

Ambivalence, Colonial Text and Tagore

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Colonial texts tend to posit some locational issues now, and the post-colonial discourses have diversified, for their teleologies, not only into the metaphysics but also into the epistemology of the question. Together with the 'pre-existing', 'marginality' and 'subalternity' the centrality of the argument has partly shifted from the concern from the pre-colonial space to the issue of *authoriality*. The entire anti-colonial enterprise is no more now than an embattlement of authoriality to restore subjecthood to the post-colonial centrality. So, demolition of theories from white colonial origination being held as a sacred discursive strategy for authority. In the process *negritude* is gradually released from the seizure of the colonial cultural fetish and the non-white is sought to be liberated from the 'white fate'. Du Bois Coetzee, Toni Morrison, Paul Gillory, Malauf, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Sally Morgan, Stuart Hall *etc.*, are engaged in the singular endeavour to refute the cultural stereo-type of blackness. Consequently, along with other theoretical concerns, colonial texts are poised against some definitional judgments. Authoriality, under the circumstances, is said to admit a theoretical nexus with its ontology beyond the cartography of the contingent. But the teleology of the act turns out to be a complicituous construct. 'The fact that I have said that the effect of interpretation is to isolate in the subject a kernel, a *kern* to use Freud's own term. . .,' as Lacan has defined the act of interpretation, is the complicity. For the post-colonialists the *kern* is the re-appropriation of 'erstwhile', the 'secular subalternity', the 'authority' of the colonial texts to re-construct subjecthood from colonial obliteration.

I

But the process is dialogic; it is continuous plebiscite of ideas on how authority is viewed to operate in the density of cultural motives and their political mediation. For Homi Bhabha it is not a realm of certitude. A quest for *authority* of the colonized admits, according to Bhabha, an exploration into the *ambivalence* of the colonial cultural authority as well. Bhabha argues, 'It is the horizon of

holism, towards which the cultural authority aspires, that is made ambivalent in the colonial signifier.' Presumably, the authoriality of the colonial texts is likely to be registered by it in its configuration of the self against the colonial construct. But Bhabha apprehends that *ambivalence* is a seizure of cultural viscosity; 'it turns the dialectical "between" of culture's disciplinary structure-between unconscious and conscious motives, between little acts and grand traditions. . . . That sows confusion between opposites and sands between the oppositions at once'. Therefore, the colonial authority cannot be homologous; it splits itself into the anthropologism of culture and the transcendence of the English texts as the text of ethnic obliteration. This binary of cultural colonialism is a hermeneutic deception. Consequently, a colonial text is largely disprivileged by it from locating the centrality of the issue of redemption. In this state of affair *mimicry* emanates as a *trope* for cultural authority; to it, the white presence and the black penance, is added the confounding argument for the legitimation of the cultural claims of political authority. The colonial texts, therefore, are often prejudiced against the colonized itself. For, the loss of subjecthood is obscured by its engagement as the metonymy of recovery of civilization from aboriginality.

Employed, to achieve the required transcendence, is the other discursive strategy, the English text book, as the 'literature of empire'. Southey discovered its poignance, as he wrote, 'A remarkable peculiarity is that they (the English always write the personal pronoun I with a capital letter. May we not consider this great I as an unintended proof how an Englishman thinks of his own consequence?' It appears to have proclaimed the triumphal sojourn of the pre-verbal to a distinct verballity. In this state the subjecthood of the language of the colonized tends to utter the reiteration of the signs of pre-verballity to voluntarily renounce the symbol of speech. 'It is the scenario,' narrates Bhabha, 'played out in the wild and woless wastes of colonial India. Africa, the Caribbean, of the sudden, fortuitous discovery of the English book. It is, like all myths of origin, memorable

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for the balance between epiphany and enunciation.' It may be argued, together with this, that the English book, for all of its overbearing unintelligibility, is taken to sign for all *authoriality* that a text is held to command. It has no cartography, for the subtlety of its operation; it percolates into the darkness of the sedated colonized consciousness to appropriate textual authority for itself from all other endeavours of textuality.

