Comparative Studies in Society and History 2007;49(3):666–688.
0010-4175/07 $15.00 © 2007 Society for Comparative Study of Society and History
DOI: 10.1017/S0010417507000667

Changing the Subject: Western Knowledge and the Question of Difference

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In 1840, the General Committee for Public Instruction in Bengal, presiding over the 'Anglicist' educational policy enunciated five years earlier, declared, "the ultimate object which we have in view is to infuse into the student, possessed of talents and leisure, a taste for literature and science," all of which would "hasten the regeneration of the country." The Committee observed with satisfaction that English education was proving very popular with the middle classes, but also noted, "At present, education is for the most part appreciated only for the direct returns it yields."[1] The Committee clearly hoped that over time education would come to be appreciated for other reasons. In the meantime, its instrumental value constituted a useful and even necessary inducement. A few years later, this same body reported many more students were entering and completing school, thus achieving their goal of attaining "the qualifications requisite to perform the mechanical duties of a writer [a clerk]." But, they continued, "our object to raise the character of the people by education and not by their purses is still far distant."[2]

The ensuing decades did not lessen the distance. That those who utilized Western education treated it as a purely material or pecuniary asset was bemoaned with increasing frequency in subsequent years. Many observed—and usually lamented—that Western education was treated as a means to an end and seldom valued in and for itself.

This essay seeks to document in all its richness a discourse that spans over a century, and which was generated from across all the usual significant

Acknowledgments: Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the universities of Princeton, Chicago, Minnesota, Columbia, Tokyo, Queensland, and La Trobe. I am grateful to the participants of these seminars for their comments, and to Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ranajit Guha, Barry Hindess, and Vanita Seth for commenting upon an earlier draft.

[1] *Report of the General Committee of Public Instruction for the Presidency of Fort William in Bengal for 1838–39* (Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1840), 7, 8, 9.

[2] *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1844–45* (Calcutta: Sanders and Cone, 1845), ccviii.

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cleavages which typically demarcated opinion—its authors were British and Indian, loyalist and nationalist, humble and exalted, official and unofficial. What I call the "complaint concerning instrumentalism," and the closely associated "anxiety of cram," voiced not only the concern that there was a failure in the dissemination of Western knowledge, but, read carefully, this discourse can be shown to implicitly register and articulate the anxiety that Western knowledge was failing to produce the subject this very knowledge presumed.

Contemporaries suggested the problem was that Indian students were appropriating this new knowledge in the same ways in which they would have appropriated indigenous knowledges. I shall show that it is indeed the case, that indigenous knowledges posited and produced a different relation between knower and known, or between what we have become accustomed to see as the subject who knows and the object that is known; it would seem that the conclusion to be drawn is that cramming and instrumentalism testified to the (stubborn) presence of another subjectivity, an indigenous one. Such a conclusion at once allows us to explain the failure being registered in the discourse of instrumentalism and cram, and moreover, to do so in a way that recognizes and remains sensitive to the fact that there are different ways of relating to knowledge, tied to different ways of being in the world. However, the category of "subjectivity" has a certain normativity built into it, and the question arises as to whether it can it be reworked in order to accommodate different ways of inhabiting the world, different ways of being a 'self.' Do such historicist emendations of our categories allow us to recognize difference, or do they unwittingly substantialize and universalize the difference to which they seek to attend?

"THE PINNACLE OF BENGALI AMBITION": THE COMPLAINT OF INSTRUMENTALISM

It was frequently commented that Indians regarded education not only solely as a means to employment, but more narrowly still, that they treated it (in the words of Viceroy Lord Irwin) as a "turnstile leading into the arena of Government service."[3] Western education was valued, according to an Inspector for Schools, because the natives had the idea that it would lead to "what is the highest pinnacle of Bengali ambition—employment under Government."[4]

A university degree, or indeed, even having sat for but failed the Matriculation exam for university entry, was a mark of distinction,[5] but only, according to the

[3] Address to Convocation of Delhi University, 1927, in *Indian Problems: Speeches by Lord Irwin* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932), 184.

[4] *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1856–57* (Calcutta 1857), Appendix A, 123 (pagination starts afresh for each appendix).

[5] As was often observed. See, for instance, S. Subrahmanyam, "National Education: Literary or Technical?" *The Educational Review* Jan. 1921: 15; John J. Cornelius, *A Study of Tagore's Experiment in the Indianization of Education in the Light of India's History*, Part 2 (Madras 1930), 117; Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969 [1927]), 186). When marriage

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Englishman, because of its instrumental use, for the natives do not "attach the smallest value to . . . degrees, diplomas or certificates" issued by the University of Calcutta, "unless as passports to Government employment."[6] Indeed, the suspicion was widely voiced that the knowledge that secured one these qualifications was regarded with a certain skepticism by pupil and teacher alike. Stories abounded of schoolmasters who told their pupils to give the 'right' answer rather than the true one: "you must learn these things so that you may be able to give satisfactory answers to the Superintendent when he comes," one teacher told his students, "but God only knows whether they are true or not."[7]

An aspect of the complaint I am labeling "instrumentalism" was that because education was seen only as a path to an income and perhaps a dowry, learning and even curiosity were seldom awakened. A "Song of Calcutta University," published in the newspaper *The Statesman* in 1904, captured both this lack of enthusiasm and an acknowledgment of the worldly benefits of education:

Shall we sigh for the souls thou hast deadened?
Shall we blame thee for brains thou hast sucked?
Shall we ask how thy records were reddened?
Or plead for the hosts that are plucked?
Thy slaves are all dead to enjoyment,
And sombre and barren their lives;—
But thou leadest them on to employment
And dowries and wives.[8]

Any intellectual awakening that did occur ceased, it was claimed, once the instrumental end was realized; nothing new was acquired, and that which had been acquired earlier was lost. Numerous commentators, both Indian and British, complained that after completing their education, students declined to ever read or indeed even think again.[9] According to one pamphleteer,

advertisements began to appear in the newspapers, for a long while "matriculation failed" was something worthy of mention among the prospective grooms other assets.

[6] *Short Essays and Reviews on the Educational Policy of the Government of India, Reprinted from the "Englishman"* (Calcutta 1866), 88.

[7] *Report of the [Bombay] Board of Education for the Year 1846* (Bombay: American Mission Press, 1847), 5. In another story a group of students admitted that they only believed what they had been taught, namely that the earth went round the sun, "as long as we are in the class-room." William Archer, *India and the Future* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1917), 240, note. In a variant of this story a school teacher is asked by a government official whether he teaches that the sun goes round the earth or the earth round the sun, and replies that he teaches that the earth goes round the sun, but adds, "I believe that the sun goes round the earth." H. Sharp, *Rural Schools in the Central Provinces* (Calcutta: Office of the Director-General of Education in India, 1904), 101.

[8] Quoted in "Watchman," *Higher Education and Control* (Calcutta 1916), i.

