Subaltern's image and the real: An inquiry

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For last few decades post-colonial studies has been one of the ruling framework for cultural theory in Indian subcontinent. In search for the subaltern we mostly can not articulate ourselves as theory. Our inquiries in to the epistemic domain ('What can we know of the subaltern?'), the metaphysical domain has largely gone unanswered ('What makes the subaltern possible?'). Here I would like to propose that the solution lies in our proletarianization process. In this article I give an outline of just such a theoretical framework, harnessing the theoretical kernel of Marx, Hegel, Lacan and Žižek.

Keywords

Subaltern, Subjectivation, Real, Hegel, Marx, Lacan, Žižek, Post-colonial studies.

Introduction: Raison d'être

A few days ago I stumbled upon the site of Golden Threshold within the old city. It is a part of University of Hyderabad campus. Golden threshold, where Late Sorojini Naidu lived and led from, was dedicated to the university by the former prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi back in 1975. If we walk across the stony pavements we face a tree grown out of the sapling taken from the tree under which Mahatma Gandhi held his fast against untouchability. If you tear your eyes off the plaque you are faced with the sign which proclaims the place to be the Center for Distance Education of University of Hyderabad. And across that you will face a window opening into an assortment of chairs under a foot of dust, piled in a room filled with furnitures that no one needs. If you come out of the campus you are faced with a street which if perhaps shot in sepia mode with a digital camera can transport you to the nostalgia of the old glory of nationalistic history in no time at all. Perhaps the picture will say a thousand words which will never be heard - or heard differently every time. We look behind to a speechless, voiceless past. Someone once elaborated on the difference between voice and speech (Agamben, 1993)). Voice is instinctual, of agony, of ecstasy. Speech is listened to with categories of today. Multitudinous such categories make the speech itself muffled, crowded with our own reveries of present. The sites of these architectures, busts, and paintings have made our past voiceless. When it speaks it does so through reifications and articulates in speech the script that we have prepared for them. By erecting our heritage in the form of these busts and allocated territories we have created our subaltern - the subaltern we choose to ignore until it screams - or perhaps we make it scream - render it helpless - subjugate it to our ideal or analytic past. Probably this is why the subaltern can

not speak - not because why some celebrated post colonial thinker says.

So how do we make the subaltern speak out of the infinite documents, figures, tables, architectures - and through us? It requires us to render everything that is silent in our categories, our understandings to come and confront us - the 'educated' - the 'modern' citizen-subjects - and lay bare our skeletons in our closets. What we need is to shake the foundations of meanings and histories of meanings. What we need is a science of attachment. Our formal and real need to question each other for the truth. The truth of our being remains co-opted in our analytic - in our critique. The truth remains that we undergo a continuous process of subalternation¹ - the bastardized form of sublation - that refuses to yield us a concrete whole of being² and thus refuses to let us posit a becoming of certainty.

This is where I begin my theoretical inquiry - the inquiry that will let me move beyond the claims of the ends that subjugate us. The myths of the subalterns and the myths from the subalterns are to be examined together. We need to see where the subaltern is determined - what are its determinators - and where lies the possibility of freedom from its own determinations.

Subject and the singular

Theoretically, an inquiry into the conceptual quilt-work that is the subaltern, one must begin with a concept that is given to us in the immediate by virtue of its simplicity, the subject itself. Much like 'being' for Hegel and 'commodity' for Marx, we must follow the derivation of the subject in order to reach the subaltern, although in the previous section

¹Subalternation denotes the specific relations in Aristotelian syllogism's square of opposition. The path from universal to particular without the negation of negation (*Aufhebung*) is subalternation in my framework.

²The totality is always the one with symptoms. Probably we enjoy our symptoms too much to be aware of the totality.

subaltern was posited as a given before the subject (much like the Capital is posited at the beginning and the end of the life-cycle of the commodity).

The point of departure

To begin one starts with the subject - the subject of which one speaks of and the subject that speaks for oneself. But how can there be a subject without its own ontogenesis if you will? Can one even speak of a subject when it has not completed its process of becoming? To deal with the hermeneutics of the subject one comes very close to the notion of a singular event - a point of departure - that through dialectical derivation unfolding in real time to give us a subject.

Let us start with the parable of the signature. The digitalized world has achieved what Gutenberg's printing press began - to copy without human agency (the will is still needed, one can add; but we might face something in contrary³). What it has done to the questions of authenticity, or the original, is a matter post-modern scholars have taken up (Baudrillard, 1994). However one can not but notice that we had to keep the signature, even when the term digital signature is becoming increasingly more commonplace. Signatures can be forged - but at least it was forged by a human being with a will and an agency. Our concepts of ethics and morals should apply to him. We can punish the one responsible for the forgery! That is our target - to hold someone responsible - to make the crime disembodied⁴. Alan Moore's *From Hell* (Moore and Cambell, 2006) scares us because the crimes are somehow embodied, resonating back and forth between centuries, resonating in tune with the whole society. In search for the one who is responsible - 'subject who is supposed to know', Foucault's elaborate confession box has been transformed into a box where we sign - we assign (make a sign as in L. assignare) a truth to our being - as disembodied subject-forms. Modernity arises because we try actively (and succeed) to make the form - or rather the form is given to us *a priori*. Kafka pushes this fundamental idea in his *Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 2008), where the protagonist, even in a changed physical form is still responsible for his world - even trapped in it till he dies (by going back to his own room). To write a history of modernity is to write a history of the subject-form - to deal with its point of departure.

One here may ask what has the logic of dialectic to do with the point of departure and what is the point of departure that here we speak of. In the common practice of philosophy one can dilute the theoretical abstraction with an example that is supposed to capture some salient features of the theoretical device. In my case I choose the example of life and non-life. At some point in time there was a departure from

non-life to life. Following that life and non-life forever entwined, coexisting in their contradiction and charted a course of differentiation and complexation - however we all recreate the same point of departure with our own lives⁵. However the logic that exists before a point of departure (in all forms - deductive, inductive or statistical (Hume, 1902)) can not be extrapolated beyond the point of departure⁶. The only system capable of even grasping the discontinuity within analytical philosophy is probably Wittgenstein's. At the end of *Tractatus Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein, 2001b) he stares into the abyss of that precise discontinuity and chooses to pass over it in 'silence'. In his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein, 2001a) he comes up with the idea of family resemblances to break the silence. However, the idea of family resemblances itself makes the point of departure obscure⁷. Outside analytical tradition it is only Hegel's *Science of Logic* (Hegel, 2010) that can possibly give us the understanding of the point of departure.

the region of truth is not to be sought in that matter which is missing in logic, a deficiency to which the unsatisfactoriness of the science is usually attributed. The truth is rather that the insubstantial nature of logical forms originates solely in the way in which they are considered and dealt with.

