The Challenge of Eurocentrism: Global Perspectives, Policy, and Prospects

Edited by
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(with the assistance of Amit Basole)
For my Daughters: Antara, Indrina, Malini, and Anjana—who will live, I hope, in the promise of a Polycentric, i.e., a De-centered World.
CHAPTER SIX

The Phantom of Liberty: Mo(der)nism and Postcolonial Imaginations in India

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1. Introduction

On May 31, 2003, jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, two of the greatest living European philosophers at that time, issued a joint declaration, in some European newspapers. It was entitled “After the War: The Rebirth of Europe.” The context was the political protests in various European cities against the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq on the one hand and the support of various European leaders (Tony Blair, Vlasta Havel, and Silvio Berlusconi among others) to the U.S. aggression on the other hand. It called upon “European peoples” to recognize and celebrate “four distinctively European achievements: the separation of church and state, the faith in the power of politics and a relatively benign state to ameliorate the impact of capitalism, the ethos of solidarity in the struggle for social justice, and the high esteem accorded to international law and the rights of the individual” (Heffernan 2005, p. 573). This document was mainly written by Habermas and only endorsed by Derrida. However, in a conversation with Giovanna Borradori on the September 11 attacks and global terrorism, Derrida made the following statement:

I say this without any Eurocentrism... But I persist in using this name “Europe,” even if in quotation marks, because, in the long and patient deconstruction required for the transformation to come, the experience Europe inaugurated at the time of the Enlightenment in the relationship between the political and the theological or, rather, the religious, though still uneven, unfulfilled, relative, and complex, will have left in European political space absolutely original marks with regard to religious doctrine... Such marks can be found neither in the Arab world nor in the Muslim world, nor in the Far East, nor...
even... in American democracy, in what in fact governs not the principles but the predominant reality of American political culture.

We used to know Derrida as a postmodernist par excellence, one who would militate against any “centrism,” who waged a war against hierarchy of categories and championed the notion of “difference” over “hierarchy.” It is remarkable to see the same Derrida, when faced with the “clash of civilizations,” returning to the European Enlightenment for a solution. There is not even a hint that the other civilization locked in the clash has anything to offer in terms of a desirable international and social order. Not only that, the solution explicitly recognizes the values intrinsic to the European Enlightenment and finds them totally absent in Islamic civilizations.

We choose to begin with this remarkable statement because it forces us to re-examine the issue of Eurocentrism with a new urgency around a new question—why does Eurocentrism persist? But Europe is not the social formation wherein we search for an answer to this question. We grant and accept that all societies are ethnocentric. Rather, we turn to non-European, in our case, postcolonial India, to listen to the murmurs of a deep “fear” that forecloses any open encounter of the (post)colonized with their own non-European worldviews. In undertaking this project, we are emboldened by the example of Kanth (1997, 2005) who has delivered a comprehensive and uncomprromising verdict on the philosophy of modernism and in particular on its proclivity to convince us of its own emancipatory potential. We find that we cling to Eurocentric discourses, even when we recognize them as such, for fear of losing any vision of a “free,” emancipated future. Progressive thinkers refuse to step out of Eurocentric terrains because they fear that all social projects of emancipation—poverty eradication, human rights, fight against tyranny, exploitation and hierarchy, and secularism—would lose the ally of the oppressed, namely, science and rationality that are self-proclaimed virtues of European modernist thought. We argue that this “fear” was significant in shaping India’s development experience and India’s social experiments after decolonization. Gandhi’s non-Eurocentric model for postcolonial India was shunted by the modernist Nehru who, with all his best intentions, thought that Gandhi’s morality would be an obstacle in devising a social order that liberates people from poverty and oppression. It continues to shape reactions to present day political controversies. We also argue that contemporary Indian social scientists suffer from the same “fear,” even when they militate against colonial “power-knowledge” and even when they are faced with historical opportunities of paradigmatic shifts. This paper is an interrogation of that fear, a turn-around and a brazen stare into the fear that stalks us.

2. The Silent Coup and Freedom at Midnight

India’s independence was marked by a peculiar conjunction of events; while the transfer of power from Britain to India was in its final phase of negotiation, internally there was a silent coup by which the modernists took control over the nation-making of India. The Indian struggle for independence was animoted to a significant degree by the Gandhian discourse on local economic autonomy and decentralized democracy. In the Gandhian vision, the village was the basis of both a self-sufficient economy (based on simple tools, artisanal production and frugal consumption) and political autonomy (the panchayati raj, i.e., local self-governance at the village level). Thus Gandhi notes:

My idea of Village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. (Gandhi 1962, p. 31)

And again,

Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. (p. 69)

One does not have to subscribe to the Gandhian worldview in order to appreciate his vision of a moral society that emphasizes frugality over unbridled lust and acquisitiveness, self-sufficiency over anarchy of markets in a capitalistic profit-making economy, and political autonomy over techno-bureaucratic control. One only needs to understand the ethics of Ahimsa (non-violence) at work in his ideal society—in his rejection of the violent interventions of industrialism in ecology, culture and reproductive processes of social life. It is this morality that drew millions to every call of Gandhi in India’s struggle for independence. The negation of the Gandhian vision, in independent India, thus constitutes a betrayal of the Indian masses, just as capitalism betrayed the masses that stormed the Bastille. The panchayati raj was negated by a strongly centralized Indian federalism and a regime of administration by “experts” and bureaucrats. The local self-sufficient economy was negated by the rational centralized planning exercise in which resource allocation and distribution on a national scale was done by fiat. Local self-sufficiency was systematically destroyed to make way for national markets and national flows of resources, labor and money. The nation, and not the village, was the unit of Soviet-style planning models adopted by independent India under Nehru. In short, the modernists rejected the Gandhian vision of a communitarian society with economically self-sufficient “village republics” and decentralized governance in favor of a secular, liberal democracy riding on fast economic growth through large-scale industrialization and urbanization.

