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THE SUDDEN DEATH OF SANSKRIT KNOWLEDGE*

Something interesting is happening to our understanding of the advent of modernity in India. Till recently, most social scientists implicitly accepted a standard narrative whereby modernity was associated with a set of characteristic social practices that originated in the West from the 15th to 18th centuries, and gradually invaded Indian society through the instrumentalities of British colonial power and the more general Western cultural influence. There was much disagreement about the evaluation of what modernity had done to Indian society, and might do in future; but there was hardly any dispute about what it was and how it had arrived. Over the last decade, this complex of certainties has become shaken.

In 2002 Sheldon Pollock published his well-known essay on 'The Death of Sanskrit.'[1] It was a wonderfully provocative thesis, and split historical and critical opinion productively. Some thought the report that Sanskrit died was greatly exaggerated. Certainly, it was not true that after the 16th century no Sanskrit poems or texts were written, or that people entirely renounced Sanskrit as the vehicle of serious reflexive composition. An example from Bengal, the literature I am familiar with, will illustrate this point. Bharatcandra Ray, the pre-eminent Bengali poet of the 18th century, displayed his virtuosity in Sanskrit in several significant ways. First, he composed Sanskrit verse. Besides, in his major verse narrative, the *Vidyāsundar*, he showed his erudition in Sanskrit semantics by wholly appropriating a famous Sanskrit *kāvya*, *Caurapañcāśikā* in an ingenious fashion. Finally, and most significantly, he showed his poetic virtuosity by composing Bengali verse in some specially demanding classical Sanskrit metres (*chandaḥ*). Sanskrit was thus an essential part of Bharatcandra's artistic and theoretical universe; but it is interesting to reflect if the example goes against Pollock's thesis or in its favour. I think in this world of vernacular artistic language, Sanskrit exerts a distant, decaying, indirect influence as a high reference point, but so

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high that it is already becoming inaccessible. Compositions in Sanskrit, in 18th century Bengal, thus acquire both the exaggerated prestige and reduced efficacy common in such settings. High Sanskrit skills are becoming more scarce; and consequently they are greatly valued but insufficiently understood and reproduced. I think the significance of Pollock's thesis lies in the fact that it captures this historical transformation through a dramatic example. But there was an intriguing implication of Pollock's thesis which was not explicitly taken up in the literary discussion. If Sanskrit was already declining, did it signify something like a rupture with the 'traditional' literary universe? It was undoubtedly an immense intellectual transformation. But how should that intellectual change be conceptually viewed? Was this rupture with tradition a start of something like European modernity? The research in the present project raises these questions far more explicitly and centrally, and forces us therefore to think about them *conceptually*.[2]

THREE KINDS OF NEWNESS

In this paper, I would like to suggest an extension of Pollock's thesis about literary change: by calling our problem the 'sudden death' of Sanskrit knowledge systems. There is hardly any dispute that in the 19th century, in some parts of India slightly later, a massive 'epistemological rupture' occurred. Sanskrit, or in Islamic contexts Persian–Arabic, was replaced as a vehicle of serious, complex, highly valued knowledge by English. More significantly, this was a 'language change' in two distinct but related ways. Not only was this a massive shift from one natural language, Sanskrit, to another, English. These natural languages housed deeply entrenched *conceptual* languages. These conceptual languages were, in turn, part of comprehensive structures of cognitive grammar – i.e., the acknowledged ways in which 'knowledges' were recognised as knowledge, acquired, deposited, examined, disseminated and continued as intellectual and practical traditions. This cognitive change was utterly comprehensive: in fields of knowledge as widely distant as mathematics, logic, astronomy, medicine, moral enquiry, religious reflection, grammar and aesthetics, what counted as 'knowledge' was transformed.

The discussion generated by this collective project as a whole and the set of papers in this workshop raise another related issue. Recent scholarship in early modern history and Sanskrit studies have sur-

prisingly converged on a common point that has subtly transformed the intellectual and explanatory question about the colonial transformation of knowledges. Conventionally, a simple explanation of this change was widely accepted, jointly affirmed by both colonial history and nationalist responses, with grades and variations. The first, *colonial* theory believed in a simple, at times essentialist, distinction between a rationalist European cognitive trajectory contrasted with a non-rationalist Indian one, and saw this change as a colonial 'civilising process.'[3] By contrast, romantic writers and European Orientalists often strenuously contested the thesis that India was a barbarian society, pointing out that it had a great civilisational past in the Sanskrit cosmopolis, and the high cultures of Indian Islam. Both European Orientalists and ordinary nationalists, however, concurred that the ancient Sanskrit-based civilisation had its cultural achievements in the first millennium, and declined afterwards. There were two versions of the decline thesis: the first claiming an internal intellectual atrophy, the second attributing it to the political environment of Islamic power. Ancient knowledge systems became arrested, repetitive, sterile, ritualised into mnemonic and iterative practices without the capacity to engage in new enquiry, whether examination of the referential world or the reflexive examination of its own premises and procedures. This decrepit system of futile, ineffectual cognitive practice was justifiably and understandably overthrown by the coming of Western knowledge carried by English education. Modernist nationalist narratives concurred with Western Orientalist perceptions of this degeneration and thus considered the overthrow of the previous knowledge systems as inevitable and cognitively justified.[4]

Two strands of research have served in recent times to undermine this conventional 'modernist' picture. First, quite external to the technical Sanskrit field, historians of early modernity and late medieval times have argued convergently that the decline of Indian society in the long 18th century was an unreliable picture produced by uncritical absorption of a colonial bias in favour of imperial orders. Uncritically equating the existence of imperial political power with social prosperity, treating it as a condition of social, economic and cognitive flourishing, was a central feature of colonial history. Since British history of India argued along these lines, this gave rise to a systematic 'imperial prejudice' in the general writing of Indian history: connecting periods of prosperity with periods of imperial dominance. The long narrative of Indian history was thus subtly

divided into high periods of comprehensive prosperity under the Mauryas, Guptas, the Sultanate, the Mughals, and the British. The intervening periods of Indian history were simply assumed, without critical evidence, to be periods of relative decline.

