



*Philosophical Frontiers*  
ISSN 1758-1532  
Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2008)  
pp. 91 - 122

## Hegel's Pyjamas: Refashioning World-History In Light Of Postcolonial Criticism

**Gina Altamura and J. M. Fritzman**  
Lewis & Clark College, Portland

**ABSTRACT:** We first present Hegel's philosophy of history. Next, we discuss objections to it that have been made by Ranajit Guha and Vinay Lal. Finally, we refashion Hegel's philosophy to meet their objections.

### SETTING

Faculty lounge, somewhere in North America.

### CHARACTERS

Dr. Desai, Dr. Khan, Dr. Lala, Dr. Rao, Dr. Singh.

### ACTS AND SCENES

ACT 1: USKAA TATVAVAAD HAI JARMAANII

SCENES: Dr. Lala Tells All • Hegel on History • No History for India • Guha Goes to the Limit • From History to Historicity • Lal Forgets History • Not about Heidegger • Two Rotis with Ghee • Conceding Too Much?

INTERVAL: EK PAL KA JEENA

ACT 2: PHIR BHII DIL HAI HINDUSTANII

SCENES: Had Hegel Watched Movies • Modernity as Self-Determined Determination? • Traditions of Modernity • Thinking With, Talking Back • The Future is India • A Suitable Boy?

**M**y neck cricked and when I took breaks from the books distant objects swam till my vision adjusted. It seemed I'd been holed up and reading for ages. Was college like this? But I had to admit, it was fascinating, some of it. There were really sad stories about Partition, and how the people you'd drunk tea with for years turned into your enemies overnight, sometimes betraying you in a heartbeat, sometimes risking everything they had to protect you. And Gandhi was a more complicated man than I'd imagined—there were stories that didn't match up between the British and Indian books. History wasn't that easy a thing to learn, seemed to be what I was learning. It wasn't a static story about dead people. It was a revolving door fraught with ghosts still straining to tell their version and turn your head, multifaceted and blinding as a cut diamond. In a book of folk tales I read a story of five blind men who were asked to describe an elephant. Each described the part he touched, crafting an entire creature from the tail alone, the trunk or ears, the belly. All the versions true; none the entire truth. It was a bit like this.

And a funny thing happened then. The more I read, the more I forgot why I'd begun reading in the first place. And now at meals, we'd sit down together, my mother and father and me, and they would enthrall me with tales of freedom fighters in our own family! Hear No Evil Uncle—derailing trains at midnight to bring the cities to a halt. My grandmother spinning all the clothes in khadi. And I found even I was able to enthrall my parents; they would sit amazed as I recounted something to them they'd never learned or had simply forgotten, left to collect dust in an unused attic of the mind.

—Shampoo comes from the Sanskrit? My father asked incredulously one etymologically enlightening breakfast along the way.

—More specifically, from the Hindi word *champee*, meaning to massage, I told him.

If anyone was going to be an expert on Indian history—whether of fact or fable, war or word—it was going to be me.<sup>1</sup>

## ACT 1: USKAA TATVAVAAD HAI JARMAANII

The day of the conference I was ready. I knew that India had twenty-five states (and seven territories), almost two dozen major languages (Hindi being the one primarily spoken by about a third of the population), and that Hinduism was the religion practiced by about four-fifths of the peeps (other religions including Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism). I had Gandhi's birth date down (October 2, 1869) and that of his assassination (January 30, 1948). I had the names of the four principal castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras). And a bindi.<sup>2</sup>

### Dr. Lala Tells All

Rao: What I find interesting about Krishnenda Ray's *Migrant's Table* is his claim that 'much of what is considered authentic is defined in opposition to 'others'.'<sup>3</sup>

Khan: Yes, he writes that 'there is no Bengali cuisine but multiple variations along class, regional, and sectarian lines,' and that's true of any cuisine. Ray also maintains that "Bengali food,' 'Bengali-American cuisine,' and 'American food' are relational categories that exist in a matrix of cross-cutting relationships. One cannot exist without the other. 'Bengali cuisine' makes sense only as a contrast to 'American cuisine' or 'Bengali-American cuisine;' they make sense only in relation to each other, and that is as analytic abstractions.<sup>4</sup>

Desai: Indeed. That's why Ray quotes Rilke, who wrote that 'we are born, so to speak, provisionally, it doesn't matter where; it is only gradually that we compose, within

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<sup>1</sup> Hidier (2002), 274-275.

<sup>2</sup> Hidier (2002), 276.

<sup>3</sup> Ray (2004), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Ray (2004), 158.

ourselves, our true place of origin, so that we may be born there retrospectively.<sup>5</sup>

Singh: Isn't that Dr. Lala?

Desai: Indeed. Hello, Dr. Lala. Over here. Please join us.

Lala: Namaste. Salaam alaikum. Sat Sri Akal. It's good to see you.

Singh: Welcome back from your sabbatical. If I remember, you were in Chicago, Paris, Mumbai, Delhi, and Calcutta.

Lala: Accha. Also Canberra, and most recently Los Angeles.

Khan: But now you're home. Tell us about your research.

Lala: Would you rather hear about my research or my travels?

Rao: Your research, please, since that's the distillation of your travels. Like a good whiskey.

Lala: I like your analogy. But wouldn't the converse be true too? From hearing about my travels, couldn't you precipitate my research?

Desai: So tedious, yaar!

Lala: Ranajit Guha contrasts storytelling in the West with that of India. In the West, the narrator decides what the story will be. In India, however, 'the story, or *kathā*, owed its inauguration primarily to the listener's demand.'<sup>6</sup>

Rao: Kissa katha ka?

Lala: Accha. As an example of the importance of the listener in Indian stories, Guha discusses the moment in the Mahābhārata, when the Brahmins—who will be the listeners—choose to hear Ugrasrava tell the story of the Mahābhārata. Ugrasrava does not immediately begin his story, but instead tells the Brahmins 'how Vyāsa, the first narrator of the Mahābhārata story, had to be asked by King Janamyjaya a thousand times (*sahasraśa*) before delegating his pupil Vaiśampāyana to recite.'<sup>7</sup> Not only that, but Vaiśampāyana 'would expect to be requested again and again (*codyamāna puna puna*) before consenting to narrate it for the king and his retinue of brahmins.'<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke; cited in Ray (2004), 137.

<sup>6</sup> Guha (2002), 56.

<sup>7</sup> Guha (2002), 58.

<sup>8</sup> Guha (2002), 58.

Khan: Well, it's a good thing we're in the West! Please take our request as a token of ten thousand pleas.

Singh: Plus, your author isn't thinking textually. The story about the telling of the Mahābhārata is itself part of the Mahābhārata. Listeners as characters within the Mahābhārata may have a role in deciding what story will be told, but actual listeners or readers don't.

Rao: I agree. Not to mention that even before we consider the textuality of the text, we should recognize that the storyteller has more authority than Guha acknowledges. In whetting the listeners' appetites for the story, he's already beginning to tell it.

Lala: It appears that you're challenging Guha's distinction between Western and India storytelling. He also claims, though, that the story 'will unfold in a retelling that works closely with its listeners as a conversational process.' This conversational process, *kathāyoga*, 'requires the bard to consult his audience about their preferences not only at the start of the narrative cycle but all throughout.' The audience thus serves as the initiators, *ārambhakāh*, of the story.

