ARTICLES

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MOVING BEYOND EDWARD SAID: HOMI BHABHA AND THE PROBLEM OF POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATION

ABSTRACT: The essay takes up the issue of postcolonial representation in terms of a critique of European modernism that has been symptomatic of much postcolonial theoretical debates in the recent years. It tries to enumerate the epistemic changes within the paradigm of postcolonial theoretical writing that began tentatively with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 and has taken a curious postmodern turn in recent years with the writings of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha. The essay primarily focuses on Bhabha's concepts of ambivalence and mimicry and his politics of theoretical anarchism that take the representation debate to a newer height vis-à-vis modes of religious nationalism and Freudian psychoanalysis. It is interesting to see how Bhabha locates these within a postmodern paradigm.

KEY WORDS: Postcolonialism, representation, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, postmodernism, Third World/First World, mimicry, religious nationalism, ambivalence

The Politics of Space

As a subaltern critic of culture, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak had pointed out what the Third-World postcolonial subject "cannot not want," thereby creating an aporetic space for the deconstruction of metropolitan historiography on the one hand, and creating newer

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dimensions of positionality on the other: "Claiming catachreses from a space one cannot not want to inhabit and yet must criticize is, then, the deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial." (64)

Such claim of a catachrestic reading of the postcolonial Third World subject was a unique means of opening up the cultural space toward the possibilities of a pluralistic debate. It is through explorations of such alternative strategies of reading that Spivak had effectively used affirmative deconstruction as a means to subvert the hegemonic formations of Western historiography. What emerged out of this was an almost contingent, arbitrary space within which the entire debate about representation could be played out, a non-foundational, non-discursive space that could only be defined in its differential limit.

It is this problem of defining or locating that is central to the discussion of the Third-World, postcolonial intellectuals in the First World. In this paper I would like to take up this debate about the politics of location vis-à-vis some of the issues raised in the writings of Homi Bhabha. In fact, with the abundance of postmodern concerns in Bhabha's works, it is even more difficult to categorize or place him within a particular paradigm of the development of Third-World intellectual positions. His theoretical anarchism rejects any consistent metalanguage, thereby "refusing to let his terms reify into static concepts," which is akin to but much more complex than Spivak's arbitrary and interventionist critique (Spivak 146). The radical postmodern position that he assumes leads him to a rejection even of the anti-humanist tropes that some of his predecessors such as Edward Said have used more or less successfully. His movement "outside the sentence" is a movement beyond any possible logocentrism, and opens up this debate about representation into an unforeseen hybridity.[1] Primarily, in moving outside the sentence, Bhabha tried to cancel out any possibility of falling into the trap of the politics of binaries, that he felt had considerably weakened Edward Said's argument, Said being one of the beginners of this argument about postcolonial location and representation. This is where, I presume, Bhabha is more like Spivak in choosing an arbitrary method of disruption to launch a counter-narrative against the pan-assimilationist strategies of the Western theoretical system.

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[1] For a discussion on Bhabha's concept of hybridity and its implications on agency, and vice-versa see Bhabha, Homi, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency" in *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994; rpt. 2004), 245-82.

Differences with Edward Said

At the time when Said had begun to publish his writings on the politics of domination and governance, he was considered quite revolutionary in his mode of attack and influences. This was one of the primary reasons of his immense popularity, particularly among Third-World intellectuals, whose primary instinct was the desperate instinct of survival against the all-pervasive techniques of assimilation of the Western socio-political system. With the publication of *Orientalism* they acquired a new weapon against Western humanist politics. Considering Said's influences, namely Foucault and Gramsci, and his stance on the subjects of imperialism and colonialism, one might easily conclude that he was anti-humanist in his politics. Notwithstanding the fact that this stance of anti-humanism was quite fashionable to assume in the America of the sixties and the seventies, one must also admit that this was a veritably valid means of registering one's protest against discursive dominance at that time. I say this to disarm the argument that some critics put forth about Edward Said's anti-humanism being a fashionable strategy to survive in the Western academia. What is also interesting to note is the way Said has used this weapon of anti-humanism. He has never rejected humanism, two of his major theoretical influences being Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer. On the contrary he has liberally used their research methodologies and resource materials to gather the information he has used against them. Only, his tools were different and new. He used the counter-discursive logic of anti-humanism to explode the myths about the "white man's burden," the lazy native, the objectivity of literature, or even the discipline of history. Two of his most read books, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, are documentary evidences of such a contrapuntal manner of reading.

