CHAPTER 3

THE CREATION OF DIFFERENCE

For the Rede Lecture at the University of Cambridge in 1875, after his return from seven years as law member of the Viceroy's Council in India, Henry Maine set out to explain 'The Effects of Observation of India on Modern European Thought'. India shared with Europe, he said, as Sanskrit scholarship since the time of William Jones had revealed, a 'whole world' of Aryan institutions, customs, laws and beliefs. India was thus part of that 'very family of mankind to which we belong'. Yet, he went on, those Aryan institutions had 'been arrested in India at an early stage of development'. The country was, as a result, 'a barbarism', but it remained one which 'contains a great part of our own civilisation, with its elements as yet inseparate and not yet unfolded'. India was implicated with Britain, somewhat paradoxically, in a common origin, and yet was fundamentally different. In much the same way, the British were, in Maine's view, at once agents of 'progress', charged with setting India on the road to modernity, and at the same time custodians of an enduring India formed forever in antiquity. As Maine put it in the conclusion to his Rede lecture, India's rulers had to keep their watches set simultaneously to two longitudes. Throughout the later nineteenth century, as they constructed their 'India', the British had always to negotiate this disjuncture: between an acknowledgement of similarity, and an insistence upon difference. The task was never to be easy, nor was the result to be a coherent ideology of rule.[1]

For men like Maine, India was Europe's past, or rather its various pasts. In India Europe could find, alive in the present day, its entire history. India was at once a land of Teutonic village 'republics'; it was 'the old heathen world' of classical antiquity; it was a set of medieval feudal kingdoms; in the coastal cities 'something like a likeness of our own civilisation' could even be discerned; and India was, of course, also an 'oriental' land forged by despotism. In the later nineteenth

[1] Henry Maine, *The Effects of Observation of India on Modern European Thought* (London, 1875. Reprinted, Folcroft, Pa., 1974); and Henry Maine, *Village Communities in the East and West* (London, 1871).

century all of these various conceptions of India existed side-by-side with little sense of incongruity. Each, in its own context, represented the 'real' India; and each, as we shall see, served the needs of the Raj.

The creation of varied pasts was not confined to India alone. For the Victorians, and indeed for Europeans more generally, history played a critical role in organizing the world around them. They used it, in particular, to create for themselves a national identity, even if often troubled and fractured, that brought together English, Scots, and (with difficulty) Irish in a 'United' Kingdom; and to constitute sets of relationships with the world outside that would position their own 'progressive' society at the leading edge of the development of civilization. Though the varied British 'histories' of India might be inconsistent with each other, they were united by this nineteenth-century 'historicism'. Together they shaped the way the British constructed the difference they ascribed to India. Above all, through a theory of 'decline' that complemented Britain's own 'progress', the history of India was made to accommodate not just the existence of the Raj, but a course of historical development that made the imposition of British rule its necessary culmination.

The Victorians set out, in addition, to order and classify India's 'difference' in accordance with scientific systems of 'knowing'. British progress could not be simply a matter of cultural pride. The study of India was thus made part of a larger scholarly enterprise in which the Victorians, as children of the Enlightenment, sought rational principles that would provide a comprehensive, and comprehensible, way of fitting everything they saw in the world around them into ordered hierarchies. The existence of empire, by imparting a sense of urgency to the process, spurred on this creation of knowledge, and at the same time the unequal power relationships of imperialism helped shape the categories within which that knowledge was constructed. No longer a product of mere assertion, in the manner of James Mill, Western pre-eminence was now demonstrated, or, more properly, assumed, as it underlay the scientific structures that grew up around it. Victorian science, like its historicism, thus necessarily if not always consciously, fitted India into a hierarchical relationship with Europe and provided the firm footing of legitimacy which the British sought for their Raj.

This chapter will examine the persisting tensions between the claims of similarity and those of difference as they informed the ideology of the late Victorian Raj in the arenas of history, race, and gender.

Chapter 4 will assess how, in the light of their understanding of India's past – and its present – the British devised structures for ordering its society.

