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**DISCIPLINES AND SUBJECTS : ANTHROPOLOGY,
HISTORY, MODERNITY**

It is a pleasure and honour to deliver the 14th KS Mathur Memorial Lecture. I thank the Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society and Professor Sukant Chaudhury for the invitation. This oration and occasion carry for me a special charge, at once affective and academic, emotional and intellectual. Hopefully, this would soon become clear.

Born to anthropologist parents, I grew up in Sagar (central India), Delhi (old and new), and Shimla (north India). My earliest years were imbued with a lingering sense of how terrains (or, times/spaces) of the “vernacular” and the “cosmopolitan” ever overlapped yet only met each other in curious, quirky, and contradictory ways. In such meeting(s) and mating(s) of the “vernacular” and the “cosmopolitan”, of Sagar and Lucknow, who occupied an important place? Actually, it was Professor KS Mathur, or Mathur Uncle to me. A friend of my parents – he called my father, Bhai Saab and my mother Bhabhi-ji – Mathur Uncle visited Sagar every now and again, staying at our home. He was a figure of immense import toward my childhood imaginaries. In the mornings of those visitations, I vividly recall Mathur Uncle’s blue brocade dressing gown and the manner of holding a tooth brush in his mouth, as he walked around the house.

A confession or two, now: while I received my own blue dressing gown – when one could actually be got in my size – from the beginning I was firmly told not to mimic Mathur Saab’s trick of toothbrush in the mouth: You see, unlike him, I dribbled the toothpaste on the floor, an unseemly sight and worse. In the evenings of those visits, Professor Mathur and my father smoking cigars, as they consumed their libations and chatted, seemed the substance, soul, stuff of friendship. This is what I mimicked with the chocolate cigars that were got for me from Delhi or Bombay (I forget now). Mathur Uncle bore a gentle persona, an inimitable style of speaking, which suggested the essence of Lucknow *adab*. Also, I reckon that I was drawn to him because he was short like my mother, unlike the tall and larger than life persona of my father.

An abiding memory of the Mathur family is of my mother and I staying with them at their Bungalow in the Lucknow University campus. This was

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after a memorable train journey from Jabalpur to Lucknow, which opened me to all sorts of sensory and olfactory delights. And it was during this visit that pink rasgullas were secured for all, especially for a small Saurabh. Despite their beguiling colour, the rasgullas were somehow bereft of the wetness-moistness that is the mark of the sweet. This led Mathur aunty (Mrs. Vimla Mathur) to quip, “*aaj hum log rasgulle nahin sirf gulley kha rahe hain!*” Could there have been a funnier moment in my very young life? Somewhat later, seeking my vocation in research and teaching, I was trained in history but drawn toward anthropology, also encountering Mathur Uncle’s work on caste in a Malwa village and other related studies. I was very proud that I shared an intimate bond with him. And so I am more than gratified to be delivering this lecture in the memory of Professor Mathur. Thank you, again.

As evidenced by Professor KS Mathur’s village studies and his wider body of writing, in speaking of anthropology my reference is to cultural-social anthropology and sociology, at large. In India, since at least the 1950s these disciplines have developed together raising important issues of the genealogy of academic disciplines, which cannot be discussed in this essay. My point now is that in this talk I shall refer to sociology-anthropology conjointly under the term social anthropology, including also ethnography. Here, I focus on anthropology, history, and modernity, especially delineating the arena of historical anthropology.¹

The talk has four sections. I begin by briefly outlining my understanding of modernity and historical anthropology. The second part raises a few questions around formative orientations of anthropology to time and temporality and of history to culture and tradition. The third part considers, respectively, important developments in study of pasts and communities, colony and empire, and nation and nationalism on the subcontinent, which form part of the dynamic between the two enquiries. These developments have variously emphasised practice, process, and power and often brought together perspectives of gender and sexuality, postcolonial and subaltern studies. The concluding section widens the address of the talk by turning pithily to disciplines of modernity.

I

Before proceeding any further, it is important to confront the elephant in the room, that category of categories, modernity. Here is a thumb-nail sketch of how I approach and apprehend modernity. Now, upon my reading, modernity is not the sole product of, say, Cartesian dualities or a singular Enlightenment predicated upon aggrandizing analytics or the imperial endeavors of the British, the French, and the Dutch after the eighteenth century or, indeed, all of the above. Rather, the modernity of the Enlightenment (with its acute interplay between race and reason) came only after the modernity of the Renaissance (with its interleaving of metaphysical instrumentalism and mercantile capitalism), quite as the constitutive violence of modernity of later

colonialisms was preceded by modern genocides of the empires of Americas at large. The point is that the processes of modernity since the sixteenth century need to be approached as being constitutively contradictory, contingent, and contested: protocols that are incessantly articulated yet remain also critically out of joint with themselves.

