The Many Faces of the Modern in Banaras

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My some thirteen year old research experience of Banaras is as of a hall of reflecting mirrors: every time you look around there are new angles to be interpreted. It is like an Escher painting where the level is not what it seems and going down leaves one on a floor higher than before. More directly speaking, the research experience has shown: any claim for the free might actually refer to the controlled; a search for the oppressed actually turn up the oppressor; a going down the social hierarchy to find the lowest rung reveals new rungs descending underneath.

We can make it more concrete still by discussing some four levels of the study of Banaras. My intention in doing this is not so much to engage in a discussion of Banaras but rather to use the data on Banaras to reflect on the study of modernism from postmodernist perspectives in urban areas.

Banaras as a Sacred Centre

The first is where the voice of the scholar merges with that of the mythmakers of Banaras. The mythmakers are an amorphous, professional group of people in diverse occupations such as pilgrimage, ritual, and temple priests; scholars of Sanskrit and sacred literatures; expounders of this literature in the vernacular Indian languages; publishers and advertisers; agents and middlemen; managers of lodges and boarding places for visitors. Their unstated intention is to maintain at an intense level the complex of beliefs about Banaras that is responsible for drawing hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and secular visitors to Banaras every day.

These beliefs range from the sacred centrality of Banaras in creation that triggers the desire to once behold this all encompassing city, to a more mundane interest in receiving some immedi-

ate fruits of the trip to Banaras and the actions performed there. The centrality of Banaras implies its superiority over every other place of pilgrimage and ritual, and climaxes in the belief that to die there is to attain moksha or freedom from rebirth. The mundane fruits of the trip there would include success in one's career, health, prosperity, and good luck for oneself and one's offsprings.

The mythmakers of Banaras spin off very precise stories, descriptions, and directions regarding how a pilgrim to Banaras should regard the city and how he should behave there. What is particularly fascinating to a scholar of Banaras is the way in which the spatial past and present of the city is woven into these legends and directions. The very geography of the city constitutes its sacredness, and to cover it with walking and viewing comprises an important dimension of the tributes to be paid to this unmatched centre.

In a very specific way, therefore, Banaras as an urban centre is open for interpretation as this special locus of Hinduism and its nucleus for ritual and pilgrimage. By "specific" I mean that the "myths" are elaborate enough to be cited selectively for diverse purposes on diverse occasions, include full fledged discussions of history and geography, as well as compete statements on cosmogony and cosmology and the mystical constitution of an individual. The myths therefore occupy a space finely separated from the area occupied by the disciplines. They are used by the professionals mentioned above in place of "science" of any other kind, of course. They are also used by scholars of Banaras in this way: by amateur scholars because impressed by the virtuosity of the myths and because they have an unstated desire to promote Banaras as well; by professional scholars for reasons worth discussing below.

It is nothing less than the critique made by a postmodernist perspective. The critique states that the older, more established approach sees consensus and seamlessness, does not recognise discord and struggle, and claims representativeness for the most dominant image of the city or whichever subject. I would emphasize another dimension. This critique refers to a theoretical shortcoming, but there is a research failing as well. The methodology of our disciplines is such that we have to wear blinders to any but our defined area of interest. Scholars have neither the time, nor the inclination, nor the training for hearing and then listening to any voices outside the one chosen for audition. It is not that they have any theoretical predilection for believing in either a consensus in general in the society they are studying nor

in the particular singularity of their chosen object of study. It is just that their research necessarily is so focused and exclusive that there is no room for discordant and contrary representations.

In the one interpretation of Banaras that I am discussing therefore, not only do the professional mythmakers describe Banaras in a particular way, but professional scholars also describe it in the same way, in an echo of each other. Our concern naturally is only with the scholars. For the mythmakers it is an activity that concerns career and success. For the scholars it implies commitment to a theoretical perspective and signifies their non-allegiance to a more non-concensual, postmodernist approach.

