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The *Pūrva-Pakṣa* of Modern Indian Thought

Plurality of Universals and Humanistic Knowledge

> The "crisis of European existence," talked about so much today and documented in innumerable symptoms of the breakdown of life, is not an obscure fate, an impenetrable destiny; rather, it becomes understandable and transparent against the background of the teleology of European history that can be discovered philosophically. The condition for this understanding, however, is that the phenomenon "Europe" be grasped in its central, essential nucleus. In order to be able to comprehend the disarray of the present "crisis," we had to work out the concept of Europe as the historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason; we had to show how the European "world" was born out of ideas of reason, i.e., out of the spirit of philosophy. The "crisis" could then become distinguishable as the apparent failure of rationalism. The reason for the failure of a rational culture, however, as we said, lies not in the essence of rationalism itself but solely in its being rendered superficial, in its entanglement in "naturalism" and "objectivism." – Edmund Husserl[1]

> When I speak of cultural subjection, I do not mean the assimilation of an alien culture. That assimilation need not be an evil; it may be positively necessary for healthy progress and in any case it does not mean a lapse of freedom. There is cultural subjection only when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost. This subjection is slavery of the spirit; when a person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales fell from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth, and that is what I call Svaraj in Ideas. – Krishna Chandra Bhattacharaya[2]

Introduction

Our contemporary concern towards intellectual resources beyond the Eurocentric traditions is a reflection of the state of modern thought. One may feel intrigued, considering the claims of vast progress achieved in the fields of modern humanistic and scientific knowledge and a corresponding narrowness of its intellectual base. Compared to the intellectual map of the premodern era, the world of modern knowledge appears to be a story of the singular triumph of the Western mind. For what could have been a rich ensemble of intellectual traditions – with distinct pursuits of knowledge-systems, styles of thought, and the languages of

1 Husserl 1970, 299.

2 Bhattacharya 1984, 383.

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conceptualisation – is as much a story of denial, erasure, and, at best, of the survival of vestigial traditions for large parts of the world. In what ways would explorations into "non-Western" or "other" traditions of thought redress this insularity? On what grounds would they claim contemporary relevance? How would one counter the claims that such traditions are not merely representing some residual pre-forms of Western thought or desiderata of their own past? While scholastic interest in the larger non-Western traditions still thrives for historical and comparative purposes, such traditions have hardly any stakes in the grand hall of "philosophy" or "theory," as any claim to legitimate human thought is guarded by the canons of Eurocentric knowledge.

However, it is still not hard to acknowledge that these other traditions have never been dead and they continue to be living forces for a variety of intellectual systems and the life-worlds. It is well-known that with the rise of European imperialism the institutions of colonial dominance played a central role in classifying, controlling, and transforming the world of modern knowledge. In its longer intellectual evolution, from the tradition of Renaissance humanities to the Enlightenment philosophies and modern sciences, Europe has also inscribed a story of its "other" as a palimpsest of modern knowledge.[3] In a rich and insightful account of Europe's discovery of the world and its modes of understanding and classification of other societies, Mary Louis Pratt has described the rise of a "European 'planetary consciousness'" between the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Pratt draws our attention to the "other genealogies" of Enlightenment, which laid the foundations of Eurocentric knowledge and were part of larger imperial systems.[4] As some recent appraisals of Enlightenment history show, contrary to much common belief, the Enlightenment was not only internally diverse, but also carried a keen sense of the societies beyond the West as a foil.[5] In the last several decades, the histories of imperial cultures have shown how Europe created its intellectual and cultural other through the imposition of a system of representations. This way it was able to project certain cultural, social, and religious stereotypes of the people outside Europe.[6]

By the end of eighteenth century, ideas emerging from Europe's view of the larger world were so widely shared in the European intellectual culture that it

3 For representative studies on the rise of European imperialism and modern knowledge systems, see Pagden 1993; and Subrahmanyam 2017. For an influential and programmatic study on colonialism and the creation of modern knowledge, Cohn 1996.

4 Pratt 2008 [1992], 11, 35–36.

5 Israel 2006; Pocock 2005.

6 Greenblatt 1992; Mitter 1977.

could even colour the opinions of thinkers like Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, J. G. Herder, the Schlegel brothers, and G. W. F. Hegel, among others.[7] By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a variety of intellectual currents – including Orientalism, Utilitarianism, and Christian evangelicalism – flowing from the West, had shaped new ideas of history, science, religion, literature, arts, and philosophy of India. While there was a move towards the discovery of Indian systems of thought, it was as much an act of reordering and reinterpretation. These developments signal how the deepening structures of Eurocentrism, together with the rapid entrenchment of imperial power, shaped the world of modern knowledge through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[8]

Almost a century after the establishment of European views of the Eastern and larger non-European world, in his rather sombre ruminations, German philosopher Edmund Husserl wondered at the intellectual crisis of Europe. He saw an imminent danger of the dissolution of the philosophical and spiritual unity once begun through Europe's teleological progress with the Greek thought and its wider sources of inheritance. However, at the back of Husserl's mind was a firm belief that, while other civilisations would have reasons to "Europeanise themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation," Europe would hardly need to "Indianise" itself.[9] It is not a coincidence that, a century after Husserl's philosophical reflections on the fate of Europe, and several decades of thinking over the idea of decolonisation, the challenges of Eurocentrism have taken a new turn. In an increasingly globalised world there is much concern being expressed about the planetary crisis. The call for decolonisation is now being heard, once again, in the pleas for rehabilitation of native artefacts and the destruction of the emblems of colonial conquest. Overall, what we are witnessing in this new decolonising move is an impassioned plea for the reparation of life-worlds lost in the long European dominance. While the decolonisation thinking has shown deep concern towards the issues around cultural memory and human heritage, a major challenge still lies for the diverse traditions of thought and humanistic

7 The representative philosophical voices are Immanuel Kant, with his lesser-known late writings on non-European societies, G. W. F. Hegel, and the German Romantic thinkers Herder and the Schlegel brothers; for a praiseworthy and influential Enlightenment voice about the Eastern cultures, Voltaire.

8 This has been demonstrated in the history of European discovery of India from the late eighteenth century onwards (Marshall 1970; Mukherjee 1968; Kejariwal 1988). The unique cultural and intellectual history of Orientalist intellectual enterprise as the second Renaissance has been shown by Schwab 1984; for a more recent account, see App 2010.

9 Husserl 1970, 15–16, 274. Husserl articulates the idea of crisis more poignantly in his Vienna Lectures. See Husserl 1970, 269–99.

knowledge. It is a challenge towards reimagining the visions of the world and the shape of knowledge through the lens of non-Western traditions of thought.

This essay offers some critical reflections on these issues, with reference to modern Indian thought and its linkages to premodern traditions and the European encounter. It suggests that one of the major tasks of intellectual decolonisation or achieving the self-rule and autonomy of ideas is to rethink the presuppositions, or *pūrva-pakṣa*, of modern thought and humanistic knowledge.[10] It tries to explore how the shape of modern thought might be reconsidered by making

10 In the Indian *pramāṇa* epistemology, the idea of *pūrva-pakṣa* forms how the idea of locus (*pakṣa*) is fixed in logic. The term *pakṣa* (place, case, or "subject-locus"), literally meaning wings, side, plank, is used to trace the idea of *sa-pakṣa* (similar place, case, or "homologue"), *vi-pakṣa* (contrasting place, case, or, "heterologue'), and *pūrva-pakṣa* (prior place or case). As a logical category, *pūrva-pakṣa* is further used as the existing set of positions or arguments one tends to engage with in establishing one's own position. See Matilal 1998, 6–7. Conceived in a dialogical mode, *pūrva-pakṣa* consists of one's interlocutors, who could help build the theses or arguments. According to *Nyāyakośa* (a modern authoritative compendium of Indian philosophical and logical terms), *pūrva-pakṣa* is a short treatise meant to dispel scholastic doubts in the form of a query (*śāstrīya-saṃśaya-nirāsārtha-praśna-rūpā phakkikā*) or that which stands in oppositions to the thesis that has been established (*siddhānta-viruddha-koṭiḥ*). See Jhalakikar 1928, 506.

Some scholars treat *pūrva-pakṣa* as the *prima facie* view, which in its actual uses is always much more complex in the texts and commentaries. Phillips, while calling it *prima facie*, also hints at possibilities where one may find the "*pūrva-pakṣa* within *pūrva-pakṣa*" and even beyond. He notes: "A *pūrva-pakṣa* is a topically unified exposition, complete with supporting arguments, of an opposed position or of an attack relative to a *siddhānta*, which is itself unified exposition of an accepted position, complete with supporting arguments and/or correlate responses" (2011, 105). Staal reminds us of the complex genealogy of the concept of *pakṣa* in Indian logic and philosophical thought through its earliest uses in the ritual context (1988, Chapters 5 and 7). *Pakṣa*, literally meaning "a wing," is used to denote the sides of the shape of the bird used in the agni-cayan ritual.

Staal notes: "The word *pakṣa* means primarily 'wing' and has come to denote 'alternative,' and, hence, in general view, 'hypothesis.' Frequent uses are *pakṣe*, 'on the other hand' ('on the other wing'), *pakṣāntara*, 'in the other case.' In Sanskrit scholarly literature it has become the commentator's custom to interpret any given text in three successive stages: the first interpretation is the *pūrva-pakṣa*, '*prima facie* view;' the second is the reply to this: *uttara-pakṣa*; and the third and final interpretation is the *siddhānta*, 'final and established view.' This practice is found since Śabara (Vth century A. D.) but may be older."