I am suggesting that the Janus-faced nature of modernity, its decisive split-ness, is made up of processes that are enmeshed with each other. Dispensing at once with heroic histories and dystopian totalities, at stake are recognitions and requirements of checkered narratives. Thus, modernity is made up of formative conjunctions between: the Renaissance and mercantilism; “the Age of Discovery” and deaths by genocide; births of democracy and expropriations of settler-colonialisms; reason and race; science and slavery; industry and colony; technologies and traditions; Enlightenment and empire; secularized religion(s) and seductions of state; figures of disenchantment and enchantments of modernity; liberty and gender; egalitarian spirits and heteronormative assumption; and critical theory and modern scholasticism. These are only a few examples, taken from my wider discussions of such questions.²

The point is that it precisely these procedures that emerge expressed by subjects of modernity, some of whom are modern subjects of course. Here, my reference is to historical actors who have been both *subject to* the processes of power and meaning of modernity, but also exactly *subjects shaping* these procedures. That is, the two meanings of the term subject. Widening the address of modernity, the subjects who have fashioned while being subordinated to its processes include indigenous nations/communities, the bearers of blackness (at “home” and in “diasporas”), and other subaltern and marginal – peasant, artisan, worker-class, migrant, destitute – peoples, all of different sexualities across the world. Needless to say, such subjects have diversely articulated (gendered and sexualized) modern processes of colony and post-colony, empire and nation, and slavery and settler-colonialism. Accompanied by middle-class and elite actors, all these subjects have registered within their measures and meanings the formative contradictions, contentions, and contingencies of modernity in non-Western and Western theatres.³

At stake are subjects of modernity that are subjects-at-large of settler-colony and sexuality, slavery and desire, gender and empire, exhibitory-orders and nation-regimes, race and heritage, capital and memory. It is keeping such processes and subjects in view that I now change gears, turning to the relationship between anthropology and history. This disciplinary relationship has been difficult and contradictory. But the alliance between these enquiries has also been passionate and productive. Over the last five decades, the interchanges between these disciplines have acquired new meanings in theoretical and empirical studies.⁴ Here, archival materials (normally used by historians) have been read through anthropological perspectives, ethnographic sensibilities. Meanwhile, field work (conventionally the method of social

anthropology) has been combined with historical analyses. This has served not only to bring together but to open-up the very meanings of the “archive” and the “field”. The blending has produced novel narratives of historical anthropology.

How are we to understand historical anthropology? Is it a form of knowledge principally involving archival research *and* field work? In this manner, are field work and archival research themselves approached as already known methods that subsequently find productive combination in this interdisciplinary terrain? Is historical anthropology, then, only an enquiry that conjoins the methodologies and techniques of two taken for granted disciplines? My own efforts involve approaching historical anthropology in a manner that *rethinks* its constituent enquiries: history and anthropology as well as their wider interplay. But there is rather more to the picture. For I also widen the range of the term discipline. That is, I consider the enquiries and knowledges of the human sciences as intimating not only modern disciplines but as disciplines of modernity. Such emphases extend in their own ways to disciplines and subjects of literature, critical thought, and postcolonial theory.

II

In conventional commonsense, history is concerned with questions of time and temporality, while social-cultural anthropology concentrates on culture and tradition. At the same time, two points stand out here. First, neither time nor temporality is the exclusive prerogative of the historian, each finding diverse expressions in anthropological-sociological practice. Indeed, studies in social anthropology have opened up the taken for granted nature of time and temporality, by exploring how different populations, groups, and communities understand and experience time and history differently. This is a question to which I shall return. Yet, ethnography has also made a clear distinction between “traditional” communities and “modern” societies. Here, the former, traditional communities, are seen as characterized by myths and rituals, while the latter, modern societies, are understood as defined by history and rationality. This is to say that social anthropology has often spatially segregated time and temporality, such that tradition, myth, and ritual are projected as static and unchanging, while the modern, the historical, and the rational are comprehended as dynamic and ever-transforming. Second, the concepts of culture and tradition might have been central to social anthropology, but they also have been variously present in history-writing, especially as received ways of understanding and explanation. Acting as short-hands in historical narratives, culture and tradition have carried formidably contradictory meanings. If all this sounds difficult, let me now further clarify these statements.