[9] Examples include *The Bombay University Convocation Address of 1894, Delivered by Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University* (Bombay: Indian Printing Press, 1894); J. Ghosh, *Higher Education in Bengal Under British Rule* (Calcutta: The Book Co., 1926), 151; and Ernest Wood, *Selected Articles on National Education* (Hyderabad, Sind: Sind Publishing House, 1917), 50.

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"There are hardly any such things as students in the proper sense of the term in our country . . . people study for material gain . . . for situations in life . . .. After getting into office they become like machines or worse still like fossils. They lose all interest in study."[10]

The most common explanation for this widely diagnosed condition was that instrumentalism occurred because Indians did not understand the character and significance of Western education, including its transformative, regenerative powers. Education was what one acceded to because it was what the ruler required of you if you were to get ahead, not something one undertook because one had come to value it or the knowledge it disseminated. Instrumentalism was at once a sign that English education had been misunderstood and the particular form that misunderstanding took, namely, the subordination of education to material concerns exogenous to education: jobs, marriage prospects, and dowry. Governor Malcolm Hailey was adverting to something like this when he opened the Punjab Educational Conference and Exhibition of 1926: "few of us would feel that education has exerted on the minds of the people at large that general stimulus, at once an awakening and a broadening of the mind, that we would have hoped to see. There is a general enthusiasm for the spread of schooling; yet paradoxically and unfortunately, people at large seem doubtful whether schooling in itself confers any lasting benefit on the scholar." In fact, Hailey went on, "one encounters the expression of a lurking feeling of regret that it should be necessary to adopt this somewhat mysterious device to hold one's own in the world; one finds even a feeling that the world would possibly be a better place if a man did not have to subject his children to a process which, for other purposes, seems to possess no very marked benefits of its own."[11]

The Indian student had his defenders, including British defenders. Some pointed out that not all Indian students regarded education so instrumentally, or that to treat education as a passport to a job was hardly a uniquely Indian problem, and that instrumentalism was not unknown among British students. Others declared that the modern spirit of commercialism was responsible for transforming education into a commodity everywhere.[12] But the critics would reply that while instrumentalism was not an exclusively Indian trait,

[10] *An Address by S. C. Roy, Delivered on the Anniversary of the Students Weekly Service* (Cuttack: Star Press, 1911), 4.

[11] *Proceedings of the Punjab Educational Conference and Exhibition, Held in December 1926*, J. E. Parkinson and R. H. Whitehouse, eds. (no publisher or date given), 13–14. An Inspector of Schools in Bihar similarly reported that neither parents nor pupils had much regard for what they were being taught, "but they consider the acquisition of our language as necessary for the advancement of their children in this life, and therefore overcome their suspicions as to what may be the effect of this mode of Education upon their prospects in the next." *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1855–56* (Calcutta 1857), Appendix A, 122.

[12] Syed Bilgrami, *Presidential Address at 26th Annual Session of the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference, Lucknow, Dec. 28, 1912* (Delhi 1913), 25.

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here the phenomenon took on an exaggerated form. In England also, the Calcutta University Commission conceded, students tended to equate education with exams, and good performance in these with worldly success. "But," they wrote, "we do not find that general closing of the ears and mind to everything that does not contribute to examination success."[13]

COPYING MACHINES: THE ANXIETY OF CRAM

In 1902, India's Viceroy, Lord Curzon, told the Convocation of Calcutta University, "The great fault of education as pursued in this country is, as we all know, that knowledge is cultivated by the memory instead of the mind, and that aids to the memory are mistaken for implements of the mind."[14] For more than fifty years on either side of this date, one heard a constant lament that Indian students studied by "cramming," by which was meant not last-minute preparation but rather "getting a thing by rote, without understanding it or digesting its truth."[15] Students sometimes referred to this as "to by-heart it." The complaint began very early, and was made of primary schools as well as of universities, girls' education as well as boys.' Nor was it confined to British India; it was heard also in the princely states. Perhaps most important, it was an observation and lament made by both the British and Indians, by colonial officials and also by nationalists. One complainant, the Principal of Elphinstone College, spoke for many when he pithily declared, "Cram is the great canker of [Indian] education."[16]

Various explanations were advanced for why the problem of cram loomed so large, with remedies varying accordingly. The importance of exams in the Indian system of education was widely cited. There were variations between provinces, but as an example, in Madras in 1896 three exams had to be passed (Primary, Upper Primary and Lower Secondary) before the all-important Matriculation exam. For half-a-century, "aided" schools were assisted according to a payment-by-results system, with results being measured by exam success; so that, as was often observed,[17] the school itself had a powerful incentive to gear all teaching towards passing exams. And then,

[13] *Calcutta University Commission Report* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1919), v. 2, 154.

[14] In *Lord Curzon in India: Being a Selection from His Speeches as Viceroy and Governor-General of India 1898–1905* (London: Macmillan and Co 1906), 485. "Memory," declared Curzon in an address delivered the year before, "is not mind, though it is a faculty of the mind" (Ibid., 317).

[15] A Native Philomath, *High Education in Bengal and the University of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Imperial Victoria Press, 1888), 18.

[16] *Indian Universities [Raleigh] Commission Report* (Simla 1902), vol. 2: Abstract of Evidence (n.p.).

[17] See, for instance, C. B. Rama Row, "Condition of Public Examinations," in *Report of the Madras Educational Conference, Held on 21st and 22nd December, 1896* (Madras: Varodochari and Co., 1897), 24. The system of payment by results came under criticism in Britain also, as did external examinations. The 1911 "Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education on the Subject of Examinations in Secondary Schools in Great Britain" advised against

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of course, there were the university examinations, which usually had to be passed in all subjects if the student was to proceed to the next level. The excessive importance of exams in the system meant—so ran the argument—that the entire system became distorted, and geared simply to the passing of exams. The Hindi novelist and short-story writer Premchand told an educational conference in Gorakhpur that the "examination mentality is destroying education."[18] Such criticisms became widely accepted; a Government declaration on educational policy in 1904 observed that while external exams could not be entirely dispensed with, "their influence has been allowed to dominate the whole system of education in India," and announced that the number of exams leading up to university was to be reduced, and that grants to schools would no longer be based on payment-by-results.[19] Nevertheless, the problem remained, and a decade later the next major government statement on education was still complaining that exams "encourage cram."[20] The link between exams and cramming continued to be made in subsequent years.

Another common explanation for the tendency of students to cram was that teaching and examination occurred in English, rather than the mother tongue of students. When students were forced to learn in an unfamiliar language, the normal processes of study and thought were rendered too difficult, and they coped by committing things to memory. Many observers affirmed that the English of most students was simply not good enough to follow a lecture or write an essay. Either they compensated by memorizing the text, or teachers compensated by dictating "*word for word*, what they wish them to learn," as the distinguished historian Jadunath Sarkar "confessed" he and most other college teachers did.[21]

The system of setting texts was often blamed for facilitating cram. The knowledge that exam questions would always be about, or derived from, a given source made it possible, even 'rational,' to memorize large chunks of the textbook. This problem was greatly compounded by the proliferation of "keys" and "made-easies," which relieved students of the need to study even the textbook, and which provided model exam questions and answers besides.