In this interpretation of Banaras, modernism or modernization plays no role. For the sacred specialists and their constituency, the city is outside time, and cannot be affected by temporal events unless presumably an event of the same dimension as the initial arrival of Shiva were to take place. Then presumably the history could be written anew. But meanwhile history consists of the given, already stated, to be elaborated, explained, commented upon, extrapolated from, and restated according to inclination. There is no acceptance of either of the two versions of modernity we will adopt in this paper: modernity as a structure and ideology that originates in the west and finds its way elsewhere, following historically upon other structures and ideologies; and modernity as a perspective upon life that could be held by anyone anywhere, implying a belief in and desire to improve, progress, and be positively instrumental in shaping one's life.

This interpretation of Banaras by scholars is non-historical and non-anthropological in that it does not concern itself with who the originators of its ideology are, whom it addresses or affects, and what its relationships to any other structural features outside it may be. There are no human subjects or objects, therefore no change in the dimension of human lives. It is of course also orientalist as an academic project, and as such a crucial part of the modernizing and colonizing project of Europe.

Banaras as a City of the People

Although humans play no role in the above interpretation, it is humans that the vision is addressed to, and humans who accept or reject it. In another perspective, one discovers that people neither accept it nor reject it; they are indifferent to this view. It is a non sequitor which they cannot or will not choose to comment on. One's guess is that they see it as ideology, developed successfully by the sacred specialists for their own purposes, therefore a matter between sacred specialists and pilgrims, and of no relevance to other kinds of specialists, either as subjects or objects.

The picture of the city that emerges by contrast is of a city of workers and players: people in diverse occupations whose lives are divided between their work and their leisure, and whose identities are constituted likewise by their work and their leisure. A clean dividing line that emerges is between "the people" or "ordinary people" or "workers" or "lower classes" and those upper, elite, more moneyed, powerful, or leisured.

These workers live in and describe a city equally precise as the one in sacred literature, only with no literature to back it up. It is a city of *mohallas* or neighbourhoods, often with occupational specialization, sometimes with age of residence in the city as criterion, but seldom any other. It is further visualised as a space divided up according to its capacity to provide music, social activity, more specific entertainments, and more general civic facilities such as open places. In this vision, in stark contrast to the first view described above, the river is delightful for swimming and boating, not because she is a goddess descended from the brow of Shiva. The temples are convenient spots for post-bathing visits and locales for singing and recitation, not divinely ordained targets for visits. The ponds and ghats are exciting and pleasurable, with no particular advantages described in the literature or extolled by specialists. The best parts of Banaras are those unmentioned in Banaras' praise literature and unknown to pilgrims: the inner spaces of the mohallas, particularly at night as occasion for interactive performance; and the outer spaces of the city, across the river and at the peripheries, for outings and picnics.

The ideology that emerges from this view of Banaras is of identity as based on freedom, deriving from artisanal and related work conditions, and on appropriateness, deriving from many sources, some not unrelated to literature. The appropriateness

matches an individual and his activity, in descending order of importance, to the season, the day, the time, the sex, the neighbourhood, the personal proclivity. For each of these in practice inseparable dimensions, there is legitimization in Sanskrit treatises, as for instance in those of Ayurveda and architecture. The relationship is not known to the practitioners, and would not be considered important by them if known.

This ideology and its practice is part of a larger structure to which it is consciously related, a structure both spatial and temporal. Spatially, workers belong to a social system in which what they do and are is dependent on others' roles as well. Much of their ideology is shared by others in the society, much is condemned, and much is patronised, but there is always a relationship. Much of course is derived from the highers in the social hierarchy, which is again neither known nor considered relevant. Temporally, workers are part of a continuum they themselves call "tradition" in which a large part of the legitimacy of an activity comes from its age. Looking beyond their own articulation, one knows that there is a direct reproduction and continuation of work and leisure patterns in the city, largely function of occupational training, education or its lack, and conservative social relations. There is again derivation from upper class activities, but in a complex way, in that the class division has not been static or clear-cut. Some activities shared by so-called upper and lower classes in the past are now labeled as mere lower class activities with their histories forgotten.