This historical picture is evidently vitiated by a crude form of political determinism. It works with a simplistic and homogeneous conception of historical time. All the familiar Althusserian arguments about the complex and heterogeneous nature of historical temporality[5] can be advanced with great force against this simple and misleading picture. It did not acknowledge the complex nature of what we analytically imagine as a 'social totality,' the relatively autonomous character of various social processes, and their specific and distinct temporal rhythms. By contrast, recent historical research has suggested that instead of regarding it as a period of decline, the 18th century should be seen as a time of experimentation with multiple possibilities of further evolution.[6]

This revisionist picture coming from history has been indirectly reinforced by the growth of an argument within Sanskrit studies – represented most forcefully by Pollock's thesis that the actual history of Sanskrit creativity should be re-appraised in the light of modern research. Two separate arguments converge here. The first asserts, contrary to conventional colonial and traditional Hindu beliefs, that the processes of transaction between Islamic power and Sanskritic culture were more complex than previously believed. It is true that the stable continuance of Islamic imperial rule in North India created a distance between political authority and social precedence; but the conventional picture of unremitting conflict in which political rulers systematically repressed Hindu cultural practices and the Hindus in turn lived in a secret, resentful hostility was simply not true. As Islamic power stabilised, it was clear that the rulers were not engaging in a project of comprehensive conversion to Islam. Medieval historians like Muzaffar Alam have argued forcefully that the Mughal rulers in particular drew upon Aristotelian ideas of 'social balance' mediated through the Islamic theoretical tradition to recognise the significance of Hindu cultural practice. As they recognised the existence of Hindu society, and its enormous power in commercial and cultural spheres, they set up relations of transaction with Hindu life.[7] Conversely, leading representatives of Hindu culture – scholars, poets, artists – entered into exchanges with Islamic political authority – not merely by accepting political suzerainty, or working in their administrative, military hierarchy, or court culture but also by

accepting recognition from the Mughal emperor for significant cultural achievements.[8] Johannes Bronkhorst's brief sketch of Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita's biography demonstrates how he received stipends from both the Mughal emperor and outlying Hindu principalities though he lived in Kāśī, near the centre of Mughal territorial power.[9] If we abandon the exaggerated functionalism behind the belief that all aspects of Hindu society suffered a decline with the establishment of Islamic empires, it becomes easier to appreciate that even when the Sultanate was being started in Delhi, a great Shaivite philosophical tradition was flourishing in Kashmir. Down to the period of the major Mughal rulers, various branches of Sanskrit knowledge and literature continued to flourish and remain productive.

If we accept this more complex picture of the relations of exchange between Islamic empire and Hindu society, it becomes easier to understand Pollock's argument that contrary to conventional belief there was considerable evidence of 'newness' in Sanskrit intellectual–cultural life in the 17th century.[10] Although originally his thesis was about 'new intellectuals in the 17th century,' in the current project the time band is expanded to three centuries. Pollock's suggestion is that there is a new culture of 'newness' in Sanskrit culture around this time, reinforcing, from an unexpected direction, the historians' thesis that (a) other spheres of life were relatively independent of imperial institutions and were not necessarily negatively affected by the collapse of empire, and (b) that this was a period of considerable ferment and creativity not just in political forms and commerce, but in intellectual life as well.[11] Pollock's thesis can be more closely analysed into two claims, one referring to intellectual, the other to social history. First, he shows convincingly that it is wrong to continue with the conventional theory that the Sanskrit tradition always, without exception, valued continuity and antiquity over newness, its allegedly unfailing preference for the *prācīna* over the *navīna/arvācīna*. Starting from Navyanyāya[12] to new theories of grammar,[13] new traditions of proprietary ethics,[14] new views of alaṅkāra,[15] many strands of Sanskrit culture explicitly asserted their 'newness' as a positive quality. Secondly, he suggests less explicitly in his paper, but more in the current project, that this intellectual newness may be connected to the social–historical environment generally. There is something new in this historical period which encourages this newness in intellectual culture. This tends to reinforce the thesis of revisionist history that new developments were taking place in the Indic civilisation from the 16th century onwards, much before and independently of the external

impulse towards modernity brought in by European colonialism. Naturally, this contributes to enliven the debate about the nature and location of the 'early modern' in India. Is India's 'early modernity' to be calculated from the time of colonial dominance, as we standardly do, or two centuries earlier in these new developments in intellectual and social life?[16]

Apart from these new complexities in historiography, the papers in this project illustrate something quite unconventional. The colonial–nationalist consensus rested on the premise that the pre-modern traditions – both Sanskritic and Islamic – became dead, fossilized corpuses because they failed to generate anything new, which made the elite preference for European knowledge in the 19th century both socially easier and intellectually justified. Sanskrit 'knowledge' became just the acquisition of information and skills about the contents of unmoving texts. Contrary to that picture, all papers in this workshop reveal undeniable signs of cognitive renewal and innovation. Navyanyāya did not content itself by merely announcing its newness in its nomenclature, it continued to develop new techniques and doctrines.[17] Even grammar, at least in its philosophic form, shows an attempt to develop a new, innovative conception of the origins of semantic meaningfulness.[18] Similar examples can be found from other traditions like aesthetics. This shows that, contrary to common belief, Sanskritic traditions incorporated a certain kind of *newness of renewal* as part of the definition of a tradition (*āgama*) itself. Consequently, this entire discussion is about the precise relations, both logical and historical, between three kinds of newness. First is the newness that was implicit, if such studies are correct, in the conception of tradition itself. The second is the more significant newness found in the historical context and intellectual cultures of the post-medieval Indian society of 16th to 18th centuries. The third kind is the simplest and the most obvious one – of the remarkable epistemic rupture brought in by colonialism. I shall offer my comments by arranging these problems into four paradoxes: of tradition, originality, verification, and disqualification. Finally, I shall briefly but inconclusively connect these issues with the larger and fascinating question of Indian modernity.