However revolutionary Said might have been during his time, Homi Bhabha and his techniques of reading have really challenged not only the Western discursive systems, but their critiques by the likes of Said as well. His basic intention was to move beyond the debate between discourse and counter-discourse and think of a location for the postcolonial intellectual (or even the common man; distinctions between the intellectual and the common man also dissolve in Bhabha's works) that is beyond this categorized, defined dynamic of contestation. His politics is arbitrary and disruptive, even more so than Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Thus, inevitably, he has moved out of the teleological or the causal bind that is at the root of liberal humanist assumptions; those assumptions which, I am afraid, Said had worked within. But first let me note the basic points where Bhabha departed considerably from Said.

The Politics of Binaries

It is rather interesting to note the way Bhabha tackles the problematic of binary opposition—the way Edward Said uses it, and he himself opposes and transcends it. What Bhabha initially looks into in his essay "The Other Question" are the basic patterns of the development of colonial discourse and the tropes that they use. He immediately notices how the predominant strategic function of colonial discourse was to create a space for the colonized through the production of knowledge, a continuous mechanism of surveillance, and the creation of stereotypes. Such a strategy of surveillance and typification helped the colonizer to categorize and hence establish a system of administration on the one hand, and to locate the colonized as the 'other' so as to ratify cultural authority/superiority, on the other:

> Despite the play of power within colonial discourse and the shifting positionalities of its subjects (for example, effects of class, gender, ideology, different social formations, varied systems of colonization and so on), I am referring to a form of governmentality that in marking out a 'subject nation', appropriates, directs and dominates its various spheres of activity. Therefore, despite the 'play' in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible (Bhaba, "The Other Question"101).

This is how the inherent politics of binarism is played out. Many Third-World intellectuals dealing with the politics of colonization failed to notice the implicit paradox within this system of operation. Whereas the consistent 'other'ing of the colonized is used to situate the West in a position of binary superiority, the complete knowability or visibility of the subject people is also assumed, as if the paradigms of Western systems of knowledge have managed to know or read the 'other' completely. Bhabha's slow but sure movement toward a psychological critique of imperial politics is perhaps a ploy to address this gap or catachrestic flaw that has been overlooked by the Third World critique of imperialism.

Bhabha sees Said to have fallen into the same trap of binary politics. This, according to him, is only a consolidation of Western hegemonic strategy, as the very acceptance of this binary logic is in a way succumbing to the assimilationist strategies of imperial power. One of the chief emphases in Said's works has been the problem of representation, a trope intrinsically linked to the problematic of location and space. It is while addressing these issues that Said uses the Foucauldian paradigms of knowledge and power. It is exactly at this moment, Bhabha notes,

when Said unconsciously falls into the trap of binarisms: power as opposed to powerlessness; knowledge as contrasted against ignorance.

The differentiation that Said makes between latent and manifest orientalisms is also symptomatic of the same implicit binary politics that completely eludes him.[2] This is not to say, however, that he misunderstood the problem of imperial politics and domination. On the contrary, as I have already insisted, he was one of the foremost intellectuals from the Third World who addressed the politics of representation in such detail. What he perhaps failed to realize was that his studied invectives against the epistemic knowledge systems of the West could easily be essentialized by the fluid mechanism of the binary framework that was (and perhaps, is) continuously in operation.[3]

Bhabha clearly shows us this binary pattern that Said easily succumbed to. He elucidates how Said's manifest Orientalism talks about the learning, discovery and practise of imperialist politics—those signifiers of stability that constitute a static system of rule and discipline, and the logic of governance. On the other hand, latent Orientalism is the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths and obsessions that are manifested through literature and the arts, cultural geography, and myriad other means of informing the unconscious. These polarities that Said creates are easily separable and can be destabilized by consistent discursive attacks, which is what his critics like Bernard Lewis have done. Such distinct binarisms fail to create a unitary epistemic system of protest or subversion that has multiple polarities and is essentially fluid in its dynamics.