There are temporal and spatial dimensions to this city of the people. It is a city of actors and subjects, but who interestingly speak of geography and time as deciding features. The nature of a certain space dictates the nature of actions to be performed there. The time of year or day decides the exact actions to be performed there. Are men not free then? Freedom consists of the capacity to be subject to no other controls but that of "the appropriate", because "it would be a madman who would do the wrong thing at the wrong time." This commonsense can be explained within the terms of the disciplines of geography, history, anthropology, and so on, but needs also to be seen as a structure larger than the sum of its parts, that bears no reductionism. Equally with the ideology of Banaras as a sacred centre, Banaras as a city of the people, is a system of beliefs parallel and non-intersecting, and also holistic and commonsensical, to that of modern science. It cannot be questioned or explained with reference to the terms of modern science.

The difference between the two projections of Banaras is therefore not this. It is that in the sacred centre case scholars do not recognise a voice and a subject; in the popular culture case scholars do. That it is a manufactured ideology in either case is presumably manifest to scholars and most of their readers. That it excludes other views and subjects, and even actively represses and injures them may not be as manifest. But in the sacred centre case there is no importance attached to the recognition of speaker, voice, and partial view preferred by a scholar. In the popular culture case there is more importance attached to this recognition.

In line with this, the people of Banaras are seen as experiencing change and modernization both as they understand and interpret it, and as a scholar may analyse it in its relationship to larger historical changes not quite known to the people living through them, though sometimes coinciding with their own understanding of their experiences. There is modernization in Banaras in the sense of a displacement of an earlier ideology of appropriateness and freedom by many aspects, sometimes consistent and sometimes not, of an ideology contrary to this (though not characterizable by me at present). This has originated with the British and with contact with the West opened up by British rulers and their Indian collaborators. It is through and through "colonial" and not "European", and even not "colonial" as a type to be found in other colonial contexts. It is thoroughly Indian in that it is adaptation and the rationalisation to preferred values, and not any copying or learning, that comprises cultural change.

In the second sense of modernization, the histories of various craft industries in Banaras show a constant impulse to adapt products to a changing market, exploit new demand and create further demand, project one's product in marketable ways, and participate in all accepted ways of improvement and progress. Those who are more dynamic in this, such as weavers and their leaders, are acknowledgedly responsible for their own success. Those who are less dynamic, such as metalworkers, blame only themselves and their social leadership. An interesting facet here is that of education, education in the modern sense. Although people believe in "modernization" as simply self-help, self improvement and change, they also believe that somehow it hinges on the corollary of modern education, or at least literacy.

My two-fold understanding of modernism therefore becomes a heuristic division and crumbles as a practical thing when looking at the data. No one in Banaras today, including Pattabhiram Shastri, the one remnant of an old style Sanskrit

scholarship, could discuss modernism as an attitude of mind without falling into the reference to values, artifacts, and ideas that originate concretely in Europe and are hierarchized as higher than equally functional artifacts, values, or ideas, older or "more native" to Banaras.

Workers and ordinary people in Banaras today are modernizers because such labouring people have always been like that, and because they are participants in an overarching ideology in the city and the nation today whereby only certain criterion of modernity, such as a modern education, can guarantee not only success in life but even mere survival.

The Banaras of the Muslims

The perspective of "the Banaras of the people" discussed above does injustice to at least two other perspectives by claiming or pretending to incorporate them while in fact silencing and repressing them. The first is that of the Muslims.

Now there is not a self-identifiable group labeled "the Muslims", either in Banaras or elsewhere in India, least of all in all India. But there have certainly been efforts to construct such a category, specially by political parties, and very often there has been action based on a presupposition that the group already existed. Scholars write most of the time about "the Muslims" in the past or present without worrying about the necessity of proving whether any such namable group can be demonstrated to exist and on what criteria.