THE NEWNESS INSIDE TRADITIONS

To explain my first point, I shall draw upon the evidence from the papers by Ganeri and Preisendanz on Nyāya philosophy and

Bronkhorst's on philosophical grammar, especially *sphoṭa* theory. I shall supplement them with some independent arguments drawn from philosophical aesthetics, particularly the case of the most interesting development of *rasa* theory from the eightfold register in Bharata to the nine analysed by the Kashmir aestheticians, especially Abhinavagupta.

Clearly at work in the philosophical thinking about both logic/epistemology (*nyāya*) and aesthetics (*rasaśāstra*) is a complex understanding of what constitutes a tradition. Tradition's own conceptualisation of a 'tradition' – what has come down and is acceptable and usable in the present – is, not surprisingly, quite different from the notion that permeates most modern understandings of the issue. The intellectual universe of Sanskrit possessed a culture of energetic, intense and vivid critical discussion, a culture that reveled in controversy; and precisely because it considered disputation so important in the search for truth, it devoted great attention to devising rules for rational prosecution of intellectual debates. In fact, Nyāya, which is supposed to discover the correct rules of arguing about anything, is necessary precisely for that reason. What Nyāya attests to is not just a particular philosophical orthodoxy, but the existence of a culture of sharp and refined disputation. Individual authors are recognised and honoured, often for their unforgettably distinctive contribution to specific fields of thinking. Their works are constantly re-read with increasingly detailed critical attention by other intellectuals of formidable skill and originality. In some cases, the power and originality of the commentarial interpretations transcended the original texts.[19]

Individual performances and propositions however do not constitute traditions. The rational compulsion of assent that is central to any knowledge comes from intellectual activity that connects single propositions to larger and more complex structures of interconnected understanding. True knowledge is not made up of single units of ideas, as propositions which carry them linguistically, but in complex structures of interconnected propositions. Knowledge, particularly its intellectually compelling power, resides in its character as a *system*. Thus the interconnectivity of knowledge, the fact that it connects subjects, gives rise to the minimal idea of a tradition. Building of knowledge is thus an intrinsically collective activity, both at a single point and across time.

Systematicity instantly raises several problems. Of course, individual works, like philosophical treatises, are systematic, because

they are constructed by the composition of propositions with internal cogency and coherence. But knowledge consists in the study not of individual works, which are systems in this narrower and easier sense, but of *śāstra*s which exhibit a different, more complex or elusive kind of coherence. A student of *rasa* would have as his object of study and intellectual enquiry not just the ideas of Abhinavagupta, but of *rasaśāstra*, the system of knowledge about *rasa* that has been created between various texts, schools, commentaries, and debates. In fact, a deep knowledge of Abhinavagupta's thought itself depends implicitly on such interconnected and differentiated knowledge. Hermetic knowledge of his texts would not yield an understanding of what is distinctive about his theory. Shastric systematicity thus complicates the conception of coherence implicit in any knowledge-field: it introduces some further relations complicating the picture – the relation between subjectivities, the relations of affirmation, rejection, refinement amongst theoretical positions, and finally the question of relations between systems across time. Propositions in themselves do not constitute traditions. By the same token, individual works or even schools of thinking by themselves cannot. A tradition exists only when such plural and differentiated positions and performances are held together by a common point of intellectual enquiry – it exists as a system and a cognitive field. This way of picturing a tradition forces us to modify some of our standard preconceptions about what a 'tradition' is, by forcing redefinitions of originality, authenticity, and continuity.

Let me explore a single example in some more detail – from Abhinavagupta's commentary (the *Abhinavabhāratī*, henceforth AB) on the *Nāṭyasāstra* (NS). There is the famous long commentarial essay on one of Bharata's propositions in the sixth chapter of the NS.[20] Abhinavagupta takes us through a long line of distinguished commentators, pointing out in each case why that particular reading of Bharata's text is 'inadequate' or 'incorrect.'[21] In this commentarial exercise, Abhinavagupta demonstrates an exemplary reflexive understanding of his own work – not merely showing us what he thought Bharata's propositions must mean, in their best construction, but also what he thought his own commentarial activity of producing new layers of meaning out of an already meaningful text consisted in. At the end of this fascinating examination of others and self, he faces a question that must inevitably arise, but rarely posed with such forthrightness. If the concept of *rasa* is so difficult to determine exactly, is the effort worthwhile? What is the point of all this negative

dialectics? Might this not create in his readers a weariness with theory, a sense that, after all, the concept of *rasa* is ephemeral, indefinable, unattainable or fundamentally flawed? Abhinavagupta provides a fascinating (though not perhaps infallible) answer. He faces the problem of originality in theory development squarely. In a phrase that is slightly ambiguous, he says, *āmnāyasiddhe kim apurvam etat* – 'This is all proven in the tradition; what is new/unprecedented in this?' This is one side of the paradox of tradition: if it simply reveals, elaborates what is 'already there' in the received texts (like the Vedas), then how can we claim that the author has achieved something new? The other side of this dilemma would then be, if we prove that the author has done something indubitably new, it would fall foul of the idea of the comprehensiveness of the source-texts. Additionally, if they are not comprehensive, how are they entitled to that special form of intellectual regard?