Singh: That reminds me of what the narrator of *Tristram Shandy* wrote about his procedure: 'Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all; —so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.'<sup>9</sup> Guha's distinction between Western and Indian storytelling may hold in general, but it can't be wholly correct. If we apply that to the Mahābhārata, then its readers do have a role in deciding what the story will be.

Lala: In a class on grammar, students were asked to punctuate the following: woman without her man is helpless. The male students wrote: 'Woman, without her man, is helpless.' But the females wrote: 'Woman! Without her, man is helpless.'

Desai: I suspect that Dr. Lala is trying to make us forget about her research.

Singh: Yes, I think so too. Surely, Dr. Lala, you're not embarrassed to tell us.

Lala: No, not at all. I'm happy to discuss my research. I appreciate your asking. I have a draft with me. Would you prefer that I read, or should I only talk about it?

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<sup>9</sup> Sterne (1986), 127.

Rao: Both! If it's a draft, then you read and we'll provide constructive criticism.

Singh: Helpful suggestions.

Desai: Useful comments.

Khan: This way, your draft will be revised as it's presented. So, jaldi-jaldi!

Lala: Accha. In my paper, I first present Hegel's philosophy of history. Next, I discuss objections to it that have been made by Ranajit Guha and Vinay Lal. I show that Guha and Lal are actually in agreement—at least on their main points—and that apparent disagreements are merely verbal. Finally, I discuss the extent to which Hegel's philosophy can be refashioned to meet their objections.

### Hegel on History

Lala: I begin with a brief discussion of Hegel's philosophy of history. He thinks that there is a deep connection between what actually happened and the remembering of those events in writing. Hegel claims that it no accident that the German word for 'history,' *Geschichte*, has both meanings, as this indicates that historical narration emerges simultaneously with the occurring of historical events. Historical events are not matters of myths or legends, or fabulous things said, but instead are events for which documented evidence is available. History is not simply a sequence of events, according to Hegel, but rather it is the narrative of the progressive realization of freedom. That history is progressive is linked to self-consciousness and self-determination. Humans continually understand more fully their social institutions and themselves as their own creations, not as natural or divine givens.

Hegel believes that history is possible only after there is a state. It is only then, he believes, that written chronicles are kept which allow historical events to be distinguished from legends and myths. Hegel categorizes the intertwining of the narration of actual events with legends as 'prehistory.' Hegel is not claiming that everything which prehistory says occurred did not happen. Without written records, however, it is impossible to distinguish events from legend. Equally important, it is only within a state that freedom can be realized. The modern state provides for subjective freedoms—including individuals having their rights respected by others and having rights against the state. Hegel believes in what Isaiah Berlin refers to as negative and positive liberty.<sup>10</sup> That is to say, freedom in its fullest sense is not primarily the

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<sup>10</sup> See Berlin (1969).

freedom of caprice—individuals’ freedom to do as they please—but instead a society where individuals recognize their desires as rational and the laws as embodying this rationality. This requires, of course, that individuals respect the rights of others. Hegel also believes that for freedom to be actual, rather than merely formal, the appropriate social institutions must be in place to allow persons to realize their freedom. It would be only a formal freedom, for example, if children were free to become educated, but there were no schools for them.

Hegel’s narrative of the progressive realization of freedom’s flourishing can be described briefly. In *The Philosophy of History*, he argues that the Oriental world knows only that one individual is free, the Greco-Roman world knows that some are free, but the Germanic world—that is, modern Europe—knows that all are free.<sup>11</sup> Guha does not find this credible, responding that ‘this is a very tall claim to make and one that is altogether without foundation in the facts of European history.’<sup>12</sup> This criticism misunderstands Hegel’s point. He is not claiming that all persons are actually free in Europe, but rather that all persons are recognized as entitled to freedom. Although it may seem perverse, the history of modern colonialism actually supports this. The ancient Greek city-states and the Roman Empire had colonies too. In establishing their colonies, however, they never felt the need to argue that they were somehow benefiting the indigenous people who were being colonized. When the British established their colonies, in contrast, they did believe that they must claim this to legitimate their rule. No doubt, these claims were often disingenuous. That they were made at all, however, upholds Hegel’s claim. The colonized often made effective use of the colonizers’ own claims to criticize their actual practices and policies, moreover; this was especially true of America and India.

Desai: I was reading George Orwell’s novel, *Burmese Days*, again last week. Something he writes may be useful to your argument: ‘Why, of course, the lie [is] that we’re here to uplift our poor black brothers instead of to rob them. I suppose it’s a natural lie enough. But it corrupts us, it corrupts us in ways you can’t imagine. There’s an everlasting sense of being a sneak and a liar that torments us and drives us to justify ourselves night and day. It’s at the bottom of half our beastliness to the natives. We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we’d only admit that we’re thieves and go on thieving without any humbug.’<sup>13</sup> I take it that you’re arguing that the need to sneak and lie is evidence that these Anglo-Indians actually realize that all persons are entitled to freedom.

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<sup>11</sup> Hegel (1956), 18.

<sup>12</sup> Guha (2002), 41.

<sup>13</sup> Orwell (1950), 39.

Rao: Not only that, but Orwell's Anglo-Indians regard their acts as stealing, rather than believing that they have a right to the resources they appropriate.

Khan: And they think of their treatment of the natives as beastly, which implicitly acknowledges that the natives deserve to be recognized as equals.

Singh: Whereas it's doubtful that the ancient Greeks or Romans, for example, would have felt this way about the peoples they conquered. It appears that Dr. Lala is converting us to Hegelianism! Please continue with your paper.

Lala: Teek hai. Hayden White's distinction between annals, chronicles, and narratives can be used to explicate Hegel's philosophy of history. 'While annals represent historical reality as if real events did not display the form of story,' White explains, 'the chronicler represents it as if real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of unfinished stories.'<sup>14</sup> An annal is a list of things that happened, the list possessing no more unity than that the items on it seemed noteworthy to the writer. A chronicle is a story of events that happened, and its organizing principle is chronology. An example of an annal would be a newspaper's list of 'Important Events on this Date,' while a chronicle might be a memoir. By contrast, narratives represent historical reality as if real events appear to consciousness in the form of finished stories. The narrative is teleological, with a conclusion towards which events are heading. This conclusion provides the narrative's plot and structure, as well as its criterion of what is worth recording. Hegel's philosophy of history is, in White's sense, a narrative.

Khan: This reminds me of Edward Hallett Carr's discussion, in *What Is History?*, of the relation between facts and history. Carr writes that 'history means interpretation' and that history 'is a process of selection in terms of historical significance.'<sup>15</sup> From among the facts available, historians recognize some as important and ignore others: 'Just as from the infinite ocean of facts the historian selects those which are significant for his purpose, so from the multiplicity of sequences of cause and effect he extracts those, and only those, which are historically significant; and the standard of historical significance is his ability to fit them into his pattern of rational explanation and interpretation.'<sup>16</sup> Later, he quotes with approval J. Huizinga's observation that 'historical thinking is always teleological.'<sup>17</sup>

Desai: So, a history of the 1857 Uprising that discusses the persons and events that contributed to the Uprising would be a narrative?

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<sup>14</sup> White (1987), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Carr (1961), 26, 138.

<sup>16</sup> Carr (1961), 138.

<sup>17</sup> Carr (1961), 142.