Teachers were often blamed for cramming. "If we appraise the work of a village teacher only at three annas a day," declared a speaker at the Madras

allowing a "proliferation" of external exams. Extracts in, J. Stuart Maclure, ed., *Educational Documents: England and Wales, 1816–1963* (London, 1965), 164–66.

[18] "Gorakhpur me Shiksha Sammelan" (1933) [Education Conference in Gorakhpur], *Premchand ke Vicar* [Thoughts of Premchand] (Allahabad: Saraswati Press, 1988), 212.

[19] *Indian Educational Policy: Resolution of the Government of India in the Home Department, 11th March, 1904*, sections 11 and 12. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1904.

[20] *Indian Educational Policy, 1913: Being a Resolution Issued by the Governor General in Council, 21st February 1913*, section 26. Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1913.

[21] "Confessions of a History Teacher," *The Modern Review* Dec. 1915: 663.

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Educational Conference in 1896, "we should also be prepared to get a return of work proportionate to this starvation allowance."[22] The miserable pay and poor prospects of schoolteachers meant, as witness after witness testified, that they occupied an exceptionally poor position on the social scale.[23] On the eve of independence, teachers at lower levels of the educational ladder were being paid rates at or below those earned by people in menial professions,[24] and most remained ill-qualified and ill-trained (or untrained) for teaching.[25]

As with the charge of instrumentalism, there were voices that would defend the Indian student. Most commonly, they pointed out that cramming was not a vice limited to Indians, and, likewise, that many of the factors blamed for cramming were hardly unique to India. One Indian author quoted that unimpeachable English source, *Pall Mall* magazine, to the effect that English schoolboys and Oxbridge pupils passed their exams "by dint of cramming,"[26] and indeed, complaints against rote learning had been heard in England too, as had criticisms against the examination system that developed from the mid-nineteenth century.[27] In fact, there are sufficient parallels between some of

[22] L. C. Williams, "Status of Primary Teachers," *Report of the Madras Educational Conference*, 2.

[23] The schoolteacher, wrote R. Rangaswami Aiyar, is "held in contempt . . . the butt of social ridicule." In "Is the Teaching Profession Calculated to Attract the Best Type of Men?" *The Educational Review* June 1920, 403. School teaching was variously described as "one of the least respected professions in society," "the last refuge of the incompetent and the despairing," and as an occupation which "may be truly regarded as the forlorn hope of a hungry humanity." In, respectively, Miss N. Ghose [Head Mistress of the Victoria Institution], "How to Make the Teaching Profession Attractive," *Report of the Bengal Women's Educational Conference*, n.p., 1927, 64; Typescript of radio talk by C. H. Barry, Principal of Aitchison College (c. 1945), in Barry Papers, Cambridge South Asia Centre Library, p. 2; and Lal Behari Day, *Primary Education in Bengal: A Lecture Delivered at the Bethune Society on 10 December 1868* (Calcutta: Messrs Barham, Hill and Co., 1869), 10.

[24] "Report of the Committee of the Central Advisory Board Appointed to Consider the Question of Training, Recruitment and Conditions of Service of Teachers," in *Reports of the Committees Appointed by the Central Advisory Board of Education in India (1938–43)* (New Delhi: Bureau of Education, 1944), 99. *The Educational Record*, a monthly issued from Madras, carried regular reports from officials of teachers' associations, which documented the appalling rates of pay and conditions.

[25] Up to the eve of Independence, having passed the Vernacular Final Exam—that is, having completed eight years of education—constituted a qualification for primary-level teaching. Only 54 percent of primary teachers in the public school sector had received any teacher training. The *Report of the [More] Committee on the Training of Primary Teachers* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1938), from which these figures are drawn, concluded that "half the teachers charged with the responsible task of imparting primary education are those who have had inadequate general training and no [teacher] training at all, and the remaining, though trained, have had unsatisfactory general education and a [teacher] training of an intermittent character" (p. 18).

[26] Setalvad [no first name given], *Indian University Commission: Letters Addressed to 'The Times of India' on the Vice-Chancellor's Vindication of Its Recommendations* (Bombay, 1903), vi.

[27] Denunciations of rote learning were heard in England from diverse sources; see Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780–1870* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1960). The deleterious effects of examinations were much discussed in England in the 1870s and 1880s; see John

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the complaints in India and in England to raise the question of whether anything remarkable was going on here at all, or whether the discourse on cram and instrumentalism was simply self-interested exaggeration. It is true that the Indian complainants, invariably themselves Western-educated, exempted themselves from their charges against Indian pupils, and can thus be suspected of seeking to preserve the value of their qualifications, which might otherwise depreciate as increasing numbers of their compatriots secured a Western education. British complaints might similarly be dismissed on the grounds that the colonizers were always wont to diminish Indian achievements. However, such a cynical reading cannot account for the fact that many of the Indian complainants were involved in the educational system as teachers and principals, and thus their criticisms were, in part at least, confessions of failure. As for the suspicion of all pronouncements from English sources, this sits ill with another oft-made claim that arises from the same premise that the colonizer's motives and pronouncements are always suspect: that the only reason that the British introduced Western education was to produce a class of natives trained to perform menial clerical chores at the lower levels of the colonial administration. But we must then ask, if the English introduced Western schools and universities only in order to produce clerks who could perform mechanical duties, why then did they complain about cramming and instrumentalism, which would seem to be the perfect form of training for the discharge of such functions?

While there are parallels between Indian and English developments, the sheer density and intensity of the discourse of cram and instrumentalism in India had no counterpart in England, and even after we allow for exaggeration and discount self-interest, something remains to be investigated. Those who insisted that cramming was not confined to India were nonetheless obliged to add that it occurred in a particularly acute form there, and with especially unhappy consequences.[28]

THE SUBJECT OF KNOWLEDGE

The two complaints were linked, and indeed they often occurred side by side in the same texts, as two sides of the same counterfeit coin. Sometimes it was suggested that it was because students had no real understanding or

Roach, *Public Examinations in England, 1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), esp. 272ff.

[28] Thus "A Native Philomath" described cramming as "the most serious intellectual malady of the present age throughout the civilised world," but added that "no where is it more dangerous than in Bengal"; *High Education in Bengal and the University of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Imperial Victoria Press, 1888), 18. Similarly, Lord Curzon acknowledged that cramming was a 'universal' problem, but added that it appeared in its worst form in India and China. Opening Address to Educational Conference, Simla, Sept. 1901, in *Lord Curzon in India*, 317.

