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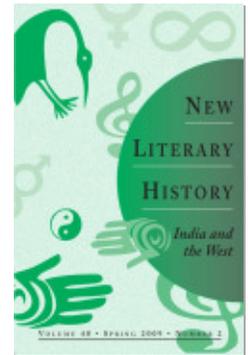
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Intellectual India: Reason, Identity, Dissent

Jonardon Ganeri

Amartya Sen and the Reach of Reason

INDIA HAS A LONG AND MULTIFACETED HISTORY of argumentation and public reasoning. In his magnificent book *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*,¹ Amartya Sen provides this history with a global context. Public reasoning is fundamental to both democratic politics and secular constitutional arrangements, and it is no accident that India, with its extensive traditions of tolerance and the admission of dissenting voices in public discourse, should have deep democratic and secular instincts. This is something, Sen suggests, which more narrowly sectarian understandings of India have lost sight of, and he recommends that we keep in mind figures such as the Indian emperors Ashoka and Akbar, both of whom strongly encouraged public debate and respect for heterodox voices, and also Indian skeptics like the atheist Jāvāli, so vividly depicted in the Rāmāyaṇa. Sen insists that such individuals are as much the precursors of a modern Indian identity as any other figure drawn from Indian history. Thus, “public reasoning is central to democracy . . . parts of the global roots of democracy can indeed be traced to the tradition of public discussion that received much encouragement in both India and China (and also Japan, Korea and elsewhere), from the dialogic commitment of Buddhist organization” (182), and it is therefore a mistake to think of democracy and secularism as “Western values” which India has embraced. The demonstrably global origin of traditions of public reasoning undermines any thought that the West has a distinctive claim upon liberal values, but also, just as importantly, it undercuts arguments that there are things called “Asian values” which are antithetical to ideas of democracy, secularism, and human rights (134–37). There are no “cultural boundaries” in the reach of reason or in the availability of values like tolerance and liberty (280).

Another central idea for Sen is that reason is “before identity,” that each of us is free to reason about what is of value and significance to us in whatever situations we find ourselves, that neither religion nor community nor tradition imposes upon us an identity fixed in advance. There is a relationship between agency and freedom, and a contrast

between agency and well-being, a full sense of agency involving not only “control over decisions” but also “the freedom to question established values and traditional priorities” (240), including the freedom to decide that religious or communitarian affiliations are of less significance than one’s literary, political, or intellectual commitments: “We have choice over what significance to attach to our different identities. There is no escape from reasoning just because the notion of identity has been invoked” (352). So reasoning has center stage both in shaping individual identities and in deliberating about public goods. And in seeking to give structure and substance to those deliberations, the whole of India’s past is available, a past that has been deeply international and profoundly interreligious. Sen finds in Rabindranath Tagore’s assertion that the “idea of India ‘itself militates’ against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one’s own people from others” two thoughts in tandem, one that opposes the idea of India as a mere federation of separate and alienated religious communities, the other opposing an isolationist conception of India in the world (349). In the global circulation of ideas, India has always been a major player, and the combination of “internal pluralism” and “external receptivity” has fashioned for India a “spacious and assimilative Indian identity” (346).

Though rightly emphasizing India’s argumentative traditions and historical accommodation of dissenting voices, the lack of detail in Sen’s description of those traditions is striking. There is in Sen’s work little mention of any actual analyses of public reasoning in India, no reference, for example, to seminal works on dialectic and argumentation such as the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Nyāyasūtra*, or the *Vādaḥvinoda*. Still less is there any significant description of the resources of practical reason in India’s intellectual past, or of the ways identities are understood as fashioned and not found. Sen’s understanding of the “reach” of reason, of the utility of critical public discussion, and of rationality in human psychology, hardly makes reference to India’s long tradition of thought about these topics. This is puzzling. It is as if the mere fact of this tradition of argumentation is sufficient for Sen, that the substance of that tradition is irrelevant. Or else it is as if Sen presumes a priori that the substance must coincide in all important respects with the concept as it features in contemporary work on political and social theory. In short, while Sen speaks freely about exemplary *political* figures like Ashoka and Akbar, he is largely silent on the *intellectual* figures who have provided India with its theoretical resources and self-understandings. Sen observes with decisive clarity how a false contrast between the intellectual traditions of India and the West is brought about by the biases in the respective histories that are told, that “[i]n comparing Western thoughts and creations with those in India, the appropriate counterpoints of Aristotelian or Stoic

or Euclidian analyses are not the traditional beliefs of the Indian rural masses or of the local wise men but the comparably analytical writings of, say, Kautīlya or Nāgārjuna or Āryabhaṭa. ‘Socrates meets the Indian peasant’ is not a good way to contrast the respective intellectual traditions” (158). What I find astonishing, though, is that this is the only time Sen mentions Nāgārjuna in the whole book, and of the many great Indian intellectuals who have thought so long and so hard about reason, theoretical, practical, and public, Nāgārjuna is lucky in getting a mention at all (no Nyāya philosophy is mentioned, for example, and the term “*Nyāya*” is not even in the index). Profoundly aware of the pitfalls, Sen seems nevertheless to fall into them.