What is denied in Said's idea of latent and manifest Orientalism is a differential quality that allows the concepts to play against each other. This would have enabled a continuous movement without any stable position or fixed co-ordinates thereby denying colonial discourse any chance to construe an attack. What Bhabha is suggesting is that in his creation of structures of resistance, Said has failed to problematize counter-discourse, and his pattern of protest was easily subsumed. Although, I feel, a lot of this is true, one must realize the advantage that Bhabha has in working with postmodern tools that have allowed him free play, which Said was perhaps denied of. By situating himself within the postmodern condition it has been possible for Bhabha to maintain

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[2] For Said's concept of "latent" and "manifest" Orientalisms see Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2001), 201-25.

[3] Jean Baudrillard has discussed how as soon as the 'other' can be represented, it can be appropriated and controlled. See Baudrillard, Jean, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities . . . Or the End of the Social, and Other Essays*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton and John Johnston (New York: Foreign Agents Series, 1983), pp.20-2.

a differential quality throughout his work, something that was not entirely possible for Said to imagine in the theoretical milieu that he was working in.

Representation of the 'Other'

I have already pointed out how the colonial stereotype is one of the models for the development of colonial discourse, the kind of *cataloguing* that helps the imperialist to create a monolithic construction of the Orient that should be dominated and ruled. Said immediately latches on to the idea of the stereotype and tries to deconstruct the myths created around it, and throughout he has maintained this as a valid course of attack against discursive formations. One of Said's chief agenda in terms of the politics of representation is to oppose the othering of the colonial subject through the formation of stereotypes. He realizes in his binary conceptions that a complete negation or disavowal of stereotypical representation might not be possible (even if decolonization is possible), and thus there is the need for an alternative language of resistance within this encounter between East and West. We notice his seething anger in a passage in *Orientalism*:

> One [the West] tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well-known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things. (58-9)

This sense of disgust culminates in a realization of confusion within colonial discourse itself, which idea unfortunately he does not further develop:

> The orient at large vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty. (Said 59)

Here we might anticipate both the anger and the frustration of the Third-World intellectual. It is a realization of the power of colonial discourse on the one hand, and its inherent confusion on the other. Unfortunately, however, at the time when Said is writing he does not possess the necessary tools that postmodernism has devised much later, to conclusively deconstruct this kind of ambivalence. Said understands his (the Orient's) powerlessness to take advantage of this theoretical aporia. Ideally, he could have pointed out the inherent contradiction

within imperial paradigms and hence situate the problem of representation on a separate plane altogether. He realizes the moment but cannot seize it because of the ultimately traditional framework that he was working within.

This is the moment where Bhabha steps in. His stance is that of the Third-World intellectual who has arrived in the First World equipped with postmodern theoretical tools. He constructs and cancels, deconstructs and re-constructs at ease, thereby playing the game of representation on a plane completely removed from Said's. Here is something we need to understand from the point of view of location. Although both Said and Bhabha are representatives of the Third World in the First, their approaches to the problem of representation are markedly different. In Bhabha there is much less anxiety about his location than in the early Said. He approaches the problem of the stereotype in a manner very different from Said: "My anatomy of colonial discourse remains incomplete until I locate the stereotype, as an arrested, fetishistic mode of representation within its field of identification" (Bhaba, "The Other Question" 109).