In different ways, time has been central to the anthropological enterprise. Consider the development of evolutionist anthropology in Victorian Britain and its colonies such as India, South Africa, and Australia. Today,

there is wide acknowledgment of the epistemic violence, which is the violence of knowledge, that attended the birth and growth of modern anthropology. Here were to be found historical sequences, based on evolutionary principles and racist presuppositions, which understood cultures in terms hierarchical stages – hierarchies and stages of civilizations, societies, and peoples that were primitive or savage and civilized or modern. Clearly, evolutionary and racist understandings of history and time were central to such social anthropology.

Evolutionary anthropology was replaced by functionalist and structural-functionalist paradigms in the discipline in the first half of the twentieth century. At the same time, were the earlier hierarchically-ordered, evolutionary mappings of cultures and societies – invoking the “savage” and the “primitive” – entirely removed from the discipline with the emergence of fieldwork based “scientific” anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century? It is worth pursuing this question.

First, the apparent ruptures of functionalist and structural-functionalist anthropology with evolutionist principles on the grounds of their speculative procedures had wider consequences. This involved an innate suspicion toward, the placing of a question mark on, history as such within the discipline.⁵ Now the practice of social anthropology could proceed in contradistinction to the writing of history.

Second, these tendencies combined with the influence of the French sociologist Durkheim in the shaping of structural-functionalist tenets. Such conjunctions led to pervasive presuppositions that societal arrangements were better understood by overlooking their historical transformations. All this involved analytical oppositions between “synchrony” and “diachrony” or “statics” and “dynamics”. Here, statics or synchrony was given much greater importance over dynamics or diachrony concerning the method of anthropology.

Third and finally, these emphases were further bound to wider social anthropological tendencies toward seeking out continuity and consensus, rather than change and conflict, in the societies being studied. Such ambivalence toward time and change in culture and tradition was implicitly based on broad oppositions, which we noted earlier: namely, oppositions between Western societies characterized by history and reason, on the one hand, and non-Western cultures held in place by myth and ritual, on the other.

Such premises came to underlie the ethnographic enterprise. Thus, key procedures of anthropological practice frequently presented a timeless “tradition” of the natives, the tribals, and the indigenous, such that these people were always located in a lasting present, an “ethnographic present”. They were without a past or a future: Or, the present was their past and their future. It only followed that the assumptions of the discipline came to sharply separate the dynamic time of the ethnographer’s society from the static temporality of anthropological objects.⁶ Together, in widespread ethnographic

understandings, change and transformation were rarely internal and usually entered “native” societies in external ways.

The Dutch anthropologist-critic Johannes Fabian has pointed to the repeated ways in which anthropological inquiry has understood its object as the other through measures turning on temporality. Here, the ethnographic object of enquiry, the primitive-native, is denied the “coevalness [or simultaneity] of time” with that of the anthropologist subject, the ethnographer-scholar.⁷ In other words, the (observing) subject or the anthropologist and the (observed) object or the native are precisely separated through time to inhabit distinct temporalities. Here, the historical time of the former, the anthropologist is always ahead of the mythic time of the latter, the native. Such temporal divide has meant that not only anthropological objects but ethnographic practice have emerged as being, what we might call, *out of time*. On the one hand, the fact that anthropological writing itself takes place in time was ignored, since the time of the modern subject and the objective time of scientific knowledge were both taken for granted, rather than requiring understanding. On the other hand, the temporality of anthropological others – their time/timelessness – could only emerge as being external to and always behind the time of the writing of ethnography.⁸ All of this has defined what we might call the “savage slot” and the “native niche” of anthropology, which have shaped the discipline.⁹

None of this is to deny that such schemes have been attended by challenges and exceptions within the discipline. Indeed, for a very long time now, anthropological understandings have displayed various approaches toward temporality and history, from willing ignorance to formative ambivalence to constitutive contradiction to imaginative understanding. All of this is exactly related to the formations and tensions of anthropology as a discipline of modernity. The immediate point is that approaches to time within the ethnographic enterprise require staying with longer. The constant presence of time within anthropological enquiry indicates the persistent influence of evolutionist understandings on contemporary anthropology. At the same time, beyond purely disciplinary considerations, they reveal pervasive “meta-geographical” projections.¹⁰ Turning on time, such projections carve up social worlds into enchanted terrains of tradition and disenchanting domains of modernity.