The more immediate reason for the anxiety about over-contentiousness relates to the preceding theoretical positions on aesthetics which Abhinavagupta has shown to be wanting (by way of *khaṇḍana*, or critique). His own solution to the problem is that these were essential for the development of knowledge in the *śāstra*:

āmnāyasiddhe kim apūrvam etat saṃvidvikāse 'dhigatāgamitvam /
itthaṃ svayaṃgrāhyamahārhahetudvandvena kiṃ dūṣayitā na lokaḥ //
ūrdhvordhvam āruhya yad arthatattvaṃ dhīḥ paśyati śrāntim avedayantī /
phalaṃ tad ādyaih parikalpitānāṃ vivekasopānaparaṃparānām //
citraṃ nirālambanam eva manye prameyasiddhau prathamāvatāram /
sanmārgalābhe sati setubandhapurapratiṣṭhādi na vismayāya //
tasmāt satām atra na dūṣitāni matāni tāny eva tu śodhitāni /
pūrvapratiṣṭhāpitayojanāsu mūlapratiṣṭhāphalam āmananti //[24]

What is new [in this idea]? It is already established in the tradition. With the development of the intellect/understanding people grasp [better] what they understood earlier. Otherwise, would people not blame someone who seeks to contradict the precious self-justifying ideas of the tradition? That the intellect, never flagging, constantly rises upwards and understands the meaning of theories/truths – is that not the very fruit of the succession of intellectual/theoretical steps of the staircase prepared by the scholars of old?[23] It is fascinating, I think, that the first appearance of things seems to be without a prior supporting cause, yet once the proper way is found, it is not surprising that bridges can be built and cities constructed. Therefore, I have here not found fault with the ideas of these good (earlier) thinkers, but only refined them. They say that in bringing coherence to the views established earlier, the result is similar to the establishment of entirely new truths/foundations.

This is in some ways similar to ideas in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Mind*[24]. Preceding theories were not fruitless, and therefore, in

slightly recondite sense, not 'proved wrong;' rather, they have gone into a kind of fulfilled obsolescence, sublated by and transcended in a more encompassing and complex conception of truth.[25] They have fulfilled their purpose of constituting a step in the growth of knowledge in that field, though with the discovery of the subsequent step, they are shown to be inadequate. What Abhinavagupta has done, he claims, is not to refute their ideas, but to refine the truth they contained (*na dūṣitāni tāny eva tu śodhitāni*).

I think the idea of *sodhana* – purification, refinement – can have at least three implications which reveal significant aspects of the Sanskrit idea of tradition.

(a) It must mean that the 'originals' – like the Vedas or the NS propositions – were unclear in some sense, and needed clarification, rectification, or elaboration – three distinct activities.
(b) The excessive compression or intransparency of the fundamental texts, produced by the literary convention of the *sūtra* form, requires and encourages a plurality of interpretative exposition – but this exegetic plurality itself requires establishment/ascertainment of correctness, clarity, and coherence.
(c) Again, due to compression-ambiguity, the fundamental texts require constant commentarial interpretation. Commentarial work seeks simplification: to the extent it succeeds, it also inevitably degrades and renders the fundamental ideas less complex. This requires the re-establishment of the complexity and dignity of the originals. Commentarial texts sometimes claim, in a revealing metaphor, that they have removed the deposit of grime that covered the originals with excessive use; and a good commentary restores the original shine to the meanings of originary textual words. Thus the Sanskritic tradition is deeply perceptive about the problems of continued meaningfulness, popularisation, and accessibility. A tradition must make its fundamental ideas widely accessible; this makes them simpler, and opens the possibility that they might become intellectually degraded. There must exist a complementary task of recovering their complexity.
(d) Finally, originary ideas are not merely fundamental in this sense; they are also fundamental in the sense that they can generate new ideas through elaboration of original principles. The task of a tradition is the constant clarification, elaboration and *generative extension* of the ideas of the originals. A serious intellectual tradition thus cannot be static. When it does become static, and is

stuck in repetitiveness, this shows that there is now something wrong with it.

Reading Abhinavagupta's interpretative thesis thus leads to an astonishing re-conceptualisation of tradition, seen from the standard modernist point of view. A tradition, he suggests, cannot be a tradition without plurality, originality, newness and criticism. There is also an interesting reflection on the nature of orthodoxy, or the fundamental nature of the fundamental texts. Why are they fundamental? What does their inviolateness consist of? There is an intriguing implicit idea about simultaneous comprehensiveness and economy of the foundations/texts of the orthodoxy. It is their economy which makes it essential to explore and interpret them. It is their comprehensiveness which makes it inappropriate to try to go beyond their limits.

TRADITION AND ORIGINALITY

Although my specific example is chosen from the field of philosophical aesthetics, this complex picture of a tradition extended by interpretative originality appears to be common to other intellectual disciplines.

Karin Preisendanz's paper provides exactly parallel examples of the relation between originary text and commentarial activity. 'According to the... understanding of the authors of these commentarial works the individual aphorisms already contain the opinions and positions explicated by themselves... No express claim is made to personal intellectual originality or innovation on the part of the individual thinkers; it is rather explicitly denied in some cases.'[26] The Nyāya commentators also claim that the purpose of commentarial activity is the 're-establishment of doctrinal positions,' because their 'real meaning had become concealed.'[27] Preisendanz points out that Udayana was dissatisfied with many commentaries and sub-commentaries and composed 'truly independent treatises.' Her analysis of the irruption of new treatises and theoretical innovations in Nyāya philosophical thought suggests, indirectly at least, that the reason for this renewal had something to do with the intellectual challenge presented by Buddhist logicians. Preisendanz's account also helps us move from this theme of commentarial originality to the second form of 'newness.' She points to a revival of interest in writing fresh scholarly commentaries directly on the *Nyāyasūtras* themselves on the

part of the 15th-century Mithila figure, Vācaspati Miśra, and his successors running down to the time of Shāh Jahān. Ganeri, taking a more analytical line of reasoning, states 'preservation need not imply ossification,' and if 'traditions of preservation too are traditions of truth',[28] they can hardly survive by simple unoriginal repetition of received doctrines. Ganeri's illuminating discussion of the debates between extrinsicists and instrinsicists on the question of beliefs about the world concludes that 'the 'newness' of the new Nyāya consists in large measure in an attempt to think through from the beginning the nature of an inquiry governed by truth.'[29] This raises the question: 'What, for a "new" Naiyāyika like Gaṅgeśa, counted as fidelity to the tradition? It was to reapproach and reconstruct the old tradition, having first freed it of a conceptual myth that had lurked for too long within. It was to think though the old problems again, from the beginning. A revolution, yes, but also a return.'[30]