He takes up the same trope of representation as stereotype but locates it out of the political into the psychological. He tries to identify the problem in terms of the "Lacanian schema of the Imaginary" (Bhaba, "The Other Question" 109-10). At the present moment I am not going into a detailed discussion on Bhabha's concept of the 'fetish' which he has talked about in much detail in some of his essays.[4] But talking in terms of representation we see how Bhabha re-locates the Saidian concept of latent Orientalism. He sees the Imaginary as constituted of two forms—narcissism and aggressivity. While narcissism reminds the subject of his inherent difference from the Orient and a consequent feeling of superiority, his aggressivity masks this difference in terms of the politics of identity with the colonized. The identity of the colonizer is thus qualified by both fixity and fantasy—the fixity of a monolithic image of the colonized subject to dominate, compare, or identify with, as also the fantasy of the narcissistic pleasure of superiority. Both these functions of the Imaginary therefore need the stereotype as an imperative.

By lifting this problematic of representation out of the political into the psychological, Bhabha allows a free-play of meanings which are not inevitably caught up in the discursive paradigms of colonial rule. What

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[4] See, for example, Bhabha, "Difference, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *Literature, Politics and Theory. Papers from the Essex Conference, 1976-1984*, ed. Francis Barker et al (London: Methuen, 1986), pp.194-211.

Bhabha is trying to achieve is a dynamic of equality between the First and the Third World in terms of representation. We need not over-emphasize the possibilities of such equality, but the movement out of the political into the psychological or the Imaginary can at least ensure a pluralistic, uncertain, ambivalent framework for the construction of identity. What I have tried to show in the discussion above is how Bhabha qualifies Said's protests about the problematic of representation and looks to re-constellate it out of its simplistic binary, oppositional logic, into a postmodern one of ambivalence, hybridity and heterogeneity.

The First World Location: Differences and Discontinuities

It is indeed true that both Gayatri Spivak (who I do not have the space to discuss here) as well as Homi Bhabha have departed considerably from Edward Said in their approach. This is, of course, not to say that they acknowledge Said only casually, as a predecessor, who also wrote about the problems of imperialism and representation. On the contrary both of them acknowledge him as a precursor, as someone, who for the first time categorically defined Third-World representation as a site for debate and discussion. It was only after him that Western academic discourse began to seriously address the question of Third-World representation, and the location of the Third-World intellectual in the First. However, what both Spivak and Bhabha departed from was the technique that Said used. Spivak's technique was one of arbitrariness and disruption. Homi Bhabha, with his postmodern tools, has taken this technique of disruption to new heights. As a major theoretician from the Third World the pressure that Bhabha has exerted with his unique ideas of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity, has not only challenged Western discursivity, but has also finally consolidated the position of the Third-World, postcolonial intellectual in the First.

Mimicry: Resemblance and Menace

An interesting aspect of Bhabha's work is the way he stitches aspects of his issues with colonial politics with that of his strategies of representation. While he discusses colonial tropes of discursivity and appropriation on the one hand, he methodically addresses the problematic of his (or the Third-World intellectual's) location in the West, on the other. The truly postmodern aspect of Bhabha's work is in the neatness with which he undertakes this enterprise, cleverly camouflaging his agenda of location

within his well researched discourse on colonialism and its critique. What I mean is really that it is easy to miss Bhabha's strategy because of the layered masks he puts on them. Let us take mimicry, for example. Apparently it might seem to be a discourse on colonial strategies of domination and a consequent thwarting of the same by the imperialized. Of course it is a critique of colonial domination and an interesting psychological unravelling of possibilities of challenging it. But it is also more than just this. Once the reader removes this mask, he discovers the face of the Third-World intellectual lurking behind it. He also mimics; he also uses the English language; he has also chosen the First-World location. So is mimicry not his (Bhabha's) strategy of protest, of consolidating his position, of trying to negotiate possibilities of a dialogue or debate? This is the reason why reading Bhabha is so interesting—a continuous intellectual challenge to unmask and decipher.

