Chapter 3
Michel Foucault and Our Postcolonial Time

Ranabir Samaddar

I owe this thought to three acquaintances: Frederic Gros, Partha Chatterjee and Julian Reid, not necessarily in that order in terms of my debt, but sequentially. Frederic Gros invited me some years ago to contribute to an anthology on Michel Foucault, a piece on the reception of Michel Foucault in India. I discussed the possibility of such a piece with Partha Chatterjee and discussed with him his own understanding of how Foucault's works reached India and in particular how he, as a creative thinker, had received with enthusiasm Foucault's ideas and concepts. While Frederic Gros' invitation to contribute an article was tempting, Partha Chatterjee's opinions and retrospective on Foucault's reception in India helped me get a sense of the attraction of the subaltern studies historians, cultural theorists and a section of the Indian social scientists towards the philosopher. However, it is to Julian Reid that I owe this particular idea of Michel Foucault and our time.

The immediate sense of this theme to anyone living in the South of the world is of course obvious, though it does not mean that the discussion in this sense has been sufficient. I am speaking of the postcolonial, our existence as postcolonial beings. Robert Young (2001) has written on Foucault and postcolonialism. That will be one sense. In this case, to speak of studies on Michel Foucault in India or those inspired by Michel Foucault in India is to appreciate the sense that the postcolonial makes of Michel Foucault's writings. But I gathered a further thought from that discussion with Julian Reid, though I must not make him responsible for this. It is the idea that receiving Foucault in India in the late years of the last century to this day is to receive him in our time, the postcolonial time. These two, the place and the time, are connected, and therefore in this note I want to explore how in reaching India Michel Foucault is mediated in both ways (also thus in the third way, which congeals the

R. Samaddar (✉)
Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, Kolkata, India
e-mail: ranabir@mcrg.ac.in

two, that is to say, the political way) of the postcolonial, namely, the postcolonial as place and postcolonial as a specific time, and of course Foucault cannot do anything about this.[1]

Young (2001) notes a paradox. While many of Foucault's ideas he finds extremely productive for postcolonial thinking, such as discipline, forms of authority and exclusion, and technologies of surveillance, in Foucault's own works, Young says there is almost a stunning silence on colonialism and race. Young made this comment perhaps before *Society Must Be Defended* (Foucault 2003) became accessible in the English edition to the English-speaking readership, but then we know that the theme of race vanishes from Foucault's thinking thereafter. We can add that there is an equal amount of silence in his writings on colonial ways of governing, on colonial state and on anticolonial resistance. Young says that Foucault's stay in the latter half of the 1960s in Tunisia, which was witnessing at that time an angry pro-Palestinian movement and student radicalism, helped a more militant Foucault to emerge. That may be the case, but his writings for the next 6–7 years were all on discourses, though to be true Foucault was never treating the issue as a matter of pure linguistics. Thus, postcolonial thought derived inspiration from Foucault's archaeological period (from the publication of *History of Madness* in 1961 to the publication of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969), too, because Young notes that he not only made new sense of the identity and difference making exercises in society through knowledge formations but also showed how discursive formations were made, how statements functioned as truth-making exercises in society, how discourses formed objects, how they were characterized by heterogeneity and finally how an analysis of the function of discourse in society helped in understanding the relation of knowledge and power. Young, in fact, profusely cites Homi Bhabha to argue that this is how the postcolonial has related to Foucault, because for Robert Young the postcolonial is a literary concept, it is a discourse and its function is to flag aesthetic and intellectual ideas and figure out how they have shaped in colonial conditions, which means shaping up in difference and proximity with colonial ideas. Thus, while Young notes in the concluding paragraph, and it seems to me he does it cursorily, that there was something called politics, etc., in the life of a colony, yet his main idea is, 'Colonialism as a practice operated at the interface of knowledge and material culture, its operations were highly dispersed, contradictory, and heterogeneous in historical and geographical terms' (Young 2001: 409). Young titles the section wherefrom I have taken this line as 'A Foucauldian model of colonial discourse'.

This idea of colonialism as discourse, etc., of course has less to do with the materiality of the colonial world and more to do with a notion called postcolonialism, which is heavily influenced by the North American university

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[1] I am aware of the intonation that this line may evoke, namely, that 'Foucault is dead'. We also know the loss that Deleuze felt on Foucault's death and said that the void was very difficult to be filled in. Also, there are other senses that have been evoked in 'Foucault is dead'. However, in writing these words, '… Foucault cannot do anything about this', I am referring to Foucault as a social text predicated by the autonomy of the postcolonial milieu.

campus discussions of both Foucault and postcolonialism. Both Foucault as a thinker and our understanding of the reality of colonialism as a system of exploitation, domination and rule and the reality of the postcolonial existence have suffered as a consequence. Therefore, the early Foucauldian writings in India (as elsewhere in the South of the world – a clear instance would be Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* 2001) picked on issues and were modelled along lines that resonated with the philosopher's influence of what is known today as cultural studies. Novels were dissected, discourse was the object of analysis, maladies and mentalities were investigated and in the case of India, the transfer of interest from Antonio Gramsci to Michel Foucault as the inspirational figure of radical writings produced, the least we can say, a queer result. Subaltern studies historiography, which took so much from Gramsci, took a turn towards cultural-anthropological explanations, thinking that it was taking the cue of going further with the help of Foucault in the sense of identifying how social realities were produced in the colonial age through classificatory and knowledge-producing exercises. One great example of this trend is Nicholas Dirks' grand work, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Dirks 2001). Readers can also place Bernard Cohn's *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Cohn 1996) in the same group of writings, which had been inspired by Foucault's discussions on power/knowledge and his preceding works on discourses and orders.

