CHAPTER TWELVE

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A DEHIERARCHIST POETICS
It is always difficult to draw conclusions, and it becomes doubly so for an attempt whose very point of departure is the assertion that nothing is conclusive, fixity itself being a political strategy towards dogmatic reductionism and status quoism. However, if a project has the temerity to call itself a ‘thesis’, it cannot but present conclusions at the end. At most, the only discount that can be made to it is the allowance that it can draw a multiplicity of conclusions instead of one coherent one, or it can draw a conclusion to its inconclusivity itself. In short, a thesis has to conclude, and the time having come at last, I have in front of me this onerous task to fulfil, knowing fully well that it is quite an impossibility.

I can begin by recapitulating some of the directions that this study has taken. It started with a bewilderment, a query, a search. Armed with the conviction that the dialectics of discourse, as involving the modes of its production, circulation and consumption, is framed and controlled by hierarchies within which it originates, the initial bewilderment was about how to ever tame these wild forces, how to ever scathe them with a resistant critical sword within the discursive space itself. The resultant query led the study, through an initial pondering over the fact that contemporary literary radicalism revolves primarily around the three poles of race, class and gender, to a hypothetical category called ‘tri-hierarchization’, which sought to find if one can or not notice in theorizations on modes of structuration, and consequently in modes of hierarchization too, a tripartition of domains into mentality, materiality and physicality. Thus began the search, which took the study to Foucault, in Foucault, and from Foucault to beyond Foucault, at the apparent end of which, here I am attempting to draw conclusions about the findings of the same.

The first thing that was noticed was that quite beyond the usual assumptions of Western philosophy being primarily binary, with an overwhelming dichotomy of mind and matter tearing it asunder into mutually incompatible dyads like Realism/Nominalism, Rationalism/Empiricism, or Idealism/Materialism, there is an attempt in post-Renaissance Western philosophy to reconcile this divide and arrive at a third intermediate category of the body, comprising what I have termed a Physicalism in philosophy. Accompanying this, it was also found that Western philosophy gets progressively penetrated with a concern for the role of power in structuration, culminating in the nineteenth century in philosophers like Feuerbach and Nietzsche. A combination of the two—of tripartition of domains into mind, matter and body, and a notion of power—forms a sure recipe for tri-hierarchization, and the study noticed how by the end of the nineteenth century, one already has the rudiments of tri-hierarchist thought in formulations on the role of power in the domains of physicality, materiality and mentality by thinkers like Darwin, Marx and Freud, respectively. In spite of having arrived at the genealogy of the category it was looking for, the search had just begun.
The major problem of the type of ‘tri-hierarchization’ one notices at the end of the nineteenth century is one of reductionism, whereby proponents of each of the three poles of power thus arrived at believe in the exclusive determinacy of their pole of concern alone in global structuration. This is definitely quite different from the type of tri-hierarchization the search initially embarked on, because the latter considers a simultaneous existence of all the three poles without necessarily privileging one over the other. Accordingly, recognizing the importance of the former type of tripartition to be restricted only to a constitution of the break that might provide for tri-hierarchization, the study proceeded to see what constitutes the episteme in itself, and identified the same in authors like Lenin, Gramsci, Althusser, Sartre and Breton and Bakhtin who undertake a suitable foregrounding of superstructural elements and of the notion of a multiplicity of power. Having identified the formation of the episteme, the study proceeded next to Foucault, whom it had commonsensically already identified as an immediate site of the tri-hierarchist thought it was on the lookout for.

Having arrived at Foucault, it was noticed how his initial concern for the relationship between power and knowledge soon provides for an inclusion of the body into the scheme too, leading to the possibility of tri-hierarchization. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault already analyses the formation of bodies of knowledge in relation to power in three domains of language, money and biology, corresponding to the three categories I identified at the beginning. It was also noticed how this conception of tripartition of modes of social formation and representation gets accentuated in a more acutely political way after the May 1968 students’ uprisings and in his later phase, Foucault takes up the three domains one after the other to show the workings of hierarchic power in their formation and maintenance. It was examined how he explores the role of hierarchies in the domains of significationary mentality as represented by discursive formations, socio-politico-economic materiality as represented by penal structures, and physicality as represented by sexuality, to arrive, by the end of his œuvre, at a tripartite and hierarchy-perpetrating power-knowledge-pleasure nexus that controls and orders all discursive and non-discursive dialectics of human life. Attempts were also made to study Foucault’s method, identified by himself as archaeology and genealogy, which unveiled itself as one demolishing the notion of global unities and continuities and establishing in its place a schema of multiplicity of discontinuous events separated by epistemological breaks but connected within an episteme by the inexorable forces of capillary tripartite power. It was this method that identified power as polymorphous and not necessarily repressive, inciting subjects to produce and participate in the production of dominant discourse. The only thing that bound the multiple sources of power together was the ethical desire in Foucault to unmask all of them, to question and demolish all forms of normative hierarchies, providing for the ethical category of what I have termed ‘dehierarchization’.
After having analysed Foucault's works to unearth from it the tropological category of tri-hierarchization as well as the implied ethical imperative of dehierarchization, the study turned to different forms of the same tripartition that lie epistemologically or spatio-chronologically beyond Foucault. An analysis in this regard of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, and of current trends in postcolonialist, Marxist and feminist literary criticism revealed once again the primacy of tri-hierarchization as well as the necessity of a dehierarchist approach towards it. An analysis, almost in antithesis, of medieval scholastic logic, Romanticism, structuralist analysis of narratives, and Indian philosophy, revealed on the other, how in spite of problematizing the same three paradigms of mind, matter and body, these philosophies do not constitute tri-hierarchist findings because of their lack of political outlook towards the subjects they deal with. In short, one is back again at the ethical category of dehierarchization, either positively through its presence or negationally getting excluded by its absence, as a marker towards the type of thought the study set out in search of.