Misleading impressions aside, the danger here is that liberal secularism is made to win too easily. The mere suggestion that one should reason more and better might seem to fail to engage at anything other than an abstract admonitory level; it might sound more like enthusiasm than practical advice. This is the deeper worry that motivates attacks on the Enlightenment’s appeal to reason, a more serious worry than simply that reason has so often been abused for totalitarian ends. What a proper response to that worry requires is a detailed engagement with the resources of reason in India as they are actually in play or can be brought into play.

The cause of Sen’s silence is, I think, that his primary interest is in provisions of the secular state itself and not in what it is to be a participant within it. A secular state tries to work out how to structure its policies and institutions in such a way that there is symmetry in the state’s dealings with any particular group, religion, class, or individual. The appropriate model of reason here is the one that Rawls seeks to capture with his use of the term “public reason.” Public reason is the mode of deliberation that brings people of diverse philosophical, religious, and moral convictions into a state of rational accord with respect to a matter of mutual concern and common interest. In a pluralistic community tolerant of difference, it is essential that the resources, reach, and requirements of public reason be properly understood, and no such understanding is acceptable that gives discriminate advantage to the particular view of any one of the parties in the deliberation. For a straightforward if overly simple example of the workings of public reason, consider the following account of the process leading to the preparation of a common communiqué at a recent meeting of the G8 industrialized countries: “Acting under the policy parameters set by their political masters . . . the job [of the negotiating officials or sherpas] is to move words and phrases in and out of square brackets. If a phrase stays in square brackets, it is not agreed. If it comes out of brackets, consensus is reached.”²

But the view from the side of the institutions and the state is blind to the question that is most pressing for the participants themselves. That is the question of how a specific individual, whose access to resources of reason has a particular shape and character, finds within those resources the materials to engage in public and practical acts of reason. How, for example, does such an individual find their way to a conception of deliberative thinking about the public good? How do they form a conception of thinking about other participants in the public space for whom the resources of reason are different?

It is important, certainly, to point out, as Sen does, that Hinduism contains within itself many dissenting voices and heterodox opinions; but the difficult question is to understand how those dissenters, no less than the mainstream, made sense of their dissent. One needs to show how Hinduism has within itself models of rational deliberation that make possible the dissenting voices and internal critiques and how those models also make available to Hindus a conception of what it is to reason about the public good. An analogous exercise needs to be repeated for each of the participants in a secular state; only in this way can each reach an understanding of what Rawls has appropriately described as the “overlapping consensus” in which each group, *for its own reasons and on the basis of its own resources of reason*, makes sense of and agrees to a common position or policy. The exercise can be seen happening within Islam through a contemporary revival of the practice of *ijtihad* (reasoning and interpretation based on the sacred texts).³ Space for such an approach depends in part on the identification of a *neutral secularism*, that is, a secularism which demands that politics and the affairs of state are unbiased or symmetric in respect of different religions (313), in contrast with an understanding of secularism that sees it as requiring the prohibition of any religious association in public or state activities (19). Prohibitory secularism requires the resources of reason to be wholly disenchanted in public, even those upon which individuals draw. Neutral secularism imposes this requirement only on state invocations of public reason; its requirement on individuals is that their appeal to private resources or reason does not bias them in favor of their own resources or lead to an asymmetry in their reasoned dealings with others. (A Buddhist analysis of debate from the time of Ashoka, the *Kathāvatthu*, provides an astonishingly subtle theorization of this idea of biaslessness in public reasoning.) The background worry is, of course, that in developing the resources of reason *within* Hinduism, Islam, or Buddhism, we are in some way making reason subordinate to tradition and religious command. Sen reads Akbar as resisting that threat with a strong insistence on the autonomy of reason (274). My argument is that we can respect the need for autonomy without restricting reason’s resources to those merely of allegedly value-free disciplines such as rational choice theory.

I am saying that the appeal to India's traditions of argumentation and public reasoning is hollow if it does not engage with the detail of those traditions. For only in this way does the full panoply that a well-informed "argumentative Indian" has available to himself or herself come to the fore, in contrast with the restricted vision of a sectarian approach. Sen's wonderful discussion of the plurality of India's calendrical systems, and the significance of that plurality, only serves to emphasize the absence of any corresponding presentation of the range and richness of Indian conceptions of reason (a range that would include, to use the Sanskrit terminology, at the minimum, *tarka*, *nyāya*, *ūha*, and *yukti*; that is to say, reason based on hypothesis, on examples and general rules, on extrapolation from paradigms, and on empirical generalization). Likewise, in speaking of the resources for fashioning Indian identities, the wealth of material about self, agency, and identity, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Jaina, orthodox and heterodox, needs in some measure to be gainsaid. My point is simply that these are the intellectual resources that an Indian entering an argument can and should bring to the table. In the case of figures such as Tagore and Gandhi, this is clearly exactly what happened, Gandhi's reintroduction of the idea of *ahimsa* as a defence against inhumanity being a good case in point. Only in this way can the claims of more sectarian thinkers, that theirs is the sole true inheritance of India, effectively be silenced.