I noted that just as time and temporality have been differently present at the core of anthropology so also the writing of history has variously involved ideas of culture and tradition. First, processes of the institutionalization of the historical discipline in the Euro-American world in the nineteenth-century meant that history-writing emerged as bearing the flag of the nation and empire. This is to say that histories were often national-imperial histories. Not only was the discipline often ethnocentrically inward-looking, but it was shaped by sharp distinctions between the civilized and the backward – concerning peoples and nations. Second, it followed that in Western countries

the historical accounts that were undertaken of distant, colonial, territories frequently presented such pasts as footnotes (or appendices) to the history of Europe. Third, several histories construed in colonized countries and newly independent nations were themselves often written in the image of a progressive West, albeit using unto their own purposes the oppositions of European modernity.¹¹ Fourth and finally, important strands of history-writing in the West and elsewhere could express hermeneutic, historicist, and counter-Enlightenment impulses, but their relationship with an exclusive, hierarchical Western modernity was double-edged. Such histories acutely articulated notions of culture, tradition, and the folk, generally of the nation. They critically questioned thereby the pretence of an aggrandizing reason that they saw as the leitmotif of the Enlightenment, particularly of the French variety. Conversely, such articulations of hermeneutic, historicist, and counter-Enlightenment tendencies themselves could not escape the developmental schemes of a somewhat singular history centred on Europe.¹²

What about more contemporary history-writing on India? Here, too, the notions of culture and tradition are often expressed in tendentious ways. If this is true of historical accounts that are principally un-reflexive about their presuppositions, they no less pose problems for history-writing that actively espouses these categories. Consider the collective subaltern studies project and its reconstruction of the forms of culture and consciousness present in the initiatives and movements of subordinate groups. There were key departures here, but difficulties in subaltern studies also contain links with the place of culture and tradition within the project.¹³ Here, culture often appeared as an *a priori* element rather than as a critical category in the writing of history. On the one hand, cultures of subalterns remained somewhat static frameworks of belief and behaviour, ironically corresponding to an earlier anthropological notion of culture as an “entire way of life”. This is to say largely unchanging and broadly homogeneous blueprints of thought and action, which underlay the passivity and resistance of subordinate groups. On the other hand, a preoccupation with the autonomy and agency of the subaltern was articulated by dualities between resistance and domination and the subaltern and the elite. This meant that meaningful practices of subordinate groups before authority appeared as simply opposing domination. Thus, cultures and traditions of the subalterns were placed outside the productivity of power. It is precisely such issues that have emerged as critical questions in the recent transformations of anthropology and history, and it is to these departures that I now turn.

III

Key expressions of historical anthropology are acutely present in recent reconsiderations of history. Three overlaying emphases have played a salient part here. Each of these has challenged the presumption that there is only one

true version of history, which can be found through the correct presentation of events and facts. To begin with, it has been admitted that there are different forms of historical consciousness. In other words, distinct groups and communities understand, express, and experience history differently. And these different forms of historical consciousness vary in their degree of symbolic elaboration, their ability to pervade multiple contexts, and their capacity to capture people's imaginations. Second, it only follows from this that history does not just refer to events and processes out there, somewhere, but that it exists as a key resource – a crucial resource at the core of shifting understandings of social worlds. This is why people fight for what they consider as their history, including living and dying in the name of the past. Third and finally, there has been the raising of critical questions considering how history writing has emerged tied to the modern nation, why histories are so often national histories: for example, history of India or Pakistan, of France or Britain, of the US or Germany. Similarly, there have been important questions raised about how history is so often imagined as needing to follow development and progress, especially of a Western kind. Together, in approaching the past and the present, such efforts toward newer forms of history-writing have often bound two impulses: the impulse to cautiously probe and affirm social worlds and the impulse to carefully narrate and describe them. Now, there is nothing “postmodern” about such search for alternative histories. For, the endeavours have taken truly seriously requirements of evidence and fidelity to facts. Yet they have also sieved historical evidence through critical filters and shaped facts unexpected. Here are facts that speak in the uneasy echoes of limiting doubt rather than deal in dead certainties.¹⁴