Lala: Precisely. Using White's distinction, moreover, we can say that Hegel sees history as a narrative that concludes with the realization of human freedom, and so history is world-history.

### No History for India

Lala: Hegel claims that India has no history, writing that 'it strikes every one, in beginning to form an acquaintance with the treasures of Indian literature, that a land so rich in intellectual products, and those of the profoundest order of thought, has no History.'<sup>18</sup> As discussed above, Hegel believes that history is the story of freedom's progressive realization. He attributes India's lack of progress in realizing freedom to the caste system. Hegel does maintain that society should be differentiated. He also claims, however, that authority should be shared among various groups. He holds that persons should have positions based on their talents and inclinations, not birth. Moreover, there should be a recognition that the differentiations of society are themselves human creations, which are capable of revision and modification. The caste system lacks these features. Moreover, although the caste system recognizes that persons have rights, they have them not by virtue of being persons but rather because they are members of a particular caste, and so Hegel maintains that this notion of rights has not yet risen to the level of morality.

Singh: It might be objected that the caste system is largely a creation of the British.<sup>19</sup> By insisting that persons declare their caste, the British ossified a system of social relations that had been much more fluid.

Lala: This doesn't undercut Hegel's criticism of the caste system. It only shows that, prior to the British, the practice of caste was better than the theory. It seems clear that it is caste that is being legitimated in the *Rig Veda* 10.90, for example, and there are clear references to caste in the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

As discussed above, Hegel thinks that civilizations can be ranked according to the extent to which they realize freedom. After 'all are free,' there is no possibility for any further development. In another sense, though, history continues. Freedom still has to be actualized so that not only is it recognized that all are deserving of freedom, but that they also are actually free. Moreover, the implications of what freedom means must still be drawn: civil rights, feminism, movements for gays, lesbians, transgendered

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<sup>18</sup> Hegel (1956), 61-62.

<sup>19</sup> Dirks (2001).

persons. Since these implications are—and will have been—human creations, it is impossible to know in advance what new forms freedom will take.

### Guha Goes to the Limit

Lala: As I said earlier, Hegel maintains that India ‘has no History.’ He argues that history only becomes possible once there is a state. In his discussion of Hegel’s view of the state (*Staat*), Michael Inwood explains:

A state usually involves three elements: (1) a people (*Volk*) that is more or less culturally and linguistically homogeneous; (2) a territory occupied by them that is more or less unified (but not necessarily homogeneous) geographically; (3) a political organization, with a central authority that exerts power throughout the territory.... Hegel uses *Staat* in two senses: (I) A state in contrast to other states, which embraces 1, 2 and 3.... (II) The state, in contrast to other aspects of society, especially the family and civil society. The two senses are related, in that something is a *Staat* in sense (I) if, and only if, it has a *Staat* in sense (II).<sup>20</sup>

Hegel claims that there is no state in India. This is what could be expected from a Schwabian, his critics might respond, whose vision of the world is limited by the blinders of a Eurocentric provincialism.<sup>21</sup> In his discussion of Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, for example, Guha claims: ‘What is presented there on the subject of World-history turns out, on closer look, to be no more than a region claiming to speak for the world as a whole. Consequently the history that goes with it proves to be highly reductive in scope—a short story with epical pretensions.’<sup>22</sup>

Guha notes that Ramram Basu wrote *Raja Pratapaditya Caritra*, which was published in 1801. It was described by one of Basu’s contemporaries as ‘an authentic history of the government of Bengal from the beginning of the reign of Achber to the end of that of Johangeer.’<sup>23</sup> Responding to Hegel’s claim that history is only possible once there is a state, Guha asks: ‘How to explain, then, that thirty years before this formulation India, described by him as historyless and stateless, had already succeeded

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<sup>20</sup> Inwood, (1992), 277-278.

<sup>21</sup> See Chakrabarty (2000).

<sup>22</sup> Ranajit Guha (2002), 34-35.

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Guha (2002), 11. Basu wrote *Raja Pratapaditya Caritra* in Bangla. It has not been translated, and Guha reports that even the reprinted Bangla edition is rare (Guha (2002), 102, note 6). As an unfortunate consequence, this article’s discussion of Basu’s book is limited to the information provided by Guha.

in producing its first history and first work of prose by an indigenous author? Excluded from World-history, Ramram Basu and his writing seem to have sneaked across the boarder somehow.<sup>24</sup> It is unclear, however, whether Hegel would agree that Basu wrote a history. Recall that a history must be based on written records, according to Hegel, whereas it seems that Basu's story is not so based. Guha writes:

Succeeding generations of political and literary historians—Nikhalnath Ray and Judunath Sarkar amongst the former and Sushil Kumar De and Sisir Kumar Das amongst the latter—have examined the text critically for its use of evidence as well as for its narrative mode. It has not escaped their notice that the author allowed his story to lapse occasionally into myth and fantasy; but they all agree that this flaw—almost unavoidable under the circumstances—has done little to undermine the overall authenticity of the work as an exercise in modern, rationalist historiography.<sup>25</sup>

Hegel would ask, though, what the evidence is that Basu relied on in writing his narrative, and whether it allowed him to differentiate actual events from legends. This worry seems particularly acute since Basu's narrative does include myth and fantasy.

Guha's discussion does nothing to allay that concern. Referring to the judgment of succeeding generations of historians that Basu has written a modern and rationalist history, Guha writes:

This is an assessment with which Basu himself would have readily agreed. For he takes care to distinguish his work clearly from the tradition of Persian chronicles that have been in vogue since the beginning of Mughal rule and flourished under the patronage of the court and regional elites. There is a little bit (*kinait*) written about Pratapaditya in the Persian language, he says somewhat vaguely without referring to any texts by name. But whatever may be there by way of such accounts is, he maintains, fragmentary and incomplete (*sanga panga rupe samudayik nahi*). It is nothing that can satisfy the curiosity of those who want 'to know the story of that prince from beginning to end (*anupurbik*).'<sup>26</sup> There is something patently modernist about this insistence on continuity and completeness—all that sets the proper historical narrative apart from the premodern annal and chronicle.<sup>26</sup>

Hegel would agree that the desire for continuity and completeness distinguishes

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<sup>24</sup> Guha (2002), 15.

<sup>25</sup> Guha (2002), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Guha (2002), 11.

historical narratives from annals and chronicles. Nevertheless, he would still ask if the evidence that Basu uses is sufficient to permit him to separate historical events for legends. Without a positive answer to this question, it must be concluded that Guha has not provided a counter-example to Hegel's claims that historical narrative only becomes possible once there is a state and that India is properly categorized as prehistorical.

Guha is also concerned with 'the uses of Prehistory for World-history,' noting that 'the latter gets its content from the colonial career of Western powers which require Prehistory in its Hegelian sense in order to dignify their dominance over the conquered and the colonized in some semblance of hegemony.'<sup>27</sup> Excluding groups from world history, consigning them to prehistory, is a stratagem of colonialism, which in turn is merely a device for exploitation. Guha is not claiming that Hegel influenced British policies, but rather that his philosophy of history provides the ideological justification for those polities. Some societies are more advanced than others, and so the former can legitimately rule the latter. If Guha can take his leave of Hegel, then he can also reject the ideological justification for imperialism. These justifications are still around today, of course, which shows that Guha's concerns are not antiquarian.