Let me give an example. There is, in the *Nyāyasūtra*, an elegant discussion of the various ways in which an opinion or principle might count as "settled" (*siddhānta*). An opinion might be "settled" because there is a general consensus, which is further analyzed as a situation in which the opinion is accepted by some parties, including one's own, and outright rejected by none.⁴ Alternatively, an opinion might be "settled" in the sense of being accepted by some parties, including one's own, but rejected by others (1.1.29). An opinion is considered "settled" in a third sense if it is used as a premise in further derivations (1.1.30), and in a fourth if it is entertained provisionally for the purpose of considering its merits (1.1.31). The idea of consensus implicit in the first conception of a settled opinion is a valuable and useful one, for it reveals a way to see how achieving consensus might require something weaker than universal endorsement by all parties. Indeed, if the officials at the G8 meeting had been cognizant of this theory, they might have wanted to refine their bracketing method so as to distinguish between the case where a phrase is accepted by some but rejected by others and the case where it is accepted by some and rejected by none. In so far as it allows for progress toward a consensus that might not have otherwise been achievable, this would represent a substantive contribution to the actual machinery of public reason. My point is that this analysis of settled opinion is a resource of reason that a well-informed "argumentative Indian" has at his or her

disposal, something that can shape the nature of his or her participation in public debate. It is by acquainting ourselves with such detail that we get a true sense of the “India large” of which Sen so admirably speaks. And Sen is surely right in his diagnosis of the cause of what he calls the “extraordinary neglect of Indian works on reasoning, science, mathematics and other so-called ‘Western spheres of success’” (80) in the “comprehensive denial of Indian intellectual originality” that one sees in the appalling colonial writings of James Mill and others (more precisely, in the twin effects of the “magisterial” and the “exoticist” approaches to India; 154–55, 160). The effects of this systematic deprecation are still to be seen in the reluctance of many scholars today to take seriously the *intellectual substance* of the Indian texts. Sen is right too when he speaks of the need for a “corrective regarding Indian traditions in public reasoning and tolerant communication, and more generally what can be called the precursors of democratic practice” (80). The recovery of bits of theory such as the one I have briefly sketched (and it was, of course, developed to a much greater deal of sophistication than I have revealed) is the way to make good that necessity. Fragments of theory like this one, though presented in the texts as abstracted from any concrete context, were most certainly the product of engagement with the day-to-day business of reasoning publicly about matters of common interest with others who did not share one’s views.

I have said that intellectuals like Gandhi and Tagore were most certainly aware of the “India large,” full of resources for reason. Sen observes how Tagore was resistant to anything that seemed to smack of the application of mechanical formula, that “[t]he question he persistently asks is whether we have reason enough to want what is being proposed, taking everything into account” (119). At least two resources from India’s intellectual past are available to support such a question. One is the prolonged debate in the Mahābhārata over the rights and wrongs of a lie, uttered by Yudhiṣṭhira in a moment of crisis. There are anticipations in this discussion of the problem that was to vex Kant, whether it is right to lie to the malicious pursuers of an innocent person. The other, perhaps even more interesting, is the strong vein of particularist moral reasoning found in the highly intellectual Mīmāṃsā school. The Mīmāṃsā theoreticians develop an account of practical reasoning that is situational and adaptive, driven by particular cases, and extremely versatile. This, again, is a resource of great value for any “argumentative Indian.” Indeed, it is through the imaginative exploitation of such models that dissenters and skeptics find the resources of reason with which to develop their critique.

Pointing to the brute existence of skeptical voices like that of Jāvālī is only the beginning of the story. What we really need to know is how a

skeptic like Jāvāli adapted and manipulated the tools of justification and argument at his disposal so as to make possible his dissent. If nothing else, that would be a step toward understanding how heterodox voices might similarly empower themselves in global public discourse today. In Sen's observation of the way one sees "the colonial metropolis supplying ideas and ammunition to post-colonial intellectuals to attack the influence of the colonial metropolis" (133), we see an expression of the typical skeptic's maneuver. Again, the general pattern of such a move would be familiar to an Indian intellectual with access to the materials for reasoned thought that an expansive conception of India makes available. For precisely such strategies have been put into practice by skeptical critics of orthodox Hinduism, voices that include the Buddhist Nāgārjuna, the freethinking critic Jayarāsi, and the dissenting Vedāntin Śrīharṣa (all of whom, it must be said, achieve a far greater degree of sophistication and methodological self-awareness than does Jāvāli). The influence of their criticism derives precisely from its using the very resources of reason used by its target. For while "reasoned humanity" should certainly be open to sound criticism from any quarter, it is a fact of human nature that it is much harder to be receptive to criticism formulated by outsiders in outside terms than to criticism made from within one's own terms. The reason for this is that rational criticism is effective and not merely enthusiastic when it has the potential to become *self-criticism*. This averts what would otherwise be a distant call upon the "sovereignty of reason."

