that while matter may be prior to thought in the order of being, thought is prior to matter in the order of knowing. An emphasis on the fundamental role of consciousness in knowledge, he argues, is therefore not antithetical to modern scientific materialism, and the analysis of existence in terms of transcendental subjectivity does not preclude a material theory of the origin of the mind.

A word of explanation may be useful . . . in regard to the precise meaning in which consciousness is said to be the *prius* of reality. This doctrine is often interpreted on the idealistic line and supposed to deny the independent existence of the material world apart from consciousness. . . . It is, therefore, important to dissociate the assertion of the priority of consciousness from the idealistic contention, and realize clearly that the doctrine of the priority of consciousness is equally compatible with the realistic belief in an independent world. Even if it be granted that knowledge does not create but only reveal a pre-existent reality, yet it would remain unchallengeable that the external reality could not be revealed to us apart from consciousness which is the principle of revelation. . . . The epistemological priority of the conscious self is thus reconcilable with realism as well as with idealism.

—(Mukerji, 1938, pp. 113–114)

Mukerji interprets *svaprakāśa* as a kind of immediate self-knowledge in which there is no distinction between subject and object. He argues that there is nothing mystical, irrational, or even essentially Indian about this notion, pointing out

that versions of it are adopted by Green, Caird, Haldane, and others in the Western tradition. He also shows that while there are good arguments for this view, it is not simply obvious, and that there may be reasons to doubt it. Moreover, he argues, if it is known to be true, that cannot be by means of introspection, but only through philosophical argument. For introspection can tell us nothing about the self as subject.⁶

... Neither inference nor introspection is capable of proving the reality of the conscious self, for the simple reason that the self is not a thing in the democracy of things. What introspection can guarantee is the reality of pleasure and pain, desire and aversion, because they are objects; but the self as foundational consciousness, as the universal logical implicate of all known things, cannot be grasped as an object. That *for* which my entire world has a meaning, that in the light of which my universe shines, cannot be objectified and perceived in the same way in which the cow or the tree is perceived. Self-consciousness is not, therefore, the consciousness of the self as an object given in introspection; and Hume as well as his Indian predecessors, the Buddhists, failed to find it in the flux of mental states, because they wanted to know it as a definite type of object among other objects.

—(Mukerji, 1938, pp. 247–248)

From Bradley, Mukerji takes the notion of immediate experience as the key to understanding *svaprakāśa* in a cogent way. Bradley argues in *Appearance and Reality* that any mediated knowledge of the world, or of the self requires immediate experience of subjectivity as its condition. For all other knowledge must be constructed from this immediate foundation by inference from cause to effect. Thus, while we cannot have discursive knowledge of the immediate, we know that we have it, theoretically by reflection (Mukerji, 1938, p. 321). Our objects, on this view—that about which we can think and talk—are given to us as a causal consequence of this immediate experience, but it itself is not an object, and is neither conceptualizable nor describable. We hence know this self, but we cannot express it.

While Mukerji argues that this absolute self is pure subjectivity, he hence argues as well that it is not a Kantian transcendental existence, but rather is entirely immanent. Nor is it a concrete universal as Hegel would have it, but is rather a personal self, only nonobjectified, existing only as subject. This is not simply a recitation of Śāṅkara's version of Advaita Vedānta. For unlike Śāṅkara,

⁶ As we will see below, this rejection of introspection as a means for knowing the self is shared by Bhattacharyya, who takes a different route to self-knowledge.

Mukerji does not take the absolute reality of the self-as-subject to disparage the reality of its objects. In fact, on Mukerji's understanding of the fundamental predicament of skepticism, Śāṅkara's own position opens up one more skeptical abyss by denying the reality of the object that must be correlative with the subject. Mukerji's own position is simply that subjectivity is immediately self-revealing not in introspection, but rather in the prereflective awareness of the fact that one is the subject of one's objective experience. It is the impossibility of denying this fact and the distinctive awareness of it that preclude skepticism about the self, and hence skepticism in general; but it can never be reduced to any other kind of knowledge.⁷ He concludes as follows:

... The Self is not a category at all, and, consequently, it cannot be said to be even a system or a relational whole or, again, a unity-in-difference. On the contrary, it is the ultimate, non-relational, Consciousness, which is necessarily distinctionless, unobjectifiable, and immediate.

—(Mukerji, 1938, pp. 338–339)

Mukerji's thought is characterized by a return to classical Vedānta categories for a solution to a problem posed by modern European philosophy. This return is informed not only by a scholarly engagement with the Indian tradition but also with the Western tradition. Mukerji simply refuses to draw boundaries between the two. But he is not alone in this respect. The Indian renaissance evoked a new kind of philosophical subjectivity that we see evinced here in the study of subjectivity itself. We now turn to another important contributor to this philosophical program, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya.

11.3. K. C. Bhattacharyya (1875–1949)

K. C. Bhattacharyya was born in Serampore in West Bengal, and educated at Presidency College in Calcutta. He spent his entire professional career at the University of Calcutta where he was King George V Professor of Philosophy, and is widely regarded as the foremost Indian philosopher of the colonial period. His early work was focused on logic and the philosophy of language, addressing such topics as negation and the logic of indefinite articles, as well as the debate between coherence and correspondence theories of truth. He then turned to topics in metaphysics and phenomenology, addressing issues in Jain philosophy and Vedānta, in particular the nature of illusion and error. Bhattacharyya was influenced primarily by Kant and Husserl in the West, and by Vedānta, Nyāya,

⁷ A view that anticipates those of Kriegel (2009), Gallagher (2006), and Zahavi (2005).

and Vaiśnava tantra from India. Three of his essays, “Svaraj in Ideas,” the “The Concept of Rasa” and “The Concept of Philosophy” (all republished in Bhushan and Garfield, 2011) still well known. The work for which he is best known, though now long out of print, is *The Subject as Freedom* (1923). His two sons Kalidas and Gopinath each became eminent philosophers, chairing departments at Vishwa Bharati, Jadavpur, and Calcutta. Bhattacharyya was a leading figure in the philosophical scene at the Institute for Indian Philosophy at Amalner, a center in remote Maharashtra where many luminaries of Indian philosophy gathered for regular seminars.⁸

Bhattacharyya and Mukerji never refer to each other’s work, and there is no way of knowing whether either read the other. Nonetheless, they were ploughing very similar fields, at roughly the same time. Each took Kant’s account of subjectivity and knowledge to provide a compelling account of our empirical knowledge of the external world, and each follows Kant closely. Mukerji and Bhattacharyya also agree regarding their critique of the Kantian project. Kant, they each argue, although in different ways, fails to provide an account of self-knowledge. They argue that he assimilates the status of the self, to the degree that it can be known, to that of external objects—as distinct from the knowing subject—in consequence, that Kant renders the subject itself unknowable. Neither Mukerji nor Bhattacharyya is content to deny our knowledge of ourselves as subjects.

Mukerji references these antecedents explicitly and sets his own views carefully in the context of his predecessors. Bhattacharyya, on the other hand, is reticent about his sources. In *Subject as Freedom*, which we will consider below, he mentions no philosopher except Kant, and even Kant only occasionally. We can work out his influences in part hermeneutically, and in part from what we know historically from reports of his students and the contents of his library. His essays on Indian philosophy are more revealing, but even those eschew careful reference and quotation, leaving the reader to work out historical details. While Bhattacharyya is every bit as immersed in the history of philosophy—Indian and Western—as Mukerji, he never thematizes that history as Mukerji does, and relies on his reader to get the references.

Reading *The Subject as Freedom* is challenging in part because of the density and terseness of the text itself and because of Bhattacharyya’s idiosyncratic and often opaque prose style. This opacity in part arises from Bhattacharyya’s peculiar philosophical neologisms. It also emerges from the fact that he is always thinking—even while writing in English—with Sanskrit senses and contrasts in the background, never making these Sanskrit references explicit. But we can say some things with certainty. First, on the Indian side, while Bhattacharyya,

⁸ For more on Bhattacharyya’s biography, see K. Bhattacharyya (1975).

like Mukerji, writes from a broadly Vedānta perspective, that perspective is inflected in part by his engagement with Bharata, Abhinavagupta, and the aesthetic tradition they initiate, in part by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Yoga traditions that for so long dominated Bengali philosophy, but especially by the Vaishnava tantric tradition that led Bhattacharyya to attend so closely to the body as an epistemological phenomenon. Second, in the West, Bhattacharyya was heavily indebted to Husserl, and in particular the first volume of *Ideas*, which he owned and annotated.⁹

11.3.1. Subject as Freedom: *The Problematic*

The Subject as Freedom (1923) is a sustained engagement with Kant's discussion of self-knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason* from the standpoint of Vedānta. In this respect, his project is akin to Mukerji's. The central doctrine of the Kantian critical philosophy that the self is an unknowable knower is anathema to Bhattacharyya as well. From the standpoint of the Vedānta and Vaishnava tantric traditions that form the backdrop of Bhattacharyya's thought, Kant gets things completely backward. According to the Vedānta system, knowledge of the self is the very goal of philosophical and spiritual practice, and the self, being that with which we are most intimately involved, must be *knowable*, if indeed anything is truly knowable—since anything that is known as object must be known in relation to the self. On the other hand, given that the self is never object, but only subject, and given that thought is always objective—that is, directed upon an object—the self, from the standpoint of this tradition, cannot be *thought*.

Bhattacharyya takes seriously Kant's own association of transcendental subjectivity and freedom. The awareness of our acts—including our act of thought—as our own, is at the same time the awareness of our freedom as thinkers, as subjects, and as actors. And it is a condition of our subjectivity that we know that these acts are ours; hence that we know that we are free; hence that we know the self. This knowledge of the self is not a knowledge by acquaintance, but rather a direct awareness of the fact that we are selves, a knowledge of who we are, and of our freedom. For these reasons, Bhattacharyya takes it that on Kant's own terms, self-knowledge—despite Kant's protestations to the contrary—must be possible. Vedānta, because of the affinities we have just noted to the broader Kantian perspective, provides the entrée for the explanation of how this is possible. Here is how Bhattacharyya himself puts the predicament:

⁹ We will see that Bhattacharyya prefigures certain later Western philosophers, prominently including Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. But we can be fairly sure that Bhattacharyya never read any of their works, and the ideas he develops that are so resonant of theirs are his own, developed independently.

11. The metaphysical controversy about the reality of the subject is only about the subject viewed in some sense as object. The thinnest sense in which it is objectified is “being taken as meant.” Ordinarily the validity of this degree of objectification of the subject is not questioned, nor therefore the possibility of a dispute about its reality. If, however, the subject is taken, as explained, to be what is expressed by the word *I* as expressing itself, it is not meant or at best meant as unmeant and is accordingly above metaphysical dispute. There is properly no metaphysics of the subject, if by metaphysics is understood an enquiry into the reality conceived as meanable. Even the unknowable thing-in-itself of Spencer and Kant is not taken to be unmeant. It is at worst taken to be a problem in meaning. The knowable is meant and the negation of the knowable is, if not meant, tried to be meant, being not a gratuitous combination of words but a believed content that is problematically formulated. . . . The subject as *I* is neither contradictory nor meanable and the exposition of it accordingly is intermediate between mysticism and metaphysics. As, however, the subject is communicable by speech without metaphor, it cannot be taken as falling outside philosophical inquiry.

—(K. C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 93)¹⁰

This discussion trades on Bhattacharyya’s distinction between the *speakable* and the *measurable*. The measurable roughly coincides with Kant’s knowable. Whatever can be designated intersubjectively as an object falls, for Bhattacharyya, under the head of the “measurable.”¹¹ In fact in ¶¶2-3 (1976, pp. 87–88), Bhattacharyya explicitly ties meaning to intersubjective agreement and availability of referents for terms. This anticipation of Wittgenstein and Sellars takes him a bit beyond Kant, but the ideas are nonetheless congruent. The *speakable*, on the other hand, is whatever can be spoken of or communicated about through language. It is a broader category than the measurable, since there may be some things we can communicate—that are not nonsense—even though we cannot assign them meanings. So, according to Bhattacharyya, we can talk about ourselves, even though there is no term that can mean the self.

¹⁰ All references to *The Subject as Freedom* are from the edition reprinted in Burch (1975).

¹¹ This distinction is drawn in the first paragraph of *The Subject as Freedom*:

1. Object is what is meant, including the object of sense-perception and all contents that have necessary reference to it. Object as the meant is distinguished from the subject or the subjective of which there is some awareness other than meaning-awareness. The subjective cannot be a meaningless word: to be distinguished from it, it must be a significant speakable and yet if it be a meant content, it would be but object. It can thus be neither asserted nor denied to be a meant content and what cannot be denied need not be assertable. Apparently, the significant speakable is wider than the measurable: a content to be communicated and understood need not be meant (1976, p. 87).

With this distinction in mind, we can return to the dilemma Bhattacharyya poses for the Kantian view: The subject cannot be taken to be meant, for it is not intersubjectively available as the referent for *I*. Nobody but me is aware of my own subjectivity, and so there is no way to establish a convention of reference or meaning. And the first person pronoun has a unique role in designating the self. Were I to refer to myself using a name or a description, in the third person, the possibility of error through misidentification intrudes.¹² But the first-person indexical gets immediately, directly, at the speaking subject, and is so understood by addressees as well as by the speaker.¹³

So, although the word *I* has no meaning in this strict sense, it is not meaningless. It conveys something, and is understood; indeed, it is indispensable. It is therefore speakable, but not meanable. But it is therefore not nonsense, and therefore denotes a possible object of knowledge. But knowledge of what kind? Not discursive, or “metaphysical” knowledge, for that would suggest that the self is an entity among entities, an object, and not the subject we wish to know. Nonetheless, it is communicable, but communicable as a kind of “intuition,” not entirely mystical, but not entirely empirical either. To explain the manner in which the self is known is the goal of Bhattacharyya’s inquiry.

11.3.2. Subjectivity and Freedom

At the end of the first chapter of *The Subject as Freedom*, Bhattacharyya returns to the Kantian problem. Here he develops the direct connection between subjectivity and freedom.

21. The persisting objective attitude of Kant in his first *Critique* explains not only his admission of the thing-in-itself and his denial of self-knowledge, but also his disbelief in the possibility of a spiritual discipline of the theoretic reason through which self-knowledge may be attainable. From the subjective standpoint, object beyond knownness, *this* beyond *this-ness* is, as explained, meaningless. It may be that, wedded as we are to our body, we cannot get rid of the objective attitude and the tendency to look beyond the constructed object to the purely given. But not to be able to deny need not imply admission and though the

¹² As John Perry was famously to point out in (Perry, 1979). So, I might erroneously believe myself to be John Perry. I would then misidentify John Perry as the person thinking this thought. I cannot, however be wrong about the fact that *I* am thinking this thought.

¹³ Note that while Bhattacharyya agrees with Mukerji that Kant can make no sense of self-knowledge, despite being, by his own lights, required to do so, the reason is very different. Mukerji focuses primarily on the transcendental conditions of knowledge, whereas Bhattacharyya focuses on the transcendental conditions of speech and of experience.

Kantian disclaimer of idealism as accomplished knowledge is intelligible, his admission of the unknowable reality appears to be an unwarrantable surrender to realism....

22. Self-knowledge is denied by Kant: the self cannot be known but can only be thought through the objective categories...there being no intuition of it.