Hegel's views could be used as pretexts for behaviors and policies which, while claiming to promote the flourishing of freedom, actually inhibit it. He would condemn such activities. Hegel assigns India to prehistory because it has not developed a state. As Gabriel Paquette explains, however, Hegel advocates colonization as a way to alleviate the problems of overpopulation aggravated by crop failures in Germany in 1816. He does not believe that colonies are necessary to correct structural problems in civil society. Paquette writes that, for Hegel, 'colonization cannot operate without constraint, and only functions effectively as a safety valve amidst acute turmoil.'<sup>28</sup> He proposes establishing colonies in places where there are few or no people, and he does not suggest that colonies should displace indigenous populations. Hegel claims that both the colonies and the home country are benefited when the colonies become independent, moreover, and he cites America's independence from Britain in this context.

### From History to Historicity

Lala: Before discussing Vinay Lal, I'd like to say something more about Guha. He

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<sup>27</sup> Guha (2002), 44.

<sup>28</sup> Paquette (2003), 423.

wants to imagine a history that would be outside of world-history and so separate from the state and the project of nation-building. This form of history he occasionally refers to as 'historicality,' as when he writes:

One of the most outstanding achievements of British power in the East was indeed the production and propagation of colonialist historiography. It was cultivated on Prehistory's vacant plots. What was sown for seed came directly out of post-Enlightenment Europe and particularly English historical literature packaged for use in Indian schools and universities. The product was history written by Indians themselves in faithful imitation of the Western statism model. Unknown to Hegel, India had already been smuggled into World-history by the colonial state for which he had no place in any of his so-called stages, presumably because it did not fit the grand design. But, ironically, Indian authorship did nothing to recover the historicality discarded as Prehistory. Incorporated in World-history, the Indian past continued to be written as history turning on the colonial and, since Independence, the postcolonial state as its axis.<sup>29</sup>

Historicality is the way in which people project meaning into their lives and world, how they find themselves within a tradition and orient themselves towards the future, and this is independent of history in Hegel's sense. Historicality may include myths and legends, as well as imaginings. The past of historicality still is living in the sense that it not only provides the stories and traditions with which individuals identify, but it also provides the contexts for aspirations, expectations, and hopes for the future. That Guha is concerned to redefine history as historicality is collaborated by his claim that the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* are histories.<sup>30</sup> This is also evidenced by Guha's discussion of Rabindranath Tagore, who castigated historians for being solely concerned with facts and not the poetic imaginings and experiences of individuals. Guha seeks to disavow world-history and the project of nation-building while affirming historicality.

As Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, however, one limitation of Guha's so sharply distinguishing world-history from historicality is that it presupposes that the project of nation-building is something externally imposed on Indians, something which would not otherwise affect their lives.<sup>31</sup> Guha does not acknowledge that many Indians believe that their being citizens of India is an important aspect of their identity. Although they are proud of their regional identities—as Bengali, Punjabi, or Tamils, for example—they do not want to deny their national identity. Put otherwise,

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<sup>29</sup> Guha (2002), 45.

<sup>30</sup> Guha (2002), 51.

<sup>31</sup> Chakrabarty (2004), 125-130.

faithfulness to the self-understandings of Indians at the level of historicity would itself require reference to world-history.

### **Lal Forgets History**

Lala: Lal wants to reject history, and he chastises Indian historians for not including myths. This becomes relevant in his discussion of the demolition of the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya in December 1992. Hindu nationalists, the Hindutva, claim that Ayodhya is Ramjanmabhoomi, the birthplace of Ram, who was one of Vishnu's avatar. The Hindu nationalists further assert that a Hindu temple commemorating Ramjanmabhoomi had existed there.

Desai: I apologize for interrupting, but the Hindutva shouldn't be called 'Hindu nationalists.' I agree with Tapan Raychaudhuri: 'Since names matter, let us be clear on one point. It does not help to refer to them as Hindu nationalists. It gives them an unwarranted legitimacy. They are no more Hindu nationalists than Le Pen's men are French nationalists or neo-Nazis are German nationalists. Describing Hindu fascists by their true names would help clarify the situation in India.'<sup>32</sup> I realize that calling them 'Hindu fascists' could be seen as gratuitous name-calling. I recommend that you use 'Hindutva.'

Lala: I appreciate and accept your suggestion. The Hindutva also claim that the temple commemorating Ramjanmabhoomi was destroyed and that the Babri Mosque was built on top of it. Although the scholarly consensus among professional historians is that there is no evidence that there ever was a Hindu temple at this site, and also that it is most unlikely that the present city of Ayodhya is the same Ayodhya where Ram was born, Lal argues that the historians fail to address the meaning of this and to consider myth. It seems that this is what he has in mind. The Hindutva assumes that, if a temple commemorating Ramjanmabhoomi was destroyed to build a mosque, then they were justified in demolishing the mosque to rebuild the temple. (It is not clear whether they believe that (1) *a temple* that (2) *commemorates Ramjanmabhoomi* are both necessary to justify the Babri Mosque's demolition, or whether (1) by itself would be sufficient). The historians responded to the Hindutva's claims as though they had raised only questions about historical facts, and the historians described themselves as acting on a political imperative to set the historical record straight.

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<sup>32</sup> Raychaudhuri (1999), 228.

Lal has two objections to this. First, the Indian historians claimed an authority to be the arbitrators of whether the Babri Mosque was built on a site where there had been a Hindu temple commemorating Ramjanmabhoomi. In doing so, the historians treated this issue as solely historical, rather than religious or mythical. Although Lal recognizes that the Hindutva also appealed to the writings of historians, frequently historians in Europe—he finds especially ironic that the Hindutva so readily accepted Western historians as authoritative—he seems to regard the Hindutva’s claims as primarily mythical. Another way to put this point would be to say that Lal thinks that although the Hindutva may appeal to historians when historians support the Hindutva’s beliefs, the grounds of their beliefs are mythical.

Second, Lal believes that the Indian historians’ actions were insufficient. What else might the historians have done? Lal seems to believe that they might also have argued that the demolition of the Babri Mosque was unjustified even if previously at that site there had been a Hindu temple commemorating Ramjanmabhoomi. The historians might argue for this by turning to myth. All of the gods of Hinduism worship each other, such an argument might claim, and so it should also be expected that Ram would worship Allah. Ram would not be pleased, moreover, to see his followers engaging in acts of violence and hatred. So, the Rāmāyaṇa contains the resources to argue against the Hindutva.

Khan: Ashis Nandy argues that Hinduism contains the resources to argue for tolerance towards other religions without recourse to a secularism which insists that religion has no place in public or political discourse.<sup>33</sup>

Desai: The American civil rights movement would have been most improbable without its connections to religion. Both Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X appeal as much to religious sensibilities as they do to democratic principles. I don’t believe it would be an exaggeration either to say that their belief in democracy was based on their religious convictions.

Lala: Lal also sees history as a trap and constraint, inhibiting the imagination of new possibilities. History can have these limitations, as when it is argued that what is proposed for today was tried yesterday and failed then, and so it would also fail now. Of course, conditions today may be different and today’s proposal may be in some relevant respects different than yesterday’s.

Desai: As Shruti Kapila reports, ‘Gandhi’s *asbrams* or abodes were marked by an absence of books.’<sup>34</sup> This might frequently cause the wheel to be reinvented, but that

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<sup>33</sup> See Nandy (1983).