For reason to be effective, it must be engaged. And it must be admitted that charged or difficult situations create impediments to the engagement of reason. Acknowledging human frailty ought not, however, to lead us to think that it is better simply to fall back on our moral instincts, such as our instincts to respond to others with respect and sympathy. Difficult as it is, reason needs to be engaged in at least the following areas: i) in publically scrutinizing policies whose unintended but injurious effects are all too easy for policymakers to ignore (such as famine); ii) in reflecting on our values and priorities in the course of fashioning an identity; iii) in questioning the appropriateness of our emotional reactions; iv) in order to "transcend ideology and blind belief"; v) to cultivate our moral sentiments themselves and revise our first perceptions (275–81). That leaves us to address the issue introduced by the rhetoric of colonialism, made salient in the work of cultural anthropologists; and kept in circulation by the politics of a "clash of civilizations": "The question that has to be faced here is whether such exercises of reasoning may require values that are not available in some cultures" (282), in particular the values of liberalism—tolerance, mutual respect, the dignity of humanity, rights, justice. Sen's answer is simply that there are no cultural barriers

to the availability of such values as these, that the idea that there are such cultural barriers is an ideology of the West, reinforced by its self-serving deprecation of the intellectual traditions of countries like India. Sen is right to see in the figure of Akbar an excellent illustration of the point. Ruling India in the sixteenth century, Akbar practiced the “path of reason” (*rahi aql*), which led him to reject traditionalism, respect all religions, and develop a “tolerant multiculturalism” (288). These ideas did not disappear with Akbar himself, and one can see in the India of the seventeenth century a commitment to the values of liberalism, among both the political classes and the intellectuals, as significant as in seventeenth-century Europe (with which India already had many cultural and mercantile relations).

Voltaire’s friend, Vauvenargues, said that “a truly new and truly original book would be one which made people love old truths.”⁵⁵ Sen’s book is truly new and truly original, and will make us love India’s “old truths” about reason, identity, and dissent. I have argued that such a rediscovery of India’s long tradition of argumentation and public reasoning must be substantive and not merely gestural. Nor should we think of this as a merely archaeological affair, best left to historians; for as it has also been very well said: “No philosopher understands his predecessors until he has re-thought their thought in his own contemporary terms; and it is characteristic of the very greatest philosophers, like Kant and Aristotle that they, more than any others, repay this effort or re-thinking.”⁵⁶ We must *re-think* the arguments of the Indians. Reason itself will be enriched if we do so.

Reason Enriched

I have argued that a modern Indian identity should avail itself *in a substantive way* of resources of reason from the whole of India’s past. In what follows, I will discuss examples across the spectrum: from the work of Buddhist intellectuals at the time of Ashoka to post-Independence fiction, from ancient Vedic ritual theory to early modern Islamic and Jaina syncretism. Reasoning, it has been suggested, is implicated in “choice over what significance to attach to our different identities” (352). The Stoics put forward a theory according to which there are four “personae,” each of which has a role in practical decision making. Their personae are: one’s rational being, the position one is born into, the choices one makes, and what fortune deals. The first of these personae is a part of our common humanity, something we share; the other three are individual. Insofar as it is possible to deliberate about one’s identity, therefore, the important point is that two forces will always be at work, one which takes

our common humanity as its starting point, the other making choices based on our individual needs, natures, inheritances, and situations. The dialectical interplay between these two forces has been a running theme in Indian discussions of selfhood, the quest for a universal self having been put firmly on the intellectual map by the Upanishads two millennia or more ago. It is not easy to decide, in a Kantian fashion, what to do on the basis of the principles of pure reason and yet no easier to exercise real choice in matters that shape the sort of person one is to be. So we tend to move back and forth between the two, in a sort of perpetual oscillation. Something of this is caught brilliantly by a Tamil short story writer of post-Independence India, whose pen name was "Mauni," the silent one. He uses the narrative device of the double to investigate the to-and-fro between our cosmopolitan and our individual selves. Mauni explores the nature of the self, and the role of choice in fashioning identity, in four brilliant stories written between 1954 and 1971: "From Death, Creation," "Beyond Perception," "Error," and "Wasteland." His most famous line sums up the tension I am speaking about: "Of what, then, are we the moving shadows?"⁷

One response to the oscillation is to attempt to cultivate a more fixed relationship with our rational being, our cosmopolitan self. We might think of this as involving something like a "return" to a natural state of being, an idea that is expressed by the Sanskrit term *svāsthya*, "coinciding with oneself," and we might think of the relevant way to cultivate such a return as a reining in of individual emotional attachments (which texts like the Mahabharata describe as a "taming" of the self). To put that thought another way, what we do is cultivate the ability to choose not to attach value or significance on the basis of our "private passions." Indian intellectuals in the Nyāya tradition have given a decidedly epistemological account of this accomplishment, according to which it is knowledge that renders such choice possible. Possessing knowledge, therefore, is necessary for agency and freedom. Knowledge enables the cultivation of a rational, cosmopolitan self.