The entire debate on whether modernization in the European style was a desirable or possible course for India to take was rather quickly moved from the political to the scientific-bureaucratic terrain of planning led
by the famous Indian Statistical Institute. As Chatterjee (1993, p. 202) notes, the struggle between the Nehruvian and the Gandhian notion of economic development or "the debate on the need for industrialization... was politically resolved by successfully constituting planning as a domain outside 'the squabbles and conflicts of politics'." This was aided greatly by the birth of the new field of Development Economics. The pioneers of this discipline, Arthur Lewis (1954), Ragnar Nurks (1953) and Albert Hirschmann (1958) saw modernization (or capitalist accumulation and industrialization) as the only viable solution for achieving rapid alleviation of poverty. Rostow's (1960) "Stages of Economic Growth" stated more openly and cruelly what was an unstated assumption behind most early development planning—that salvation for the poor nations lay in mimicking the West. The depoliticization of this debate and its displacement onto the techno-bureaucratic terrain of "developmentalism" meant nothing less than dissolution of the anti-Eurocentric moments of anticolonial resistance movements. We see this as the decisive victory of Eurocentrism wherein the independent nation-state legitimized and defined itself on a notion of social and economic development singularly informed by Eurocentric discourses. An appropriate symbol for this is perhaps the resignation from the pre-independence National Planning Commission (NPC) of J. C. Kumarrappa, the sole Gandhian voice on the commission, who questioned the authority of the NPC to discuss plans for industrialization and eventually dropped out after "virtually every other member had disagreed with his views."

Gandhi differed with modernists such as Nehru not only on the meaning of economic development but also on the nature of the future Indian state. The debate of the Constituent Assembly of India, on the eve of the adoption of the Constitution of Independent India brought into high relief, in the political domain, the central conflict between the Gandhian view of the village or community as the fundamental unit of Indian polity and the liberal, European view of the individual as the fundamental unit. Ridiculing the complaint leveled by some Gandhians that the draft constitution had no place for the "ancient polity of India," Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the author of the constitution commented on India's villages:

That they [the Indian villages] have survived through all vicissitudes maybe a fact. But mere survival has no value... I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India... What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism? I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit. (quoted in Dharmapal 1962/2000, pp. 25–26)

We have quoted Ambedkar at such length because as the writer of independent India's constitution his voice carried great weight and furthermore, coming as he did from the lowest caste in society (he was himself a dalit or an "untouchable") his view of the village as a den of oppression carries moral force. Ambedkar was captivated by liberal modernist discourse (he was John Dewey's student at Columbia University) because of its emancipatory potential. His caste position forced him to challenge the ethicity of the Gandhian village community. Gandhi's vision of independent India's polity emphasized decentralization of power to the village panchayats. This, Ambedkar feared, would only strengthen the local structures of hierarchy within which dalit had suffered for generations. This contradiction, symbolized by the many (and at times bitter) interactions between Gandhi and Ambedkar, is still fundamentally unresolved and the alleviation of strengthening local hierarchies is frequently leveled on communitarian thinkers today.

Thus in the modernist view, as secular, liberal, and feminist critics remind us, the community is the domain of un-freedom, a site of caste and gender oppression, class exploitation, and poverty. The individuated modern (urban) civil society is, if not the domain of freedom, at least a step in the right direction. At the other extreme, for Gandhi, the community is the domain of freedom while the modern "free" individual is a slave to the capitalist and the market. The Gandhians have pointed out that the laborer in capitalism is degraded and alienated; his creativity as an artisan is destroyed and he becomes an appendage to the machine; bourgeois civil society is the space where private property and accumulation are glorified and rewarded, as a result of which capitalism leads to massive ecological destruction, poverty and inequality worldwide.

It is thus a confrontation between two sets of truth-claims. A priori there is no reason why the choice between the individual and the community is a predestined one. But the teleology of Eurocentric history, wherein Europe's transition from community to civil society (through the agency of capital), is simultaneously universalized as well as cast as progress ("as it happened in Europe, so it will elsewhere, and a good thing too") makes the choice predestined. While recognizing that the community harbors many kinds of exploitative social relationships, we pose the following question: if it took centuries to reform capitalism—to end slavery and colonial empires, to sensitize the capitalist society to race, gender and class—the process is still ongoing—then why could a communitarian society modeled on Gandhi's village republics not be similarly reformed, democratized and sensitized to prevailing hierarchies?

3. The Ally of the Oppressed

The nation-making of India was thus firmly anchored in modernist Eurocentric discourses. The social engineering designed to end poverty, achieve growth and end social oppression of various types established and reconfirmed European modernity as the "ally of the oppressed." The Gandhian opposition in time petered out. This led to an imperialism of
categories and a loss of language—other languages, other's languages. Other worldviews were slowly erased in education, health, law, administration, and policy space. Over time other worldviews have become inaccessible to us, shaped as we are, in and through institutions of modernity. We observe that emancipatory or progressive ideas in order to be recognized as being such must speak in the language of liberal or radical European social theory. Non-European emancipatory discourses can only fall short of “true emancipation” at best, or are a threat to the latter at worst. The Gandhian political project may be unique—and may be recognized and admired as such—in promoting a certain morality valued by the majority of human beings (e.g., ahimsa or nonviolence). Yet his strident criticism of Western civilization, including modern science, medicine and education disqualify Gandhi as a relevant political thinker in the modern political culture. We would rather tolerate the violence of capitalism which, the telos of modernity tells us, will produce its own “grave-diggers,” the working class, rather than put our faith in supposedly timeless, unchanging Gandhian communities.

Yet, the violence of modernity (particularly economic development) and predatory capital has led to numerous and multiplying acts of resistance to this Eurocentric project. Communities have thrown themselves against capital to resist dispossession and environmental degradation. In recent decades, modernity has come under criticism in both its homeland and in post-colonies. Concerns with livelihood and environment have made us go back to Gandhi such that “inside every thinking Indian, there is a Gandhian and a Marxist struggling for supremacy” (Guha 2001, p. 6). The resurgence of community against capital all over the world has reinstated the debate between Gandhi and Nehru in contemporary times. In the economic sphere, large-scale exclusion of the laboring population from the capitalist miracle has shattered the image of modernity as the ally of the oppressed. The continued sabotage of sovereignty of third world countries not only by richer nation-states, but also by supra-national bodies such as World Bank, IMF, WTO, and so on have cast doubt over the liberal intentions of modernity.

