23   Dialogue and Culture: Reflections on the Parameters of Cultural Dialogue

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Culture is flux. All cultures are somewhat permeable and hold internal tension. Dialogue between East and the West, or between Hindu and Buddhist cultures cannot *a priori* assume diametrically opposed cultural agents. Terms such as "inter-faith dialogue," "cultural discourse," "Hindu-Christian dialogue" were familiarized in recent decades. Here I outline parameters for such conversations derived from cultural dialogue in religious and philosophical sources of classical and medieval India. My approach will be general. Historical examples are excavated to show how diametrically opposing parties are constituted in the process of dialogue itself and not located within static cultural subjects that are frozen in time.

Can philosophical discourse mirror collective social and cultural dialogue? One problem is that conclusions derived from philosophical observation can have minimal impact on socio-political history. Since texts are products of history and reflect society of that time, textual discourse, I argue, helps shape social dialogue. The effects of cultural exchange: fusion, clash, appropriation, subordination, negation, and annihilation are identified in textual history by reading inter-textually across time, not as isolated or frozen units. This requires a bird's-eye-view, rather than a microanalysis of specific texts and events. Whilst reading a chapter or text for philological insight has its own merits, this approach limits recognition of the cultural flux and textual dynamism portrayed by the shifting horizons of writers inside traditions. A single text may obscure transition or fusion of traditions. A lineage might demonstrate

deviation from earlier premises if we examine historically contextual forces and factors.

Reading textual battles are enlightening in many regards. We can either spill the metaphoric ink or human blood. Maintaining difference is inherent to our being in the world and it is only a matter of choice over how we intend to institutionalize our difference. I, for one, prefer to waste virtual ink than real blood. My observations in this paper confront the position that historical parameters are red. When our ink fails or when philosophers undergo collective amnesia, our inherent difference becomes the very weapon to annihilate us. As long as philosophers live, our minds sustain our difference. And it is naïve to presume that all differences be absolved. Both philosophical hegemony and imperial conquest fail to recognize the inherent human drive to both community and difference and are therefore destined to eventually fail.

Ideological battles are not less violent and can fuel wars. Metaphors include Plato's *Sophist* or *Republic* on philosophical wrestling. Philosophers apparently "hunt" for a definition, weigh the "force" of the definition, and this search can be compared to a battle between gods and giants. In many regards, cultural dialogue can be compared to a land dispute. There is a constant effort to assert territory to take over the other's property, to breach the barriers, to conquer a particular region, to appropriate the other's position, to plant one's ideas in another's field, and so on. There are not just victories and defeats, there are also retreats and logical ambush, and

philosophers, like bull-fighters, are taken aback by one or another horn of the dilemma. Some arguments are "sharp"; apparently some others are blunt. And the sharpest ones claim to be the "diamond-cutters" (*vajra-chhedikā*). Like the swords in the battlefield, arguments "cut" (*khaṇḍana*) the position of the opponents. Along the same lines, one can be "penetrated" (*viddha*) with an arrow of logic. And the list can continue indefinitely. The point is, we can either relish our metaphorical battle and sustain ideological difference or erase the internal conflict and savor the blood.

Classical and medieval Indian cultural history provides generous examples of ideological battles that sustain conceptual difference. This is not to say that there were no real battles with real blood spilled in India. It is only to say that there is a lot to learn from Indian sources about navigating marginal lines from within cultures. The cultural clash between the Vrātyas and Śramaṇas on one hand and the Vedic Aryans on the other is just one example to buttress the argument.[1] In a semi-nomadic migratory culture, the Vrātyas resisted change. Rather than making an argument that they are transgressing the societal norms by abandoning the settled household life, my understanding is that Vrātyas chose a nomadic life and refrained from learning farming, just like some of us in our generation have resisted using some aspects of technology. The then-shifting parameters between farmers and hunters is portrayed by early anxiety, a consequent moral justification of killing, and the ritualization of hunting as vividly demonstrated from the *śūlagava*-type rituals to the complex rituals of *aśvamedha*.

The tension between nomadic and farming lifestyles is one of the earliest examples of

ideological difference in the Indus since the anthropocene. Brāhmaṇa texts were produced to justify a single killing, already ritualized, and the first significant intellectual battle that we can see in classical India is the violence surrounding ritual killing. Living an ascetic life or a married householder's life is yet another issue. Seeking for liberation or heaven is a later development, an extension of the early cultural dialogue to some extent. After the Vedic-Vrātya dialogue, a more formal dialogue in the shifting cultural paradigm is that among the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, and this is not necessarily about the philosophical premises but regarding virtue and violence: if farming relies on some degrees of violence and if for this reason the monks are distanced from farming, is it virtuous for the monks to rely on householders? If Vedic rituals embody violence, so does farming. The earliest philosophical concerns in classical India are therefore moral concerns, and they center around violence and intentionality. Hindus would exempt the killing of small insects or animals, particularly smaller than a mongoose, in order to exempt farmers from the act of violence.

Buddha would attribute a higher degree of violence in having mere intention than in the actual violent exercise. Mahāvīra would redeem the farmers from killing small insects in tilling their field, as their action per se is not directed towards killing, but not exempt a fisherman even when he fails to catch a single fish, as the act of fishing assumes his intention to kill. Nevertheless, they all saw a non-violent mendicant lifestyle as karmically positive. From the ritual-oriented life-assuring Brāhmaṇic perspective, even the mendicant lifestyle entailed inflicting pain upon oneself.[2] Buddha

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[1] For studies on Vrātyas, see Shastri, 1982; Choudhary, 1964; and White, 1991, 256 (fn. 46–47).

[2] Rejection of this type of *tapas* is visible even in the *Bhagavadgītā* (Chapter 17) where inflicting pain for the sake of *tapas* is seen as comprised of *tamas* and thus negative.

recognized the defects of self-inflicted pain through ascetic practices. The issue of self-inflicted pain or violence towards oneself could not gain the same prominence though. If we consider the shifting life-style choice, the discourse on ritual-violence and ritualization of violence, and the rigorous debate over intentionality in its moral justification, the first cultural battles of Indian classical literature seem to have occurred in this culturally fluid environment, rather than in two enclosed cultural settings. The first intellectual battles in the Sanskrit literature were therefore about neutralizing corporeal violence.

The Parameters of Dialogue

In what follows, I will address in ten points the basic parameters for a cultural dialogue gleaned from reading textual history. This is, as always, fraught with tension, with dialogical subjects always in flux, and identities constantly being reconstituted. Before going through each of the points, I would like to give my own subjective account that illustrates my central impetus towards this endeavor. I enjoyed participating, and eventually winning medals in school and college debates. It could be about anything: Is a tomato a fruit or vegetable? Is the sword mightier than the pen? Should learning history be compulsory? You name the topic. When I went to Varanasi, the debates became more dramatized: There were teachers mentoring each side and we debated classical issues. Some of us posed as ritualists and others as nihilists, some as Buddhist Mād-hyamikas and others as Nyāya polemicists, some as grammarians and others as the advocates of Śaṅkara. Nobody was really making any new arguments. We were reliving the moments of classical debates and on many occasions we were actually living for the first time the debates in the field that were previously orchestrated only in the classical books.

Identified as *śāstrārtha* or the "essential meaning of the texts," we were enamored with our laurels at the end of the debates, being victorious against one or another arch-nemesis. We often chose the sides against those chosen by the colleagues that we despised. While the debate was nothing more than a drama, our orchestration was real, and our victories or defeats shaped our real life. Upon being defeated in one of those settings, one of my colleagues dropped out of college. Our debates were essentially hollow, but their phenomenal effects were real, as at times, it meant life or death for the debating parties.