—(K. C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, pp. 100–101)

This is the summation of Bhattacharyya's diagnosis of the Kantian predicament. Kant allows the reality of the self, and indeed its necessity, but denies us any knowledge of it, including, presumably the knowledge that it lies beyond knowledge. The "surrender to realism" is the commitment—incoherent on Kant's own grounds—to something that is real, yet in its nature independent of our mode of intuition and knowledge. We will see that when Bhattacharyya examines the self as an object of knowledge, it will importantly not be real in this sense, but will turn out to be transcendently ideal, not given independent of our modes of subjectivity, but determined by those very modes. Thus, as we will see, Bhattacharyya takes himself to be even more of a transcendental idealist—more relentlessly consistent in this commitment—than Kant himself. Bhattacharyya continues later in this paragraph:

... The subject is thus known by itself, as not meant but speakable and not as either related or relating to the object. It is, however, believed as relating to object and symbolized as such by the objective relations. The modes of relating are at the same time the modes of freeing from objectivity, the forms of the spiritual discipline by which, it may be conceived, the outgoing reference to the object is turned backwards and the immediate knowledge of the *I* as content is realized in an ecstatic intuition.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 101)

Self-knowledge, that is, is knowledge of the self as it exists independent of its objects, even though that must be knowledge of a self that is essentially capable of objective relations. This is the first link of subjectivity to freedom. The self must be capable of being understood simply as a self, free of any relation to a particular object. That knowledge must be immediate, on pain of turning the self into an object, but can only be realized through an act of ecstatic transcendence in which subjectivity stands outside of itself. Bhattacharyya emphasizes this in the next paragraph:

23. Spiritual progress means the realization of the subject as free.... One demand among others—all being absolute demands—is that the subjective function being essentially the knowing of the object as distinct from it,

this knowing which is only believed and not known as fact *has* to be known as fact, as the self-evidencing reality of the subject itself.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 101)

In what follows, Bhattacharyya identifies three broad stages of subjectivity, each consisting in a distinctive level of freedom. The first is bodily subjectivity. In being aware of ourselves as bodies in space, we are aware of our determinate location in relation to other objects, and so our freedom to consider or to disengage with other objects in space and time. In psychic subjectivity we are aware of ourselves as mental subjects, whose direct intentional objects are representations. In this awareness, we recognize our freedom from our bodies and from our location in space and time, and the fact that we can entertain representations in the absence of any external object to which they correspond.¹⁴ In the final level of subjectivity—spiritual subjectivity—we recognize our freedom from those representations. We come to realize that our existence is not dependent upon our objects, but they depend upon us. At this point we intuit ourselves as spiritual subjects *per se*. We complete this process of self-knowledge, Bhattacharyya intimates, when we adopt the same cognitive attitude of freedom toward ourselves that we are able to develop in relation to our objects, an unmeasurable sense of ourselves as pure subjects.

Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, rejects the idea that introspection alone can ever give us knowledge of the self—the subject of experience. This is because while introspection, he argues, is essential to any knowledge—since we must know what we know and that we know it in order for any state to count as knowledge at all—introspection always retains an objective attitude toward the epistemic subject. Thus, while in introspection we achieve a certain kind of necessary detachment from the object of knowledge, in virtue of seeing it as object for ourselves as subjects, our subjectivity is presented to us only in a mediated sense, and we, to whom it is presented, remain absent from the cognitive state.¹⁵

¹⁴ Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, develops an idealistic system that is nonetheless robustly realistic about the external world. While for Mukerji the strategy to that goal involved the reconciliation of transcendental idealism and science, for Bhattacharyya the route goes through the phenomenology of embodiment.

¹⁵ Bhattacharyya draws an interesting corollary from his account of introspection: introspective awareness, or self-knowledge, is essential to knowledge itself. (§§35–37, ff.) This is because knowledge requires the distinction between perception and illusion, which in turn requires the distinction between believing in the content of a perceptual state and not believing in it. To be aware of something as an illusion is to be aware that one has a certain presentation and that one does *not* believe in the existence of that which is presented; and knowledge, for Bhattacharyya as well as for Kant, requires the awareness that we know; and to take oneself to know something is to be aware of one's reflective belief in what is presented. This is not a trivial matter: Bhattacharyya is pointing out that the subject and its relation to its objects cannot be excluded from the domain of knowledge, as that would be to eviscerate the entire structure of knowledge itself.

To take introspective knowledge as knowledge of the subject would take us only as far as Kant goes in his account of empirical self-knowledge. When Kant excludes the subjective side from the domain of knowledge, Bhattacharyya argues, he excludes what must be presupposed even as a ground of the argument for its exclusion, sawing off the metaphysical branch on which the transcendental philosophy rests. The very fact that we can only know what is subject to the constructive activity of the mind entails that if knowledge of that is possible, knowledge of the subject that conditions it must be possible as well, and this in two respects: first, to know that our knowledge is always conditioned by the subject is to know something about the subject; and second, to understand the objects of our knowledge, to understand their limitations to the conditions of our subjectivity and to understand them as *our* objects, is to be aware of ourselves as subjects. Bhattacharyya sums this up as follows:

51. Thus we meet the Kantian difficulty. Psychic fact... is object and more than object. It is *more* in the sense of being a metaphysical reality constitutive of the object which is its phenomenon, a reality that is known as unknown and as knowable... [it] is at once real and realizing, realizing as being already real, this being the objective counterpart of knowing the object as unknown. To Kant, metaphysical reality... is only thought and believed.... We agree that the introspective awareness of the presentation... is not knowledge of knowing but only imagination of knowing the metaphysical. The imagination, however, is not an illusion, but only incomplete or unrealized knowledge.... Cognitive realization of the metaphysical reality as subjective has to be admitted, at least, as an alternative spiritual possibility.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, pp. 115–116)

We now turn from this general conception of the relationship between subjectivity and freedom to the specific modes of subjectivity Bhattacharyya posits. The first is bodily subjectivity.

11.3.3. The Grades of Bodily Subjectivity

The first grade of subjectivity is the physical: awareness of and knowledge of oneself as a body. Bhattacharyya distinguishes three successive moments of bodily subjectivity, each involving a distinct aspect of self-knowledge, and each implicating a distinct mode of freedom. The first of these is the awareness of the body as an external object; the second is the awareness of the body as a felt immediate object; the third and most abstract, is the awareness of absence. Let us consider each of these in turn.

We identify ourselves with our bodies; we recognize ourselves in the mirror; we recognize and ostend others as bodies. Our bodies constitute the perspective from which we are perceptually engaged with others, the mode under which we act, and the loci of our sensations. They also provide the spatial reference point from which we experience the world—the here that makes it the case that *I* am always here. Bhattacharyya emphasizes this centrality of the body to self-experience:

58. The materialistic view that the subject is but the body is true insofar as the body represents a stage of being of the subject. But it ignores the unique singularity of one's own body even as a perceived object. No merely objectivist account can do justice to this singularity. The objectivity of other perceived objects is constituted by their position relative to the percipient's body, which itself, therefore, cannot be taken to be so constituted. To the percipient, the body is an object situated relatively to some other percipient's body as imagined, being not perceived by himself in a space-position though not known, therefore, as non-spatial. The percipient as in his body or as his body is in this sense, dissociated from the external world, being what his perceived world is distinct from. At the same time he cannot help imagining himself as included in the world though it may be as a privileged object.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, pp. 122–123)

At a basic but nonetheless essential level, the subject is the body. When I use the first-person singular pronoun to refer to my physical incarnation, I am correct. Nonetheless, one way in which I know my body is to perceive it as an object using external senses including sight, touch, and even smell and taste. I am hence perceivable, and am hence, as body, a kind of fusion of subject and object. My senses give me knowledge of my body as object, but although the mechanism of their doing so is the same as that by means of which they deliver other objects, they also do so in a way importantly different from that in which they give me those others: for I lie at the origin of the spatial coordinate system that structures my knowledge of the external world, and all other bodies are spatially located relative to my body. The only way that I locate my body in subjective space is by reference to the imagined gaze of another, as to assign a determinate location (as opposed to a subjective origin) presupposes another origin for the coordinate system (as Merleau-Ponty was to argue later in *The Phenomenology of Perception* [1945]).

Self-knowledge at this level of subjectivity, according to Bhattacharyya, is hence twofold: it is in part perceptual; and in part an immediate nonperceptual knowledge of myself as spatial origin. Without the former, I cannot represent myself as a physically instantiated subject in a physical world, and so cannot even

represent my own sensory knowledge as mine; without the latter, I cannot distinguish myself as a subject from all else in the world that is object. And at this level of subjectivity I already distinguish myself as subject by a kind of freedom—in this instance, the freedom from being simply another object located in the external world, and hence the freedom to posit the loci of the objects of my *lebenswelt* in relation to me, to my body.

The second moment of bodily subjectivity concerns the body not as perceived in external sense, but as known immediately. This immediate knowledge is the awareness of the body from the inside, as subjective. The account of this subjectivity, which is the first level at which, Bhattacharyya argues, a genuine sense of freedom emerges, and at which subjectivity is first experienced *as* subjectivity, is complex. Bhattacharyya draws the distinction between the perceived and the felt body as follows:

60. One's own body is not only perceived from the outside; one is immediately or sensuously aware of it also from within in what is called "feeling of the body." This feeling is not, like the feeling of an object, a psychic fact from which the object known is distinguished. The bodily feeling is but the felt body, which is not known to be other than the perceived body. Yet the perceived body is distinct from it so far as it is an "interior" that is never perceived and cannot be imagined to be perceived from the outside. . . . [T]he interior cannot be understood here as the interior that one may imagine oneself seeing.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, pp. 123–124)

The first distinction here is that between an awareness in which the object is distinct from the psychic fact of which it is an object, on the one hand, and feeling, in which there is no such distinction, on the other. In the perception of any object—for instance, when I see my hand—we can distinguish between the act of perception, in this case, perhaps, a visual perception, and the object, my hand. The former is psychic fact; the latter object. But when I feel my body as a physical interiority there is no such distinction. There is not an act of feeling distinct from my being my body. Second, Bhattacharyya emphasizes, this interiority is not simply a distinct perspective on the same object. The interiority of my felt body is not an imagined spatial interior that I might see, for instance in a laparoscope, but rather a position that can never be imagined to be perceived. It is in this sense, while physical, purely subjective.

Bhattacharyya draws this distinction in yet another way, pointing out that the kind of space represented in the interior of the felt body is different from the kind of space the perceived body occupies. He puts this in terms of a kind of indefiniteness. The guiding idea here is that while the interior space of the felt

body is not experienced as having definite dimensions or spatial location, that indefiniteness is not the same kind of indefiniteness that we might find in an indefinite awareness of the location of a sensation, such as an itch in our back, or in a hazy awareness of our posture at the end of a long day:

61. Objective space that is indefinitely perceived is the same as the objective space that is definitely perceived. . . . But felt space is indefinite in the sense that it is more than the objective space it is defined into.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 124)

The indefiniteness of spatial representation, according to Bhattacharyya, in the felt body is not an absence of precision; it cannot be precisified at all, in fact. Instead, even when we limn perfectly the volume of the interior of the body, we leave out the interiority of the body, which, while spatially oriented, outruns any attempt at location. Location in objective space can be definite because we can give increasingly precise coordinates for any location; interior space allows no such coordinate system. So, while it is “defined into” objective space—we are somewhere—it escapes any effort at precise location; in a literally spatial sense, it is nowhere. Bhattacharyya now turns to the implications of these differences for the nature of subjectivity itself and the freedom it implicates:

64. We may consider body-feeling in relation to psychic fact and introspection into psychic fact on the one hand and to the perceived body and perceived object on the other. The perceived body is only potentially dissociated from the perceived object inasmuch as it is not merely like presentation not denied to be object but is positively known as object. . . . The object, however, is fully distinguished from the felt body: the perceived object presents exterior surface only. . . . Corresponding to this full distinction from the felt interior, there is the actual but imperfect dissociation of freedom of the felt body from the perceived environment. The felt body, however, does not appear even imperfectly dissociated from the perceived body.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 125)

Bhattacharyya points out that the perceived body is not all that different from other perceived objects. While it has a subjective dimension, it is also represented as an object from which, like all other objects, the subjective awareness of it is dissociated. The felt body is entirely different in this respect. Even though, as Bhattacharyya notes at the end of this passage, the felt body is in one sense the same thing as the perceived body, in its mode of presentation as felt, it is entirely distinct from the object. Perceived objects are only surfaces—they are essentially

exterior; the felt body, as opposed to the perceived body, has no surface—it is essentially interior. Bhattacharyya now brings this point to bear in order to draw another important distinction, in terms of psychic fact and identification:

65. Again, the perceived body is fully distinguished from psychic fact... There may be consciousness of the body as *mine* and at the same time as not other than myself, unlike the consciousness of the object which if felt as *mine* is felt as *not me*. The felt body, however, is only half distinguished from psychic fact, since it is the feeling of the body on the one hand and is not actually dissociated from the perceived body on the other.
—(K. C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 126)

When we perceive objects, including our own bodies, there is, as noted above, a distinction between object and cognitive act. The object is hence alien to the self, and this is true even of the perceived body, as perceived. But the felt body is not mine, but me; not alien, but intimate. For that reason, the felt body is more like a psychic fact than the object of one; it is hence, unlike the perceived body, on the subject side of the subject-object duality, not on the objective side. This has important consequences for subjectivity and freedom:

66. The facthood of the subjective is constituted by the feeling of detachment or freedom. The first hint of this freedom is reached in the feeling of the body... When the perceived body is distinguished from the felt body, the exterior from the interior, we have an explicit feeling of distinction, detachment or freedom from the perceived object.
—(K. C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 127)

Despite a simple level of freedom in the perceptual awareness of the body, Bhattacharyya argues, there can be no awareness of that freedom in that perceptual consciousness. This is because without the awareness of interiority, there is no awareness of the distinction between psychic fact and object, and hence no awareness of subjectivity itself. Only when we have this feeling of body do we rise to the level of true self-consciousness, and at that, only at the most basic level. We climb one step further when we enter the third and final moment of bodily awareness: the awareness of absence.

Bhattacharyya argues, as Sartre was to notice a few decades later (in *Being and Nothingness* [1943]), that the awareness of absence constitutes an essential mode of subjectivity. Unlike Sartre, however, Bhattacharyya argues that this mode of subjectivity is an aspect of bodily self-consciousness, and indeed is the most abstract and profound mode of that consciousness. It is noteworthy that Bhattacharyya introduces the knowledge of absence at this point. He does so

without comment, but it is likely that he is relying on the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology in which absence (*abhāva*) is one of the fundamental categories of existence. In this classical philosophical system—whose center was and still is Bengal—specific absences of objects at loci are among the basic constituents of reality, and are objects of immediate perceptual knowledge. Bhattacharyya apparently relies on this ontology here.

The examples he gives us are the awareness of the absence of a tree in a field in which the tree once stood, and the absence of a book we seek in a room where we expected to find it. In each case, a specific absence becomes the object of our awareness. Now, Bhattacharyya concedes (§ 74) that our awareness of the absence is not entirely perceptual. After all, we see an empty field, not an absent tree, and we see a space on the table where we expected the book, not an absent book. There is hence an essentially imaginative aspect to this awareness. So, unlike the perception of the body, or even the feeling of the body in perception of an external object, here the object of our awareness is not a perceived particular, but rather imagined abstraction, although represented in the very act of perception.

Bhattacharyya explicitly characterizes the mode of our awareness of the absent object as *imaginative*. Using an example closer to that Sartre was to mobilize in his discussion of the absence of Pierre in the café, Bhattacharyya writes:

77... [C]onsider the absence of a beloved person. . . . When such a person is missed or imaginatively perceived as now absent, there may not be any relevant reference to the locus, namely the room. But one may come to imagine the room as with the person and then realize his absence in reference to this imagined content. To imagine an object in a perceived locus is a special form of imagination in which the present locus is viewed as characterizing and not as characterized by the imagined content. The belief in the absence of the object as thus characterized by the locus, the absence here of the imagined room as sentimentally associated with the beloved person, is immediate knowledge but not perception. The absence is not taken to be fact in the present locus; and as the presentness of the absence is not the presentness of any concrete thing, it cannot be said to be perceived. The secondary cognition is conscious non-perception, the room that is perceived by sense being turned into the imagined character of the location of the imagined person.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 133)

While Bhattacharyya regards the awareness of absence as in a certain sense immediate—that is, we are not first aware of seeing something, and then aware of inferring an absence from it—that is not the immediacy of perception, but

rather of an automatic act of imagination. Sartre sees the empty café, but he is instantly aware of the absence of Pierre. And he is not thereby perceptually aware of Pierre, but rather imaginatively aware of the *café avec Pierre*, while perceptually aware of it *sans Pierre*, and at the same time aware that that is mere imagination, or, as Bhattacharyya puts it, conscious nonperception.