But as in 1947, the fear of non-Eurocentric discourses stops us from articulating a counter-hegemonic position against capital grounded in the community. Contemporary debates clearly betray this fear. Consider the arguments of Sarkar (2000) and Nanda (2002, 2003) that a critique of Eurocentrism or of “Enlightenment rationalism” unwittingly strengthens the forces of religious fundamentalism. In the context of the rise of the Hindu fundamentalist Right in Indian politics, many are apprehensive about a possible Fascist movement in India. Parallels have been identified between the rise of Fascism in Europe and the rise of Hindutva in India. To challenge Enlightenment philosophy and to claim a non-Eurocentric history for Indian subalterns in the given context is perceived to be dangerous because it might lead to a kind of indigenism uncomfortably close to the chauvinistic claims of the Hindu Right. Critiques of Enlightenment rationality are seen to undermine secularism in the fight against religious fundamentalism, since secularism is understood to be a unique Enlightenment legacy. Local culture and history is deemed irrelevant in addressing a contemporary social and political problem. Thus the fact that South Asia is home to numerous indigenous traditions (such as sufism and bhakti) some of which had historically diffused the tensions created by organized Hinduisms and Islam, and in the process created a syncretic, pluralistic faith, counts for very little in this formulation. In his reply to Sarkar, Chakrabarty (2000) laments this loss:

It is true that the experience of fascism has left a certain trauma in leftist intellectuals in the West. They have ceded to the fascists all moments of poetry, mysticism and the religious and the mysterious in the construction of political sentiments and communities (however transient and inoperative). Romanticism now only reminds them of Nazis. Ours are cultures rich in these elements. Gandhi, Tagore and a host of other nationalists have shown by their examples what tremendous creative energies these elements could unleash in us when mobilized for the purpose of fabricating new forms of life. It would be sad if we ceded this entire heritage to the Hindu extremists out of a fear that our romanticism must be the same as whatever the Europeans produced under that name in their histories, and that our present blunders, whatever these are, must be the same as theirs in the past. What, indeed, could be a greater instance of submission to a Eurocentric imagination than that fear? (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 277)

Noting that recent scholarship in the Subaltern Studies school has tended to challenge “Enlightenment rationalism” and Eurocentrism, and has valorized “the community,” Sarkar (2000) comments on the “shared discursive space” between this position and the rhetoric of the Hindu Right:

... the Hindu right often attacks the secular, liberal nation-state as a Western importation, precisely the burden of much late-Subaltern argument: suggesting affinities that are hopefully, still distasteful, yet difficult to repudiate within the parameters of an anti-Enlightenment discourse grounded in notions of community. (p. 313)

But does a critique of Eurocentrism automatically bring us closer to the forces of reaction and fundamentalism? We think not. For example, Gandhian philosophy can certainly be described as “an anti-Enlightenment discourse grounded in notions of community,” and although in Sarkar’s estimation it therefore automatically shares discursive space with Hindu fundamentalism, Gandhi himself was as much an
object of criticism of the Hindu right (and indeed was assassinated by a member of the Hindu right) as of the Left. Further Gandhi's philosophy of the community as a site of resistance against modernity drew as much upon what Rudolph and Rudolph (2006) have called the "Other West" (Ruskin, Carlyle, Carpenter, Thoreau, and Tolstoy) as it did upon Gandhi's own reading of Indian history and Indian texts. Thus Gandhi found allies in the West sympathetic to his own project, as it were on his own terms.

Sarkar (2000) is understandably skeptical of a critique of a homogenized notion of "Western colonial power/knowledge" and "Enlightenment rationalism" and of the uncritical valorization of "the community" that leads to a blindness to class, caste and gender, all of which form persistent and important structures of oppression within communities. He articulates his fear thus:

Culturalism rejects the importance of class and class struggle, while notions of civil, democratic, feminist and liberal individual rights—many of them indubitably derived from certain Enlightenment traditions—get delegitimized by a repudiation of the Enlightenment as a bloc. (p. 318)

These are exactly the concerns of Nanda (2003) who advances a similar though more general criticism of "postmodern intellectuals" who uphold left-wing political ideals, but who have lost all confidence in the classic left-wing cultural ideals of scientific reason, modernity and the Enlightenment" (p. 1, emphasis in the original). Here we see clearly the fear that rejection of Eurocentric social categories or worldview is counter-productive to the emancipation of the oppressed; in part because alien categories can break up traditional hierarchies (such as those based on caste or gender) in a way that is politically explosive. Point taken. But in her eagerness to demonstrate the links between Hindu fascism, neo-Gandhism, and post-colonial/postmodern scholarship Nanda overlooks their many important distinctions. The unspoken assumption is always that truly emancipatory or liberatory potential is carried only by modern science, and only a movement toward liberal, secular democracy of the Western kind can be considered progress. As Nanda (2003) forcefully asserts, "Skepticism, institutionalized by modern science, is the standpoint epistemology of the oppressed" (p. xiii, emphasis in the original). And further, "it is time it [modern science] was recognized, once again, as an ally of social justice, peace and advancement all around the world." (p. 267). Nanda points to the numerous instances of empowerment of oppressed groups utilizing Western notions of rights, democracy and equality before the law. Thus her strongest weapon is her assertion that this liberal, scientific utopia is desired by the very subaltern and oppressed peoples, in whose name calls for decolonization and respect for all knowledge traditions are put forth by "fashionable" postmodern and postcolonial intellectuals. In other words,

the battle against Eurocentrism is basically an elite concern; the masses simply want more Euro-modernity.

Although we agree with Nanda (2002, p. 217) that the "underdog" need not always "reject [modern science] as alien and undesirable" we also observe that confrontations and contestations between "Science" and "Tradition" are allowed within the modernist frame, only so long as the ultimate victory of Science is assured. We do not deny that left-liberal political categories are useful in constructing resistance to oppression in many forms. Specifically, within the European institutions that we carry as a colonial legacy these categories offer certain empowering possibilities. These European categories will clash with other, local non-European categories in the complex space of postcolonial experience. Categories can and should clash but outcomes should not be predestined if one wishes to eschew epistemic violence. Within the Eurocentric social discourses, however, only one outcome is sensible or desirable, even permitted—the subaltern's acceptance of European modernity. The rejection of European modernity by the subaltern is deemed unacceptable and the acceptance of non-Eurocentric rationality by the modernist is not even a possibility worthy of consideration. This epistemic position is imperial/colonial.