Upon coming to America, I attended some Inter-Faith dialogues. I was not impressed. Parties never dared to engage differences, but no party believed in what they said. I found the debates disappointing and sometimes nauseating in contrast to those of my college days. The debates tended to be prematurely and superficially harmonized, ending in consolation without rigorous discussion. Both the school and college debates that are far more appropriately called a drama and the inter-faith dialogues that were essentially devitalised had something positive to offer at the end. The cathartic experience that results for both the dialogical parties and the participating audience is still real. It works like a ritual exorcism: It does not matter whether the Shaman believes in his ritual. It works if the subject undergoing the treatment believes in it. Before the ritual, he was possessed by a ghost, and viola, he is now free! And in fact, subjects are more possessed by ideas than by the spirits. In such inter-faith debates, subjects from different faiths participate in such dialogues and some of them eventually start dating! Some forge business alliances and others derive insights for future events. Only fools go there to learn; the wise ones go there for food. Words expressed are merely a display: What is real is the get-together and the possibilities. Moreover,

dialogue is not necessarily an inter-subjective exchange, but rather, it can be a set of monologues.

Dialogues Are Not Cannibalistic

The erasure of an antithesis is also an erasure of the thesis, no matter in whatever synthetic form it may reappear. Dialogues presume an open space, the space that allows the parties to draw their boundaries and the space that allows them to shift their parameters. What gazing upon a single point in history fails to see is that cultural dialogue has always facilitated this open-space over the span of time. Texts read in isolation are events bracketed from history. Dialogue, then, is a subsystem or a background process and what we see are only ripples of internal currents. Since this exchange does not require verbal exchange, real dialogues occur in this conceptual space, and the real space plays the role of facilitator. Dialogue in this subspace is not about the words exchanged but actually about the words withdrawn from exchange. Silence in this regard is more dialogical than the presence of words.

Dialogues framed through textual exchange teach us that ideological exchange is not meant to silence the other party. On the contrary, it is meant to cultivate a dialogical space that is more nuanced and systematized. Every rejection of an idea leads to some counter-argument, a defense, and every new counter-argument results in some new objections. We can read Hegelian dialectics in this regard. What Hegel does not address is the creative force inherent within dialogue. He is not ready to accept the dialogue's transcendence over subjectivity. If we can learn from history, the self-sustaining force of dialogue is vivid in all cultural transactions. Although the present dialogical moment may appear as self-negating and abnegating the other, temporally

elastic history says otherwise: Dialogue is best at sustaining the very dialogue itself. Its ramification in society is worth noticing. Keeping the parties in dialogue can itself be an achievement, if we see the ways dialogues and negotiations have unfolded in history.

In every single cultural dialogue, central and peripheral forces are at constant play. The cultural other is always in dialogue from within the culture by representing the marginal. Every cultural dialogue thus becomes an internal discourse as well. Even in texts, mirror arguments evolve within the same cultural or philosophical platform being based on the arguments developed by the philosophical outsiders. Bakhtin's discourse on centripetal and centrifugal forces makes sense in this regard.[3] As far as sustaining textual discourse goes, both texts and dialogues sustain each other. If not for constant tension, a need for reinterpretation, and for defense, no dialogue would be possible. Creativity, along these lines, is inherently dialogical, and the advancement in reasoning, maintenance of new positions, and abandonment of the old ones are thus the central drive of creativity manifest through dialogue.

Dialogue Is a Set of Concurrent Monologues

Some of the best conversations I have encountered are between my grandmother and her friends. Before she passed away, her hearing was extremely compromised and there were some other ladies of her age in the same situation. And they would converse for hours. The exchange of drinks and popcorn, and the eventual relief in their face is what I count as the

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[3] I have engaged the works and arguments in my summary of Bakhtin's perspective in the writings of Zappen, 2004, Holquist, 2002, Todorov, 1984, and Bakhtin, 1982.

measuring stick of dialogue's success. At the least, these dialogues were therapeutically far more relieving than the "inter-faith dialogues" in modern society.

From among the parties I have identified above, Aryans and Vrātyas did not initiate any formal dialogue. Aryans viewed what Vrātyas maintained as violations of dharma and Vrātyas must have viewed the Aryan customs accordingly, as one can glean from the later development of the Śramaṇa movements, Ājīvikas being their predecessors. Even today, cultural dialogue is mainly sustained by the presumed other in the discourse that is present through its absence. Although the other does not have his own voice in this exchange, the presumed voice plays a major role in determining the norms. Is the conversation between two deaf people a dialogue? My understanding of dialogue is that it incorporates speech and content, posture, and, importantly the space enabling the presence of the speakers, all of which collectively constitutes dialogue. Even in absence of verbal communication, a dialogue still occurs. There is in fact no monologue: All soliloquies are internal dialogues. Some dialogues have actual partners and others have the imagined ones. And even the imagined ones guide us not any less, as the counterfactual scenarios are always behind our moral judgments.

This scenario forces us to consider two different dialogical platforms. The dialogue that occurs in actual space, and the other dialogue, the subtle vibration, the real pulsation that undergoes all conversations while transcending these temporal eruptions, all of which are co-constitutive. It is necessary that we separate natural discourse in history; we separate the process that co-constitutes interlinked systems and encounter the subspace for cultural discourse where the real transformation occurs. Although we anticipate a real change through verbal exchange, the exchange only works with regard to redefining parameters, reclaiming boundaries, but not flexibly allowing the space for the other. Ritualized dialogue needs to be viewed as similar to ritual exorcism: it is effective for believers and has no significance for non-believers. It is a ritual that rests entirely on faith, as reason demands that dialogue sustains itself.

The Outcome of Dialogue Is the Creation of a Space for Interpretation

The power of conversation relies on us being able to sit next to each other not just on what we say. What comes out of a staged dialogue, mutual agreement, signed deal, means little in the long run. It is the internal dialogue that constitutes the space for the manifest discourse to open room for the other. As long as convictions are imposed, no outcome is enduring. Just because virus cells communicate with body cells and trick the body cells into opening their boundaries for the parasites to penetrate does not mean that a dialogue has occurred. Probably the most significant dialogue for complex life was between mitochondria and single-celled bacteria. That our human cells evolved from this, and that the bacteria that live in our body vastly outweigh the number of "human" cells indicates that relationality and dialogue need not, by nature, endanger the continuity of host cells but can develop into bodies within which differences are coevolving. This mutual integration of cultures requires the preservation of parameters of difference to enable symbiosis. This is what I mean by the possibilities of dialogue. The cultures that negate the being of the other as a precondition cannot initiate any cultural dialogue and they are destined to erase the other, if the other is as vulnerable as the body cells that are tricked by the virus, for example if their "cultural homeostasis" fails to successfully protect one from the other.

My understanding of the "fusion of horizon" is either the coexistence of two entirely independent entities or a constitution of a new element that preserves the being of the predecessors. Symbiogenesis has this power of creating a new element and not eliminating the parent cells. Therefore, a precondition for dialogue is an acceptance of the existence of the other. No matter what inspires the parties to engage a conversation, the "will to power" has to deconstruct itself if a dialogue capable of cultivating empathy is to occur. We need the other to both love or to hate, to fight or to make love. It is just that some need the other for one reason more than the other.

Although violence is inherently dialogical, the silence that results as a consequence of dialogue is much more vibrant. While political force is dialogical in nature, its power cannot undermine the power of speech. What a dialogue can grant is something more sublime than what brute force can bestow. Just like a lily blossoms out of mud, occasionally brute force creates the space for dialogue and in such circumstances even the battles are constitutive. Take for example the battle between Gilgamesh and Enkudu, a king and a proletariat, a nobleman and a wild man.[4] Just like anybody in power, Gilgamesh fears being overthrown; he wrestles with Enkudu to no avail. A dialogue is an exchange of the appropriate means so that both parties can understand each other, and in this case, it is brute force. Due to the fluidity of power or due to its indeterminate parameters, the meeting horizons are constantly in tension. Among individuals, empathy makes it possible for the

negotiating ground to emerge. Among brute forces, knowing each other's might may be the only way out. The only problem is, power is fluid.