Cultivating an ability to make choices is a way of giving orientation to reason, and it can be helpful to draw further on nautical imagery and to contrast orientation by means of the polestar with orientation by means of a compass. The polestar is a fixed point in the distance, upon which we set our sights. In the present context, what this corresponds to is what Kant called a regulative ideal. Nirvana and mokṣa are regulative ideals; so too perhaps is the ideal life of a Buddha or a sage. The important point is that, although we *take aim at* them as a way of giving direction to our choices, it is not necessary that we should expect ever to *arrive* there. Orientation by means of a compass is quite different. What it corresponds to in the domain of practical reason is the use of maxims

and principles in making decisions. Just as one can use a compass even in deep fog, when one's destination is not visible, so one can let moral rules or religious commands be one's guide in the course of deciding what to do. As we have mentioned above, Indians like Tagore have been skeptical about so orienting reason; others, though, have brought reason to its defence. A skeptical voice is heard in the following passage of the Mahābhārata:

There was an ascetic by the name of Kauśika, lacking very much knowledge of the scriptures. He lived in a spot far from the village, at the confluence of several rivers. He made a vow, saying, "I must always speak the truth." He became celebrated as a speaker of the truth. At that time some people, running in fear from a band of robbers, entered the wood where Kauśika lived. The robbers, filled with rage, searched carefully for them there. Then, approaching Kauśika, the speaker of truth, they questioned him, saying "O holy one, by which path have a group of men gone a little while ago? Answer us this question, which we ask in the name of Truth. If you have seen them, tell us." Thus adjured, Kauśika told them the truth, saying, "Those men have entered this wood crowded with many trees and creepers and plants." Exactly so did Kauśika give them the information. Then those cruel men, it is reported, locating the people they sought, killed all of them. As a consequence of that great sin, which consisted in the words he spoke, Kauśika, ignorant of the subtleties of morality, descended into hell.⁸

The scriptures of which Kauśika is unaware are, presumably, those Dharmaśāstra passages which explain the circumstances under which untruthfulness is permissible. The clear implication is that Kauśika is to be held responsible for the consequences of his thoughtless commitment to truth telling, that he is culpably ignorant of the analysis of moral reasoning available in the literature.

It is important to understand how the resources of reason can make internal dissent possible. This is especially the case with respect to the broad family of culturally similar traditions that is Hinduism, for Hinduism has often been regarded by its opponents as intolerant of dissent and by its proponents as speaking with a single voice. Of many skeptical voices within Hinduism, let me mention one that challenges the moral authority of the Vedas on rational grounds. The argument appeals to broad principles of rational interpretation: the Vedas, it is said, are verifiably mistaken, internally inconsistent, and pointlessly repetitious (*Nyāyasūtra* 2.1.57). As speech acts, the argument continues, they resemble the delusional ramblings of a drunkard; they carry no epistemological authority. An uncharitable view of religious tolerance might lead one to expect this skeptical argument to be met with censure and condemnation, but in fact it is joined in argument. Other principles of rational interpretation are advanced that resolve the inconsistencies and explain the repetitions,

and a justification of the assent worthiness of the Vedic pronouncements is sought in a general epistemology of testimony.

I have suggested that there are as many concepts of reason in India as there are calendars. An important contrast within orthodox Hinduism is reflected in the use of the terms *hetu*, “evidence-based rationality,” and *tarka*, “hypothesis-based rationality.” Manu, the author of the most influential of the law books, is disappointingly unequivocal in his criticism of the unconstrained use of evidence-based reason, but he is considerably more willing to allow hypothesis-based rationality (Manu).⁹ A careful examination of the resources of such rationality reveals that there is an underlying model of considerable flexibility and power. This model of rationality is based on two sorts of principles: i) principles for the selection of paradigmatic cases or exemplars, and ii) principles for the mapping of truths about the paradigms onto truths about other cases, based on rules of adaptation and substitution. One might imagine how one reasons when one is trying to change the battery of a new car, a process that involves remembering the procedure that worked on the old car and adapting it to fit the different layout and design of the new one. Clearly this “blueprint + adaptation” model is situational and particularist. I believe that it came to serve as the basis of a general theory of moral reasoning, leaving behind its origins in Vedic hermeneutics. And, as many texts make clear, it makes possible the existence of dissent and disagreement, for different decisions about what counts as an appropriate adaptation, and also what counts as a relevant paradigm, can always be advanced and defended. As a resource to be drawn upon in reasoning about one’s choices, the model is a highly versatile one. The details of this theory are found in works on Dharmaśāstra and Mīmāṃsā, especially in commentaries on the *Manusmṛiti* and in Kumārila’s *Tantravārttika*.