The newness of late medieval times however is of a different kind. Both these types of 'newness' – the space for originality internal to tradition, and the more historical newness from the 16th to the 18th century are involved in Johann Bronkhorst's account of Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita's renewal of philosophical grammar. Bronkhorst's exposition shows how Bhaṭṭoji reformed the central questions of philosophical grammar from earlier issues like 'What is a word?' to 'What is expressive in language?' Interestingly, Bronkhorst too points out that 'Bhaṭṭoji ...went out of his way to show that his new ideas about *sphoṭa* were not new at all,'[31] and speaks about 'his relative originality within the grammatical tradition he represents'[32] – a descriptive locution very similar to the manner in which Preisendanz and Ganeri characterise their thinkers. Bronkhorst's analysis of Bhaṭṭoji however crucially connects the two kinds of newness as his author resided in Banaras at the time of Shāh Jahān, and is a contemporary of Paṇḍitarāja Jagannātha, whom he is reported to have called a *mleccha*.[33] Both Bronkhorst and Preisendanz suggest an intricate and complex pattern of patronage from which these Sanskrit theorists drew their income. Drawing on Bernier's account of his visit to Banaras, Bronkhorst suggests that their patronage came from rich merchants, at times the aristocracy, Hindu regional kingdoms lying at the edges of the Mughal empire and from the emperor himself. This shows that the relation between knowledge and power was complex, and Sanskrit knowledge was regarded as a distinct, separate, and autonomous domain not entirely controlled by territorial claims of sovereign rulership.

The papers in this project thus connect interestingly with the larger movement of argument about a 'proto-modernity' in India in the period of Mughal rule. From the 16th to the 18th centuries, authors in a wide range of intellectual disciplines appear to start to place a new value on innovativeness – on doing something new, or in a distinctly new way. However, there is something rather odd in these declarations of newness. Pollock's own work shows that in most intellectual disciplines this declaration remained empty, in the absence of substantive new arguments, or new methods of acquiring knowledge. In the case of the *dharmaśāstra* traditions he studies, the new activity consists in the production of massive, encyclopaedic compendia of dharmic principles: but what is new is the scale, not the principles. The new research presented in this historically minded Sanskrit scholarship therefore raises an intriguing question: should we think of an historical period, immediately before the arrival of British colonialism, which can be legitimately regarded as 'proto-modern' or an indigenous beginning of modernity? The main conceptual question arising from this discussion is about the relation between these two forms of newness and what goes into the conceptual definition of the 'modern.'

THE NEWNESS OF COLONIAL MODERNITY

Now we move to the third, the most dramatic kind of newness: the nature of displacement of traditional Sanskrit knowledge systems by modern Western ones with the establishment of colonialism. Clearly, this is a new kind of newness, compared to the two earlier kinds. The first kind was *internal* to traditions. The second kind was probably induced by a constellation of historical circumstances, but still entirely connected epistemologically with earlier forms. These were departures from earlier knowledge traditions, but still clearly within the encompassing horizons of the same system. Ganeri, Preisendanz, and Bronkhorst agree on this point: that although the new developments were often highly original and startling, they were easily intelligible in terms of the earlier conceptual and theoretical systems. Later developments of Navyanyāya logic still worked upon the corpus of traditional philosophic ideas. Bhattoji Diksita's new philosophical grammar and its theory of expressive semantics similarly treated as its material the received corpus of grammatical doctrines in the Sanskrit textual universe. The newness of colonial knowledge was

different. The new knowledge systems established themselves by disqualifying the earlier knowledge systems in a strangely comprehensive manner. In retrospect, there are some intriguing features of this cognitive rupture which seem to require closer analysis and research. Obviously, the main task of this project is not to comment on the type of knowledge systems that came to replace the Sanskritic ones; but this corpus of research would undoubtedly throw much light on this question – at least indirectly. The historical question of intellectual modernity, how and why traditional knowledge systems were supplanted by modern ones derived from Europe, has two constituent parts. The first is to ascertain the state of these systems in the 18th century, and the other to understand the cognitive skills and systems that entered India with colonial culture. The standard procedure is to describe the process through which traditional education for instance was quickly replaced by Western-derived models, or how older medical doctrines were discredited and replaced by Western theories and techniques. The general weakness of that story is that it too often assumes that the traditional systems were ossified, and were ripe for replacement. The evidence of the new research of the Sanskrit knowledge-systems project complicates that picture by showing that in certain parts of the Sanskrit cognitive system there was considerable vitality and movement – making the *explanation* of the modernist colonial transformation more difficult.

The colonial transformation of knowledges was an epistemic rupture on the vastest possible scale – one of the greatest known in history. One interesting feature of this rupture is how different it appears, when closely analysed, from the intellectual revolutions in early modern Europe with which this is conventionally compared. Epistemic transformation in the colonies was utterly different from the Western process of cognitive rationalization – in which political power played much less of a role; and traditional cognitive theories were not sent into a similar wholesale desuetude. In early modern Europe, specific cognitive fields – like astronomy, physics, physiology, and subsequently 'moral philosophy,' the common name for early social sciences – were subjected to a deliberate, incremental process of experimental or theoretical disputation of earlier ideas, and gradually populated with radically new doctrines. The peculiarity of the historical advent of modern knowledge/knowledge-systems in the colonial setting was its comprehensiveness and rapidity. Modern knowledge disqualified and stigmatised precisely 'everything' associated with earlier systems – not individual propositions, theories, fields

of knowledge or specific philosophical doctrines. This was a comprehensive disqualification of an entire cognitive universe – in the most literal sense, an *epistemological break*.[34] Thus, if this transformation is seriously different from its European counterpart, it will be instructive to analyse closely the exact procedure of this disqualification.