Let us see what his concept of mimicry entails—both in terms of method and strategy. In the first place mimicry is born out of the necessity of colonial domination, to assert itself through a panoptical vision of domination. This entails not only a pervasive strategy of cultural imperialism, but a regular supply of indigenous imitators of an identical cultural logic who would maintain the mechanics of the imperial administration: ". . . colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*" (Bhaba, "Of Mimicry and Man" 122).

This ambivalence is both reassuring and menacing. The similarity that is 'not quite' helps the colonizer to locate the other as 'a difference', the fine objectivity that sustains the master-slave binary and helps the tropes of power. But what is implicit is the other obvious argument that is located antipodally, and holds true by the same logic. The subject position of this mimic man has shifted from its conclusively binary one of the colonized 'other'. He is now 'other' but 'not quite'. This lateral movement places him in the ambivalent position of the hybrid subject who is neither colonizer nor colonized, but something in between. This in-betweenness of the emergent colonial subject who is 'white, but not quite' portends the beginning of a counter-gaze that effectively displaces the social control of the power centre. As Bhabha writes, ". . . the reforming civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double . . ." (Bhaba, "Of Mimicry and Man" 123). This continuous slippage from the legitimate pattern of the colonizer-colonized binary is something that Bhabha discovers from his postmodern location, and this is what is menacing about the otherwise sound administrative logic of the creation of the mimic man.

This kind of a double bind is something that the colonial masters did not obviously anticipate. However, once this mechanism of the creation of the mimic men was set in motion, the inevitability of this 'disciplinary gaze' became apparent. The initial necessity for the master was to create a 'reformed' colonial subject who would help in matters of administration. As Macaulay had clearly laid down the exact denomination of this pandering colonial subject, who is trained to help and not to think, trained to imitate rather than imagine, to execute much less to know matters of colonial policy: ". . . a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay 49).

Clearly, the basic idea behind the creation of these Anglicized (but not English) subjects was to make them *repeat* rather than *represent* the West and its socio-cultural formations. It was also to transform Indian knowledge into European information that would facilitate domination and rule:

> The Indians were sources or "native informants" who supplied information, *viva voce*, in English or Indian languages; who collected, translated, and discussed texts and documents; and who wrote exegeses of various kinds that were classified, processed, and analyzed into knowledge *of* or *about* India. (Cohn 51)

However, what the European master failed to realize was that many of these chosen and educated colonial subjects who were meant to play the role of the mimic men were also men of letters by their own right. They realized that they were being used by the colonizer for the simple reason that they were better than many of their brethren in certain respects. In many cases, they were even superior to some of their English masters, and this is why there was always the implicit possibility of the counter-gaze: "The Indian scholar knew he was superior to his European Master in respect of Indian languages, [but] he was primarily an informant, a mere tool in the exercise of language teaching to be handled by others" (Das 107).

This sense of a deliberate suppression by the British master, the humiliation of being merely an 'informant' and not an intellectual was something that automatically created the occasion for counter-gaze, for making the colonizer nervous and uncomfortable. This is the ambivalent location that Bhabha talks about. The English educated colonial subject has the advantage of being conversant with the cultural tropes of both the colonizer and the colonized. He thus becomes a representative of a difference that works both ways—that is both for the colonial master and his colonized other. Bhabha compares this kind of colonial textuality

with the partial nature of Freudian fantasy that is caught between the unconscious and the preconscious. This is how Freud talks about fantasy:

> Their mixed and split origin is what decides their fate. We may compare them with individuals of mixed race who taken all round resemble white men but who betray their coloured descent by some striking feature or other and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges. (Freud, 'The Unconscious' qtd. in Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man" 127)

It is this kind of an interdictory location that is the ideal site for mimicry, a blurred frame of reference from where this mimic man revalues the normative principles of race, writing, history that have been laid down by colonial hegemony. This is what Bhabha calls the 'metonymy of presence'—a camouflage, a form of resemblance, which differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically: "The desire of colonial mimicry—an interdictory desire—may not have an object, but it has strategic objectives which I shall call the *metonymy of presence*." (Bhaba, "Of Mimicry and Men" 128). Thus the desire for mimicry, that I had argued in the beginning to be the desire of the colonizer is eventually transformed into a strategic desire of the colonized, who, metonymically subverts the location from one of disadvantage to one of advantage.