The myth of the churning of the ocean demonstrates another dialogue. Eternally fighting gods and demons realize that they can collectively work towards procuring the nectar of immortality. A project to achieve something higher is what it takes for the dialogue occurring through blood and force to turn into dialogical insight. Every center of power is a *yūpa*, a sacrificial post where animals are sacrificed, and it is through sacrifice that the center retains its centrality. What the center often forgets is there exists no *maṇḍala* in the absence of a periphery, the outlying circle. Even the periphery allows itself to be thrown out and kept in the margin. By not recognizing that every point in the periphery is a center unto itself, one can erect a *yūpa* in every peripheral fort and initiate the sacrificial rite.

Returning to the original narrative, Gilgamesh befriends Enkudu. Enkudu is not fighting to preserve anything. All he demands is respect. Respect is the foundation of recognition, whether it is self-recognition or an intersubjective recognition. It is always something else, the threat from outside the periphery, that unites the fighting parties. Both Gilgamesh and Enkudu embark on the journey to fight the monster, Huwawa. Enkudu dies protecting Gilgamesh, just like proletariats that have immolated themselves to preserve the "center." Hegel and Marx may have failed to recognize this reality but Mao and Stalin did not, as they exploited the millions to pour their blood to enthrone them. The only unexpected turn of events in the narrative is that Gilgamesh embarks on a journey, seeking immortality for Enkudu. This is where natural born enemies become best friends. For me, this is where a dialogue occurs.

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[4] While the narrative of Gilgamesh is fairly circulated, some new findings keep surprising the world. For a recent (2015) find of 20 new lines, see: www .openculture.com/2015/10/20-new-lines-from-the-epic-of-gilgamesh-discovered-in-iraq-adding-new-dimensions-to-the-story.html

In this dialogue, Gilgamesh displays a wide range of emotions such as anxiety, fear, anger, and love: All this culminates in empathy. Enkudu may have lived but does not die alone and may have lived but does not die for himself. There is no center threatened in this dialogue, as the subject from the periphery willingly sacrifices himself. The narrative vividly displays that the periphery is undefeatable as a foe but is self-sacrificing as a friend. In the eyes of Gilgamesh, Enkudu rises from being a beast to becoming a friend.

Dialogues Can Be Both Creative and Destructive

A creative dialogue empowers the periphery, which in turn sustains the center. The power that seeks to centralize itself abnegates its extension to the periphery. As a consequence, the center destroys itself, as in absence of a periphery, the center does not exist. The very premise of dialogue rejects abnegation of the center or the periphery. Borrowing Bakhtin's terminology, power has a twofold nature: centrifugal forces lead towards a centralized power structure and therefore constitute an absolute center, whereas centripetal forces tend to diversify power. This tension is at the heart of the constitution of power, similar to the center and the periphery where they co-constitute. There are two types of power: the power that underlies the negation of the other and the power that rests on recognizing the other. The tension that results in negation of the other can sometimes lead to the power of mutual recognition. Tribal, colonial, and imperial expressions of power are precursors to the potential evolution of the power of mutual recognition. The central tendency in these evolutionary steps is that the agenda of "care" has become more and more diminished and the drive for oppression and fear from the other have been more prevalent. This does not

mean that mutual "recognition" is not possible. It is just that we need more dialogues. In essence two extreme poles of power are cannibalism and self-negation. Both these poles of power are expressed in the narrative of Hariścandra, a legendary king who experiences being both an emperor and a vagrant.[5]

The center that erects its edifice by sacrificing its periphery fails to recognize the basic law. It has an inverted space within itself, it constitutes its periphery in its own mental space at the cost of negating the external space. A tyrant is therefore an empty person, a center where the periphery has collapsed. The other in him resides as the projected others, just the way he likes them to be. A tyrant lacks language as he cannot initiate a dialogue. He believes in forcing someone to love him and buying another's approval. Because he fails to recognize the other, language lacks force. He cannot say anything to others, neither can he hear what others are saying. He then lives completely self-enclosed and dies self-enclosed. When he conquers everything that is there to be conquered, he exists within the boundary of his epidermis. His body and his being become one, and his ego inversely encounters himself.

Dialogue Is Not Just Recognition of the Otherliness of the Other

A good dialogue confirms the self in the other, a dialogue discovers the collective mirrored in the other, and a good dialogue transcends the dichotomies posed by the self and the other, as it leads to a realization that becomes an experience of the collective: this is where the subjects experience themselves in terms of "we" and not merely as I and thou. Dialogue creates

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[5] The narratives of Hariścandra are found in several places including the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Mahābhārata,* and the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa.*

the possibility for the self to redraw its parameters, allowing the otherliness of the other even within the boundary of the self. The space that a dialogue constitutes is like the margin of a page where new inspiration finds its space. The self and the other are constantly reframed in this new dialogical space that underlies the real space as defined by the center and the periphery.

Dialogue Sustains Difference

The anxiety of "to whom shall we offer libation?" or the hermeneutic twist of "we shall offer libation to Ka," as is vivid in early Brāhmaṇa and Upaniṣadic discourse, manifests as a mere systematization and institutionalization of difference and not its negation. The conversation in Chāndogya, "there was something in the beginning" and "there was nothing in the beginning" or the Ṛgvedic dictum of "neither was there being nor non-being" exemplify early hermeneutic dilemma. Noteworthy is the outcome that not one interpretation becomes the "official" or "true" interpretation, considering the other as "false" and "heretical." The dialogue between Yājña-valkya and Gārgī, or the sages, or the king, or his own wife Maitreyī are few more examples of how the text constitutes itself in the entirety of perspectives rather than being a book of one conclusion. Due to this textual openness, no theologian such as Śaṅkara or Rāmānuja owns the truth. Scholars have interpreted the conversations between Ajātaśatru and Bālākin or Bhṛgu and Varuṇa along the lines that these conversations aim to lead to one conclusion and show how other possibilities are false. Unfortunately this comes from their lack of understanding that the text constitutes as a whole, all opinions prevail over time and are therefore eternal, and even when some positions may enjoy primacy over the other, they

cannot overpower the others and wear the laurels of being the only true perspective.

Ideas live among each other, constituting a network. There is not just "one" idea: There are ideas and some are more applicable at one time than are the others. Following Bakhtin's paradigm, the lead idea is just the outcropping in the archival site of thoughts, and other ideas are sedimented beneath. The dialogues preserved in the texts from classical India, whether between real subjects or fictional ones, portray this sedimentation. The parameters of creative dialogue, logical wrangling, fallacies, the acceptable and unacceptable norms, all are determined in this dialogical space that is in flux. The classical philosophical debates among Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain philosophers point to this space of creative dialogue. Each of these traditions has their own truth claims.

If we investigate further, each of these traditions are split into hundreds of sub-schools and traditions and they each have their own truth claims. And this does not stop there. Texts and commentaries and sub-commentaries all claim to own some truth. If we observe collectively, all these claims are mere possibilities. If given sufficient time, we can maintain as many philosophical positions as mathematically possible. Now it comes down to us being able to reevaluate our own nature and start thinking beyond the fixed positions and accept human creativity as more than a mere possibility. And dialogues, while maintaining their own truth-claims, provide the venue for exploring these options.