This is not a unique problem in the case of "the Muslims". There are no "artisans" - there is not even such a word in the local languages of Banaras - but rather master craftsmen, labourers, those who own four looms, those who work at home, and so on. There are those who came from Mau and those who belong to Banaras. There are the low and the high and they do not wish to be classified as a single group and such is not their concept or practice.

We are familiar, or should be, with the problem in the category "women". On what basis do we find this immense commonality between those of different regions, occupations, classes, and cultures? In none of the cases do the categories we use match either the conceptual worlds of the people concerned or some indisputable objective criteria. Yet, of course, some categories match worse than others, and some present interesting problems for analysis.

"Muslims" is an analyzable category in that while not a "real" one, it has proved a powerful rallying cry in the politics of modern India. It has provided a pivot for research on 19th century Indian society and an entry point into British actions in the construction of identities. It introduces us to the languages of "communalism". It forces us to confront the power of naming; how naming is constantly creating realities, naming by the state, by unscrupulous leaders, by colonizers and orientalists, even by scholars (within a proportionately smaller sphere of influence naturally).

An analysis of Banaras as a city of the people could find enough that was shared by the people regardless of sectarian differences, and enough that was structurally parallel between those of different sects, for the analyst to make a confident claim for one urban culture that was shared by all lower class people. This analysis, however, could be shown to be comparatively insensitive to the internal, unarticulated, less aggressive and dominant, and therefore less available world of certain artisans.

However we may distinguish religion to refer to only some restricted practices, and others, seemingly of the same set, to be not categorizable as religion at all; and however much we may find it impossible to distinguish in the informant's actual experience between religion and anything else, there is a utilisation of the term "religion" which would not be wise to ignore. In other words we may put aside the question of whether there are "really" any "Muslims" and ask rather how the category "Muslims" has been used in Banaras.

Once rid of this ever retreating enquiry into the "truth", we become privy to information clouded over so far. We can particularly *suppose* Muslims to be a category by taking some of their community leaders' claims to this effect at their word and then proceed to see how this works. What is the history of Banaras for them? What is the cosmogony of the Banaras space? We find that history and geography is differently conceived than for non-Muslims, although undoubtedly this knowledge is differentially held. But there is a private face to being a Muslim in Banaras. It includes, among other things, knowing of the location and significance of various mosques and shrines, the tales of piers and babas, and the complex structural world of Muslim festivals and life cycle ceremonies. It includes, equally, ignorance of the location and significance of various temples and shrines, the tales of birs and mais, and the complex structural world of Hindu festivals and life cycle ceremonies. As said earlier, both the knowledge and

the ignorance is unequal. As occurs with minority communities, Muslims have less ignorance of Hindus than the reverse. Yet, no matter how differentiated within themselves and unable to see their own patterns, there is a characterisable reality to being "Muslim" that is analysable.

If we could hypothetically erase our minds of all the information it contains about the history and nature of Banaras, and begin research with a tabula rasa, only this time going exclusively to informants professing the Muslim faith, what would we come up with? That there was no consensus: there would be views according to whether the professor was Sunni or Shia; Ahl-e-hadis, Deobandi, or Barelwi; Mauwalla or Banarasiya; Madanpur-ite or Alaipur-ite; master weaver or labourer; educated or not; even observant of his surroundings or not. There would be probably some axes we could establish that stood true for all our informants, such as, perhaps, that freedom is the most desirable state, and all men are theoretically free, but some are freer depending on their economic resources. Or that the exemplary person in all history is the Prophet Mohammad, but everyone outside my sect has understood him wrongly, some more than others. Of these axes or outer limits, some would in fact correspond to those held by non-Muslim informants (which we wouldn't know but would find out), such as the first of the two above, and others would be peculiar to Muslims, such as the second.

When I suggest that we would in this instance have to pretend we knew nothing about Banaras or its dominant religion or its official history, I am in fact suggesting that it is extremely difficult to ever escape the official version on any subject, no matter how sincere we are about our objectivity. Objectivity, after all, is limited by what we know and can know given our theoretical approaches. No one can discover anything they do not imagine exists. It remains invisible to them, or non-real, or insignificant.