"The terms *pūrva-pakṣa* and *uttara-pakṣa* can also mean Eastern and Northern wing, respectively, or first and second half of the lunar month. It seems probable that the earliest technical or semi-technical use of the term *pakṣa* originated in the Vedic ritual. The *Taittirīya-saṃhitā* had identified the sacrificial fire with a bird, *vayas* or *pakṣin* (i.e., 'winged') [...] Moreover, each wing is further enlarged into the direction it points to, for the longer the wings, the stronger the bird and the wider its flight. The idea is, that the bird thus carries the sacrificer to heaven. Similarly do the strong wings *pūrva* and *uttara-pakṣa* carry the philosopher to his final view, while *sapakṣa* and *vipakṣa* cases lead the logician to his final proof" (106–07).

sense of the three interlinked realms of human intellection, speech, and sociality. These realms, it further suggests, are crucial to the modes of worldmaking in relation to which systems of thought evolve.[11]

It is not hard to see how decolonised thought is linked to the twin tasks of intellectual self-discovery and of reimagining a world of knowledge. By making sense of the *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern thought, we could rethink the plurality of the forms of intellection and their specific notions of universals. Only such a plurality of thought and the world, it is argued, with deep reflexivity into the colonial makings of self and mind, could help draw the new paths. The essay also aims to address some of the quandaries linked to such an exploration and suggests a move from the long decolonising *moment of critique* to a phase of *constructive theory*. For this purpose, it mainly draws upon the Indian traditions of thought and considers three key *pūrva-pakṣa-s* of decolonised thought in relation to the ideas of veridical knowledge (*pramāṇa-śāstra*), linguistic meaning (*śābda-bodha*), and social imaginary (*loka-kalpa*). The terms *pramāṇa*, *śabda*, and *loka* are not merely replacements for the given Eurocentric conceptual vocabulary, but an exploration into what we have called the interlinked realm of human intellection, speech and sociality, which could be both a ground for plurality of universals and a humanistic knowledge beyond the Eurocentric traditions.[12]

11 Goodman (1978) takes cues from Ernst Cassirer's idea of the symbol and the plurality of worlds, and defines worldmaking as "working with the world at hand." To Goodman, knowing is similar to worldmaking and is both "remaking" and "reporting" (6–7). Goodman's ideas, offered in an analytical scheme, resonate with Gadamer's notions of context and the hermeneutic principles of culture (2013), out of which the human sciences would acquire their own method. However, language plays a central role in Gadamer's elaboration of the hermeneutic philosophy for the humanities.

A comparable picture can be built of worldmaking on the basis of Indian hermeneutic epistemology and ritual action in *Mīmāṃsā* philosophy and the rich tradition of philosophy of language and meaning. The world, both in its concrete and phenomenal form, plays a central role in the ideas of human thought, language, and meaning in Indian intellectual traditions. On plurality of the world, see Jaina metaphysics and epistemology of *anekānta* or manifoldness of the views. See Mookerjee 1978 [1944], Sanghavi, 1977.

12 The three terms *pramāṇa*, *śabda*, and *loka* refer to the ways in which they become the ground for thinking and worldmaking in Indian intellectual traditions. The theories of *pramāṇa-śāstra* or *vidyā*, *śabda-pramāṇa* or *śābda-bodha*, and a variety of ways in which the idea of *loka* denoting the physical, social, and phenomenal world provide a rich gamut of concepts. I have tried to use the term *loka-kalpa* as the closest possible translation for the idea of social imaginary.

Cultures of Intellection

Presuppositions of Modern Indian Thought: Defining the *Pūrva-pakṣa*

Human thought has usually been characterised with its universal claims in the Eurocentric tradition, despite its own evolution from the Greco-Roman lineage. Such universalism has mostly been denied to the traditions of thought beyond Europe, which are seen to be largely determined by the ethnic and cultural origins of the people. The idea of universal thought is supposed to be the possession of certain kind of cultural mind, with an innate mentalist feature and peculiar human faculty. While this view is countered by positing an embodied sense of the emergence of thought, which normally upholds externalist and holistic notions of the rise of knowledge, the divide between the culturalist origin of non-Western thought and the universal notion of the Western thought still persists. In important ways, the rise of modern thought in its Eurocentric view has also been determined by the two key perspectives of scientism and historicism. While thinking of non-Western traditions, it is crucial to keep in view the way scientism bolsters a strong positivist idea of the real world and historicism makes a case of progression through time.[13]

In this context, our suggestion to rethink the *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern thought is both a methodological and a hermeneutic move.[14] The term *pūrva-pakṣa* is drawn from the Indian philosophical method of argumentation, or *vāda-śāstra*, where it denotes the available views under consideration from one's own or rival traditions. In debating manuals and the Nyāya system of philosophical reasoning, *pūrva-pakṣa* is part of a comprehensive mode of forming one's own views by tracing the grounds of one's addressee. An opponent or an interlocutor could be

13 I use the phrase "cultures of intellection" to suggest the possibility of covering a wide range of modes, forms, and practices of human intellection, which make knowledge and understanding possible. In recent decades, historians and philosophers of science have developed some suggestive ways of thinking about how theories and systems of knowledge function. These are very distinct from the conventional treatment of epistemology as a major branch of philosophy dealing with issues of knowledge, beyond its context of generation and use. Two important examples in this tradition are Karin Knorr Cetina's use of the method of "epistemic culture" (1999) and Lorraine Daston and others' use of "historical epistemology."

14 In the tradition of philosophical debate, or *vāda-śāstra*, in which *pūrva-pakṣa* is the position of the real or assumed opponent, or the existing set of arguments, the opponent is an ally in a certain dialogue. Once turned into a creative interlocutor, the opponent is contiguous rather than standing solely in opposition.

both a real or imaginary partner in dialogue, where his or her ideas become props for the refutation and reconstruction of a position. *Pūrva-pakṣa* institutes a mode of thinking in which one is accountable to one's critical addressee. In this mode, thinking is a systematic mode of intellection, in which one builds up a hermeneutic context with a community of people holding shared presuppositions. One creates one's own views (*uttara-pakṣa*) in a dialogic tradition of reflection and interlocution on a shared foundation of reasoning. *Pūrva-pakṣa* can be treated as creating the grounds for self-reflexivity and is premised on the acknowledgement of shared, conflicting, and even alien elements in a conversation. As a method, *pūrva-pakṣa* allows us to ask how premodern and colonial systems determine the conditions of the rise of modern thought. At the same time, a variety of forms of intellection and systems of thought – specific to diverse linguistic, cultural, and social traditions – could be the grounds for raising such issues. *Pūrva-pakṣa* is hardly a search for foundational views; rather, it is recognition of the various existing positions to which one could relate to as an interlocutor in creating one's own. Largely known as the central method of argumentation in Indian intellectual traditions, actual instances of its operation in the philosophical (*darśana*) and knowledge systems (*śāstra*) illustrate what can be called the method of *dialectical hermeneutics*.[15]

The challenges of imagining the *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern Indian thought could be various, including how the colonial encounter led to specific interpretations of Indian knowledge traditions, the rise of India as a cultural and civilisational entity, and the historical evolution of its own traditions of thought. The three major contexts for rethinking the presuppositions are linked to the very idea of "premodern" or "classical" Indian thought; the "medieval" encounter with the Perso-Arabic and European traditions; and the long vernacular renaissance of Indian languages, well into modern times.[16] Some of the key issues pertaining

15 In defining *pūrva-pakṣa* as the non-foundational ground, which helps generate the rise of the systems of thought, we may compare it with the views of Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013), Donald Davidson (1973–1974), and John McDowell (2002), where a coherent and holistic theory of knowledge, language, and the world is argued. In such views, a certain form of dialectic and dialogue go together in the act of knowing and making sense of things, and a non-instrumental view of language plays a central role. In this sense, Indian grammarian philosopher Bhartṛhari sees the world as linguistically pervaded, and Mīmāṃsā philosophers create a theory of action and linguistic meaning. Several insights from Nyāya, Buddhist, and Jaina epistemology can help us rethink the issues around intellection and worldmaking.

16 Modern studies of Indian philosophy, mainly inspired by the comparative method, have tried to engage with the foundational structure and presuppositions of Indian thought. Most of such efforts have seen Indian thought as grounded in certain key religio-ethical and soteriological

to the rise of Indian thought in the modern period have been linked to the larger idea of Indian intellectual traditions with the rise of Western disciplinary knowledge, the role of English language, and the modern vernaculars in the colonial era. However, one of the least explored aspects is the variety of lived, performative, and practical forms of knowledge traditions, which seem to lie beyond the canonical textual systems of thought. These raise a series of questions regarding the very idea and nature of "Indian thought" and its traditions as seen through Eurocentric frames. While these questions take us to the deeper issue of the rise of non-Western thought, much decolonial thinking is limited to the use of indigenous terms as a possible counter to Eurocentrism.[17]

Despite the variety of Indian intellectual traditions and knowledge practices, most Eurocentric views have understood them as pale imitations of supposedly universal Western concepts. In this context, it is difficult to imagine the quotidian, aesthetic, and skill or craft-based traditions of intellection to be part of modern humanistic knowledge. Even for the most generous accounts of performative traditions, aesthetic creation, and philosophical anthropology, it has not been easy to lay claim to systems of thought arising out of lived forms of life or human creativity. While there has been much to reflect upon Indian theories around these traditions – both in canonical and vernacular forms – colonial or Western conceptuality seem to restrict their search to authentic textual forms of thinking or show scepticism towards such ideas. Scholars and critics have shared various opinions towards the very idea of "Indian thought" in the long colonial era and its contemporary invocations. While some have shown extreme pessimism about the recuperation of any such idea, some have accepted the inevitability of the absolute hegemony of Western knowledge. A strand of deep scepticism has always seen the lurking dangers of indigeneity, nativism, and uncritical glorification of the high tradition, which the idea of "India" may

goals based in the ideals of *puruṣārtha* (aims of man) related to the four areas of *dharma* (larger order and ethical law), *artha* (wealth and prosperity), *kāma* (desire and pleasure), *mokṣa* (liberation or summum-bonum). See Karl Potter 1999 [1991] for an older but still a comprehensive account of presuppositions of Indian philosophical thought.