The first paradoxical feature of this process is related to its intellectual method. Every knowledge system – the rationalistic modern one in particular – contains publicly acknowledged, widely accepted procedures for rejection of an idea, or withholding assent from a proposition.[35] It is generally accepted that modern cognitive systems rested on a verificationist procedure for confirmation or rejection of scientific ideas.[36] The new rationalist science that came from Europe not merely contained a system of knowledges, but precisely in order to be a system, it necessarily followed strict methodological principles and procedures. Only when information was produced by following those procedures could these bits of information be integrated into the open-ended, impersonal structure of ideas of modern science. Interestingly, in the colonial setting, advancing systems of modern knowledge rejected traditional conceptions in a large range of cognitive fields without subjecting them to this procedure.[37] This raises a problem: was a rejection like this a true 'scientific' rejection? Were these traditional ideas disqualified following scientific procedures, or simply disgraced? A rational knowledge system must follow an agreed model of refutation. Although the system had a clearly worked out and widely enforced model of refutability, it did not apply them to a vast body of purported 'truths.' Modern colonial knowledge, by implication, treated those traditional beliefs as deserving of something *more* than ordinary refutation.

There is a further problem. Even when rejected, propositions remained propositions of science, constituting parts of the domain of science, though individually falsified as propositions. This did not happen in the colonial context. Individual propositions of Ayurvedic medicinal systems were not subjected to a verificationist procedure, and falsified and rejected. They were rejected wholesale, in a far more comprehensive fashion – i.e., ideologically. So that the disqualification was not of discrete, atomistic propositions, but of the whole systems – which were not and which could not be subjected to such precise, atomistic submission to the verification rule. Thus the victory of the new rationalist science over its adversaries was done against its own methodological procedure, by breaking the rules it proclaimed as fundamental rules of good scientific practice.

The important point then is a distinction that emerges through this elucidation. We are forced to make a distinction between two types of propositions – some which are *irrational*, and others that are *false*. Surely, in a certain sense, both these types of statements are false; but modern Popperian scientific theory insists that there is a difference between these two types of falsity. It is entirely possible that a proposition P^1 – let us suppose a view that a disease is caused by bad food habits – is replaced 20 years later by proposition P^2 – that it is caused by genetic make up. This kind of replacement is fairly common in science. What is the relation between the two propositions, and particularly, the exact status of P^1 when scientific opinion has already moved on to P^2? Modern scientific theories would strain to point out that the first belief, P^1, not merely constituted a part of science then. It still does, though proposition P^1 is now known to be false, and proposition P^2 as true. Inside the intellectual process of scientific development, its falsity does not disqualify P^1 from 'scientific status,' being part of the scientific domain. This has to be separated out systematically from those beliefs which said, for instance, that carrying of an amethyst on your body would get you out of financial difficulties – which is not false, but an unfalsifiable belief, and thus to be treated as irrational. The two types of falsity are distinct. Indeed, it would be a great disservice to clear thinking if we lazily content ourselves by saying that both beliefs are false: indeed, they are, but their conditions of assertability are quite different, and therefore, they are also false in different ways. We can even go further and say that the first has the quality of being a truth-producing falsity, while the second has a falsity that is intrinsic, because it does not specify conditions under which it can be proven false. That does not make it true, but unfalsifiable – that is, worse than ordinary falsehood, and disqualifies it from inclusion in the scientific domain.

This particular discussion in Indian intellectual history can connect profitably with another in African anthropology around Robin Horton's controversial application of the Popperian dichotomy of open and closed systems to the contrast between modern science and traditional African thought.[38]

HOW CAN WE HISTORICALLY EXPLAIN THIS PROCESS?

A successful historical explanation should not merely record and describe this huge historical change in intellectual history, but also try

to offer some suggestions regarding how this can be understood. How can such immense changes in cognitive practice be explained? Explanations derived from three types of theories of intellectual change can be applied to cases of this kind.

The first way of dealing with the death of Sanskrit knowledge can be called in a literal sense a theory of 'epistemological break.' It uses a form of argument found in the works of Gaston Bachelard, the French cognitive theorist whose ideas about modern science being born through an epistemological rupture were adopted and used by Louis Althusser in his works on Marxist philosophy.[39] The second approach could be drawn from Thomas Kuhn's conception of a scientific 'paradigm shift.'[40] In both these ways of thinking about epistemic change, there is a misleading rationalistic presumption in the very framing of the problem. In such explanatory enterprises, there is often a crucial implicit act of preliminary characterisation of the enquiry to follow – the way we conceive what our explanation would be like. At times, such preliminary assumptions tend to prejudge the nature of the enquiry – by telling us beforehand what we should be looking for, when the trouble is precisely that we do not know exactly what to look for, what would constitute a successful explanation. Both these theories offer what can be called an explanation of a *homological* causation.

The first type of argument misleads by suggesting that an explanation for the 'epistemological rupture' that we have factually discovered and are trying to understand/explain has to be of an *epistemic* type, and that we shall, it is not clear on what assurance, find its key in epistemological beliefs, or procedures. This form of reasoning is supported by a plausible, but unexamined assumption of homologicality – that epistemic shifts are always epistemically caused. It does not even trouble itself by the thought that this first step needs some critical control: on what grounds are we so confident that these ruptures in modes of enquiry are undertaken on purely epistemological grounds? What if they are not? What if other, non-epistemic, non-rationalistic, non-intellectual background changes make them appear plausible, acceptable and eventually obligatory? However, this is not a view advanced by Western intellectuals alone. A dominant section of the Bengali intelligentsia in the 19th century, interestingly, conceived and practised this change in precisely this fashion as a shift sanctioned by purely rationalistic considerations.[41]

Despite overall similarity, the second, Kuhnian line is, on some crucial points, more complex. Kuhn's account of the dynamics of

intellectual change takes into account some non-intellectual factors. In its detail, Kuhn's work offers a more complex approach than the Althusserian version of an 'epistemic rupture.' The novelty, originality and subversiveness of Kuhn's position stemmed from the fact that he gave to this supremely rationalistic problem an unsettlingly non-rationalistic answer, at least in part. He suggests that at least in parts the settlement of rationalistic/epistemic questions are decided by sociological factors, by the operation of authority in science structured as a sociological community. It is one of the implications of Kuhn's argument that scientific paradigms try to protect themselves from collapse and scrutiny by a sociological system of authority, discouragement and exclusion, not entirely by rationalistic intellectual procedures. However, Kuhn is an eventual rationalist. In the last instance, Kuhn concedes to a fundamentally rationalistic line of reasoning, providing a homological explanation of cognitive change. After all, the causal force in the fundamental change represented by scientific revolutions is rationalistic, internal to the purely *intellectual* processes of scientific practice. Kuhn's approach thus introduces sociology into an analysis of the operation of scientific practice, but stops short of giving primacy to a sociological explanation of intellectual change.