INDIA'S PRESENT AND BRITAIN'S PAST

Maine is most widely remembered for his striking, aphoristic statement in *Ancient Law* (1861) that 'the movement of progressive societies has hitherto been a movement from Status to Contract'. In his Rede lecture he reiterated his conviction that civilization was 'nothing more than a name for the old order of the Aryan world' reconstituted around 'several property' in place of an earlier collective ownership. Indeed, he insisted fiercely, 'Nobody is at liberty to attack several property and to say at the same time that he values civilisation.' Such views expressed a concept of social progress whose roots went back to the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment. But Maine, with the other evolutionary theorists of his time, repudiated the utilitarian vision of an infinitely malleable human nature. Societies were different, and history had shaped the path each had followed. As John Burrow has written, in this view 'mankind was one not because it was everywhere the same, but because the differences represented different stages in the same process'. And, he continued, 'by agreeing to call the process progress one could convert the social theory into a moral and political one'. The superiority of Europe, and of private property, was thus preserved in an era when old certainties were fast disappearing.[2]

In place of Benthamite deduction from the abstract principles of utility, Maine sought a scientific basis for his evolutionary social theory in what he called a 'comparative' and 'historical' method of analysis. By this reasoning India's ancient institutions, linked to those of Europe by their common Aryan origin, became the germs out of which the social and political systems of modern Europe had emerged. They were not merely curious anachronisms, of interest only to antiquarians, but successive phases of one on-going process of development. The old Aryan institutions had persisted in India, Maine argued, partly because of the country's geographical isolation, shut in by the Himalayas and the sea, and partly too because all subsequent migrations after that of the Aryans had affected Indian social organi-

zation to only a superficial extent. With the people insulated from outside influences, 'Brahminical religion' and the system of caste had preserved 'in extraordinary completeness' the society's 'old natural elements', along with the institutions and ideas which were their 'appendage'.

Yet Maine's theory was hardly coherent. Despite his commitment to an evolutionary concept of history, his use of the 'comparative' method had the effect of undermining the theory it was meant to sustain. In order to justify making inferences from India's present to England's past, Maine had inevitably to assume that India had had no history since the time of the early Aryan invasions. The result was to sharpen the distinctions the Aryan theory was meant to contain. As he gave India with one hand a history linked to that of England, with the other he took it away. The dichotomy between India's static society and England's progress ultimately overwhelmed any sense of parallel development. Similarity was necessarily subordinated to difference. To account for this difference, other contemporary thinkers, as we shall see, preferred to speak of India's Aryan past not in institutional but in racial terms, and in the process devised yet other ways of explaining its unique history.

Central to Maine's analysis alike of India's similarity and its difference was his conception of the village community. By Maine's time the notion of the 'village community' had already acquired an extended history both in India and in Europe. Building upon the writings of German Romantics, who sought their national origins in the Teutonic forests, Victorian liberals, anxious to discern the origins of Britain's distinctive freedoms, conceived of the Saxon village community as the training ground for all subsequent self-government. From the Saxon freeman, these 'Germanists' argued, a line could be traced directly to the parliamentary system of their own era.[3]

The idealized Indian village community, derived from the same Romantic imagination, was described in much the same language, but served purposes of a very different sort. The conquests of the first decades of the nineteenth century first brought the British face to face with the fortified villages of Maharashtra and the North Indian plains. In 1830 Sir Charles Metcalfe, defending the award of revenue collect-

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[2] J.W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1966), especially pp. 98–100.

[3] J.W. Burrow, 'The Village Community and the Uses of History in Late Nineteenth-Century England', in Neil McKendrick (ed.), *Historical Perspectives: Studies in English Thought and Society* (London, 1974).

ing rights to these corporate village bodies, rather than to landlords or individual cultivators, wrote:

the village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds to revolution; Hindoo, Patan, Mogul, Mahratta, Sikh, English, are all masters in turn; but the village community remains the same ... If plunder and devastation be directed against themselves and the force employed be irresistible, they flee to friendly villages at a distance; but when the storm has passed over, they return and resume their occupations ... This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India through all the revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence.[4]

As a Company official, Metcalfe's objectives were in large part fiscal and administrative. It was easier to rule by incorporating rather than destroying such entrenched institutions. Yet Metcalfe's romanticized vision of the village was difficult to reconcile with the community it purported to describe. Although the disruptions of the later eighteenth century had enforced a great degree of self-reliance upon the Indian village, it was at all times much less isolated, from state and market alike, and much less egalitarian than Metcalfe's rhetoric implied, for the community of cosharers rarely encompassed the entire population. Nevertheless, Metcalfe's text resonated through the years. Neither the decline of romanticism, nor that of the independent village community itself, which by mid-century had been incorporated into a system of law and a colonial economy that offered little scope for the exercise of its alleged virtues, much affected the way the village was perceived. Even the utilitarians, who disparaged the village community as an impediment to their plans for an agrarian revolution in India, spoke of it in terms that acknowledged its cohesion and independence.[5]

In the later nineteenth century policy and theory together combined to embed the 'village republic' ever more deeply into the ideology of the Raj. With the shift after the Mutiny to a bulwarking of what were seen as traditional and stable elites, and the consequent desire to