But this conscious nonperception requires more of us than would the actual perception of Pierre. The latter requires awareness of the object, and so immediately of its relation to our body in space. To become aware of that awareness, in turn requires attention to our own bodily interiority—to the fact that our subjectivity is in our body, even though it is not perceivable. But to become aware of the absence requires us to be immediately aware of the fact that we are perceiving one thing and imagining another, and hence of the position of the body with respect not only to that which impinges upon it and to which it is perceptually related, but also with respect to that which we merely imagine. We imagine the absent object—even though it actually bears no determinate relation to our body—in relation to our body. The awareness is hence bound up with the body, but free of the actual nexus of our body with its surrounds. Bhattacharyya puts it this way:

78. In the imaginative perception of absence and the absent, there is no explicitly felt dissociation from the position of the perceived body, which however is imperfectly distinguished from the imagined position of absence or of the absent. In conscious non-perception, there is the explicitly felt dissociation from the perceived body but not from the felt body, though the felt body has begun to be distinguished from the absence of the absent. The relation of the perceived body in the former case and the felt body in the latter to the known absence is like the relation of the perceived body to the felt body. The perceived body is half distinguished from the felt body which, however, is not felt to be dissociated from the perceived body. Absence imaginatively perceived is thus on a level with the felt body, both being felt undissociated from the perceived body which however is half distinguished from them. Absence known by conscious non-perception is on a higher level.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 134)

This paragraph is far from transparent. But once we see what is going on here, we will see why this form of consciousness is, according to Bhattacharyya, physical, and why it is so important in the hierarchy of modes of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. First, Bhattacharyya notes, when we are aware of an absence, we are aware of it as an absence in a particular locus, and that locus is identified in relation to our body. It is an absence *here* or *there*. But second, we do not relate

the absent thing to our perceived body. After all, the perceived body occupies a particular space, and the absent thing does not. Instead, we locate it with respect to the felt body.

Bhattacharyya calls attention to a strange asymmetry in the relation between the perceived and the felt body: When we are aware of the perceived body, it is “half distinguished” from the felt body; that is, it is present as mine, not as me in perception, even though I identify myself with it in other respects, taking it to be the same as the felt body. I do not, on the other hand, represent the felt body also as mine, and so do not consciously associate it with the perceived body; it is me, not mine.

Bhattacharyya points out that the absence is represented as distinct from the perceived body—it is represented as an absence in a space outside of the perceived body—but it is not dissociated from the felt body, for it is not represented as a real concrete thing, but rather as a cognitive act of imagination carried out by the embodied subject. For this reason, the awareness of absence is a higher level of consciousness, and implicates a higher level of self-consciousness, despite remaining tied to an embodied perspective. Bhattacharyya concludes this discussion with the following observation:

79. Conscious non-perception then is a transitional stage between body-feeling and imagination with which psychic fact begins. It is the consciousness of presentness without space-position. . . . It is free from space but not from the present and accordingly does not imply a presentation of the object as dissociated from the subject. Psychic fact begins with the distinguishing of what the present is not. . . . Were one to start with object-perception, . . . the first clear hint of the subjective fact would be realized in the knowledge of absence through conscious non-perception.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 135)

The awareness of absence is hence the fulcrum of self-knowledge. It allows us to be aware of an object, but not at a particular place. Nonetheless, in virtue of the temporality of that awareness, it is an awareness of that object in relation to the physical self. And it is a direct awareness of the object, albeit as absent, not an awareness of a representation of that object. So, once again, it is tied to the physical, to embodied reality, the world of objects that exist in relation to the physical self. Nonetheless, because of the awareness of the distinction between what is perceived and what is imagined, reflection on this mode of awareness takes us for the first time beyond the physical into the realm of psychic fact. For the distinction between perceiving Pierre and imagining Pierre is a psychic, not a physical distinction.

Self-knowledge here then rises to the apperceptive awareness of myself as a being who perceives in distinct modes. It is on this basis that I can come to be aware of myself as a mind, and of the distinction between my representations and reality. This forms the bridge to the account of psychic subjectivity, en route to the final account of spiritual subjectivity. It is to that mode of awareness, and to that level of self-knowledge, that we now turn.

11.3.4. Psychic Subjectivity

Bhattacharyya begins the transition to the discussion of psychic subjectivity with this observation:

80. Psychology does not begin till the perceived object is distinguished from the half-perceived body. . . . To those who would not go further in psychology, introspection is only observation of the indefinite body-interior and psychic fact is only a bodily attitude, the beginning of the behavior of an organism to the environment. Some, however, would go one step further and admit the image as a unique fact, appearing as a quasi-object from which object including the body is distinguished. . . . The image may be functional in character as a reference to the object, . . . but that it appears presented as a substantive something from which the object is distinct and exists in a sense in which the object does not exist cannot be denied.

—(K. C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 136)

Bhattacharyya uses the term *image* as Kant does *vorstellung* or most contemporary epistemologists do *representation*.¹⁶ He argues that introspection into somatic self-consciousness is one thing; the reflective recognition of thought mediated by representations, and hence of those representations, is another. While representations share with felt somatic states (as opposed to perceived somatic states) the absence of any determinate spatial location, and like them are on the subjective, as opposed to the objective side of experience, unlike somatic states they lack both spatial and temporal determinateness.

Our beliefs or imaginings need not be occurrent; they need not have fixed temporal boundaries. And unlike felt somatic states, he urges (§§86 ff), these are not experienced as internal to the body, but rather to the mind. Introspection into our cognitive activity finds not felt states but rather thoughts, and these

¹⁶ It is likely that Bhattacharyya is thinking of the Sanskrit term *ākāra* here, often translated as “image,” though more often these days as “representation,” a term that would have the semantic range he is here attaching to *image*.

thoughts are all intentional in structure. Throughout this discussion, Bhattacharyya's debt to Husserl (the first volume of whose *Ideas* he read and annotated) is evident. Moreover, Bhattacharyya argues (§§ 90 ff), unlike the conscious nonperception of the absent (the mere awareness of absence) our awareness of our representations, even when the objects of those representations are absent, is not merely the nonperception of objects, but an awareness of the actual facticity of the representations themselves.

A second moment of psychic subjectivity, Bhattacharyya argues, emerges when we move from the awareness of images, or representations of objects, to ideas. Ideas are nonimagistic, discursive symbols that do not represent concrete objects. Bhattacharyya's principal examples of ideational thought are logical thoughts, and thoughts expressed in words. Bhattacharyya draws the distinction between the representational and the ideational in two ways: in terms of their respective vehicles of thought and in terms of their respective objects of thought.¹⁷ The vehicle of imagistic thought is the representation of an object, and its object is a particular; the vehicle of ideational thought is the word, and its object is a universal.

Bhattacharyya analyzes subjectivity as essentially involving freedom, and sets out a hierarchy of moments of subjectivity, each involving deeper self-knowledge. Corresponding to each of these moments of subjectivity is a new degree of freedom. In imagistic thought, the subject is conscious of its freedom from the object. Unlike perception—even "perception" of absence—there is no requirement in representational thought of the representation of the body, or of the presence in thought of any external object or space whatsoever. And when we move to ideational thought there is a further freedom—a freedom from the particular as an object of thought, together with a freedom from any sensory component of thought whatsoever. The purely symbolic frees thought from any reference to the concrete at all, even in intentional content.

To be conscious of oneself as a thinking subject is hence to be conscious of oneself as free in a sense far greater than that involved in thinking of oneself as an embodied subject—it is to represent one's cognitive subjectivity as absolutely independent not only of the external world, but also of the modes of appearance of that world to physical senses. On this view the subject has a unique, primordial ontological status, and is the unconditioned condition of all of its objects. There are clear affinities of this view to Vedānta, and to Mukerji's own analysis of subjectivity.

Reflection on this mode of subjectivity yields yet another level of self-knowledge. Even at the level of imagistic representational thought, Bhattacharyya

¹⁷ The distinction Bhattacharyya draws and the ways in which he draws it closely track the distinction between *pratyakṣa/svalakṣana* (perception/particular) and *anumana/samṣānalakṣana* (inference/universal) as these are drawn in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Buddhist epistemology.

claims, introspection finds not somatic states or feelings, but intentionality. And once the climb has been made to ideational subjectivity, introspection finds intentionality directed to the abstract and not the concrete. We come to know ourselves at this level of subjectivity not as conscious bodies, but as intentionally directed, concept-and-language-wielding thinking things. Again, this self-knowledge does not replace, but supplements that developed earlier, layering our self-understanding as we layer our subjectivity.

11.3.5. Spiritual Subjectivity

The final moment of subjectivity for Bhattacharyya is the spiritual. In developing his account of this kind of subjectivity, the level at which complete freedom as well as the most complete self-knowledge emerges, he begins with the concept of feeling. Importantly, this term must be understood not in the sense of somatic feeling that is in play in the discussion of the second level of bodily subjectivity, but rather in the sense of aesthetic, as well as ethical feeling. In approaching spiritual subjectivity in this way, Bhattacharyya, however, is following not Kant's path to the third *Critique*, but the Vedānta emphasis on aesthetic sensibility as the path to the understanding of *Brahman*, a track he also treads in his important essay, "The Concept of *Rasa*" (Reprinted in Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, pp. 193–206). Bhattacharyya argues in that essay that it is essential to aesthetic experience not only that we are affected by the aesthetic object, but that we free ourselves from that affection by contemplating that affection, and so achieving reflective awareness of ourselves as subjects. Whereas for Kant, aesthetic experience is always essentially tied to the object, for Bhattacharyya, following the Vedānta tradition, aesthetic experience always demands a detachment, or freedom from the object, and the achievement of a distinct mode of subjectivity. In Vedānta, this aesthetic subjectivity is intimately tied to the subjectivity through which one is related to the world, and most importantly to the absolute. (See TMP Mahadevan, 1969.)

In ethical experience we address one another as subjects in dialogue. In this discussion at the close of *The Subject as Freedom*, Bhattacharyya returns to an important insight he defends near the beginning of the book: to take oneself as the referent of *I* is to take addressees as *you*, others as *he* or *she*. In short, he argues in the first chapter of the book, the possibility of speech—and hence subjectivity—is conditional upon intersubjectivity, simply because speech presupposes both addressees (second persons) and conventions that constitute meaning (established by third persons). He deploys that insight at the denouement of the discussion to argue that to understand oneself as a subject is to understand oneself as a member of a class of those capable of introspective self-awareness:

120. The realization of what a speaker means by the word *I* is the hearer's awareness of a possible introspection. Such awareness is as much knowledge as actual introspection. The speaker calls himself *I* and may be understood by the hearer as *you*. As thus understood, the introspective self is individual, not an individual being—for introspection is not a subjective *being* like feeling—but the function of addressing another *self*. The speaker does not understand himself through the meaning of the word *I*: his introspection is through the word and not through its meaning and is less a self-knowing than a self-revealing, revealing to a possible understander of the word *I*. Yet as the addressing attitude is only implicit, it is to him accidental and posterior to his self-knowing. To the understanding self, however, although he understands the speaker's self-knowing because he is himself self-knowing, his understanding of the other *I* is primary while his own self-knowing is accidental and secondary. The speaker knows himself in implicitly revealing to the hearer and the hearer knows the speaker in implicitly knowing himself. . . . There are thus two cases—self-intuition with other-intuition implicit in it and other-intuition with self-intuition implicit in it. Both are actual knowledge. . . . Because the word *I* is at once the symbol and the symbolized, it cannot be said to have simply the symbolizing function. . . .

121. Actual introspection is implicitly social, being a speaking or addressing or self-evidencing to another possible introspection or self.

—(K. C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, pp. 161–162)

This is dramatic stuff, original to Bhattacharyya, and quite different from the individualistic perspective we encounter in Mukerji, despite the shared Vedānta roots. It is hard to miss the anticipations of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Sellars, whose respective emphases on the necessarily social nature of self-consciousness, language, and thought were to transform twentieth-century philosophy of mind.

First, Bhattacharyya notes, the term *I* does not denote an object. It is, in the language of the first chapter of the text, a term expressing a speakable, but not a meanable. When we use the first-person pronoun, we signal that we are introspectors—that we are capable of self-consciousness—but we do not denote that which is the ultimate content of introspection, for that is subjectivity itself, which, if denoted, becomes object, and not subject. Second, in virtue of the role of *I* as a vocable, but nondenoting term, this speaking of the self, and hence self-consciousness itself, is parasitic on the very possibility of language, and so on the existence of addressees who are also capable of using the first, and the second person pronouns and on consciousness of myself as a possible addressee

by another. So, self-knowledge and therefore also subjectivity, are essentially intersubjective phenomena, not private.¹⁸

Spiritual subjectivity, the awareness of oneself as pure subject, capable of action, reflection and judgment is then not the awareness of an isolated ego, but the awareness of a self among selves, and for this reason can rise from the level of mere awareness to that of knowledge. Bhattacharyya concludes his investigation with this reflection on the nature of freedom as it emerges from this collective notion of subjectivity:

135. I am never positively conscious of my present individuality, being conscious of it only as that which is or can be outgrown, only as I feel freeing myself from it and am free to the extent implied by such feeling. I do not know myself as free but I conceive that I can be free successively as body from the perceived object, as presentation from the body, as feeling from presentation and as introspective function from feeling [I] may be free even from this distinctness, may be freedom itself that is de-individualized but not therefore indefinite—absolute freedom that is to be evident.

—(K.C. Bhattacharyya and Burch, 1976, p. 171)

Absolute freedom, like absolute subjectivity, Bhattacharyya concludes, is not an object of immediate awareness, not something of which I am positively conscious as an entity. Instead, it is something that I know as a potential; the potential to ascend in reflection at any time through reflection on my identity as a body to reflection on my identity as a thinker, and finally to reflection on myself as that which can be aware of itself either as body or as cognitive subject. The cognitive subject is transcendental, and, like Kant's transcendental subject, is absolutely free in aesthetic or ethical experience. On the other hand, contra Kant, I can speak intelligibly about it, even if that self about which I speak remains beyond denotation.

That self is not pure individual, but a social subjective position of which I have knowledge whenever I speak with others as a person among persons. While the absolute subjectivity, with its special mode of transcendental access to the self is inspired by that articulated in Vedānta, the insight that the social turn is necessary for its intelligibility is Bhattacharyya's.

When we assemble this complex and sophisticated form of self-knowledge, we can see the shape of Bhattacharyya's distinctive response to Kant. While Kant insisted that we could think, but could never know the subject, Bhattacharyya shows that we know the subject in a variety of modalities: perceptual, cognitive-introspective and reflective; cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic. Nonetheless, we

¹⁸ G. E. M. Anscombe was to develop a similar insight in her essay, "The First Person" (1975).

do not know the subject as an object among objects; that would be to deny its subjectivity and its transcendental status. Instead, while we know and can even speak of the subject, we can never directly *refer to*, or *mean* it. Rather, we engage with it as a mode of freedom, and as a mode of our engagement with other subjects.

Bhattacharyya hence makes good on the promise to vindicate a central insight of the Vedānta tradition—the insight that the self as subject is knowable, and that knowledge of it is a necessary condition for all other knowledge. And he does so both through the surprising route of a detailed examination of bodily consciousness, undoubtedly inspired by Vaishnava tantric ideas. But as we have seen, it is not a mere repletion of an Indian tradition or appropriation of a European tradition. Nor is it even a simple synthesis of ideas from these two traditions. Bhattacharyya, in dialogue with these traditions, introduces a dramatic linguistic and communitarian twist.

11.4. Conclusion

Bhattacharyya's account of subjectivity and his response to the Kantian problem of self-knowledge differ from Mukerji's. Our aim here is not to assess their relative merits, but to point out that each is a strikingly original and powerful contribution to philosophy, and that each is emblematic of the renaissance sensibility we have characterized. Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, is *doing* philosophy, not reporting on it, and he is doing philosophy in an easy cosmopolitan dialogue with Indian and European sources and ideas (despite his own exasperating refusal to acknowledge any of them explicitly). Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, takes a classical tradition (or several) as his reference point for addressing modern problems. And like Mukerji, he works happily in an Indian vernacular language—English—albeit in conversation with texts he is reading in German and in Sanskrit. Once again, we see a philosophically progressive moment—indeed one that anticipates many later developments in European philosophy—in continuity with an Indian tradition, and in dialogue with the West. However different the specific approaches to the account of subjectivity of Mukerji and Bhattacharyya are, their own subjectivities are remarkably akin.

That subjectivity—inhabited not only by Mukerji and Bhattacharyya, but also by many of their colleagues—as we noted in the first chapter, was, however, not always comfortable. The late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century philosopher Jitendra Mohanty was to characterize this subjectivity in the title of his own autobiography (2002) as being “between two worlds.” Mohanty describes the sense of dislocation and fractured identity experienced by Indian philosophers, the same fractured identity to which Daya Krishna gave voice. (See

chapter 1.) In retrospect, we can see this subjectivity—at least for those philosophers working in the colonial context—as arising not from a failure to inhabit either tradition, but rather from success in inhabiting both. In doing so, they prosecuted philosophy, for the first time in the modern era, as a global enterprise, a success perhaps not apparent even to those who achieved it, and perhaps not even to many of their successors. This cosmopolitan approach, in tandem with the deliberate reference to a classical tradition, is the hallmark of a renaissance moment. Moreover, this fact falsifies the charge that Indian philosophical culture died with the coming of the British. Here we see compelling evidence of its vital continuity. The renaissance is not a rebirth following death, but a renewal and reinvigoration of a living philosophical tradition in a broader context.