How could the textual assertion of the colonial texts be determined then? Not by piece-meal, but by a summary dismissal of the total trumpeted claims of colonialism and the trumped up charges of pre-verbality against the rules that such a fit can be accomplished. It is with a desire for the recovery of speech and its authenticity that the post-colonial interrogation of the colonial text is negotiated. Not only for the taxonomy, but also for its epistemology does it engender the protest. Understandably, the colonial text is indexed; it is ought to be classified in accordance with its disposition towards the authorial issue on the basis of the immediacy of the contingent more than by the eschatology of its pre-colonial historicism. This brings *ambivalence* to be installed in the decision of the *kern*, the Derridian *enter*, which often acts as erasure of the pre-colonial anti-sceptic sequestration. Even if it is understood that the colonial authority requires 'modes of discrimination' the colonial text may stammer, for lack of the 'most tenuous word', to pronounce subaltern marginality and authorial boundedness. The claims, therefore, of the *horizon*, of the *erstwhile*, of the *subjecthood* are inscribed on the texts, particularly on those of the post-colonial era, as the only creed of the anti-colonial discourse.

Colonial texts, hence, are assumed by the contemporary critics of colonialism as *post mortem*, to announce their authoriality, of the contrivance by which the pre-colonial space is entailed by a theory of progress for recovery. The whole of black-literature, in its intent, is focused on the ballad of *negritude*, in the retrieval of geography from the unilateral white discoveries, or, in other words, in writing back the West. It is a contestation of 'marginality, the stereotypical quality and the fetishized nature of images of blackness', or the Fanonian 'Dirty nigger I or simply, Look, a Negro' and its temporal location of ethnicity, 'You come too late, much too late, there will always be a world-a white world between you and us'. It is certainly a different placement of the incarcerated blackness from Phyllis Wheatly's innocent temerity:

That there's a God, that there's Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor know.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,

'Their colour is a diabolic die'.

Remember, *Christians, Negroes*, black as *Cain*.

It also serves to explain the distinctive features of a colonial text from its post-colonial manifestations. Presumably, it has raised a serious question on how the races are inter-linked with nations, the imprisoned space liberated into the textual space of the unmediated horizontality of existence. The Black Atlantic incidentally is reiterative; it did not exhaust in Wheatly: from Wheatly to Du Bois to Delany to Paul Gillory to Stuart Hall to Coetzee it had reincarnated to lay its claim on its pre-colonial space. Du Bois in his *Dusk of Dawn* has engaged in an Atlantic peregrination, being conquered by its surrogation against the tidal waves of heroic nation-building activity in the *erstwhile* memory has been surrendered to the ambivalence of the present. It is in fact a severe theoretical scrutiny by which the post-colonial intends to suture the *Black Atlantic* across its temporality. Delany, of course, has considerably redeemed himself from the paradox of the pre-colonial, which is, *interestingly enough*, a rejection of the *post-colonial litany of the pre-existing*. The *post-colonial* existentiality being unveiled by him for a theoretical gaze Delany installs a daring futurity. 'We must Make an issue, create an event, and establish a national position for ourselves' constitutes the new slogan for the recovery of the *self*.

The rhetoric of the creation of an event has persisted, and in its urgency it has engendered multiple linearity to be uttered. Chinua Achebe while crafting *Things Fall Apart* has predicted a way to experience reality where the boundary, which was once interminable, is diminished. Though Achebe appears to have reinstalled a new boundary in an ethnographic irony the fact that 'The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors' is an act of relocation in the history of the compulsive existence of their pre-history. This capacity to control representation is itself a fundamental horizontal practice.

Nevertheless, horizontality is installed as a cultural product of the text through the literary representation of the pre-colonial cultures. This vision of 'pre-colonial' is one form of horizontality achieved in the post-colonial discourse and in the European ontology. Horizon, hence, has been elevated, in a later turn of the discourse, from the mundane geography to a metaphysical vision of liberty. So, various ways are found to have been employed to do it; one way to breakdown the various boundaries of the natural world, between the foreground and the background, the animal and human has been suggested by Les Murray in her *Equanimity*

A field all foreground, and equally all background
 like a painting of equality. O infinite detailed extent
 like God's attention.
 Where nothing is diminished by perspective.