It will serve no purpose to name individuals or make a list of all such writings here; all we can say is that these historians and anthropologists discovered power (and rightly so) in every cultural move, in every line written on this earth, but saw or wrote very little of the power of truncheons, jails, scaffolds, courts, laws, patterns of violence, mutinies, revolts, resistances and elementally the body – the basic instruments on which colonial rule thrived. There were exceptions: some of the new historical writings in the 1980s and 1990s carried the imprint of these issues and in doing so bore the philosopher's mark, but let us admit that these were few and far between. Of more interest was the theme of modernity than violence or Enlightenment than the dynamics of rule. In a deep way, the early Foucault (early in Indian reception) had failed to inspire studies on politics and the emergence of the political subject. The archaeological Foucault had damned political subjectivity by damning the subject. Hence, the great work, *Madness and Civilization* (1965) (the English translation of the full book, *History of Madness* [2006], was still unavailable then), was ineffective in terms of reorienting radical thought in India, though it is true that studies of exclusion were conducted, and other reasons were investigated as historians inquired into the persistence of community bonds among jute workers, violence in colonial India and cases of 'deviant' behaviour (we can refer to writings like Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Rethinking Working Class History, Bengal 1890 to 1940* [1989]). Notwithstanding these studies, there was little new light on the formation of the anticolonial subject. But then Foucault did not have this agenda of inquiry; in his archaeological period, the thinker had been busy with declaring the 'end of man' – a figure drawn on sand and hence only temporary. In battling theories of human essence, he had at least for some time given up the study of the emergence of rebels and rebellions.

But all that changed with globalization and the reappearance of terror in world politics from the mid-1990s, and it was in this milieu that the emphasis in Foucault's writings on the physicality of our conflictive existence came to the notice of the radical intellectuals in the Southern world. In this reconfigured world, *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1991; first English edition 1977) was the landmark, followed by the arrival of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* (Foucault 1990; first English edition 1978), though the latter was decidedly second to the former in terms of influencing postcolonial ideas and thinking. Our time, we can say with some exaggeration, begins from then.

That clearly means one more thing: again, this will not be music to the university Foucauldians, namely, that this time, which we claim as ours, is not Foucault's time. We can briefly take note of the differences: What seemed to be the overwhelming perspective against which Foucault wrote consisted of the apparent stability of bourgeois rule, the strong mechanics of capitalist production and the deep hold of liberal individualism over social life. It was also a time when the evidences of socialist decay were clear. Eurocommunism was a vulgar answer to the crisis of socialist thought in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. As a contrast to that time, today we think of neither capitalism nor bourgeois society to be stable, particularly against the background of repeated currency crises and the meltdowns, nor are societies deemed to be as individualistic as Foucault thought. In fact, studies of collective actions and contentious politics tell us other stories of how trust and collective actions build up in modern societies. Explaining stability of rule is not the concern of this time. Strengthening the encounter that makes sense of the contentious time of ours is the call of the day. Yet, this is not what I meant principally when I said that ours is not Foucault's time. I have two special reasons for this remark.

First, for Foucault, modernity was almost an undifferentiated epoch. Not that he made an explicit comment to this effect, but the effort he made in outlining the trajectory of the growth of modernity does not have a parallel in his writings in the sense of having a similar effort in understanding different phases either of modernity or of capitalism. Therefore, though he made a sustained effort to find an outside ground to critique modernity and bourgeois rule – an outside that he found sometimes in Nietzsche, sometimes but less in Marx, sometimes in Freud, sometimes in the recall of an earlier stoic tradition and sometimes in the deposits of counter-Enlightenment currents existing in society – in order to judge Europe by anti-Europe, philosophy by genealogy, soul by the body and establishment and power by critique, yet in terms of influence on critical thinking in the postcolonial milieu, Foucault's treatment of modernity did not carry the same resonance (as in the West) in the ex-colonies, where modernity was being reshaped in many different ways. In that sense, our time is different; it is a contentious modernity – people are making their own modernities and they refuse to take a single script of modernity or a single script of its critique as universally valid. Therefore, Foucault's thoughts are mediated by other strands of critical thinking. Gramsci, Fanon and contemporary thinkers such as Agamben and Negri mark the postcolonial milieu, not to mention the rekindled interest in the writings of Marx, Lenin and Mao, who simply refuse to vanish from the critical and radical minds in the South.

The second reason is more immanent to the question of 'time', but this reason, we shall see, is connected with the first one. As we know, Foucault in his famous essay, 'What is Enlightenment?' (Foucault 2007b; first English edition 1984), wrote in appreciation of Immanuel Kant that Kant had shown the possibility of a kind of 'philosophical interrogation', which 'problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of self as an autonomous human being' (Foucault 2007b: 109). This, Foucault suggested, was possible because of Enlightenment. Enlightenment was not 'faithfulness to doctrinal elements, but rather the permanent reactivation of an attitude – that is of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our own historical era' (Foucault 2007b: 109).[2] By one stroke, we all had thus become the sons and daughters of Immanuel Kant. Foucault of course did not explain what exactly he meant by 'our own historical era'. Because of this explanation that *our time* was constituted by self-referential knowledge of time, Foucault not only thought that the concerned text of Kant was important, he went back to it again and again: indeed, Immanuel Kant more than Nietzsche became for him the point of departure for further epistemic inquiries. Therefore, even though he said in that article that while people took modernity to be an indicator of time, he preferred to take 'modernity as an attitude'[3] – a consciousness of one's own self as (i.e. the conscious being) constituted by the present – clearly attitude, like time, remained undifferentiated for him. Different attitudes to time, different attitudes to the same modern,[4] different attitudes to the making of the self and thus different ideas of modernity – these were never the principal point in the various lectures he gave on the theme of the Enlightenment. We all know Foucault's philosophical life began with an engagement with the anthropology of Kant. The preoccupation then surfaces in *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1997a). Overshadowed by his references to Nietzsche in the 1960s–1970s, Kant of course does not vanish. Some say that Foucault's examination of 'What is Enlightenment?' (Foucault 2007b) is the most American moment in his life, when he discovers that he has to respond at the level of philosophy to the inquiries by Walter Benjamin and, following him, Jurgen Habermas. Kant comes back in a pronounced way for the first time in his 1978 lecture, 'What is Critique?', to the French Society of Philosophy; then we have again in the first lecture in 1983 at the College de France reference to Kant's text when he has to discuss 'What is Revolution?' (Foucault 1997b). His lectures on subjectivity, truth, 'ethics of discomfort' (of the present) (Foucault 2007c) and, in general, on the theme of the present in that period are all marked with references to Kant and his text. From the postcolonial point of view, the result of this mode of engagement with the present and in general with philosophy will be immediately clear once we interrogate this preoccupation.