17 Given the immense diversity of India as a cultural and social unit, some find the use of "Indian thought" exclusionary. In my view, such uses of the epithet "India" serve a heuristic purpose. Two insightful examples of dealing with the idea of "Indian thought" can be found in Halbfass (1990) and Ramanujan (1989), which cover both its richness and complexity. While Halbfass mainly looks into the ancient and classical philosophical thought in its long history of encounter with Europe, Ramanujan offers some highly suggestive puzzles in characterising "Indian thought" and its "contexts-sensitive" plurality through cultural and literary sources, in their varied classical, vernacular, and folkloric forms.

succumb to while characterising its diverse intellectual traditions. I suggest that the colonial history of loss, continuity, and transformation in the world of ideas is a complex spectrum to be explored in view of the long history of various traditions of thought evident in its scholastic, vernacular, and performative traditions in the Indian sub-continent. If the rich testimony of the history of Indian thought is to be told, then it should begin by tracing the *pūrva-pakṣa* of various modes of intellection and their systems.

The Epistemic Culture of *Pramāṇa*

In India, an elaborate system of knowledge classification has thrived in the compendia of grammar, arts, rhetoric, economy, polity, and medicine. As an illustration we can have a view of how means of ascertaining human knowledge, that is *pramāṇa*, have been central to the traditions of Indian thought. This has been evident in the evolution of various traditions of scholastic philosophy, knowledge systems, and performative arts. With the rise of Sanskrit as the main scholastic language, grammar, as a major branch of knowledge, acquired special significance. With its systematisation of the linguistic usages and reflections on the relations between language and the world, from very early on Sanskrit grammatical thinking has been central to understanding the role of conception and meaning. Most importantly, philosophical thought, known as *darśana* (envisioning or true perception) or *ānvīkṣikī* (analytical and rational exploration), saw the emergence of *pramāṇa* epistemology as the chief tool to fix the criteria for valid cognition or knowledge. While the *pramāṇa* system was accepted by all philosophical and knowledge traditions, the larger moral and soteriological goals of thinking were linked to the respective spiritual or religious visions for the cessation of human suffering and attainment of a morally good life. Together with *pramāṇa-s* (the means of knowledge), it is *prameya-s* (the objects of knowledge), which create the main edifice for devising epistemic methods. Knowledge is acquired through four key *pramāṇa-s* of perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), analogy (*upamāna*), and testimony (*śabda*), together with, in some cases, postulation (*arthāpatti*), and non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*). The modes of valid cognition range from mere perception and inference among the sceptic school of Buddhists to all the six tools of *pramāṇa-s* among the Vedāntins. The philosophical traditions of Nyāya (with its logical method and reasoning) and Vaiśeṣika (propounding a realist ontology shared by Nyāya) are examples of systems with great significance as sources for the categories that could make sense of the modern physical sciences and logical systems in Indian

terms.[18] While in general the *pramāṇa* theory of knowledge has been at the centre of claims that Indian philosophy could match the standards of Western epistemology and rational thought, the larger significance of *śabda-pramāṇa* (verbal cognition or testimony), together with *upamāna* (analogy), in the rise of humanistic knowledge has hardly been explored.[19]

In the *pramāṇa* system the establishment of valid cognition is linked to a variety of scholastic methods, modes of arguments, and the social milieu. As systems of knowledge, or *śāstras*, dealing with different realms of human and natural worlds are based on the epistemic edifice of the *pramāṇa-s*, they also lay out the schemes of classification and contexts of their use. There are social and moral prescriptions for those who could be initiated into these systems of knowledge and could also be upholders of a certain tradition. To attain the goals linked to these intellectual traditions, they are also supposed to follow certain rules prescribed for ritual functions and social roles.[20] However, the larger world of performative traditions related to dramaturgy (*nāṭya*), music (*saṅgīta*), arts (*kalā*), crafts (*śilpa*), rhetoric (*alaṅkāra*), and literature (*kāvya* or *sāhitya*) have their own disciplinary systems, which aim to realise the effective goals (*artha*) by putting systems into practice (*prayoga*) and human conduct (*vyavahāra*). Their larger context comprises what the Indian rhetoricians, following its initial suggestions in the Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* (a foundational treatise on dramaturgy and other arts), called the *mārga* (established path or manner) and *deśī* (the realm of local

18 For the significance of the *pramāṇa* theory of knowledge and its larger import for the evolution of Indian intellectual traditions, see Mohanty 1992. For a condensed account of the Indian *pramāṇa* epistemology and its methods, with a comparison to western logic and analytical philosophy, see Matilal 1998; for a bold constructive endeavour to place *pramāṇa* theory as contemporaneous in terms of rigour and insight to modern Western epistemology, see Matilal 1986 and Phillips 2012. For a recent reappraisal of the larger rational aspect of Indian thought in its historical contextualisation, see Ganeri 2011. It is intriguing to note that while a huge literature in English and European languages, apart from the writings in Sanskrit and modern Indian languages, has highlighted the significance of the *pramāṇa* epistemology, it has hardly ever made inroads into the larger field of humanistic knowledge or contemporary thinking.

19 For a reflective suggestion to reappraise the verbal cognition, see Mohanty 1992, in particular, discussions of *śābda-bodha* (83–89) and *śabda-pramāṇa* (249–59). Independent studies on *śabda-pramāṇa* are few (see Billimoria 1988 for an important exception). See also Tatacharya's recent extensive study of *śābda-bodha* in Indian thought written in Sanskrit (2005).

20 Most of the key treatises on specific fields of knowledge lay out the systems' classification, modes of acquiring knowledge, and the goals. This is prominently evident in the *Artha-śāstra* (well-known treatise on economy and polity), *Caraka-saṃhitā* (a foundational treatise on the medicinal sciences), and in *Manu-saṃhitā* (a treatise on religious duties and moral conduct), among others.

conventions) modes of practice. Instead of carrying a strict boundary between the high and the low, this larger context formed a cultural world based on the dialectic of active forms of local practices and the creation of systematic modes. While the *mārga* tradition carries the burden of creating systems (*śāstra*) as quasi-normative paths, one of its chief sources of authority still lies in the protean and fluid world of local (*deśī*) practices. *Mārga* is the well-trodden or well-marked path, while *deśī*, bound to a locus or a region, keeps evolving. What is seen as the distinction between the two realms is more of a dialogue between the system-in-the-making (*mārga*) and the world of localised practices (*deśī*). While in their modern uses, the two terms have been reduced as easy ways to capture the notions of "classical" and "folk," their rich and chequered meanings are resonant of a peculiar cultural universe they create through mirroring each other.[21]

In the Indian culture of intellection the lived and phenomenal world carried significant authority, as the act of knowledge-creation was beholden to the realm of human and natural action. At the same time, the goals of knowledge were bound to larger ideas of cosmology and the normative structure of the social world. In this scheme, not only is thought tied to epistemic truths but it also leads to desired results (*phala* or *niṣpatti*). The process of acquiring knowledge is as much tied to inner mentalistic operations as to modes of understanding and the making of the world. Through their reflection on the means, processes, and goals of knowledge, Indian systems of knowledge are bound to the awareness of the limits and possibilities of human intellection. In their reflective core, Indian intellectual traditions tend to nurture a continuous meditation on the views of the world and the very act of the creation of knowledge. By the early modern era, with the thriving tradition of Navya-nyāya – the philosophical school of epistemology and logic – the *pramāṇa* system had attained a remarkable sophistication in defining both philosophical thought and other fields of knowledge. With the

21 While they have been occasionally noted as peculiar modes in which cultural practices have evolved in premodern India, it is hard to find a sustained treatment of the terms *mārga* and *deśī*. This is perhaps a result of their modern use as mirroring the distinction of the "classical" and "folk." But despite this surface resemblance, careful study of these terms hardly fits into this schema. The uses of *mārga* and *deśī* have been various in the treatises on rhetoric, poetics, and arts in general. They cover a range of meanings from established path, mode, style, and manner (rīti) to that which bears the true sense (*tattvārtha*) in texts like Bharata's *Nātya-śāstra*, Daṇḍin's *Kāvyadarśa*, Dhanañjaya's *Daśarūpaka*, Kuntaka's *Vakroktijīvita*, Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa*, and Śārṅgadeva's *Saṅgīta-ratnākara*. For *mārga* broadly understood as style or manner (*rīti*), see Raghavan 1942, 172, 177. For a recent treatment of the concept of *mārga* and *deśi* as central to "vernacularisation" and "cosmopolitanism" in premodern literary culture of India, see Pollock 2006, 204–10, 220–24, 405–10.

onset of the modern era, such traditions not only maintained their scholastic conventions, but also played a central role in defining modern thought in India, once colonial knowledge and its disciplinary systems began taking root. However, what were gradually characterised as the "traditional" Indian and the "modern" Western systems of knowledge in the colonial period determined much of the story of Indian thought.[22]

It has not been easy to trace the ways in which modes of intellection and worldmaking are linked in the realms beyond the scholastic traditions. This has largely been the case because the canons of modern thought are beyond the expressive and quotidian realms of intellection and are mainly based on the propositional nature of thought. Despite their conceptual richness, the expressive forms of poems, novels, musical compositions, rhetorical speech, artisanal work, and everyday skills have not been treated as the resources of systems of thought. Perhaps it is due to the limits of modern thought – an inability to engage with the diverse modes of intellection and styles of thinking embedded in such diverse practices – that they could not be treated as the *pūrva-pakṣa*. While *pramāṇa* epistemology offers us a rich repertoire for determining the conditions of the rise of knowledge, the larger world of Indian knowledge systems (*śāstras*) and cultures of intellection offers a useful meeting point for such rethinking. The systems are not only based on the epistemic architecture of the *pramāṇa* system, but also offer a glimpse into how knowledge shapes the world.[23]

The colonial intellectual and institutional system fashioned a mode of plucking discrete Indian concepts from their intellectual contexts and tried to put them to uses they did not have in their own systems of thought. In different ways, the

22 It is increasingly important to place the study of modern Indian thought in relation to larger intellectual transformations and innovations taking place in the early modern to the colonial period, see Pollock 2011. For a much-cited work on thriving Indian knowledge and pedagogic traditions in pre-British India, Dharampal's account (1983) still remains a source to validate the story of decline during the colonial period. Such studies have often been used by Gandhian critics of colonialism and modern knowledge to paint an authoritative picture of the premodern Indian social world and its thriving intellectual culture.