The above example needs certain caveats. It is not to be read as positing dialectic derivation as a causal force behind the singularity of events - that is the point of departure. The dialectic gives us an abstraction of an unfolding process within the realm of the human subject and not for any natural process like origin of life. The point of departure in itself is modern - there are no points of departure before modernity. Before modernity a point of departure can not have infinite

³One can indeed think of the copying as what Lacan calls as repetition - where the symptom is to repeat the traumatic kernel in order to come to terms with it (like the case of shell-shock), a mechanism devoid of wish-fulfilling drive as Freud noticed.

⁴A disembodied crime is also disembedded. The causal chain of crime is then delinked from the totality of the concept of crime. It was very nicely illustrated in a webcomic where superman tries to catch a burglar - who blames his employer for laying him off - the employer blames the Wall St. and so on, until superman gets frustrated enough and punches the burglar.

⁵One can get a sense of Freud's Thanatos in this precise logic

⁶Even after the point of departure in the above example non-life retains its own logic and however the discontinuity still remains.

⁷Family resemblances are supposed to take us around the discontinuities of their own categories. For example if the relations of capitalist mode of production exists in both pre-modernity and modernity, one can appeal to the idea of family resemblances to understand the invariants of capital relations. However in this attempt one misses the point of departure from the quality to quantity (from 'capital in general' to 'many capitals')

replicability within the human subject⁸. The human subject and the singular character of the event (Badiou, 2005) appears simultaneously with science and modernity.

of modernity exists within a nexus of symbolic fiction - science, religion, myth, psychology and many more. The purpose of symbolic fiction is to provide an alienation from nature that is required for us to be human. In pre-modernity symbolic fictions were incomplete (mostly provided by religion) and thus the human subject was incomplete in its alienation from nature⁹. The incomplete subject becomes complete by its complete alienation of nature through symbolic fictions that mask these precise discontinuities in its own hermeneutics¹⁰

There are threefold questions to be asked in this juncture. Firstly, how do we even identify the points of departure? Secondly, how do we characterize the points of departure? Thirdly, what is the precise mechanism through which symbolic fictions negotiate with the points of departures?

In Badiou's *Theory of the subject* (Badiou, 2009), he talks of the beginning of Hegel's *Logic* (Hegel, 2010)

where being and nothing are the same thing posited twice. Here, too, one can 'track down' the becoming-split of a category only because one gives oneself, whether secretly or publicly, this minimal primary differential: two times One.

I say that it is 'the same thing' posited twice because alterity has here no qualitative support. We are, if you will, at the dawn of the qualitative, at its structural skeleton. This only differs from that by the statement of the difference, by the literal placement. One could name this infamous stasis of the contradiction the indexical stasis. There is A, and there is A_p (read: 'A as such' and 'A in another place', namely, the place p distributed by the space of placement, or P).

It is the place that differentiates the being-in-itself (ontological being) and being-for-itself (ontic being)¹¹. The placement itself offers the displacement for the ontological being A from its ontic being A_p . However the true contrary of A is not A_p , but the set of places $p_1, p_2, ..$ where the A can appear, that is P. Remember how Marx in the beginning of his *Capital Vol 1* makes the distinction between 'capital in general' and 'many capitals' (Marx, 2000; Rosdolsky, 1992), but his investigation itself is a movement from one level to another - from essence to concreteness, from quality to quantity. To do so he had to begin from the commodity-form (Banaji, 1979). The true nature of the commodity-form however lies in the proletarianization process - precisely with the commodity that turns out to be the unreason of the reason itself - labor-power. Labor-power is a unique commodity whose use increases its use-value and the exchange value(s) resulting

from it (Marx, 2005). Thus the true contrary of the proletariat is not the bourgeoisie, but the capitalistic world system (Badiou, 2009). The proletariat thus appears as the universal of bourgeoisie-capitalist system.

However, this brings us to the next crucial point. If similarly universals of modernity are to be derived from the fundamental unreason within reason - within the excluded who are the support of the system itself, then the universals of modernity are to found elsewhere from Europe, it is to be found in the colonial citizen-subjects who embody the universals of modernity in their subject-form. However, before we can go to the subject-form we need to give idea of symbolic fiction a bit more attention.

Symbolic fiction

In his book *The birth of tragedy* (Nietzsche, 1999), Nietzsche posits the universal of human existence in an antagonism between the Apollonian form and Dionysian formless. The horror of existence stems from trying to posit the individual¹². However, it is twentieth century that gave the horror of existence its form. In his book *The aftermath of war*, Sartre in one of his most creative moment asserts that they have experienced no freer moment than during the German occupation (Sartre, 2008). Every point of expression in the period was an authentic moment of freedom of expression. Is it to be taken as just an expression - something written to mitigate the horror of existence in the Nazi occupied France? Or, was there a truth to the proclamation? If the latter is true then doesn't this proclamation violate the notion of Althusserian subject - one who is forever interpaleted and alienated in a 'process without subject' ? If the symbolic is at work in the subject, so must the real be.

In the introduction to his book *The sublime object of ideology* Zizek points out the difference between Althusserian subject as an ideological mis-recognition and the subject of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Zizek, 1989) -

In contrast to this Althusserian ethics of alienation in the symbolic 'process without subject', we may denote the ethics implied by Lacanian

⁸There is no post-modernity or rather there is no real of post-modernity. The symbolization does exist, though, excessively so. The kernel that moves post-modernity is still the real of modernity.

⁹It is the fear of that monstrous incomplete subject that provided punitive power in 18th and 19th century with its symbolic fiction (the discourse of psychoanalysis) (Foucault, 2003).