I am not suggesting that there are in fact "Muslims" in Banaras, or that it is for them an "Islamic" city just as for Hindus it is a Hindu city. I have certainly found so in my research, but then my research was conducted with certain purposes in mind. What I am suggesting rather is that such *might* be the case and unless we hypothesize it we may never find out.

Why I find that the status of "the Islamic" in Banaras is not so much a question of "truth" as of purpose is because first, this is a process that shows acceleration with time over the last 100-150 years. Second, it varies with class, so that the prosperous, upwardly mobile merchant and/or his educated sons will be more

"Muslim" than the illiterate weaver. Third, it increases with modern facilities such as education. Schools and madrases have acted over the last century to contribute in constructing a simpler, more unidimensional, easier manipulated identity than exists outside schools.

The first of the above three processes takes us well outside the city, and we really have to be very familiar with the larger history of North India during the British in order to formulate any conclusions at all about the progressive Islamicization of Muslims in Banaras. The second is a process structurally similar to that in every sect and occupational group of whichever religion and is related to colonialism on the one hand and modernization on the other. Once every group had been given a name and a rank, it was unavoidable that they struggle to associate that name and rank with higher status. It was done partly through creating more luminous histories, partly through reform of existing social practices, and partly through a struggle to purify in the name of an ancient state of grace. Since every caste, real and imagined, does that we might think that the efforts cancel each other out and there is nothing to remark about in the process.

Intention does not equal result as we know. When the Sunni weavers of Banaras adopted the Ansari nomenclature in the 1930s, they gradually developed a set of characteristics that they came to identify as "Ansari". Among these were illiteracy and simple heartedness. These are peculiarly suitable to the needs of the silk industry in that an illiterate and simple weaver is a good weaver who will spend his childhood learning the trade, undistracted by modern education; and as an adult worker will not consider entering into acerbic class relations with middlemen and merchants. Another characteristic, together with that of all artisans, is the love of freedom and the repulsion to servility.

If the desire to reform and purify that led to the creation of the Ansari was an impulse to protest against colonialism and progress, the concomitant features of the new identity had mixed benefits. The Banaras silk industry has expanded, but the labour force's contribution to this expansion seems to hinge on their remaining poor, insecure, and illiterate. The ultimate done in the name of modernization or keeping up with the times has been the opening of madrasas, the religious schools with a stable base of the Quran and a sampling of other subjects acknowledged as part of modern school education. Thus weavers' children are so far doomed to grow up with minimal literacy in Arabic and Urdu, religious teaching, and little other education - all because as good

"Muslims" they cannot be exposed to the secular modern education prevalent outside the madrasas.

There are other Muslims in occupations apart from weaving and such crafts, and there have been other kinds of efforts to modernize among them. One prominent instance is of the followers of Sir Sayyad Ahmad Khan, who maintain that a good Islamic identity can be developed by education in religion along with the modern sciences and languages. They are critical of the Ansaris and their madrasas for being over-inclined towards *diniyat* - religious education - at the expense of the *duniyayi* or worldly, and thus breeding a liability in their pupils in the form of inability to deal with a changing world. The non-madrasa Muslim schools may well be criticised by "secular" or non-religious Indians as being themselves over-inclined towards diniyat, and weakening the impact of their modern education.

The category of "Muslim", I am arguing, is not non-existent. It is "real" in that it has been, and continues to be, used for many purposes, such as to keep a labour force content and unquestioning about their working conditions and the socialization of their sons into the same profession. When we speak of "Muslim", we need to fill in the category with the dimensions of time, economic level, sect, and even purpose, but speak of "Muslim" we have to.

The Gender Politics of Banaras

One of the less literary and therefore less discussed appelations of Banaras is as 'a city of men' (*purushon ka shahar*). The very founder and king of the city, Shiva, is renowned for his disinterest in domestic life and his preference for wandering abroad. His wife had to pursue him and grab him physically many times to hold on to him and even had to manufacture a son from her single body in his absence to ward off loneliness. Shiva is the archetypical ascetic, the *phakkar* and *aghori*, one who observes no norms of civilisations, acts as he pleases, follows simply his moods, reverses codes, and is best not to be seen around with, what with his disheveled hair, unkempt appearance and unpredictable behaviour.