Rather than demand "epistemic purity" (whether European or indigenous) from political emancipation projects, we emphasize the need to break the hegemonic hold of Eurocentric liberal and radical thought as the sole credible mode of thought available to us. We are led to this position partly by the observation that the response of the "underdog" is unlikely to be reducible to such simple binaries as acceptance or rejection of "Western values" or "the legacy of the Enlightenment." We have already seen above that the Gandhian communitarian model was as much "Eastern" as it was influenced by the "Other West." But the point can also be illustrated by Nanda's own example of B. R. Ambedkar and his use of Eurocentric rationality in fighting caste. Nanda (2002, p. 217) notes that "Ambedkar and his dalit followers challenged the brahminical knowledge about the natural world not in the name of their own dalit caste myths and origin stories, but in the name of scientifically obtained objective truth." Yet Ambedkar's most prominent act of rebellion, the celebration of which still today draws millions of dalits from all over India, is his conversion to Buddhism. Thus Ambedkar found his exit from the oppression of tradition, not only in the liberalism of John Dewey but equally so in a 2,500-year-old religious, anti-caste movement. Nanda understands this act as Ambedkar's conversion to "reason and scientific method" based on his being able to "hybridize" John Dewey's ideas on scientific temper with the Buddha's teachings. But she admits that indigenous anti-caste movements and numerous heterodox anti-Vedic schools also played a part in influencing Ambedkar. The reliance on Buddhist and other non-brahmin philosophies by dalit leaders is for Nanda (2003, p. 192), "an attempt to find a cultural homologue for materialist and skeptical traditions in
India’s minority, non-Vedic traditions.” Why can the same acts not be read as drawing upon European ideas to the extent that they strengthen indigenous sources of resistance? Or is this merely a matter of semantics? We think not.

Nanda (2003) recognizes the postcolonial condition of hybridity, typified here by Gandhi and Ambedkar, but feels that postmodernist theorists have wrongly adopted a “celebratory stance toward hybridity as the politics of emancipation” (p. 178). An uncritical valorization of hybridity is wrong in her opinion because it sees no problem with say a farmer’s adoption of high-yield seeds and chemical fertilizer and the same farmer’s deeply hierarchical and patriarchal worldview. Thus she is led to her conclusion: “It is the incompleteness of the project of Enlightenment, rather than an excess of it, that explains India’s turn to reactionary modernism” (p. 43, emphasis in the original). How can we then explain the fact that France, which more than any other European nation—took secularism to its height by legally separating the state from religion in public life, at the same time, denied this separation in Algeria and instead relied on the most conservative religious discourses in colonial administration? How can we make sense of John Stuart Mill when he ruled out the colonized from the land of liberty—claiming they were as yet not fit for liberty? Was it not hybridization on part of the enlightened Europe—that is, a reactionary modernism of Europe, a modernism that was always and already reactionary? Was Enlightenment incomplete in Europe too, then?

An important caveat is in order here. Our project is not a mere “celebration of hybridity,” that Nanda scornfully attributes to the postmodernist movement. We are not content ascribing the label “alternative modernity” to the phenomenon of high-tech agriculture mixed in with caste and gender oppression. We do not argue for a challenge to Eurocentrism merely to assert postcolonial identity, difference or agency. We rather ask that political emancipation projects that do not speak in the language of liberal and radical European thought ought not to be automatically suspect for that reason alone. Ultimately, as regards challenging Eurocentrism, Nanda’s anxiety stems from the belief that “treating rationality and knowledge as completely constructed by culture puts culture beyond a reasoned critique” (Nanda 2002, p. 216). Thus in showing Eurocentric rationalism to be parochialism masquerading as universalism Nanda is afraid that we might strengthen the notion of a “Hindu rationality” which can conveniently justify all manner of oppression. But as the existence of numerous anti-caste and religious tolerance movements which not only contributed to religious tolerance between different religious communities, but also advanced other emancipatory demands, such as the demand for more equality between women and men (in case of bhakti) shows, treating rationality as a cultural phenomenon does not put culture beyond critique. To assert this is to overlook thousands of years of liberation struggles against all manner of oppression, that predate nineteenth-century European liberal and radical thought.

4. The Pashchimikrit and the Bahishkrit

Paradoxically, we cling to Eurocentric discourses even at a time when local politics and local communities have risen to unprecedented prominence in the Indian political space shattering previous strangleholds of both Westernized and indigenous elites. We argue that this phenomenon (which we describe in more detail shortly) opens up a historical opportunity for the development of genuine non-traditional, non-modern alternatives.

Development in India began with big-bang industrialization in the first two decades after independence. This regime of economic planning, inspired by Soviet five-year planning models, was buttressed by the absolute dominance of Indian politics by the Indian National Congress. Khilnani (1999) notes that the Congress Party15 was able to rule India unchallenged for the first two decades after independence because of an "unbeatable" coalition that forged between "commercial and industrial capitalists, rural landlords, and the bureaucratic and managerial elite (in the later decades, newly enriched farmers and unionized public-sector workers..."

These were social groups which had either been brought into existence with colonial rule or had greatly benefited from it. They constituted the pashchimikrit samaj (Westernized society) whose vision of a future society was largely based upon the European experience and whose liberal and radical sections (such as the intelligentsia) drank deeply from the internal critiques of Europe’s modernity. The pashchimikrit samaj was affiliated with the "imperialism of categories" and saw Indian society largely through Western eyes (Sahasrabudhey 1991).

This development model came to be challenged by late 1960s, when economists were dismayed to find that two decades of rapid growth had not ended material deprivations of India’s majority. Dandekar and Rath’s (1971) pioneering study on poverty showed that economic development in India in the 1960s did not benefit the poorest 40% of the population at all, despite the high rate of growth of national income in the first three five-year plans. As disillusionment with the planning model set in, starting with the 1980s and picking up pace since the reforms of 1991, the Indian economy was restructured along neoliberal lines and the transition from “a closed to an open” economy is still ongoing.16 Despite a decade or more of reforms, however, a general picture of poverty and exclusion prevails. The poverty rate still stands at 30% (albeit reduced from 50% in the 1970s) and the Gini coefficient measuring inequality has actually risen from 28–29 to 35–36 (rural and urban respectively).17 Even today, only about 27 million people—7 to 8 per cent of the workforce—are employed in the organized sector, that is, public sector and organized private sector. The rest of the non-agricultural workforce earns its livelihood in the urban and rural informal sectors with low incomes and precarious conditions of employment unprotected by laws and social security provisions. What is obvious is that even when industry increased its share of national
income, it did not support a correspondingly larger population. Rather, agriculture, with a decreasing share of national income, has to harbor a more than proportionate burden of population. At the same time that it provides secure, protected jobs at a decent salary to only 7%-8% of population, the development of the modern economy led to the displacement of 25-50 millions since 1951 (Murickan et al. 2003). Between 1950 and 1991, only 25% of displaced people have been rehabilitated, leaving aside questions regarding what constitutes adequate compensation. During the same time, 30%-50% of common property resources have been depleted. Jodha (1991) claims that traditional common property resource management had collapsed in 90% of the villages he surveyed. In short, expanding capitalism breaks down traditional economies, yet cannot provide livelihoods for the people thus displaced from their traditional sources of subsistence.