<sup>34</sup> Kapila (2007), 125.

may not be so crucial when the aim is not to make progress but instead to live meaningfully and creatively. Moreover, if Gandhi had paid attention to history, he would never have tried—or even imagined—nonviolent resistance, *Satyagraha*.

Rao: Yes, but that itself had antecedents, Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, for example.<sup>35</sup> Being without books may allow one the courage to try what has never been tried before, but it can also mean that things which have been achieved in one place remain unimagined elsewhere.

Desai: Indeed. Gandhi's beliefs were partially inspired by Europeans. As Raychaudhuri observes: 'Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (India's Independence), written in 1909, invoked the supposed ideal of India's self-sufficient 'village republics' in rejecting the civilization of modern Europe, but was in fact inspired by a particular strand in western thought. The authorities cited by Gandhi included two Indian writers, Naoroji and Dutt, but their works discussed India's impoverishment through colonial rule, not the evil inherent in modern civilization, the central theme of *Hind Swaraj*. The inspiration for the theme came from Tolstoy, Ruskin, Mazzini *et al.* 'This huge sham of modern civilization' was Tolstoy's phrase, quoted by Gandhi.'<sup>36</sup>

Lala: Be that as it may, Lal's repudiation of history may appear to contradict Guha's claim that India did have a history. Guha and Lal actually agree, however, as both want to endorse historicity but repudiate world-history. What seems to be a disagreement between them is really only using terms in different senses. When Guha says that India had a history, he actually means that it had historicity. And when Lal repudiates history, what he rejects is world-history and what he perceives to be the too narrow range of concerns of professional historians.

Lal's position seems to suffer from a performative contradiction. Although arguing that history should be disregarded, his own argument proceeds by a detailed history of issues and historians. What can be retained from Lal, though, is a wariness of history that limits the imagination. This is compatible with Hegel, who thinks that history teaches no lessons that can be applied in the future, as conditions are then different.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Thoreau (2008).

<sup>36</sup> Raychaudhuri (1999), 42.

<sup>37</sup> Hegel (1956), 6.

## Not about Heidegger

Lala: This is not a paper on Heidegger, but it will be useful to briefly discuss historicity, as this concept is appropriated explicitly by Guha and implicitly by Lal. Historicity refers to the temporal sense held by a person or community (*Dasein*, in Heidegger's terminology). Historicity can include events that—from the perspective of history as an academic discipline—actually happened, but it can also include myths and legends. It would not be too impressionistic to say that historicity refers to the stories that persons or communities tell about themselves, and to themselves, that define and self-define them. It would be wrong to believe that historicity is solely directed to the past, as it also includes an element of projection toward the future—not only who we have been, but also who we are (which is partly articulated by who we take ourselves to have been), and who we aspire to become.

My paper so far might give the incorrect impression that what is at stake involves choosing between world-history and historicity. Guha seems to see things in these terms, as he aims to use historicity to dislodge world-history and to take his leave of it.<sup>38</sup> However, world-history may be retained without repudiating historicity. Indeed, the two can mutually inform each other as the narrative of world-history becomes the way in which the modern world understands and defines itself. What Guha and Lal believe to be an exclusive 'or' shows itself for an 'and' which sought to repudiate one of its conjuncts.

## Two Rotis with Ghee

Lala: With only historicity, Guha and Lal lack the resources to choose which aspects of the past are to be affirmed and which repudiated—what of the past will also be owned as tradition. World-history is needed, as well as historicity. Chakrabarty makes this point, in other terms, when he says that Marx is needed as well as Heidegger.<sup>39</sup> Although both Hegel and Marx advocate what can be referred to as 'stagism,' their ideas about this are distinct. As discussed above, Hegel believes that world-history consists of three stages: Oriental, Greco-Roman, and Germanic. These are stages of world-history, however, not stages of national development. World-history has arrived at the Germanic stage, with the recognition that all persons are entitled to freedom, but

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<sup>38</sup> Guha (2002), 48-74.

<sup>39</sup> Chakrabarty (2000), 16-22.

Hegel does not hold that areas which are still at the Oriental stage must have a Greco-Roman stage before they can arrive at the Germanic stage. Rather, they may move directly to the Germanic stage. In contrast, Marx's stages—prehistory, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, communism—seem to be stages both in world-history as well as national or regional, such that an area that is at the feudal stage would need to progress through capitalism before moving to socialism. The point here is that the postcolonial animosity to Hegel's philosophy may be a misdirected criticism of Marx's stagism.

Desai: You don't just want two servings of roti, you want ghee on them too.

Lala: Yum. I just remembered another point I need to add to my paper. Hegel's critics would agree that Britain without an empire would have been better than Britain with one. This indicates that they would also agree that a country similar to Britain but without an empire would have been superior to Britain. This suggests that they actually agree with Hegel that civilizations can be ranked according to the extent they promote human freedom.

Khan: Perhaps. In regards to your claim that historicity needs to be supplemented with history, it may interest you to know that in his essay, 'Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven,' Gautam Bhadra notes that even when the rebels were initially successful in ousting the landlords and the British who supported them, the social structures that the rebels set in place frequently replicated those that they had just overthrown.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the rebels did not understand the nature and extent of the British Raj, and so they did not perceive that overthrowing the British in their local area would not be sufficient to permanently free themselves from the British. This strongly suggests that the 1857 Uprising would have had greater chances of success if its leaders had some knowledge of history.

Rao: To be fair, though, Bhadra also notes that the basis of the rebels' discontent was largely a result of the British altering traditional institutions. If the Uprising didn't succeed because the rebels were ignorant of history, it was provoked because the British didn't know historicity.

Desai: I'd like to add that Gyanendra Pandey argues, in 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism,' that in not supporting the 1919-1922 peasant revolts against their landlords, Gandhi, Nehru, and the Congress Party wrongly believed that it would be possible to forge a coalition of all Indians demanding that the British leave. What this failed to recognize, of course, was that supporting the British was in the landlords' interests, and so it was most unlikely that they would support any such coalition. Moreover, the Congress Party also failed to see that the peasant revolts against

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<sup>40</sup> See Bhadra (1988), 129-175.

landlords had the potential to directly challenge the economic base of the British, as much of their revenues came from taxes and moneys paid by the landlords.<sup>41</sup> This suggests that an exclusive focus on the national level can be as limiting as one that considers only the local.

Khan: Your attempt to link history and historicity can be made by turning briefly to another discursive domain. Edward Said argues that all texts are ‘worldly.’ That is to say, even imaginative works of fiction still retain ties to the actual world in which they are written. It is this worldly nature of texts that allows criticism to procedure counterpunctually. On the one hand, literary criticism can celebrate and acknowledge the extent to which novels can transcend their world by imagining new social relations and possibilities. On the other hand, criticism can also register the extent to which texts surreptitiously reproduce and uphold actually existing injustices. Readers of Jane Austen’s novels can recognize, for example, that her characters’ wealth depends on the British Raj.<sup>42</sup> This has two consequences for your argument. First, demonstrating the worldly aspect of texts crucially depends on history. It would be impossible with only historicity. So, Guha is incorrect to suggest rejecting history in favor of historicity. Second, religions and myths, like texts, are worldly. Because of this, Lal is wrong to oppose religion and myth to history, since history is necessary in order to interpret and criticize religion and myth.