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appreciation of the character and value of education that they regarded cram as an adequate way to acquire it; or else, that because cram was the only way they could get through the system, they were never really able to develop any understanding or appreciation of it, and thus could only regard it in instrumental terms. In either case, the discourse of cram and instrumentalism articulated the perception that Western education could neither presume, nor had succeeded in creating, an Indian subject who could value it and appropriate it in the terms which it required.

Does this mean that the British goal was to create a new (colonial) subject, for instance, a rational, enlightened, and even 'expressive' subject? Not at all. Western education was not aimed simply at producing clerks to staff the lower ranks of the colonial administration, as was sometimes claimed. If it had been, it would have been wound up in the early 1870s, when British officials began to warn educated Indians that their numbers exceeded the proportion of positions the Government was willing to make available to them. But neither was it aimed at producing Indian Emiles or Tom Paines. This way of posing the question is unhelpful. That is, if one asks it in the language of intentionality then the immediate response—not unnaturally given colonialism's exploitative and oppressive nature—is to deny any proposition that could be construed as ascribing good intentions to the colonizer. My argument, however, is not about intention—my claim is not that the British sought to produce modern subjects, but rather that Western, modern knowledge posits and presumes a certain subjectivity or type of selfhood, and that this is so irrespective of intentions. The introduction of modern, Western knowledge implied not just absorption of 'facts' and theorems, the replacement of one set of ideas with another set, but also a deportment, a stylistics, a whole series of 'adjustments' in how human subjects inhabit the world (a great many of which are informal rather than formal, unstated rather than thematized). It does not necessarily follow that the production of such a subject was ever seriously 'intended'—indeed, if one insists on imputing ill-intentions to the rulers one could even, adapting an argument from Pierre Bourdieu, argue that 'failure' was part of the intention; that the intention behind Western education was to demonstrate that it was beyond the capacity of most Indians. However, because knowledge necessarily presupposes a corresponding subjectivity, what does follow is that any discourse about a failure in the dissemination of knowledge would also at some level register this fact, even if it did not explicitly thematize it. I read the discourse of cram and instrumentalism as registering, and on occasion thematizing, the perception that this subjectivity was absent among Indian students.

Instrumentalism and cram did not, then, *simply* express the concern that Western knowledge was not being effectively diffused. In part they did not even signify the belief that knowledge was not being acquired, for inasmuch as the successful dissemination of knowledge was gauged by being able to perform certain functions—doing sums, passing exams—it sometimes had

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been. But it turned out that even where this was so, sometimes the results had to be discounted. Hence an educationist complained that while Indian students in primary schools displayed an extraordinary facility at learning their times tables, they had "no real comprehension of quite elementary number work when presented … in an ordinary, everyday, concrete way"[29]; and another remarked that even where students could recite their lessons, they usually had no idea of their meaning, and indeed sometimes "they did not believe that the sentences could convey any meaning beyond being read."[30]

How and why could successful performance of designated tasks still constitute failure? Unlike the joke that intelligence is defined as that which is measured by an IQ test, the position taken here was that what was at issue was not a verifiable skill but rather a mode of relating to knowledge, so that even where students met the test measuring their acquirement of a skill (such as by passing their exams by cramming), this could still be deemed a 'failure' of education. It was a failure of education because mastery of the task had been achieved by means that sidestepped the transformation of the subject and the subject/knowledge relation. What I draw attention to here is not that the complaint about cram and instrumentalism could be interpreted as 'also' being about subjectivity; I am making the stronger claim that it made no sense unless it meant this, that it is only this that makes intelligible the idea that cramming and instrumentalism are a failure of knowledge rather than a form of it.

When the authors of the statements I have been documenting sought to explain *why* cramming and instrumentalism were a failure of knowledge rather than a form of it, they usually did so by distinguishing between understanding and 'merely' memorizing, between learning how to 'think' on the one hand, and regurgitation on the other, and between knowledge which is acquired by oneself and thus sustained by conviction, and that which is accepted in deference to authority. Such a conception of knowledge has a lineage, one that includes the Reformation, the scientific revolution, and the Enlightenment. By the latter part of the eighteenth century Kant would define "Enlightenment" in terms of the free and independent use of one's reason,[31] and Kant the pedagogue, in his 'Announcement' of his Winter Courses for 1765–1766, told prospective students, "the method of reflecting and concluding *for oneself* is the skill the student is really seeking."[32] In the

[29] H. Dippie, "Principles of Education and Class Teaching," in *Instruction in Indian Primary Schools* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1936), 5.

[30] Ram Prasad, *Teaching the Teacher* (Allahabad 1915), 6.

[31] I refer, of course, to "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment." See also Kant's 1786 essay, "What Does Orientation in Thinking Mean?"; and also *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, in which Kant contrasts memory with genuine "understanding"; Victor Dowdell, trans. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), section 42, 91–92.

[32] Quoted in John H. Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 72.

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nineteenth and even into the twentieth century this understanding of education and knowledge had by no means triumphed to the point of completely reshaping the educational systems of Europe, but variations of this idea were expressed and developed in different ways in the writings of figures such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Humboldt, as well as by educational bureaucrats like Kay-Shuttleworth. The notion that only that which is independently acquired and sustained by personal conviction counts as knowledge had become the common property of much of the European intellectual elite.

Such a conception of knowledge had also become part of the understanding of a section of the Indian elite, which is precisely why they were co-authors of the discourse of instrumentalism and cram. Sir Gooroo Dass Banerjee, high court judge and first Indian Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University, was only one of the more distinguished of many in India who emphasized the critical difference between a student understanding something and 'merely' rote learning it, and between knowledge that had been made one's own and second-hand knowledge.[33] The nationalist leader Bipan Chandra Pal in his autobiography explained that he had taken little interest in the 'traditional' education he received as a young child, because the requirement that he learn Persian passages by heart did not "suit my impatient intellect, which was eager to know and understand."[34]

THE INDIAN HEART

If we accept that the discourse of cram and instrumentalism expressed the anxiety that Western education was not remaking subjects, we can now go further. The discourse of cram and instrumentalism expressed the fear that not only was Western education not remaking colonial subjects, but that Indian students and native practices were deflecting and 'remaking'—that is, bending and distorting—education.

If we return to the discourse of instrumentalism and attend to it carefully, we will note that the complaint is not, or not usually, that Indian students and their parents have no desires or goals other than the mundane and material. The complaint is rather that they have such desires, but they do not associate these with English education; that they do not see Western knowledge as pertaining to this domain, as having anything to contribute to it. An essayist in *The Modern Review* wrote, "The English learning is universally considered as an *Arthakari vidya* or learning that enables one to earn money."[35] Neither the essayist nor his audience assumed that earning money was the *only* goal his fellow countrymen

[33] *Reminiscences, Speeches and Writings of Sir Gooroo Dass Banerjee* (Calcutta: Narkeldanga Printing House, 1927), 155, 171.

[34] Bipin Chandra Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times* (Calcutta: Bipinchandra Pal Institute, 1973), 21.

[35] Ramaprasad Chanda, "Future of Education in Bengal," *The Modern Review* Sept. 1917, 316.