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[2] 'What is Enlightenment?' is the text of a French manuscript by Michel Foucault first published in English in the *Foucault Reader* (Foucault 1984), subsequently published in other editions, including a collection of Foucault's writings titled, *The Politics of Truth* (Foucault 2007b).

[3] "What is Enlightenment?", p. 36.

[4] Thus, postcolonial investigations today speak of 'colonial modernity', 'early modernity', etc., just as in Foucault's lifetime some of his contemporaries spoke of 'late modernity' or 'post-modernity', a term Foucault of course did not agree to.

We can have arguably our reference point the moment in history that occurred midway in the nineteenth century (1845), when Marx declared that he was severing his ties with philosophy as a way of engaging with the reality of his time (published after his death, Marx 1888).[5] Anticolonial politics and today's postcolonial critique eternally draw inspiration from that moment, namely, that the route to understanding materiality is not through philosophy. What comes in its place? Position, critique, action – this is the route of change. But that is not all; it means that only through trying to change the obtaining conditions we are able to understand the irreducible character of the materiality around us. Thus, anticolonialism did not require a philosophical explanation of domination; it required position, critique and action. In any case, I am mentioning all this only in order to point out that radical thinking in India had a strange attraction for Foucault's ideas. This attraction had less to do with his desperate search to find out the historical-philosophical bottom of the mystery of subject formation but more to do with the 'physical' aspects of his ideas, of the 'microphysics of power' (as elaborated in *Discipline and Punish*) as he formulated the question once, of his numerous suggestions on the question of power and resistance and of course his eternal quarrel with Marx that the latter had not gone enough in his inquiry into the materiality of power, hence his ideas on government, governmental rationality, etc.

How did postcolonial thought find out its own terms of engagement with Foucault? First of all, in postcolonial thought, there was and is a strong emphasis on history, eternally going into the depths of history, not to make society the subject of history (the standard menu of social history), but in order to find out what we, as the once colonized subjects, are today. In this sense, the political history that came to be written in the last 10–15 years or so has proved to be fundamentally no different from political philosophy[6] but has proved to be capable of authoring political philosophy in a different way. From this emerged the suggestion of a new method, too, for which we remain beholden among others to the philosopher Michel Foucault whom we are discussing today in the context of our time: a method which is critical, genealogical and a unique combination of practicality and ethicality. To think of *politics as a discourse of actions* is now possible because the colonial past was never banal. In the colonial milieu, violently destructive each moment of the day for nearly 200 years, genealogy and history came together naturally, and philosophy was grounded in that shattering present. This was possible, for reason here showed itself from its first moment of appearance in split form (violence and liberal preaching combined from day one), which is its original form – and it needed, therefore, no Immanuel Kant to demonstrate its practical and pure aspects. Finally, this has been possible, for the ethics that this political subject has needed is of a practical kind or one might say of an applied kind, in the sense, that once again ethics has been asked here not as a matter of 'care of the self' and 'self-caring technologies' but as a matter

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[5] The referred line is to the famous Eleventh Thesis.

[6] One of the well-known historians of our time, Pierre Rosanvallon, has expressed the same sentiment while remarking on the close relation between the two: 'I do not think there is a necessary gap between political history and political philosophy' (Sebastian 2007: 712).

of achieving the right mental and spiritual conditions to effect transformation of the conditions outside (the classic instance of such ethics would be Gandhi's relevant advices in *Hind Swaraj* (1909) or some of the advices that the nationalist novelist Bankim Chandra records in the process of retelling the story of the ancient mythical character Lord Krishna in *Krishnacharitra*).[7] In this ethics, caring for the country was the essential gradient of caring for the self. In any case, transformation was and still remains the great agenda of thinking, and this produces a particular kind of hermeneutics of the political subject. Anticolonial politics was never what Marx called 'contemplative materialism' in *Theses on Feuerbach*.

The way the attention of radical thinking in India transferred from Antonio Gramsci to Michel Foucault is a story of interest by itself. We shall need possibly longer time span to understand the significance of this displacement. It all began with the students and peasants upsurge in India in the second half of the 1960s. The ideas of the Communist Party in India with its factional quarrels did not radicalize the postcolonial thoughts. The marches by the Red Guards, the bombings of Vietnam and the resistance there in particular the Tet Offensive, the Palestinian movement, the idea of Tri-Continental solidarity and of Che Guevara and finally the writings of Frantz Fanon – all these mixed with peasant movements and students upsurge in the country have led to produce the attraction of the postcolonial radicals towards new ideas of the Left. The organized parties reaped the benefits of this radicalization to the extent that by 1977 India not only overcame the Emergency (1975–1977) but succeeded in removing for the first time the long-time ruling party from power. It was in this milieu that Gramsci reached India. *Selections from Prison Notebooks* (trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith) came out in 1971 and reached India by the latter half of the 1970s. In 1978, Gramsci's *Selections from Political Writings (1921–1926)* was published. The early subaltern school writings on history (the first volume being published in 1982) bore marks of Gramsci's ideas on hegemony, passive revolution, war of position, national-popular formation, etc. Yet, we must not forget in this story there are two more figures – and they could not be less alike to each other. First, Mao's *Selected Writings* (in five volumes)[8], along with theme-wise selections of his writings, was sold widely throughout India in this period and translated in several Indian languages. Gramsci was also translated, though not in comparison to the extent of translations of Mao's writings. The clearest evidence of the impact of Mao's writings was in numerous pamphlets, booklets and books and in the intellectual world in writings on agrarian revolts, agrarian political economy, class analysis, the 'transition debate'[9] and, in general, on the issue of transformation of society and politics. Yet, in the intellectual world characteristic of it, direct political writings are never enough. The old, dialectical mode of analysis and an unambiguous stress on practice (for instance, Mao's two most influential

