Why Decolonisation of the Indian Mind Must Begin at School

YASHOWARDHAN TIWARI AND ANIRBAN CHANDA

Much ink has been spilt over the theme of this piece time and again, almost reducing it to the level of banality. As a product of a colonised post-colonial society ourselves, we contend in this piece that although ‘decolonisation of the mind’ has turned into a cliché, yet probably rightly so.

What needs to be grasped is that decolonisation is a slow, conscious and rigorous process, to free the mind from the shackles of our colonised selves, and allow fluidity and fecundity of the intellect beyond the contours of our dwarfed and compartmentalised imaginations.

*But in order to do so, we first need to remind ourselves repeatedly of the very existence of our colonised selves.*

In the process, we might have to build up a theory based on concepts borrowed from our colonial masters, but that shouldn’t prevent us from going ahead.

The very inability to produce a counter-narrative of our own vindicates the deep-rootedness of the colonial narratives and hints at the immediacy of decolonisation. The dependency on themes borrowed from colonial narratives to root out our colonised selves is probably the price we pay to be able to produce original thought.

**Gandhi & Decolonisation**

It comes as rather ironical that decolonisation as a theme and an academic category to be dealt with seems to have been reduced to a rational science by the academic circles, stripping it of all its creativity and imaginative possibilities.

*What we fail to realise is that the process of decolonisation doesn’t come as a whole and it cannot be initiated and accomplished by prescribing formal procedures or a set of doctrines to be followed.*

Rather, on the contrary, it comes in bits and pieces, one step at a time. It isn’t a dull scientific process to be worked out and drawn to its logical conclusion, rather it’s a beautiful hope of freedom that enacts itself in the theatrics of thought experiments.

Today, the enacting of the process seems to be a product of modernity itself, colonisation being its illegitimate child. Here, we cannot pass further without mentioning Gandhi.

**Decolonisation Not Possible Without A Critique Of Modernity**

*Gandhi, the original thinker that he was, very well realised that the decolonisation of the mind was not possible without a critique of modernity.*

Not only did he critique modernity, but also tried earnestly to save the Western civilisation from its modernity. While putting forth original arguments highlighting the ills of the modernity of the West, he deliberately and consciously avoided using any of the big categories produced by the West.

*Gandhi’s ‘Hind Swaraj’ shouldn’t be seen simply as a political manifesto but should also be treated as a manual to initiate the process of decolonisation.*
Gandhi very well knew the importance of the rituals he performed (such as avoiding using big categories) to exorcise the colonised selves of the subjugated Indian minds.

Each and every baby step mattered, as it brought one closer to the ultimate goal of decolonisation. Gandhi’s idea of swaraj also reflected an attitude towards bringing about a decolonisation of the mind by establishing one’s rule over one’s self rather than just having a self-government. The least we can do is to learn these tactics from Gandhi.

The ‘Colonised Methodology’

The primary site of initiating the ritual of decolonisation is the university. Sadly, it is the schools and universities where the colonial narratives get adopted and perpetuated instead of being contested. Today, our entire education system, both at the school and university level, is completely dominated by these hegemonic narratives. It serves as a kind of neo-colonialism and our budding minds get willingly subjugated en masse.

While the academic circles do acknowledge this phenomenon and try their best to counter and dismantle the hegemonic narratives, they ultimately fail to do so as the critical frameworks that they implement are borrowed from the West.

Unless these frameworks are totally abandoned, one cannot escape the highly complicated web of colonisation.

Resurrecting The Culture Of Original Thought

Original thinking has been wiped out completely due to research methodologies adopted from the West. The resurrection of a culture of original thought requires not just a radical critique of the present research methodologies but also a questioning of what should actually qualify as research work. This demands greater value to be attached to original works and also new frameworks for mapping the legitimacy of such works (which includes putting up a challenge to the culture of citations being considered as a sign of authenticity of the work).

Decolonisation of the Indian mind calls for much de-schooling and unlearning.

It also requires developing a new language, and thinking in the dialects of Indian cultures and traditions. And this needs to be done playfully, in bits and pieces, discarding all sorts of doctrines and theories and procedures.

It is a radical freedom which one dreams of here, which can be secured only through the ethics of a child. The first step towards it could be a creative re-reading of Gandhi, and devising new ways to attain swaraj. The moment you stop thinking within the confines of straight-jacketed themes and binaries of the West, and start dreaming of an alternative world of new possibilities, it may very well be said that the ritual of decolonisation has been initiated.

(Yashowardhan Tiwari and Anirban Chanda are enrolled in BA LLB (H) courses at Jindal Global Law School (JGLS), O P Jindal Global University, Sonipat. This is an opinion piece. The views expressed above are the authors’ own. The Quint neither endorses nor is responsible for them.)