The nature of the city and its inhabitants is closely associated with that of Shiva in all descriptions. By "inhabitants" is meant only the male inhabitants; by descriptions only male descriptions. As far as I know no woman has ever written a popular or indigenous literary description of Banaras. Women are the inhabitants in almost equal numbers, however, and the complete invisibility

of both their work and leisure worlds becomes very striking, once the observer becomes aware of them. However, to become aware of them is itself a task, since every source of information is constructed by men, coloured by their prejudices, channeled through them, and, as I will show below, distorted by them to their advantage. A researcher may find herself ignorant on the whole subject of women unless she hones her research tools very fine.

To learn about women in Banaras one would have to adopt the methodology discussed for underlings, oppressed groups, everyday modes of protest, the colonised, and the weak, and then extend the methodology further. That is, in archival data, to search for the implications of gaps and silences, and question the uses of language whereby certain characteristics are imputed to people and actions without obvious explication. In the archives of the Agrawal Samaj, for instance, one of the richest castes in Banaras, there is abundant data on the activities of the Samaj, its efforts to "uplift" women by establishing a school for them and finally getting it a proper building and facilities some thirty five years later. The imputation of passivity on women is complete, undisputed, and undefended: as potential students who had to be bullied or persuaded into the schools; as teachers and assistants who apparently had not one action to their credit that merited mention in the documents; and as spouses of the members, the Mrs Agrawalas, who held the fort on the domestic front enabling the men to devote their time to public activity.

With this kind of data one has, to begin with, to read "against the grain". The composers of these documents were socially established people with ties both occupational and cultural to other members of the society, and their texts have to be read with this historical setting in mind. Not only are they not 'raw' data in any way, they speak equally eloquently in what they exclude, repress, or belittle as they do in what they glorify and include. These are old historiographical concerns, beginning with 'whom is the text addressing?' or trying to impress?

Closely connected with the care in archival research for a study of women is the development of an oral history project. Although verbal data collected from people does not have the same status as written sources, there is no reason why it should not have that status, particularly when the written sources are so transparently biased that they exclude well known circumstances or logically acceptable possibilities. I seem to be engaged in a crusade here, but if so, it is because the gendered nature of

Banaras life and all the androcentric sources that we typically use to study it are destined to remain disguised in their one-sidedness unless we become far more adventurous methodologically than we are. Fortunately, feminist theory suggests many techniques. It is the practice of feminist research that supplies further methods.

What role does modernism or modernization play in the lives of the women of Banaras? At the first level there is no special "problem of women": they have been workers and continue to be. As workers they are trained and therefore "educated", and are regarded as such. They have a separate cultural world of fasts, festivals, singing, socializing, which is known to men and respected as existing autonomously - the respect demonstrated by non-interference. In these respects women are on a par with, or at the same status with, men. When people seek self-improvement, how to exploit circumstances to their advantage, how to mark progress in the world through their own criteria, it is both men and women who do so. There is no passivity "naturally" associated with women in this perspective. It is only that in articulation and in reportage, the men's worlds predominate and they are all we become aware of.

But modernization as a European born structure of concepts which becomes familiar in Banaras through administrative, occupational, and educational changes and many results thereof, affects men and women differentially. Women become a symbol of each caste or lineage group's superiority and advancement. Woman signifies variously tradition, custom, and culture, that is, a continuation with the best in the past; and by the beginning of the twentieth century the educated woman signifies reform, progress, and a judicious break with the past. In this process women have to be moulded and mould themselves in such a way that they are fully mothers, their original nature and function, pure, protected, virtuous; and are also skilled, competent, aware of modern knowledge.