23 The influence of the *pramāṇa* architecture of knowledge and its terminology in shaping the larger structure of Indian culture and thought and vernacular traditions is significant. An influential modern example is the way it was used for the creation of modern scientific knowledge and disciplines in the colonial period, as seen in the work of, among others, Brajendranath Seal, the pioneer of comparative philosophy and knowledge in modern India. A culmination of the long nineteenth century attempt to create modern European knowledge based on Indian conceptual resources, Seal's work (1915) was a telling example of the creation of a compendium of Western scientific categories from the stock of the terms of *pramāṇa* epistemology of Indian philosophy, largely of the realist and logical Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika systems and Sāṅkhya-Yoga cosmology.

life of these concepts was gradually turned into the comparative and translatory regime of categories in the colonial context. Apart from Orientalist interpretations of Indian knowledge, with their emphasis on philological reading, the new uses to which such concepts were put became equally evident in the systems of colonial pedagogy and in the vernacular traditions. Indian categories had a newfound purpose as carriers of Western knowledge. And while Indian concepts were supposed to facilitate the creation of Western disciplines of knowledge in the colony, they were granted no analytical power of their own.

This, in brief, is the summary of how Indian intellectual traditions and their rich conceptual vocabulary gradually lost significance during colonialism. Indian thought was largely relegated to the historical and comparative accounts based on the translations and interpretations of its ancient and traditional texts in the name of Orientalist or Indologcial knowledge. At the same time, two clearly identifiable new domains were created by Eurocentric colonial knowledge through the introduction of Western disciplinary forms and modern knowledge in the Indian vernaculars. If indeed, the Eurocentric knowledge facilitated the comparative validity and instrumental uses of Indian terms for the spread of different streams of modern Western knowledge, Eurocentrism could hardly be the ground for intellectual innovations based on Indian traditions of thought or be the much-vaunted *pūrva-pakṣa* it cherishes in an intellectual quest.[24]

The Other Universals

Perhaps this is the occasion to rethink the problem of the universality of human thought and the plurality of epistemic cultures arising from worlds of thought beyond Europe. In many ways, the legacy of colonial critique has been to probe the limits posed by the colonisation of knowledge traditions and the gradual irrelevance of indigenous concepts. However, the possibilities of constructive

24 The problem of comparative knowledge in Indian thought has largely been confined to the field of philosophy, which has seen it as a problem worth revisiting from time to time. Apart from the sub-disciplines of comparative or world literature, Indian social sciences and humanities have hardly paid attention to this problem. More striking is the way Indian vernaculars have been left out of such scrutiny, while shouldering the large burden of rendering Eurocentric knowledge forms and terms. On comparative philosophy, see Halbfass 1988; Chakrabarti and Weber 2016; Ganeri 2020. Ganeri tends to support his idea of pluralism in the light of Deweyan pragmatism, to go beyond relativism by grounding oneself in the wide philosophical vision of the Indian traditions.

thought require us to turn the colonial intellectual encounter into a *pūrva-pakṣa*, or the grounds of presuppositions, to be addressed. Modern humanistic knowledge faces this challenge because of the deep structural presence of Eurocentric frames of knowledge. When the interpretation of non-Western or indigenous traditions is thought to be inseparable from the claims for significance in the larger realm of human thought, the challenges become starkly apparent. It is ironic that Europe's own notion of universality is built upon a certain historical claim – one that orders the world of knowledge in light of its own tradition.

Let us consider a few recent examples of thinking through Indian traditions of thought as they speak to some of our concerns. In an ingenious example of thinking through Indian musical categories, Mukund Lath, a historian and musicologist, has shown how thought gives shape to concepts. Based on the analogy of the Indian musical system of initial improvisation (*ālāpa*) of the basic notes, and its further development into a fully developed musical creation (*rāga*) drawing upon a given structure, he offers an example of how a non-essentialist idea of identity takes shape. For Lath, the acts of thinking and conceptualisation mirror the coming-into-action of the building blocks of musical performance. It is through the process of *ālāpa* that one begins to draw the audience into a dialogue. As an initiatory act, *ālāpa* is the creation of a contract with the listener, preparing the ground from which grammar of music (*dhun*) and the larger body of creation (*rāga*) evolves. With his creative use of musical concepts, Lath sees thought as a process that is similar to *ālāpa* in music, which remains distinct from both the *dhun* and the *rāga*, but both eventually emerge from it.[25] In a different elaboration of these ideas, Lath emphasises the main aesthetic import of *rāga* through the rise of creative emotion (*rāga-bhāva*), which is a marker of the "individuality" and "identity" of *ālāpa*. He further shows how the whole process entails a notion of changing identity. Through *ālāpa*, the identity of a *rāga* is "nurtured in wilful change." *Rāga-bhāva* is thus the "felt-identity" of a *rāga*. Lath concludes with a formulation in which *ālāpa* is like thinking, and *rāga* is like the forming a concept. The process of improvisation, with the resulting plurality, turns the notion of identity into an evolving pattern. Lath suggests a theory of meaning and form as the ground for the essential plurality of all processes of creation. The process followed by thought, leading to the creation of concepts, is no different.[26]

The distinctiveness of Indian idea of thought as creative process can be further enriched by considering the way notions of imagination and reality play out. In a philosophically nuanced rereading of premodern Indian poetry and rhetorical

25 Lath 2007, 5–10, 29, 33–36.
26 Lath 2018, 6–23.

thought, drawn from Sanskrit and South Indian languages, David Shulman has argued for the rise of a distinct imaginary of the real. In contrast to the recent trend that has lamented the waning of Indian literary and intellectual achievements by the end of early modern era, Shulman takes us on a counter-intuitive intellectual journey, detailing the rise of new ideas of selfhood, autonomy, and the singularity of personal identity, all these being carved through the creation of a supple world of human imagination. Giving an account of a particular culture of controlling and projecting the imaginative process (*bhāvanā* or *kalpanā*) through various mentalist and linguistic devices, he foregrounds the ways the acts of imagining and effecting the real are not distinct. Shulman lays bare a world where, contrary to our preconceived notions, perception of the real becomes possible through an intensely attentive process of human imagination. As he suggests, in this world, our given modernist distinctions between the real and imagined tend to weaken. He is conscious of reminding us that, while in terms of a larger historical setting, it is indeed a world of thriving little kingdoms and polities, in which complex economic and social processes are at play. At the same time, distinct mental and imaginative cultures are being forged in a shared world of pan-Indian classical Sanskrit and regional vernacular traditions. Shulman illuminates a literary and aesthetic phenomenology that evolved in parallel to developments in the larger Western and Islamic worlds. What we learn not only counters the theory of mimetic representation that forms much of our common sense, but outlines a distinct trajectory of the 'modern' before the onset of colonialism in India.[27]

A reflection on the deeply ingrained modern duality of the mind and the world in contemporary Eurocentric knowledge opens up further directions to rethink the issues of experience and rationality. In a deeply reflective engagement with the possibilities of modern humanistic knowledge, Gananath Obeyesekere has dealt with the different modes of rationality borne of visionary experience on the margins of the mainstream traditions of modern Western thought. One may wonder in what ways dreams, visions, religious experiences, and states of spiritual or aesthetic rapture could be the ground for alternative Enlightenments or systems of rationality. Obeyesekere argues for the rehabilitation of such human experiences to treat them as distinct modes of human intellection. In one of his readings, he deals with the Buddhist notions of *jhāna* or *dhyāna* as legitimate grounds of cognition by going beyond the Cartesian duality of the atomistic human "I" and the world. Making the case for visionary experience as a source for a different kind of Enlightenment based on the idea of "It" consciousness, he brings the phenomenology of human visionary experience into the ambit

27 Shulman 2012, especially Chapters 1 and 3.

of modern epistemology and human sciences. Obeyesekere foregrounds such human conditions and experiences as possible resources for human knowledge. His is a profound plea to look into the bearing this could have upon other forms of Enlightenment and rationality, while we aim to rethink humanistic knowledge.[28]

We need to consider how the above examples of thinking musical elaboration through *ālāpa*, the aesthetic imagination of *bhāvanā* as phenomenology of the real, and the visionary experience of *jhāna* or *dhyāna* as alternate enlightenments open up the possibilities of a world of thought beyond Eurocentrism. In many ways, these suggest engagement with the larger idea of embodied thought linked to sound, imagination, and experience as ground of human knowledge. The worlds are made out of diverse forms of intellection and meaning, rather than being known through the sole instrumental powers of the human mind. In these schemes, the tools and methods of what has been seen as mind-based Eurocentric knowledge are, instead, part of the embedded linguistic, imaginative, and experiential processes of Indian cultures of intellection. We may ask if an appreciation of this view could help shape a new humanistic knowledge. But before we do, let us consider some of the key concerns which language poses in the shaping of this intellectual universe.