Every cultural "fusion" constitutes its own parameters and becomes a new position. We do not make a single position by combining two but gain one additional position where two independent positions stand separate and the position that combines the both struggles to find its difference from the others. If "fusion" were the objective of philosophical

debate, then either we would have infused all positions into one by now or we would have found philosophies utterly useless. Every new insight has only given us more positions and further argumentation. This demonstrates that good dialogue sustains difference in perspectives and guarantees the existence of the other. A dialogue that aims to find a singular position is similar to a conversation that is staged to annihilate the other. Conscious and spontaneous dialogues, while developing windows for seeing the other and being seen by the other, preserve the uniqueness and authenticity of the parties engaged in dialogue. They allow for the creative process of conversation, which cannot occur with the dissolution of the other.

The distancing tendency of these dialogues is visible immediately in each and every encounter. However, the blending and fusing aspect of discourse is noticed only over a long period of time, over generations and sometimes over centuries. Maintaining difference is so crucial to the existence of dialogue that even when what they maintain is conceptually identical, the two parties will have different words as the placeholders of difference. With a lack of words, we will find some icons to distinguish us. To lack difference would be tantamount to lacking our own identity. It is ironic that the base, the foundation of identity, is provided by difference. This is why we cannot all be called seven of nine (Star Trek character) The language of dialogue maintains difference even when the content is fused. Language, dialogical in its nature, maintains its own difference, which is *a priori* in all dialogical contexts.

The over-intellectualization of cultural differences in classical India led to construction of a society that maintained that conflicts grounded on difference could be rectified through discourse. Abū Rayhān Al-Bīrūnī (998–1030, p.19) an early Indologist and contemporary of Mahmūd of Ghazni, makes his stark observation:

[The Hindus] totally differ from us in religion, as we believe in nothing which they believe, and vice versa. On the whole, there is very little putting about theological topics among themselves; at the most, they fight with words, but they will never stake their soul or body or their property on religious controversy.

There are many forms of language, including wrestling and warfare. A dialogue sustained merely on verbal exchange may be strange to those wrestling for their beliefs. Historically, this is what has accrued substantial benefits in the Indian sub-continent though. Even contemporary inter-faith dialogues initiated by Rammohan Roy, Dayanand Sarasvati, or by Jñān Dil Das in Nepal, or the interfaith dialogue circles run by king Akbar as precursor, depict this same tendency.

Every new cultural shift is a consequence of cultural dialogue. The emergence of the Mahāyāna system depicts both an internal dialogue among the Buddhists and also the dialogue between the Theravāda Buddhists and the Brahmanic philosophers. The philosophy of Gauḍapāda and Śaṅkara exemplifies the "fusion of horizons," between the Mahāyāna Buddhists and the Brahmanic philosophers. The emergence of Vajrayāna is yet another example of cultural dialogue where mantras, maṇḍalas, and deities overlap between Hindus and Buddhists. This is the same case with the development of Tibetan Buddhism, as it shows the cultural dialogue between the Buddhists and Tibetan animistic traditions. Whether we examine Sikhism or the Bahá'í faith, a certain degree of fusion is embedded in the very premise of these faiths.

This experiment of fusion does not begin and end here. All cultures are hybrid if we see culture in the span of a millennium or more. Just as there is an impetus to maintain difference so that cultures can maintain their identity, so also is there an intrinsic impetus to infuse and enrich, to learn and adopt from

others, as this makes each culture immune to self-annihilation. This constant process of hybridization cannot make any one redundant though, as this is what the force that maintains inherent difference seeks to control. Consequentially, just as cultures maintain their difference so too do they aspire for a fusion. The tradition of the Siddhas, the Sufi tradition, or many other streams of medieval Indian practices, are just a consequence of this fluid transaction and positive dialogue. This type of dialogue leading to fusion is not new to pan-Indian civilization, as one can find its trace in the *Ṛgveda* itself. What scholars consider Vedic culture is in itself a product of multiple cultures and what they identify as Sanskrit language is an amalgamation of various languages.

One of the natural consequences of cultural dialogue is the creation of cultural hybrids. The forces that push cultures from the center of gravity meet the forces from other cultures, and a cultural hybrid emerges. A dialogue does not stand for "fusion" but stands for understanding each other and maintaining difference. Dialogue is a response to the human enigma of not knowing the other. The true purpose of dialogue, therefore, cannot be cannibalistic. Hybridization, however, is one of the outcomes, mostly led by the process of interpenetration of the foundational premises as well as the abnegation of aspects of one culture by the other, a dialogue based on force and displacement of the other. This is also based on a dialogic relationship between speech and brute force. The dialogical process of understanding may not always maintain difference. There is not just a single "fusion" of horizons. Cultural fusion is a cultural byproduct of dialogue.

The tendency towards fusion creates a discourse that may *create* common underlying premises. Negotiating parties constantly redefine the parameters of their premises. As a consequence, a language emerges that can express the maxims of both parties without violating the central premises of each. This fusion, in the cultural context, also bridges an "esoteric" horizon.

Yoga, Tantra, Sufi practices, Sikh devotionalism, all are exemplary to study this fusion of the esoteric domain. Fusion of the metaphysical horizon continues this process and is a positive outcome of cultural dialogue. The concept of Tathāgatagarbha or Gauḍapāda's Advaita in his *Āgamaśāstra* demonstrate this. The fusion of the "epistemic horizon" is the final consequence of the process of dialogue. At the end we come to the agreement that there can be a method through which we may establish the categories that can be mutually agreeable. Candrakīrti's acceptance of verbal testimony as a reliable means of cognition, the Advaita exegesis of negation and its acceptance of negation as a valid means of cognition are a few examples of this fusion.

Following Jeffrey Alexander, "culture is the order of meaningful action." I wonder, what is the most fundamental action that a culture finds meaningful? Whether by adopting rational or irrational beliefs or by maintaining normal or bizarre forms of practice, the first meaningful action a culture strives to perform is self-preservation. And this becomes evident when cultures are expressed in dialogical platforms. A culture finds its meaning when in dialogue with another culture. This results in saying that cultural parameters are dialogical. Although initially in the form of monologues, the meaning of cultures are found, shaped, reinvented, and reestablished through dialogic exchange. Cultural dialogue, although codified in history, is not an end product. As an interaction between living organisms, cultural discourse is framed on an ongoing basis, and this discourse does not end even with the death of that culture. Nuances of a culture live transplanted in another, and in this sense, cultures

do not just die. Only the future will determine whether the strands of culture that we live today sustain the long thread of cultural expressions from Neanderthals and Homo Habilis. The ability of one culture to have a dialogue with another reciprocates the nuances that the other culture will borrow and keep alive even in absence of the source culture.

Just as language is dialogical in nature, so too is culture. It always has its own "other" within and this is what necessitates the dialogue. Every culture creates its own cultural other, their own outsider, their own subaltern. At times, the real cultural others may enjoy more prominence within a cultural platform than their own marginalized sister. This internal other, the weird sister, is what is portrayed as the cultural other. And this is where the initial cultural dialogue begins with her at the margin sustaining the dialogue. Once a culture is open to a dialogue within, it can also open to embrace the complete other.

The Co-Creative Nature of Dialogue Is the Self-Sustaining Mechanism of the "Deep Dialogue" Intrinsic to Being

Textual histories are not an accurate representation of real events from the past. It is also true that many events recorded in the narratives could have been a mere figment of the author's imagination. This, however, does not mean that the dialogues recorded there are not real or that they do not reflect real social anxieties and anticipations. Authors are merely filling gaps, giving a thread to the manifest beads of social history. What authors think, or the texts themselves, are not isolated from the natural unfoldment of history. Internal dialogue, the foundation for our expression in temporality, gives the impetus for authors to shape a narrative from otherwise meaningless and scattered events. There is no meaning

outside in the world: it is consciousness, particularly human consciousness that is intrinsically structured to seek for and discover meaning. And there is no linear unfolding of temporality or history outside of our minds.