### Conceding Too Much?

Desai: In this attempt to harmonize Hegel, Guha, and Lal, you’re trying to have your own Trimurti, not of Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu, but *Amar, Akbar, Anthony*.

Khan: Yes, and just as Anthony is the central character, so Hegel is the star of your show.

Singh: Accha, next she’ll have Hegel singing ‘My Name Is Hegel Gonsalves.’

Lala : Huh?

Khan: Don’t you watch movies?

Rao: But this concedes entirely too much. It seems to be a consequence of your argument that world-history is only the historicity of modernity, and that world-

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<sup>41</sup> See Pandey (1988), 233-287.

<sup>42</sup> See Said, (1994).

history's claims to universality are only arrogant pretensions. Moreover, these pretensions in turn serve as the expression of and a mask for imperialistic ambitions.

Lala: That's what Guha believes. He writes that 'it is thus that the 'peoples without history' in the subcontinent got history as their reward for subjugation to civilized Europe and World-history, just as elsewhere in realms unredeemably sunken in Prehistory the colonized lacking in footwear and faith got shoes and the Bible.<sup>43</sup> The history the Indians got was that of the Raj, of course. Writing of the West's so-called civilizing mission, Guha adds that 'the mission was, we know, a package made up of the Bible, soap, and history carried by the West to the lands it had conquered.'<sup>44</sup>

Desai: Not at all. In her book, *Imperial Bodies*, Collingham reports that the British learned from Indians to bath regularly and to associate cleanliness with bathing rather than only wearing clean clothes. Similarly, the British learned to wash their hair, rather than powder it, from Indians. These practices, along with wearing pyjamas, were subsequently imported back to Britain.<sup>45</sup> If the British brought their own soap, Indians showed them how to use it.

Singh: Pyjamas—so cool in hot weather, so comfortable.

Khan: Especially when the person wearing them has bathed!

Desai: Indeed. And Indians had the Bible before the British. Saint Thomas had visited India, after all, not Britain.

Singh: What about shoes?

Lala: So uncomfortable, yaar!

Rao: No doubt, India made major contributions to world civilization by giving it baths and nightwear. That doesn't address the main objection. Isn't Guha correct that Hegel's world-history is no more than a local historicity that arrogates to itself dominion over all others? Isn't world-history really just the ideology of imperialism?

## INTERVAL: EK PAL KA JEENA

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<sup>43</sup> Guha (2002), 52.

<sup>44</sup> Guha (2002), 48-74.

<sup>45</sup> See Collingham (2001), 44-49.

## ACT 2: PHIR BHII DIL HAI HINDUSTANII

Kavita was beaming with pride at Sabrina, who was onto something about mehindi not being tantamount to temporary tattoo, and how it's been appropriated by Western capitalist culture. But the mehindi originated in Africa, and so India appropriated it from a people of color as well, according to Upma, and thus we shouldn't wear jeans or listen to Queen, then. But Freddie Mercury was Indian, Sabina pointed out, Parsi, and plus, half of these things are made in India anyways if you check the tags. Somehow eventually arriving at: Whatever it was, why did a white girl have to wear it before it was regarded as cool?

—Oh god, do you see Karsh? whispered Gwyn. —He looks so impressed.

— ... the most obvious example, Upma was adding. —Being Madonna in her South Asian phase.

—This is my moment, Gwen whispered. —Do I look okay?

—You are looking fine, Gwyn, said Kavita. —It's an identity conference, not the spring collection, isn't it?

—But clothes are a huge part of my identity, said Gwyn. Then, to my stundom, her hand shot up, body following a moment after.

—Excuse me?

A hush descended upon the audience as they stared amazed and prêt à pouncer at the salvar'd blonde before them. Oh no, now they would definitely maim us.

—I just wanna say: Why are you guys still talking about Madonna's South Asian phase anyways? Gwen began. —Hello—that's already ancient history. Madonna's just done what we all should do. Get into the groove. You have to subvert. Be all that you can't be.

Upma didn't look so pleased.

—So what are you saying, she snapped, steeling her gaze right at Gwyn. —How am I supposed to subvert my South Asianness? Tell someone, *Hey! I do Bharat Natyam, I go to temple—fuck you?*

—Sure, said Gwyn. —Oh, and by the way, regarding the whole South Asian thing: I don't think you should worry so much about using the term. Of course we can't

become the same. You'll never be a size zero, and I'll never be a twelve—you're about a twelve, right? We can dress the same and still maintain our differences.

She just stood there a moment, every head doing a 180 to check her out.

—What would you know about people of color? Upma sputtered finally. —Do you have any black friends?

—Do you have any white? Gwyn retorted. She gestured at me and then Kavita. —I have South Asian friends.

She pointed Karshwards.

—And him.

Karsh lifted a half-steeple in a tiny wave. A stunned silence ensued, punctured by a quick but thick round of applause, before Upma could huffily continue her spiel.

Gwyn nearly curtsied on her way down. And ear-to-ear grin was glued to her face from that moment on. And me, I was utterly depressed. I thought that at least here I might be one step ahead of my popular pal, but looked like I was, as always, more than two behind.

As the conference continued it occurred to me finally that it wasn't really about Indian history as it was written, but really about rewriting it by taking a fresh look at race, ethnicity, gender, and a mix of sociological questions—as the opening paragraph of the program laid out in bold text; I had been so busy trying to locate Karsh I had failed to notice this.<sup>46</sup>

### Had Hegel Watched Movies

Desai: 'When we greet one another we fold our hands in namaste because we believe that God resides in the heart of every human being. We come from a nation where [we] allow a lady of Catholic origin to step aside for a Sikh to be sworn in as Prime Minister by a Muslim President to govern a nation of eighty percent Hindus. It may also interest you to know that many of the origins of your words come from Sanskrit, for example, *matri* becomes 'mother,' *bhraathra* becomes 'brother,' *gyaamti* becomes 'geometry,' *trikomati* becomes 'trigonometry.' We have five thousand six hundred

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<sup>46</sup> Hidier (2002), 280-282.

newspapers, thirty-five thousand magazines, in over twenty-one different languages, with a combined readership of a hundred and twenty million. We've reached the moon and back, but yet you people still feel that we've only reached as far as the Indian rope trick. We have the third largest pool in the world of doctors, engineers, and scientists. Maybe your grandfather didn't tell you that we have the third largest army in the world and even then I fold my hands in humility before you because we don't believe that we are above or beneath any individual.'

Lala: Huh?

Khan: Don't you watch movies? That's from *Namaste London*, where Arjun Ballu Singh (played by Akshay Kumar) tells some arrogant Brits what India is really like. If Hegel watched movies, he'd learn something about India.

Desai: Strike a pose.

Lala: What?

Singh: Don't you watch music videos?

Lala: It feels more like a posse than a pose.

Rao: Since you've fallen into the den of this four-headed Ravana, you may need that rope trick.

### Modernity as Self-Determined Determination?

Lala: It must be conceded that world-history is the historicity of the West become self-critical. The question is whether this is fatal to its claims to universality. As you know, reasons and arguments that are convincing rely on beliefs which persons share. Those beliefs themselves can be questioned, of course, but only by relying on other beliefs that are not currently being questioned. While there is probably no absolute foundation—such as Descartes hoped to find—the beliefs that are relied upon in any particular argument could be said to constitute that argument's foundations.

