

Decolonization and Development

The Enemy Within I

STUDENT: We agreed that in order to decolonize ourselves we would have to fight against an exploitative world order outside. We also saw how this world order was supported by us, the very people who suffer from its ill-effects.

TEACHER: The 'us' that you refer to above needs to be defined. Again, we could start with what happens to the psyche of a society, which has been colonized'

The experience of colonialism is traumatic, both economically and psychologically. It produces some peculiar kinds of neurosis or anxiety. Frantz Fanon has written at length about the pathologies of oppression—what the oppressed suffer under colonialism. It seems to me to be fairly clear that when the self is under tremendous stress, it copes or survives through certain devices. Societies, too, evolve their own coping strategies to deal with sudden, unwanted changes in internal and external environment; they devise various means to minimize and reduce the resulting cognitive dissonance.'

STUDENT: You mean societies also resort to denial, repression, transference, displacement, or sublimation—sort of like Freud's defence mechanism?

TEACHER: The mechanisms and methods are, really, numerous. But I wish to concentrate on a few which will help us identify the 'enemies' within our society.

Colonized societies, often, use at least two self-destructive methods of coping with their trauma. First, the exploitative and reactionary elements within these societies become stronger, encouraged and patronized by the

colonizers. Secondly, a new class of assimilated natives—carbon copies of their masters— develops.

STUDENT: You mean, the self is under tension all the time; but under colonialism, the tension becomes unbearable. This results in a split. That is, a part of the self 'goes over' to the adversary, becomes its mirror image. Another part retains pristine values.

Even if there is no split, there is continual tension between the acquired self and the older self, between the colonized and the pre-colonial, between the new and the old.

TEACHER: This sort of thing is happening all the time, not just under colonialism but also under neocolonialism.

STUDENT: Hence a novel like *Samskara*?

TEACHER: And indeed all those novels which show a conflict between tradition and modernity, between the East and the West.

STUDENT: So isn't the tension creative?

TEACHER: It may be. But often it is debilitating. Very few people can move from their confused tensions to the clarity of self-expression. That requires deep understanding and enquiry.

STUDENT: So how is this related to the enemy within?

TEACHER: The enemy within is that aspect of the psyche which has internalized the values of the colonizer. These values prevent the decolonization of the mind. They create confusion and inertia.

STUDENT: But by contrary implication, can one decolonize oneself entirely? Can one remove, excise, or terminate that part of one's mind which has been occupied, colonized, and penetrated by the adversary?

TEACHER: Not unless one is looking at the problem in Manichaeian terms. You can never completely rid yourself of your opposite, your other, because, in a sense, you *are* the other. But certainly through understanding, through knowledge, through enquiry, one can arrive at a stage where one's own shaping influences are clarified. Then they cease to threaten and overwhelm one. Then one can employ them creatively and usefully as Gandhi said we

could English education if we only understood what it stood for (*Hind Swaraj*, 90—91).

STUDENT: So you are suggesting no radical removal of a part of the psyche, but its transformation.

TEACHER: Right. The colonized part of the mind mustn't dominate one's thinking. It mustn't cause confusion and self-contempt. It must be understood and tamed. This would be a positive method of coping, somewhat like sublimation.

STUDENT: What about the other 'enemy', that aspect of the oppressive pre-colonial past which lingers on or is actually strengthened?

TEACHER: I'll illustrate with two examples, one economic and the other cultural, of what actually happened in India after the British took over our economy. Because the burden of taxation on the peasant became fixed and unbearable, the village money-lender assumed a key position in the economy. A lot of small peasants had to mortgage or lose their land, which led to untold hardship. Similarly, the institution of *sati* reached epidemic proportions in Bengal. Thus, several reactionary and destructive forces and traditions were strengthened under colonialism.' One cannot also help remembering how important a role the local tribal chieftain played in the slave trade in Africa. often actively assisting the capture and sale of his own people.

STUDENT: Colonialism also led to revivalism—the glorification of our past beyond all reason—almost in a desperate bid to preserve our identity.

TEACHER: In fact, even the residual past. traditional values, which one has inherited from one's pre-colonial heritage can be harmful. That too can be a kind of colonization. Moreover, It might merely be a reconstruction by the colonized of their past.'