A distinctive feature of the Vedānta tradition, and of Indian philosophy more broadly, is the centrality of aesthetic experience to spiritual awakening, and of aesthetic theory to philosophical speculation. No Indian account of subjectivity or of the fundamental nature of reality is complete without this aesthetic dimension, and the practice of art in these traditions is therefore central to human life. Moreover, as we have seen, conceptions of art were essential to the development of Indian national consciousness and the construction of an idea of Indian identity. We now turn directly to the consideration of art and aesthetic theory in the Indian renaissance.

Indian Ways of Seeing

The Centrality of Aesthetics

12.1. Introduction

We have been considering all along a question faced by Indian philosophers in the colonial period: how does one engage in Indian philosophy in a way that is at the same time faithful to the Indian tradition and relevant to and cognizant of global trends in philosophy? The same fundamental questions animate Indian aesthetics during the colonial period: the question of authenticity, namely, what makes Indian art authentically Indian?; and the question of relevance: how can one remain authentically Indian while being creative, modern, and relevant to the art world as a whole?

Thus we see, in the domain of aesthetics, the debates we encountered in our discussion of Indian national identity played out in the world of art. In this chapter we consider two different approaches to these questions about authenticity and relevance: one taken by the philosopher-theorists at the major Indian universities and the other by the artists and art critics in the vibrant art world of colonial India. Art practice and philosophical practice, we will see, interacted, and together, although in different media, responded to the colonial predicament by theorizing a modern Indian aesthetic culture.

We begin with the philosophers. We will examine the work of Mysore Hiriyanna, Anand Kentish Coomaraswamy, Mulk Raj Anand, Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya, Mohammed Iqbal, and Mian Mohammad Sharif. We then turn to the quite different arena of art practice focusing on Ravi Varma from the Bombay Art School, Abanindranath Tagore (the Art School of Calcutta) and Amrita Sher-Gil (who belongs to neither of these schools). We also consider art critics such as A. K. Coomaraswamy (in his public role) and Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble), who were actively championing particular artistic styles and art subjects as authentically Indian, while dismissing others

as derivative of European style. In this chapter we explore each of these trajectories of argumentation in aesthetics in preindependence India. We conclude with a sketch of how these arguments about authenticity and relevance have continued to play out in these two constituencies in independent India.

12.2. The Philosophers

12.2.1 Mysore Hiriyananna and Anand Kentish Coomaraswamy: The Location of *Rasa*

In this section we turn our attention to philosophical aesthetic theory, both Hindu and Muslim. Modern Indian studies of aesthetics begin, as Kapila Vatsyayan notes (Hiriyananna, 1954, pp. 11–12), with the scholarship of Mysore Hiriyananna (1871–1950), who was professor of philosophy and Sanskrit at the University of Mysore. Hiriyananna is best known for his excellent history of Indian philosophy [*Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, originally published in 1932 (Hiriyananna, 1993)], a textbook still in use in India and in the West. But he was far more than a textbook author; he was a preeminent historian of philosophy, whose scholarship focused on epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. His most creative work, however, was in Indian aesthetics. Hiriyananna's work always refers to Indian antecedents despite his extensive scholarship in Western philosophy and literature. He was an advocate of the work of younger Indian scholars, and regularly reviewed new philosophical work published both in India and in the West.¹

Hiriyananna's early work is framed by two intellectual contexts. The first is set by the debates about Indian art to which we will turn below. The second, and more direct, is the attention to *mokṣa* in neo-Vedānta philosophy. Hiriyananna himself was an orthodox Vedāntin, but was also concerned with other philosophical schools, prominently including Sāṃkhya. He argued that aesthetic theory in India really belonged to a distinct school initiated by the classical Indian aestheticians Bharata and Abhinavagupta, to which he refers as the *rasa* school. Nonetheless, his own analysis of aesthetic experience connects *rasa* firmly to Vedānta concerns.

Hiriyananna argues that aesthetic experience is important primarily because of its close kinship—albeit nonidentity—with the experience of *mokṣa*. He writes:

¹ This attention to the history of Indian philosophy as a primary reference point is typical of philosophers of this period in the Madras and Mysore microcommunity. We see the same approach, for instance, in the work of S. Radhakrishnan and T. M. P. Mahadevan.

Indian philosophers, especially the Vedāntins among them, compare the experience of art with that of the ideal state, which they describe as *mokṣa*. But the two experiences are only of the same order and are not identical, for the former has certain limitations which are not found in the latter.

—(Hiriyanna, 1954, p. 28)

The difference here, according to Hiriyanna, is that aesthetic experience is transient, does not transcend ignorance, has no ethical content, and is dependent on the aesthetic object, whereas *mokṣa* or final release is permanent, “springs naturally from within” (Hiriyanna, 1954, p. 29), and involves a transcendence of all illusion. Nonetheless, the value of art consists in large part in its ability to induce this taste of liberation and the impersonal joy that it involves. Impersonality and detachment, Hiriyanna argues, are central dimensions of this aesthetic experience and are the marks that distinguish aesthetic pleasure from other pleasures, and that link it to liberation. Hiriyanna describes the aesthetic contemplative attitude as follows:

... Here no... dualism of end and means is recognized. There is only a single self-justifying process of contemplation, which represents a *pro-gressive* appreciation of the aesthetic object. The purpose is thus present throughout the process or is imminent in it... The value of art accordingly consists not in providing mere delight for us, but in the totality of experience for which aesthetic contemplation stands... It aims... at inducing in us a unique attitude of mind which signifies not only pleasure but also complete disinterestedness and a sympathetic insight into the whole situation depicted by the artist... In the view of Indian thinkers, it is comparable to the ideal state of the *jivanmukta* or one that has realized the goal of life.

—(Hiriyanna, 1954, p. 26)

Hiriyanna makes several important points here, which are connected to the Vedānta analysis of experience we saw at the end of the previous chapter. First, while some might maintain that the contemplation of art is a means to aesthetic pleasure, Hiriyanna denies that. He argues instead that contemplation is nondually related to that pleasure and so that aesthetic contemplation is an internally self-justifying activity. The second point is that the character of the delight to which aesthetic contemplation is internally related is disinterested. The aesthetic subject does not enjoy the artwork because she desires, or for that matter, abhors its content, but rather because of the transcendent state the art induces in her, and she does so because of her understanding of the work of art. This is the sense in which art gives us a foretaste of spiritual liberation.

Hiriyanna insists that art is autonomous: its value consists not in its ability to inspire religious or political or even ethical attitudes, or in its decorative function. Art may succeed or fail in any of these respects, but that success or failure is irrelevant to its value as art (Hiriyanna, 1954, p. 27). Moreover, art is never, on his view, didactic. To the degree to which it is—that is, to the degree that a piece of art explicitly directs the viewer to a position—the art, he argues, fails aesthetically. This connects his account of the noninstrumental value of art and artistic contemplation directly to the idea of *līlā*, the other activity valued not because of an external good to which it leads, but in itself.

In *Indian Conception of Values* (Hiriyanna, 1975), Hiriyanna distinguishes aesthetic from both logical and ethical value. Logical value concerns truth and falsity and demands fidelity to the real. In the case of art, however, reality is beside the point. We do not ask in aesthetic judgment whether the work or art faithfully records reality. Ethical and aesthetic value, he argues, share a grounding in the deficiency of reality with respect to ideality. In the case of ethics, however, this demands action to bring the world closer to the ideal; in the case of art it calls us only to experience the ideal, albeit in imagination. In neither case, however, is the real itself the goal.²

Hiriyanna in this context points out that the aesthetic is alogical in two important respects. The first is that, as we just noticed, it is unconcerned with reality or truth. The second, closely connected to this, is that its content is, properly speaking, nothing the work of art represents, but rather the emotion it evokes. This is why art cannot be didactic. It must evoke, and not describe or prescribe emotion. Hiriyanna argues that the device of *dhvani* or indirection, comprising, inter alia, the use of metaphor, ornamentation, and so on, is essential to artistic success (Hiriyanna, 1975, p. 56).

The nature of the unique kind of emotion evoked by art, Hiriyanna argues, following Bharata and Abhinavagupta, is *rasa*. The term *rasa* has a long history in Indian aesthetics. In its original sense it denotes the sap, or essence of a plant. It comes to mean *taste*, and in that meaning it has exactly the ambiguity of the English word *taste*: it can denote flavor or artistic appreciation. The various kinds of *rasa*, as well as its locus and its relation to more transient emotional states (the *bhāvas*) are addressed by Bharata (ca. third century B.C.E.–first century C.E.) in the *Natyāśāstra* and adumbrated in great detail by Abhinavagupta (tenth–eleventh century C.E.) in his massive commentary to that work, the two foundational treatises of Indian aesthetics. Bharata and Abhinavagupta enumerate a list of

² There is a second sense in which the aesthetic and the ethical align: in each case value is internal to the activity, and not dependent on its effects. Hiriyanna compares this to the *Gītā*'s assertion that action is to be performed for its own sake, and not for the sake of a result.

eight (or nine) *rasas*³ but disagree about whether *rasa* is primarily a property of the aesthetic object or the subject. Hiriyantha sides with Abhinavagupta, arguing that *rasa* is to be found in the subject.⁴

Despite the fact that Hiriyantha locates the essence of art in its ability to evoke *rasa*, and denies that aesthetic purpose is ever didactic, he does think that artistic experience can improve us, heightening both religious and moral sensibility. This relation of artistic to moral life is connected to Hiriyantha's larger modernist reading of Indian philosophy in which he is concerned to dispel the myth of "Indian passivity" and to demonstrate the centrality of action and purpose in Indian philosophy, both in the mundane and the transcendent domains:

... We must be careful to remember that by describing this [aesthetic] attitude as contemplative, we do not mean that it is passive and excludes all activity. The very fact that it is an *appreciative* attitude implies that it is active. The belief that it is passive is a result of mistaking the disinterested for that which is totally lacking in interest. ... All that is meant by saying that the art object makes no appeal to the practical self is that our attention then is confined wholly to that object, and that it is not diverted therefrom by any thought or an ulterior use to which it may be put.

—(Hiriyantha, 1954, p. 36)

Hiriyantha's claim to philosophical authenticity is clear. His very program places the *rasa* school in the domain of contemporary discourse. But that program is motivated not by idle historical curiosity or a curatorial approach to the history of Indian philosophy, but by a conviction that Indian aesthetic theory is directly relevant to the appreciation of Indian art. By correcting a mistaken impression that Indian aesthetic theory demands only a passive role for the observer, he argues that engagement with art in India is active, sophisticated, and of moral—and by implication—religious and political relevance.

We have already encountered A. K. Coomaraswamy's nationalist thought in chapter 6. Coomaraswamy, in a string of influential essays on Indian aesthetics, also takes up the concept of *rasa*, with a nationalistic purpose. He argues for the

³ Love (*Śringāra*), Bravery (*Vīra*), Anger (*Raudra*), Humor (*Hasya*), Wonder (*Adbhuta*), Sorrow (*Karuna*), *Bhayanak* (terror), and *Bhibatsa* (disgust). The ninth, *Śānta* (tranquility), is controversial. We need not enter that controversy here.

⁴ There are multiple versions of *rasa* theory in classical Indian thought. Abhinavagupta's theory, although developed in a commentary on Bharata, diverges considerably from Bharata's own account, emphasizing the subjective, rather than the objective aspects of aesthetic experience. Modern *rasa* theory follows Abhinavagupta. There are important regional aesthetic traditions, such as the *alamkāra* traditions of South India that follow Bharata more closely.

presence of the distinctive Indianness in the best Indian art and identifies that distinctive Indian essence as its evocation of *rasa*. *Rasa*, he argues, can only be evoked by art objects that are traditionally Indian, in a subject immersed in Indian culture and aesthetic theory (Coomaraswamy, 1910; 2003; 2004). Coomaraswamy argues that Indian art is a distinctive genre. It is not concerned with representation or even with beauty. Rather, he argues, it points directly to the spiritual, and succeeds in doing so because of its unique expression of *rasa*. Coomaraswamy, unlike Hiriyanna, follows Bharata in locating *rasa* firmly within the work of art, and argues that the spectator's role in aesthetic experience is to experience the *rasa* in the work and thereby to contact transcendent spiritual values.

In this theory of art, the most important term is *rasa*, rendered above "Ideal Beauty," ... the work of art is *rasavat*. ... The idea of an aesthetic beauty to be *tasted*, and knowable only in the activity of *tasting*, is to be clearly distinguished from the relative beauties or lovelinesses of the separate parts of the work, or of the work itself considered merely as a surface, the appreciation of all which is a matter of taste (*ruci*) or predilection. The latter relative beauties will appear in the theme and aesthetic surfaces, in all that has to do with the proximate determination of the work to be done, its ordering to use; the formal beauty will be sensed in vitality and unity, design and rhythm, in no way depending on the nature of the theme, or its component parts. It is indeed very explicitly pointed out that any theme whatever, "lovely or unlovely, noble or vulgar, gracious or frightful, etc," may become the vehicle of *rasa*.

—(Coomaraswamy, 2004, pp. 47–48)

Coomaraswamy's account of the creative process also emphasizes the connection to the spiritual. He refers to art as a *yoga*, and argues that artistic conception always involves an intuition of the divine to be embodied in the work of art. The artist's skill is not the creation of surface beauty, but the evocation of spiritual realization in the viewer. Craft is important, not for its creativity, but rather for its adherence to the rules of construction that make that evocation possible (Coomaraswamy, 2004, pp. 164–169). He quotes Śukrācārya:

Only an image made in accordance with the canon can be called beautiful; some may think that beautiful that corresponds to their own fancy, but that not in accordance with the canon is unlovely to the discerning eye. ... Even the misshapen image of an angel is to be preferred to that of a man, however attractive the latter may be.

—(2004, p. 167)

Coomaraswamy glosses this, “this is because the representations of the angels are means to spiritual ends, not so those which are only likenesses of human individuals” (2004, p. 167).

Hiriyanna on the theoretical side, and Coomaraswamy on the art historical and critical side, recenter aesthetics in Indian philosophical discourse. In doing so, they set the stage for an efflorescence of thought about art, aesthetic theory, and the place of art in politics and the public sphere. The debates they inspired were carried out both in academic settings and in the popular press. We now turn to other important aestheticians who developed the academic discourse, beginning with Mulk Raj Anand and K. C. Bhattacharyya. We then turn to their Muslim colleagues Mohammed Iqbal and M. M. Sharif, before considering the more public work of the artists and art critics, including Ravi Varma, Abanindranath Tagore, and Amrita Sher-Gil, whose paintings and essays in art criticism raise the issues considered by the academics.

12.2.2 Mulk Raj Anand and K. C. Bhattacharyya: Form and Function

In the cases of Anand and Bhattacharyya, we are interested not simply in the content of their respective theories of *rasa*, but also in the ways in which they each craft their essays. Their literary choices, as well as their positions, evince their attitudes toward philosophical practice in the Indian colonial context. In particular, we will showcase the different strategic decisions each philosopher makes regarding form in the service of similar projects. Discussion of the ways in which form interacts with content will allow us to see more clearly what each was up to in their respective programs, who they took their intended audiences to be, and how this enables us to reflect on the creative devices philosophers could use to complicate the power dynamic even in the esoteric halls of the ivory tower in the Indian Academy.

Anand (1905–2004) is another prominent Indian philosopher who studied at Cambridge. He completed his PhD in philosophy in 1929, after studying experimental psychology at University College, London. Anand is best known as a distinguished writer, critic, editor, journalist, and political activist. He was one of the first Indian novelists in English to gain international fame, with novels that dealt with social, economic, and political issues of his day, such as *Untouchable* (1935) and *The Coolie* (1936). Anand was not only a novelist, activist, and editor; he was also a professional philosopher and aesthetician, whose first philosophical publications antedate his career as a novelist. Anand had forged connections with the Bloomsbury group in England while he was still a student and carried that early influence of artists and aesthetic theorists with him upon his return to India. He was the founding editor of the influential Indian arts magazine *Marg*, which began publication in 1945. Anand was appointed

Tagore Professor of Literature and Fine Arts at the University of the Punjab and Fine Art Chair at the Lalit Kala Akademi.