The emphases outlined above have *not* turned to oppositions involving cyclical notions of the past as characteristic of the East and linear conceptions of history as constitutive of the West. Nor have they approached the assertive appropriations of the past in historical and contemporary worlds by submitting to views that each of these visions is equally true. Rather, they have precisely tracked expressions of history as made up of conflict-ridden processes of meaning and authority.¹⁵

The explorations have traced the variability and mutability that can characterize the perceptions and practices of the past of historical communities. They have extended to tracking the uses of the past and their contending validities in the making of social worlds, especially the play of power in the production of history. Such writings have variously combined historical field work and ethnographic archival research. Unsurprisingly, they have not only explored the persistence of oppositions between myth and history in authoritative understandings. They have precisely placed question marks on pervasive projections of the West and nation as history, modernity, and destiny—for all people and each community.¹⁶

No less than history, the acute rethinking of community has lain at

the core of historical anthropology. Consider groups belonging to adivasi and dalit populations. Here, key questions have been raised regarding persistent presumptions of community as intimating a tightly bounded entity – one tending toward consensus in its expression; involving primordial tradition; and as broadly opposed to modernity. This questioning has had compelling consequences. On the one hand, communities have come to be understood as active participants in wider elaborations of colonialism and empire, state-formation and modernity, and nation and nationalism. On the other hand, there have been explorations of the many meanings of community shaped by its members, as providing substance to their differences and identities. Together, these developments have involved examinations of the crucial location of community within wide-ranging processes of power alongside its own internal divisions as expressed in terms of property, gender, law, and office.¹⁷ Moreover, such efforts have been strengthened by incisive accounts of communities as questioning and contesting dominant projects of meaning and power, including those turning on religion and caste and empire and nation.¹⁸ Finally, there have been diverse efforts to write greater heterogeneity into the concept of community. Indeed, recent rethinking of the category has derived further support from the critical exploration of the antinomy between community and state. These moves have queried the analytical binaries of modern disciplines. Such writings further suggest that prudent procedures in historical anthropology are afoot in the rethinking not only of community and history but also of colony and empire and nation and nationalism.

Colony and empire are not new to anthropology and history. At the same time, the critical crossovers, the mutual mixing between the disciplines in recent times have led to newer expressions of these categories and processes.¹⁹ Indeed, innovative work in historical anthropology has built on and broken with prior anthropological and historical analyses that debated the complicities between anthropological practice and colonial projects, constructed detailed accounts of economic systems and social structures spawned under empire, and tracked the responses of the colonized to processes of colonization.

What are the shifts in the study of colony and empire that have been made possible by current intersections of history and anthropology?²⁰ To begin with, these transformations are keenly manifest in astute refusals to treat the pasts of colonies as mere footnotes and appendices to the history of the metropolis, the European home country. Recall that this pervasive tendency projects the latter, the metropolis as providing the former, the colony with Western civilization and European governance. Rather, recent writings have explored the intimate linkages between the metropole and the colony. Such explorations have carried forward earlier examinations and contemporary discussions of imperial histories and colonial cultures as deriving from interactions between the colonizer and the colonized. They have crucially considered the mutual shaping of European processes and colonial practices,

imaginatively analysing also how developments in distant margins could influence changes at the core of the metropolis.²¹

Moreover, current work in historical anthropology has acutely questioned colonialism as a homogeneous project, a monolithic endeavour. It has variously explored the critical divisions between different agents of colonialism, diverse agendas of empire. Here are to be found discussions of the representations and practices – and the boundaries and contradictions – of imperial agents, settler communities, and evangelical missionaries in colonial locations, which is to say a focus not only on colonized populations but on colonizing peoples.²² At the same time, intimations of the plural articulations of empire have informed understandings of the transformations of caste and kingship, community and kinship, environment and nature under colonial rule.²³

Finally, diverse dimensions of colonial cultures have found critical expression in historical anthropology. At stake are varied, overlapping cultural forms entailed by colony and empire, which have themselves been diversely explored within the field. The explorations have covered the politics under empire of art, popular representation, museums, and consumption.²⁴ They have further extended from tracking the numerous modalities of knowledge and power as expressed in colonial discourses and practices²⁵ through to tracing imperial articulations of space, crime, and the body.²⁶ The critical spirit of such work has been extended by two other developments. In the first place, writings in history and anthropology that have focused on the forceful work of gender as variously influencing and shaping colonialism's cultures, including the terms of sexuality and race under empire.²⁷ And, in a similarly critical move, the manner in which not a few of the analyses discussed above have rethought the past and the present of the social scientific disciplines, especially keeping in view their linkages with colony and nation.²⁸