Meaning Is What We Constitute It to Be

The dialogues encoded in texts are dialogues from the mind of the author, and speech expresses itself whilst the author is the means for the voice to express. Dialogue precedes human consciousness. Subjectivity is dialogical in nature and therefore texts do not transcend the natural process of speech. No language can express something by transcending its linguistic and cultural parameters. Buddha and Mahāvīra did indeed say something that Yājñavalkya and Ajātaśatru did not, but this does not mean that their speech transcended what was implicate so that dialogical speech could unfold. It is as if speech anticipates that subjects will reveal themselves. And there is even a proverb, "wisdom approaches the wise ones begging them to save her."[6]

Whether real or imagined, agents are relatively insignificant. What matters is that the discourse encoded in texts did not emerge from outside the culture and that it reflected the cultural anxieties of that time. Even if Yājñavalkya anticipated the conversation between himself and his wife, this only addressed what needed to be said at that time. Most importantly, these texts were not preserved in some archives or libraries. These were memorized by generations who kept a lived memory of these texts because these reflected their cultural imagination. One can also argue that these texts carved out the cultural parameters for

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[6] *vidyā ha vai brāhmaṇam ājagāma | gopāhi māṃ śevadhis te'hamasmi.*

the communities that followed. In the same way, this chapter seeks to carve out parameters relevant to the cultural context in which it is written by bringing forward the insights of the past and applying them to the present for the future. In this sense the dialogue anticipated what was there to unfold in real time. Either way, whether they reflected a reality that preceded the textual composition or grounded the future where the texts became real because they were heeded by a living community, they were co-constitutive of the truth that unfolds in time, and they co-shaped reality in its temporal expression.

Texts often exonerate time from its follies. Even when they fail, they have the impetus to undo the mistakes they have made. The violence that is in the mind of the author plays out in real history if the author encodes his deep-seated violence in the texts. On the other hand, if the speaker is at peace, the words guide peace to unfold. Our texts are the testimony of how we are reliving the past, sustaining the violence that existed in the mind of nomadic people encoded in texts. Today's Middle East, for example, relives the past tension between Pharaohs and Hebrews. We are fighting against old anxieties using modern weapons.

Texts sometimes orchestrate a negotiated ground, as the authors anticipate such a possibility. This converging point, however, is not necessarily aimed at erasing the existing positions in the polemical battle. So-called spontaneous and creative dialogue is often a ritual play of already-rehearsed polarity. The only difference is, the written word is shared with the opponents before the orchestrated "battle" and therefore what the opponents know about their rivals is only what has been encoded in history.

It is not the case that all debates only relive the past, as we always come up with new insights, and this is where creativity finds its niche. This is where the transcendental

dialogue manifests itself in actual time. Examples abound. The dialogues between Yājñavalkya and his opponents rest on Yājñavalkya's privileged position. A good example of how intertextuality mixed with a cross-cultural reading can lead to misunderstanding is found in the case study of the early application of infinite regress, pointed out by Yajñavalkya in conversation with Gārgī, which was later misunderstood with misleading interpretations cultivated by Indologists in our times.[7] The dialogue between Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī seeks a negotiated ground, addressing the anxieties of wives when their husbands return to the forest.[8]

The dialogue between Raikva and Jānaśruti epitomizes the dialogue that deconstructs power.[9] Raikva is a subaltern, a peripheral marginalized subject. He has nonetheless mastered self-knowledge. His self-recognition is not a mere recognition of the subject unfolded in time where Raikva has found his outcaste subjectivity. This self that transcends the manifest discourse is the real author of the dialogue that is yet to unfold in time. In a healthy society, political power bends over this self. In a sick society, political power eliminates such subjects. There is a thin line between civilization and primitiveness, and where brute force overrides reason, so called primitive instincts rather than civility are displayed.

The entire center-periphery structure is displaced in healthy dialogue where brute force, orchestrated by the king in this narrative, has to surrender to the transcendent force that unfolds itself through speech. Time has nothing to do with this dialogue. We may evolve in time but that does not guarantee that we also

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[7] See the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* III, Chapter 8 for the conversation of Yājñavalkya and Gārgī.

[8] *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* 3.6.1.

[9] For the conversation between Raikva and Jānaśruti, see the *Chāndogyopaniṣad* IV, Chapters 1–2.

evolve towards higher rationality shedding our primitive nature. The dialogue between Raikva and Jānaśruti endeavors to deconstruct brute force and positions the power of speech as manifest through dialogue and transcendent to the will to power. Nietzsche failed to recognize the interdependent self and the power of self-recognition that grounds speech as primary and overpowers brute force, and in the same breath, the will to power. Classical India provides a plethora of examples, including the narratives of Janaka and Yājñavalkya, Rāma and the washer man, Nahuṣa and the hermits, Dilipa and Vasiṣṭha, … The list continues. What these texts from classical India teach is the primacy of dialogue over brute force. Otherwise why would the text encode Hariścandra abandoning his palace and living among the outcastes, or King Dilīpa caretaking Vasiṣṭha's cow?[10] The quest of Mahāvīra and Buddha becomes meaningful in this context as they are seeking the same transcendent power of speech that presides over the brute force that is represented by the throne. Nietzsche realized the power in negation of the other but he failed to acknowledge the power of self-negation.

Along the same lines, we learn from the dialogue between Buddha and Ānanda that there is no absolute truth that the master owns and shares with the disciple.[11] It is the dialogue between them that reveals the truth. It is this dialogue that makes "Buddha as transcendent truth" embody the historical "Buddha that inhabits the flesh." And it is this conversation that grants women equality in practicing Dharma. Ānanda is not pleading with Buddha. He is arguing with him, and Buddha the flesh surrenders to Buddha the truth and negotiates with Ānanda. Buddha did not claim the rules he instructed as given by some higher being, and he kept changing the Vinaya or disciplinary rules throughout his lifetime. This openness to negotiate ground is what gives speech

primacy and what makes teachings sublime. If the teachings are rigid or frozen in time, they only force adherents to relive the lives of the authors by means of erasing the subjectivity of the followers. What constitutes the Buddha as an enlightened being is primarily his recognition of the hollowness or emptiness of the history that unfolds in time in light of the truth that transcends both temporality and brute force. Polemical positions are the products of discourse and are in constant dynamism. They can alter at any moment when the parameters change.

Silence Is a Form of Dialogue

"Neither the eyes, nor speech, nor even the mind reaches there,"[12] "Whence retrieve the speech, not reaching to the target, alongside the mind,"[13] "Beyond the scope of the speech and also of the mind,"[14] are some of the common statements to describe the pure being, the being that is equated with pure consciousness. This foundational pure being, equated with silence, is also the one that initiates the transcendent dialogue in the form of the "self-seeing" (paśyantī) speech. Buddha gave his instructions through both speech and silence. Nāgārjuna found the teaching of Buddha through the silence of a higher category, rather than teachings transmitted through speech. Mahāvīra recognized the teachings given through silence as of a higher category than the teachings imparted through language. Teaching is not just about imposing ideas and words. Real teaching is about allowing the

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[10] This narrative is poignantly depicted in the *Raghuvaṃśa* (Cantos 1–4).

[11] Significant is the dialogue regarding the right of the women to join the order. Noteworthy is the dialogue between Ānanda and Buddha regarding this issue.

[12] *na tatra cakṣur gacchati, na vāg gacchati, no manaḥ |*

[13] *yato vāco nivartanta aprāpya manasā saha |*

[14] *avāṅmanasagocaram |*

speech to unfold on its own. Buddha does speak when it comes to teaching dependent origination and emptiness. He, however, maintains silence when it comes to argumentation for the sake of polemical pleasure. Moggalāyana could not have anticipated the total silence of the Buddha. His silence in this context and also silence in the case of Aṅgulimāla are not less conversational than any other verbal dialogues. Early Buddhism closed itself to discussion outside of its periphery, while nonetheless keeping the conversation within alive. This internal conversation erupted into in-and-out debates, as we can see in the post-Nāgārjuna development of Buddhist philosophy.