¹⁰Lacan's Barred subject \$.

¹¹Remember even for the tautological a=a statement one has to give oneself the possibility of a difference that is negated with the statement itself.

¹²In Hegel's *Logic* (Hegel, 2010) one must remember the dialectical derivation of the individual from the universal and the particular (In his section on Being).

psychoanalysis as that of separation. The famous Lacanian motto not to give way on one's desire (*ne pas céder sur son désir*) is aimed at the fact that we must not obliterate the distance separating the Real from its symbolization: it is this surplus of the Real over every symbolization that functions as the object-cause of desire. To come to terms with this surplus (or, more, precisely, leftover) means to acknowledge a fundamental deadlock ('antagonism'), a kernel resisting symbolic integration-dissolution.

Here he precisely posits the subject as the site of antagonisms. However, he also points to a fundamental antagonism that determines (in the precise Hegelian sense) all the other antagonisms. The role of the symbolic is a magician's card trick - mediating the fundamental antagonism in the middle of others. However insofar as the antagonism exists, so does the possibility of solving the fundamental antagonism. The possibility of freedom lies in the cage of the subject-form itself - insofar as it can reflect the symbolic order back onto itself.

The derivation of subject thus locates two important lacunae of inquiry. The subject of the subaltern is 'placed' in modernity as its universal, but the subject-form delineated by the symbolic fictions of modernity reproduces its ontogenetical core 'point of departure' at sites of the antagonisms within the symbolic order itself. This gives us a way to look at the real of the subject by the way of analysis of the subject form itself.

On the subject-form

The real of the subject

I did not know that I behaved like a girl, it felt natural for me to do so. I did not know how to be like a boy. It was like eating for me - just as I would not stop eating because someone asked me not to eat, I felt I could not stop being a girl, because others told me I ought not to be so.

From A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* (Revathi, 2010)

What is a subject? Subject appears in modernity to substitute the self, or rather supplement self with excesses that allows a metonymic inversion where to talk of the subject is to automatically refer to self¹³. The self in philosophy is always a being reached at the end of a quest - a quest of self-realization and personal identity. In the Upanishads tradition the self (Atman)

.. is eternal, connected with a body due to its own good or bad deeds, capable of realizing its true nature by following the spiritual path best suited to itself, which finally escapes the circle of births and deaths attaining moksha¹⁴ (Rumkani, 1998)

Thus the subject is imagined as a voluntary agency that renders him/her responsible for their own acts - in other words imbues them with agency. The root of the agency is located in a 'will to act'¹⁵. The 'will to act' can either be individual (in which the society is individuated) or general (To which one submits their individual will for the good of the society). The will to act is always connected to reason (as Kant locates reason in its public and private locutions in 'What is Enlightenment' and sums it up with the maxim 'Think, but Obey'). It is through reason that one looks at the advent of the subject. The subject moves from habit to instrumental or means/end reason in modernity as explained by Weber.

However reason can not take us any closer to the understanding of the subject as it tries to find the secret in some hidden kernel behind the subject (in its will or reason, etc). However the mystery lies in how the self gets the subject-form itself¹⁶. Subject form appears as a product of the dialectical tension of the Real and its symbolization (through the symbolic fictions of language, religion, science etc. (Cassirer, 1946)) appearing at the separation of object and desire. One must remember that the real always resists symbolization and is always in excess of symbolization. However only in modernity can symbolic fiction stand independently of the real. There can be even a symbolic void that can be filled by anyone. In the movie *City Lights* Charlie Chaplin occupies such a symbolic void of the rich person for the blind female protagonist in the film (Zizek, 2012a).

However this in itself signifies that the only way one can get to the real is where the real resists and is in excess of symbolization. However for the subject two processes are at work simultaneously. Both of them, I will refer to as subjectivation - (a) the process of becoming subject, the form, the subjection and (b) the mechanism at work to activate the real, the symptomatic the possibility of the real. Both of them are at work simultaneously and through a scission in the subject

¹³See (Foucault, 2005) where he ostensibly starts by inverting the old Delphic maxim of *gnothi seauton* (Know thyself) with *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self)

¹⁴The author is aware of the fact that Atman has several meanings in Indian philosophy, however here it is being used in the meaning that comes closest to self in Western philosophy.

¹⁵One must note here the will is strictly Schopenhaurian - one that gives texture to reality - reality of the subject.

¹⁶The idea is similar to when Freud discourages from finding the hidden kernel behind the latent dream content and asks us to realize that the mystery is how does the unconscious attach itself to the conscious/preconscious to give it the dream form.

himself. The possibility of resistance is within the system itself, we have to activate it through our psychosis, but the opposing process is at work through ideology.

Denial of subjectivation

It was years before the red wall of West Bengal would fall that I was waiting for the girl who would become one of my best friends for life. I was standing in front of my college in the middle of so called College Street or the book alley. It was November, no chill in the air though, as is the general custom of Calcutta (not Kolkata). I had just come out of a meeting of the student political organization I owed allegiance to. We had discussed mainly the immediate, how many new recruits, what the obvious scumbags from our rival organization was doing – their underhanded technique of luring away boys with fashionable girls we secretly wished were with us. However, standing there in the middle of the commerce of ink and paper, I remembered something as a fleeting memory. On the roof of our canteen, during the twilight hours, while smoking contraband, a brilliant physics student had confessed to me that his aim in life was to be a full-timer for the communist party in the state. Weren't we from a post-ideological state? After all globalization and fall of Berlin wall were a decade old for us. Woodstock was just a video. Che Guevara was a cool face on the T-shirts. Revolution was the word we shouted with vague unease or complete certainty of non-believers. We all were struggling to polish our excuses for conforming through all our struggles, so that we can laugh and shake our heads later at our own youth.

What was ideological in our stance was not the overt complicity with the systems of thought. However, it was ideological stance that allowed us to gloss over the truly revolutionary moment in all of our lives – when we finally are able to confess even to ourselves what is truly absurd, and thus truly revolutionary in its domain of illogical. Our subjectivation denies our subjectivation itself.

In his *Four fundamentals of psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 1995), Lacan refers to a the dream of a burning child

A father had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hour's sleep, the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: 'Father, don't you see I'm burning?' He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried

into it and found the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.