Critical conjunctions between anthropology and history have played an important role in reformulations of approaches to nation and nationalism, state and modernity. Conventional wisdom presents nations and nationalisms as always there, as ancient, as primordial. Now, important writings have questioned presuppositions regarding nations and nationalisms as primordial, innate entities. They have queried also the ways in which widespread portrayals of the past can be differently yet intimately bound to authoritative, biographical portraits of nation-states and nationalist endeavours. In such questioning a key role has been played by acute recognitions that nations, nationalisms, and national cultures are historically and socially constructed processes. This is to say that although nations and nationalisms are among the most important features of modern times, they nonetheless display attributes of what Benedict Anderson has called "imagined communities."²⁹ Following such recognitions, there have been astute studies of the historical construction of nations, nationalisms, and national cultures as projects and processes of power. Here ethnographies and histories have come together with sociological discussions

and literary explorations not only to question familiar understandings of these categories but to do this by tracking their varied creations.³⁰ At the same time, other related endeavours have highlighted the importance of tracing the ways in which the ideological practices and pedagogical performances that construct nation and nationalism acquire a forceful presence in the world, assuming pervasive worldly attributes.³¹

These emphases have been accompanied by analyses stressing the distinctions and differences at the core of nations and nationalisms, particularly considering their subaltern expressions, anti-colonial manifestations, and gendered dimensions. The subaltern studies project and associated scholarly developments have led to rich explorations of the idioms and trajectories of wide varieties of subaltern endeavours. Against the tenor of nationalist propositions and instrumentalist projections concerning the politics of the lower-orders, these analyses have shown that in the broader terrain of anti-colonial politics subaltern ventures followed a creative process of drawing upon as subverting the ideas, symbols, and practices defining dominant nationalism. Such initiatives articulated thereby a supplementary politics with distinct visions of the nation and particular expressions of nationalism that drew upon yet went beyond the aims and strategies of a generally middle-class leadership.³² Unsurprisingly, extending the terms of these discussions, it has been emphasized that middle-class anti-colonial nationalisms embodied their own attributes of difference and distinction. The endeavours translated and transformed the images of the sovereign nation and the free citizen through forceful filters of the subjugated homeland and the colonized subject.³³ With distinct accents, other critical approaches have unravelled the presence of gender and the place of women in formations of nation and articulations of nationalism. The focus has involved, for instance, the mapping of the nation in terms of domesticity as the gendered formulation of the homeland as a feminine figure – the idea of *Bharat Mata*. It has extended to the ambivalent terms of participation of women in nationalism and the ambiguities attending their definition as citizen-subjects.³⁴ In this way, the lens of gender has helped to incisively explore the attributes of authority and difference at the heart of nations and nationalisms – in their dominant and subaltern incarnations. These different yet interconnected emphases have clarified that across shifting contexts and terrains, nations and nationalisms have articulated wide varieties of historical practice and disciplinary power. Similarly, formations and elaborations of modernity are increasingly discussed and debated today as contradictory and contingent processes of culture and power.³⁵ All of this is indicative, once more, of the productive possibilities opened up by historical anthropology and its ongoing transformations. Revealed thereby have been emergent genealogies and mutating histories that have defined – through space and time – the making and unmaking, the continuities and shifts, of imperial imaginaries, colonial formations, national dispensations, and modern worlds, at large. This brings me to the last section of this lecture. Here I spread my

wings wide, very wide, to discuss disciplines of modernity.

IV

What does it mean to rethink history and anthropology as *disciplines of modernity*, bearing the archival tracks of its protocols and procedures?³⁶ Beginning with the Enlightenment and Romanticism, historical and anthropological knowledges each appeared as mutually if variously shaped by overarching distinctions between the “primitive/native” and the “civilized/modern.” It followed that the wide-ranging dynamic of empire and nation, race and reason, and analytical and hermeneutical orientations underlay the fraught emergence of anthropology and history as institutionalized enquiries in the second half of the nineteenth century. And so too, across much of the twentieth century and through its wider upheavals, it was by attempting uneasily to break with these genealogies yet never fully even escaping their impress that these enquiries staked their claims as modern disciplines. This entailed especially their discrete expressions of time and space, culture and change, tradition and modernity. Unsurprisingly, the mutual makeovers of history and anthropology since the 1970s have thought through the formidable conceits of both these knowledges while reconsidering questions of theory and method, object and subject, and the archive and the field. As we noted, the newer emphases have imaginatively articulated issues of historical consciousness and marginal communities, colony and nation, and empire and modernity. Yet, such valuable departures have often also been accompanied by an uncertain reproduction of the oppositions between power and difference, authority and alterity, even as the haunting antinomies between the “savage/native” and the “civilized/modern” have found mutating expressions within emergent hierarchies of otherness.