Some readings of Foucault's works on intellectual history have offered the most audacious and complex proposals for understanding cognitive change.[42] Foucault's working methods are notoriously difficult to interpret, making it possible to see their implications is several plausible ways. Edward Said and others working on the problems of 'Orientalism' have read his work in a purely sociological fashion. Foucault, on this view, allows us to disconnect the problem of intellectual change from strictly intellectual impulses, and to substitute instead an entirely unmixed logic of power;[43] though more complex versions of the Orientalist argument would accept a distinction between direct political power, and cultural hegemony – power in a more intellectual form. Foucault's approach to discursive change offers a fascinating, and in some ways, more adequate explanation of the 'colonial epistemological break' by stretching the sociological element as far as it is conceivably possible to do. Foucault's theory of discourse advances two disconcerting hypotheses. Truth, in Foucault's reading, is persistently associated with discursive power and deep movements of social authority. If we compare Foucault with Kuhn, we could say that he offers us just the obverse mixture of the rational and the sociological. Systems of knowledge

are inextricably linked to systems of power. They are set up and undermined by transformations of power systems. The history of science is, on this subversive view, literally political. Enthusiasts for cognitive indigenism would doubtless be delighted by its clear implication. The immense transformation of cognitive practice in modern India – from philosophy and aesthetics to scientific knowledge and medicine – would then be explained simply by the rupture of political sovereignty, in a comprehensive symmetry between cognitive rupture of modern knowledge and power rupture of colonialism. Nyāya logic was supplanted by Western logic, not because it was rationally superior, but because it was aligned to colonial power. Ayurveda was replaced by modern Western medicine not because it was less effective, but because the colonial authorities and the modern elite abandoned and suppressed it. This simple 'Foucauldian' explanation obviates the need for a falsificationist explanation of the decline of Sanskrit knowledge. Sanskrit knowledge systems could die so comprehensively and so suddenly precisely because, in intellectual terms, it was no ordinary death. It was caused by instruments – not of superior techniques of knowledge but of power.

The implications of this third view are bound to be attractive to nationalist and postcolonial arguments. It also deals economically with the two undeniable features of modern Indian history – the rupture in the field of power and the rupture in cognitive systems by simply making the second causally dependent on the first.

Who can say with certainty if, without colonialism, these systems would have been changed, abandoned, supplanted? And if this more heterological vision of the change is true, then how should we look upon various attempts at restoring and reviving these unfairly dead knowledges?

Although this is a plausible view of the connection between the two ruptures, there are significant difficulties. First, many societies which did not go through the loss of sovereignty that colonial India represented, slowly abandoned their own comparably traditional systems of scientific and social thought – thus in the case of China and Japan. Secondly, even in India, sociologically, this obliteration of traditional knowledge systems was very uneven. Many of the traditional ideas retreated into a more sheltered space in colonial culture as 'religious' ideas, and continued to be held not as cognitive truths, but as ideas of cultural self-definition. Ayurvedic and Yunani medicine remained popular with ordinary people, outside modernist elites. Some segments of traditional knowledge in fact did not quite die, but

continued an undergound existence. Aesthetic theories from traditional Sanskrit texts fell into disuse, and intellectual discourse turned decisively to modern European aesthetic language. Yet vernacular writing rang with a muffled and pleasurable rustle of those ideas, carried in ordinary language. They structured the very process of artistic delectation, because in the actual making of art traditional aesthetic categories and conventions remained powerfully alive. Even modern poetry or narrative writing can hardly be analysed without some assistance of deeply effective traditional practices. An explanation of cognitive change exclusively by power relations thus appears too simple, it seems to exaggerate the reach and depth and to underestimate the complexity of colonial power.

THE QUESTION OF TWO MODERNITIES

The Sanskrit knowledge-systems project also links up with a much broader question that is slowly opening up through research in various disciplines. Research in various historical fields – from political, economic to intellectual and literary history – now appear to point to the existence of not one, but two 'ruptures' or 'breaks with the past' – which I have called, following the work of this project, the second and the third kinds of newness. Translated into more ordinary historical language, this would suggest that there were two separate 'ends' to the traditional-medieval world in India. It is clear that in the 12th to 14th century Vaiṣṇava poetic aesthetics broke away from deeply entrenched forms of medieval aesthetic practice.[44] Should we call that kind of poetry 'modern' or 'proto-modern'? The current work by Pollock and his colleagues seem to show that something quite similar happened in cognitive intellectual disciplines as well. Established forms of cognitive theories and practices were often challenged and overthrown by new styles and forms. If such changes are happening across vast intellectual fields – from literature to grammar to philosophy – should we view this as the end of medieval structures? Should we then call these the beginnings of an indigenous Indian modernity – which had already started to undermine traditional intellectual systems and practices, before and without the force of colonial culture? Is this modernity then overcome, interrupted, shattered by a modernity drawn from the West and forced through by its power? Where does this leave our conventional story of the emergence of the modern in Indian history? Are there two 'moder-

nities,' one destroying the other? These questions are unavoidably raised by the new research, and their further explication would produce a more complex picture of what modernity means in Indian history. It might even begin a wider discussion about the trajectories of modernity outside the narratives of the West.