Language Habitations

Language and Thought: Ideas of Habitation

In our normal understanding, the relationship between thought and language seems to be modelled on the analogy of content and carrier. This offers us a picture where both, thought and language, are linked and yet belong to two distinct realms. But, treated as a habitation of its own kind, language challenges the ways we understand and operate in the world. From an abstract notion of language as a rather undefinable and ungraspable phenomenon, this view turns language into local and specific instances of its operations in worldmaking. Through their variety of interlinked functions, language, thought, and the world create patterns of knowledge and meaning of a certain regularity. They are part of a whole, rather than constituting distinct realms. Like epistemic culture, language in its specific function of sense-making through a regularised set of speech practices creates its own habitations.

28 Obeyesekere 2012, Book 1.

Notably, theories of language have been treated as models to understand human behaviour and the function of social and cultural institutions. This has been facilitated in large measure by the idea that language carries the basic grammar of human behaviour and institutions. Not surprisingly, language theories have been at the centre of the modern human sciences' effort to lay bare what lies behind apparent phenomena. The central issues informing such theorisation could be summarised as how language is seen to be linked to the mentalist faculty, embodied phenomena, and the power of the human imagination. These factors have broadly influenced the way the work of language and thought has been seen by the thinkers of European Romanticism, phenomenology, and conceptual analysis.[29]

Language poses a major challenge in terms of its role in creative imagination, where it is hard to uphold the notion of fixed meaning. On the one hand, if words are distinct carriers of meaning, the question of semantic power arises. On the other, if the sentence is the primary site of meaning, the added role of syntactical relations must be considered.[30] For some theories, linguistic meaning essentially lies in its power to generate action. Given the capacity of language to do things, widely known as "speech-act theory," the context becomes a key factor in the generation of meaning. It is not hard to imagine the kind of influence speech-act theory, together with structuralist theories of language, has acquired in the human and social sciences, for it offers a rich and dynamic theory not only of meaning but of the human action speech generates.[31] The expressive powers of language, as adumbrated by Romantic thinkers' early efforts and later those of phenomenologists, created a broad base for language as a realm of understanding. Such interpretations treat language as an embodied phenomenon bound to the contexts of meaning. Things happen *within* language, rather than merely through its uses as a medium or template of rules.[32]

While such theories straddle different understandings of "word," "sentence," "mind," "structure," and "action," their core concern is what linguistic meaning entails in terms of making sense of things. But what makes these activities so

29 Charles Taylor's recent account (2016) covers both these grounds rather well, describing the positive reappraisal of the role language plays in our understanding of the world, through a re-reading of the German Romantics and phenomenological strands of thinking. Taylor offers two key models of the "constitutive" and "enframing" roles of language. Clearly informed by late eighteenth century German Romantics, he himself makes an argument in support of the "constitutive" model's possibilities.

30 Dummett 1973; Quine 2013 [1960].

31 Austin 1962.

32 Gadamer 2013, especially Part III, on language.

natural is the way language, through its capacity to describe, and by mapping the realm of meanings, creates pictures of objects, events, and the world. What emerges as the realm of meaning is a picture of the world itself; thus, one can surmise that thought is a picture of the sense of things, created by linguistic meaning.

At the core of the above-mentioned ideas of language, meaning, and thought is the distinctive role of translation. Theorists of translation deal with the puzzle of finding the exact words to correspond to the intended meaning, as well as their elusiveness. However, translation is also seen as central to the very act of generating meaning, whether in relation to a simple word, a document of everyday use, or a literary composition. An important aspect of translation and meaning is the significance of the world and its larger (and multiple) contexts. When seen not solely as an act of finding linguistic correspondences, but as the unleashing of meaning, translation poses the problem of the world's plurality in a most compelling way. If we treat culture as the broad term for such contexts of the generation of meaning, then translation emerges as closely linked to our efforts to wade through the series of meaning-contexts. The human sciences, mainly dealing with the issue of cultural interface – either through ethnography, cultural history, or literary criticism – have found translation in this sense to project one of the main issues arising from cultural encounters. The history of the colonial encounter, right from its beginning, bears testimony to such conditions. In colonial contexts, forms of linguistic imposition, control, and the errancy of translation not only institute their own forms of knowledge but also modes of worldmaking.

Translation played a key role in the creation of the meaning-contexts through which Eurocentrism of the colonial intellectual universe took shape. The problem of naming others and their worlds made translation a major concern of early modern European thinkers. As a challenge to making sense of other worlds, translation in such encounters created the idea of culture. In tandem with translation, at the heart of a systematic tracing of diverse human histories was the cognate enterprise of the search for linguistic origins and the comparative study of languages. As the science of language, philology became a template for European visions of how human societies and thought evolved. People and their worlds were to be deciphered through the nature of the languages they spoke.

Our interest in language as forming a habitation is to suggest how humans not only found themselves in a linguistic milieu but were capable of sense-making, as much as of creating worlds of their own. A habitation is not a given, and neither is it solely the result of human makings. Language is uniquely placed to be both a site and agent of worldmaking. Like epistemic cultures, where human practices of cognition and knowledge play a central role, language habitations are the practices of making sense.

Language and Meaning: *Śābda-bodha*

It is important to think how language habitations can be imagined as sites of modern thought with the possibility of conceptual innovation and humanistic knowledge. In this context, one should perhaps revisit the riches of Indian philosophies of language and meaning. One of the mainstays of Indian thought has been a sustained reflection on issues of linguistic cognition, meaning, and the art of literary creation. The science of language, *vyākaraṇa*, which lays out the workings of human speech in Indian tradition, has proverbially also been hailed to be the source of all knowledge. From linguistic behaviour to its metaphysical foundations, speech is seen as the source of knowledge and meaning. Known as *śābda-bodha* (verbal cognition) or *vākyārtha-jñāna* (sentential meaning), the philosophy of language in Indian tradition creates a key aspect of its own epistemic and semantic system. The term *śabda*, which literally connotes sound as well as verbal utterance in the widest sense, is also treated as one of chief sources of human cognition and meaning.[33] In its larger sense of linguistic meaning, the tradition of *śābda-bodha* is not only a source of a peculiar conception of human thought in relation to the world, but of the variety of modes of worldmaking and expressive forms.

Speech (*vāc*) is not only the primal utterance; it leads to a genealogy of contexts through which cognition and meaning arise. Believed to be non-originary, it creates sources of validity and authority beyond human control (*apauruṣeya*) by harking back to a sourceless tradition of utterances. From its indestructible nature (*akṣara*) to being a complex web of manifest and unmanifest sound, the expanse of speech ultimately becomes the source of different layers of meaning and action in the world.[34] In a suggestive example of the link between the language and the world, one of the foundational grammatical treatises, the *Mahābhāṣya* (Great Commentary) by Patañjali of the second century BCE, states that the word (*śabda*) is the sound or speech used in people's behaviour in the world (*loka-vyavahāra*). He elaborates *śabda* further in relation to its eternal (*nitya*) and destructible (*anitya*) qualities, and those of meaning (*artha*), through an analogy to the way one treats useful things, such as utensils. The *Mahābhāṣya* further states that, unlike the way one goes to a potter to ask for a useful pot, one never visits a grammarian to get words made for a specific purpose. Rather, as soon the desire to speak (*vivakṣā*) arises, one makes use of words. The story of the potter is suggestive of how language was seen as given and acquired through human

33 Deshpande 1979; Bronkhorst 2011.
34 Raja 1977 [1963].

uses.[35] In another foundational treatise on the philosophy of language, the fifth century *Vākyapadīya* (Concerning Sentences and Words) by Bhartṛhari, the link between language and the world is explored in its various uses as the source of cognition, meaning, and action. Bhartṛhari weaves together the grammatical and metaphysical aspects of language, and places speech as the prime mover of the world. The first treatise very suggestively states that no cognition of the world is unaccompanied by speech, as all knowledge is pierced or interwoven (*anuviddha*) by it. It is the eternal identity of knowledge and speech that makes all cognition possible. And thus, it is speech which binds all knowledge of sciences, arts, and crafts, and makes their classification possible.[36]

What is notable in these examples from two foundational treatises of Indian thinking on language is the constant evocation of the world (*loka*), in relation to which speech cultures evolve. Language emerges in different meaning-contexts and shapes human knowledge and understanding of the world. The capacity of language to create sense is inalienable from the world to which it is linked. In their long evolution, speech patterns and meanings stand as hinge to the fundamental structure of the world of Indian thought. The function of linguistic meaning, *śābda-bodha*, ranges from the emergence of human cognition, systems of knowledge, religious belief, ritual actions, and the rhetorical and visual arts to the physical, medicinal, and architectural sciences.

Whether the word or sentence is the chief bearer of meaning is respectively a function of designation (*abhihit*) and relation (*anvit*) brought forth by the way syntactical relations are played out in language. The generation of meaning also follows certain semantic conditions of expectancy (*akānkṣā*), competency (*yogyatā*), proximity (*āsatti*), and intentionality (*tātparya*). In many ways, the distinction between a word's independent power to carry meaning and its emergence through the syntactical relations in a sentence shows how the internal functioning of language determines atomicity or the context-based aspect of meaning. The Sanskrit term *padārtha* means both an object and the meaning of a word. Thus, things of the world are the sense they designate. If objects are embodied meanings, then further explanation would be sought to explain language's role in worldmaking. Indian theorists of language were not oblivious of this factor as they considered the linkages between the word and the world. More specifically, how language shapes ideas of the natural and social world had been carefully observed. In the same *Mahābhāṣya*, Patañjali argues that it is according to the

35 For the example of the potter and uses of language, see Shastri 1995 [1962], 4, 28–29.
36 Pillai 1971, 28.

śiṣṭa (disciplined or noble) people and *sādhu* (proper or correct) uses that speech acquires valid form.[37]