In 1933, Anand wrote a text on aesthetics for a broad audience entitled *The Hindu View of Art*.⁵ In that book he offers his own account of *rasa*, and the ways in which a devoted artist expresses and evokes it in religious and secular practice. This account would come to be regarded by the intelligentsia and art critics of the day as not simply a Hindu, but an Indian view of art. Anand's work juxtaposes this "Hindu" view with contemporary British philosophical approaches to art. It is the distinctly philosophical dimension of Anand's work that interests us here, and to which we now turn. We will see that, unlike Hiriyanna, whose artistic framework is entirely that of *rasa* theory, Anand's philosophical references are equally to the Western aesthetic tradition.

The opening line of Anand's chapter on "The Aesthetic Hypothesis" from *The Hindu View of Art* (1933) seems transparent: "The Hindu view of art proper may be said to lie in the aesthetic conception of *rasa*" (1933, p. 145). Anand here simply locates the idea at the core of Hindu art. To one conversant with British aesthetic theory of the time, however, this sentence would also bring to mind the theorist R. G. Collingwood, who introduced in *Principles of Art* the notion that there is a category one could productively call "art proper" (Collingwood, 1938), distinguished from those objects that, while colloquially called "art," nonetheless do not belong to the class of "art proper."

Collingwood identifies a central attribute that all such objects share in virtue of which they belong to "art proper" (what he calls "expression of emotion," but of a special kind). Another influential British philosopher of art, Clive Bell, in *Art* (1917, reprinted in 1958) put the point pithily: "For either all works of visual art have some common quality, or when we speak of 'works of art' we gibber" (1958, p. 7). Bell argues that this common property of "works of art" proper is "significant form." Our best evidence for this property is its evocation in us of "aesthetic emotion." So, with one short sentence at the outset of his essay, Anand ingeniously manages both to articulate a concept that is distinctive to "Hindu art" and to link that concept for the reader to a contemporary narrative and concept in British aesthetics.

Anand next discusses the necessary conditions of an artist evoking *rasa*: "[H]e should have a deep consciousness or vision of the illimitable resources in which he can mirror the Cosmos" (1933, p. 150). This description of the Hindu artist's required skill has an attached footnote: "Creation comes from the depths—the

⁵ The title echoes a work written almost a decade earlier by S. Radhakrishnan, the then King George V Professor of Philosophy, at Calcutta University entitled *The Hindu View of Life* (1927). Each of these is an attempt by an Indian intellectual to communicate to a global audience issues central in philosophy, religion, morality, art, and aesthetics.

mystic will say from God” (E. M. Forster) Again, this juxtaposition of the Indian and the English is far from accidental: just as the reader begins to feel the cultural divide implicit in the demand placed on a Hindu artist, the reference to E. M. Forster articulating a British view of artistic creation undercuts this difference.

Further into the essay, after describing the link between the eight traditional *rasas* and eight mundane emotions as proposed in the ancient Hindu *śāstras*, Anand adds a critical footnote: “Compare the analysis of emotions and their bearing on art in Sully’s *Outlines of Psychology*, and Bain’s *English Composition and Rhetoric*, Vol. II. Also Lord Kames’ *Elements of Criticism*” (1933, p. 153). Sully’s text describes how psychological concepts are connected to the field of art; the views of the Scottish rhetoricians and Utilitarians. Bain and Kames are invoked as well at this juncture, the latter for underscoring the importance of training readers to be receptively competent.⁶ After noting in his essay that the ancient *rasas* are identified with certain colors, Anand’s next footnote refers to Laurence Binyon (1869–1943), an English poet, dramatist, and art scholar from a very different cultural context: “It would be vain to deny that certain kinds and tones of colour have a real correspondence with emotional states of mind” (Binyon, 1911, pp. 90–91).

Anand’s essay on Hindu aesthetics is filled with footnotes quoting Schopenhauer, Goethe, Plato, and Plotinus on the topics of music and the laws of beauty. He concludes this discussion by announcing the ancient idea captured in the philosophy of Vedānta: “Brahman is *rasa*, *rasa* is bliss” (Anand, 1933, p. 162). This notion of *rasa* as a transcendental mode of consciousness in which one “realizes the wholeness of experience in a moment” (Anand, 1933, p. 163) is familiar to anyone who is even passingly familiar with either Hindu philosophy or Sufi aesthetics, but many Western-educated readers might take these philosophical frameworks to be exotic and alien. Anand destabilizes this attitude in his juxtapositions. He immediately adds a footnote from Goethe: “Beauty is inexplicable; it is a hovering, glittering shadow, whose outlines elude the grasp of definition” (1933).

Anand’s essay is hence as revealing in form as in content. The main text is on its surface straightforwardly descriptive, focused on articulating the “Hindu” view of art for an English speaking audience. While the footnotes noted above play their customary role of acknowledgment and scholarly legitimation, in this instance, careful attention to their content reveals that they do more. These footnotes use creative juxtaposition as gestures of political equalization, religious

⁶ This attention to receptive competence as central to aesthetic theory will also be apparent in the work of Bhattacharyya and Sharif, as we will see below. In orthodox Indian aesthetic theory this is captured by the idea of *sahṛdāya*, or shared sensibility, literally “having the same heart.”

de-exoticization and theoretical connection to a modern intellectual milieu. *The Hindu View of Art*, taken in its entirety, reveals a preindependence Indian aesthetic vision distinctive in its link to a rich, classical philosophical tradition that goes back to the Vedas⁷ as well as in its anticipation of and continuity with a modern European aesthetic tradition. This is Anand's answer to the two questions of authenticity and relevance. Authenticity is vouchsafed by taking *rasa* as the fundamental aesthetic notion; relevance is achieved by placing it in constant conversation with modern European aesthetic theory.

We turn now to K. C. Bhattacharyya's "The Concept of Rasa" (1930). Bhattacharyya, like Anand, treats the classical aesthetic concept of *rasa* in a contemporary context. But in contrast to Anand, who uses the device of footnotes of comparison to juxtapose Indian and Western aesthetic notions, Bhattacharyya insistently resists the footnote device (and all scholarly references, for that matter). Nonetheless, while the content of his essay remains focused exclusively on the classical Indian concept, using no gestures of comparison, his analysis of *rasa* itself is decidedly nonclassical. Let us now turn to the ways in which form intersects with content in Bhattacharyya's essay.

K. C. Bhattacharyya's analysis, unlike that of Anand, is shorn of the Sanskrit language and classical examples that one would typically find in the texts of Indian aestheticians. In the opening sentence, Bhattacharyya states, "Indian aesthetics presents the characteristic concept of *rasa* for which it is difficult to find an English equivalent" (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 195). In this single sentence, Bhattacharyya identifies and underscores the interpretive problem for one who would provide an analysis of the concept of *rasa* in English. He follows with a list of the usual translational suspects for *rasa*—"taste," "feeling," and "essence"—only immediately to register his concern that these notions each have their own history in the Western intellectual tradition that deviate from the historical Indian use of the term.

From this point on, however, Bhattacharyya makes a surprising move. He does not begin his analysis in what one might regard as the natural starting point, that is, to the traditional classical context of Valmiki's and Abhinavagupta's world.⁸ Instead, eschewing any reference to the entire Sanskrit tradition, he situates his philosophical discussion in the contemporary world. Moreover,

⁷ And, indeed, Bharata's early aesthetic treatise on dance-drama, entitled *Nāṭya Śāstra*, is regarded by many as the Fifth Veda. (To what degree this is justified need not detain us here.)

⁸ The traditional classical context for aesthetics takes us back to a particularly poignant moment of anguish for the poet Valmiki (500–100 B.C.E.), author of the epic *Ramāyana*. As he watches two birds delighting in each other's company, a hunter shoots one of them, causing its companion to shriek and flutter in grief, in turn affecting Valmiki so powerfully that he breaks out in verses full of pathos. This is, on one telling, the genesis of *rasa*. The phenomenological experience of the poet as expressed in and evoked by the verses constitutes the blissful state of the *rasika*.

instead of focusing on the original religious dimensions of *rasa* theory or on works of art, he turns instead to the secular domain of ordinary objects and people.

Bhattacharyya asks his reader to consider three different degrees of engagement with an object, and asks about the nature of the affect proper to each form of engagement en route to locating the specific character of *rasa*. Consider a child enjoying his toy. What is the nature of the feeling of joy as it is experienced by a child in relation to that specific toy? Consider next the joy felt by a grandfather enjoying the enjoyment of his grandchild in relation to the toy. What is the nature of that feeling? And finally, consider a stranger's enjoyment as he takes in the entire scene that includes the grandfather's enjoyment of his grandchild's enjoyment of the toy. What is the nature of this feeling?

Bhattacharyya's perfectly mundane example invites his audience into an imaginary space, a space that is culturally neutral and universally resonant. He then invites us to think with him about the kinds of feeling evoked at each stage—in the child, in the grandfather, in the stranger. He thereby gets us to consider the kinds of relation possible between subject and object, expressed in kinds of feeling, for which he suggests the terms *primary joy* (direct and purely personal), *sympathetic joy* (indirect, but still personal), and *contemplative joy* (impersonal).

Bhattacharyya introduces the notions of distance, detachment, and freedom for our consideration as dimensions of the relation between the subject and object in analyzing these three “grades of feeling” captured by his example.⁹ The child's joy is so intimately bound up with the toy (his object) that it is impossible for the joy to exist without the object. The joy is unfree, yoked as it is to the specific toy that is the source of the particular joy felt by the child. (Consider what happens when that toy is taken away and replaced by another.)

The referent of the grandfather's joy is not the toy itself but the child's feeling (in relation to that particular toy): so it is distanced from the toy (the child's object) but still intimately bound to this child's feeling (which then becomes the object of the grandfather's own joy). In this sense the grandfather's joy is also unfree, though more free than that of the child's, in virtue of not being bound to the specific object eliciting the child's joy. While it is not bound to the child's object, or indeed to any concrete phenomenon, it nonetheless is bound to a specific object, namely the child's feeling.

The third person's joy in contemplating the scene is focused neither on the toy nor on the child, but on the feeling of sympathetic joy, of which grandfather's

⁹ The resonances of his account to Kant's aesthetic theory are not accidental. It is also worth noting the connection between his use of the concept of freedom here to his analysis of freedom in subjectivity. See chapter II.

feeling is but an arbitrary instance. The spectator has no personal connection to the grandfather, the child, or the toy. This joy, while it is in this instance particular to the spectator, is impersonal in what Bhattacharyya calls *felt content*. Its proper object is not the particular, but the universal, the kind of emotion experienced by the grandfather, of which the grandfather's emotion is but the token in this instance. This impersonal nature of feeling is made possible by distance, detachment, and the consequent freedom from the particular and therefore from the personal and merely mundane. In this, last grade of feeling, suggests Bhattacharyya, lies the distinctly aesthetic enjoyment, namely, *rasa*.

Bhattacharyya explores different versions of this scenario in his essay. Each version introduces his audience to ordinary people and things with whom any person from any culture might identify: a mother, a waif in the street, a savory dish, whether actual or imaginary. Bhattacharyya's examples and his language are strikingly culturally and historically neutral. There are no asides or footnotes that invite his audience to make comparisons, nor are technical terms from aesthetic theory—Indian or Western—used. This is as pure a conceptual analysis of *rasa* as one could get, where even the term *rasa* disappears from the discussion as Bhattacharyya focuses on the interpretive side of the equation.

Once he has his example and analysis on the table, however, Bhattacharyya introduces terminology that suggests a cultural turn. Here is such an instance:

The felt-person-in-general may be semi-mythologically called the Heart Universal. . . . Artistic enjoyment is not a feeling of the enjoyer on his own account; it involves a dropping of self-consciousness, while the feeling that is enjoyed—the feeling of the third person—is freed from its reference to an individual subject and eternalized in the Heart Universal.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 199)

The cultural resonance is subtle. The use of the phrase “Heart Universal” (Sanskrit: *hrdaya-samanya*) is a surprise, especially in the context of his prior analytical discourse. The English reader has to wonder what this means. Bhattacharyya goes on to describe this Heart Universal not by referring explicitly to its obvious Sanskrit ancestry, but rather in English (and Latin) as “the feeling *par excellence*.” This is Bhattacharyya's *rasa*.

Here one might expect Bhattacharyya to continue in this more “Indian” line of thought, connecting the aesthetic *rasa* with the metaphysical or religious *Brahman* (as do many other Indian aestheticians of this period, including Aurobindo, Hirianna, Mahadevan, and Raju). Bhattacharyya does not take this route. He instead underscores the dimension of personal feeling: “The conception of *rasa* or aesthetic essence may...be interpreted entirely in terms of

feeling, without any reference to the intellectual Idea or the spiritual ideal” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 200). Unlike Coomaraswamy, Bhattacharyya is explicitly offering a transcultural, or universalist understanding of an aesthetic idea that simply happens to be denoted by an Indian term.

But then Bhattacharyya turns to Indian metaphysics and epistemology to make his case.

We have indicated the place and significance of aesthetic joy by determining the level or grade of feeling to which it belongs. A further elaboration is necessary to bring out the distinctive flavor of the Indian concept. Artistic enjoyment is conceived not merely as free from the entanglement of fact but as the *realization* of an eternal value, as an identification with the aesthetic essence without the loss of freedom.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 200)¹⁰

Realization—by which Bhattacharya means spiritual realization—the realization that issues in liberation—is connected, as it is for Hiriyanna, directly with aesthetic experience. *Rasa* is a distinctively Indian idea on this view not because of its intrinsic properties, but because of its soteriological dimensions. The remaining four sections of this essay (§§16–19) constitute the creative heart of Bhattacharyya’s analysis of different possibilities for this “identification with the aesthetic essence without the loss of freedom.” His analysis is based on different permutations of relations on the subject/object axis. Realization (at least in Vedānta) is typically captured in the idea of the nonduality of subject and object. Bhattacharyya goes further, presenting his audience with a metaphysically and phenomenologically grounded analysis of nondual realization, understood as a form of “identification.”

Bhattacharyya analyzes the multiple relations possible, first between subjects (projective and assimilative sympathy) and then, significantly for his purposes, between subject and object (projective or assimilative direction). When a subject encounters an object in the aesthetic register, regardless of direction, “the enjoyer identifies himself with the eternal value” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 201). Thus aesthetic enjoyment of an object is possible when it is of the beauty of the object taken in as its “eternal value” and to which the actual object itself is—in this mode—“related as a symbol.” Here the subject projects herself into

¹⁰ In the closing section of his essay, Bhattacharyya turns to the *rasa* of *bhibatsa* or disgust to demonstrate the power of this analysis of aesthetic experience in terms of detachment or freedom. He argues that the ability to derive aesthetic pleasure from something that one regards as personally repulsive or ugly demonstrates the possibility of ascending to a higher, more detached level of contemplation at which one’s personal immediate response to an object can be freely aestheticized, demonstrating the liberation of feeling from the immediate causality of the object. See (Chakrabarti, 2016).

the object, inhabits it, and thereby “overcomes its opacity.” Consider, for instance, the phenomenology of total absorption in a piece of music or in a painting. Consciousness of oneself dissolves, and all that is present is the work of art, but present not as an opaque surface, but as a window into something transcendent.

On the other hand, aesthetic enjoyment of an object is also possible in the other direction when the subject—by dissociating from (rather than by projecting into) the actual object, thus freeing it from its sharp boundaries—assimilates its felt eternal value. Consider in this context, Bhattacharyya’s own example: the third person contemplating the grandfather’s joy. In the “assimilative” dimension, this detached contemplation also secures for the subject what Bhattacharyya calls a “universal joy” or aesthetic experience. But this experience does not dissolve the subject into the object, but rather into the experience itself. Bhattacharyya calls the former kind of aesthetic realization the “objective absolute,” the latter the “subjective absolute.”

On Bhattacharyya’s account, all aesthetic experience, regardless of the tradition within which it occurs or is theorized, is feeling. The difference between Indian and European theorists, on his telling, involves the direction of identification. He then supplies the central aesthetic concepts that govern the direction of each tradition, broadly construed: “[I]n the Indian theory of art, the aesthetic essence is conceived as a subjective absolute or *rasa* rather than as an objective absolute or beauty” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 201). Here we find a clear separation of Indian *rasa* theory from the traditional Western focus on theories of beauty. The distinction is grounded in a topic dear to Bhattacharyya’s epistemology, the relation between subject and object. (See chapter 11.)

Bhattacharyya hence demonstrates both the difference and the commonality between the Indian and European traditions. *Rasa* and beauty theory, in his analysis, are each theories of realization; but the direction of absorption in that realization is different. The European account stresses absorption into the object and locates the principal aesthetic value in the object; the Indian, on his account, stresses absorption into the aesthetic experience of the subject, and locates aesthetic value in that experience. So, while he argues that there are multiple forms of aesthetic realization, Bhattacharyya shows us that the Indian approach is distinctive.