The vast majority of small and marginal peasants, tribal, rural landless laborers, as well as the urban unorganized workers (street vendors, casual workers, sweat shop workers, etc.) are victims of dispossession resulting from capitalist accumulation. Dispossessed, disentitled or otherwise diminished, these groups found themselves excluded from meaningful participation in society—both due to the lack of adequate income opportunities in the high-productivity modern economy and the absence of a social welfare system for such a large section of the population. This history of dispossession and economic exclusion traces a continuity across both regimes and creates—as its own historical product—the bahishkrit samaj (ostracized society). The bahishkrit samaj is neither rural nor traditional—that is, it is not a preindustrial, precapitalist residue. Rather it is the victim of dispossession that accompanies capitalist growth and so such is to be found everywhere (in the countryside and in the cities, in agriculture, in industry and in services) as the historical product of modern capitalist development. The “jobless” growth of the modern economy sucks up natural resources at an accelerated rate, yet modern technology is becoming more and more labor-saving. As a result the modern economy requires an ever more share of natural resources and an ever-shrinking part of the global workforce, which means that a burgeoning surplus labor force must subsist on a dwindling resource base. Modern capitalism creates its own huge wasteland—a seething mass of “excluded” poor with inadequate resources to sustain life. This great social divide is eloquently captured in the pashchimikrit—bahishkrit distinction—which we owe to Saharsabudhey (1991)—where the binary opposite of “Westernized” is not “Indian,” but rather, “ostracized or excluded.”

The Eurocentric economic model leads not only to a minority of “beneficiaries of development” and a huge mass of “refugees of development”—the pashchimikrit and bahishkrit in the economic sense—but also different modes of organization of life in the pashchimikrit and bahishkrit samaj. While the pashchimikrit samaj valorizes private acquisition and accumulation, bahishkrit samaj sustains itself on a “culture of sharing.” Yet the latter is denigrated as a culture of poverty, rather than a culture of convivial non-violent survival. The former is still hegemonic as a culture of progress, in the sense that it is a way out of poverty, even though it has threatened the survival and livelihood of majority of mankind. Thus the pashchimikrit-bahishkrit distinction is as much cultural, even epistemic, as economic. Kumarapppa’s resignation from the National Planning Commission was the exit of the first bahishkrit from the nation-making of India, even before India became independent.

Paradoxically, despite the economic exclusion and cultural domination, the bahishkrit samaj is more and more visible in the political sphere. By any criterion, Indian democracy has flourished and almost every major social, cultural, and economic issue in India is represented in mainstream Indian political space via political parties. Caste, class, religion, language, ethnicity, autonomy—all these issues are prominently present in the contemporary Indian polity. In this sense, there has been an Indianization of Indian politics over time, such that issues more specific to the “local” are politically dominant compared to the universal European categories like secularization, modernization, development and socialist planning which ruled for the first 25 years of Indian independence. More and more people are voting and participating in the broader electoral processes in India in the recent times. Moreover, more and more people from the oppressed and marginalized social groups are voting. Rural participation exceeds urban, hence by extension, poorer sections of Indian society are voting in greater numbers than the richer. At the national level, participation of women, dalits, and adivasis (indigenous peoples) has increased. Palshikar and Kumar (2004) conclude that “if we are comparing the present situation with the one that obtained till the 1970s, then it may be accurate to argue that social deprivation is no more an obstacle for electoral participation” (p. 5414). In a similar vein Nayyar (1998) discusses the radical disjuncture between economics and politics in India today pulling the population in opposite directions. In the sphere of economic life, more and more people are excluded from the benefits of economic growth under the neoliberal regime, yet the same marginalized groups are included in the political processes of electoral democracy. “The rich dominate the economy now more than ever, but the poor have a strong voice in the polity more than earlier. And there is a mismatch” (Suri 2004, p. 5405).

Even, outside the electoral sphere, the bahishkrit is visibly engaged in a direct confrontation with the state as well as private capital. Both violent and non-violent local resistances to development projects have garnered more and more attention. Starting with the Chipko and Narmada struggles in the 1970s and 1980s to the myriad struggles in Kalinganagar (against POSCO-India), Phalimada (against Coca Cola), Singur and Nandigram (against the Government of West Bengal), and so on, all have brought home the point that development is a politically negotiated process. No longer can a later-day Nehru with sanctimony and confidence, ask his citizens to suffer “in the interest of the country.” Radical challenges in the
form of people's movements have emerged against the prevailing models of development. These non-party political movements have encompassed a gamut of social issues ranging from class and caste based struggles to local control of local resources and have involved sections of Indian society that have traditionally been excluded in formal politics (tribals, dalits, women, small peasants, informal sector workers).

And yet, despite the manifold multiplication of such indigenous resistances, Indian social scientists and philosophers have not seized on the opportunity to construct non-Eurocentric categories and discourses. It is to this problem that we now turn.

5. Order of Discourse and the Rarefaction of Knowledge

In a recent article, Basu (2007) has argued in the context of the controversy over the acquisition of farmlands for industrialization in India that displacement of farming populations for industrial projects is an act of “primitive accumulation” by global capital. He believes that the global calculus of capital can only be countered by the concrete and the locally embedded values of communities. By communities, we mean groups of people who populate a distinct “life-space” in the society and even as members of the broader society, have another identity which is a product of sharing and surviving on a certain resource base and community infrastructure and network. These communities can be traditional (forest dwellers and tribal groups) as well as contemporary (informal waste recycler, street hawkers and slum communities in metropolises). The ethics of the local— as we understand it in the Gandhian tradition— is the ethics of survival, conservation and reproduction which provides an alternative to global capital’s logic of expansion, transformation and accumulation. Yet, can we expect this call for a return to the local to snowball into a major epistemic overhaul—the inauguration of a new episteme—non-modernist, yet progressive and emancipatory and drawing on different sources of wisdom and life-experience? Can we argue for “situated knowledge” which “takes into account local knowledge and practice—how denizens perceive and interpret their world,” and recognizes that “[h]eory constructed from below produces different futures than theory constructed from above”? (Rudolph 2005, p. 17). We argue that retrieving the non-European local discourses, traditions and world views might help us pluralize the space of knowledge.