All of this underlies anthropology and history as constitutively contradictory, necessarily split, and formatively contended disciplines of modernity. As archive and practice, these disciplinary formations have at once inscribed and unraveled modernity’s traces and tracks. Indeed, abiding antinomies between static, traditional communities and dynamic, modern societies have played a crucial role in exactly these scenarios. Three points stand out. First, underlying the disciplinary formations of anthropology and history, the broad binary alluded to above has articulated other enduring oppositions between ritual and rationality, myth and history, community and state, magic and the modern, East and West, and emotion and reason. Second, as salient imprints of developmental-temporal projections of universal-natural history as well as singular-spatial pathways of an exclusive-Western modernity such antinomian procedures and oppositions have not only sought to name and describe but to objectify and reshape the subjects of their desire and despair. Third, the actual elaborations of the pervasive separations between enchanted/traditional cultures and disenchanting/modern societies have imbued them with

contradictory value and contrary salience, including ambivalences, ambiguities, and excesses of authority and alterity. These contending attributes simultaneously straddle rationalist and historicist, progressivist and romantic, and analytical and hermeneutical dispositions; post-Enlightenment thought and non-Western scholarship; and the actions and apprehensions of subjects of modernity, at large. All this suggests that anthropological and historical knowledges, far from being easily autonomous academic enquiries, emerge densely embedded in the world, that is as *worlded*. They are, in a word, disciplines of modernity.

Notes

- 1 The text of this talk is derived from my distinct discussions – in the English and Spanish languages – across the last three decades. Some of these are indicated in the notes ahead. The essay has retained the informal style of the oral presentation.
- 2 See especially, Saurabh Dube, *Disciplines of Modernity: Archives, Histories, Anthropologies* (London, New York, and New Delhi: Routledge, 2022).
- 3 Saurabh Dube, *Subjects of Modernity: Time/Space, Disciplines, Margins* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).
- 4 See, for example, Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Brian Axel (ed.), *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and its Futures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview, 1992); Saurabh Dube (ed.), *Historical Anthropology* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Saurabh Dube, “History, anthropology, and rethinking modern disciplines”, in Mark Aldenferer (ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 1-40. See also, K. S. Singh, *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist: A Study of Birsa Munda and his Movement, 1874-1901* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1966).
- 5 I register the distinction between the “functionalism” (of Malinowski) and “structural-functionalism” (of Radcliffe-Brown) as analytical procedures, but I also consider together the shared orientations of these traditions to temporality in the practice of anthropology. George Stocking, Jr., *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology 1888-1951* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 233-441.
- 6 Not only anthropological but historical writing also can set up a sharp separation between the principally dynamic time of modern subjects and the relatively static temporality of all others. Hans Medick, “Missionaries in the rowboat? Ethnological ways of knowing as a challenge to social history”, in Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. William Templer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 41-71.
- 7 Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
- 8 Here I am engaging and extending the critical arguments of Fabian, *Time and the Other*.
- 9 On the notion of the “savage slot” of anthropology see, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Anthropology and the savage slot: The poetics and politics of the otherness,” in Richard Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe:

- School of American Research Press), pp. 17-44. On the “native niche” of the discipline see, Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 10 Saurabh Dube, “Anthropology, history, historical anthropology”, in Dube (ed.), *Historical Anthropology*,
- 11 On this issue, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: Who speaks for ‘Indian’ pasts?”, *Representations*, 37, 1992, 1-26; and Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and connection: Rethinking colonial African history”, *American Historical Review*, 99, 1994, pp. 1519-1526.
- 12 The critical edge of my arguments notwithstanding, there is much to be learnt anew from all these different tendencies of history-writing. Specifically, the distinct entwining of hermeneutical and analytical impulses in different modes of historical endeavour requires especial attention.
- 13 Dube, *Stitches on Time*, particularly chapter 5.
- 14 See especially, Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Dube, *Stitches on Time*.
- 15 Shail Mayaram, *Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); Yasmin Saikia, *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to Be Tai-Ahom in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Dube, *Stitches on Time*. See also, Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).
- 16 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). See also, Ashis Nandy, “History’s forgotten doubles”, *History and Theory*, 34/1 1995: 44-66.
- 17 Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Past: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Rowena Robinson, *Conversion, Continuity, and Change: Lived Christianity in Southern Goa* (New Delhi: Sage, 1998); Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); Prem Chowdhry, *The Veiled Woman: Shifting Gender Equations in Rural Haryana 1880-1980* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, and Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002). See also, Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- 18 Ishita Banerjee-Dube, *Religion, Law and Power: Tales of Time in Eastern India, 1860-2000* (London: Anthem Press, 2007); Shail Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press,