STUDENT: We seem to have tied ourselves into knots. What's the way out?

TEACHER: I think we must remember that decolonization implies rejection not only of the harmful ideas from the West. but also of destructive aspect of our past.

The way out is to radically question the given—whether it comes from the West or from India. Only a deep questioning will lead to clarity about who

we are and where we are going. Questioning only the West will lead us to unacceptable positions from our past; questioning only our past and accepting the West on trust will make us more powerless and self-contemptuous.

STUDENT: If we question everything, then where does that leave us?

TEACHER: It leaves us free to act as nothing else can.

STUDENT: Then what about the enemy within?

TEACHER: The enemy within is thus tamed, harnessed to a new programme in which its knowledge is useful but not enslaving. The enemy within is thus disarmed and integrated into a newer understanding of reality.

STUDENT: You mean through deep questioning, we deconstruct the enemy within; uncover its premises, decode its secret language—thereby rendering it harmless.

TEACHER: Yes, something like that. But also once we have understood the causes of the tension, we must act. There can be no truce with the enemy within. We must ruthlessly pursue this enemy to its lair and expose its machinations.

STUDENT: Can you give an example?

TEACHER: Well, I need to ask myself, which values of the West have I really accepted and which have I denied?

STUDENT: Isn't that difficult? Aren't the strands hopelessly intertwined?

TEACHER: Yet, an effort is needed. For instance, do I accept that the goal of life is to achieve a progressively more humane, just, and materially comfortable social order on the basis of technological invention? I must ask myself this if I think that this is what the 'good' West represents. Then I must ask what goals from my own culture, *dharrna* or *moksha*, for instance, do I wish to retain. Are these compatible with progressive humanism of the West? And, finally, can a viable synthesis be worked out?

STUDENT: Usually, the problem is much more mundane: do I buy a VCR or washing machine?

TEACHER: Ha, ha! Then you will have to come to terms with what the VCR represents. Who produces it? How much it costs? And what do you have to

do to be able to possess it? But with the advent of Cable TV, I can safely advise you against buying it.

STUDENT: OK, but that doesn't solve the problem of whether or not to buy a microwave, a washing machine, an air conditioner, and so on. I know people who will literally take a bribe to get these goods because their prices in India are so high.

TEACHER: There you have your answer. If the prices are so high, there is a reason for it. Excise, duties, whatever be the reason; if the good that you wish to possess is beyond your reach, then in order to acquire it you will have to breach some norm of conduct. This in turn will affect your country because it encourages corruption, false values, and so on. So in your particular case, a microwave or a Maruti car is out!

STUDENT: Thank you. But can we go back to decolonization?

TEACHER: I said that the enemy within prevents decolonization. It wants to continue with its slavish ways, either blindly following tradition or chasing an illusory modernity.

There is a similar split in the social self. A small section of an elite fringe gets totally Westernized. This fringe becomes a kind of comprador faction within our society. It collaborates with the exploitative world system.

STUDENT: This fringe is probably not a fringe at all—I see all of us to be a part of it, in one way or another.

TEACHER: Yes, the middle class, the bourgeoisie, is the most vulnerable to the lure of the West and of modernity. That's why, as we said earlier, we have to split it!

STUDENT: Then the internal enemy is really all of us as a group, not just a part of our individual psyche.

TEACHER: Yes.

Notes

1. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin,
2. 1967) and Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). Also see Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (1983; rpt. New Delhi: OUP, 1988) for a valuable and lucid discussion of some of the issues raised in this chapter.
3. See Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1937; rpt. Madison, Ct.: Inter-Universities Press, 1967).
4. See Albert Memmi, *The Colonized and the Colonizer*, tr. Howard Greenfield (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).
5. By U.R. Anantha Murthy, tr. AK. Ramanujan (1978; rpt. New Delhi: OUP, 1989).
6. See Bipan Chandra et al., *Freedom Struggle* (1972; rpt. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1991) for all excellent introductory account of the economic effects of British colonialism. See Ashis Nandy, 'The Sociology of Sati,' *Indian Express*, 5 October 1987; this and other articles on the subject can be found in *Sati* edited by Mulk Raj Anand (Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corp., 1989).
7. See Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Critical Theory,' in *Problems in Marxism and Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1981) for a discussion of residual culture.