When I talk about the mimic man revaluing the normative principles of hegemonic imperialism in terms of race, writing or history, I do not necessarily insist on this being an academic or a pedagogical process-a process which is perhaps the most obvious one for the middle class native representative. No doubt there were conscious intellectual enterprises on the part of the native men of letters to make full use of their interdictory locations, and thereby subvert the discursive imperial dynamic: obvious examples in Bengal were the likes of Raja Rammohan Roy, Raj Narayan Bose or Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who wrote and spoke in both their native tongue and English and who were some of the chief and most powerful instruments of nationalism in India (and obviously Bengal). However, I want to address this issue of interdictory locations from a somewhat different perspective rather than this obvious one of counter-discursive nationalism. I have already spoken about an implicit possibility of counter-gaze that started working in the minds of these mimic men. The permanent pressure of imperialism on the one hand, and the perpetual desire of subversion on the other, let the native to prepare himself psychologically for a fight back. Interestingly, this manner of psychological seasoning was not always conscious or deliberate. Sometimes this happened suddenly like an epiphany and sometimes from a continuous deliberation within the subconscious. Religion or

more precisely, religiosity played a key role in such methods of counter-gaze. The tradition of Indian spirituality and a return to religion as a buffer was thus an interesting method of both evasion and subversion of the imperial logic. Religiosity or spiritualism is sometimes a bit abstract in its logic, and thus, this trope of using the divine was a unique way of subversion. Here I shall try to establish this point.

The Case of Aurobindo Ghose

Aurobindo Ghose could be a classic example of this kind of an evasive, differential religiosity. His stance as a god-man of sorts not only subverted the much used trope of imperial rationality, but also supplied, at least for a certain period of time, a frenzy associated with religious nationalism. Aurobindo was born Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose to a completely Anglicized and Brahmo father Krishnadhan Ghose. Krishnadhan belonged to that category of brown sahibs who would never conceive of using his location as a 'metonymy of presence'. From his unilaterally defined location he hated everything Indian—its culture, language, religion and people. At the age of seven Aurobindo was shipped to England and housed under the care of Reverend and Mrs. Drewett, with strict instructions that he be well guarded from anything remotely Indian. Thus Aurobindo took lessons in English, Latin, Greek and French, and did not even know how to speak properly in his mother tongue. Sisir Kumar Mitra rightly points out that Krishnadhan "took the greatest care that nothing Indian should touch this son of his."[5]

Due to such strict instructions Aurobindo never made any friends in England, and he grew up a nervous and petulant child who was called "Baby Ghose" by his classmates.[6] It was perhaps in his loneliness that the first seeds of rebellion were sown. He began to review the West and the implications of imperialism with inputs from his maternal grandfather Raj Narayan Bose, and certain nationalist magazines that would trickle through to England. He took the first part of the Classical Tripos with a first class, and then did not take the degree. He also deliberately flunked in the Indian Civil Service examination. Having fared extremely

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[5] Mitra, Sisir Kumar, *The Liberator: Sri Aurobindo, India and the World* (Delhi: Jaico, 1954), p.24. This and other references to Aurobindo Ghose have mostly been acquired from Ashis Nandy's writings on Aurobindo in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[6] Government of India, Home Department, Political File No.13, June 1908, Note on Aravinda Acroyd Ghose by A. Wood, ICS

well in all the exams of the civil service he deliberately missed the riding test and was thereby disqualified.[7]