Bhattacharyya’s aesthetic theory is striking, both in its own right and measured by its success at resolving the twin problems of authenticity and relevance that we identified at the beginning of the chapter. The analysis of experience in terms of freedom, and the analysis of freedom in terms of first-, second-, and third-person perspectives—an analysis dependent upon Bhattacharyya’s phenomenology developed in *The Subject as Freedom*—is a distinctive contribution to global aesthetic theory. It is also a novel way of interpreting *rasa* and of bringing this classical Indian rubric into dialogue with contemporary theory.

Bhattacharyya's theory lays claim to Indian authenticity both implicitly in its vocabulary, and explicitly in the distinction he draws between directions of assimilation at the close of the essay. This project is hence one that calls attention to Indian perspectives not as alternative ways of saying what is already said in European texts, or as a radically exotic other, but rather as a conversation partner bringing its own perspective to bear on a common problem.

In this discussion, we have highlighted the very different ways in which two influential Indian philosophers in the academy chose to write and talk about Indian aesthetics in the colonial period. Mulk Raj Anand and K. C. Bhattacharyya each find a way to depict Indian art theory in a way that blends the traditional with the modern, and to deliver authentic Indian aesthetics to a modern global audience. Each is concerned with Indian authenticity; each is concerned with relevance. Anand addresses the first question directly by canvassing the Sanskrit tradition; he addresses the second by creatively juxtaposing the two traditions to emphasize not their difference, but their commonality. Bhattacharyya addresses the first by arguing for a distinctively Indian account of the locus of aesthetic freedom; he addresses the second by utilizing a vocabulary and range of examples that allows this account to participate in a contemporary English aesthetic discourse.

12.2.3 Muhammad Iqbal and Mian Mohammad Sharif: Indian Aesthetics in a Sufi Voice

So far, we have attended to the work of Hindu aestheticians. Their Muslim colleagues were also concerned with aesthetic questions, which often connect directly to those we have seen thus far. We now turn to that community of philosophers.

Muhammad Iqbal, whose metaphysics we encountered in chapter 9, and whose political theory we discussed in chapter 7, was also an influential aesthetic theorist. Once again, we note, Hindu and Muslim theorists, whether or not they read one another, do not cite one another, and so while we will note important theoretical resonances between Iqbal's (and Sharif's) aesthetic ideas and those of their Hindu contemporaries, any speculation on mutual influence would be unwarranted. While their respective historical touchstones were very different, they responded to the same currents in European philosophy.

Art, according to Iqbal—in direct contradistinction to Hiriyanā—is always didactic, because, in his view, art has a purpose only to the degree that it serves to enhance individual spiritual realization or collective political consciousness. Even if its didactic purpose is implicit, its success as art, he argues, is proportional to the cultivating effect it has on the aesthete. His aesthetic theory follows his mysticism. Intuitive, ineffable knowledge is always the most important, and the role of art is to lead us to that kind of knowledge; this is evident in his poetry.

(Iqbal is often known as the “Poet of the East,” and was named National Poet of Pakistan.)

In our age it is thought that
 reason is the light of our way
 Who knows? Insanity may possess
 perception as well
 Reason’s only talent is information
 gathering
 The only cure for your pain
 is in your view.
 Man is how he sees; the rest is shell
 and outer covering.
 How he sees is that which is seen
 by the Friend.
 Clear-sightedness is the fountain
 from which blood flows
 Science of today is a toy by which
 faith is made lifeless and weak.
 —(Quoted in Khamenei and
 Shari’ati, 2008, p. 98)

Iqbal here clearly contrasts the mere information that reason can deliver with the true insight to be achieved by direct mystical experience. Iqbal’s poetry and philosophical program are often religious in character, but they are also often straightforwardly political, as we saw in the poem to Aligarh students quoted in chapter 1. In general, Iqbal’s aesthetic theory demands that poetry have a hortatory role. Consider this poem:

Create a new style for thy song,
 Enrich the assembly with thy piercing strains!
 Up, and re-inspire every living soul!
 Say “Arise!” and by that word quicken the living!
 Up, and set thy feet on another path;
 Put aside the passionate melancholy of old!
 Become familiar with the delight of singing;
 O bell of the caravan, awake!
 —(Sevea, 2012, p. 78)

Iqbal’s poetics and aesthetic theory, like his version of antinationalism and cosmopolitanism, invite comparison to the other great poet-laureate/philosopher

of India, Rabindranath Tagore (who also stresses the ability of poetry as a medium to direct the reader to mystical insight, and values that insight, but not at the expense of reason). Let us juxtapose an apposite poem of Tagore's:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high
 Where knowledge is free
 Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
 By narrow domestic walls
 Where words come out from the depth of truth
 Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
 Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
 Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit
 Where the mind is led forward by thee
 Into ever-widening thought and action
 Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

—(Tagore, 1997, p. 51)

Had Iqbal not cast his lot with Pakistan, one could imagine his poem, and not Tagore's, being recited by schoolchildren across India as the pledge of allegiance each morning. Note not only the similarity of rhetoric and the cadences, but also the commitment to poetry as a call to action. Note also the very different attitudes toward reason. While Iqbal is suspicious of reason, Tagore embraces reason as a vehicle for insight and liberation.¹¹

M. M. Sharif (1893–1965) was the second Muslim student, after Iqbal, to study at Cambridge. Like Iqbal, he had been T. W. Arnold's student at Lahore; like Iqbal, Sharif studied with McTaggart and Ward. Sharif, however, completed

¹¹ Tagore, like Iqbal, celebrates the soteriological purpose of poetry. In "Pathway to *Mukti*" (1925), Tagore argues that philosophy and poetry have a common aim:

According to our people, poetry naturally falls within the scope of a philosopher when his reason is illumined into a vision. . . .

The numerous saints that India successfully produced during the Mohammedan rule have all been singers whose verses are aflame with the fire of imagination. Their religious emotion had its spring in the depth of a philosophy that deals with fundamental questions,—with the ultimate meaning of existence. That may not be remarkable in itself; but when we find that these songs are not specially meant for some exclusive pandits' gathering, but that they are sung in villages and listened to by men and women who are illiterate, we realize how philosophy has permeated the life of the people in India, how it has sunk deep into the subconscious mind of the country

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 154)

Tagore, in a more ecumenical vein than Iqbal, emphasizes here the continuity in purpose of philosophy and poetry. Given his insistence on philosophy as essentially soteriological, with its vehicle being reason, we see his commitment to the same purpose in poetry, although its vehicle is direct inspiration.

his education at Cambridge, writing a thesis that addressed Rumi's thought in connection with neo-Hegelianism, before returning to a very successful academic career in India. Sharif was professor of philosophy at Aligarh, and also served as its vice chancellor. After leaving Aligarh, he was appointed dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of the Punjab, and was elected president of the Indian Philosophical Congress. Sharif was an aesthetician and a Kantian. He wrote about Iqbal's thought, but as a sympathetic critic, not as a follower. In his work we see a careful engagement with Iqbal's aesthetic and political theory, and an approach equally idealistic, but not at all mystical, equally referential to Islam and the West, but not pan-Islamist.

Sharif argues that Iqbal, although anti-Platonic in his metaphysics, is Platonic in his aesthetics. That is, Iqbal, according to Sharif, was committed to a purely didactic model of art, and measured its success according to its accomplishment of hortatory or salvific purpose. Iqbal was an objectivist about beauty, and opposed all forms of expressivism, arguing for the metaphysical reality of beauty as a manifestation of the vital principle of the universe, and hence deeply connected to the religious apprehension of the absolute. Sharif, on the other hand, like Hiriyanna, argued that aesthetic value is *sui generis*, connected neither to religious, political, nor ethical value and that the role of art is always to edify, to elevate sensibility and to put the viewer in a position to appreciate, but not to see, the absolute.

Sharif's own aesthetic theory is expressivist, developed through a critical engagement with the work of Benedetto Croce. Sharif argues that beauty always involves successful expression, that appreciation of beauty also involves expression, with truly successful art allowing the viewer to express the same idea or experience that the artist is expressing. This idea is very much akin to the orthodox Hindu account of *sahṛdaya*, of the sharing of sentiment, to which K. C. Bhattacharyya and M. Hiriyanna also appeal. Sharif locates his aesthetic account squarely within an idealistic framework, arguing that the artwork itself—not only its aesthetic value—exists only in the mind of the artist and the aesthete:

The artist's vision or his imaginal intuition (as a mental state) is in itself a complete work of art. A passing fancy or conscious recollection is a mere mechanical *association* of ideas and is in no sense an artist's intuition. The latter is always a synthesis; and a poem, a statue or a song is complete when it has been imagined by the artist in its fullness. It is the artist's private possession and may die with him without ever being known to other beings. The concrete process of production can be symbolized in four states: *a*, impressions; *b*, expression or the aesthetic synthesis in imagination; *c*, pleasure accompanying the synthesis; *d*, translation of the aesthetic fact into physical phenomena, sounds, tones, movements, constructions of lines and colors, etc. But the chief

part, the only one that is properly speaking aesthetic is in *b* and *c*; *d* is merely entailed by it.

—(Sharif, 1964, pp. 79–80)

While Sharif derives his fundamental outlook from Croce, he rejects important parts of Croce's framework, and aligns himself more closely with Bosanquet and indeed with Rumi, in his focus on intuition and in his idealistic conception of art. In particular, Sharif rejects Croce's view that aesthetic intuition is prior to perception; he rejects Croce's identification of intuition and expression, for, as he says, "intuition involves *impression* as well as expression" (Sharif, 1964, p. 125); otherwise artistic appreciation could not be understood through expression. Most important, he rejects Croce's view that art is an externalization of vision, siding with Bosanquet in regarding it as internal to the intuitive process (Sharif, 1964, p. 126).

Sharif agrees with Croce however (and decidedly parts company with Iqbal in this respect) that art has no extra-aesthetic function; that it is not didactic, but cathartic, and that the audience is one who shares the aesthetic vision with the artist:

There seems to be no doubt that the artist's activity is not *essentially* directed to any goal beyond itself, that art is not a copy of the universal and that it has the power of *catharsis*. It appears to be equally true that the artist's work stimulates in the appreciating critic the same intuitions as his own, for they are kindred spirits.

—(Sharif, 1964, pp. 126–127)

Sharif's sensibility is informed by Islam, but is shaped as well by European aesthetics and perhaps even Hindu aesthetics. His approach is more secular and more academic. It is therefore no accident that Sharif remained within academic philosophy and within India, while Iqbal worked for and moved to Pakistan.

The two questions with which we began this chapter—questions about authenticity and about relevance—were as pressing for Indian artists and art critics as they were for professional philosophers. For Hindu and Muslim aestheticians alike, it is important that Indian art be continuous with and be judged against standards deriving from Indian philosophical traditions (although there may be divergence among them about which Indian traditions are relevant). For Hindu and Muslims aestheticians alike, it is critical that art speak directly to the contemporary populace. Once again, there is significant disagreement among aestheticians regarding *how* it should speak and to *whom*. But there is unanimity that authenticity and relevance are central to aesthetic evaluation.

12.2.4 Questioning the Very Idea of Indian Authenticity: Benoy Kumar Sarkar

There are significant voices to consider who dissent from the general narrative of the distinctiveness of Indian art and aesthetic theory. One of those is B. K. Sarkar. In “View-points on Aesthetics” (Sarkar, 1922). Sarkar argues against restricting *rasavidya* to any specific religious, cultural, or philosophical tradition.

Perusing the current logic of art-appreciation, we should have to dictate that Indians must, by all means, avoid the contact of Lavoisier and his disciples, of Humboldt, Pasteur, Agassiz, Maxwell, and Einstein because in order to be true to “heritage” it is necessary to boycott everything that has appeared in the world since Leibniz, Descartes and Newton! No Indian, therefore, we must accordingly advise, should investigate the acoustics of the violin, because not much on this subject is to be found in the medieval *sangita-ratnākara*! And since the only mechanical engineering of which our great encyclopedia, the *Brihatsamhitā*, is aware, is the dynamics of the bullock cart, no Indian, if he wishes to remain a loyal Indian, must pry into the mysteries of the printing press, wireless telegraphy, the Zeppelin, and the long-distance phones!

From the identical standpoint the student of Hindu heritage and polity should he asked to come forward with the message that India’s Indianness is to be found only in Kautilya or from the great vantageground of the *Arthaśāstra* and of the Tamil inscription discovered at Uttaramallur. Young India can afford to declare a contraband of Rousseau, Washington, Mill, Marzini, Trotsky and Lenin! . . .

. . . The absurdity in the current methodology in the appraisal of life’s values is patent on the surface.

—(Sarkar, 1922, pp. 169–170)¹²

Artistic value and aesthetic theory, Sarkar argues, are universal, and *rasa* theory and nationalist discourse about art simply serves to mystify them.¹³ While he

¹² Sarkar also notes that the Indian chauvinism he deplores would entail the rejection even of the neo-Vedānta thought from which it arises: “certainly the apostles of the Indianness of the Indian mind will as a matter of course fail to appreciate the achievement, whatever be its worth, of Vivekananda simply because on account of his Western leavening, this Carlisle of Young India happened to realize and exploit the dynamic possibilities of the Vedānta such as were undreamt of by Śaṅkaracārya” (Sarkar, 1922, p. 170).

¹³ Daya Krishna agrees, in his article “*Rasa*: The Bane of Indian Aesthetics,” reprinted in Bhushan, Garfield and Raveh (2011).

acknowledges that the significance of a work of art—whether for a religious devotee, an art historian, or a nationalist—depends upon the religion, art historical training, or nation from which the individual springs, he argues that for a *rasika*, one who is to appreciate the work on purely aesthetic grounds, the grounds for that appreciation must be universal. Returning aesthetic debate to the realm of form, he writes, “paintings and sculptures are . . . universal in their appeal because their spiritual basis is geometry, the most abstract and cosmopolitan of all *vidyas*” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 187).

Sarkar makes the case for the sculpture of the Tamil *Nataraja* as one of the permanent glories of the human creative genius in the following way:

Nataraja is a most original creation in the ripple of bends and joints. The balancing of diverse masses in motion, the swing of the volumes away from one another, the construction of imaginary circles within circles, the grouping of unseen parallels and movements and poses, and the gravitation of all the varied shapes to a common center of dynamic rhythm—all these constitute an epoch-making attainment of unity in diversity, of the correlation of matter in motion, which possesses a meaning in the idiom of *rūpam* as much to the Western as to the Eastern artist.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 189)

In this way, Sarkar illustrates the kind of universal language and the universal structural forms that, no matter where and by whose hand they originate, when wielded by the artist in his or her appropriate genre, can evoke *rasa* in the *rasika*, who comprehends and appreciates that language. Sarkar’s views on aesthetics, however, had very little impact on the India of his day, which was preoccupied with the nature of Indian identity in all spheres.

These issues that animated these academic debates had a political edge in the colonial period. The art journals often foregrounded the political dimensions of aesthetics and art practice. This is in part because of the very publicity of art. Art tends to attract a lot more attention and to be a lot more visible than articles in philosophical journals. Moreover, the very medium of depiction often places in view subjects that are political by their very nature, however aestheticized they may be. The context of the independence movement turned abstract questions about artistic authenticity into questions about national identity, thus enhancing the political valence of art and aesthetic theory.

Art and criticism during this period addressed questions about authenticity and relevance both through explicitly thematic material, and through debates about genre. In each case, the question about that in which authentically Indian

art consists, as well as the question concerning the relationship between Indian art and the global art scene were at the center of practice and discussion. We will consider the controversies concerning the respective roles of the artists Raja Ravi Varma of Kerala and Abanindranath Tagore of Calcutta, and then discuss the way that the artistic practice of Amrita Sher-Gil, an intriguing interloper, offers a path to resolving these questions.