[4] Cited in Dewey, 'Images of the Village Community', pp. 296–97.
[5] Louis Dumont, 'The "Village Community" from Munro to Maine', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 9 (1966), pp. 77–89; Dewey, 'Images of the Village Community', pp. 307–28; Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 137–42.

dampen the pace of social change, the 'village community' came to define an ordering of Indian society which was at once unchanging and unthreatening. Indeed, almost paradoxically, one might argue, as the village community altered to accommodate the requirements of an increasingly interventionist state, the simultaneous need for a secure agrarian order evoked an ever more urgent ideological assertion of its enduring permanence. At the same time, from the 1860s onward, with the growth of evolutionary thought, the Indian village community took on a new, and larger, meaning. In 1871 Maine published *Village Communities in the East and West*. In this work he described India's villages, with their patriarchal clans and communal tenures, as marking out the earliest phase of an evolutionary process whose end point was to be found in contemporary England. India was, he insisted, 'the great repository of verifiable phenomena of ancient usage and ancient juridical thought'; he went on to pronounce its present village communities 'identical' with the 'ancient European systems of enjoyment and tillage'. Like Metcalfe's vision of the 'village republic', Maine's theory also had little place for the state or for caste; the latter, in his view, was 'merely a name for a trade or occupation'. The institutions of the village thus embodied for Maine that which at once most intimately linked, and yet separated, India and Europe.

Maine refused to let inconsistencies, whether in 'Germanist' theory or Indian practice, deter him from constructing a unilinear scheme of evolution for the village community. In large part this was because what mattered to him was in the end not India, but Europe. His principal objective was always to explain Europe's historical development in a way that inextricably connected 'civilization', progress, and private property rights. Not surprisingly, in consequence, Maine's views secured a wide and appreciative audience among Europe's privileged classes. As time went on, however, alternative views emerged. By the 1880s agrarian reformers, determined to secure occupancy rights for Irish, and for Indian, tenants, turned Maine's theory to their own purposes. They argued that the collective organization of property in these early communities justified placing restrictions on private property in their own day. Maine and his followers, in response, fearful of 'communistic' attacks on landed property, vigorously denied that joint property holding had ever existed in the early history of Europe, and so brought to an end the European career of the village community. At the same time in India, officials like B. H. Baden-

Powell, on the basis of the land settlement reports of the 1870s and 1880s, insisted that the Indian village community had never enshrined communal ownership of land and indeed owed little to the country's Aryan invaders. Patterns of landholding were, in this view, always heterogeneous, most often ryotwari, or household based; and they were shaped by the social requirements of indigenous Dravidian and aboriginal peoples. Still, the notion of the 'immemorial' village community remained as a compelling sign of the 'traditional' India which the Raj sought to sustain. Eventually this idealized village was appropriated in turn by India's nationalists, who saw in these communities evidence for the antiquity of an indigenous concept of democracy.

Insofar as he extended India's ancient past up to the present, Maine had of necessity, despite his evolutionary schema, to deny that India had ever passed through a 'feudal' stage comparable to that of medieval Europe. He acknowledged the possibility of a 'nascent' feudal development, but his need to leap directly from India's antiquity to its present foreclosed any further discussion. For many of Maine's contemporaries, however, India was *par excellence* a 'medieval', even a feudal society. The Indian official Alfred Lyall, for instance, in 1875, marching through Rajputana, wrote that 'Barring Oriental scenery and decorations, the whole feeling of this country is medieval; the Rajput *noblesse* caracoles along with sword and shield; the small people crowd round with rags and rusty arms; the king and his principal chiefs are lords of the country, and the peasant is at their mercy.'[6] As one of the most philosophically and historically minded members of the Indian civil service, Lyall was to play a major role during his career in India in shaping an ideology for the late Victorian Raj.

Much in the description of India as 'medieval' was simply an extension of the 'picturesque' vision, attracted by the colourful and the exotic, which found such comparisons to be the most satisfactory way of coming to terms with India's difference from Victorian England. Nevertheless, the 'medieval' vision of India had much in common with that of the idealized village community. In each case one group was made to represent the whole: as the Jat community of the northern plains embodied the Indian 'village', so too did the princely states of Rajputana (now Rajasthan) personify a 'medieval' India. In the

[6] Mortimer Durand, *Life of the Right Hon. Sir Alfred Comyn Lyall* (London, 1913), pp. 181–82.