Khan: Your describing what Timm Triplett refers to as 'contextual foundationalism'—it could also be called a dialogical or conversational foundationalism—'according to which basic propositions are whatever fundamental assumptions remain accepted and

unchallenged in a given social or even conversational context.<sup>47</sup> Are you saying that world-history is the West's contextual foundation?

Lala: Not quite. What I want to say is that even though the West has the resources to be self-critical—a hallmark of modernity—it must rely on some of its own beliefs to do so, although any specific beliefs could be challenged and altered. Over time, I suppose, maybe all could be changed. There are only two alternatives to this, as far as I can see. The first would be to find some foundational beliefs on which all others could be derived. I don't see any hope for that project.

The second would be if reason could proceed without relying on any beliefs at all. This is the view that Richard Dien Winfield attributes to Hegel.<sup>48</sup> If thought could produce itself by thinking itself without relying on anything other than itself—what Winfield refers to as thought's self-determining determinations—and so generate a system of ethics and law, then it would be possible to know a priori that all competing systems were without reason. Modernity developing independently of any tradition could be termed 'Reason' with a capital R, and modernity as a questioning of beliefs based on other beliefs could be called 'reason' with a lower-case r. With Reason, big R, modernity could legitimately impose itself on traditional societies, as their beliefs would be merely dogmatically held falsehoods. At best, traditional societies might have reasons, small r, for their beliefs and ways of life, but they would not have Reasons, big R, for them.

I find the arguments of Clark and Fritzman convincing against such any such interpretation of Hegel's philosophy. I'm also persuaded by their arguments that, even if it were Hegel's view, this project of Reason, big R again, can't succeed.<sup>49</sup> In that case, though, even so-called traditional societies will be modern to the extent that they give reasons for their beliefs. It will then follow that the distinction between traditional societies and modernity is one of degree. Modernity is on a continuum with traditional societies, not absolutely distinct from them. Moreover, since societies can be self-critical while relying on different sets of beliefs, it would not be wrong to speak of their being traditions of modernity.

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<sup>47</sup> Triplett, (1990), 101.

<sup>48</sup> See Winfield (2001), 91-109.

<sup>49</sup> See Clark and Fritzman (2002) and (2003).

## Traditions of Modernity

Lala: Modernity is not without traditions, but instead holds that any claim can, in principle, be contested. This is one way in which modernity differs from traditional societies. Even in modernity, reasons will only be given when pertinent, when the challenge seems significant. This means that the roles of judgment and politics are inelimitable. It is not irrational, moreover, to not have reasons for everything. The need to give reasons emerges when something does not work or when beliefs or practices are challenged. If this is correct, pace Winfield, then modernity must dialogue with more traditional societies, not impose its own views.

Khan: In a recent article, Faisal Devji discusses Sayyid Ahmad Khan. Writing in the 1870s, Sayyid Ahmad Khan argued that ‘while modernity emerged with Islam, it was forgotten because Muslims retreated to the traditional world, only to rediscover this modernity in nineteenth-century Europe.’<sup>50</sup> Whereas there was a conflict between religion and modernity in Europe, Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s strategy of linking modernity with Islam gave him the conceptual resources to bypass that debate. More importantly for the present discussion, though, is that he could also argue that modernity was not something foreign to Islam, which was being imposed by the West. Rather, in adopting so-called Western modernity, Muslims were actually reclaiming their own heritage.

Lala: That sounds rather fanciful.

Rao: No, it’s not. There are good historical arguments, as you know, for seeing the Enlightenment as a secular and more radical extension of the Protestant Reformation. In *The Unity of Theology*, Muhammad ‘Abduh argues that many of the values and ideas central to the Reformation and the Enlightenment were actually imported from Islam. The Europeans who invaded Islamic countries discovered and advanced culture with a religion that emphasized social justice, where knowledge, learning, and critical thinking weren’t seen as incompatible with faith. They returned with these and with a desire to limit the authority of religious leaders.<sup>51</sup> Insofar as Islam provided some of the seeds of the Protestant Reformation, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that Western modernity was made possible, at least in part, by Islam.

Desai: This would support your argument that modernity isn’t unique to the West.

Lala: Guha writes:

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<sup>50</sup> Devji (2007), 68.

<sup>51</sup> See ‘Abduh (1966), 148-150.

If Spirit were on its journey in the world, a stage would indicate how far it had traveled, how much further it had to go, where it had stopped and for how long. But a stage is also a platform used for display as in a theater, and World-history is, for Hegel, 'the theatre in which we are about to witness [*Geist's*] operations.' In undertaking thus to put the latter up for show on the stage of World-history, the philosopher assumes the role of impresario or producer—the wise man who, as an accomplice of Spirit itself, already knows the plot. Or he may be acting as the *sūtradhāra*, the controller of the story line, who, in a Sanskrit drama, could also be the *vidūṅka*, i.e., the jester. If the stage is meant to display Spirit's performance in the world not merely for entertainment but also for the evaluation of what it has achieved, the prologue can make a difference depending on who delivers it. I leave it to my audience and readers to identify the figure they first see on the stage when the curtain goes up. Is that the philosopher of history or history's fool?<sup>52</sup>

In claiming that World-history is modernity's historicity, I fully agree with Guha that Hegel is a *sūtradhāra*, but not that he is a *vidūṅka*. He plays the role of a *sūtradhāra* in that his philosophical history goes beyond a mere chronicling of events by situating those events within a narrative—the progressive realization of freedom. What is crucial to note here is that in telling this history, Hegel is himself intervening in history. Insofar as Hegel can convince his readers to accept his narrative, they will then judge contemporary events and individuals by the criterion of whether freedom is thereby advanced. Hence, whether he is the history's philosopher or fool depends on whether his narrative is convincing. As I've argued, even those who claim to find it wholly unpersuasive nevertheless implicitly adopt such a view when they criticize colonialism and imperialism.

World-history is the historicity of modernity, but it also is what allows the imperialist and colonial ambitions of modern states to be challenged. In claiming to be universal, modernity cannot consistently ignore challenges made according to its own criteria. In claiming that all persons are equally entitled to freedom, the West cannot consistently deny that freedom to others. Since freedom is achieved by action, moreover, holding others in tutelage is inconsistent. Here, John Stuart Mill's argument that modern nations can rule others until those others can rule themselves, so that the modern nations are adults while the others are children, can be effectively met by the observation of Martin Luther King Jr. in his 'Letter from A Birmingham Jail' that 'wait' and 'later' too often mean 'never.' Gandhi observed that people would rather be governed badly by themselves than well by others. The deeper point here is that it is only by governing themselves, even badly, that people learn to govern themselves.

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<sup>52</sup> Guha (2002), 27.

## Thinking With, Talking Back

Lala: Earlier this afternoon, Dr. Singh mentioned the identification of writing with conversation in *Tristram Shandy*. I believe that too often we've allowed authors to talk all, and not held up our end of the conversation. We've forgotten that we can be initiators. If writing is conversation and reading is dialogue, then a text cannot consist of an author's assertions written in a book. A text will be a collaborative product of its author and readers, instead, and while articles and books are seldom co-authored, texts always are. Author and readers generally think together, with the readers imagining details that the author did not provide. Sometimes, though, the readers become unhappy with the direction in which the author would continue, perhaps because they perceive that the text has a certain trajectory to which the author is not being faithful, and so the readers not only think *with* but also *against* the author. In such cases, the text becomes the site of a struggle, an agon, and the conversation between author and readers resembles more a disputation than cocktail party chit-chat.