Zizek analyses this beautifully in his *Sublime object of ideology* (Zizek, 1989)

The subject does not awake himself when the external irritation becomes too strong; the logic of his awakening is quite different. First he constructs a dream, a story which enables him to prolong his sleep, to avoid awakening into reality. But the thing that he encounters in the dream, the reality of his desire, the Lacanian Real - in our case, the reality of the child's reproach to his father, 'Can't you see that I am burning?', implying the father's fundamental guilt - is more terrifying than so-called external reality itself and that is why he awakens: to escape the Real of his desire, which announces itself in the terrifying dream. He escapes into so-called reality to be able to continue to sleep, to maintain his blindness, to elude awakening into the Real of his desire.

It is precisely like the dream of the father in *Four fundamentals* (Lacan, 1995), we wake up from our dream in order to not face the truly traumatic of our existence. What Joseph Stiglitz says for the rules of economics is true for our psychology as well. Even if it is wrong, the economy just might work. Likewise, the ideology no longer needs us to be consistent. It is no longer a fantasy that operates as a support for our reality¹⁷. But the real's symptomatic is that even without the support it just might work (Warjri and Sengupta, 2012).

At the second step of the derivation of the subject-as-given or the subject-form we reach ideology as a process of subjectivation. However, as the inconsistent foundation of ideology leads to the negation - denial of subjectivation, the symptom of the real of subject-form is revealed within the points of schism within the symbolic fiction itself. As the next step of the derivation we have to pay attention to the expression of the symptoms.

Symptom and the senses

Speech

I have earned the right to have sex in my own house ... and by god I will have it.

Thundered Hoshang Merchant ¹⁸ in video produced by 'Bol India'. For more than half of the interview shown in the

¹⁷Remember how this precise fantasy worked for the revolutionary moment in the past, from French revolution to Russian.

¹⁸From his wikipedia page

video, he tries to articulate - through gestures and words. I do not mean any deficiency in the part of his command over the language. I mean language leaves a residue of desire. Desire articulates in slips, in neurosis, in dreams. There is no real without the desire - or there would be no desire if the gap between the object of desire and its symbolization did not exist. As K Narayan Chandran pointed out in his essay entitled *The Untranslatability of Dreams* (Chandran, 2011), "Is it then more appropriate to say that the Unconscious is structured like a *foreign* language?" (emphasis Chandran's). In this essay with reluctance he tried to understand Derrida's line in *Writing and Difference*, "[S]ince the materiality of the signifier constitutes the idiom of every dream scene, dreams are untranslatable" (Derrida, 2001). In doing so he manages to subvert Derrida's deconstruction through his own lines

... the reason Derrida gives for the untranslatability of dreams. It is very easily explained in other terms as well. The tumult of the dream is all silence. And it is relayed in silence, as, say, in Sylvia Plath's "Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams." Dream has a language that does not enforce or reproduce oppression through social or other institutions. That it gives all of us an alternative consciousness is its unique claim to our special attention, at least since Freud and his studies. In this alternative consciousness, there is absolutely no insistence on *meaning* as we have routinely come to think of it. If anything, there is only the insistence not to accept *meaning* on its putative claims.

By not accepting *meaning* on its putative claims Chandran precisely manages to sublimate the horizon of speech. (Don't the subaltern have to speak if speech itself negated at its own horizon?). But is the claim that to speak as theory (in our alternate consciousness), we have to speak only in/through dreams - in our neurosis - in Freudian substitutions/slips? Will our alternate consciousness always elude us as it is also foreign? However let us not obliterate the distinction between unconscious and conscious. It is the unconscious that is structured like a foreign language (To speak as theory is like losing our foreign accent perhaps?). However like Freudian hysteric symptom, we also have to overcome it by articulating the symptom itself - the divide between voice and speech.

What lies between the voice and speech? Is it so that such a distinction of voice and speech itself is not a product of warped system of communication as Habermas would put it?

We would perhaps fall into a structuralist fallacy if we were to announce the binary of Dionysian voice with that of Apollonian speech - the formless vs. the formed/structured. What I propose here is to not simply ask qua *negative dialectic* sense to somehow free the formless heterogeneity from

instrumental identity. My question here is quite different. How is speech possible? What are the transcendentals of speech? How does one even talk of speech in its totality - with its symptoms?

Speech is symptomatic. What is repressed in speech is not the guttural/instinctual voice but the process through which speech itself appears instinctual. Truly symptomatic of speech is that the process of narrativization strips the narrative of its crucial character, that in the process of narration instinctualizes the narrativization process itself. Like Chandran mentions "the 'materiality' of one language is that which another relinquishes in translation".

Truly pathological of speech is in its appearance of subjectless substance while reducing the proletariat to substanceless subjectivity ... truly pathological of speech is that progressively hierarchically in the social reality one needs someone to speak for someone else ... where we can manage to hide the hierarchical into the seamless dilute Foucauldian mode of continuous regulation/application.

In his essay presented in IIAS, Simla, entitled *Why the Revolution Failed: Three Poets and Two Stray Birds*, Hoshang answered Aime Cesaire's poem *Return to my native land* with his own poem regarding his father's second wife. To speak of himself he used the following lines

What's poor girl to do?
I became lover, lunatic, poet
I had an out
Up is down and down is Up

He found his voice as a lunatic - refusing reason. I find that his starting point is also from the symptom, from his insistence on not accepting "meaning on its putative terms".

Image and the symptom

There is less than fifty years of gap between the journey made by Goethe to Switzerland and Emerson's trip across

Hoshang Merchant was born in 1947 to a Zoroastrian business-family in Bombay, India. On his mother's side he descends from a line of teachers and preachers. Merchant was educated at St. Xavier's College, Bombay. He has a Masters from Occidental College, Los Angeles. Thereafter at Purdue, he studied Renaissance and Modernism, and for his PhD (1981), wrote a dissertation on Anais Nin. He has lived and taught in Heidelberg, Jerusalem and Iran where he was exposed to various radical movements of the Left. Since the mid-80s, Hoshang Merchant has made his home in Hyderabad, where he teaches English at University of Hyderabad. He has written 13 books of poetry, and two critical studies. He edited India's first gay anthology *Yaraana: Gay Writing from India*.