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had, but rather that "the English learning" pertained only to this goal. In a similar vein, it was a commonplace that for a Bengali, 'English is the language of commerce, Bengali the language of the heart.' Apart from again indicating the instrumental nature of the engagement with English and Western education, what this commonplace also registered was that the Bengali did, after all, have a heart. However, his Western education did not address it; it addressed him only in his capacity as a householder, desirous of providing for his family and making his way in life. Education was failing to have the desired effects not only because it was not being properly understood and appreciated and hence used instrumentally; more than that, it was being compartmentalized or quarantined, put into the slot of 'that which enables one to get ahead in life,' instead of refashioning the understanding of what constitutes the good life. Such an attitude was cheerfully and pithily summed up by a Muslim judicial official, who told an Inspector of Schools, "Men labour for Din [otherworldly purposes, salvation] or Duniya [this-worldly purposes]. For Din we have our own books, for Duniya 'Marshman's Guide to Civil Law in Urdu.' This is sure to lead us to a Principal Sadir Aminship."[36]

And what of cram? We observed earlier that it was frequently noted that Indians had a 'gift' for memorization. This capacity, or gift, was seen as closely connected with an indigenous pedagogy, which it was generally believed had relied largely or exclusively on rote learning. The Indian student, many concluded, had drawn upon this, such that that which was meant to be transformed had infected the agency of transformation. The Report of the Bombay Board of Education for 1845 observed that while the Government-established vernacular schools were a "considerable improvement" over the indigenous schools they were intended to replace, "we do not think that we are at liberty to assume that our vernacular establishments as at present conducted are capable of operating any effective permanent improvement on the native mind. . .." Why was this so? A major reason was that the Government schools had been infected by old methods, and were simply applying them to new materials—"The same inefficacious habit of committing everything which is put before them to memory exclusively prevails; catechisms of geography, of grammar, and the Government regulations are all treated in this manner, besides the complicated and needlessly long multiplication tables. And the people we are assured are much prepossessed in favor of these old practices."[37] Seventy years later the same point about the relation between the 'old' and the 'new' learning was still being made.

[36] Quoted in S. N. Chaturvedi, *The History of Rural Education in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (1840–1926)* (Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1930), 174.

[37] *Report of the [Bombay] Board of Education for the Year 1845* (Bombay: Government Press), 15–16.

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Western education was to transform knowledge and the recipient of it, but indigenous practices had warped the system, and the Indian student had bent the system to his own strengths, finding the loopholes that resulted in the pedagogic process being shaped by Indian students (and teachers), rather than the students being reshaped by pedagogy. One could, at this point, ask if this should be read as an instance of 'resistance'—the native fighting back by subverting the practices and disciplines being foisted upon him. I will, however, 'resist' the temptation to plumb this fashionable if shallow well, a temptation all the more easily avoided since there would be something ludicrous about treating dowry-seeking crammers as heroic figures, resolutely fighting off British hegemony.

The more interesting question is this: if the Indian student was bending things his own way, was the failure to shape subjectivity occurring because another subjectivity was intervening—an indigenous one? Having shown that Western knowledge presupposed a corresponding subjectivity, and that the discourse of instrumentalism and cramming registered its absence, we can now ask whether this testifies to the presence of another subjectivity, one connected to indigenous knowledges. Below I will argue that Indian knowledges did presume a different relation between knowledge and the knower. However, whether this leads to the conclusion that these posited a different subjectivity is not answerable simply by attending to indigenous knowledge practices; it turns on whether the difference in question is one that is best registered by stretching the category of 'subject' to accommodate diverse ways of relating to the world and our knowledge of it. But in order to arrive at the point where this question presents itself to us, we need to address the indigenous knowledge practices that Indians were said to be drawing upon as the source of their prodigious powers of rote.

OTHER KNOWLEDGES

Modern knowledge, for all its diversity, is unitary, which is why its transmission can be organized according to degree of difficulty—primary, secondary and tertiary, but in principle accessible to all. By contrast, in India, knowledge was always in the plural, always took the form of so many knowledges and practices: esoteric and restricted knowledges accessible only to some social groups, 'practical' and more widely available knowledges, variations according to caste and region and religion, and none of all this organized as an 'educational system.' Collectively this yielded a riotous variety of knowledge practices, from unstructured and occasional ones to more structured 'institutions' such as *maktabs* and *madrassas* and *tols* and *pyal* 'schools,' and *patshalas* and others,[38] with knowledge being passed on by *gurumahashoys*

[38] William Adam provided a revealing snapshot of the diversity of learning practices even in a single administrative unit, the *thana* of Nattore in Rajshahi district. See *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal (1835 and 1838)*, Anathnath Basu, ed. (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1941), 2d and 3d reports, 221 passim.

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and *pandits* and *pantojis* and *maulvis* and *upadhyayas* and *acharyas*—only some among the variety of words for 'teacher' or 'learned man' in the subcontinent. We cannot, then, compare modern knowledge with indigenous knowledge, but rather have to specify which among the various indigenous knowledges (and the practices in which they were embedded and those through which they were transmitted), we are choosing to refer to.

One type of knowledge with strictly coded and prescribed forms dictating how it was to be transmitted was knowledge of the Vedas, the sacred texts that go back some three thousand and more years. Knowledge of these was to be cultivated by those Brahmins whose task it was to recite from the relevant sacred sources at sacrificial occasions, and to preserve the Vedas through recitation.[39] The Vedas had been orally composed and have been maintained, over an extraordinary time span, by oral transmission—Vedic texts are *srutis*, truths meant to be heard, which were not committed to writing till late in the day, and the tradition has injunctions against learning them from writing. Each Brahmin family that cultivated Vedic knowledge had its own *sutra*, to be kept and passed on (but only to those considered authorized to receive it) through *svadhyaya*, or oral transmission. The archaic Sanskrit in which these were composed was superseded by classical Sanskrit, and then the various vernaculars, but they continue to be recited and transmitted in their original form. It was to become a common criticism that these Brahmins were in fact unlearned, for they did not understand what they recited. Even Indians who sought to defend indigenous traditions were sensitive to this charge, and either denied its truth or devised ingenious arguments to explain and excuse it.[40] But this criticism missed the point: the Vedas are *apauruseya*, of non-human origin, and the words *are* the meaning, that is, the meaning of these texts is imbricated with their sounds and the forms of their recitation. Hence how they were said was all important, and the sacred texts include elaborate instructions on how they are to be recited—with what accents, where the

[39] The discussion of *svadhyaya* in this paragraph draws upon Max Muller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1964), especially the postscript to the third lecture; J. F. Staal, *Nambudiri Veda Recitation* ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton and Co., 1961); and Staal's *Ritual and Mantras: Rules Without Meaning* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996).