The alliance that Murray intends to achieve between the equanimity of perception and the indigenous form of representation is controversial, but that it is with boundary she has been engaged is indeed quiet panegyric to horizontality. The centrality of the issue is what space to inhabit when the marginal invade the *culturally quarantined*, and together with it, the diasporic, exiled, estranged boundaries with the contrivance of the horizon. Interestingly, the writers in the borderlands negotiation the fragile space, fragility imputed by their unique observation of porousness, somewhat directly, though they cannot decide if their space is the *pre-existing*, or the *elsewhere* which can be inhabited securely. Gloria Anzaldua attempted an answer:

When I write it feels like I'm carving bone; It feels like I'm creating my own face, my own heart a Nahuatl concept. My soul makes itself through the creative act. It is constantly remaking any giving birth to itself through my body. It is this learning to live withal *Coatlucis* that transforms living in the Borderlands from a nightmare into a numinous experience. It is always a path/state to something else.

But the question which the *pre-existing*, taken for the horizon, encounters to negotiate with colonial existentiality and its post-colonial metamorphosis is the ontology of location. It is the metonymy of the post-colonial where the innocent habitation in a home is intimidated not only by the inviolability of the fences but also by the ambiguity of the location. Consequently, a contact zone, the metaphor of the no-man's land has been contemplated now where the transculturation of the 'insider' and 'outsider' may take place in an apparently non-negotiable boundary. The metaphor of the contact zone suggests that the discourse is replaced by a counter-discourse in which the very identities of the 'inner' and the 'outer' become negotiable. Its alterity, the imposition of a home on an alien land by the colonizer, is the arrogant 'extraterritoriality' which is flaunted to demarcate the 'no-entry' to those who own the land in tradition and in contemporary legality. So, the question remains, how is the home to be inhabited? And what is it that is the authentic home of estranged? Toni Morrison has struggled with the dispensation of the Western epistemology to liberate the home from its inherited frontierties. In his *Paradise* he pronounces:

This is their home; mine too. Home is not a little thing.
 . . . That Place. Who was God talking to if not to my

people living in my home?

However, a strange epistemic skepticism continues to encumber the pre-colonial *erstwhile* to defeat all the arguments of its *placeness*. This is the paradox; the post-colonial enthusiasm to retrieve the pre-existing has to surrender its unsuspecting faith on placeness. A home is no geography; it is also belatedly realized, when the protest subsides into the calmness of a rational scrutiny, that it is also emotion interpreting homeliness. Sally Morgan discloses the rational capture of the situation in her *My Place*. In the earlier part of the novel the reader can explore from Sally's grandmother the way of inhabiting space that enables one to transform it, to own it to make it an extension of one's self. Significantly Sally has been asked to sit on the step and be very quiet:

Suddenly, the yard filled with a high trilling sound, My eyes searched the trees. I couldn't see that, but his call was there. The music stopped as abruptly as it had begun. Nan smiled at me. 'Did you hear the bird call?'
 'I heard Nan', I whispered in awe.

At the end of the day it is observed that the claims on the colonial texts by the post-colonial discourses to state authoriality are laid on a plural metaphysical prescriptivity. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the colonial texts are made to serve some ontological purposes. They are held to be authorial in virtue of the fact that they tend to repudiate marginality, boundedness and are committed to the retrieval of the pre-existing, as superstition clings around faith.