Public reasoning under a secular constitution demands a framework which is symmetrical or unbiased in its accommodation of a plurality of standpoints. Jaina and Buddhist dialecticians have done important theoretical work here. The tolerance of diversity of the third century BCE Buddhist emperor Ashoka is well known, and the council he convened with the purpose of settling doctrine disputes between different Buddhist groups was run according to a codified theory of impartial debate. Debate is so structured as to give each party a fair and equal opportunity to rehearse their arguments and for counterarguments to be presented. Guiding the entire debate is an endeavor, not to find a winner and a loser, but to tease out the hidden assumptions that may lie in the background of some given position, so that there can be a clarification of what is at stake and what each party is committed to. The policy of making debates have the clarification of commitments

as their function, rather than confrontation and victory or defeat, has important advantages. One is that it is easier to concede, if one comes to see that one's position rests on hidden commitments that one would not endorse. There can be progress in public reasoning without there having to be winners and losers. The text which Ashoka's dialecticians produced is called the *Kathāvattu*.¹⁰

If neutrality is one requirement of public reasoning, another is that there be common ground. Indian theoreticians describe this shared ground as the *dṛṣṭānta* or *udāharaṇa*; I will call it the "anchor" in a debate. Anchors are what ensure that acts of public reasoning engage with the participants, that what is disputed and what is implied are tied to their frames of reference. At one level, this is simply a reflection of the "blueprint + adaptation" model of decision making, shifted from the domain of individual practical reasoning to the domain of public consensus-seeking reasoning (from *svārtha* to *parārtha*, in the terminology of the Indian theorists). Any given case that is to serve as the starting point in a public discussion must be such that its relevant features are agreed upon by all participants to the dialogue; otherwise, the act of public reasoning will not even get off the ground. So the existence of anchors is a requirement in an act of public reasoning. It is possible to develop an account of anchoring from ideas described in the ancient Ritual Sūtras as well as in early Nyāya sources.

I have been arguing that the full range of resources from intellectual India is available in the fashioning of modern Indian identities. J. L. Mehta has said about one such resource, the Rig Veda, that: "We in India still stand within that *Wirkungsgeschichte* and what we make of that text and how we understand it today will itself be a happening within that history."¹¹ I think we should generalize what Mehta says to include all the texts and traditions of India and to broker Indian identities in the global diaspora as well as in India itself.

India and the World: Globalization in the Seventeenth Century

India in the seventeenth century, the century after Akbar, was a place of great intellectual excitement. Muslim, Hindu, and Jaina intellectuals produced work of tremendous interest, ideas circulated around India, through the Persianate and Arabic worlds, and also between India and Europe. If ever there were a concrete embodiment of the open and spacious "idea of India" to which Tagore gave voice, it was here. Let me illustrate my point by focussing on a single year: 1656. In India, this was the year in which a long running process of religious isomorphism,

pioneered by Akbar's minister Abu'l Fazl and orchestrated around Ibn al Arabi's idea of "Unity in Being" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), reached fulfilment in Dārā Shukoh's grand project to translate fifty-two Upanishads into Persian, a project for the sake of which he assembled in Varanasi a large team of bilingual scholars. Dārā believed that he could establish that the differences between Hinduism and Islam were largely terminological, and even that the Upanishads could be read as a sort of commentary upon the Qur'an. 1656 would also be the year in which the French philosopher and physician François Bernier would leave behind him the France of *les libertins érudits*, on a journey that would bring him soon to Mughal India. The leading disciple of the great empiricist Pierre Gassendi, it was Bernier who would eventually, on his return to France, make Gassendi's work available to French and British audiences. Before doing so, however, he was to spend years as the court physician first of Dārā Shukoh and then of Aurangzeb, spending his spare time translating the works of Gassendi and Descartes into Persian, and discussing philosophical ideas at his home with the by now redundant members of Dārā Shukoh's team of pandits, as well as with his scientifically minded patron Dānishmand Khān. To any one of them, Gassendi's empiricist atomism would have resounded a familiar Vaiśeṣika tone. Coincidentally, no doubt, this was to be the time when three of Varanasi's leading Navya Nyāya philosophers would compose brilliant and original Vaiśeṣika works: Mādhavadeva's *Nyāyasāra*, Raghudeva's *Dravyasārasaṃgraha*, and most particularly Jayarāma Nyāyapañcānana's *Padārthamālā*, a work completed in 1659. All three were also signatories to a 1657 "letter of public declaration" (*nirṇayapatra*) by a large group of Varanasi Sanskrit scholars, an historically important act of public reason in its own right.