princely state, as in the village, time stood still. The Rajput states, as Lyall wrote, had 'managed to preserve unaltered much of their original structure, built up out of the needs and circumstances of primitive life'. No other 'political fabric' in Asia, he insisted, had changed so little in the preceding 800 years. In this way, as India's princes were shaped to fit the needs of the Raj, India's past was once again created anew.[7]

The idea that the Rajput principalities represented an Indian feudal order took shape along with the British conquest of this desert region. In the 1820s, as Colonel James Tod negotiated the treaties which brought the Rajput chieftains under British suzerainty, he ordered their past as well as their present. In his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* Tod laid out in over a thousand pages of print the customs and lore of all the major Rajput states, and he did so with such authority that nearly a century and a half later the old Brahmin guide taking tourists through the Chitor fort would refer to Tod as 'our historian'. For Tod 'the leading features' of government among peoples in the 'same stages of society ... must have a considerable resemblance to each other'. The 'martial system' of the Rajputs, with its feuds and rivalries, its ties of lordship and vassalage, was similar, he wrote, lumping all these peoples together as medieval, to that of the ancient German tribes, the Franks, and the Gothic races. Hence, the Rajputs too had to possess a feudal order. Indeed, anxious to turn aside the 'contempt for all that is Asiatic' which, he said, too often marked 'our countrymen in the East', he proudly insisted upon Rajput participation 'in a system hitherto deemed to belong exclusively to Europe'. Despite 'general decay' during long periods of Muslim rule, Tod argued, much still remained of these 'ancient institutions', especially in such places as Mewar, which was 'worthy of being rescued from oblivion'.[8]

Other officials extended this 'feudal' analogy to princes outside Rajputana. George Campbell, for instance, compared the eighteenth-century Sikh states in the Punjab to the princes of medieval Germany. It was, however, he said, a 'puzzle' how these Sikh Jats, who had 'for many hundred years' never seen anything except their village communities, should create a 'complete and fully organized feudal system'. The only explanation Campbell could offer was that 'the same feudal

[7] Alfred C. Lyall, *Asiatic Studies*, vol. 1 (London, 1884), p. 208.
[8] James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, 2 vols. (reprinted, London, 1914), pp. 108–15, 155–58.

system which prevailed in Europe is a sort of natural instinctive habit of the Aryan race when they go forth to conquer'. Only a racial ideology could undo what the same ideology had created in the Aryan 'village community'![9]

One of the more attractive features of this Indian feudalism for the British was the way its dispersed sovereignty served as a check on 'Oriental despotism'. Lyall, for instance, contrasted the Maratha ruler Sindhia, 'a despot of the ordinary Asiatic species, ruling absolutely the lands which his ancestor seized by the power of a mercenary army', with the Rajput states, where the 'feudal lords' counterbalanced the sovereign power of the prince, 'exactly as the barons of Europe did, and very effectively prevent him from becoming an arbitrary despot'. As a result, he said, although the peasantry were often reduced to near serfdom, the 'feudal system of Rajputana' was 'the only free institution of India'. A system of government that could be described by analogy with that of Europe, even the Europe of the Middle Ages, was by definition superior to a system which was purely 'Oriental' in character.

The 'feudal' view of princely India did not go wholly unchallenged. By the 1880s many officials, including Lyall himself, had determined that the political system of the Rajput states was shaped not by ties of vassalage but by those of kinship. The Rajput chief, Lyall argued, was 'the head of a clan which has for many centuries been lords of the soil which now makes up the State's territory'. Critics pointed out that such central feudal elements as the fief and the manor, homage and the knight's service, were all lacking in India. Although he emphasized Rajput participation in the larger feudal order, Tod was himself aware that in many of these states the 'vassal chiefs' claimed 'affinity in blood' to their sovereign. This 'tribal' ideology found its fullest expression, as we shall see later, in accounts of the society of the neighbouring province of the Punjab.[10]

The reconstruction of Indian 'feudalism' as a social order based on ties of blood and kinship inevitably implied that it was fundamentally different from any European form, and so called into question the possibility for India of any evolution, of the sort that had taken place in Germany, from a medieval to a fully modern state. Still, the notion

[9] George Campbell, *Memoirs of My Indian Career*, vol. 1 (London, 1893), pp. 46–47.
[10] Lyall, *Asiatic Studies* (1884), pp. 224, 244; Charles Lewis Tupper, *Our Indian Protectorate* (London, 1893), chapters 10–11; Tod, *Annals*, pp. 107–9.

of the Indian state system as medieval served important political purposes. Like the India of the idealized village community, a 'feudal' India lived in a past that extended into the present, yet one tied to elements of Europe's own past; it possessed its own indigenous institutions of self-government, yet needed the British to secure the larger order that warring principalities could not by themselves bring about.