III

In the light of the above argument a question can be proffered: Are the three fictions of Tagore, *i.e.*, *Gora*, *Ghare Baire* and *Char Adhaya* colonial texts? The interrogation originates from the fact that they are neither retrieval of the pre-colonial space, nor endeavouring for subject-making, nor refuting colonial marginality. The problem emanates from an epistemic rejection of their anti-coloniality; the discernible absence of the isomorphic congruence between colonialism and its repudiation contests their cultural location as texts. Poised against them are the tenor of argument in Gillory's *Black Atlantic*, Coetzee's *Foe*, Malau's *Remembering Babylon*, Morrison's *Paradise*, to name a few, where an unmitigated subjecthood is sought to be recaptured from the obliteration of colonial historiography. The *kern* has been released, by the awakening to self, from the metaphysical obscurity of the colonial anthropologism. Understandably, the post-colonial anguish for pre-coloniality is very loud in its moral affirmation. But in it, for all of its

legitimacy, is also embedded the post-empire confrontation with the lethal 'national allegory' to disembark the Third World Literature into surrogate authoriality. The issue is characteristically polemical; its refutation, consequently, can be founded only on the poignant instance of cosmopolitanism in the colonial literature. Before we proceed it may be mentioned that somehow, on account of the disdainful marginality and loss of subjecthood in as much as the earnestness for a post-imperial retaliation, a category mistake has obscured the frontiers between colonial and post-colonial texts. Authority claimed or contested, therefore, and in the figurative formulation of ontological virtue/epistemic inadequacy is found to endure unsuspectingly the cultural stratigraphy of hybridity to qualify both of them. Tagore, hence, emerges as the appropriate instance to explore the metaphysical foundation of the dialogue between colonialism and its antinomy.

Gora of Rabindranath Tagore is vehemently dialogical. More than that, the assertion of ideologies, *Gora*, Benoy, Paresh Babu, Anandamays, Sucharita have been carefully stacked on layers of dialogue to reveal their inside to the gaze of a ponderous Indian history. Tentatively the narrative owes to a location in the contemporary Hindu-Brahmo theological debate. But Tagore has intended to convey the falsity of cultural topography, because the lived history is taken by him for a shared history. He argued that in the frontiers of tradition, horizontality of rationalism, in the depth of humanity and in the openness of the historical space is uttered a statement of sameness. For Tagore, *Gora* is an answer of transcendental historicism to the ethno-cultural nomonological question of *Kim*. In the entire course of his argument Tagore has been inscribing an edict of indictment against cultural diasporic whose ethnic and cultural authenticity is berated as the surrogation of a transferred epithet. *Gora* has no ambivalence, which *Kim* had, such as that of Jemmy of Malauf, about the fence between civilization and aboriginality. That *Gora* could have transported himself, without any theoretical crisis, from his white ethnicity to Hindu nationalism, is a refutation of the argument advanced to recover *Kim* from his aboriginal (Indian) childhood for restoration to civilization (ethnic mediation). *Gora* virtually argues, in as much as he has argued against all boundedness, for his liberation from a clandestine sequestration of a-historicity into the wider space of *will* and *consciousness*. This is the theoretical posture, which Tagore could have engendered at that time, to repudiate the colonial grounding of ethno-cultural nomena and white historicism.

Incidentally, *Gora* is equally deciphered in his cognitive code of conduct. He confesses that he could not sit with all in his quest for the empiricism of 'that part of

India in which he intended to see it' and he has been finally haunted, on that account by '... an imaginary isolation all the time' resulting in a feeling of 'emptiness'. Here Tagore is very transparently critical of the pre-colonial erstwhile; he points at the debris of a-historical fragmentarity, of the illegitimacy of the pre-existing, on moral grounds to continue to exist, even if it claims a geographic and cultural mapping. So, he could not argue, as the post-colonial critics are doing, that the retrieval of the pre-colonial space is needed for its placeness to register textual authority. On the contrary, he was arguing for the ethical elsewhere, the moral semioticity, past all historicisms, where God could confidently utter 'good good'. It is not reiterating an experience which is only theologically certified; he intends to install an indulgence to negotiate an experience that is prescriptive. 'Teach the hymn of that deity,' implores *Gora*, 'which admits everybody, the Hindu, the Muslim, the Christian, the brahmo into its temple.' For the *erstwhile* Tagore virtually cautions 'not here, not here, elsewhere, somewhere else', which is also the first installation of the issue of the *elsewhere* in the entire anti-colonial discourse.