U.S.A. Goethe writes in exquisite detail concerning the vineyards and the characteristics of the towns in a rich and somewhat excited manner.

..Woods in the back of the watch-tower. A man climbing up the great tall beech trees with a rope and iron cleats on his shoes. What a village!...

Emerson compares the trip as being akin to looking at pictures in the wall.

... The towns which I pass between Philadelphia and New York made no distinct impression. They are like pictures on a wall.

What makes their journeys different is the invention of locomotion in case of Emerson. However that technological kernel alone does not explain the transition narrative in its totality.

The mere technological advances in the abstraction of power is not enough to characterize the real difference in these two images written by Goethe and Emerson. If we are willing to take the analogy drawn by Emerson a bit further - we might say the production of images (in the visual treat of the scenery or in the form of works of imagination) itself has somehow turned a blind eye towards the very abstraction process that produces it. The locomotion does not offer an immediate (visible image) source of abstraction of kinetic energy as the horse does. In a similar manner we want now more silent, smooth cars and easily accessible images of Monalisa for a dime a dozen. The invisibility of the source of locomotion allowed (albeit, as we hope, coincidentally) one to gloss over entire landscapes and pass it off as one of the images hung on a wall.

However there is a problem with such proclamations above. What if the images are the only real and the rest of the technological progress, etc. are just a way to mitigate the real? What if the real offered in the images represent to us our fundamental proletarianization process (like in the name of efficient image of the company of the industry one can chop off the legs of collective bargaining rights¹⁹) where we see the loss of Goethe's details as gain in time for Emerson?

The more, that you can read all the way in a car a French novel.

In the beginning of this essay *Why the Revolution failed* Hoshang summarizes Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare baire*

Tagore's *Ghare Baire* presents a love triangle between Nikhil, his wife Bimala and her revolutionary lover against the Swadeshi Movement's backdrop (1903-08). Bimala is encouraged to come out of the zenana into the parlour. But

she transgresses by gleefully into Sandip's arms and giving him her gold. Sandip is the outsider in society, a revolutionary, and to Bimala's family: he is her lover. Two outsiders meet to destabilize society but society rearranges itself. Changes occur, psychologically, but revolution is thwarted. Sandip returns the gold, Bimala goes back to her husband. The film like the novel opens and closes with Bimala rooted to the same spot in the home. *India imaged its emancipated self as the emancipated Mother India. Emancipation (especially sexual freedom) was not for sister or wife.*

The man who would be queen understood the desire-to-be a woman by refusing to be rooted in the same spot as Bimala. If the image is not real it can not mitigate the real of the woman. This is the precise symptom of the image.

From the story to a joke

The story

In a postcard size story one Bengali author with pen name 'Bonophool' wrote about a child and his father. The title of the story can be roughly translated as 'It so happens' alluding to an everyday nature of the narrative the author wishes to present. The child in the story goes through his morning rituals of hyperactivity while taking a bath, eating food while attempting to make an impatient face and barely letting his mother put clothes on him. Then he goes and climbs on his wooden horse to say 'Giddy up, I will be late for office'. Everybody laughs. In the next paragraph the child's father goes through an identical routine of hurried bathing, eating and wearing clothes (supplied by the same mother) and getting on to his car while urging his driver to hurry as he is late for office. Nobody laughs.

If we play the story in our head we face two ominous symptoms in the story, the laughter and the silence, prompting us to laugh or be silent ... like the prompt shown to an audience whose laugh is to be recorded for a comedy sitcom. The child mimics the father, the image of the father to be precise ... and that evokes laughter. The image of the father is the Ideal-ego of the child. However, as the child enters the world of language and the Father, we who laugh and be silent, the Ego-ideal ... the spectators offer the master signifier for the child to organize his world (including his wooden horse). However there is a further doubling and further inversion embedded in this. What is absurd in the child and laughter evoking apparently has been absorbed in the father leaving nothing but silence in the response. The child is also

¹⁹As was advocated for the last standing strong union in U.S.A., the GM union, in the piece entitled *Imagining a GM bankruptcy*

reflected in the image of the father not just as a past but an image of his love and hate (those who search for the fountain of youth also are displeased of youth). But the inversion goes a bit further. The child's mimicry of the father accompanied by the laughter clearly hides his future role as father where 'Nobody laughs' as in a startling revelation Bertrand Russell had realized from reading his father's diary that his own courtship was almost identical to his father's.

The role of symbolic fiction then is to compensate for the loss in the chain of signifiers and even realizations of such a loss. In his book *Other Times, Other Realities*, Arnold Modell sets out an example of his patient (Modell, 1990),

Because his airline went out on strike, my patient was stranded in a distant city and unable to return home. He did everything possible to obtain passage on another airline: he cajoled and pleaded with the functionaries of other airlines, all to no avail. Although my patient was usually not unduly anxious and was in fact a highly experienced traveler who in the past remained calm under circumstances that would frighten many people, in this particular situation he experienced an overwhelming and generalized panic. He felt as if the unyielding airline representatives were like Nazis and that the underground passages of the airline terminal resembled a concentration camp. The helplessness of not being able to return home, combined with the institutional intransigence of the authorities, evoked the following memory, which had been unconscious.

When this man was three years old, he and his parents were residents of a central European country and, as Jews, were desperately attempting to escape from the Nazis. They did in fact manage to obtain an airline passage to freedom, but until that point, the outcome was very much in doubt. Although my patient did not recall his affective state at that time, his parents reported that he seemed cheerful and unaffected by their anxiety. In this example, his helpless inability to leave a foreign city, combined with the intransigence of the authorities, evoked a specific affect category that remained as a potential memory of an unassimilated past experience.

He analyses that his patient transferred past memories on to the present without recontextualization in the metaphoric process. I disagree with this explanation on two points. Firstly, this explanation overlooks the fact that the self is already disoriented, uncoordinated and the ego that manages to keep us together is already at work in this patient. Then what caused the trauma? Maybe because the trigger of memory

does unhinge the Ego-ideal. It is as if the laughter track was heard in the case of both the child and the father, unsettling us. Secondly, what triggered the trauma even when the patient was unaffected while experiencing the actual event as a child? How does something so mundane as air travel induce such ideological metaphoric transfer? This is possible only when we accept our symbolic domain is itself ideological, the image has turned the laughter track off like in the painting 'Scream'. This brings us to the joke.