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[7] *Hind Swaraj* (http://www.mkgandhi.org/swarajya/coverpage.htm – accessed on 3 July 2013); on *Krishnacharitra*, see, particularly, the 'Introduction' (Chattopadhyay 1886/1973: 707–723).

[8] The entire series is now available online – http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/ (accessed on 3 July 2013).

[9] For a summary of the debate on the transition to a capitalist agriculture in India, see Patnaik (1992).

writings – *On Practice*, July 1937, *and On Contradictions*, August 1937)[10] could not be enough. It was at this juncture that Althusser's writings and what came to be known as structuralism also came to the notice of Left intellectuals in India. We must note here in passing that postcolonial writings never got trapped in the doctrinal quarrels of the New Left in Europe. Althusser and E.P. Thompson were both studied avidly in the late 1970s and 1980s, notwithstanding Thompson's polemic against Althusser (*The Poverty of Theory* 1978). If Thompson's writings on history had enormous influence on labour studies here, also on studies on issues of time, law, constabulary, machines, moral economy, etc., Althusser's writings had an equal, if not more profound, impact, which continues till this day. In politics, social anthropology, political economy and history scholars avidly read Althusser. *For Marx* (English edition 1969), *Reading Capital* (English edition 1970) and *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (English edition 1971a) – these three volumes of Althusser (and his colleagues) arrived in succession (not necessarily in that order) to become huge attractions for radical intellectuals. We must remember that Michel Foucault as a philosopher and historian arrived in India in such a milieu.

What does this mean? Recalling those years, it is impossible not to find the essential philosophical task of this emerging time. Radical thinkers in India never contemplated complete comfort with any particular model of thinking or explaining or suggesting. In the background of the defeat of the revolution in the 1960s, the idea of historical certitude was gone. The present became extremely fragile, and as radical thinkers kept thinking of the present, suddenly the year of 1989 – the year of the miracle, the *annus mirabilis* – happened. With fall of socialism along with the model of one-party rule and the global victory of bourgeois ideology, we found ourselves in the midst of a period of restoration. In that fragile instant (and certainly for the next 10 years or so), as I shall explain now, Foucault's influence was significant as well as contradictory.

First, of course, he signified a different way to engage with the problematic of truth and falsehood; he also signified a new way of understanding capitalism, its ideology of freedom and its techniques of control. But then, and this is my second point, the way the discontent of the people in the ex-colonial countries surfaced even when the shine of victory of the West was still present – the first Gulf War had taken place to be followed within few years by U.S. bombings over Belgrade, the anti-globalization movements had just commenced and then while on one hand there was Rwanda, on the other hand the second *intifada* followed in Palestine within a decade of the first one – it was clear that the colonial problematic had returned, in the face of which Foucault's ideas were not enough. With globalization, what I have termed elsewhere as the 'postcolonial predicament' had emerged and was to characterize our time. This time, to say simply, is the time of postcolonial predicament.

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[10] Both available online – for *On Practice*, see http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm (accessed on 28 June 2013); for *On Contradiction*, see http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm (accessed on 28 June 2013).

But before we go into the implications of this formulation and the paradox, we can see briefly how in the 1980s and 1990s some of the significant writings in India were shaped by Foucault's influence. As I said, the influence was evident first in the writings of the subaltern studies scholars.[11] Partha Chatterjee's 'More on the Modes of Power and the Peasantry' (1983) and David Arnold's 'Touching the Body: Perspectives on the Indian Plague, 1896–1900' (1988) clearly bore the mark of Foucault, and in the *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Guha and Chakravorty Spivak 1988), the section in which these two essays were included was explicitly titled, 'Developing Foucault' (pp. 351–426). We can also recall in this context Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition* (2003). Historical essays such as these, in particular on the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the Partition of 1947 (e.g. Bhattacharya 2007; *EPW* 2008), were again marked with Foucault's ideas on the body, on violence, on minor and insurgent knowledges or on how a new type of power had emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from within the society, replacing the earlier monarchical model. There were also a number of writings that commented on the history of ideas and historiography in terms of analysing discourses. Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (1986) was a landmark in this respect. It was built on Edward Saïd's *Orientalism* (1995), one of the foundational works of postcolonial studies and known for starting the 'cultural critique' by postcolonial scholars worldwide in the 1980s. Both books became quite influential in understanding colonialism in a particular way. Saïd's own work, we have to remember, was heavily influenced by Foucault's analysis of formation of discourses and the ability of a discourse to form objects of analysis. Chatterjee followed up his earlier book with *Nation and Its Fragments* (1993). These two and some other books written at that time, for instance, Shahid Amin's *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (1995), were exercises in analysing discourses and showing how social texts form and relate to the issue of knowledge and power. They showed how discourses clashed and how disciplines represented the emergence of new knowledge and power mechanisms. They showed that with colonialism a new type of power had emerged from within society, whose origins lay in the encounters between colonial politics and nationalist engagement with the former. This trend culminated in several volumes authored in the 1990s as collections of essays, one of the prominent among them being *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal* (Chatterjee 1996) where again Foucault's insights were explicitly mentioned. In all these writings, we find marked emphasis on the cultural signifiers of the new type of power that these authors claimed as emerging. Veena Das' *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors* (1990) was one of the well-known anthropological works in the postcolonial milieu that exhibited the style of new social theory influenced by Foucault. In this context, we have to remember that Saïd (particularly, with his *Culture and Imperialism* (1994)) and