After nearly a millennium, a prominent treatise on Indian poetics and rhetoric, the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* (Analysis of Poetry or Literature) of Rājaśekhara laid out an elaborate typology of how language, and more importantly, its rhetorical and poetic inflections, is socially marked. It also showed how the world of *śāstra*, the system of knowledge, followed the conventions of linguistic uses. Writing in the learned tradition of Sanskrit rhetoricians in the tenth century, Rājaśekhara laid out the way metaphysical and divine manifestations of speech bring out the rhetorical beauty in the social world. Rājaśekhara had clear notions of how speech was embodied socially, and how poetic embellishments were marked by distinctions of region, time, and people's customs. In the ensuing centuries, Indian thought witnessed a kind of renaissance in the fields of philosophy and rhetoric, as well as in various other areas of knowledge, with the theory of linguistic meaning (*śābda-bodha*) playing a central role. It was greatly evident in the rise of new epistemology (*navya-nyāya*), rhetoric and poetics (*alaṅkāra* and *kāvya-śāstra*), commentarial tradition (*bhāṣya*), and the devotional (*bhakti*) literature and aesthetics.[38]

Language and World: Beyond Colonial Lingualisms

While ideas of language and theories of meaning played a central role in the evolution of Indian thought till the early modern period in the eighteenth century, it would be important to see the way it got transformed through colonial mediation. The colonial beginnings of engagement with Indian languages also paved the way a new world of ideas got reshaped. In a terse formulation, historical anthropologist Bernard S. Cohn characterised the colonial treatment of Indian languages as creating both the "command of language" and the "language of command."[39] This gave rise to what we can call a system of colonial lingualism, which sees language as an empirical code of human culture in the wake of philology as its science. Language was treated as a course for deciphering the foundational structure of an extremely diverse Indian society and its culture. If Sanskrit, because

37 The first part of the *Mahābhāṣya* presents a curious mode of establishing the norms of linguistic usages, in which, while uses in the world are primary, a model of standard speaker (*śiṣṭa*) and the correct language (*sādhu*) are treated as the norm to be followed. See Shastri 1995 [1962].
38 Rājaśekhara, trans. Sarasvat 2000. In particular, see Chapters 1, 2, 17 and 18.
39 Cohn 1996, 16–56.

of its long pedigree and rich textual tradition, became the putative classical language of India, the large variety of vernaculars (*bhāṣā-s*) made India an ideal Babelesque world. For several decades in the early colonial period, there was a fervent excitement among the Orientalists and European scholars about how comparative philology could establish the common origins and linked histories of Oriental and European societies. What was crucial was the way philology was able to put words at the centre of the function of language and offered clues to the historical evolution of humans and their institutions.

By a dominant section of colonial educators and administrators, Indian languages were not seen as ideal vehicles for the new knowledge coming from Europe. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the British scholarly views regarding Indian languages had gradually divided into two camps: those who saw them as legitimate clothing for the new ideas and those who hardly found them fit for the purpose. Thus English, a language of Western knowledge, was at the centre of how colonial lingualism took shape. This marked a radical shift for the earlier culture of Indian languages and the rich tradition of thinking on grammatical and philosophical issues. Seen through the lens of comparative philology, Indian languages were a thing of the past, rather than carriers of a lived world of meanings and intellectual innovation.[40]

We see that, during colonialism, the world of Indian languages was explored in the three registers of philology, comparison, and translation. Turned into more of a cultural object with its peculiar history told in terms of India's past, Indian languages became a source for historical origins and evolving identities. From Orientalist constructions to nationalist counter-claims, language was increasingly turned into a new cultural and social habitation. The gradual coming together of a theory of the origin of language and of peoples at once valorised and museumised languages. Unlike that of Renaissance Europe, Orientalist "classicisation" was not a source of cultural innovation. At the same time, Indian vernaculars, despite their long precolonial traditions of literary efflorescence, were treated by the colonial educators as more of a channel to transmit European knowledge to the common masses.

As recent accounts of early modern intellectual history have shown, the onset of colonialism was preceded by the decline of Sanskrit intellectual tradition as a creative source. The idea of Sanskrit's demise has not merely been metaphorical in the sense of its innovative potentialities' shrinking as compared to early

40 Das 2005; Dasgupta 1993; Alam 1998; Pollock 2003. For a reflection on history, language, and literature from a contemporary perspective, see Mukherjee 1975.

centuries.[41] It has been argued that the millennium-long Renaissance of Indian languages and literatures went through a rapid change once India became part of the colonial empire. It is through the long reign of what we have characterised as colonial lingualism that European knowledge got inscribed onto the intellectual map of India. For it was colonial lingualism's aim to render Indian languages into mere carriers, rather than vital agents, of intellectual and creative power of the natives. At the same time, the story of Indian languages in the colonial period, whether in the interpretations of "classical" or "vernacular" traditions or the introduction of the English or Western languages, gave rise to a rich culture of encounter, preservation, and creativity. This new language habitation shaped the world, as much as it created the grounds for new forms of intellection and sociality.

The Social Imaginary and Worldmaking

The Social Body, Life-World, and the Social Imaginary

We shall consider now how the *pūrva-pakṣa* of human intellection and linguistic meaning relate to the idea of human sociality. Through the three realms of the social body, the life-world, and the social imaginary, which respectively cover the embodied, lived, and affective and theoretic forms, the human social arises. The way thought and language relate to human sociality gives us the most concrete expression of the modes of worldmaking. And the ways of imagining sociality make explicit one of the fundamental human capacities to address the other. They are a function of the elemental modes through which humans find themselves in the world as a zone of meaning and action in relation to other fellow humans. Sociality allows us to think of the plurality of worlds and modes of worldmaking as communal activities. The social imaginary emerges from the forms of the social body and of the life-world as the realm of generality. It is the realm of expressive forms and theoretic conscience, where thought and language take shape.[42] The life-world is the realm of practice and shared domains in which

41 Pollock 2001. In Bronner, Cox, and McCrea 2001, see particularly Parimal Patil's chapter regarding the continuity of Sanskrit knowledge traditions during the colonial period, which offers a corrective to Pollock's theory of the death of the system (293–314).

42 Charles Taylor offers a fruitful definition of the social imaginary: "By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when

several social bodies, with their changing forms and interrelations, participate. The ideas and structures of the social imaginary permeate both the spheres of social body and the life-world and allow the collectives to negotiate and shape the world. The social imaginary also opens up the possibilities of normative reflexivity on notions of human sociality.

The social body is the concrete manifestation of a collective, with its given norms of function and rule. A large part of institutional structures and their functions are in fact carried out by the agency anchored in such collectives. This way social bodies are the bearers of social processes and larger historical transformations, from the development of agricultural cultivation and primitive technological advancement to feudalism and capitalism. Life-worlds, on the other hand, work at a different temporal rhythm, showing how social bodies enter into relationships with their worlds, to seek meaning through their lived orders. Social bodies enter into the quest to seek meaning in their lived reality in diverse ways. Most social and religious rituals, systems of beliefs, and cosmological visions shape life-worlds.

Much modern social thought based on Eurocentric categories has tried to figure out the ways in which social collectives are formed and become agents of transformation. Colonial knowledge and disciplinary systems have been major prisms through which modern ideas of the Indian social and its categories – from primitive, indigenous, and tribal, to caste, race, and religion – were constructed. Through colonial empiricism and enumerative practices of ethnography, survey, and census, the categories defining certain ideas of the social tend to become agents of the actual transformations of the new social bodies. At the same time, while the complex interplay of categories emerging from colonial knowledge and the modern human sciences creates a conceptual prism, changing notions of the social body enter into different trajectories of social, moral, and political change. There have also been periodic attempts at revisiting the methods of the studies in social and human sciences through a reflexive exercise and by retrieving the indigenous concepts and categories.[43]

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they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (2004, 23).

43 The idea of the Indian social, both in colonial interpretations and in modern social scientific literature, has been dealt with in relation to forms of sociality and collectives, mainly created around caste, religion, and linked associational groupings. An influential study in sociology and social anthropology by Louis Dumont has long set the terms for such debates (1980). A representative critique of Dumont's structuralist essentialism has been advanced in the wake of historical

While such reflections on the Eurocentric ideas of human sociality begin with the promise of capturing the conceptual and practical efficacy of the changing forms of the social body, what is left out is the way this body functions and relates to life-worlds and social imaginary. The functioning of a social body is caught up in a more contentious nexus of its normative structures and the functioning of life-worlds. Through such a nexus, a social body defines its other and keeps things at its spatial and ritual boundary. However, in a life-world, through a series of apparent and hidden significations and symbolic systems, such boundaries are blurred, and the interaction of social bodies takes place. But, at a much deeper level of social imaginary, the abstraction of the human social arises through reflexive practices.

What we are trying to characterise as the social imaginary is the cognitive and affective world of generalisations in which humans participate. It is the creation of a possible world of theoretical reflexivity where ideas of a human social can arise. A social imaginary requires a sense of reflective and theoretic transcendence as a form of universalisation. If a variety of Indian terms for the social body, such as *sabhā* (assembly), *samiti* (council), *jana* (living being, people), *viśa (*settlement, people), *pura* (town), *grāma* (village), and *rāṣtra (*region, territory) invoke social, economic, and political units, it is the shared moments and spaces of ritual, work, play, worship, and festivity that bring them into the realm of life-worlds. At a different level of experience, such as the aesthetic, the state of becoming a *sahṛdaya* (person with taste), *sāmājika* (member of assembly), *rasika* (one who appreciates), and *bhāvaka* (one with aesthetic taste), the abstract human social emerges through the shared process of generalisation, or the universal aesthetic import, known as *sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*. We should be wary of treating this kind of generalised social experience as forming a utopian world, as it arises from the lived conjuncture of social body and life-worlds. However, at the same time, it carries the potential of an idealised collective, which could participate in a shared world of generalised or universal experiences of the human social.[44]

In many senses, all social bodies and life-worlds are in constant negotiation and, in real-life circumstances, run the risk of losing their boundaries and normative structures. That is where ideas of the "other" or "outsider" come into view. The outsider lives at the interface of the social imaginary and creates space for

anthropology by Nicholas Dirks, and others, see Dirks 2001. Unlike caste, the category of religion has not been scrutinised as a form of sociality in Indian contexts.