12.3. The Art Worlds of Bombay and Calcutta

Discourse invoking the trope of the authentic placed aesthetic and even political demands on artists and their artwork and defined the emerging aesthetic sensibility in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indian artists were challenged by the following sorts of questions: Is your art non-Western enough? Is it national enough? Is it native enough? Aesthetic discourse then asks how much of these ingredients is enough to warrant the seal of authenticity. Artists in India, just as artists anywhere, also faced the following questions: Is your art creative enough to be art? Is it modern enough? Is it distanced enough? Is it sufficiently universal to be real art? And aestheticians in India, just as aestheticians anywhere, asked how much of these is enough to warrant the seal of authentic art. In the Indian colonial context, these two apparently complementary sets of demands turn out to be almost impossible to satisfy jointly. An artist could be either authentic (authentically Indian but uncreative) or creative (aesthetically authentic but un-Indian). Either way, he or she would end up as one more failed attempt by a native to join the global art world.¹⁴

We consider the projects of Ravi Varma (1848–1906) who represented the Bombay School (despite being self-taught and from Kerala) and Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), who led the Calcutta school, on the one hand, and that of Amrita Sher-Gil (1913–1941) who comes from outside, on the other. Varma and

¹⁴ There is an interesting contrast—but also an interesting parallel—to the predicament and response of the philosophers we have been examining. Note, for instance, how K. C. Bhattacharyya very freely uses an Indian aesthetic concept such as *rasa* to express his own aesthetic theory, but develops that theory in a way that engages naturally with global aesthetic discussions, connecting it to ideas of freedom that are Kantian. Nonetheless, when Bhattacharyya reflects on his own work in “Svaraj in Ideas,” he expresses the anxiety that his work is not, in fact Indian, and that it in also fails to be properly modern. This sense of being caught between conflicting demands that cannot be jointly satisfied is hence quite general. Nonetheless, while individual philosophers—then and now—debate the authenticity and the global value of Anglophone Indian philosophy, those debates are confined to the rarified world of metaphilosophical discourse, and do not generate a national, public debate about the role of philosophy or its status in the nationalist project. Because of the greater publicity of art, these debates boil over into the public domain, and the issues become central to art criticism and public nationalist discourse.

Tagore, we will argue, achieve a certain cosmopolitanism—that is, each of them produces work responsive to global aesthetic trends, and each achieves recognition as an Indian artist. Their work, while it reveals their cosmopolitan sensibilities, remains rooted in the colonial fantasy of the authentic, one that insists on keeping national identity at the center of the aesthetic enterprise. Sher-Gil's own struggles with authenticity, on the other hand, have little to do with the colonial debates about Indianness. Since she does not get caught up in the ideology of the authentic to begin with, she is freed from its constraint in her work and in her sensibility as an artist.

12.3.1 Varma and Tagore

The early work of Raja Ravi Varma, in the period from 1900–1907 was initially seen as successfully overcoming this problematic dichotomy. Varma used techniques from the Company School in the style of academic realism, but evoked Botticelli and Renoir in style and sensibility. Varma's artwork, in its subject matter, represented ideals of Indian virtue and female beauty; it was historically continuous with ancient art subjects, depicting Indian mythological and religious themes and figures central to the *Ramayana*. The immense popularity of Varma's art and the resonance of the classical themes and values it espoused was, despite the deprecation of certain aesthetes, genuinely efficacious in generating national consciousness and so contributed to the nation-building effort.

Varma initially achieved enormous success as an Indian cosmopolitan artist, viewed as being both authentic and creative. His art transcended local community boundaries and was immediately popular throughout India (indeed, judging by the frequency of display, he must certainly be rated today as the most popular of Indian's artists in India). But his stature—as an artist able to be at once both contemporary and Indian—was ultimately unstable. For an “Indian Renoir” was, in the end, according to the critics who gained ascendancy in Calcutta, a Renoir *manqué* who happened to be Indian and an Indian bent on imitating the West.

Moreover, and perhaps most decisively, Varma transgressed a great class boundary between art and craft. He was among the first artists in India to make use of lithography in the distribution of his work. This contributed enormously to his mass appeal. But in appealing to the masses, and in reducing the monetary value of his work, he fell from grace with the arbiters of high taste and the collectors of Badralok Calcutta. Praise turned to deprecation; his art came to be disparaged by most Indian and Western art critics as inauthentic—as mere imitation of a colonial model. He came to be regarded as expressing at best an Indian enthusiasm, that, while genuine, was superficial, merely reporting on Indian mythological themes rather than artistically rendering them. Thus Ravi Varma, in the end,

was impaled on both horns of the dilemma: incapable not only of being both authentic and artistically relevant in his work, but incapable of being either.¹⁵

This deprecation of Ravi Varma's work went hand in hand with the evolution of a different approach to Indian art, starting around 1910, focused on "idealism and spirituality" (Guha-Thakurta, 1992, p. 183) as the key to its authenticity. Art critics such as A. K. Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita explicitly contrast Ravi Varma's work with that of Abanindranath Tagore, arguing that, in the work of Tagore, one finally finds a recovery of genuine tradition, transformed as the disciplined, ideal, and spiritual Other to the West's realist, practical, and material artistic sensibility as it is imitated in the work of Ravi Varma. Sister Nivedita (1867–1911) was born Margaret Noble in Ireland. She was an educator and art critic and a monastic disciple of Vivekananda in the Ramakrishna mission. Nivedita, in her essay "The Function of Art in Shaping Nationality" (1907) writes, "not every scene is fit for a picture . . . in a country in which that posture is held to be ill-bred, every home contains a picture of a fat woman lying full length on the floor and writing a letter on a lotus leaf! As if a sight that would outrage decorum in actuality could be beautiful in imagination! In a country in which romantic emotion is never allowed to show itself in public, pictures [such as Ravi Varma's] abound" (Nivedita, 1911, p. 120).

Within this new critical perspective, one grounded in Indian *rasavidya* as an alternative aesthetic framework to that imposed by Western aesthetes, modern Indian art is revealed not as condemned to failed representation, but as capable, in the hands of Tagore, of successful evocation. Nivedita (1907) writes, "An Indian painting, if it is to be really Indian . . . must appeal to the Indian heart in an Indian way" (Nivedita, 1911, p. 49). Ravi Varma, we now learn, gets it all wrong. The buxom female body depicted by Varma is a distraction from divine womanly virtue, evoking, at best, the wrong *bhāva*. Indian purity and spirituality are undermined by Varma's realistic depictions of women, men, children—and gods, for that matter—represented, despite their idealization, without the symbolic markers that would lead the viewer beyond the concrete work to a contemplation of the transcendental ideal, the Indian ideal. This world beyond appearance, where

¹⁵ It is useful to compare the status of the artist generally simply known as Sadequain (Syed Sadequain Ahmed Naqvi), born in India, but who worked in postindependence Pakistan. Sadequain's painting and drawing sometimes reminds one of Picasso, sometimes Jamini Roy, and in general references European and other Indian artistic styles. But his subject matter is very much working-class Pakistan and religious themes deriving from Islamic poetry and theology. He is referred to in *Le Monde* as a "Pakistani Picasso." But in this postindependence world, these "inauthentic" roots, and even the sobriquet, do not count against him, but serve instead to validate his art as universal, while still authentically Pakistani. There is all the difference in the world between a colonial and a postcolonial context when evaluating the reference to the work of others in art.

the ineffable soul of India is revealed by Indian artistic genius, is immanent for the first time, according to Coomaraswamy and Nivedita, in the work of Abanindranath Tagore. Writing in *The New Age* in 1914 (NA 14:24:762), Ananda Coomaraswamy writes that, “Ravi Varma was vulgar (ten thousand times more so than Raphael), but we have not felt as yet a truly primitive impulse to the creation of significant form.” This assessment is grounded in his comparative analysis of Varma and Tagore developed in “The Influence of Modern Europe on Indian Art” (1909):

The best known exponent of [European] style...has been the oil painter Ravi Varma, whose works, constantly reproduced, are everywhere popular in India. The ‘educated’ public of modern India, having learnt to judge all things by what was understood to be a Western standard, misunderstood the conventional art of India herself...and so...welcomed this painter who broke through traditions and gave them realistic and sentimental pictures of familiar subjects.

A picture of “Sita in Exile” well illustrates the difference between Tagore’s and Ravi Varma’s works. In the latter’s “Sita in the Asoka Grove” we see only a woman bullied by her captor; in the “Sita” by Tagore, we see the embodiment of a national ideal....Ravi Varma’s divinities in spite of their many arms, are very human, and often not very noble human types. At best the goddesses are “pretty.” Stronger condemnation of what should be ideal religious art it would be hard to find.

It has indeed been Ravi Varma’s reward for choosing Indian subjects, that he has been to some degree a true nationalizing influence; but had he been also a true artist with the gift of great imagination, this influence must have been tenfold deeper and greater. He is the landmark of a great opportunity, not perhaps wholly missed, but ill-availed of. Theatrical conceptions, want of imagination, want of restraint, anecdotal aims, and a lack of Indian feeling in the treatment of sacred and epic subjects are his faults. His art is not truly national—he merely plays with local color. His gods and heroes are men cast in a very common mould, who find themselves in situations for which they lack a proper dignity. Ravi Varma’s pictures, in a word, are not national art; they are such as any Europeans student could paint, after only a superficial study of Indian life and literature.

A reaction from these ideals is represented by what has been called the New School of Indian Painting, founded by Abanindranath Tagore, Vice Principal of the Calcutta school of Art.

—(Coomaraswamy, 1981a, pp. 78–79)

In terms of their artwork alone, though, it is hard to justify issuing the seal of authenticity to Tagore and withholding it from Varma. It is clear that Varma is appropriating the styles of the European masters in rendering Indian themes, and is wildly successful with the Indian public, for whom Indian art becomes salient as the authentic expression of Indian sensibility as never before. On the other hand, however, it is also clear that Tagore is appropriating Japanese and Mughal miniature styles in his work (along with French impressionism) in rendering Indian themes and is wildly successful with the Indian art elite, for whom Indian art becomes salient as the authentic expression of Indian sensibility as never before, despite its inaccessibility to the average Indian and its failure to penetrate India beyond the Calcutta salon.

So why is Varma's work eventually judged to be discontinuous with the deepest Indian sensibility, while Tagore's work is seen as continuous with it? The answer to this question, is not entirely clear. Coomaraswamy (1907) bases his criticism of Varma's work quite explicitly on Varma's training lineage. The Bombay and Madras Schools of Art, on his view, train their artists simply to mimic Western styles, so that while the subject matter of the artwork may well be Indian, in its style and evocation it is distinctly "un-Indian." In contrast, the Calcutta School, again, on his view, explicitly rejects such mimicry, with a record of seeking newness in Asia, rather than Europe, looking to Japanese art style and sensibility. But as Guha-Thakurta observes, "[In the end], it was... Orientalist and nationalist propaganda which established [Abanindranath Tagore] as a cult figure of 'national art' and defined a 'New School of Indian Painting' around him" (1992, p. 189).

In the end, matters extraneous to the quality of the art itself may explain Varma's and Tagore's relative evaluation. These are matters such as whose art lineage is more expressive of continuity with the Indian tradition; what subjects are evocative of Indian virtue; which forms best express Indian spirituality; and, last, but certainly not least, who counts as the quintessentially Indian artist and who gets to answer that question. All these commitments are expressive of political, social, and personal dimensions of the authentic. In the end, these determine which artist most accurately captures the aesthetic soul, the *rasa*, the essence, of colonial India.

Last, but not least, having noted the ironic role of class in establishing authenticity, it is worth noting another weird irony in the discourse of Indian authenticity, which is replete with racial overtones. Varma is criticized for being derivative in virtue of drawing his stylistic image from Europe, while Tagore is lauded—in a pan-Asianist spirit—for looking to East Asia, and approved of as authentic in virtue of his appropriation of Japanese technique (however much these readings may be reductive and unjustified in each case). One is also forced to wonder about the role of the coterie of strange hybrid aesthetic critics and arbiters of

taste—the mixed-race Coomaraswamy in Boston, Sister Nivedita (European by birth but Indian by choice), the British principals of the art schools such as E. B. Havell and the Protestant Anglophone Unitarian Brahma Samaj reformers in Calcutta. These highbrow aesthetes, not the Indian masses, had the last word in deciding what it is for art to be purely Indian.

12.3.2 An Indian in Paris: Amrita Sher-Gil

Let us return to that crucial remark by Sister Nivedita that set up the artistic challenge for that period: “An Indian painting, if it is to be really Indian... must appeal to the Indian heart in an Indian way.” Nivedita is expressing the invention of a distinct category of art, of artist, and of audience in India, for the very first time, namely, Indian art by an Indian artist, for an Indian audience. The category INDIA is occasioned by the British colonial encounter with a multinational sub-continent, but is taken up, articulated, and transformed in the creative Indian response to British rule and to the fantasies that animated it. Varma and Tagore each invented *an* Indian artistic tradition; each was a complex weave of nation, tradition, and aspiration to authenticity. Each tried in his own way to be free. But in neither case was their art free from explicit consciousness of this purpose, that is, of the deliberate inquiry into what it meant to be an Indian artist; in each case, it drove their oeuvre and its reception. In neither case did their cosmopolitanism as artists transcend the aesthetic problematic of colonial consciousness.

Amrita Sher-Gil’s work provides an illuminating contrast. Born in Hungary in 1913 (died at age twenty-eight, in 1941), Sher-Gil was of mixed heritage, with an Indian Sikh aristocratic father and a Hungarian Jewish aristocratic mother. She spent the first eight years of her life in Hungary, moving to Simla with her parents for the next eight years, before returning to Europe where she studied painting at the École de Beaux Artes in Paris. She was trained in the style of academic realism, but was profoundly influenced by Cezanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh (as well as the philosopher-poet Baudelaire). Upon her return to India from Paris, these influences were joined by the Ajanta and Cochin frescos, the sculptures of Mahabalipuram, and Rajput miniatures.

Because she was mixed racially, she was forcibly freed from a crucial dimension of the essentialized and racialized authentic in the Indian context. In her *Self-Portrait as Tahitian* she plays with the category of race even as she undermines its pretensions to essentialist purity. In this painting (reproduced on the cover of this volume), Sher-Gil represents herself as an exotic other, framed in the gaze of a shadowy voyeuristic figure we are invited to read as Gauguin. Her own identity in the painting is ambiguous, as is her relation to power and to the gaze of the voyeur and the viewer. She is at once the author and the object of the piece; she is at once the consummate expert on European representation of exotic natives and the exotic native

holding the European subject to account as an indicted object. This painting hence explores authenticity, hybridity, and ambiguity in as many levels as these phenomena operate in Indian aesthetic life. The painting also confronts the viewer with a disconcerting mixture of frank confidence and sinister possibility, reflecting the pervasive effect of an unstable colonial context and the pervasive affect of an unstable colonial consciousness. In many of her works she calls attention to the fact of racial difference, as marked by color (*The Hill Women*) or caste marks (*The Brahmacharis*) as a contingent topic for artistic exploration, rather than as a representation of (idealized) eternal truth.

Moreover, in virtue of her mixed roots, her taste for different traditions arises from the ground up, or organically, in virtue of her contact from a very early age with a wide variety of works, peoples, and tastes reflecting different cultural contexts. This is also true of her training. Her taste and training conditions not so much a reflective and deliberative response as it does a deeply visceral response to aesthetic variety. In her choices of subject matter, her attention to difference is nuanced, as is her attention to similarity. She calls attention both to ways in which color and form differ in figure and landscape in different geographical, racial, economic, and cultural contexts, and to ways in which they are inextricably intertwined.

Sher-Gil's multiple roots nourish a unique artistic perspective that allows her—in contrast to her artistic contemporaries—a freedom to appropriate styles and to blend them to fashion her own artistic signature. Her unique background also provides Sher-Gil with a cosmopolitan lens that allows her to see subjects in their particularity. The multiplicity of categories she invokes, and her awareness of their fluidity and interpenetration, prevents her from essentializing her subjects.

Yashodhara Dalmia (2006) describes Sher-Gil's artistic attitude as follows: "She melded the Western and Indian idioms and did not, like many other artists of her time, attempt to find an authentic 'Indian' mode or weave together a nationalist agenda" (2006, p. 91). Sher-Gil herself said: "Modern art has led me to the comprehension and appreciation of Indian painting and sculpture. It seems paradoxical, but I know for certain that had we not come away to Europe, I should perhaps never have realized that a fresco from Ajanta . . . is worth more than the whole Renaissance!" (quoted in Dalmia, 2006, p. 43). Sher-Gil was able to find her way into the aesthetic pleasures of the Ajanta frescoes by distancing herself both from their religious environment and from the narratives occasioned by the tools of modern art.

In much of her work, Sher-Gil explicitly explores the human body and various forms of human intimacy, including both feminine intimacy and intimacy with one's own self. Her gender is relevant to her style of cosmopolitanism, particularly when interwoven with her mixed racial heritage. For our bodies—which are inextricably bound up with who we are—are indeed colored, while

spirits and minds are not. Sher-Gil takes her physical identity seriously, in her life and in her work. This engagement with embodiment and its implications in India and in Europe explains in part her interest in exploring this central aspect of human existence in her artwork, neither—like Ravi Varma—with the goal of rendering the body “pretty,” nor—like Abanindranath—with the goal of dissolving into the ethereal ideal, nor—like Gauguin—as a voyeur fetishizing the exotic, but as an intimate participant in embodiment.