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[11] In all, twelve volumes were published from 1982 to 2005, the first volume being published by the Oxford University Press, Delhi, and the last being published by the Permanent Black, Delhi. Detailed bibliographic information available at https://dl-web.dropbox.com/spa/zohkohb0i282t94/Area%20Studies/public/subaltern/ssmap.htm (accessed on 3 July 2013).

along with him some other thinkers remained throughout this period, and not by design, the conduit for the passage of the required skill and ideas for discourse analysis from Western university campuses to Indian shores. In India, the result was that while Foucault was less influential in philosophy or history, he seemed to have been securely lodged in literary studies in the universities.

Yet, it is worth noting what Edward Saïd states in his 'Foreword' to the *Selected Subaltern Studies* volume:

> In reading this selection one becomes aware that this group of scholars is a self-conscious part of the vast postcolonial cultural and critical effort that would also include novelists like Salman Rushdie, Garcia Marquez, George Lamming … poets like Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mahmud Darwish, Aime Cesaire, theoreticians and political philosophers like Fanon….
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> Yet this extra-ordinary common effort is not … an exclusively non-European phenomenon…. None of the Subaltern Studies scholars is less than anything a critical student of Karl Marx, for example, and all of them have been influenced by many varieties of Western Marxism, Gramsci most eminently. In addition, the influence of structuralist and post-structuralist thinkers like Derrida, Foucault, Roland Barthes and Louis Althusser is evident, along with the influence of British and American thinkers like E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and others…. (Saïd 1988: ix–x)

Significantly, the names of Lenin and Mao were absent from the list, which perhaps truthfully put on record the figures that had influenced the radical scholars of the 1970s and 1980s. Saïd, indeed, captured the milieu well. What he did not mention, or had no way of realizing in 1988 when he wrote those lines, is that this was too good a mix to last. While the Saïdian 'postcolonial' developed a distinct style out of this brew and the writings of Das, Chatterjee, Amin and others mentioned earlier carried that style and indeed had contributed greatly to the development of that style, in not too distant future, this style was to relapse into what I call, for lack of a better word, 'culturalism'. It means trying to understand the materiality of conflict through an over-emphasis on cultural signs and symbols, at times taking the latter to be the former and, at the end, losing grasp of the dynamics of the material world itself.[12] In the process, even when all the while our postcolonial scholars were speaking of power, there was less concrete analysis, less light on our time and more bad examples of the genealogical method, with many of them finally proving to be less Foucauldians and not more.

But the story of Foucault in India and in our time does not end with this enchantment with hybridity. A number of factors, possibly unintended, have proved responsible for his re-emergence in our time as a foundational thinker, notwithstanding his blind spots. First, of course, the deep hold of Marx and other Marxist thinkers (along with the new influence of other Left thinkers like Negri, Agamben and the rediscovered Frankfurt School[13]), combined with the curiosity towards new

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[12] For a critique of such culturalism, see Samaddar (2006).

[13] The 'Frankfurt School' refers to a group of German theorists who analysed the changes in Western capitalist societies in post-Marx period. The name is derived from the Institut fur Sozialforschung in Frankfurt, Germany, where these theorists worked in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Some of the most well-known theorists were Max Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse. They along with others wrote some of the finest accounts within critical social theory of

approaches, keeps Foucault relevant and deeply studied. Second is the time brought in by globalization and therefore attention on the consequent political and social struggles and new interest in what democracy and liberalism are. Third, two of Foucault's specific ideas have proved enormously fertile today, again possibly not in the way he wanted them to be developed: his idea of biopolitics (who knows in their interpretations and applications whether Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose are right or Negri[14] – and judging this is not our task) and connected to this the idea of governmentality. Finally, two new developments have made some of his writings relevant: the phenomenon of terror with the beginning of the new century[15] and the developmental discourse that has made population groups specific targets of management in countries like India.

We can note now what these new factors have meant in the development of a new style and form of writing and analysis. If we take some of the remarkable feminist writings in the last decade on events such as the Partition,[16] or on borders, or, say, a theme like law and jurisprudence, we can already see the creativity of writers at work. Only in a small way indebted to Foucault, they have achieved the kind of criticality, rigour and scholarship of which Foucault would have been the first to appreciate. Their ideas and style make their expositions of the physicality of social conflicts much less metaphysical. Similarly, Dalit writings have achieved similar rigour in describing the physics of social conflicts (e.g. Ilaiah 2005). Oral narrative has been the most potent weapon in retrieving the contentious past.[17] In this new, critical style, which one may now term as a post-subaltern studies scholarship, we have a more rigorous and political way of understanding our existence and a new urgency to combat the postcolonial predicament – and this we should note is characteristic of not India alone but throughout the world – given that with globalization, invasions and renewed wars, we have a return to the colonial past and with that a warlike model of politics. We can say using the words of Charles Tilly that contentious politics is the stuff of our inquiry. This is not a slogan. We have to only think of the implication of what this means. For that, we have to first make a small digression.

Given Foucault's explanation of the appearance of rights,[18] it is instructive to see in this context how in the new writings radical scholars in India have tried to combine Foucauldian ideas with investigations of different kinds into the origin of rights.

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the changing nature of capitalism. They also generated a tradition of critical cultural studies on the basis of their analysis of the processes of cultural production and political economy. The leading figures of the School sought exile in the United States after the rise of Hitler in Germany.