This is how the study ends, neither with a bang nor with a whimper, but with silence, a hermeneutic silence arising from the multiplicity of voices that arise in the course of its generation, a stunned and somewhat embarrassed silence at raising profound questions and traversing miles and years of theoretical landscape without being able to provide, like some transcendental savant, a unified answer to them all. Yet, in spite of its origins in a bewilderment and its closure in a silence, this study claims to be a 'thesis', and it can shirk the responsibility of drawing conclusions only at the risk of being rejected. Therefore, I will indicate three very simple points as the conclusions one can arrive at from this otherwise inconclusive study. First, ontologically, it suggests on the one hand that social formations and representations, especially significative discourses, are intrinsically connected to hierarchies, they being produced, circulated and consumed according to certain political norms, and on the other, these determinant political conditions can themselves be structured as belonging to one of the three domains of mentality, materiality and physicality, or in their intersective categories, leading to what I call tri-hierarchization. Secondly, epistemologically, it suggests that the play of these hierarchies can be understood from an archaeological and genealogical perspective, whereby a concern for discontinuities and multiplicities reveal the manoeuvres that operate deep beneath the surface placidity of structures, normally interpreted only in terms of the overwhelmingly reductionist schema of origins, loci, and uniformities. Finally, ethically, this study points towards the imperative of dehierarchization, or that the role of the critic should always be one of unmasking demolishing all the forms of normative hierarchies thus unearthed. To sum up, however unsatisfactorily it might be, the conclusions of this study lie in this highly multifarious three-point agenda of tri-hierarchization, archaeology/genealogy and dehierarchization, and in a bottomline that this is formulable from a reading of Foucault.
Since I have said that the bottomline of my thesis is that its conclusions, though locatable genealogically in a formative state in a lot of Western theory, are primarily readable in the works of Michel Foucault, I would like to provide here a few clarifications, because such a reliance on a single author may itself be read as iconic and author-centric. The first critique that can be raised about Foucauldian thought and hence about this thesis which relies heavily on it is that Foucault’s equation of power and knowledge is simplistic, reductionist and problematic. This objection is answered by Foucault himself in a 1984 interview, where he shows how for him knowledge and power are not identities but categories which have certain relations between them in spite of their differences and heterogeneity. He says,

If I had said, or meant, that knowledge was power, I would have said so, and, having said so, I would have had nothing more to say, since, having made them identical, I don’t see why I would have taken the trouble to show the different relations between them. What I set out to show was how certain forms of power that were of the same type could give rise to bodies of knowledge that were extremely different both in their object and in their structure.¹

There is thus a set of determining relationships between power and knowledge and not any reductionist identity as it might be assumed. It should be recalled that this relationship between discursive forms and modes of hierarchies is, as I have shown, tripartite, but Foucault shows further that this tripartite relationship is guided by the categories of will to knowledge and will to truth, whose powers force generation of knowledge, and in turn invests forms of knowledge with power to protect their truths. This view itself can lead to some misunderstanding, with it being possible to interpret that Foucault lays too much stress on the idealist category of truth in his analyses. Foucault says, however, in the same interview that I quoted from above, that though it is not possible in political analysis to be indifferent to truth, at the same time it is not possible for any regime or doctrine to lay down the whole immutable truth. Foucault’s insistence on truth is thus not a regression into an absolute category:

Nothing is more inconsistent than a political regime that is indifferent to truth; but nothing is more dangerous than a political system that claims to lay down the truth. The function of “telling the truth” must not take the form of law, just as it would be pointless to believe that it resides by right in the spontaneous interplay of communication. The task of telling the truth is an endless labor: to respect it in all its complexity is an obligation which no power can do without—except by imposing the silence of slavery.²

A third possible objection, which also has to be resisted, is the idea that in constructing his notions of tri-hierarchization, archaeology/genealogy and dehierarchization, Foucault is providing for an alternate ‘system’. It should be instead recalled how in a 1971 interview, Foucault claims that the Soviet Union failed because it tried to replace one system by another, and Foucault very clearly shows that a system of hierarchies cannot be undone with a counter-system, even if it concerns only reversed hierarchies and an apparent political correctness:

² Ibid., 267.
I think that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system. This is perhaps what happened in the history of the Soviet union: apparently, new institutions were in fact based on elements taken from an earlier system—the Red Army reconstituted on the model of the Czarist army, the return to realism in art, and the emphasis on traditional family morality. The Soviet Union returned to the standards of bourgeois society in the nineteenth century... If you wish to replace an official institution by another institution that fulfills the same function—better and differently—then you are already being reabsorbed by the dominant structure.  