The contradiction inherent in this requirement was a reality experienced by women and continues to be experienced today. One solution they found was for women to be active, self sufficient and capable, and unmarried or widowed, that is, beyond the demand for service to husband and family. Additionally, for the most ambitious, their lifestyle should be such that they could be classified as *devi*, goddess, or *sant*, saint, therefore austere but powerful, even with an unusual, unpreictable energy; at any rate unchallengeable regarding the more mortal criteria of purity and modesty.

The experience of modernization for women in Banaras has taken the form of a game that can only be understood in cultural terms. Men of various "communities": Agrawalas, Khatris, Yadavs, Halwais - the lower down the social ladder we go the less dramatic their actions - decided that European style modernization was a good thing if it could be adapted to another and more culturally legitimate structure, so that the best of both worlds could be obtained. Partly this was an inside-outside vision: a traditional home and a modern workplace. Partly it was a gendered vision: a traditional wife and a modern husband. But largely it was a complex overlapping of many inconsistent ideas and visions, where some practices in turn seemed desirable because old and others because new, some imitable because derived from the British, others condemnable for the same reason.

The experience for women was that she could strive for education, training, greater choices and further autonomy, all if the image she continued to project was that of austerity and modesty. As leaders, women had to be either goddesses or nothing. In historical record, all the efforts of women had to be presented as the coercion of them for a worthy cause by awakened men.

The story of women in Banaras has these characteristics then: (i) women seem invisible and unimportant compared to their actual contribution in work and socialization, and even compared to the hidden informal agreement in society that indeed women are neither invisible nor unimportant. (ii) When modernization occurs in Banaras in education and lifestyle as response to colonial image construction, women are supposedly resistant and passive and men the actors and visionaries. (iii) The case of the many dynamic and visionary women who not only work in modern institutions but actively create and administer them is explained with reference to their austerity and consequent superhuman capacity. None of the men's energies are explained as derived from austerity. (iv) The result in any case is that however symbolically couched, there do gradually come to be available modern institutions for women, and the public world of work becomes gradually accessible to them. (v) In all modern institutions, however, and in the workplace at large, women's work continues to be lower in status and in qualification, is less rewarded and less acknowledged, and continues to be largely invisible.

The Banaras of the Modernizers

In the eighteenth century and to some extent in the nineteenth century, modernizers equaled Europeans. The reaction of Europeans to Banaras as a sacred centre was uniformly one of disgust, non-understanding, and even repulsion, or at best bemused and distant tolerance. The pilgrimage industry was not given the credit it deserved for a well organised, resourceful industry with excellent advertising and public relations. It was believed by observers and continues to be by most observers, including scholars, that all there is of note in Banaras is its sacred activity, considered "sacred" and not professional. The inherent "modernity" of this inherently capitalistic relations of exchange and even projection have not been recognised then or now.

Artisans and craftsmen are by all association "traditional" and to be sacrificed to the grindmill of history as the wheels turn towards modernisation. The anthropologist goes to study artisans as a search for the indigenous and traditional, and firmly believes any modernisation in technology, production relations, or socialization to be fatal to the craft. So in fact is proved. The children of artisans who acquire a modern education do not in fact continue in their ancestral occupation, nor does that occupation guarantee prosperity in the competition from more modern products with burgeoning markets.

The only industries which survive are those like silk weaving where the workers are tightly united by bonds of socialization and culture and firmly believe that only a careful selectivity towards innovation will guarantee survival. This selectivity includes religious education at its core. A modern Muslim, accordingly, is likely to be a reformist, self consciously Muslim person. Modernization for Muslims began in the 19th century, and modernizers consisted of social and religious leaders from within the community. They found a variety of ways to modernize but each served also to heighten the confessional element in the composition of the modern individual.

The case has been parallel for women. Again, reformers and progressivists in the 19th century have ensured that whatever desirable changes occurred in the conditions of women, these were not at the expense of the preservation of womanhood. In the process this definition of womanhood was probably more finalised, formalised, and fixed than it had been before - very much as the definition of "Muslim" came to be.