[14] We can read with interest Rabinow and Rose (2003).

[15] For a general discussion on this theme, see Reid (2006) and also Morton and Bygrave (2008).

[16] I have in mind writers like Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin (1998), Urvashi Butalia (1998) and Ratna Kapur (1998, 2005), to name a few and very arbitrarily.

[17] One of the finest examples is an autobiography of a Dalit woman, Viramma, recorded, written and edited by Josiane Racine and Jean Luc Racine (1997).

[18] In this context, we can refer to three of his writings: two volumes based on his College de France lectures (Foucault 2007a, 2008) and an essay from the Tanner Lectures (Foucault 1979).

These new investigations remind us of some of the writings of the late Charles Tilly. In one of his classic writings, Tilly (1988) had argued that rights were claims, also entitlements. He said that entitlements were enforceable claims on the delivery of goods, services or protection by specific others. Tilly planned to understand wherefrom rights such as citizenship rights had originated. Following Barrington Moore (1966), he argued rights were historical products and outcomes of extremely acute contentions. Democracy meant collective claim making in the making of rights and that crucial rights come to fruition by means of rebellions and revolutions. Tilly doubted the centrality of feudalism in the account of genesis of rights; he argued that crucial events had occurred after the general dissolution of feudalism; also he did not give huge importance to the issue of ideas in this history and gave emphasis on grounding rights in specific histories of different regions. This was a classic essay, and this is how he posed the question, namely, there are several fundamental questions concerning how rights spread to larger populations and how they eventually become citizenship rights: Were the rights wrested from local authorities and spread to the larger population from there? Did benevolent despots grant these rights to a few, which were eventually passed down to the rest of the population? Or did the rights spread due to a struggle at a national scale? (Tilly 2002). Tilly supported the last perspective and argued that struggles at national scale had to do with the rise and spread of rights. Rights and duties were enlarged and enforced obligations – the result of bargaining between the two parties – states and peoples. Tilly was using here two planks in formulating the theory of contentious politics. First, he seemed to say that democracy as a process of transformation was perched on a national template. It was the national sphere in which collectives could emerge and make claims. Second, these claims often beginning in the form of claim-making actions settled finally in a series of bargaining. Bargaining, as we know, is a collective action; thus, there was again a twofold meaning in Tilly's usage here: struggles over demands made by the state on their subjects, by subjects on the state or by subjects on each other and struggles by specific groups of subjects to enter the polity, to help others to enter the polity, to defend certain polity membership or to exclude others from the polity. In this process, bargains and struggles of both kinds resulted in citizenship rights. Yet, while inquiring the origin of rights, he did not oversimplify the situation and argue that this meant a weakening of states. In a series of writings, he had explained how on the other hand in early modern Europe, which had no previous experience of large-scale bargaining, the state and its subjects witnessed two developments at the same time: bargaining between state and the subjects and, second, which actually caused the former, the passage from indirect rule to direct rule, as due to internal and external power struggle and competitions, states in Europe now required standing armies in place of the earlier practices of mercenary troops, rented foreigners. States found it necessary to create standing armies consisting of members of the domestic subject population. Indirect rule meant that the states till that time had to rule through a series of local power holders. Bargains over the supply of resources therefore were of different type. Direct rule, on the other hand, was centralization of power by means of which the states took charge of resources including human resources. The nature of bargaining

changed with that. Direct rule creates rights. Precisely at a time when Michel Foucault through a series of lectures (Foucault 2007a) was showing us the possible past of democracy involving securitization of life, politics, territory and the emergence of rights as guarantees of existence in a risk society, Charles Tilly was presenting a related but a different explanation. On this we shall have to read closely his arguments in *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Tilly 1990).

We can continue with this contrast in explanation (owing to a good measure to the contrast in the explanatory tools – for Foucault, it was mainly a survey of thinking; for Tilly, it was a survey of incidents, events, institutional measures, contentious legislations, actions, etc.). For Foucault, it was the overall emergence of biopower and biopolitical mechanisms within which rights and controls emerged. For Tilly, the explanation depended on a relational framework. Rights congealed the relation between the rulers and the subjects. He went on to explain how the creation of a national army consisting of its own subjects created also the obligation to concede the claims of the latter. Maintaining a standing army was costly; it required increased levels of taxation and, as Tilly argued in "Where Do Rights Come From" (1998), more opportunity cost for population. Bargaining was required from both sides, and rights and obligations of citizenship rose from this process. It also meant grant of national rights only to a minimum set of people. Tilly's main argument was that the creation of mass national armies created the rudiments of national citizenship in Europe. Rights eventually expanded. He pointed out that struggle for one kind of rights prepared claimants to struggle for the next kind. Or consider the way in which he compared nation states with protection rackets – levying money from the subjects in exchange of offering them protection. 'Consider the definition of a racketeer as someone who creates a threat and then charges for its reduction' as he wrote in a chapter ('War Making and State Making as Organised Crime') of the well-known volume on state and states, namely, *Bringing the State Back In* (Tilly 1985). Tilly admitted that this was just a theoretical sketch, but we can see the main elements of this model: (a) the claim-making agent or the claimant and the target of claim can reward or punish each other in a significant way, (b) the two are thus bargaining over those rewards and punishments, (c) both parties or one of them is also bargaining with third parties having interest in these claims and (d) in this relational process the parties to the claims constitute durable identities and stakes on each other. This was a fascinating explanation of the origin of modern power, distinct from Foucault's explanation, but as I said they are related. In all these researches, Tilly, like Foucault, never bothered with the explanatory mechanism or the heuristic device. If Foucault shifted from the structural to the archaeological to the genealogical method of inquiry, Charles Tilly also changed his methods frequently: from anthropological inquiry to handling large series data to event centric analysis to appreciation of stories to pure archival work. He at times stressed the structure of contention, at other times the process of contention and still at other times the pure relational dynamics.