The Enemy Within II

STUDENT: You have defined the enemy within as that section of our population which is not really interested in decolonization.

TEACHER: And there are at least two distinct groups of such people. The older vested interests, exploiting the residual culture, and the neo-colonized urban elite.

STUDENT: But isn't the first group, more or less, defeated?

TEACHER: Only partly. The back of the priestocracy is broken; it cannot terrorize people in the name of God and religion. But there is a new class of neo-Hindus, kulaks, caste lords, brokers of backwardness (not to be confused with those who are really backward), and so on. Worst affected by this new combination of rapacity born out of a commercial culture *and* the older, oppressive culture are our women. Lower class/caste and rural women are the most exploited and oppressed section of our population.

STUDENT: We need a separate chapter to discuss the question of women in our society. But, briefly, how do we dismantle older, traditional tyrannies?

TEACHER: By a two-pronged strategy: first, by redefining tradition and drawing inspiration from it to fight its abuse, as all social reformers from Rammohan Roy to Gandhi did. Secondly, to repudiate certain aspects of tradition altogether, as lower caste reformers such as Jyotiba Phule and Ambedkar did, when they rejected Brahminism and Hinduism. In both cases, we can also judiciously apply several liberal and humanistic correctives—drawn from modernity—to tradition, thereby challenging and revitalizing it. Of course, there are some who think that tradition, modified, is entirely self-sufficient; on the other hand, there are those, like our Marxists, who think that modernity is entirely self-sufficient.

STUDENT: We can talk about these strategies in greater detail later. Here I wish to devote more attention to the enemy within—the latter, urban, Westernized kind.

TEACHER: This section is happy enough with the subordinate position that India occupies in the world order as long as it continues to enjoy a place of prominence within India.

STUDENT: But can you please relate this idea to our central concern with Svaraj or the decolonization of our culture and society?

TEACHER: Let me ask you. rather provocatively, who *is* interested in decolonization? Who among our politicians or academicians or even artists is really committed to it?

STUDENT: Do you want me to mention names?

TEACHER: Try even that if you wish. You'll find only a very few. Because decolonization is not very simple.

Instead, you'll find most people pretty much satisfied with the compromises that they have reached.

We all talk of decolonization today. But how many of us really want it?

STUDENT: Yes, come to think of it, I can think of very few of our teachers or scholars who have really achieved a breakthrough. But isn't everybody speaking of it nowadays? Aren't books being written and papers published on the subject?

TEACHER: Yes, hut that's the point, isn't it? Today. it has become fashionable to speak about decolonization. But nobody wants to actually get there. They want to remain colonized intellectually, but to continue to speak of decolonization.

STUDENT: How startling! You mean it's like the man who goes around saying I want to be enlightened, but never becomes enlightened?

TEACHER: You see, this very project of seeking God becomes a way of postponing the finding. Krishnamurti points this out very clearly. He regards all our efforts at freeing ourselves to be a camouflage of our deep fear of freedom; we are merely putting off the inevitable. Our quest becomes the baggage that we carry around, that is our new crutch, our excuse, our security blanket. Remove even that and we'd be nowhere.' Those who speak of decolonization have made it not only a way of life but also a way of earning their livelihood. It is their ultimate crutch and solace. It gives them a sense of being on the right side of things ideologically. It gives them security and assurance.

STUDENT: Aren't we also speaking of it? So are we really ready for it? Are we also making it merely a topic of conversation? How are we different from them?

TEACHER: That is a question each one must ask himself or herself. This discussion, to me, is our immediate contribution to decolonization. We must decolonize ourselves even as we proceed in this dialogue. Otherwise, we shall have failed completely.

STUDENT: Do you mean to say that most of us are not really interested in decolonization?

TEACHER: Some are merely cynical. They use it as the latest bandwagon, to acquire all the worldly advantages. Others are more serious, but confused. They don't know a way out.

STUDENT: You are speaking against some of my favourite young teachers, especially the foreign-returned ones, fresh with the latest imported ideas. What is your evidence to prove that they are mistaken?