We come, after this summary, to the troublesome question of how modernisers in Banaras *should* regard this multi-layered city, given that the needs and requirements of priests, scholars, artisans, cultural minorities, and women are so specific and different. The assumption is that modernisation, in its first meaning of an attitude of self-help and self-improvement is desirable, and in its second meaning of a European derived system of values and actions is unavoidable.

I am proposing this unusual question because I feel that one way to get beyond modernist into postmodernist interpretations of history, and beyond colonial into postcolonial interpretations, is also to throw off the stance of pretending that we, as scholars, are totally neutral and uncommitted, that we are neither modernizers nor non-modernizers, that we live no discourses like that, and can look back at the actions of reformers and progressivists in the past with a bemused and critical and highly intelligent gaze.

Any scholar today, functioning as she does, in the modern academy, is a "modernist" and it is certain that her values and actions also fall into the same world-view. One may be self-critical, however, and one *is* specially when studying those of another world-view, say tribals, peasants, artisans. One is so too unidimensionally, however. If the peasant or artisan in question wishes to modernise one is critical; it doesn't quite fit into the role one has put them into. There seems no escape from holding the view of either the orientalist or the moderniser.

Those who have been worrying about this question have suggested that one recourse is to unpack and render transparent the suppositions of modernity, specially its Eurocentrism. That does not, in practice, make modernity any more suspect for those, say, in Banaras, who feel they know what is good for them, regardless of whether it originates in Europe or elsewhere. In fact their nationalist consciousness is comparatively so weak that they think of the world as either their neighbourhood or the whole universe and little in between. The dominant critique of postmodernist scholars seems to suggest that people would be well off enough left alone but certain reformers, nationalists, and middle class modernizers of insufficient knowledge and vision wished to mould them into a Eurocentric modernisation. People here are attributed a peculiar thinness, a lack of passion and desire, a passivity and insensibility to the larger world - which is not perhaps the intention of the scholar but happens anyway.

I argue, therefore, that a postmodernist and postcolonial approach such as I advocate must take very seriously the process

and presence of modernization for the subjects we study, particularly in the two underrepresented dimensions of its different meanings to different groups, and of modernity as an active choice that means neither helpless coercion nor mindless imitation, but is instead a creative, complex choice, constantly moulding itself to the actor's preferences.

To take this seriously means (i) for the past, to actually place ourselves in the position of the modernizers and reformers and question what it was they did that seems to us so "wrong" or detrimental or incomplete? What would we have done in their place? (ii) for the present, apart from denigrating the funny and sometimes mixed-up efforts of people, what do we have to offer as "solutions" in place of their own? We come in this way to appreciate the rationality and the appropriateness of their choices much more and to realise the limited as well as paradoxically the wide range of choices.

We get outside the bounds of established history and anthropology when we do this, but not outside the bounds of postmodernism. Weavers, for instance, would benefit from a more "secular" education that enabled them to improve their working conditions, no matter how holistic and persuasive the usually articulated view of them as good and also progressive Muslims educated in madrasas. Instead of in an ethnosociological mode appreciating their declarations of purpose, one might be more skeptical of them, since weavers are not a homogeneous category and not all voices are heard equally, and even a silence or indirect statement such as about "simple-heartedness" may be interpreted with distance, empathy to employers, or empathy to workers.

Most of all there is no homogeneity in the interests of men and women. To understand the latter, we might need not only to question the silence or oblique statements, but to actually reverse them to show their implied underside, such as in: 'There was no response from the girls for a long time, but gradually the efforts of the Agrawal Samaj leaders bore fruit and society became conscious of the importance of education'. This implies, to a contextual aware and motivated researcher: 'There was resistance from the society towards girls' education regardless of the girls' own preferences, but gradually the girls' insistence bore fruit and society became conscious of the importance of education'.

Postmodernist understandings of Banaras imply, therefore, a respect for its differences and a recognition of an inevitable journey into worlds within worlds; and equally a respect for the different modernisations, including theirs and ours.