Modeled as it is on Euro-modernist institutions, the Indian educational system either relegates alternative non-modernist philosophies to the margins or restricts them to special areas of study. Further, the International Academy, with its system of rewards and punishments makes non-European discourses unavailable or un-renumerative. We argue that the institutional infrastructure of Eurocentric knowledge production may make certain non-European critical traditions simply inaccessible to the social scientists working on the postcolonial experience. Chakrabarty (2000) recognizes this loss of language:

Faced with the task of analyzing development or social practices in modern India, few if any Indian social scientists or social scientists of India would argue seriously with, say, the thirteenth century logician Gangesa or with the grammarian and linguistic philosopher Bhatti... Sad though it is, one result of European colonial rule in South Asia is that the intellectual traditions once unbroken and alive in Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic are now only matters of historical research... And yet past European thinkers and their categories are never quite dead for us in the same way. (pp. 5-6)

Interestingly, Chakrabarty also talks about the constructed nature of the “European intellectual tradition,” pointing out how work by Martin Bernal (1991) and Samir Amin (1989) has problematized the very idea of an unbroken tradition from classical Greece to Renaissance or early-Enlightenment Europe. The “appropriation” of classical Greek scholars was, if anything, the defining feature of the intellectual revival of Europe in the fourteenth-seventeenth centuries. Aristotle was 1,500 years and three civilizations (Greek, Roman, and Islamic) removed from Bacon. Could it seriously be argued that scholars such as Bhatti, Ibn Khaldun, or Abul Fazl, are hopelessly removed from our circumstance and that we are unable to engage with them, if the very European Enlightenment that we cling to was built upon a similar intellectual adventure?

We have argued that in part it is the fear of being labeled “reactionary,” “nativist,” “cultural nationalist,” or even “fascist” that makes us hesitant. Within the confines of European radical and critical thought we are safe from such allegations. But if we step outside, we are deserted the only reliable ally we have in the battle against exploitation, poverty and oppression. But that is not the only reason. Even protests against Eurocentrism, in so far as they are lodged in the global academic institutions—which are shaped and dominated by European theoretical traditions—are subjected to a “disciplinary price of admission.” Even the resistance to Eurocentrism has to be based on Western texts in order to be intelligible to the reviewers and referees of international publishing circuits. Can we hope to publish in an international journal an article that refers primarily to vernacular texts, the majority of which might never be translated into major European languages? Even if it gets published, the author will surely be criticized for citing obscure texts. Yet there is a sustained articulation of challenges to European modernity in many vernacular texts—in bad print and cheap jackets—published by small local Third World publishing houses. The “unavailability” of alternative non-European discourses reflects a materiality inherent in the discursive practices and institutions of global academia—a materiality that has the effect of screening out a large set of articulations, utterances, statements and cries as “non-serious,” “non-scientific” knowledge.
Of course the status of Science in modernist thought has been subjected to trenchant critique by philosophers in the European tradition (e.g., Husserl, Heidegger, and Foucault) as well as outside it (e.g., Ashis Nandy and Rajani Kanth). One cannot overemphasize the point that hegemony of official Science undermines the democracy of knowledge itself. In this spirit, our project is to draw attention to the fact that knowledge, rather than being scarce and held by experts, is much more abundant in society and much more democratically held than widely believed. It is produced at many social sites, the academia and the laboratory being just some of them. And the increasing prominence of the bhishkrit samaj should provoke an examination of its knowledge and should be converted into a sustained critique of Eurocentrism as well as the development of non-Eurocentric emancipatory visions for society.

Thus we emphasize that ours is not a call to replace the hegemony of Eurocentrism and “modern” Science with the authority of “tradition” or the holy cow of the “community.” Instead we argue for epistemic humility and plurality of knowledge. The political assertion of the bhishkrit samaj has unveiled reserves of alternative knowledges, epistemises—which cannot be strictly classified according to the traditional/modern binary, but reflect a hybridization motivated by the struggle for livelihood in the face of predatory capital. Even more interestingly, some of these movements have directly confronted both, the Eurocentric nature of the planning and the neoliberal development models, as well as traditional knowledge hierarchies. In a recent article Sangvai (2007) notes that the challenge for the new social movements “has been to counter the new paradigm of modernism and development by proposing alternatives that are not ‘archaic or traditional’ but rather rely greatly on local cultures, initiatives and knowledge as key driving forces.” And again,

The conventional development model is established on the notion that there exists only one linear knowledge base. The new consciousness questions its supremacy and validity itself... The appreciation of plurality of knowledge, of every community and group, based on certain criterion, is replacing the hegemonic concept of “knowledge”. Limiting the vast spectrum of knowledge due to the colonial or brahminical approach, we are deprived of a rich and varied world of knowledge, expressions and production processes that common people developed. (p. 115)

6. Protean Power and Instrumentalization of the “Local”

Power shifts continually to accommodate resistance and old language of resistance may become new means of exercising power. So observe that since the 1990s and into this century proponents of the neoliberal agenda such as the World Bank and USAID have been prominently pushing the idea of participatory development and of the importance of indigenous knowledge. The “new development economics” would seem to have learned its lessons from failure of technocratic, state-based approaches. It speaks in a language similar to that employed by radical anti-Eurocentric critics. Indigenous or traditional knowledge of the sort that Sangvai (2007) alludes to has already found its own comfortable niche in development discourse. Mainstream thinking on sustainable development has acknowledged that “poor-people’s knowledge” (to use the title of a 2004 World Bank publication), should play an essential role in their own development. The rhetoric of participatory, sustainable development based on indigenous knowledge, has proved entirely consistent with neoliberal macroeconomic policy with its emphasis on fiscal austerity, roll-back of the State’s welfare activity and a devolution of responsibility (but often not resources) to local government and small communities. The Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendments to Indian Constitution are landmark events toward promoting the panchayati system of governance. Is this turn toward local self-government under neoliberalism a genuine move to decentralize power or yet another way to trim the powers of the state against capital and the giving up of all pretense of the state’s promise of radical economic uplift; a failure masked as radical democratization?