44 Ingalls, Masson, and Patawardhan 1990, 113–19, 220–22; Shastri 1971, see particularly Abhinava's intricate commentary on Bharata's *rasa-sūtra* (maxims on the *rasa*) in Chapter Six of the *Nāṭya-śāstra*. For reflective modern interpretations of the idea of *sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*, see Hiriyanna 1954, 14; Chari 1993, 196–207.

critique, dissent, breakdowns, and, as much, the possibility of a new sociality. A variety of social and cultural antinomian currents in India, such as the Buddhist and Jaina *śramaṇa* (ascetic) traditions of thought and life, a vast array of Bhakti devotionalism and literature, and the tribal, peasant, and labouring class protests define the ways in which alternative social imaginaries, or what can be called *loka-kalpa* in Indian terms, come into existence. The long history of various ideas of sociality also forms the *pūrva-pakṣa* to rethink the Indian social beyond the Eurocentric categorical lens. We shall reflect upon this issue by looking into the career of the concept of *loka* through its wide uses and immense possibilities, characteristic of Indian forms of sociality and worldmaking.

The Social Imaginary of *Loka*

A variety of terms and current usages in Indian thought capture the sense of collective forms of sociality. With their long pedigree and rich uses in different contexts, terms like *loka* (people, world), *jana* (person, people), *samāj* (gathering, society), *samudāya* (group, collection), *pantha* (path, sect), and *sampradāya* (tradition), are obvious examples in our modern vocabulary. A more complex history of Indian sociality is known to exist around the terms like *varṇa* (lineage and status based social class) and *jāti* (caste or kinship based social groups), which are clearly marked by their scheme of differentiation and hierarchy. But a different set of terms like *sabhā* (assembly), *gaṇa* (series, group), *goṣṭhi* (group, meeting), *maṇḍala* (circle, collection), *samiti* (council), *paṅkti* (lineage), *varga* (group, class), *saṅgati* (company), *samāgam* (association), *saṅgha* (congregation) and *samaṣti* (collection) denote a variety of ways in which social collectives and associations are imagined. They are as much resonant of premodern literary and cultural meanings as of their modern uses in official and public contexts. Most of these terms are based on the idea of coming together and forming some kind of association on social, cultural, political, or religious lines. Here we can consider an important term like *loka*, simply meaning "the world," "sphere," or "the people" in its most general sense, drawn from the larger Indian traditions of thought and creative expression. *Loka*, with its rich repertoire of meaning, has been protean in nature, never losing its capacity for conceptual innovation. The corpus of knowledge, which goes into the making of Indian thought, carries markers of the social body, life-world, and social imaginary. What could be called the idea of the "human" is formed in relation to ideas of "sociality" as found in the above terms, invoking social, religious, and moral visions. A large variety of premodern treatises and compendia on religious and moral duty (*dharma*),

politics and economy (*artha*), and didactic literature (*nīti*) give us a view of what could be called social empiricism and forms of classification. Modern ideas of the Indian social are a product of classificatory and normative schemes emerging from premodern texts and the practices based on enumerative empiricism of modern Western forms of knowledge. Thus, our modern views of the social are extractions, informed by a composite picture of normative and empirical worlds, that is based on the long script of the making of three realms of the collective as social body, life-world, and social imaginary.[45]

In the Indian intellectual traditions, it was through many uses of the term *loka* that some of the main ideas of the world and worldmaking found expression. *Loka* is primarily the realm of the phenomenal world, which manifests itself in terrestrial, natural, and human social forms. It connotes a variety of meanings from space, realm, region, sphere, abode in their real and imaginary forms. It is also a term which gives the sense of any form of collective, which the humans or living beings create. On the one hand, *loka* is the division of the mundane and terrestrial realms or spaces and the natural or physical world; on the other, it connotes the most general idea of a collective whole of any kind. But what marks its distinctive meaning is its phenomenal quality, as that which is seen and is in the purview of humans or living beings. Thus, *loka* deals with the cosmic divisions, the natural and social spheres, and collectives of living and non-living beings, and it is the world which is out there and can be perceived with its objects, people, and their movements. *Loka* connotes a variety of ways in which the world exists and becomes available to humans. It is a term which captures the Indian idea of social imaginary, or *loka-kalpa*, as we have called it, in its most varied form.[46]

The concept of *loka* shall help us pose some of the questions to rethink the *pūrva-pakṣa* of the social world. As a manifestation of people's common behaviour and actions, in its modern uses *loka* has also covered the ideas of "folk" and "the people."[47] With a variety of meanings, where a fusion of the senses of the world and people's actions takes place, *loka* creates an important cluster of terms, like *loka-vārta* (popular account), *loka-yātra* (worldly affairs), *loka-dharma*

45 In some Indological studies, the essential features of Indian civilisation have been seen as informing contemporary processes and conflicts, see Heesterman 1985. For a nuanced study of structural continuities across periods combining the textual and ethnographic studies, see Biardeau 2004.

46 The etymological roots of *loka* bring us the terms *ruc*, *luc*,and *lok*, which primarily connote a sense of seeing or perceiving.

47 For a comprehensive account of the uses of the term *loka* in the Vedic corpus, see Gonda 1966, 25–31. For an in-depth survey of the idea of *loka* in Indian intellectual traditions, see Misra and Sharma 1992, 110–56.

(worldly matter or popular religion), *loka-cāra* (worldly custom), *loka-kalpa* (worldly or social imaginary), *loka-vṛtti* (worldly custom or profession), *loka-pravṛtti* (worldly trends), *loka-śruti* (popular lore), and *loka-saṅgraha* (welfare of the world). *Loka* also carries the most generalised sense of the social collective, or the people's world, to be the locus of normative actions, or *loka-vyavahāra*. In the sense of the human collective, *loka* seems to transgress the boundary of the social body and speaks across the life-worlds. *Loka* is also the way worldly norms are manifested. The sheer plasticity of a term like *loka* makes it stand both within and above all imaginable concepts of collectives or whole and shows the potential to create new imaginaries. And perhaps, this gives it an immense capacity to make the idea of the whole ever flexible and malleable. It stores a rich notion of the ways in which the world can be continuously created, dissolved, and be transformed.

Loka offers us a ground to rethink ideas of the social imaginary because of its capacity to transgress the bounds of the social body and the life-worlds, and suggests a world beyond the available orders, the realm of *lokottara*. At the same time, in its most imaginative uses in Indian thought, *loka* is the sphere of the lived and the phenomenal, where the emergence of the abstract and generalised idea of the human social becomes possible. For Indian rhetoricians, it is the realm of aesthetic generalisation, where the creator, creation, and the audience can become one. In Indian aesthetic theory, this is the widely accepted goal of aesthetic appreciation, where, while re-enacting the world (*lokānukīrtana*), a certain generalised or universal affect (*sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*) is created. Thus, *loka* also makes possible the creation of a social imaginary through the world of aesthetic commons.[48]

Loka in its modern sense has been used to capture key social and political ideas, based on abstract notions of "the people." The idea of "the people" as a rights-bearing political entity and the source of modern notions of sovereignty becomes central to modern liberal ideas of representative democracy and citizenry. In modern Indian languages, both in its popular and official uses, "democracy" is known as *loka-tantra* and connotes the sense of "political rule" or "system" of the people. In its modern political uses, *loka* (together with *jana*) is the key term for forming ideas about the people and the public. In modern cultural uses, it predominantly captures the sense of the "popular." This way, in its modern uses, the term *loka* connotes a range of abstract secular and public con-

48 The term *loka* is variously used in treatises on different knowledge traditions pertaining to economy, society, polity, rhetoric, dramaturgy, religious and moral conduct, and in the sense of both the group of the people and the larger natural and phenomenal world.

cepts. However, its older premodern sense of the normative human collective still survives in contemporary social and religious uses. Seen in relation to some of the known categories of sociality in Indian thought, together with the modern idea of "society" and collectives such as *samāj*, *samudāya*, or *saṅgha*, *loka* creates an important spectrum of meaning. From the perspective of its longer genealogy in Indian thought to its vibrant currency in modern usage, *loka* invites us to think through it as the *pūrva-pakṣa* of the social imaginary.

The Human Social: A Decolonial Imaginary

Our concerns of rethinking humanistic knowledge is, needless to say, linked to ideas and practices of human sociality beyond Eurocentric conceptions. Such humanistic thinking would require us to explore the conceptual significance of the emergence of the human social in terms of the diverse forms of the social body and of life-worlds. The task is to treat the plurality of universals and modes of worldmaking of various social imaginaries as the *pūrva-pakṣa*. Beyond idealised notions of cosmology and systems of thought, a modern humanistic knowledge would look into the ways that Indian thought and sociality are not arcane cultural essences. While uses of such essentialisms in the name of things "Indian" pose the challenge of anachronistic valorisation of an idealist view of society and its past, it also creates the spectre of uncritical nativism, indigeneity, and unified ideologies. At the same time, the challenge remains to think beyond the universalist and modernist promise of Eurocentric thinking. A plethora of modern terms such as politics, democracy, caste, religion, nation, and progress are clear examples that not only emerged out of the long European encounter, but are also the results of their Indian uses. Such processes of conceptual redrawing have been evident in the rise of the key modern ideas of "human," "society," and "people" for humanistic knowledge. They have equally influenced the forms of institutionalisation and representation of the ideas of freedom, rights, and citizenship and their statist, vernacular, and everyday uses. These modern concepts, which capture diverse forms of human sociality, variously carry genealogies and translations across social, intellectual, and linguistic contexts.