The tragic, in the *Ghare Baire*, under the foamy crest of the nationalist tempest is the obliteration of the private space by the anonymity of the overwhelmingly assertive public space. Space, the legacy of a cultural truce, on which the post-colonial discourse has been founded, is a conceptual exaction which Tagore, as the critique of colonialism, has secured from colonialism to examine its theoretical perplexity. For Tagore, the pre-colonial and the issue of its habitation, after it is recovered from colonialism, is of no serious concern, as long as the recovery of the *private space* is not executed. Because, the enterprise of colonialism/nationalism is a dilemma metaphored appropriately by Bimala in her confused surrender of her private domain to her indigent quest for the concretes in the opaque indistinctiveness of an ideology. She pleads for '...such a concrete image of my country which I can address as mother, as goddess, as Durga, to whom I shall slaughter the sacrificial animal to release a stream of blood'. But why was she so crest-fallen and so soon? Is it the ethical retribution of her privacy, the surplus that has been engaged so far for the aesthetic mediation of her conjugality retrieving itself, or the rejection of the claims of moral precedence of her perplexed political incarnation? It may also be inferred that Bimala is finally defeated in her redemption into the sociality of her husband from the sordid demands of an ideological promiscuity, which is empty of any serious theoretical foundation.

On the whole, *Ghare Baire* states the inadequacies of ideologies which are more of hegemony than of negotiated consensus. They are totally confounded when

societality, severely injured and comatized like Nihlesh, is returned by its underlying sanity to the post-coloniality from the ruins of its rejection. It is not its habitationality that explains their turn as *home-coming*. The pre-colonial *home* has been composed of a private space, the fief of *liberty* and *will*, has been subverted by the illegitimacy of the uncertain *public*. The pre-colonial place seems to have been obliterated, and what appears to be its post-colonial recapture is an inconceivable horizon of indistinct existence. So, it has been a serious predicament for Tagore to contest the *erstwhile* to prescribe the terms of authority of the colonial texts, just as it is a serious dilemma for Sally Morgan today to take pre-colonial space for textual space.

Char Adhaya is yet another text of moral legitimation; the delicacy of privacy and its tender operation in the nurture of will in the geography of mental space foregrounds the morphic more than the semantic of the term civilization. To stifle it by an argument that openly defies the small habitational spaces for the *horizon* is to employ the erasure to obscure the *entre* in the enterprise of civility. In the context of the contemporary post-colonial debate the colonial text is being held as a counter-discursive strategy in the general discourse. Often it is needed to accomplish a discursive rejection of the imperial textual containment for anti-colonial purposes. Chinua Achebe claims it in his essay 'The Novelist as Teacher' for effecting revolution and restitution.

Tagore's texts suggest a discourse which is not either writing back the imperial texts, or they are not engagement of any discursive strategy of anti-colonialism. It is a category of literary concern in which the characters might be located in colonial historiography; nevertheless, as a different genre of literary protests the characters renounce the homologue of discursively to enter into an arena of complex dialectics of an ideology intricately mediated by history and social commands. The endeavour, therefore, is not homogenous, as it is ordinarily held to be. And so, it tends to insert the significant *otherness* that has been conveniently overlooked for the purpose of arguing for an integral theory. In Tagore's texts the nations materialize, not always, as an allegory; it is on this point Tagore may be problematized, in retrospect, as the invalidity of the Jamesonian accusation of the entire Third World Literature as 'national allegory'. Hence, Tagore may be regarded as the metaphor of the anti-colonial *other* of the national allegory, and also the *other* of the *other* of the imperial discourse. It is this dual otherness that has enabled his characters to transcend the protocol of ideologies to reach a state of dissolution in their operation of consciousness to narrate the allegory of humanism.

IV

In the final analysis the colonial texts assume a more complex texture of metaphysical import than that apprehended by the post-colonial teleology. If Tagore, along with Senghor and Cécyl, is found by Edward Said to '... Rise above their national environment and gain universal significance' it is attributed to textual authority in their own terms. Tagore has inscribed a pre/text of the pre-existing and the text of retributions from the pre-colonial cultural asylum and the tendentious colonial historicism.

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