The joke ... we must count the pigs

It is an old Communist era joke that I heard in Kolkata from a member of Communist Party of India (Marxist). During the cold war era, Stalin went to visit one of the animal husbandry collectives. There was a photo taken for the Communist newspaper in Moscow. The picture was taken when Stalin was inspecting the pigs and had taken one of them on his lap. The argument at the editing table of newspaper ensued regarding the possible caption of the photo. Many suggestions like 'Stalin inspecting a collective', 'Stalin and pigs', and so on were rejected. The final caption was 'Stalin (3rd from the left)'.

Unlike the story, the joke has elements of real humor and it was from a Communist U.S.S.R. before the real comedians were silenced (Seldes, 1988). What provided the comedy in the joke was precisely the ideological element ... but a doubling and inversion is at work here also. The joke was told from one member of the Communist party to another, like perhaps the joke itself might have started during Stalin's regime itself. The image of Stalin with pigs betrays the brutal nature of his regime as well as paves the ideological path for the participants of the joke. The silent understanding between the two parties mentioned here who can act on an ideology and still can laugh at it is itself ideological.

The punch of the joke comes in the line where one counts the pigs ('third from the left') yet never mentions them. That is where the inversion takes place. That which is counted but never mentioned is the proletariat undergoing its proletarianization in the Stalin's collectives. The joke is that we must start counting the pigs again in a world where even satire has lost its bite. We have to turn the laughter track on, be unsettled, and count the pigs unless we understand our fundamental proletarianization process all jokes will be rendered stale.

The symbolic fiction is itself ideological, and thus inconsistent - but our subjectivation allows us to keep our ego substantiated, because the alternative is to look at ourselves as the subject-forms delineated by an inconsistent symbolic fiction - to understand ourselves as substance-less subjects (cogito) undergoing the process of becoming substance-less (proleterization). However, this leads to the possibility of a duplication / image (child and father, pig and Stalin) that can invert this very process. In the next point of derivation leads

us to the possibility of the reflection/image of the subject-form within the process of signification of symbolic fiction.

Anselm and Aquinas

Verachte nur Verstand und Wissenschaft,
des Menschen allerhöchste Gaben—
So hast dem Teufel dich ergeben
und müsste doch zu Grunde gehn!

-Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust* as misquoted by Hegel in *Philosophy of Right*²⁰

In his *Proslogion* (Anselm, 2001), Anselm set out to prove the existence of God starting from the meaning of the word god itself (a variation of his argument can be found in Descartes' meditation). In the fourth chapter he ends his proof with making a distinction between thinking and understanding - "For no one who understands what God is can think that he does not exist." Aquinas in rejecting Anselm advanced a few arguments for God's existence himself. In his *Summa theologiae* (Aquinas, 2000) Aquinas states this of the word 'God'.

Once we understand the meaning of the word "God", however, it immediately follows that God exists. The words itself signifies "that being a greater than which cannot be signified." That which exists in fact and in the mind is greater than that which exists in the mind alone.

His argument strangely follows a circuit that begins at the master signifier (God) which has to be self-evident entity for the other concepts (signified) to have their own ontic being and signifier. However, if we take the Lacanian notion of 'quilting', then the world of free floating signifiers is interpreted through a master signifier that somehow manages to 'quilt' through the patchwork of our existence. The image needs the symbolic fiction for the symptomatic to emerge.

Let us consider the Anselm's argument in a bit more detail. In his second chapter of *Proslogion* Anselm says (Anselm, 2001)

But certainly that same fool, having heard what I just said, "something greater than which cannot be thought", understands what he heard, and what he understands is in his thought, even if he does not think it exists. For it is one thing for something to exist in a person's thought and quite another for the person to think that thing exists. For when a painter thinks ahead to what he will paint, he has that picture in his thought, but he does not yet think it exists, because he has not done it yet. Once he has painted it he has it in his thought and thinks it exists because he has done it. Thus even the fool is compelled

to grant that something greater than which cannot be thought exists in thought, because he understands what he hears, and whatever is understood exists in thought.

What he precisely speaking of is a distinction between speaking and thinking. The meaning is not attributed to speech even before speaking it out loud. Even if the fool of Anselm can speak of the non-existence of God, he can not think it as God is the *a priori* of signifiers from which we have to draw connections to all the concepts (signified). What does it say about our conduct, our duties, our enjoyment? Even to enjoy, we need God to exist. When Freud asked why we can't simply enjoy sex, he arrived at an answer of stages (not linked causally, yet timed nonetheless²¹) that leads us progressively into the symbolic order.

What does it tell us of the concepts like the square circle of which one of Lacan's patients dreamed of? How can we think or even dream of the nonsensical, the impossible? It tells us that of something frightening. If God does not exist, then nothing is allowed, even enjoyment (Lacan's reversal of Dostoyevsky's proclamation). For our enjoyment, we posit our master signifier. The permissive society exists so that we are compelled to enjoy. However, as Hegel explains in his *Phenomenology*

The life of the Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins truth only when, in utter disembodiment, it finds itself ... Spirit is this power only by looking negative in the face, and tarrying with it. -(Hegel, 1988)

We must see the negation as the symbolic reflection of the same impossibility. The impossibility which as master signifier lets us tarry with the negative. That impossibility of the squared circle lies at the heart of Hegelian concrete universality - the becoming split (between being-in-itself and being-for-itself), the schizophrenia, and what I call the point of departure. In *Science of Logic* Hegel writes (Hegel, 2010)

Being is the indeterminate immediate; it is free from determinateness in relation to essence and also from any which it can possess within itself. This reflectionless being is being as it is immediately in its own self alone.