Silence is often stronger than expressed speech, because there is latent speech in every silence. Following Nāgārjuna, a Mahāyāna thinker, the silence of the Buddha instructs emptiness at a higher plane than his words could teach. This understanding is congruent with the thesis that what constitutes dialogue is not just the words but also silence. Being is determined through speech, whether in manifest form or in latency. Silence, therefore, is intrinsically dialogical by means of anticipated speech.

The challenge for the Buddha is not simply to engage with established cultures that have recognizable differences. Denial of discourse becomes the first method of finding identity in this context. Buddha's insistence on using Pālī language was not necessarily using the language of the public. India is full of dialects. In Buddha's time, there may have been even more dialects than now. By changing the language of discourse, he was simply maintaining "difference." At times, evading dialogue plays the same role by allowing the silent party to maintain its identity by means of the difference granted through silence. Bringing an alternative perspective into discourse, as has been epitomized in the use of Pālī or Māgadhī,

requires the shift of language, as at times language fails to separate itself from brute force. In order to have cross-cultural dialogue, a language that can transcend one culture and reach out to another is required. We can find this in the Mahāyāna Sanskrit texts. By the time Sūtra texts emerged, conceptual parameters were already drawn and so the use of Sanskrit did not translate into abandoning the conceptual framework.

Silence and Conversation Co-Constitute Dialogue

The position of the Buddha is ambivalent regarding the application of dialogue in recognizing reality. On one hand he evolved; his teachings, particularly regarding discipline, changed contingent upon dialogue. On the other hand his philosophy of language undermines its ability to directly reveal the truth, even in the relational and relative sense. On a number of occasions he preferred silence over speech. Even so, Buddhist ideas evolved by means of dialogue over time. *Kathāvatthu* or *The Subject of Conversation*, composed as early as 250 BCE, demonstrates how Buddhist traditions leaned towards philosophical and cultural dialogue. Buddha did recognize the threat of dialogue's ability to dismantle difference, resulting in the disappearance of one or both paths of dialogue. Cultural and philosophical circles can accept dialogue only to a certain extent, as prolonged dialogue can endanger their own existence. There is always a possibility of mutual acceptance, a complete compromise, and homogenization.

The teachings found in *The Subject of Conversation* are more than simply training in logical exegesis. The author prepares his disciples to combat with others: the Brahmanic philosophers. This necessity for discourse in Buddhism is more due to the controversy and disagreements within its own growing

community than it is to engage with others. Dialogue is an intrinsic requirement for the expression of being in time. Absolutist cultures find their cultural others within themselves; the difference, no matter how marginal, still drives them to wield the sword, or spill the ink. Believing in a single God has not stopped these fighting parties from inventing their differences and wanting to eliminate the historical manifestation of the being of the other. The guiding parameters for cultural dialogue should therefore be about allowing the parties to maintain their difference not about finding a common ground. What constitutes difference can be marginal. The erasure of difference is not conductive of dialogue, as it is not even consistent with the intrinsic nature of dialogue, otherwise it would be monologue. Successful dialogues presume difference and are performed only to draw parameters that maintain difference. Dialogue is not about leading to "unified charters of agreement." The inherent difference found in Buddhism, as has been epitomized in Sautrāntika-Mādhyamika-Vaibhāṣika debates, is a consequence of internal dialogue. The dialogical other, in these debates, is not often labeled with the cultural other. Pudgalavādins can be identified with following the Upaniṣadic philosophy, or Śaṅkara can be called "crypto-Buddhist." And the parties are forced to redefine their parameters, as nobody likes to be pushed out of the boundary. This is why the concept of *amalavijñāna* or the ninth level of "pure consciousness" could evolve in Chinese Yogācāra, which would be too Vedāntic in the Indian cultural context.

Ritual etiquette, ritual efficacy, and ritual violence determined the scope of early internal dialogue among the Vedic Hindus. Rituals reflect the technology of living life among the forces that determine our being beyond our spatio-temporal manifestation. Rituals therefore needed to be mathematically precise and geometrically exact. Ritual times needed

precise lunar clocks and their relation to solar clocks needed to be exact. Ritual space determined the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. Yet speech transcended spatio-temporality and therefore these boundaries. This is how speech maintained its power over the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. At the end, ritual was summed up as an orchestration of the dialogue from primordial times.

The exactness in ritual was so central that it gave birth to various forms of mathematics. In order that the manuals for rituals were not misunderstood, they developed commentarial and hermeneutic systems. Even the issues such as performing the rite before or after sunrise led to a generational debate. The Vedic exegetes had a choice: they could have developed a linear exegetical model and assign a text with a single meaning. For the Vedic culture, this possibility was unworkable. Yāska, for instance, gives multiple interpretations to Vedic verses, suggesting that a mantra does not necessarily have only one valid meaning. Early Vedic hermeneuts enjoyed the open field of textual interpretation. They always applied the metaphor of "cows" (*go*) for speech, and no animal likes to be caged. The beliefs did not give primacy to gods over rituals: It was the ritual efficacy that made the gods gods in the first place. Devotion had no place here, as it was about the exactness of performance, the science of rituals, that granted the results. Essentially, rituals were more important than deities. *Apūrva* or the unprecedented energy to guide future actions had more to do with mantras than with the gods. This efficacy had to retain some higher value by means of transcendent speech, some intrinsic dialogue, other than simple correspondence to the manifest speech, even to everyday language.

For Buddha, silence was not just a means to express some higher metaphysical truths. It was a mechanism to subvert language and by

the same token, it was a process of undermining rituals. In a broader picture, it was also a language to reject the world. His rejection of the authority of language might have emerged in early times during the course of rejecting ritual language, but it extended beyond ritual language. While Buddha might have rejected the efficacy of language and by the same token rejected the testimony of speech, his disciples institutionalized his speech. Both rejection and affirmation presume language, so even the rejection of language is dialogical. No one can evade dialogue as even the silence of the Buddha became a subject of interpretation. Buddhism as a culture preserved the "words of the Buddha." The philosophy that stood against the primacy of the spoken words reduced itself to another language. In this process, silence contributed as much as the spoken word. Both speech and silence cocreated each other and evolved into a dialogue.

The Mādhyamika dialectic of Nāgārjuna is not the fusion of two horizons. On the contrary, it is the exclusion of the extremes. All positions are extreme in one way or the other. For Nāgārjuna, to say that it exists is one extreme and to say that it does not is another. He does say that even the "silence" maintained as a position is just another extreme. The negotiated ground, that it both exists and does not exist at the same time, is just another extreme along the lines of Nāgārjuna. Even to maintain that the truth lies beyond these positions is yet another extreme. This middle ground of Nāgārjuna does not lead to the confirmation of any position. Now the question is, if all speech is dialogical, how can this Nāgārjunian position anticipate it? Nāgārjuna advocates that silence is the true teaching of the Buddha. The silence of the Buddha should not be construed as the silence of a caveman. On the contrary, it is a dynamic silence, it is an active silence, it is the silence in the presence of the other. As one can see, Nāgārjunian speech did

not stop the use of language, nor did it confront the natural unfolding of dialogue. The development of the Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika positions is the testimony of this natural dialogical process. At the end, speech returns to affirm its prominence and all the language used to negate its use further confirms its predominance.

