

The Rational Colonial and the Civilised Modern: An Indian Perspective on Western Epistemology and Personality Formation

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Abstract

This article critically compares the social formation and tenants of Indian and British knowledge systems through an analysis of British colonisation in India. Specifically, it draws on Gandhi's understanding of the id, ego and super-ego relationship that is revealed in the colonial situation and its legacy. While Europe characterises Asian societies and individuals as id-like and therefore in need of meditation by the ego represented by European modernity, in actuality pre-colonial Indian civilisation is better represented by the super-ego that is driven to sacrifice for the collective security of the whole and Europe is better characterised as the id-driven by the desire for capital accumulation with the ultimate goal of self-satisfaction. Within this framework, I explore how each society was deeply formed by the respective id and super-ego orientations—from their knowledge systems to their understandings of the human being and sociopolitical arrangements. This analysis better helps to understand how the political economy of India was corrupted through British colonisation and why so-called European modernity could not fulfil its promise, creating instead new crises in its wake.

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