The essence of Foucauldian thought is thus neither a reduction of everything into an overwhelming power-knowledge identity, nor an attempt to establish the truth about things and event, nor even the desire to set up a system of alternate hierarchies, but to consider things in their differences and divergences, in their multiplicity and in their incessant contradictions. In a 1969 review of Deleuze, Foucault explains this saying, 

The freeing of difference requires...thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple—of the nomadic and dispersed multiplicity that is not limited or confined by the constraints of similarity; thought that does not conform to a pedagogical model (the fakery of prepared answers), but that attacks insoluble problems—that is, a thought that addresses a multiplicity of exceptional points, which are displaced as we distinguish their conditions and which insist and subsist in the play of repetitions.  

It should however be noted that this insistence on multiplicity and differences does not make Foucauldian thought non-committal and politically indifferent. As is clear from the quote above, he talks of ‘affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction’ and ‘thought that does not conform to a pedagogical model...but that attacks insoluble problems’, and therefore in spite of being rooted in diversity, his type of thought does have a coherent method, an ontological model of tripartition and a politically committed dehierarchist goal.  

This ethical imperative for political commitment leads to Foucault’s notion of the role of the intellectual in society. In a 1984 interview, Foucault calls himself an intellectual and says that his role is not to succumb to any received thought but constantly question a priories:  

What can the ethics of an intellectual be—I claim this title of intellectual, though, at the present time, it seems to make certain people sick—if not this: to make oneself permanently capable of detaching oneself from oneself (which is the opposite of the attitude to conversion)? If I had wanted to be exclusively an academic, it would no doubt have been wiser to choose one field and one alone to work in... To be at once an academic and an intellectual is to try to manipulate a type of knowledge and analysis that is taught and received in the universities in such a way as to alter not only others’ thoughts, but also one’s own. This work of altering one’s own thought and that of others seems to me to be the intellectual’s raison d’être,  

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The role of the intellectual is thus essentially political. He or she has to constantly question the normative hierarchies that forms of knowledge present and also try to undo forms of discrimination that are practised in social and discursive situations. The intellectual has to be politically committed, and while Foucault shows this in all his works, continuously attacking systems of hegemonic control and discrepant power allocation, it becomes especially interesting to note how much he was involved in the problems of the gay community, a marginalized group to which he himself belonged. In a 1982 interview, he says,

I am of course regularly involved in exchanges with other members of the gay community. We talk, we try to find ways of opening ourselves to one another. But I am wary of imposing my own views, or of setting down a plan or program.6

If there is any conclusion to be reached in this thesis, it is this imperative of political activism on the part of the intellectual, whereby criticism of social formations and representations cannot but be political and bear on the one hand a recognition of the tri-hierarchization that goes on within them, and one the other, a dehierarchist stance aimed at exposing the same.

Returning to the problematics with which this study began, that of literary theory and criticism, what comes out as the result of the search is the category that I have termed earlier as 'dehierarchist poetics', a poetics which nevertheless concerns itself primarily with the hierarchies that a text gets constituted by and in turn constituted. This critical method does not root itself in any one mode of hierarchy, but in its attempt to unmask all normative hierarchies invokes the tri-hierarchist model, and takes into consideration all the multiple hierarchies in the discourse, while also not getting lost in its quagmire, with the clearly tripartite structuration providing the methodological and ontological plinth. Of course, this means to go out of the linguistic interiority of a text, and its intrinsic economy of entertainment into socio-political factors, but this itself should not be problematic, because as Foucault shows in his 1966 article on Blanchot, the very characteristic of literature is a passage to the 'outside'

It is a widely held belief that modern literature is characterized by a doubling back that enables it to designate itself... In fact, the event that gave rise to what we call "literature" in the strict sense is only superficially an interiorization; it is far more a question of a passage to the "outside"... in this setting "outside of itself", it unveils its own being, the sudden clarity reveals not a folding back but a gap... a dispersion.7

The dialectics of discourse as manifest not only in its production, circulation and consumption, but also in its interpretation, as between the text and the critic, thus essentially invokes a resistant space, the space of dehierarchization. If at all this dissertation has to have a conclusion, let this simplistic assertion be it, nothing more, and well, nothing less.