Whereas the respective receptions of Varma and Tagore as artists are explained in part by the added dimension of an Indian ideological lineage, in the case of Sher-Gil this kind of ideological lineage is absent. Sher-Gil is an individual woman artist, not easily classifiable as belonging to a particular race, nation, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. She certainly does not occupy any of these identities essentially in any case, and in her artwork, she represents a wide range of actual experiences in India, a place with which she so strongly identifies.

She is therefore a cosmopolitan artist; but what makes her authentically Indian? At the very least, we propose, the following two facts: first, she took herself to be Indian. This was not justified on grounds of racial purity, nationalist loyalty, or even a continued presence in India, but was rather due to a host of interlocking causal factors mentioned earlier, no one of which was necessary or sufficient for her being Indian, but which together enabled a sensibility and a sense of belonging to the actual and imaginary space of India. Second, India has come to claim her as one of its own. Once again, it is external, not intrinsic facts, that determine the answer to the questions of identity and authenticity.

Sher-Gil forged connections between Indian and European art not only through her use of European technique and her European training, but also because she exhibited her work both in Europe and in India. Thematically, not only was her work diverse enough to connect it to a much broader community of artists than her Indian contemporaries, but her work also addressed issues of immediate political concern: while it was never didactic or overtly nationalistic (she never painted *Bharat Mata*, for instance, or portraits of Indian royalty), her art was political. She depicted women; she depicted the poor; she depicted scenes and people from a broad range of Indian geography and culture, with an attention to the everyday. Paintings of fruit vendors, hill people, and of women bathing raised issues and indicated identity, but also connected, both in style and in content, to a global modernism in art. Sher-Gil, then, less self-consciously, but to a greater degree than either Varma or Tagore, successfully addressed the questions India posed to art. While she may not have been the most prominent artist of the colonial period, she may well be the most instructive.

Amrita Sher-Gil's art and artistic sensibility were very different from those shared by Ravi Varma and Abanindranath Tagore (despite their differences from

each other). Most influential art critics and aestheticians of colonial India were focused on the Varma-Tagore distinction, sharing a commitment to the idea that Indian art must reflect Indian national identity. In this context, to be an Indian artist was first and foremost to be Indian. But to be an *artist*, as well as to be Indian, one had to be cosmopolitan as well. Varma and Tagore each achieved a kind of cosmopolitan relevance. But neither was entirely successful. Varma came to be seen as a cheap imitator of the foreign, despite having contributed so much to the creation of modern Indian art; Tagore, despite his adoption of technique from outside, never quite transcended an Indian context. It is ironic that Sher-Gil, arguably in retrospect the greatest Indian artist of the colonial period, was nonetheless the artist who cared the least about being authentically Indian, and who cared the least about performing an Indian national identity. Her insouciance about these matters enabled her to negotiate the complicated questions of authenticity and national relevance in ways that eluded those obsessed with those questions.

Art is important in this story for two reasons. First, the practice of art was, as we have seen, central to debates about Indian identity and nationalism, and artistic practice was itself both a political and a philosophical matter. But, art is important for another reason as well: Indian philosophy, for over a millennium, has taken art as one of the central vehicles for philosophical and religious insight, and has located aesthetics at the center of the discipline of philosophy. We conclude by returning first to the place of aesthetic theory in Indian philosophy and then to art as a vehicle for philosophy.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that Indian aestheticians and artists in their exploration of *rasa*, and in their consideration of Indian national identity, addressed two questions: what makes Indian art *Indian* and what makes Indian art *art*? These questions are inextricable in the context of the independence movement and in a context in which British occupation involved the establishment of British art schools, British art museums, and British universities, institutions that together worked to appropriate authority regarding the quality of art, aesthetic theory, and proper art practice. Reclaiming culture therefore required both the reclamation of practice and the reclamation of an understanding of that practice. These questions about art—both as they were posed by philosophers and as they were posed by critics and artists—hence have pressing political importance as well as deep philosophical importance.

Moreover, while aesthetics may be a peripheral area of philosophy (for better or worse) in the contemporary Western academy and in the history of Western philosophy, aesthetic experience and theory was always central to classical

Indian philosophy. The experience of aesthetic objects in India was never merely recreational contemplation nor was it aimed at personal pleasure; it was always part and parcel of a broader philosophical or soteriological project. Art and aesthetics are philosophically and culturally central during the independence period partly because of the continuity of this role of the aesthetic in Indian culture. That centrality is accentuated in the colonial context because of the public, representational character of art, and because of the role the British assumed as arbiters of Indian art. For this reason, Indian philosophy, politics, and public life revolved around art and cannot be understood without attention to it.

It is worth closing this chapter by noting that these issues, while they subsided in salience after independence, are not dead. *Rasa* theory is still a topic for discussion. K. C. Pandey, for instance, defends it as India's most important contribution to contemporary aesthetic theory (Pandey, 1959). Daya Krishna, on the other hand, takes it to be important to attack *rasa* theory as a relic of Indian aesthetic theory it is best to leave behind (Bhushan and Raveh, 2011). And the discourse about the Indianness of Indian art is hardly a thing of the past, either. While it has receded as a theme for art criticism in India, discussions of the poetry of the modernist Indian poet Arun Kolatkar, for example, often refers to his attention to Indian religious sensibility, to his use of both English and Marathi, and to his use of poetry to evoke moral sentiments and a kind of "rapturous observation" (Kolatkar, 2010). These categories of assessment make implicit reference to the axes of relevance and Indian authenticity and derive from the framework of *rasa*, asking art to evoke particular moral and transcendent insights in the viewer, whether the medium be color, form, or language. It is therefore not surprising that during the period in which Indian identity was so contested, and in which philosophy was so concerned with these questions, the theory of *rasa* in particular, and aesthetic speculation and art criticism more generally, took center stage both in the professional philosophical and in the public landscape.

This book has been about the place of philosophy in the Indian renaissance, and we have seen that that place is complex and contested. Why do we close with a chapter focused on art? We have adverted already to the place of aesthetics and artistic practice in Indian speculation. But we can say something stronger. At this juncture, driven by the dynamics we have been exploring, art and artists occupied the same terrain as philosophy and philosophers, exploring in an aesthetic register the very questions that occupied academic philosophy, and encountering the same challenges and the same opportunities for development in a contested domain of ideas. The fact that the medium of expression is visual enabled this work to be even more public, and perhaps even more influential in some circles than that of the philosophers whose oeuvre requires a certain literary sophistication.

The Triumph of Indian Philosophy

Thinking Through the Renaissance

This has been a book about the history of Indian philosophy under British occupation. This history has long been ignored, and the philosophy has been more often disparaged than read. To return to A. C. Mukerji's poignant 1950 address to his own community:

I am fully aware of the general attitude of scorn and contempt, of distrust and discouragement, that has brought discredit upon the contemporary Indian thinkers from within and outside India; but I shall not enquire into the nature and cause of the circumstances responsible for this growing volume of suspicion. Of one thing, however, I am pretty sure and it is this that the adverse critics have neither the inclination nor the courtesy of spending on the Indian attempts a hundredth part of the time and attention they devote to the study of the currents of foreign thought... I for one do believe that the philosophers of contemporary India have already given sufficiently convincing evidence of the virility and strength of Indian thought which, given favourable atmosphere, would gradually develop into world views of far-reaching consequences.

—(Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 456)

We hope that the reader now agrees with Mukerji regarding the “virility and strength of Indian thought” and with us regarding the continuation of a spirit of debate and intellectual vitality in Indian philosophy in the colonial period; we hope that our attention to this thought will produce the “favourable atmosphere” for which Mukerji longed.

We have been writing about the Indian philosophical community in the colonial period. But, to talk about “*the* Indian philosophical community” is misleading. There was not *a* community, but *communities*. As we have noted, Hindu and Muslim philosophers rarely engaged one another's ideas. Even within the Muslim

community, Aligarh and Osmania, while they interacted, developed philosophically largely independently. Communities such as those in Allahabad, Calcutta, Madras, Mysore, and Pondicherry were for the most part quite isolated from one another. Although some work appeared in the national journal, *The Philosophical Quarterly* (and a few published in international journals), most philosophical publication during this time was in local university magazines or journals, or on local presses.¹ European publications had more thorough penetration into multiple sites of philosophical research than did those in Indian philosophy. In general, Indian philosophers during this period interacted nationally only in meetings of the Indian Philosophical Congress or—in the case of a small cadre of elite philosophers—at the philosophical research center in Amalner, a small town in remote Maharashtra. So, the history of Indian philosophy at this time is in large part the history of a set of microcommunities.

Each microcommunity contributed to the Indian renaissance and so to the development of Indian modernity, drawing on classical roots as it forged a modern Indian philosophy. Aligarh philosophers, consistent with the mission of bringing Cambridge to India, focused their attention on European philosophy, but integrated it with Sufism; Osmania's philosophers, consistent with its mission to educate in Urdu and to address Muslim culture, primarily addressed Islamic philosophy, but also translated Western philosophy into Urdu. Allahabad specialized in the history of philosophy, always with attention both to European and Indian philosophy. Calcutta was a hotbed of Ramakrishna-inspired neo-Vedānta, stirred together with neo-Hegelian transcendental idealism. Mysore and Madras were much more classical departments, addressing the Indian tradition per se, with comparative nods to Western sources. In Madras, a modern Advaita Vedānta is brought to bear on the philosophy of science.

Pondicherry hosted Sri Aurobindo. While during his Pondicherry years, Aurobindo was better known as a purely religious leader, we also know that many Indian academic philosophers traveled to Pondicherry to consult. Indra Sen (who studied under Heidegger in Freiburg) even left his post at Delhi University to live permanently at the Ashram. His daughter, Aster Patel, herself a philosopher, reports to us (personal communication) that a host of Indian philosophers—including M. Hiriyanna and T. M. P. Mahadevan among others—turned up to talk philosophy, allowing Aurobindo's version of Vedānta to penetrate more broadly into academic philosophy.

We might also say that the community of Scottish missionary philosophers, despite their geographical distribution—constituted yet another microcommunity.

¹ This publication pattern continues to some extent to the present day. Indeed, Bhushan and Garfield (2011) was recently reviewed in the *Journal of the Philosophy Department of the University of North Bengal*, Darjeeling (Devarakonda 2012).

They were concerned with interreligious dialogue and with the application of Western hermeneutics to understanding Indian philosophy. To understand the wealth of Indian philosophy in the colonial period is to understand this rich diversity of approaches.

Amalner was the hub that linked many of these microcommunities. In 1916, two Marathi industrialists, Srimant Pratap Seth and Seth Vallabhadas, neither of whom studied philosophy, endowed an institute for philosophical research with an explicit mission to “encourage *generally* the comparative study of Indian and European philosophy; with a view to correctly interpret and evaluate the former in terms of the latter to the West; and to promote especially a critical study of the system of Śaṅkara which in the humble opinion of its founders is the highest expression of the Indian Philosophical Thoughts [sic]” (Malkani and Deshpande, 1997 p. xii). K. C. Bhattacharyya was its first director, but the institute was led for many years by Professor G. R. Malkani, himself a specialist in Vedānta, who also studied at Cambridge. The Institute published *The Philosophical Quarterly*, the oldest national philosophical journal in India, and the only venue for national-level publication in preindependence India. Amalner attracted leading philosophers from all over India for residencies and research seminars. Among the visitors to Amalner were D. M. Datta, P. T. Raju, Ras Bihari Das, S. Radhakrishnan and R. Tagore. The Institute continues to this day to operate as the Pratap Center.

Colonial Indian philosophy was characterized not only by this internal diversity, but also by its constant engagement with the philosophical world outside of India. As we have seen, many of the great philosophers of this generation studied in England and Germany. Even those who did not travel to Europe read and addressed both the European and the Indian traditions. This cosmopolitanism—which, as we have seen, was hardly unique to the colonial period—was not a dilution or pollution of Indian philosophy, but an enrichment. Hermetic isolation was never a reality in India, and can never be a condition for taking a tradition seriously; hence the bankruptcy of any discourse of authenticity as a critique of the philosophy of this period. As we saw, the era of the *karaṇams* and that of the *munshis*, as well as the era of *Navya Nyāya*, were each, in their own way, also periods of cosmopolitan engagement and secular philosophical activity, often in vernacular languages. These periods provide important context and precedent for the luxuriant philosophical activity and vibrant debate we encounter in colonial India.

Nonetheless, there was something unique about this cosmopolitan moment. The specifically colonial context that made English available as a medium of intellectual exchange, but that also made it mandatory as a language of control, inevitably led to discomfort with that language. And the clear identification of colonial subjects as subjects of a foreign power forced self-conscious reflection on identity. That reflection in turn generated a creative approach to reconstructing both identity and philosophy and at the same time anxiety about the probity

of that reconstruction. That is the tension that animates this period, and that gives this cosmopolitan moment its unique texture. Indian modernity is distinctive in its inflection by this encounter between an indigenous classical culture and a modern foreign imposition. Here we try to understand the difficulties this created for philosophical life, but we also celebrate the creativity that encounter engendered.

The denizens of this masala modernity were themselves a set of curious hybrids. Pandits were professors, and professors pandits, blurring the distinction between the *math* and the university. Prominent individuals occupied identities as political leaders and as philosophers without boundary. Art critics were philosophers of national identity, and artists not only inspired but engaged in nationalist propaganda and aesthetic debate. Irish women adopted Indian identities and led Indian movements; Scottish missionaries may have arrived to convert the heathen, but joined the community of Indian philosophers. Foreign-returned Indian intellectuals and barristers discovered India and identified as Indian for the first time in the context of the independence movement; philosophers raised in India speaking English labored to master their mother tongues. While this hybridity generated anxiety about identity, it also permitted the transgressive positions that allowed for the creative appropriation and recombination of multiple traditions.

This hybridity and the cosmopolitanism it enabled generated a new kind of modernity, a renaissance modernity. India became modern through a deliberate and reflective recovery of its past, or at least, its past as imagined. That is, India developed an artistic and intellectual attitude that valued the independent and the innovative; generated pluralistic civil society; and self-consciously engaged as a nation among nations, a culture among cultures by reimagining its own past. The resurrection of Vedic or medieval Islamic ideas was a response to the need to construct a national identity. Once resurrected, however, those ideas did not underwrite a reactionary return to the past, but rather a creative use of that past in confronting the future. Philosophy was central to the appropriation of the past because the past appropriated was in large part a philosophical past. The renaissance was, as Aurobindo puts it in *The Renaissance in India*, “a rebirth of the soul of India into a new body or energy” (Bhushan and Garfield, 2011, p. 59).

The principals of this renaissance—the philosophers whose lives and ideas we celebrate here—were indeed “minds without fear.” They freely embraced both classical and modern thought; both Indian and European philosophy; both public and private reason. They were neither scholastic commentators nor Naipaul’s mimic-men imitating the academic lives of their masters. They were neither bound to a tradition they inherited nor alienated from their home tradition by the imposition of a foreign ideology and language (however much they or their successors may have worried that this might be the case). The proof of

their creativity and success is the legacy they have left us; our task is to take that legacy seriously, both for its own sake as a moment in human intellectual history and for what it tells us about the role of ideas in renaissance and hybrid contexts.

We denizens of a postcolonial globalized world are all intellectual hybrids if we are serious intellectuals at all. Philosophy is the discipline that contains its own history, and we constantly—self-consciously or otherwise—refer to our past to create our present and future. We are never intellectually pure in a world in which traditions are constantly interpenetrating one another, and we always find ourselves either moving between languages, or thinking in languages other than those of our interlocutors. By coming to understand these giants of the Indian renaissance who deliberately deployed these gestures and, because of their colonial context, thought them through with care, and debated them both publically and in the academy, we come better to understand ourselves.

There is one final reason to read this literature with care. We often hear today—especially in conversation with the parents of our prospective majors—that philosophy doesn't matter. It is self-indulgent, and socially idle, an amusement for the leisure class at best. Whatever one might think about this attitude in the present context, things were very different in preindependence India. Then and there, philosophy mattered. Philosophy infused and inspired the construction of Indian identity; philosophy infused and inspired the Indian independence movement; philosophy infused and inspired modern Indian art; philosophy linked India with its own past and with its global present. We come to the Indian renaissance to remind ourselves of the perennial role of philosophy in human affairs, and of to remind ourselves of the power of philosophical thought to move history.

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