Because it is indeterminate being, it lacks all quality; but in itself, the character of indeterminateness attaches to it only in contrast to what is

²⁰Disdain sanity and scholarship, The loftiest attributes man has been given, And so the devil has you And your soul is infallibly lost

²¹In Freud's formulation of childhood sexuality, oral, anal, and Oedipal stages follow each other, but without any necessary causal connection

determinate or qualitative. But determinate being stands in contrast to being in general, so that the very indeterminateness of the latter constitutes its quality. It will therefore be shown that the first being is in itself determinate, and therefore, secondly, that it passes over into determinate being – is determinate being – but that this latter as finite being sublates itself and passes over into the infinite relation of being to its own self, that is, thirdly, into being-for-self.

Aquinas takes up this very point in the first of his five proofs for God's existence (Aquinas, 2000)

A thing moves something else insofar as it actually exists, for to move something is simply to actualize what is potentially within that thing. Something can be led thus from potentiality to actuality only by something else which is already actualized.

He also moves from quality (the potential of motion) to the quantity (actualized motion) but does not tarry with the negative (the sublation). In the path from a being of potential motion to actualized motion, the being must also actualize a potential for being without motion. If we tarry with the negative (sublation) we do not reach God, but a master signifier.

If we accept the incision at the heart of universality, we can fathom why Vico also in his *New Science* (Vico, 1984) explained the two divine (as he explains divine as which foretells the future) given to humans are marriage (sex/life drive) and burial (death drive). But where lies the sublation of the drives, that force the unconscious drive to articulate the desire in the form of the dreams, of slips of tongue, of language? It is at the place where desire even has a possibility of articulation, the symbolic order. To have a look at the symbolic order is to turn the reflection back to its source, to come to terms with the negation itself.

Of naked elves and the patriarch

Of naked elves ... the form

The story of the elves and the shoemaker in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales is a bit more convoluted than just an inspiration for J. K. Rowling's elves - the one's who serve you unseen and are freed by getting clothes. Even without much prodding we can see the Marxist angle to this industrial revolution age fairy tale. The free pricing of the goods by the cobbler, the unseen alienated labor of the elves, the 'freedom' received by the working elves through the clothes given by the rich cobbler, etc. However the mechanism that is in work here is the gap between object and desire. The hard-working, honest cobbler has said his prayers and went to sleep full of optimism of beginning work next morning on the piece of leather that can be made into only one shoe. In

the same situation, sometimes at even better situations we are driven to despair. However, the cobbler does not despair. He places his whole gambit on one pair of footwear to be made that allows him peaceful sleep. But his sleep is disturbed only when he is making profit and wants to see who is doing him such a good favor. There he finds the elves, who are naked, and evidently in need of clothes.

The cobbler needed to get rich, he did. The elves needed clothes, they got them and sang

"Who will wonder at our glee?
Happy little men are we,
Well dressed now, as you may see."

Moreover we are assured that the cobbler family was rich enough not to require the elves services any more. The chain of signification has been terminated. They all live happily ever after. However there are some very disturbing silences. The elves never speak save for their happy song ... one where we get to know that they are happy *little men* or what actually happened to the cobbler. But we do not know what they desired. The drive is absent - either in the elves or the cobbler. There is no search for an original position to return to. There is no trauma. This tells us that the drive lies elsewhere. We can almost imagine an alternate ending where the cobbler rests in peace while dreaming the whole after story. However this fantasy where everybody's desire is fulfilled becomes the support for the reality for all the other cobblers searching for their naked elves. This is probably what separates a dream from the daydream - the cobbler does not even need to be a cobbler, neither poor. It can just be a void in the symbolic order - reconstruction of the past of somebody rich who might not even have been a cobbler, telling the story of how he came upon his fortune - much like the Baron Münchhausen's stories of pulling himself out of a swamp by pulling himself up by the root of his own hair. As a subject we are already only a form - we are already a virtual image as explained by Žižek in *For they know not what they do* (Žižek, 2002)

.. the status of the subject itself (the subject of the signifier) is that of just such a "virtual image": it exists only as a virtual point in the self-relating of the signifier's dyads; as something that "will have been", that is never present in reality or its "real" (actual) image. It is always-already "past", although it never appeared "in the past itself"; it is constituted by means of a double reflection, as the result of the way past's mirroring in the future is mirrored back in the present.

The patriarch ... the content

In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Autumn of the patriarch* (Marquez, 1976), we are treated with a monolith narrative

encompassing all viewpoint and gazes. As one reads the intertwining narratives, and becomes a proficient reader of the novel, it becomes clear that we do not need to distinguish the viewpoints consciously, if at all. It is the same story (history) of a dictator who lived for 107 or 232 years that the narratives have joined, coalesced and in the death of the dictator, the whole country has become one in the narrative. The time might be uncertain, but the nation has come to be. In the course of the novel we see the uncertainty in the physical boundaries and more. The sea is gone. The people have changed. But nation has been collectively imagined into existence at the death of the dictator, or because of the death of the dictator. Or perhaps as the novel shows time and again with the example of his body double, the picture of his death in fortune teller's vision - the dictator might just have been the imaginary. Indeed he was precisely that as his corpse was found after an unknown amount of time by the people. The death of the dictator is the master signifier for the nation-state to emerge.

All histories have to posit the trauma of the past that is the healing point for the present. The history can not begin without the creation of the precise symbolic void, by killing off the monster, the dictator, the reactionary, etc. But what happens when the symbolic void of history is revealed in its precise symptom - the time line itself? The void is transferred in a tale of lack, inadequacy. It is of no coincidence that Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India* (Sarkar, 1989) talks of three grievous incompletenesses/failures. The lack of citizenship, the burden of historicism gets transformed in the lack/inadequacy of the people.

But there is always a double lack (Lacan, 1995). The anterior lack corresponds the Freudian death drive. In the graphic novel *V for Vendetta* (Moore and Lloyd, 2009), after hijacking the voice of Fate, V speaks to the people and bombards them with images of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and asks why they make the same mistakes every time and give the power in the hands of these totalitarian regimes. He hits upon a nerve when he points out it is us who put them in power²². Why do we do it again and again? It is the notion of freedom which can provide us with the key to this anterior lack. In search for a freedom of contract in the capitalist market we let go of the other freedoms. The freedom of contract that makes us forced to sell our labor is the one that leads us to the symptomatic of freedom and the death drive of nation-state itself - both the Nazism and antisemitism were working class movements. Thus the autumn of the patriarch is also the autumn of the archive of the nation as well. It is on the fallen leaves that one writes the histories (by placing a mound on their corpses and making an archive out of it).