Dialogue Sustains Both Cultures and Dialogue Itself

Dialogue and culture are co-constitutive, but in the absence of dialogue, cultures perish. As said earlier, dialogues are not about seeking harmony or institutionalizing conflict: They are self-enclosed, and dialogue completes its task by simply initiating its being. In this process, it also breathes life into the culture that instantiates the dialogue. Take the example of Kumārila. Legends suggest that he went to learn Buddhism with the masters just so that he could refute the Buddhist tenets.[15] There was no fusion intended here. There was no understanding in the metaphoric sense of mutual respect, but just the verbal understanding of one's argument for the sustenance of the polemics. Kumārila did recognize the need for a thorough understanding of the other's position, so that he could provide a precise criticism, not so that he could follow it. Now, one may wonder, should Kumārila not anticipate reconciliation? This, however, is a question that arises due to the misunderstanding that dialogue negates itself instead of the understanding the subjects as mere vessels for the expression of speech.

Jains surpassed all in recognizing the limits of discourse and the fictitious character of the philosophical viewpoints, as is evidenced with

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[15] I have borrowed this story from the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*. See Apte 1891.

the position of the *anekānta*, or "not one extreme." Their "not one extreme" position and the doctrine of "maybe" relies on refuting the "extreme" positions. Congruent with Nāgārjuna, positioning itself is an extreme. The logic that took a shape of "seven-category-argumentation" (*sapta-bhaṅga-nyāya*) did not unfold in a single flash. It evolved first during internal debates between the Śvetāmbara and Digambara exegetes and it expanded the discourse by eventually inviting into the fold of dialogue Hindus and Buddhists. Unlike ritual hermeneutics that led Brahminic philosophers to dialogue, or exegetical problems that posed thorny challenges to both Hindus and Buddhists, the Jains engaged in internal dialogue first to establish the codes of conduct. The dialogue that aimed at involving the outsiders did not relate to their codes, but to metaphysical or epistemological issues. Similar to the Nāgārjunian position, Jains believed that the highest teaching Mahāvīra gave was not through language but through his silence. His is a different silence than that of the Buddha though. Through his silence, Mahāvīra actively sought to transmit the experience that could not have been verbalized. In this paradigm, there are some metaphysical truths that cannot be expressed through verbal language. This is not to deny some higher form of expression and dialogue.

Both the centripetal and centrifugal forces are at play in constructing and sustaining cultures. Cultural currents that pull towards the center, in most contexts the historical center, and currents that disperse towards the periphery, seeking to expand the horizon and as a consequence inviting the outsiders or outcastes within, are the two determining factors that keep cultures alive. Dialogues are the ripples manifest in the process of the friction of these forces. These forces are vivid in any pluralistic society. This, however, is there at the bedrock of any culture, even if it negates the being of

anything that remotely resembles the cultural other. External dialogue is also driven by a need to retain internal harmony. Or otherwise, the centripetal forces drive the inherent tendencies towards disintegration. Buddhism was productive in giving rise to multiple Nikāyas during the period when it was insulated within. Dialogue is a precondition to being, and if there is no conversation with the outside, there will always be some form of conversation within.

The dialogical nature of culture resembles the character of language. When pure being expresses itself in spatio-temporality, there is always dialogue embedded with this manifestation. This is what constitutes language to begin with. One may call it an "internal system of symbols." Bhartṛhari identifies "self-seeing speech" (*paśyantī*). This is essentially the first will of creation to express itself and therefore dialogue is inherent to culture. Whether in real or imagined forms, dialogue is presumed in all modes of social transaction. In this regard, our being expressed in metaphysical claims, biological expression through different configurations of the amino acids, corporeality that presumes exchange among different subsystems, or expressed speech that allows us to interact in society, all are dialogical. Among social agents or characters fancied by an author, dialogue has the tendency to shift from ontological-epistemological to self-referential exchange. One can say in this regard that language initiates dialogue and it culminates in showing the limitations of language itself. Dialogue in this regard is self-deconstructive.

However, this is not to say that dialogue negates itself. Dialogue deconstructing itself is not identical to dialogue negating itself. If two parties come to agreement on one single point, there can be no dialogue about it and "dialogue" would be self-negating. In this sense, dialogue is rather self-confirming. Through dialogue, difference is maintained.

Dialogue preserves the conversation: it is through the sincere effort of those in dialogue that the discourse continues. All historical dialogues, that of Śaṅkara with Buddhists, Jains, Pāśupatas, the dialogue of Dharmakīrti with Hindus, the dialogue of Kumārila or Udayana with Buddhists, all are not in order to reconcile difference. Dialogue is not self-defeating. The other in himself and the other that constitutes a dialogue are not always identical. The challenge for the subject of discourse is to correct the otherliness of the other portrayed by the opponent while maintaining the otherliness as anticipated by the subject. There are two apparent "others": the other anticipated by the dialogical self and the other presented by the dialogical other. The image of the other is in constant flux, based on the force of dialogue in carving its image. Because the self and the other are the products of dialogue, they are not in charge of creating or sustaining their image. The dialogue that the self and the other initiate is only the visible layer of what lies beneath: The discovered dialogue may never exhaust what lies beneath the construction of the polarities that in themselves are embedded within the being that is in itself dialogical.

Dialogue Is Not Governed by a Single Pole

At times it appears that there is no balance of power between the parties engaged in conversation. This, however, is based on the delusion that brute force is identical to speech as power. As long as there is no initiative in both parties to constitute a discourse, any exchange in itself does not constitute dialogue. To demonstrate that these dialogues are not necessarily controlled by power and guided by the will to power, there are several examples from classical and medieval India. In most cases, the categories of discourse are not determined by the establishment side. In Hindu monastic traditions, the Advaita of Śaṅkara has played a central role. Their overall influence in the society, however, does not give the Advaitins the privilege to determine the course of debate. The *Saptavidānupapatti* or *Sevenfold Untenables* of Rāmānuja established the philosophical discourse on Advaita that subsequently divided Advaita into multiple sub-schools. Had it not been for the rigorous critique of Rāmānuja, the Advaita of Śaṅkara may not have evolved with multiple sub-schools. Because there is not a single response to any particular objection, varied responses may lead to a nuanced development in the philosophical and theological arena, leading to the emergence of multiple strands of a single school of thought.

The dialogical tension and philosophical rearticulation of the central premises that are visible in the Vedānta Deśika's *Śatadūṣaṇī, One Hundred Defects,* can scarcely be found anywhere else in the history of philosophy. Deśika categorically refutes the central premises, one hundred of them to be precise, that the Advaitins maintained. Had it not been for the masterpiece of Deśika, Vyāsatīrtha may not have penned the *Nyāyāmṛta.* The *Advaita-siddhi* of Madhusūdana is a categorical refutation of the positions maintained by Vyāsatīrtha and one can consider this book a negative commentary upon the *Nyāyāmṛta*. Deśika's text thus determines the course of philosophical debate for over 400 years.

When we read these texts closely, we can unravel the scope of discourse by not only tracing what has been said but also by extrapolating what has been sidelined. The early Advaita that emerged in conversation with Mīmāṃsā and Sāṅkhya, and the Advaita that responded to some of the Buddhist critiques is not the same Advaita, dialogically speaking, that survived the period and challenged the Mādhva dualists. Just as the Advaita in the early era appears to be confronting the ritual

and metaphysically dualistic positions, the Advaita of the middle ages seems to be finding a balance with Mahāyāna precepts, neutralizing the overlay of theology. The Advaita in its final phase, however, tends to rediscover theology within. The Brahman as the singular Puruṣa, the Brahman as transcendental to language and discourse, and the Brahman as identical to its manifest expression as Īśvara vividly portray this tension. The early issues relate to the soteriology of karma and knowledge; this is exemplary in Maṇḍana's works as well. The second phase, found in Śaṅkara's writing, can also be found in Śrīharṣa's writings. Thus, the dialogue shifts in every single generation. Śrīharṣa confronts Udayana, the Nyāya realists. The Advaita of Ānandapūrṇa, Citsukha, or Madhusūdana responds to the criticism of the Mādhva school. Mainstream or not, the Advaita of Śaṅkara had to always redefine itself in accordance with the shifting cultural horizons. Even the reiteration of Vivekananda in modern times can be viewed in this same breath, as his cultural others are the Christians, and his response is shaped in this anticipation of the cultural other. Dialogical power is therefore not to be confused over brute force, the will to power. The strength that the periphery holds in dialogue is insurmountable. The only problem is, these dialogues that I see as creative and inter-subjective and the life-blood of civilization are sometimes rigged by brute force.