If Europe had not yet been awoken to Gassendi's empiricist alternative to Cartesian rationalism, 1656 was nevertheless to be a significant year there too, for it was the year in which Spinoza received his *cherem* in Amsterdam, an excommunication from the Portuguese Jewish community as a result of some anticipation of the heretical views he would later systematize; the pantheistic/atheistic doctrine that "God or Nature" is the only substance, the denial of miracles, of prophecy, and of scriptural revelation. While China was perceived by Pierre Bayle and Nicolas Malebranche to be a land inhabited by Spinozists, it would fall to Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, while introducing his translation of Dārā Shukoh's Persian Upanishads into Latin, to declare that the Upanishads indeed represented a creed of "true Spinozism."¹²

Bernier himself reported on the influence of the "Unity of Being" idea that had underpinned Dārā Shukoh's project, which, he says, "has latterly made great noise in *Hindoustan*, inasmuch as certain *Pendets* or *Gentile Doctors* had instilled it into the minds of *Dara* and *Sultan Sujah*,

the elder sons of *Chah-Jehan*.”¹³ Claiming that this same doctrine can be found in Plato and in Aristotle, and that it is almost universally held by the “Gentile Pendets” of India, he adds that “this was also the opinion of [Robert] Flud[d,] whom our great *Gassendy* has so ably refuted.”¹⁴ (Fludd drew on Neoplatonist resources in a search for hidden connections between a purely intelligible realm and the realm of sensation.) Bernier describes the idea in question as being that

God . . . has not only produced life from his own substance, but also generally everything material or corporeal in the universe, and that this production is not formed simply after the manner of efficient causes, but as a spider which produces a web from its own navel, and withdraws it at pleasure. The Creation then, say these visionary doctors, is nothing more than an extraction or extension of the individual substance of *God*, of those filaments which He draws from his own bowels; and, in like manner, destruction is merely the recalling of that divine substance and filaments into Himself.¹⁵

Bernier concludes that this idea has led him to take as his motto the slogan that “There are no opinions too extravagant and ridiculous to find reception in the mind of man.”¹⁶ No reader of David Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* will fail to identify either the image of the spider or the slogan with which Bernier concludes. It is as likely that Hume read Bernier directly as that he received the simile from Bernier’s correspondent Pierre Bayle, whose *Historical and Critical Dictionary* was published in French in 1697 and includes information from ancient Greek sources about the Indian Brahmins as well as from contemporary travelers’ accounts. While it was certainly rhetorically convenient and effective for Hume to ridicule the notion in its Indian formulation, his attack on the rationalistic explanation of the unity of the world brought the career of that widely admired cosmopolitan idea decisively to an end.

To illustrate the importance of these relationships, it is perhaps worth stressing just how well connected Bernier was with the circles that fashioned the early Enlightenment in Europe, the *libertins érudits* and the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens*, and how quickly ideas circulated between India and Europe. Among his correspondents, for example, was the prominent new skeptic, François de La Mothe Le Vayer; and if John Dryden had already penned his play *Aureng-Zebe* in 1675, this was only because Bernier’s *Travels* had by then been translated into English by the first Secretary of the Royal Society, Henry Ouldinburgh. With Gassendi’s work translated into Persian even before it was available in French, and the monistic pantheism of the Upanishads and Dārā Shukoh already in France and England years before Spinoza’s *Ethics* were published, what more dramatic evidence could there be of the rapid global circulation of ideas in the 1660s and 70s?

Some years before, Dārā Shukoh sat next to Shāh Jahān as they received a deputation by the Varanasi poet Kavīndrācārya Sarasvati, who had come to argue that a tax on Hindu pilgrimage to Varanasi and other pilgrimage sites be repealed. He engaged them in philosophical conversation and indeed described to them the contents of Śaṅkara's *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*. When he returned triumphant, the speeches in his honor were led by the Navya Nyāya scholar Jayarāma Nyāyapacānana, a senior public intellectual of the period and someone whose students received the support and encouragement of Kavindra. Himself the student of the great Navadvīpa scholar Rāmabhadra Sārvabhauma, Jayarāma had impeccable credentials in Navya Nyāya. He and his school of philosophy might be said to represent to the intellectual world of early modern India what Gassendi and Mersenne did to early Enlightenment Europe. Indeed, just as Gassendi sought to reintroduce the empiricist atomism of Epicurus through a colossal Latin commentary on the Epicurean texts, the *Syntagma Philosophicum*, so Jayarāma would be the first person in many centuries to write a commentary upon the early Vaiśeṣik sources, his *Siddhāntamālā*. In his discussion and defence of atomism, Jayarāma refers intriguingly to a group he calls "the new skeptics" (*navyanāstikāh*); I have yet to determine exactly who he had in mind.