NOTES

[1] Pollock, 2001a.
[2] For the ongoing work of this project on Sanskrit knowledge-systems on the eve of colonialism, see, in addition to this collection, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 30, 2002. But some of these questions can be glimpsed in the essays in Pollock, ed. 2003.
[3] The classic statement of this argument was James Mill's foundational text of colonial historiography, and one of the best critiques of its arguments can be found in Guha (1989).
[4] Although Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Chatterjee, 1986) was primarily concerned with social thought and political ideas, his thesis, if extended to the cognitive terrain, can yield a critique of nationalist history on these lines. It is important to point out, however, that there were variations in nationalist thinking on this question. Thinkers like Gandhi or some Hindu conservatives would not assent to this entirely. It is interesting to note that a conservative Hindu theorist like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay partially accepted this thesis by arguing that science was a matter of immense importance, and must be acquired from the Europeans (Mukhopadhyay, 1981).
[5] Althusser and Balibar, 1972: 91–118.
[6] The work of historians like Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, C.A. Bayly and David Washbrook have in different ways contributed the most notably to this altered perception of the historical period of Mughal decline.
[7] Pollock, 2001a.
[8] Pollock's paper provides an excellent example with the case Paṇḍitarāja Jagannātha, the author of *Rasagaṅgādhara*. Ibid.
[9] Bronkhorst in this collection.
[10] Pollock, 2001b.
[11] Parallel arguments about social and intellectual history of South India have been advanced recently in the works of Sanjay Subrahmaniam, David Shulman and V. Narayana Rao. Cf. especially their joint work, Rao et al., 2002.
[12] See the papers by Jonardon Ganeri and Karin Preisendanz in this collection, and more generally, the work of philosophers like Arindam Chakrabarti.
[13] Bronkhorst in this collection.
[14] The work of thinkers like Raghunātha Śiromaṇi and the Gauḍīya tradition of *smṛti*.
[15] Bronner, 2002.
[16] This opens up a question of enormous significance and complexity which ought to be taken up for serious discussion among historians and other social scientists.
[17] Ganeri in this collection.
[18] Bronkhorst in this collection.
[19] This seems to have happened incontrovertibly in the two cases of the Navyanyāya re-interpretation of originary *Nyāyasūtra*s, and in case of the commentarial extension of the central ideas of the foundational *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

[20] *Nāṭyaśāstra* ch. 6, the 'rasādhyāya.'
[21] Abhinavagupta's commentary deals with theories advanced by Bhaṭṭanāyaka, Lollaṭa, and Saṅkuka in succession, pointing out why he considers them deficient.
[22] Following NŚ *kārikā* 3 (*Hindi Abhinava Bhāratī*, pp. 468–469). The translation that follows is mine. I am grateful to Sheldon Pollock and Guy Leavitt for suggestions.
[23] There are two readings of a crucial word in the fourth line. The Gaekwad edition reads *phalaṃ tad ādyaiḥ*; a more intriguing, even arrogant alternative is *alaṃ tad ādyaiḥ*. This would alter the meaning of the assertion dramatically and suggest a Wittgenstein-like point that once the results have been reached, we can throw away the ladder.
[24] Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Mind*.
[25] For an exposition of Hegel's thinking see Taylor 1975, Part 2, specially chapter IV.
[26] Preisendanz in this collection.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ganeri in this collection.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Bronkhorst in this collection.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] To use a term introduced by Louis Althusser, after borrowing it from scientific histories of Gaston Bachelard, and much beloved of structuralist Marxists in the seventies.
[35] Even if we acknowledge that there are great and complex debates about the nature of the principles which underlie modern rationalistic knowledge, we can use as a useful general theory the arguments in Karl Popper's widely influential digest (in Popper, 1972).
[36] To speak of a modern knowledge system in the singular is obviously a huge simplification. It disregards the well known philosophical differences between both philosophical views about knowledge – like empiricism and rationalism, and contending theories of science – like verificationist, falsificationist and other positions. But it makes sense to speak of them as a provisional singular in this case, because despite their significant differences, they share some basic assumptions while contrasted to pre-modern systems of knowledge.
[37] There is an impressive literature which shows this inconsistency in colonial introduction of modern science. Works by scholars from a wide variety of fields have contributed to this point, particularly those of Ashis Nandy, Shiv Viswanathan, Frederic Apfel Marglin, David Arnold, Gyan Prakash among others.
[38] Robin Horton's initial analysis was presented in Horton (1967). See also his revision of the initial thesis in Horton (1982). Horton admits that conventional pictures of 'traditional thought' exaggerated their static quality, and notices 'the picture is of a conservatism which none the less permits a high degree of adaptability and responsiveness to change' p. 219 – remarkably similar to the characterisations of traditional Sanskrit thought in our papers.
[39] Althusser, 1971. These ideas were later given a more systematic, not necessarily more convincing, form in the joint work, Althusser and Balibar, 1972.
[40] Kuhn, 1970.
[41] For an excellent account of the Bengali 'scientific revolution' see Raychaudhuri, 1999: 49–64. Especially symbolic is Aksay Kumar Dutta's cry: 'They were in want of someone to lead them. They were in need of one Bacon, one Bacon, one Bacon' (cited p. 56). True, there were dissenting voices. Some damaged the cause of tradition

by their really irrational devotion to every single idea of traditional practice, and seeking with pathetic desperation for a seemingly scientific explanation for it. The 'tiki,' the tiny pigtail worn by Brahmins, was supposed to conduct electricity from the atmosphere. Others like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay often advanced a cogent and reasoned defence of traditional beliefs, but they concentrated on moral and religious questions, rather than problems of scientific knowledge. For Bhudev's response to colonial undermining of Hindu thought, Raychaudhuri, 1990; Kaviraj, 1994.

[42] I put this cautiously, because Foucault's own work is not directly concerned with scientific change in the narrow sense. But his work certainly tends in this direction – by implication.

[43] Said, 1978: 3, 9ff.

[44] I have discussed this in Kaviraj, 2003: 521–528. During the discussions in that project this question came up repeatedly.

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