This becomes explicit in Hegel's philosophy. In the 'Preface' to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, he maintains: 'Philosophy ... is its *own time comprehended in thoughts*. It is just as foolish to imagine that any philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time or leap over Rhodes.'<sup>53</sup> This is not only true for philosophy in general, it also holds for Hegel. Philosophy is retrospective, and it narrates the history of present conditions. Like Saleem Sinai in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Hegel's philosophy is 'handcuffed to history.'<sup>54</sup> Comprehending the present, for Hegel, means understanding its history. At the beginning of the penultimate paragraph of *The Philosophy of History*, he writes that 'this is the point which consciousness has attained [*bis hierher ist das Bewußtsein gekommen*], and these are the principal phases of that form in which the principle of Freedom has realized itself;—for the History of the World is nothing but the development of the Idea of Freedom.'<sup>55</sup> Since philosophy is essentially historical, according to Hegel, it can describe only the understanding of freedom that consciousness has reached thus far, '*bis hierher ist das Bewußtsein gekommen*,' but it cannot know how its understanding will develop in the future.<sup>56</sup> It is because philosophy's perspective is one of hindsight that Hegel writes the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*: 'A further word on the subject of *issuing instructions* on how the world ought to be: philosophy, at any rate, always comes too late to perform

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<sup>53</sup> Hegel, (1991), 21-22.

<sup>54</sup> Rushdie (1980), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Hegel (1956), 456.

<sup>56</sup> Katharina Altpeter-Jones and Dinah Dodds are thanked for discussions regarding Hegel's German and its translation.

this function.<sup>57</sup> A consequence of this historical orientation is that Hegel's philosophy is always provisional. Since it is based on past and present conditions, it will have to be revised in light of future events, and thus readers may disagree with Hegel's own opinions.

Writing *The Philosophy of History* in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Hegel supposes that 'the History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of History, Asia is the beginning.' He knows that 'the term East in itself is entirely relative,' but he still claims that 'although the Earth forms a sphere, History performs no circle around it, but has on the contrary a determinate East, viz., Asia.' Writing that in the East 'rises the outward physical Sun, and in the West it sinks down,' Hegel claims that it is in the West where 'consentaneously rises the Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance.'<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, readers in the twenty-first century should boldly assert that the West where the sun sinks down is—from another perspective—simultaneously the East where it rises, and that history and self-consciousness have circumnavigated the globe. It is fashionable to castigate Hegel for his Eurocentrism, since he tells a narrative of the progressive realization of freedom that moves from East to West. This criticism acquires an apparent cogency only through failing to discern that there is a trajectory to Hegel's texts that continues beyond them. It can only continue, however, if his readers make their contribution. His readers have let him talk all, too often, without imagining something in their turn too.

### The Future is India

Lala: Since Hegel claims that modern Europe has recognized that all persons are entitled to freedom—so that 'Europe is absolutely the end of history'<sup>59</sup>—does this not prove that the narrative of progress ends in the West? There are two reasons for a negative answer. First, freedom must not only be recognized but also realized, and so institutions and practices must be created to ensure that persons actually have the freedoms to which they are entitled. Actually having freedoms means, according to Hegel, having what is required to exercise them. This is a task that is not confined to Europe. Second, discerning what freedom means is a continuing endeavor. Since Hegel's own time it has been recognized that rights extend to persons regardless of ethnicity or gender, for example. Moreover, current debates on the status of immigrants, the rights of prisoners of war and enemy combatants, and whether

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<sup>57</sup> Hegel, (1991), 23.

<sup>58</sup> Hegel (1956), 103-104.

<sup>59</sup> Hegel (1956), 103.

marriage is legitimately confined to heterosexual couples indicate that the narrative of freedom's progress has not concluded.

The challenges that India confronts in discerning what it actually means to say that all persons are entitled to freedom are in many respects much greater than those in Europe and North America. India has eighteen official languages and thousands of unofficial languages and dialects. It also has many ethnic groups, significant social stratification, and persons of strong religious convictions. This strongly suggests that India may be the site where freedom's flourishing will be substantially advanced. 'Europe is absolutely the end of history' in that there is nothing beyond 'all' in the one-some-all are free sequence. When it comes to realizing freedom and discerning its scope, however, there is no reason to believe either that Europe is history's end or that history could have an end. Indeed, controversies about the ethical treatment of animals suggest that even the referent of 'all'—and not only freedom's scope—has not been finally established. Due to the long tradition of vegetarianism in India, there again is reason to suggest that it will be a focus of such discussions.

The example of modern India shows that societies which had been prehistorical are not destined to remain so. Hence, that Hegel judges India prehistorical does not entail that, when viewed from a contemporary perspective, India is not now the land of the future. Occasionally there are debates about whether the tools of the master are able to dismantle the master's house.<sup>60</sup> These tools are more than adequate. Indeed, if the metaphor is treated literally, it is obvious that the master's tools can tear down the house. What needs to be added, though, is that those tools can also be used to remodel and improve the house, or to build a better one than the master imagined possible. This is especially true when it is remembered that India has available not only tools left behind by colonizers, entrepreneurs, and tourists, but also a wide range of resources from a variety of indigenous traditions.<sup>61</sup>

### A Suitable Boy?

Lala: Hegel's philosophy is well suited to India. Hegel does not believe that the citizens of a state need to share an ethnicity. Indeed, he believe that Greece and Rome were able to flourish as they did because they were so ethnically diverse.<sup>62</sup> Given that Hegel

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<sup>60</sup> See Lorde (1983), 98-101.

<sup>61</sup> See Sen, (2005).

<sup>62</sup> See Hegel (1956), 225-227 and 341-342.

celebrates ethnic diversity in a state, there is no reason to believe that he would object to its also containing multiple religions, languages, and cultures.

It is consistent with the trajectory of Hegel's thought to conclude, for example, that colonizers are so likely to abuse the colonized —whether intentionally or not—that colonization should be wholly disallowed. It would also be consistent to maintain that India, the land that had no history, is now the land of the future. Hegel's philosophy of history cannot give advice to India, but India shows how to interpret Hegel. It's India that underscores passages in Hegel. India shows that Hegel's philosophy continues after him. In so doing, it contradicts some of his particular pronouncements. Hegel asserts that India has no history, but now its place in world-history is secure.

Desai: So, Hegel's philosophy is German, but his heart is Indian?

Rao: And he's a suitable boy?

Lala: Huh?

Khan: Don't you watch movies?

Singh: Don't you read?

Lala: Accha...<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Earlier versions were presented to the Midsouth Philosophy Conference at the University of Memphis, 23 February 2008 (James Winchester is thanked for his commentary), the Northwest Philosophy Conference at Lewis & Clark College on 6 October 2007 (Jeffrey A. Gauthier is thanked for his commentary), and to a joint Department of Philosophy & Summer Research Colloquium at Lewis & Clark College on 14 September 2007. William A. Rottschafer, Robbie Roy, Rishona Zimring, and an anonymous reviewer for *Philosophical Frontiers* are thanked for their suggestions. Lewis & Clark College provided support through a Collaborative Research Grant.

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