Perhaps unsurprisingly, at the same time that these concepts have become widely prevalent, they have been purged of any radical edge they may possess. Thus indigenous knowledge is often conceptualized not as a non-Eurocentric vision of a future society free of oppression and injustice but rather as a reservoir of solutions or “box of tools” to be drawn upon as needed for the realization of the original modernist goals of development and transformation of third world societies. Local knowledge can be a force for radical transformation and for mounting a locally grounded challenge to the new imperialism, as Basu, Sangvai, and many others have argued. But for this, the apolitical and technocentric category of indigenous knowledge needs to be replaced by a more politically useful category. Knowledge is not merely a collection of technical fixes or production methods; knowledge belongs to a worldview that is itself the product of a particular social organization, a particular type of society, a culture, a history, an ecology. Thus for example, when we valorize “local knowledge” or “traditional knowledge” only as far as it relates to the sustainable use of forest produce, and ignore the knowledge produced by the same community about social organization, about role of markets, or norms of consumption, commodification of resources etc., we slide from a sociopolitical to a technical understanding of knowledge. A fuller consideration of the merits and demerits of indigenous knowledge discourse in challenging Eurocentrism is outside the scope of this article. We simply hope to have provided some initial comments in this direction.
7. Conclusion

In this paper we have put forward a few arguments to explain the enduring hegemony of Eurocentric political and social thought. An important achievement of Eurocentric social theory has been to monopolize the position of ally of the oppressed, that is, the uniquely progressive role in the struggle against exploitation, injustice and poverty. As a result critical thinkers cling to modernist thought, even when they recognize its Eurocentric premises, for fear of losing any vision of a free, emancipated future. We argue that this fear was significant in shaping India's development experience and India's social experiments after decolonization. The imperialism of liberal-radical European ideas has erased, deformed, denigrated or written off other emancipatory projects embedded in heterogeneous local discourses and philosophies. In independent India, the Gandhian vision of a moral economy and a democratic society suffered similar fate in its struggle against European models of economic development. While the modernist project of development has increasingly come under attack due to its failure in delivering a decent standard of life for people in the developing world, the loss of language resulting from the erasure of local discourses has forced/persuaded postcolonial scholars to argue that alternative non-Eurocentric discourses may be irretrievably lost to us. Instead we argue that it is the institutional infrastructure of the Academy that reproduces and sustains the domination of Western texts resulting in what has been called the imperialism of categories. We argue, moreover, that academic elitism leads scholars to overlook the essential plurality of knowledge—the fact that knowledge is produced at many social sites, the Academy being just one among many other such sites. People, in, and through living, produce alternatives, counter-discourses. In order to chisel out categories of thought that do justice to our lived experience, that is, in order to reclaim a plurality of languages for ourselves, we need to use this "social" archive of alternatives to European modernity. That is why a return to the "local" is so important for fabricating any alternative to Eurocentric thoughts and to counter the elitism of social thought. We end with a cautionary note that even local discourses are being appropriated and their radical potential subverted by the high institutions of modernity in the name of decentralization, globalization and inclusion.

Before we conclude, a confession is in order. Throughout this paper, we have engaged in the art and politics of representation—in talking about "Europe" and "non-Europe," as if there is only one of each type, as if one can talk about a "Europe" and a "non-Europe," as if the terms themselves do not carry the marks of discursive violence. We acknowledge that in doing so we become complicit in the violence. In defense, we have this to say. We are contesting the hegemonic representation of modern Europe as the apostle of liberty. In this we are building solidarity with those traditions within Europe which have contested this representation and continue to do so. There is nothing uniquely non-European about communitarian ethics or a pluralistic worldview that recognizes the values of the "local." We have cited several Western texts in presenting and substantiating our anti-Eurocentric views—texts which speak for "Europe's own other"—though we have not clearly traced our intellectual debt to those traditions. This is partly due to the constraints of space and partly because we wanted to emphasize the urgent need to revisit the traditions of local discourses within postcolonial India. That is why we have suppressed the irrepressible plurality that inheres in the figure of Europe, not to deny it, but to take the gaze away from Europe—a plural Europe, notwithstanding—toward a plural India. In doing so, we believe, we also contribute toward counter-hegemonic struggles within Europe, against a totalizing figure of "Europe." In assailing this figure of Europe, we are slaying the Phantom of Liberty that stalks the pluralist multitude in Europe as elsewhere.

We also have to make a second confession. We have mitigated against Eurocentrism, yet we have not clearly stated whether the community or the local is free from ethnocentrism of its own kind. We admit that human beings will perhaps always be ethnocentric. In arguing for the "local" and the "plural"—that is, a radical heterogeneity of worldviews and discourses—we hope to weaken the power and violence of ethnocentrism. After all ethnocentrism in its benign form is simply the limit of our knowledge—something that we are unable to transcend, a view of life that is necessarily bounded. When we come across other cultures, we ought to approach them with wonder and a poetic craving for the unknown. We become judgmental only when we extrapolate ourselves beyond our natural limits, beyond the ethical boundaries of our collective and individual identities.

Finally, when we envision a new social order based on a multitude of communities, we do not posit a new utopia, we do not claim that the community is the domain of Freedom. In fact, we share with the critics of community many of their apprehensions. Rather we posit a different terrain of emancipatory struggles. The emancipatory discourses in such a social order will work within an institutional framework based on the episteme of plurality and "embedded/situated" knowledge rather than on the epistemic foundation of universalism and homogeneity. This will also help undermine tendencies toward fascism and aggressive social chauvinisms of different colors so endemic in modernism.

**Notes**

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1. The interview is available online at http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/derrida/derrida911.html. Last accessed on December 3, 2008.


3. Developmentalism: An ideology premised on the "need to develop" in societies represented as inadequate and lacking in some a priori criteria.
4. Chatterjee (1993, pp. 200–216). Other than Kumarrapa, the NPC consisted of 4 capitalists, 5 scientists, 3 economists, and 2 political figures (Nehru and the labor leader N. M. Joshi). Chatterjee locates the necessity for developing a political project in the "expert," technocratic domain in the foreseen need for forms of exploitation of subsistence producers associated with primitive accumulation "which could not be legitimized through the representative processes of politics." For a more celebratory account of the heady early days of planning and the desire to go on to the tribe of economists see Byres (1998).