TEACHER: For one thing, the discourse of decolonization that they deploy is itself totally colonized. That is, this discourse has been penetrated by the West, appropriated by it, and made a part of its market. Hence, these days, it pays to speak of decolonization. The West's own motives for this self-flagellation are interesting. It helps assuage their guilt but also earns them money because it sells. Finally, it confers power and becomes a way of recolonization. As long as they control the discourse of decolonization, they are preventing decolonization.

STUDENT: Amazing!

TEACHER: But more convincing evidence is seen in the absence of any radical or meaningful understanding of decolonization from within our academia. We are merely duplicating the latest trends in the West. Our great concern is not to be left behind. We want to prove that we understand what is going on and are 'with it'.

A real concern with decolonization would result in ending, not perpetuating, our dependency on the West. Are our intellectuals interested in this? Or are they interested in acting as middlemen or brokers in this unequal exchange, thereby ensuring that their position, their scholarships, their trips abroad are not threatened?

The Indian intellectuals, especially the professional ones, have a bit of the cheat and an idler in them. They don't want to think for themselves. They would rather live with what K.C. Bhattacharya called the shadow mind: a

realm of borrowed ideas and thoughts. They would rather not question their place in the Western-dominated global intellectual system.

So they're not interested in decolonization at all, but continue to speak of it.

STUDENT: This hypocrisy is frightening. Rather like a radical Marxist professor who rakes in a huge profit by moonlighting as a real estate agent. These people want to be pure ideologically, but as bourgeois as possible in their daily lives.

TEACHER: It's the old problem of means and ends which obsessed Gandhi. If you want to decolonize, but everything you do actually leads to further colonization, then you have a very big contradiction in your life.

STUDENT: Is everyone who speaks of decolonization the enemy within?

TEACHER: I hope not, otherwise this dialogue would be meaningless.

I used the instance of the discourse on decolonization as an example of how something so seemingly anti-colonial can lead to further colonization. The enemy within academics is that section of our intelligentsia which perpetuates our position of inequality and inferiority.

STUDENT: How do they do this?

TEACHER: By accepting Western notions of what our goal as a society is.

STUDENT: I think this is where their attitude to tradition becomes important.

TEACHER: Yes. It seems to me that the enemy within has accepted a largely Occidental version of what the world should be like. They have accepted the Enlightenment and its totalizing project of changing the world. They have accepted History and the idea of a linear progression for human kind. They have accepted scientific materialism. They have, in a word, accepted modernity

STUDENT: Do you mean to say that we should revert to some premodern. Hindu view of the world, the so-called spiritual goal of culture? What about the oppressive aspects of our tradition?

TEACHER: Let us not make the mistake of thinking that we can automatically reoccupy some ideal space from the past from which we are today divorced. Such an idea may serve as a cementing factor, imbued with

tremendous emotional appeal to a beleaguered culture—and the best example of this is perhaps Iran—but it is still a chimera both theoretically and practically.⁴

To question modernity does not make one a die-hard obscurantist, revivalist, or traditionalist. I mentioned earlier that one must be equally critical of tradition as one is of modernity.

I would agree with Ashis Nandy when he says that the debate today is between the critical traditionalists and the critical modernists.' However, I am not very sure how critical our Indian modernists are.

Perhaps, I should rephrase Nandy: the struggle is between those who are critical and those who are not—whether traditionalist or modernist.

STUDENT: But where does this take us as far as the issue of decolonization is concerned? Don't you think that decolonization implies a conflict between the West and India, and therefore that's where we must turn our attention?

TEACHER: Yes. But we have tried to see that this fight is not so simple and clear-cut as it seems. The West must be defined. Those aspects of it which are inimical must be resisted. At the same time we have seen how our own response is by no means uniform, how much we ourselves contribute to our continued domination, and how little we have actually done towards our own decolonization.

Notes

1. For an introduction to Krishnamurti's thought, see Mary Lutyens. ed.. *The Penguin Krishnamurti Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1970) and *The Second Penguin Krishnamurti Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin. 1972). Also see Luis SR. Vas, ccl., *The Mind off. Krishnamurti* (1971; 2nd. rev. ed. Bombay: Jaico, 1975) for a set of readings on Krishnamurti.