Aurobindo dropped the 'Ackroyd' from his name and came back to India. The seeds of nationalism that were sown in him during the final phase of his stay in England now germinated with a vigour in Baroda where he was a bureaucrat and a language teacher. He started learning Indian languages and quickly picked up Bengali, Sanskrit, Gujarati and Marathi. It was during this phase that he started having spiritual experiences and had the experience of being enveloped by a deep calm and silence (Mitra 34). He also claimed that he had seen the Goddess Kali as a living presence, and it is through such spiritual experience that the subversive logic of nationalism started to work. The mythography of India as a powerful but oppressed Mother started to feature in his literary works. He writes:

> In the unending revolutions of the world, as the wheel of the Eternal turns rightly in the courses, the Infinite Energy, which streams forth from the Eterna . . . sets the wheel to work . . . This Infinite Energy is Bhavani. She also is Durga. She is Kali; she is Radha the beloved, she is Lakshmi. She is our mother and creatress of us all. In the present age the mother is manifested as the Mother of Strength. [8]

This was almost like a manifesto of nationalism, but spread by means of the frenzy of religion. This was obviously a very oblique and subversive method that Aurobindo was using. These tropes of *swadharma* and *swajati* were beyond the traditional weapons or means of subversion—opposition, or direct confrontation, or questioning the master narratives of the West. Religion and the concept of the 'jati' that were being used in this kind of nationalism was exclusive of the Foucauldian power-knowledge paradigm that the colonial masters were so used to. As Bhabha writes:

> Its [colonial discourse] predominant strategic function is the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised . . . It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledges of colonizer and colonized which are stereotypical . . . (Bhaba, "The Other Question" 103-4)

Aurobindo was acting outside this stereotype, and thereby subverting the binary logic. The brown sahib who was supposed to be the pro-

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[7] Mitra, *The Liberator*, p.26. Aurobindo was eleventh in the open competition of 1890, twenty-third in the first periodical examination, and thirty-seventh in the final examination. See, Government of India, Judicial and Public File 1396 of 1892.

[8] Aurobindo Ghose in *Bhavani Mandir*, trans. Mitra, Sisir Kumar, *The Liberator*, p. 48.

imperialist interlocutor, the link that would consolidate the empire was reacting in a completely incomprehensible manner. What Aurobindo was doing was really simple: he was using his ambivalent location—that of the English educated native—against the expected pattern of its use. Thus, the imperial perspective of viewing the colonized 'as a social reality which is at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible'[26] was frustrated by Aurobindo's actions. He was arrested for sedition, and on his release moved into a completely spiritual life in Pondicherry, a French colony at that time. This part of his life is not topical to our present discussion. However, Aurobindo's location, I presume, remains quite interesting in terms of the 'metonymy of presence' that Bhabha is talking about.

Religion as Nationalism

Aurobindo Ghose's life in India—both political and spiritual—might be seen as a perpetual search for self-esteem and cultural autonomy. His reaching back to the classical texts of Hinduism, was to develop a critical awareness of one's own culture, as also a search for individual authenticity. The logic of evasion that he was using against British imperialism was interesting. One of the well-known tropes of cultural imperialism has always been to trivialize the 'present' of the colonized country as contrasted to its 'glorious past'. Thus the past is already authenticated within the logic of imperialism itself. The past was glorious and noteworthy, and the present is not even a shadow of that past. Aurobindo, instead of playing the obvious game of opposition, used this trope of the glory of the past to perfection. In a short pamphlet called *Bhawani Mandir* he liberally used resources of the past, particularly from the *Markandaya Purana*—which was a Brahmanical text with Tantric influences.[9] The concept of 'Shakti' that he evokes in *Bhawani Mandir* is clearly borrowed from the *Markandaya Purana*:

> What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisa Mardini sprang into being from the Shakti of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity

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[9] A good discussion on the *Markandaya Purana* can be found in Farquhar, J.N., *An Outline of the Religious Literature of India* (1920; Varanasi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1967), pp.150-1. On the Tantras in general see Woodroffe, Sir John, [Arthur Avalon, pseudo.], *Principles of Tantra*, 2vols. (Madras, 1960), pp.212ff.