5. Dalits—The word means "oppressed" and refers to the lowest position in the Hindu caste hierarchy, those outside the caste system, the "untouchables." Historically dalits have performed occupations of the lowest caste in traditional Hindu society. They are employed as laborers, cleaning garbage and human refuse, etc. Even today dalits (also known as the scheduled castes) are severely underprivileged segments of Indian society.

6. Gandhi’s lower-caste panthayats as communally elected bodies, not as the traditional council of village elders. Moreover, Gandhi himself was a sort of anarchist when it came to individuality. He was for least government by the state and even argued that majority opinion is not always the correct way to go. See http://www.calpeacepower.org/0201/gandhi_anarchist.htm. Last accessed on December 3, 2008.

7. We react differently to historical transformation in societies within the Euro-modernist discourse. For example, when Michel Foucault supported the Indian revolution of 1979 as a radical challenge to European modernity, his comments were taken as "miscalculations" or "foibles." They were considered aberrant writings by an otherwise great philosopher in the European tradition. It was simply Foucault’s "mistake," a temporary and rare slippage of a great European mind. On the other hand, contemporary China’s turn to capitalism is not considered a disaster of the same order as Islam’s turn to Islamism as the former is still an experiment within modernity, even though the turn away from socialist principles to capitalist wage-labor as a means of producing a prosperous population and a regime of prosperity and a regressive periodization and a regressive periodization and a regressive periodization and a regressive periodization and a regressive periodization and a regressive periodization and a regressive periodization.

8. Hindutva ("Hindu-ness") is the ideology of a nationalist, Hindu-chauvinist political movement in India, ideologically committed to the idea of a Hindu nation, via a highly selective reading of India’s syncretic cultural tradition. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) that governed from 1999 to 2004 is part of the Hindutva movement.

9. There are grounds for this fear that we share with Sarkar and Nanda. For example, in the name of non-European centricity, a purely Vedic heritage has been claimed for the pre-Vedic India. Harappa Civilization of South Asia in order to demonstrate that Vedic culture is completely indigenous to the sub-continent. Thapar (2002, p. 12) notes: "The notion that the Vedic culture and language had a genesis within the Indian subcontinent goes back to a politically-motivated Hindu ideology of the 1920s and 1930s. The intention was to insist that the Vedic culture, which was held to be one of the greatest civilizations of the world, was Vedic, and that the entire Hindu civilization was Vedic." The concept of a "purely Vedic" civilization is closely linked to the idea of a Hindu nation.

12. Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing inherent in the idea of obedience to an Ahikar or a Chakravartin, if they are so fortunate as to find one.” (Mill 1975, pp. 15–16, cited in Mehra 1999, p. 70.)

13. Nanda’s preferred “alternative hybridity” combines “a modernist appropriation of rationalist and naturalistic traditions” (typified in her opinion by Ambedkar). This hybridity is allowed only in so far as it does not depart from modernism and naturalism. But why, we wonder, should rationalism itself be restricted to its modernist avatar? Would a hybrid politics taking Buddha’s anti-caste rationalism and the Sufi/Buddhist philosophy of love be unacceptable simply because it fails to pay homage to the Enlightenment?

14. This point has been stressed by several authors including Amin (1989), Wallerstein (1977), Dussel (1990), and Kanti (2005).

15. The Indian National Congress, also known as the Congress party, is an Indian political party in India, founded in 1885. It played a prominent role in India’s independence struggle under the leadership of Tilak, Gandhi, Subhas Bose and Nehru and after independence ruled unchallenged under the Prime Ministership of Jawaharlal Nehru for nearly thirty years.

16. Import duties and tariffs have been substantially lowered or eliminated, stock markets opened to foreign investors, the indigenous licensing system dismantled (see Rao and Dutt 2006 for one account).

17. Rao and Dutt (2006). Other indicators show this as well. The average Indian family today is absorbing 150 kg less per year of food grains than in 1991; average calorie intake has fallen from already low levels, and since data show that urban calorie intake has risen, it is rural absorption that has fallen much more than the average (Pandit 2003, p. 314).

18. According to Pashukanis and Kumar (2004), 65% rural and semi-urban versus 53% urban in 1999 and 66% rural as compared to 56% upper-castes in 2004.

19. The Chipko movement (lit. "to stick") in India began in 1973 in the Uttarakhand region of India and was composed of female peasants who acted to prevent deforestation and to reclaim traditional forest rights threatened by the contractor system of the state Forest Department. The "Save the Naraini" movement has agitated against the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam and for tribal rights in Western India since the 1980s. The other examples cited, are more recent struggles for the Indian peasantry and the agricultural sector. In 1999, the anti-Coca Cola agitation in Plachimada, which was linked to groundwater depletion.

20. "If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country." Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking to villagers who were to be displaced by the Hirakud Dam, 1948, quoted in Roy (1999).

21. Mowitt (2001, pp. 11–12) talks of the "discursive and institutional infrastructure of the critique of Eurocentrism" and why failure to take that into account may lead to "simply more and better Eurocentrism."

22. Husserl observed that official Science "regalated life-world" i.e., the lived world, to the inferior status of domain of 'non-serious' knowledge, or subjective knowledge incapable of producing truths. Foucault, similarly, was not against Science, but against the hegemony of Science and called rather for the "union of erudite knowledge and local memories." In Peet (2005, p. 131).

23. There is a rapidly growing literature on the concrete application of indigenous/traditional knowledge in these present day contexts, usually combining insights from "modern science". See, for example, Warren, Slidker, and Brokenshi (1995) and Smalloe, Bicker, and Toon (1999). The focus is on technical solutions such as artificial reef management by local communities in coastal fisheries (Kurien 2007), or restoring control of indigenous populations over extraction of rubber from the Brazilian Amazon based on traditional techniques adapted to modern export markets (Hall 2007). The later in particular is an interesting example of a khalasini indigenous community relying on its own adapted knowledge base to challenge large-scale deforestation undertaken for industrial meat production. Thus the "technical fixes" are often embedded in the context of a political struggle over who has control of resources and who has knowledge counts as legitimate. It is to this knowledge politics that we wish to draw attention.


25. Part IX, "The Panchayats" of the Seventy-third Amendment provides for independent elections and finance commissions for panchayats and for one third of the seats to be reserved for women. But attempts to implement Gandhian-style local government ran into resistance from ministers reluctant to relinquish power as well as from unenthusiastic bureaucrats. See Rudolph and Rudolph (2006). Several states, however, have activated panchayats to a greater or lesser extent, e.g., West Bengal and Kerala.
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