[40] In A. S. Altekar's scholarly and nationalist work *Education in Ancient India*, which first appeared in the 1930s and then in subsequent editions, he acknowledged that many *pandits* did not know the meaning of what they recited. But he explained this as a consequence of a division of labor initiated when the number of texts became too large for any one body of persons to both commit them to memory, and to understand and interpret them. At this point, Altekar speculates, some *pandits* were assigned the task of interpreting, while others were required to "devote their energies to the mechanical memorizing of this extensive literature with a view to prevent its loss," an arrangement which "no doubt exposed some Brahmanas to the taunt of being mere parrot-like reciters of the Vedic hymns." "It is gratifying to find," he goes on to observe, "that they did not mind it in the wider interests of the preservation of the national literature and culture" (Varanasi: Nand Kishore and Bros., 1965, 5th ed.), 150.

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tone is to fall, and so on. In *svadhyaya*, explains Frits Staal, "there is no sharp distinction between word and meaning."[41] This does not mean that they have no meaning, or that it is unimportant, but rather that what the reciter and the Indologist understand by 'meaning' might be two different things, and that any approach predicated on the notion that words express or represent a meaning anterior to them will always find this to be 'mere' memory.

It may be objected that this example is not illuminating because this particular knowledge of the Vedas (there are others) is essentially liturgical. I have already noted that the subcontinent had knowledges rather than knowledge, so let us then consider other forms.

Other parts of subcontinental knowledges are arts or sciences, such as (what we would call) grammars, logic, poetics, medicine, and astrology. These are certainly not liturgical; they involve intellectual operations like interpretation and classification. For instance, a philosophy was extracted from (or read into) the Vedas, producing Vedanta. Here meaning in a sense we would recognize it is very much present. But even here, we should notice two important differences when these are contrasted with modern knowledges, apart from the obvious differences of content.

First, memory learning was still an essential component of these knowledges.[42] The mode of transmitting the knowledge invariably required committing vast amounts of material to memory (the texts memorized were usually composed in the form of verses, aphorisms and other mnemonic forms, indicating that they were composed to be memorized). Furthermore, memory learning in the form of recitation and chanting was valorized by the traditions in which these knowledges were embedded, in the form of injunctions to memorize, prayers asking for the gift of memory, and rituals and initiation ceremonies.

The common 'explanation' for this refers to the absence or scarcity of books or manuscripts, assuming that memory learning was a 'technique' necessitated by the shortcomings of technology. We are all familiar with Derrida's argument that Western metaphysics privileges speech over writing; when it comes to historical understanding, however, it would appear that we assume that speech and memory are what you have to take recourse to in lieu of writing (otherwise, why does memory learning need 'explaining' at all?). But this explanation does not account for pre-modern traditions of learning even in Europe, where, as in India, even after book manuscripts had become more widely available this did not result in memory training becoming redundant. In the high

[41] Staal, *Nambudiri Veda Recitation*, 16.

[42] On the importance accorded to memory learning see, inter alia, Max Muller, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth*; A. S. Altekar, *Education in Ancient India*; Mavelikara Achyuthan, *Educational Practices in Manu, Panini and Kautilya* (Trivandrum: College Book House, 1974); K. G. Ghurye, *Preservation of Learned Tradition in India* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1950); S. V. Venkateswara, *Indian Culture through the Ages* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1928); and Axel Michaels, ed., *The Pandit: Traditional Scholarship in India* (New Delhi: Manohar 2001).

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Middle Ages Thomas Aquinas had stored an extraordinary number of 'texts' in his memory; his capacity was exceptional, but the phenomena itself was still common. Books themselves were for a long time conceived of as mnemonics, as "memorial cues and aids," and people often read books in *order* to commit them to memory.[43] In her important work *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Mary Carruthers tells us that in medieval Europe *memoria* was not just a technique, necessitated by the absence of the printing press, but an ethical practice, a discipline, and a way of developing character, judgment, and piety.[44] The knowledges of the subcontinent were very different from those of medieval Europe, but they shared this feature, that memory was an essential component of knowledge; and memory was not simply a technique necessitated by the absence of certain technologies, but involved a different relation between knower and known.

The second feature to note about knowledges of these higher arts is the extraordinary importance attached to forms or observances—to a stylistics and a deportment—as distinct from the content of learning. This is seen, above all, in the emphasis on absolute respect and devotion to the teacher. Texts that discuss how knowledge is to be transmitted devote as much or more attention to this aspect of it than they do to questions of method or 'curriculum.' Indeed, the question of how matters are best learned was in large part answered by the injunction to respect and obey the teacher. Lessons were to be commenced and concluded by the student clasping the teacher's feet in his hands; and the injunction *acharya devo bhava* ('may your teacher be your god') was something every student knew.

We moderns have a ready-made explanation for this. Schooling, we will say, is not just about the transmission of knowledge, but also about socialization, and about power. The child who is enjoined to treat his teacher with respect is receiving lessons in authority and order, over and above the knowledge he receives. If we are moderns who are capable of subjecting our own practices to the same critical scrutiny, we will add that the same is true of modern schooling; the discipline of the school bell, of standing in line, and the like, instill the more abstract notions of order and authority which our societies require and continually reproduce.

Such an explanation of indigenous education would not be beside the point, but it would be grievously incomplete. Power and authority there were aplenty, no doubt, but the limit of this explanation is reached when we assume that modes of transmission are separable from the knowledge transmitted. We assume this for our knowledges, because a defining feature of modern

[43] Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[44] Carruthers, *The Book of Memory.* See also Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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knowledge is its formal character, the fact that it is in principle conceivable outside of the current network of relations (and power) that characterize the transmission of knowledge in most societies. Rationalization in the Weberian sense means precisely this—that knowledge is freed from substantive contexts and can be used 'technically,' to match means to ends. But the same is not true of the knowledges I am describing here. In 'traditional' learning, the content and the form are indistinguishable. Absorbing the 'information' or mastering the 'skills' is not the content, with respect and awe for one's teacher being the form or process through which the knowledge happens to be transmitted; instead, they are all aspects of the same process. The knowledge transmitted was not a separable 'thing,' which happened to be transmitted through the *guru-shishya* relation; it could only be transmitted through that relation. This is not to say you *cannot* separate the two, and indeed some of these knowledges have now been wrenched from their contexts and have a new life as part of the modern (for example, *ayurvedic* medicine), even if usually at the fringes of it. We sometimes think that this fact—that these knowledges can be reproduced in and through altogether different contexts—goes to 'prove' that their contexts were so much window-dressing, contingent and inessential form rather than substantive content. Of course it proves nothing of the sort. One can treat machines and the knowledge that produces them as magical, and worship them—people do—and we do not thereby assume that this is their reality, and that scientific protocols and factories and laboratories are so much window dressing, fetishes which function simply to obscure the enchantment which is the truth of these machines.