of the Shaktis of three hundred million people; but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of tamas, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. To get rid of tamas we have but to wake the Brahma within.[10]

This is an interesting revival of the past, a complete surrender to spiritualism, that both underplays and consolidates nationalism and a sense of cultural identity at the same time. This harking back to the past is essentially rooted in indigenous tradition and beyond the immediate scope of binary games of essentialism. This evocation of the Brahma is very self-contained, completely independent of all foreignness: "In *Bhawani Mandir* the British are not present and are not held responsible for the fall of India. Rather, Indians abandoned Shakti and therefore were abandoned by her" (Gordon 113).

What needs to be noted is the element of surprise and shock of the British master at the behaviour of the brown sahib. This is a movement beyond all scopes of essentialism. In fact this is a use of the 'past' that is rarely problematized by imperialist discourse, the past that is advertised as glorious by the colonialist himself.

Thus the ambivalence of location of the brown sahib is suddenly overshadowed by an ambivalent temporality where the possibility of the 'past' is re-evoked in the 'present', and used as a means of disruption. Bhabha notes this kind of a deliberate return to tradition:

> Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. For the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is *archaic* and *mythical*, paradoxically representing the nation's modern territoriality, in the *patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism.* ("DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" 300, italics mine).

Through such movement into traditionalism and an evocation of *brahmatej*, the politics of nationalism moves on to a mythographic framework, beyond the immediate reach of imperial stereotypes.[11] This

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[10] Aurobindo Ghose, *Bhawani Mandir*, rpt. in Purani, A.B., *The Life of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1926)*, 2nd edition (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1960), pp.88-9. The entire pamphlet has been reprinted in Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1964), pp.84-97.

[11] There is much debate about the nature of such a mythographic nationalism. While statist historiography has wanted to see nationalism as essentially a secular enterprise, historians of the subaltern valorise an ahistorical notion of Indian religion as the only authentic site of nationalist resistance. Dipesh Chakrabarty has drawn our attention to the 'remarkable failure of intellect' in Sumit Sarkar's book on the subject whenever it

kind of a displaced 'atavistic' plurality easily overcomes the tropes of both fixity and fantasy with which the colonizer tries to arrest the colonized subject within a unilateral and stereotypical representation.

This game of traditionalism, of seeking cultural nourishment from the past that the brown sahib played, sometimes consciously (like Aurobindo), or sometimes unconsciously (in a way like Keshab Chandra Sen, who I cannot discuss within the scope of this paper), completely unsettled the purpose of creation of these mimic men. The colonized 'other' who is 'white but not quite' makes full use of this ambivalence to transform narcissism of the colonizer to paranoia, and to violate the rational, enlightened claims of his enunciatory logic. As Bhabha writes:

> The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from *mimicry*—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to *menace*—a difference that is almost total but not quite (Bhaba, "Of Mimicry and Men" 131)

It is this same 'not quite'ness that is symptomatic of the location of the Third-World intellectual in the First World academia. Bhabha's concept of mimicry is thus a way of writing back, a way of registering one's presence. His choice of postmodernism as a theoretical tool is to maintain the dynamics of ambivalence, to locate the Third-World intellectual within a certitude of uncertainty. He liberally uses their theoretical tools, their discursive logic, and thereby clearly walks around the paradigm of binary confrontation, but never, for a moment, steps inside it. This is a 'menace' that cannot be theorized, and hence cannot be essentialized or appropriated as Bhabha never takes a position or assumes a role. His ever shifting, ever evasive location creates multiple aporetic possibilities and this is perhaps what Bhabha sees as the predicament of the Third-World intellectual in the First World.

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addresses the question of religion. See Chakrabarty, Dipesh, 'Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism: Some Recent Critiques of Subaltern Studies' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (8 April 1995), p.753. See also Sarkar, Sumit, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973), p.316.

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