The idea of the social imaginary is a useful heuristic tool for humanistic knowledge, once seen in relation to the various modes of worldmaking of which it is a part. The idea of "religion" as organised belief system and "caste" as a form of social hierarchy and division are a case in point. In their modern congealed notions, religion as *dharma* and caste as *jāti* are results of descriptions of certain forms of worldview, sociality, and institutionalisation. They challenge

our understanding of phenomena in relation to their precolonial forms and their colonial conceptualisation and to their quotidian and vernacular lives. How are such formations of the social to be understood beyond their Eurocentric conceptual descriptions? This is where the social imaginary as a form of worldmaking becomes crucial as a *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern thought. It seeks to look into the rise of these concepts and their forms of sociality – together with their systems, practices, and descriptions – under the shared genealogies of the indigenous precolonial and the Eurocentric colonial systems. The premodern conceptual script of these categories, and linked institutions, is hardly erased in the rise of a colonial episteme, neither does it evolve as a story of simple breaks or continuities, as neat divisions into historical periods and transformations tend to suggest. The goal of decolonising the social imaginary is to rethink the conceptual possibilities of rich Indian forms of sociality through the sieves of such histories and their power to speak through the quotidian and vernacular forms of social life.

Here we need to dwell upon the critique of Eurocentrism arising from colonial mediation and think of what we have called *constructive theory*. As we suggested at the beginning of this essay, the task of achieving autonomy of intellect, which modern Indian thinkers have very evocatively called the *svarāj* or *self-rule in ideas*, is not solely an act of breaking free of the shackles of colonial ideologies and their domination. The claim to freedom of mind or thought is the act of achieving a self-determining cultural self, too. For colonised minds, the creation of the sources of cultural self and theoretic conscience are not simple tasks of retrieval of lost origins or utopian pasts. They are at best some kind of proleptic fiction. The real task of achieving the *svarāj in ideas* begins by accepting the challenge of retracing the *pūrva-pakṣa* as the presuppositions and hermeneutic preconditions emerging from the above contexts. We have tried to think through this issue by treating cultures of intellection in relation to language habitations and the social imaginary to achieve the plurality of universals arising through the forms of worldmaking.

One of the achievements of decolonising thought in the latter half of the twentieth century was of mounting a strong critique of the lingering shadow of colonial ideologies in the realm of polity, economy, and culture. In societies like India, Western thought and knowledge traditions have continued to exert a deep sense of enchantment, even as they remain a form of alien heritage. Decolonisation this way became the moment of recognition of both the limits and possibilities of one's own intellectual traditions. As an exploration of the colonial psyche and cultural self, decolonisation thought has as much been a recognition of the moments of encounter, assimilation, and dissent between the Western

knowledge and indigenous traditions.[49] These facets of the decolonising era have been poignantly explored in terms of psychic depths, the retrieval of intellectual traditions, and the variety of life-worlds lost in colonialism.[50] It seems we are witnessing a turn from the moment of the decolonising critique and reflexivity to the task of reparation and restitution from colonial violence. The moment of critique now seeks a resolution in justice long due.[51] Such a plea takes one beyond the critique of historical legacies and seeks to address the spectre of lost heritage and memory in the present – memory which could hardly settle in a passive truce with the past, which brought with it violence and erasure.

The deep connections between the West's self-image and its long imperial subjugation of "others" are being forcefully addressed once again. In this way, the decolonising critique and Eurocentrist heritage are brought face to face in the postcolonial and global contemporary moment. By restituting memorials and monuments, the West enters into a gesture of recognition of historical loss. And by divesting itself of its imperial heritage, it enters into a restoration of the missing links between cultural memory and symbols of heritage in postcolonial societies. Two recent examples of getting past this long decolonising moment, stripping one's mind and self of the colonial veneer, became evident in the way the claims for the return of "imperial heritage" were made. They seem to address the deep influence of colonialism on cultural self and human thought.[52] While restitution of the symbols of a larger loss inflicted by colonial regimes may transform the realm of tangible heritage, how would an act of restitution work in the realm of thought, its conceptual resources, and the lived forms of life? One needs to think how to address the sense of death and loss of the cultures of intellection and world of ideas, and the possible modes of recovery and reconstruction. It

49 We use 'decolonisation' here to indicate intellectual movements after the end of colonialism, when erstwhile colonial societies entered into an engagement to do away with colonialism, mainly in the intellectual and cultural sense. Such movements and debates in the colonial period were part of a larger anti-colonial struggle in politics, culture, and ideas. A major emphasis in the debates around decolonisation in the decades of fifties and sixties, just after the decline colonialism, was focused on the economic and political aspects.

50 Influential early critiques of colonial ideology and its impact on the cultural psyche of the native population have been central to the rise of calls for cultural and intellectual decolonisation, see Fanon 1963. Writers and poets like Leopold Senghor are now at the centre of some profound rethinking around decolonised aesthetics and philosophy, see Diagne 2012.

51 For some of the current rethinking on the idea of intellectual decolonisation, see Mbembe 2019; Mbembe 2021; Diagne and Amselle 2020; De Castro 2015.

52 Sarr 2019; Sarr and Savoy 2018; Hicks 2020. While scholars and conservationists debate the return of heritage and reparations, one cannot miss occasional reports about the return of heritage in India from different parts of the world.

would require us imagine how the rich legacies of modern humanistic knowledge could transform themselves through the larger non-Western traditions of thought. The claims for, or restitution of, non-Western traditions in the modern universal canon of thought could become a call for the unworking of the global hegemony of Eurocentric humanistic knowledge.[53]

Conclusion

In the above discussion, we have made an attempt to reflect upon the possible frame of decolonial thought by addressing the *pūrva-pakṣa* of the three realms of human intellection, speech, and sociality, drawing upon their diverse historical and cultural genealogies in Indian intellectual traditions. We have tried to understand the way the task of decolonising human thought and imagining new forms of humanistic knowledge would not solely reside in the rejection of the Western encounter of knowledge traditions and its wider impact; nor would harkening back to the lost golden ages of the premodern world or of native wisdom be of help. What decolonial thinking requires is to think through the given shapes of the human knowledge. It is hardly an ideal legacy to be cherished; rather, it is the only ground to tread in order to think anew. As we have understood, modern humanistic knowledge, beyond the given Eurocentric canons, can be created by treating different Western and the non-Western traditions, with their premodern and modern legacies, as a hermeneutic horizon. For this purpose, with the help of the *pūrva-pakṣa* mode of engaging with the available grounds or presuppositions of Indian intellectual traditions, we have tried to open up a method of dialectical hermeneutics.

We could see that this kind of hermeneutic appreciation would take us beyond the task of merely rehabilitating indigenous categories and their token uses for the possibility of a new theory or philosophy. While our illustrations are mainly concerned with the terms and concepts arising from the Sanskrit intellectual traditions, it is evident that they carry wider valence across different knowledge systems and practices, and shape the vernacular and contemporary uses too. However, we may look into the wider culture of intellection in Indian traditions by treating the world of practice, performance, and lived forms, both modern and premodern, for this purpose. In that case, one would need to trace the conceptual

53 Garfield and Van Norden 2016. For a book-length treatment of the above issues triggered by this op-ed debate, see Van Norden 2017.

significance of the created (*prayoga*) and lived (*vyavahāra*) traditions, instead of merely using the concepts of established knowledge traditions (*śāstra*).

While our goal has been to create a suggestive template of the ways to treat Indian concepts for humanistic thinking, it is also an exploration into the rich worlds of thought and creative forms beyond the regime of given Western universals. We have aimed at creating a frame of humanistic knowledge, which instead of seeking its sources in some pristine or foundational tradition takes into account mutually enriching hermeneutic encounters of human thought, both within and without. As we need modes of conceptual innovation to create newer descriptions thinking through non-Western forms of intellection, language habitations, and social imaginaries – it is, in fact, the life of the dead other of the West, which begins speaking to the present. This also makes possible our search for the plurality of universals and modes of worldmaking that lie beyond Eurocentric forms of thinking. Imagining decolonial humanistic knowledge is, thus, an invitation to consider the way various worlds of thought, speech, and sociality arise through a variety of conceptual schemes.[54]

As we have seen in the above discussion, colonialism was able to institute a radical ordering of these realms by bringing in European systems of knowledge and the English language as its key tools. These created a new habitation of Western concepts and social, moral, political practices as these acquired new lives in the colony. The colonial modern has given rise to contending historical and cultural notions of the premodern thought. Bound to the traditional and presentist views, such traditions have not only survived but have also been projected as idealised prehistories of the native intellectual heritage. At the same time, the idea of premodern thought being fully lost in the colonial encounter has been more of a myth than the full truth, as these traditions are as much a living realty. While the search for Archimedean points in any social universe is mostly about cultural myths, yet one cannot imagine a colonial or national history which is shorn of myths of origin and pristine cultural forms. The actual histories of such myth-making pose much tangled ideas of the past traditions, when we think of the world of Indian thought.

A theory of modern Indian thought, as we have tried to understand here, has to be created when the forms of *pramāṇa*, *śabda*, and *loka* become a connected ground of presuppositions, or *pūrva-pakṣa-s*, to be addressed, which in turn speaks to the kinds of worlds we seek to make. Such a conception of the *pūrva-pakṣa* of thought and the visions of worldmaking will be both a challenge to his-

54 For a subtle analysis of how concepts are not isolated mentalist and epistemic schemes, but part of "untouched mediation" with the world, see Davidson 1973–1974, 5–20.

torical understanding and philosophical vision, and it will not be distinct from our capacities to create new descriptions. If such descriptions are the grounds of the emergence of new thought, then their patterns and systems would create newer forms of intellection and epistemic cultures. It would be a realm beyond the imperious hold of Eurocentrism on various worlds of human thought. A template for decolonised thought, as we have tried to suggest here, has to aim at the practice of such newer cultures of thought. It is time Europe's other, which is the large part of humanity, claimed its *svarāj* in ideas. Perhaps, that is where our dream of a new humanistic knowledge lies too.

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