Let us finally consider one more form, or class, of knowledge practices. I have said that in the subcontinent knowledges were related to status, for the more ritualized and specialized knowledges were not available to all, not just 'in fact,' because of poverty and inequality, but 'in principle.' The knowledges described above fall into that category. There were other knowledges which were suitable for almost everyone—for higher castes who might tarry there briefly before proceeding to acquire knowledges corresponding to their status, for trading castes, and for occupations connected with the administration of land and the collection of revenue; and even, sometimes, for the children of tillers of the soil. The *patshala* and *pyal* school (whether of the 'basic' variety or the more specialized sort which taught account keeping, writing business letters, and other such skills to children who were to go on to the hereditary profession of their caste) often transmitted a knowledge that, unlike that described above, had a practical value but little or no ritual status. Moreover, they often did so in a manner that was exceedingly effective. The British authorities were sometimes obliged to acknowledge this, though, as noted previously, they would usually add that this 'success' was a form of failure, because the same students, if asked to do anything out of the ordinary, could not apply their arithmetic, just as they could sometimes read entire passages

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well, but on being asked what they meant, often could not explain them, and sometimes did not even know the passage had a meaning beyond its recitation. That is, these students confused knowledge with its application, and had no knowledge outside of its application. Our conception and practice of knowledge is very different. To be sure, we too have 'applied knowledges,' but these are applications of a knowledge that is always in principle independent of its uses. Indeed, the processes of rationalization mean that, increasingly, knowledges and skills that could once only be acquired 'on the job,' and which had no existence outside of their use/application, are now deemed to have a formal component, which is a knowledge like any other; their practical component now presupposes a mastery of the theory of which this is the application. Nursing and tourism become university subjects, knowledges which have to be learnt in such a way that the student can draw upon his or her stock of formal knowledge and 'apply' it according to context—each person their own casuist.

KNOWING AND BEING

From this brief description one thing at least should be apparent, namely that the comparison between the indigenous schools and those of the modern type reveals much more than a difference between two different curriculums and pedagogies; it would be more accurate to say that what we find is *not* a difference between curriculums and pedagogies, because indigenous practices were not the same thing with a different content. As Tim Mitchell observes (in the context of a discussion of the sort of learning which occurs in the great mosque of al-Azhar), in these cases the very category of education "is a misnomer, a misapprehending of the kinds of practice in which the life of the community . . . was lived. It is to take a dominant practice of the late nineteenth and twentieth century and project it back onto a world in which it did not exist, resulting in unhelpful observations about the limited nature of its 'curriculum.'"[45] If we categorize these knowledges as a form of 'education,' we are condemned to seeing them as inferior versions of modern knowledge and pedagogy. Only if we grant that they corresponded to different ways of constituting the relation between knower and known, were different ways of *being* in the world and not just different ways of learning, can we begin to grasp them in their specificity.

If indigenous education corresponded to what I here provisionally label a different way of being, and not just knowing—deferring to the next section the question of whether historicizing the category 'subjectivity' is the means by which we can recognize and render, in all its complexity and richness, such a different way of being—this helps explain why 'indigenous education'

[45] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 85.

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continued for quite some time to be popular (often disconcertingly so, for educational officials), especially among those (lower) classes which did not see themselves as being in a position to tap into the instrumental benefits of Western education. Even those who did receive a Western education, but preceded by a few years of 'traditional education'—and there were many in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries[46]—expressed ambivalence concerning this 'pre-modern education.' One might expect that those who had been graced by 'understanding' rather than repetition, and who had gone on to inhabit the modern institutions of law courts, councils, universities, and so on, would unambiguously reject a pedagogy that stifled their subjectivity. In J. S. Mill's terms, having experienced both lower and higher forms of pleasure, would they not opt to be "Socrates dissatisfied" rather than a "pig satisfied"? In fact, though, reactions were sometimes more complex.

An interesting example is that of S. N. Chaturvedi, an official in the Provincial Educational Service of the United Provinces. Chaturvedi was the author of two books, and in *The History of Rural Education in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (1840–1926)*, he describes his own experiences of indigenous education.[47] After some basic instruction from a *maulvi* at home, Chaturvedi attended a *patshala* in his village, then a *mahajani patshala* in Allahabad where he learned book-keeping, arithmetic, and the *mahajani* (bankers) script, and then a Sanskrit *patshala* where he learned Sanskrit vocabulary, verses and grammar, and a few verses of the Vedas. Only then did he move on to the English schools that "had caught my fancy," after which he took a degree from Allahabad and a Teacher's Diploma from London. Chaturvedi is an official of the new educational system, and he intersperses descriptions of his indigenous education with a condemnation of its narrowness, its lack of practicality, and the fact that a great deal of the learning was memory learning. But this is belied by the tone of his description, with its detailed account of the daily routine, of a teacher whose "stern looks and authoritative voice were generally sufficient to keep us little urchins in order,"[48] and of the festivities the schoolchildren indulged in on festival days, by his reproduction in full of some of the couplets and aphorisms the pupils learnt, and by his summation of the type of pupil produced—"Respect for authority, devotion to learning for its own sake, humility, an almost ascetic attitude towards life, and great

[46] M. G. Ranade observed in 1882, "the grown-up men of this generation have all been taught in their young days by indigenous school masters." "Primary Education and Indigenous Schools" (1882), in *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Hon'ble Mr. Justice M. G. Ranade* (Bombay: The Manoranjan Press, 1915), 265. For the reminiscences of some elderly men on the indigenous education that they had received around the turn of the century, in Kerala, see Ananda K. Wood, *Knowledge Before Printing and After: The Indian Tradition in Changing Kerala* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).

[47] Chaturvedi, *The History of Rural Education*. My summary of his account of his school days is drawn from pages 40–66.

[48] Chaturvedi, *The History of Rural Education*, 41.

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regard for spiritual values were the outstanding traits of the products, of these schools."[49] At the point where the lyricism of the description threatens to overwhelm the narrative, Chaturvedi draws back thus: "these very virtues were their defects . . .. The respect for authority was so much emphasized that the pupil could not think or act for himself . . .. Humility was so much encouraged that all courage to differ or resist was completely killed."[50] From the viewpoint of 'national advance,' all this made the people look too much toward the past. From the point of view of the individual, however, "in spite of the disadvantages they suffered owing to the causes described above, the more educated of them obtained a capacity of intellectual enjoyment and material contentment which made their lives bright, cheerful and happy. Even those who could obtain only the necessary rudiments of the three R's shared in these advantages."[51]

This is, at the very least, a rather ambiguous condemnation. When it comes to evaluating his childhood experiences under the category of 'education,' the (modern) criteria built into this category lead Chaturvedi to the standard oppositions (thinking versus remembering, one's own knowledge versus secondhand knowledge) and compel a negative judgment. But the terms of his description overflow 'education' and clearly become a description of a way of life, and as they do so, the description itself assumes an altogether softer and more benign hue.