I hope readers can now understand why I took this detour in order to convey how radical thinkers in India from the 1990s combined what they had learnt from Foucault with other ideas and models of contentious history, some of which got their first concrete expositions in other kinds of writings including those of Tilly.

I am not suggesting that there has been an intellectual agenda to combine Foucault and Tilly. But in several writings of ethnographic and historical nature, we can find the combination of the contentious approach of Tilly with Foucault's views on power. The work that immediately comes to mind is Nandini Sundar's *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar 1854–2006* (Second edition 2007) or my own two books on contentious politics (Samaddar 2001, 2007).

All these, particularly the continuing relevance of Foucault (but relevant in a different way from the earlier phase), are of course possible today, because of a new understanding of Foucault in India with the arrival of some of his writings hitherto unpublished in English but now made available to wider readership. First came the three-volume *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (Foucault 1998–2001). Then his *College de France Lectures* (Foucault 2007a) became accessible, and these took radical readership by storm. Here was almost a new Foucault (at least to the English language audience), with new significance of his researches and writings. One day we shall probably say that the 'Foucault effect'[19] in India began really with these. The lucidity, directness, relative lack of restraint (needed for a book) that at times made those lectures take unexpected turns and the nature of these lectures as submissions to a continuous workshop of ideas – all these qualities make in some way the other Foucault: speaking, experimenting, admitting, gesturing to other views, reconciling and conceding; in short they make him more open and more dialogic to new interpretations and more capable of suggesting new research agenda than his published books would do. But this also means that in today's time there is greater scope of engaging with him, similarly, an increased scope to make post-colonial understanding more relevant to politics in the wake of globalization. This makes today's study of Foucault more meaningful and interactive or dialogic. It is possible to think today of rescuing him from the academic trap.

However, this possibility depends on the resolution of two questions. I shall end with brief discussions on them. First, what will happen to his thesis of governmentality, which Foucault adherents lapped up with enthusiasm and which gave birth to huge number of studies on population groups, governments, administration, public health, urban management, demography, etc., in fact a mushroom of micro-studies of management, and was put forward as the central concept linking his political and ethical views? Will this find a permanent place in terms of influencing postcolonial thought? Second, what will happen now to philosophy that is philosophy in the way Foucault wanted to practise it? Both these questions are difficult; also, we are not fortune-tellers of ideas. But a study of the present dynamics of the spread of certain ideas may itself be an interesting task, particularly since Foucault himself had advocated the idea of present as history and of pursuing investigations in the spirit of what he called political journalism.

Partha Chatterjee (2004) has in a series of articles used the Foucauldian concept of governmentality to argue that postcolonial democracy is shaped by modern governmental techniques to manage population and the consequent kind of politics

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[19] I am referring to the book of Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (1992).

with which the governed population has responded. He has argued that the implication of this reality is that while disenfranchised people may not have formal rights, the sheer necessity to govern them means that the government has to allow the disenfranchised the scope to fashion their own politics of survival and subsistence. And this inaugurates an effective politics that refashions aspects of modernity and the state. It also means that resistance of the subalterns emerges out of, rather than operating outside of, the government. He terms the entire site of such struggles, bargaining and negotiations (these are, he says, combinations of legality, semi-legality and illegality) *political* society, as distinct from *civil* society, which Foucault too did not think as possessing any emancipative or empowering capacity for the disenfranchised. Chatterjee's ideas have been debated; his ideas have been referred to in some of the recent research in urban sociology and urban politics; he, too, has refined his idea on this further – but we can see the looming shadow of Foucault, who showed how rights in democracy operate under a broad canopy of governmental policies, restraints, disciplines and regulations and how liberalism as a practice and a science of government indicates predicated rights. The radical Left as we know in India as elsewhere disagrees with this interpretation, and in India it is difficult to visualize Chatterjee's thesis gaining approval of the radical scholarship in the present time[20] – because as of now this present is extremely contentious, violent and warlike, bearing all the evidences of an all-out social war – a milieu in which an explanation of popular politics in terms of the operation of governmentality (and the birth of the subject through governmental operations) may appear too soft and disregardful of the desire for autonomy in radical, democratic politics. Chatterjee has defended himself by saying that it is time that we study the noncoercive forms of power. Radical scholars will in turn ask which Foucault should be accepted: the Foucault of *Society Must be Defended* (2003) or the Foucault of *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008)?

But this question is linked to the way Foucault developed the idea of governmentality and biopolitics. We have to remember, however, that each time he approached the issue, he added a little to what he had argued earlier. There is no one, definitive text. Therefore, it is difficult to summarize his view for our present purpose – in order to see how much it is relevant for the postcolonial time. In brief, we may say that governmentality is the link between his explorations in two sets of relations: first, his exploration of the relation between political rationality (by which he would also mean the genealogy of government) and the techniques of domination and, second, his exploration of the relation between ethics (by which he would mean the genealogy of the subject) and the technologies of subjectivity. Governmentality links the formation of the modern politics and the formation of the subject. Foucault, through his lectures of two successive years (see Foucault 2008), tried to sketch a genealogy of governmentality from the classical Greeks and Romans through the Christian idea of pastoral guidance to the idea of state reason and the police in the eighteenth century. He investigated in this context liberal and neoliberal ideas

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[20] See Chatterjee (2008a); criticisms of his views (John and Deshpande 2008; Shah 2008; Baviskar and Sundar 2008) and his reply (Chatterjee 2008b).

in order to show how neoliberalism works to govern or shape the conduct of populations through the deregulated market that considers the whole of society as its domain. If governmental rationality has produced neoliberalism, he wanted to say that neoliberalism, and liberalism in general, was a political project. We can even say that he was almost arguing that political economy was a part of this governmental rationality, and not an ideology of a particular form of production.