It is evident in these observations that dialogue shifts from external controversy to discourse about controversy. More than the points of agreement, dialogues demonstrate the points of disagreement. It is not possible to read the impact of dialogue in one exchange, but rather, it needs to be read in light of historical flux. Spoken words, therefore, do not hint toward what the parameters of actual dialogical battles were. We learn of the historical fact of dialogue and the issues of discourse through written words. We cannot read one text as a simple dialogue of the author with another rival, his contemporary. Although most of his arguments may be new, or revised in light of later objections, these carry nuances of the earlier positions of philosophers that may now be lost.

Dialogue Sustains Textuality

Texts are not that different from archaeological sites. Under the rubble of the words of the author, there are words and concepts of earlier thinkers glimmering just below the now-excavated surface. This is particularly visible in the Indian tradition, where debates are controlled among established parameters. A later position in one school of thought occurs in response to the counter-argument raised earlier by the opponents. Subsequent writers often summarize early positions in order to present their thought. They also present their *prima facie* position, the position that they argue against. A text is therefore a site of parallel and relevant thoughts. Commentaries reveal the ongoing debate concerning the position and status of the text. A text, along these lines, is not only a constellation of history up to the period of the author, but also a continuation of similar thoughts through the time that is yet to unfold.

The peculiar nature of texts to be able to speak in different directions can be addressed in terms of Bakhtin's dialogism. Mikhail Bakhtin maintained that a set of powerful but highly unstable conditions are at work that give a word uttered then and there a meaning that is different from what it would be at other times and other places. Multiple commentaries upon the same text, contradictory understandings of the same statement, are embedded within the text, or in any dialogue whether written or oral. All our efforts to comprehend

texts are summed up in this simple Bakhtinian premise. There is not a single understanding of Śūnyatā or emptiness among the contrasting schools of Buddhism. What is meant by Ābhāsa by Sureśvara and by Utpala is not the same, and the school of Ābhāsa needs different interpretations following the foundational differences found in the understandings of the term in each school. These are just two examples of hundreds of such categories.

Classical texts from India have been enigmatic for the Indological enterprise. Texts such as Mahābhārata are generational collaborations. No linear reading can exhaust the wealth of meaning, particularly of texts that have gone through a series of reconstruction. Indian traditions have constantly tried to "dehistoricize" texts by assigning mythological origins. To assign an author and point a particular moment in history for textual composition underscores the assumption that there is one truth and that is revealed to one person in one point of time and place. This position drastically differs from the one that the truth has the power to constantly reveal itself in myriad forms without being conditioned or confined by spatio-temporality.

Words are the products of culture and texts their extension. Philosophical premises and arguments to buttress those positions give texts their life breath. The concept of Vedic revelation endeavors to explain this phenomenon. There is no authorship of the Vedas. Actually there are many texts in the Āgamic traditions without any claim of the authorship. This phenomenon highlights the fact that we are not the authors of our words. We instead are the instruments for the words to reveal themselves. Texts are therefore dialogical. If we expand the arguments applicable to texts to envelop the cultures, making cultures dialogical, this is itself a process that compels a culture of self-awareness and criticism. Imposed values and resistance to the values of dead civilizations of

the past are the results of "truths" imposed by power. At any given time, all cultures are capable of self-criticism, and dialogues precipitate such an environment.

Any pluralistic culture is more conductive to dialogical evolution. The more cultures are comfortable in incorporating the change, the more they provide the archival materials that accrete over time in history. Cultural evolution has to deal with resistance to change, but if a culture stubbornly resists change, it ends up being irrelevant. This is where dialogue is crucial for the survival of a culture: It is dialogue that allows open space and it is through dialogue that boundaries are constantly negotiated. The less culture is assertive of internal or external dialogue, the more it is prone to being irrelevant in the dynamism of time. It is not to say that brute force cannot keep it from its imminent collapse, but that cultures incapable of self-reflexivity and cultural dynamism easily become stagnant nothing more than carrying a dead carcass and claiming it to be alive. It is the dialogue that offers the opportunity social adjustment, and this social renegotiation of the boundaries is what keeps cultures relevant in the dynamics of time. In a dialogical process, the position of x revealed to y is historical, and it is the dialogue that gives x the opportunity to upgrade its system. In its absence, cultures cannot transform and eventually become irrelevant.

The "other" in discourse is often taken for granted as someone fairly well understood. The already-known side of the other comes to discourse, not the side that is yet to be discovered. The intersubjective nature of dialogue is confirmed when the other reestablishes its position, defends the old positions by new arguments, or abandons old arguments and strikes the opponent on new fronts. Sometimes a positive outcome of dialogue could be just the recognition that x does not know y. Borrowing Bakhtin's concept of polyphony,

the creative aspect of cultural dialogue is where the partners are both unfinished characters engaged in discourse. In this genuine and open-ended dialogue, there is a factor of surprise on all fronts in every step of discourse. It occurs when the known other reveals its unknown aspects and conceals the already-familiar nuances.

Dialogue Is Manifest in Spontaneous Creativity

Dialogue has the power to harness ideas and generate new thought. "Critical exchange" and dialogue are considerably different processes. Actually, in the case of cultural dialogue, "critical exchange" is a mode of understanding the other. Through critical exchange, the other becomes able to see oneself as seen by the other. Bakhtin would say that when the character and writer are in dialogue, the writer has the privilege to see the background of the other that is not visible to the other. One can see the blue sky in the background of the character in front, but this is not visible to the character. Bakhtin endeavors to break this privilege by creating a "character" that is always unfolding and unpredictable. In the same way, cultural transformations can be studied in view of the exchange or the dialogue that precipitates change.

Because each culture considers its cultural constructs as truths and historical analysis demonstrates that these constructs were a response to another culture or a response to the identity, survival or unity of one culture, these truths are constructed in time and revealed in history. Dialogue both reveals and conceals cultural truths. In so doing, dialogue facilitates modification of claims by all parties engaged in discourse. This opportunity enlivens cultures through sustaining difference, and results in a new language that is required for transforming the peoples of that culture.

A vivid consequence of these dialogues is their ability to internalize violence and ritualize discourse. The results of dialogue are almost always predictable: There are no winners or losers. Any dialogue that ends up erasing the other by means of some polemical victory is a rigged battle by the use of brute force. There are always some questions that are not properly addressed by one side, and there are always some questions that are answered with more nuanced responses. What these ritualized dialogues do is to facilitate "remembering" the positions that are developed in a logical process, and in the absence of dialogue these positions are rendered irrelevant.

When ritual-centric philosophy vanished from center place, discourse aimed at critiquing such positions became irrelevant. Both Buddhists and Jains have critiqued multiple Hindu positions. In the absence of Hindus maintaining the positions that prompted these critiques, the discourse becomes irrelevant. Returning to the Vedic exegesis, most of the arguments between the Kumārila and Prābhākara schools of Mīmāṃsā do not make sense without the actual Vedic ritual performance. Textual study that undermines this cultural fluidity and resistance overlooks the vitality of dialogue encoded in the text. As a consequence, scholars pick up words like banana peels and throw away the essence.

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