This is the point at which to say something about Yaśovijaya Gaṇi, by far the most brilliant and productive Jaina intellectual of the seventeenth century. The tolerant pluralism of the Jains had attracted Akbar, but Yaśovijaya's story holds a particular interest because he provides a link between the two traditions of thinking I have been describing, the theistic monism of the Upanishads, Dārā Shikoh and Ibn al'Arabi on the one hand, and the empiricist atomism of the new Vaiśeṣikas on the other. Yaśovijaya spent an extended apprenticeship studying Navya Nyāya in Varanasi, his stay coming to an end shortly before Dārā's translational project began. Yaśovijaya himself, after a period writing Jaina philosophical treatises using the techniques and methods of Navya Nyāya, then switched to writing works of a more spiritual orientation, several dealing with concepts of the self. Both Dārā and Yaśovijaya would appeal to the venerable metaphor of the ocean and its waves to explain the relationship between apparent multiplicity and underlying unity they sought to articulate in their common quest for an interdoctrinal rapprochement. In Yaśovijaya's case, however, the unifying conception is more like that of a shattered mirror, in which each fragment reflects some part or aspect of the reflected object, a representation of which is to be built up by reconstructing all the partial images; while for Dārā it is as if multiple images of some one thing, some clearer and some indistinct, are reflected in the surfaces of parallel facing mirrors. In the later work of Yaśovijaya, there is, I would suggest, a clear expression of a range of values associated nowadays with political liberalism.

It is clear that there was a good deal of movement between Varanasi and Navadvīpa (in Bengal) at this time; indeed Raghudeva's scribe Mahādeva Puñtām̐kara tells us that he made a number of trips himself in order to study with the Navya Nyāya pandits there. One person to make at least part of that journey was the Englishman John Marshall. Marshall was a friend of the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, to whom indeed he entrusted his literary remains. He found work with the East India Company and travelled between Hugli and Patna in the early 1670s, where he died in 1677. What makes him remarkable is his interest in Indian ideas. Having learned Persian and Arabic, he prepared English translations of two works, the Sāma Veda from Madhusūdana's Persian, and the Bhāgavatapurāṇa. Two centuries later, E. B. Cowell would declare that if Marshall's researches had been published "in 1680, they would have inaugurated an era in European knowledge of India, being in advance of anything which appeared before 1800."¹⁷ In Marshall's diaries we find him drawing attention to the existence of the story of the Flood in the Hindu scriptures,¹⁸ presumably as it is found in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa itself, this over a century before William Jones made comparative mythology into a science. Marshall also knew of the Hindu conception of the world as a cobweb emanating from God,¹⁹ already mentioned by Bernier. Marshall's descriptions are especially remarkable in being free of the condescending tone of most later European writing from India.

Conclusion

The "idea of India" is indeed an open, assimilative, and spacious one, sustaining a plurality of voices, orthodox and dissenting, of many ages, regions, and affiliations. Modern Indian identities in the global diaspora, as much as in India itself, can call upon all these voices and traditions, *re-think* them, adapt and modify them, use the resources of reason they make available in deliberation about who to be, how to behave, and on what to agree. That is a fundamental freedom, one which ought not to be surrendered in binding oneself to narrower, constricted understandings of what India is.

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NOTES

1 Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Picador, 2006) (hereafter cited in text).

2 "Sherpas Call Tune for Political Masters," *The Guardian*, June 30, 2005.

- 3 David Smock, "Itjihad: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the Twenty-First Century," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 125 (Aug. 2004), available online at <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr125.html>.
- 4 Gautama, *Nyāyasūtra*, ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997) (hereafter cited in text by book, chapter, and verse).
- 5 Vauvenargues, *Réflexions et maximes*, §400; quoted from *The Reflections and Maxims of Luc de Clapiers, Marquis of Vauvenargues*, trans. F. G. Stevens (London: Humphrey Milford, 1927).
- 6 Peter Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), 11.
- 7 Mauni, *Short Stories*, translated by Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997), 48. See my "What you are you do not see, what you see is your shadow': The Philosophical Double in Mauni's Fiction," in *The Poetics of Shadow: The Double in Philosophy and Literature*, ed. Andrew Ng Hock Soon (Hanover: Ibidem-Verlag, forthcoming).
- 8 *Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa*, trans. K. M. Ganguli, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1976), 8.69.40–46.
- 9 *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005). For Manu on evidence-based reason see 2.10–11; for hypothesis-based rationality see 12.106.
- 10 *Points of Controversy, or, Subjects of Discourse: Being a Translation of the Kathāvatthu from the Abhidhammapitaka*, ed. S. Z. Aung and C.A.F. Rhys Davids. Pali Text Society, Translation Series no. 5 (London: Luzac & Co., 1960).
- 11 J. L. Mehta, "The R̥gveda: Text and Interpretation," in *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: ICPR, 1990), 278.
- 12 M. Anquetil-Duperron, trans., *Oupnek'hat, id est, Secretum tegendum*, translation of the Upanishads, vol. 2 (Paris: Levrault, 1801–2), 659, 665.
- 13 François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A. D. 1656–1668*, trans. Archibald Constable (1891; London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford Univ. Press, 1916), 345.
- 14 Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, 346–47.
- 15 Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, 347.
- 16 Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, 349.
- 17 E. B. Cowell qtd. in John Marshall's entry in *Biographical Register of Christ's College 1505–1905, and of the Earlier Foundation, God's House, 1448–1505*, ed. J. A. Venn (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1910–1913), 592.
- 18 *John Marshall in India: Notes and Observations in Bengal, 1668–1672* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1927), 181.
- 19 *John Marshall in India*, 186.