The subject-form of an individual or content of archive / history of a nation thus appear as reflecting points of the same process within the symbolic fiction. Thus within our derivation we have located another process involved in the stages

of negation that gives the subaltern, or rather, the myths of the subaltern.

Alienation and the 'Other'

Subaltern and alienation

In the early 1980's Bengali novel '*Kalbela*', the author Samaresh Majumder sets out the history of Communism in Bengal from the late 1960s till the Naxalite Movement. The events are captured from the position of the Communist critics of the Communist Party, namely, the protagonist - Animesh. What strikes us especially in the description is what leads to the revolutionary moment. The moment was there in Nakshalwari, but its real has never been captured anywhere since.

In his writings of the virtual, Deleuze talks of the body without organs²³; but the revolutionary moment exists as organ wanting a body. The precise revolutionary moment in this is seen in the grotesque reflection in the middle and working classes - in the failure of translation of the dream, of desire. However, the real lives in the image of every subsequent fringe Marxist struggle being deemed as Nakshal - in the image created by the middle and working classes. It is at this point where we are at the dawn of the determination of the subaltern. Subaltern is determined because of this gap in translation, the gap in desire. This is precisely the determination that lies at the heart of the notion of representation of the subaltern. It is here as the strange amalgamation of the untranslatability and gap of desire that makes the subalterns and their myths possible.

In the preface of his *Logic of Sense* (Deleuze, 2005), Deleuze sets the infinite possibilities of the world of Alice in Wonderland in motion.²⁴ But these infinite possibilities themselves remain, as it will, a body without organs²⁵. In

²² As Marx had explained regarding becoming-a-king, which is a relation between subjects and the king appears to the subject as a property standing outside of them - as if they are subjects because the king is their king.

²³ As Deleuze says in *Anti-Oedipus*

The body without organs is an egg: it is crisscrossed with axes and thresholds, with latitudes and longitudes and geodesic lines, traversed by gradients marking the transitions and the becomings, the destinations of the subject developing along these particular vectors. -(Deleuze, 2004)

²⁴ "We present here a series of paradoxes which form the theory of sense. It is easy to explain why this theory is inseparable from paradoxes: sense is a nonexisting entity, and, in fact, maintains very special relations with nonsense. The privileged place assigned to Lewis Carroll is due to his having provided the first great account, first mise en scene of the paradox of sense ..." -(Deleuze, 2005)

²⁵ As Deleuze points out

this formulation of the virtual, he is speaking of the reality of the virtual, or the Lacanian Real (Zizek, 2012b). For the virtual to arrive at the real, it has to start from the inversion of the body without organs; that is, the organs without bodies. Because even the possibilities and hope of the farmers at Nakshalwari stems from their despair, stems from their last resort.

Walter Benjamin says that every fascist rule is an index of a failed revolution. However, does it necessarily mean that every failed revolution must give rise to a fascist rule? Is the strength of a fascist regime to be determined by the degree of failure of the revolution? Does it mean that the bigger the dream of the revolution, the greater the possibility of a fascist backlash? This may, of course, be the case. But the key to the revolutionary moment lies in that precise inversion of possibility at the heart of the proletarianization process. Thus, that same process that denies the substance to the subject has the key to the revolutionary moment. And if the above proclamation is true, then we must see the subaltern as the point of symbolic reflection. Which is why, the 'others' of the subaltern for whom the subaltern's dreams and desires remain untranslatable, undergo the same process of proletarianization themselves. And this is the truest sense of alienation of the spirit in Hegel.

The 'other' of subaltern

Syed Mujtaba Ali gave a brilliant description of his journey through the Khyber Pass on his way to Kabul from Peshawar in his book *Deshe Bideshe*. Here, he speaks of his inability to describe a journey, or rather to the unfamiliarity of a journey. He brings in Tagore to explain the unfamiliar, the foreign. He talks of the mountains, the sea and the snowfall. He admits that the mountain and the sea are half-familiar to a Bengali, whereas snowfall is completely alien. And he mentions that even though Tagore, having seen snowfall for the hundredth time, chose not to write about it.

But we do see the Khyber Pass as the corrugated, tin-wrapped bus ambles along the treacherous mountain path with the author as a passenger. And on this journey, in the old fashion of Canterbury Tales, he engages in a reverie of life and death with his fellow passenger who is working for the radio office in Kabul. In the inn, on the way to Jallalabad, his fellow passenger talks about the white man's burden in the following terms:

Death by starvation is an unique Oriental institution. To selflessly maintain its efficiency is the white man's burden.

This is the culmination of the harsh landscape of the Khyber Pass summarized in the lines regarding starvation. But whose

starvation?

We notice that it has been spoken with regards to the farmers of Bengal. The truth of the Enlightenment man is finally revealed in the starvation of farmers. Here, we come to the point of the 'others' who can speak for the starvation of farmers, yet can distance themselves from the revolutionary moment fearing the burden of history. And this precise vacuum that is created by the death of the farmer is what forms the denial of their real. It is only in the death of the subaltern that they become the critique, indeed, revolutionary critiques of their own determinations - and also of the 'others' of the subaltern who cannot speak of the unfamiliar, the alien, yet alienate the familiar.

Conclusion

In his book *First as tragedy, then as farce* Slavoj Zizek speaks of four commons in relation to his idea of communism - the commons of our biogenetic inheritance, commons of our intellectual property or culture, the commons of the external environment, and the commons of new slums and new walls (Zizek, 2009). He clarifies that instead of four commons it should be read as 3+1, giving the idea that the commons of new slums and walls, the commons of 'part-of-no-part' belong to the domain of excess, the domain of a necessary excess - the domain of a supplement. The notion of this '+1' is the key to subaltern. The one excess, surplus proletarianization forms the foundation of all the other proletarianization processes. It is not a question of listening to the voices from the margins, it is not a question of including those excluded in the present system - rather we must reveal the points in the symbolic where we are always already subjectivised (Warjri and Sengupta, 2012).

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... the body without organs is closed on a full depth without limits and without exteriority. -(Deleuze, 2005)

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