SUBJECTIVITY AND DIFFERENCE

Documenting the discourse of what I have labeled "cram" and "instrumentalism," I have gone on to argue that this discourse did not only signify a widespread feeling that knowledge was not being successfully disseminated, but is best read as signifying that the dissemination of Western knowledge required, but had not produced, a corresponding form of knowing subject. I went on to ask whether this meant that there was another subjectivity present, one that frustrated the emergence of the desired one.

It would seem that I have answered this question emphatically. Cramming, we have seen, was widely attributed to the survival and adaptation of indigenous knowledge practices. These other knowledges and associated forms of learning corresponded, I have argued, to a subjectivity or selfhood different from that presumed by modern knowledge and pedagogy. The obvious implication—obvious only because I have carefully led the way to it—is that the failure to produce the modern subject testified to the resilience of a preexisting one, the one it was to have displaced, the 'native' subject presumed by the indigenous learning practices described above.

[49] Ibid., 61.
[50] Ibid., 64–65.
[51] Ibid., 66.

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I will embrace this conclusion, but in a very provisional way, suggesting that it is indeed necessary to think this thought, but only in order to then problematize and surpass it. I will conclude by arguing that it is necessary to entertain the idea of a 'different subjectivity,' but that we cannot end the argument there, for the 'different' in 'different subjectivity' is simultaneously enabled and obscured by the concept of 'subjectivity.'

Built into the discourse of cram and instrumentalism is a certain ambiguity or imprecision. In some cases cram and instrumentalism are seen as failures of pedagogy—too much rote learning, and the wrong sort of understanding of the value and purpose of Western knowledge. That this concern is tied to and presumes a certain conception of the subject is something that we, as readers and interpreters of this discourse, unearth in it. In other cases, the failure of pedagogy is explicitly connected to subjectivity and even dimly registers that the absence in question is not a complete lack, but rather indicates the presence of another way of relating to knowledge. The second understanding is unquestionably the deeper one, but upon closer examination, it turns out to be not that different from the first: the absence of the desired subjectivity is understood as the presence of another, but this 'other' turns out to be an inadequate or, more accurately, unrealized version of the first. The subject who loses himself in the world by cramming, for instance, is clearly different from the subject who stands apart from the world and makes it his own, but he also turns out to be a (potentially) modern subject who has simply failed to emancipate himself from his background. Why this ambiguity or imprecision?

Because within the categories in which this question is posed, 'different sort of subject' and 'failing to fully become a subject' are in principle inseparable. All forms of subjectivity turn out to be variations upon, and more precisely, partially realized versions of, a single subjectivity: a 'different' subject is always one who has failed to 'fully' become a subject. Facetiously, in this categorical frame there are only acorns, oaks, and acorns on the way to becoming oaks; a chestnut will always appear as an acorn that for some reason is suffering from arrested development. My point here is not simply that the notion of subjectivity has a teleology built into it, such that all forms of subjectivity culminate in modern forms of selfhood, nor the related point that subjectivity has a certain normativity built into it. The point I am seeking to make incorporates both of these, but also goes beyond them. Let me clarify with an example.

The term "slave" is for us moderns a social category, meaning that we understand "slave" to signify a free man enslaved, rather than, as for the Greeks, understanding it to denote a form of selfhood. Our idea of human selfhood or subjectivity has, in other words, a certain notion of "freedom" built into it. Words like "freedom" make us think of Rousseau and Kant, and the French and American revolutions, and of 'fuller' conceptions of freedom—not just freedom as non-enslavement, but as autonomy, as choosing our ends

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and the means toward them. These associations are of course apt, and are part of what I have been invoking in insisting that modern knowledge presumes a form of subjectivity—active rather than passive, and so on. But the 'first' sense of freedom—first both in the sense of being logically prior and historically earlier—is freedom in the sense of not being merged into the background, lost into nature, like animals and slaves; *nomos* rather than *physis*. The Greeks did not think all men possessed it, and thus this was not built into their very conception of what it means to be a human self.[52]

My point is this. When it comes to the modern self—the self who is heir to the bourgeois revolutions and to Kantian philosophy—we, being intelligent products of a historicist age, can acknowledge that the free, autonomous chooser possessed of rights is not the only type of human that there has been. With a certain effort and vigilance we can try to desist from reading all other forms of selfhood as leading toward and culminating in this one, and thus as incomplete forms of this one. This constitutes our way of staying sensitive to difference. But our notion of self or subject is not thereby rendered, as we imagine, into an empty form into which any content can be poured; it already has a certain content inscribed into its very form. When we 'think' difference in this fashion we do so in the manner of those historicists, like Max Weber, who insist that those who lived in other times conceived of and inhabited the world in ways different to ours, and thus that understanding cannot be achieved by attributing our modern ways of thinking and being in the world onto other periods, and peoples. We must instead picture other humans who, in turn, picture the world in ways very different from our own. The subject who threatens to merge into the world thus appears as very different from us; his difference lies in his adopting a stance toward the world that is one of merging. The subject who attributes his agency to supernatural powers is again very different from us; his difference lies in his attributing his own beliefs and capacities to another. But like us, they too picture the world, they too endow it with meanings (meanings different from ours), and that being so, we are inescapably led back to seeing their sense of self as a version of ours, lacking only in self-consciousness (all subjects endow the world with meaning, but we modern subjects know that this is what we do). If we nonetheless declare that their way of looking at the world is 'as valid' as ours, our intention is belied by the mode in which it is thought. Our commitment to difference remains embedded in intentions, while our categories, the grammar of our thought, lead us always into teleology and normativity. The best we can do is to be vigilant; but it is an unequal struggle, for we struggle to express one thing, while our conceptual language leads us to say another.

[52] The very richness of the Greek idea of freedom, it has been argued, is intimately connected to the absolute subjection implied by slavery in ancient Greece. See, for instance, Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (London: Verso, 1978), 23.

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It seems to me that it is necessary to entertain the thought that cramming and instrumentalism testified to the presence of another subjectivity, and to travel this route of argument. Without doing so—without stretching the category 'subject' so that we can imagine different kinds of subjects—the questions of cramming and instrumentalism would remain ones of pedagogy and technique, and 'difference' would appear only in its racist form, as the question of the stubbornly unintelligent Indian. We cannot dispense with historicizing, because the alternative is a universalism in which there is only ever one norm, and all difference is a deviation from it, or a journey towards it. But nor, let me end by suggesting, should we be content with it. I do not wish to conclude this essay, then, with a resounding demonstration that the absence of modern subjectivity, which the discourse of cram and instrumentalism testified to, was a consequence of the existence of another, an indigenous one. Instead I suggest that we need to search for ways by which we can 'think' this difference without substantializing it into another 'subjectivity,' and thereby bringing it under a category which erases with one hand the difference which it writes with the other. We need to search for forms of thought that allow us to recognize that there have been, and are, ways of thinking the world other than modern, Occidental ones, but also ways of thinking difference without invoking the Subject and without setting into motion an anthropology which ceaselessly transforms humans into Man.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417507000667 Published online by Cambridge University Press