We can now see the difficulty of scholars in the postcolonial milieu in warmly welcoming such an inference. What happens to the body/power question that Foucault had raised in *Discipline and Punish* (1991)? What happens to his assertions that the relations of power are to be understood in terms of war, struggle and conflicts? We must, however, note in this connection that the seeds of Foucault's last turn were hidden in *Discipline and Punish* itself. Let us read him attentively: he commented in that absorbing book that the modern mind within the order of war began a fantasy of a society that was like a body machine, not an industrial machine but a socio-military machine, which would cover the whole territory of the nation and to which each individual would be occupied without interruption but in a different way: 'Disciplinary power as its correlative an individuality that is not only analytical and "cellular", but also natural and "organic"' (Foucault 1991: 156). And then he wrote in an extremely terse way in which only he could write:

> Politics, as a technique of internal peace and order, sought to implement the mechanism of the perfect army, of the disciplined mass, of the docile useful troop, of the regiment in the camp and in the field, on manoeuvres and on exercises.… If there is a politics-war series that passes through strategy, there is an army-politics series that passes through tactics. It is strategy that makes it possible to understand warfare as a way of conducting politics between states; it is tactics that makes it possible to understand the army as a principle for maintaining the absence of warfare in civil society. The classical age saw the birth of the great political and military strategy by which nations confronted each other's economic and demographic forces; but it also saw the birth of meticulous military and political tactics by which the control of bodies and individual forces was exercised within states. (Foucault 1991: 168)

We know that because Foucault did not explore the links between the two, and in his later research, he emphasized the individual body, leaving behind the other theme of strategy and masses behind, at times almost arguing that there was a disjunction between the two with no interface. But postcolonial researches, while benefiting from his writings, take a different line. They demonstrate the link between sovereignty and governmentality, juridical power and molecular power, mass and the body and normalcy and exceptionality.[21] Therefore, this new scholarship, while appreciating the insights of *Discipline and Punish*, does not accept his contention that law, legitimation, will and consensus, or what he described as the juridical model of power (1982), do not help us understand the emergence of modern disciplinary power. Therefore, this new scholarship has had extreme difficulty in accepting Foucault's last turn, whereby discipline had been relativized

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[21] One of the detailed instances of this new approach is the collection of writings in Kannabiran and Singh (2008).

in the perspective of micro-political phenomena, which Foucault would now understand as biopolitics. For Foucault, the earlier model of power now had given way to a new model, termed 'governmentality'. That is to say, government does not operate as right or violence but as 'conduct of conducts'. It ensures the right conduct of population – self-regulated conduct – in a deregulated society and market, and ethics in this way connects up with politics, which is now biopolitics, and power, which is now biopower. First, Foucault had cut the head of the king or the sovereign; now, he was able to cut the head of politics.

As I have said, given the reality of pervasive conflict and the established legacy of anticolonial resistance, the postcolonial society is neither settled nor pacified, nor can it be left to self-regulation. International political managers are perpetually busy in teaching postcolonial societies to self-regulate, but passions still rule politics. So is the case in the international arena where the logic of war, interventions and recolonization cancels the prospect of any successful neoliberal management. In fact, after the crash and meltdown of 2008–2009 and the postcolonial predicament, which is global, it is extremely difficult to see the late works of Foucault gaining positive approval beyond the circle of Rose and few others who have nothing to offer for popular politics. In India, on the other hand, there is now an increasing amount of researches in the areas of law, extraordinary powers, nature of sovereignty, exceptions, etc., all of these in a creative way, which integrate Foucault's ideas with a kind of nonconformity and radicality that society is generating now. We cannot forget that already social inquiries into the body and the physical aspects of our political life have taken interesting new turns, but this is nothing new. The entire tradition of what Lenin had termed 'militant materialism' had begun with the body, and its attention never left the body in distress, in discipline, in power, in desire, as object of torture, as object of surveillance, as victim of hunger, etc., and even if its normalization makes us forget its significance, those who run the society will not allow us to forget – thus, every day, we hear slogans of the corporate body, nation as the 'geo-body', the woman as the body of desire and pleasure, legal body, 'king's two bodies', indeed, society as the body, etc.

In this postcolonial milieu, what will happen to philosophy that is philosophy in the way Foucault wanted to practise it? In any case, the boundary between philosophy, in this case political philosophy, and social theory has now almost vanished, and Foucault would have been least concerned with that prospect. He wanted philosophy to cross the line of grandeur and enter the place of immanence and become in that way endurable, workable and thinkable. In that sense, he remained a student of Louis Althusser. In that sense, he did what Althusser had termed 'philosophical practice', because 'philosophy is a certain continuation of politics' (Althusser 1971b). In that sense, Foucault taught us how to practise philosophy. History, a critical anthropological reflection, a rigour in logic, a devotion to reality and, to use the words of Marx in his preface to *The German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1932), a determination, to settle accounts with our past 'philosophical consciousness' – all these marked his career as a thinker. Therefore, notwithstanding how he reached India, or precisely because of the way he reached India, radical postcolonial political thinking will keep Foucault as a resource. He will not be a

castaway, though to be sure his 'American moment' will not return here.[22] But that also means that the postcolonial engagement and dialogue with Foucault will continue. To rephrase the words of Althusser (1971c), namely, that it is better that Lenin read Hegel after he read Marx (Lenin said that this was the reason why he now understood Hegel better), similarly, it is good that we have come to appreciate Foucault and his legacy through the militant materialist experiences.

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[22] The significance of the difference in Western and postcolonial receptions of Foucault will be clear, if, for instance, one juxtaposes the Indian writings referred to in this chapter with the account given by Colin Gordon (1996).

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