- 1997); Dube, *Untouchable Pasts*; David Hardiman, *The Coming of the Devi: Adivasi Assertion in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); See also, Anand Pandian, "Securing the rural citizen: The anti-Kallarmovement of 1896", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 42, 1, 2005, 1-39.
- 19 For a detailed discussion see, Saurabh Dube, "Terms that bind: Colony, nation, modernity", in Saurabh Dube (ed.), *Postcolonial Passages: Contemporary History-writing on India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6-14.
- 20 Elsewhere, I have discussed the tensions between the somewhat singular renderings of colonialism in postcolonial scholarship, on the one hand, and the innate analytical privilege accorded to continuities between Indian regimes and British rule in influential historical work (as represented by the writings of Christopher Bayly, for example), on the other. Rather than merely taking sides, such tensions are productive to ponder. Dube, *Stitches on Time*. See also, C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 21 Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999); Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Other studies in this domain include: Sudipta Sen, *Distant Sovereignty: National Imperialism and the Origins of British India* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Sumathi Ramaswamy, *The Lost Land of Lemuria: Fabulous Geographies, Catastrophic Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Michael H. Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004); Antoinette M. Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
- 22 Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Dube, *Stitches on Time*; Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea: Women, Labour, and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, C.1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001); Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). See also, Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- 23 K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Pamela Price, *Kingship and Political Practice in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ishita Banerjee Dube, *Divine Affairs: Pilgrimage, Law and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2001); David W. Rudner, *Caste and Capitalism in Colonial India: The Nattukottai Chettiars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliney in Kerala, Malabar, c. 1850-1940* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2003); Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism* (London: Anthem Press, 2002); Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and*

- Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Ajay Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forest, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ann Gold and Bhoju Ram Gujar, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).
- 24 Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Daniel J. Rycroft, *Representing Rebellion: Visual Aspects of Counter-Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005); A. R. Venkatachalapathy, *In Those Days there was No Coffee: Writings on Cultural History* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006); Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 25 Martha Kaplan, "Panopticon in Poona: An essay on Foucault and colonialism", *Cultural Anthropology*, 10/1, 1995, 85-98; Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Richard S. Smith, *Rule by Records: Land Registration and Village Custom in Early British Panjab* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).
- 26 Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Mathew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Ian Barrow, *Making History, Drawing Territory: British Mapping in India, C. 1756-1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Collingham, *Imperial Bodies*; Satadru Sen, *Disciplining Punishment: Colonialism and Convict Society in the Andaman Islands* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 27 For instance, Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 28 An important role has been played here by the probing of disciplinary links with the colonial archive. Dube, *Disciplines of Modernity*; Tony Ballantyne, "Rereading the archive and opening up the nation-state: Colonial knowledge of South Asia", in Antoinette M. Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 102-121.
- 29 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).
- 30 Pandey, *Remembering Partition*; Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000). See also, Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth-Century Banaras* (New

Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

- 31 Consider the emphases of, for instance, Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*; and Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 1998).
- 32 The literature is vast. At the same time, major tendencies in the work on popular nationalism within subaltern studies and related intellectual endeavours are discussed in Dube, *Stitches on Time*; and Dube, "Terms that Bind", 14-20.
- 33 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
- 34 For instance, Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998); Anupama Roy, *Gendered Citizenship: Historical and Conceptual Explorations* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2005).
- 35 Elaborations of these issues are contained in Dube, *Stitches on Time*; Saurabh Dube, *After Conversion: Cultural Histories of Modern India* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010); Saurabh Dube and Ishita Banerjee-Dube (eds.), *Unbecoming Modern: Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2019); Saurabh Dube (ed.), *Enchantments of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2010).
- 36 For wider discussions of these questions see, particularly, Dube, *Disciplines of Modernity*. See also, Dube, *Subjects of Modernity*.

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