Not only India's princes, but the Raj itself, so the British believed, exhibited 'striking analogies' to the medieval world. Such resemblances were not accidental. They reflected the powerful appeal of the medieval ideal in Britain. A number of elements converged to create this enthusiasm for the Middle Ages: the search for the picturesque, the Romantic creation of a national past, the Anglo-Catholic religious revival, and the abandonment of classical for Gothic forms in architecture. All, however, expressed an overriding nostalgia for what has been called 'the world we have lost'. In an age of industrialism and individualism, of social upheaval and *laissez-faire*, marked by what were perceived as the horrors of continental revolution and the rationalist excesses of Benthamism, the Middle Ages stood forth as a metaphor for paternalist ideals of social order and proper conduct. Though they had no intention of repudiating the material benefits which progress had brought to Britain, the medievalists looked to the ideals of chivalry, such as heroism, honour, and generosity, to transcend the selfish calculation of pleasure and pain, and recreate a harmonious and stable society.

Not surprisingly, the medievalist conception of an ordered society, together with its idealization of character in contrast to mere material wealth or intellect, made it an attractive vision for both the landed classes in Britain and the civil servant in India. Indeed, as the public schools by mid-century were propagating the virtues of the chivalrous 'gentleman', even people of middle-class origin could hope to join this elite. Whether at home or in the empire, and also in relations with women in the masculine world of Victorian Britain, like knights in armour, the noble were to protect, and cherish, the weak. Medievalism thus sustained the Raj not just by portraying India as itself a 'medieval' society of hierarchy and deference, but by holding forth an ideal of benevolent paternalism derived from ostensibly 'medieval' virtues.

As this medievalist ideal helped shape Disraeli's toryism, it is no surprise that in India the medieval fantasy reached its fullest flower in the 1877 Imperial Assemblage, when Disraeli's creation of Victoria as

empress was proclaimed to India's princes. The viceroy, Lord Lytton, a romantic medievalist and member as a youth of Disraeli's Young England group, determined to use this occasion to give India's 'feudal nobility' a firm institutional basis, and to secure for the British Crown as 'the recognized fountain of honour' a visible place 'as its *feudal* head'. He sought to set up an Indian Privy Council which would bring together the 'great ruling chiefs' in a common body with the viceroy and high British officials, while he established a College of Arms at Calcutta to order the Indian 'peerage'. In this way, Lytton argued, the 'Imperial supremacy of the British Crown' could be associated with all hereditary ranks and titles.

In addition, Lytton designed for the major princes large banners emblazoned with coats of arms. The armorial bearings, devised by a Bengal civil servant and amateur heraldist, embodied European notions of the 'history' of the various princely houses. The presentation of these banners to the attending princes formed the central event of the Imperial Assemblage. The decoration of the viceregal pavilion erected for the ceremony also invoked a lush Victorian version of the 'medieval' idiom. The shafts holding the canopy, for instance, were festooned with satin bannerets displaying the Cross of St George and the Union Jack, while the frieze hanging from the canopy displayed the rose, shamrock, and thistle, with the lion of India, embroidered in gold and silver. Silver shields, with strips of red and white satin, decorated with fleurs-de-lis and gilden lances, completed the decorative ensemble. To open the Assemblage, announced by a fanfare from six trumpeters in medieval costume, the viceroy entered the arena to the strains of Wagner's 'March from Tannhäuser'.

Although the Assemblage represented India as having at once a feudal past and a medieval present, the organizing principles of the Assemblage were not consistently 'medieval'. The selection of Delhi as the site for the event was shaped by a desire to create for the Raj a Mughal past, while the orderly layout of the British camp announced a strategy of colonial mastery whose message did not go unheeded. As Sindhia's prime minister Dinkar Rao reported after viewing the imperial camp from Flagstaff Tower, anyone who notices 'the method, the order, the cleanliness, the discipline, the perfection of the whole organization ... will recognize at once the epitome of every title to command and govern which one race can possess over others'. The use of banners also attracted Lytton, not only as a way of representing

India as a 'feudal' society, but as part of a larger 'Orientalist' strategy of rule. In his view the Indian peasantry were an 'inert mass' capable of being moved only by their native chiefs and princes, and these princes in turn responded most effectively to symbol and 'sentiment'. The 'further East you go', he wrote, 'the greater becomes the importance of a bit of bunting'.[11]

Lytton's use of 'feudal' imagery nevertheless raised awkward questions about the direction of India's political development. The secretary of state, Lord Salisbury, warned Lytton, in making announcements about the proposed 'native peerage', to avoid the 'technical expressions applied to similar institutions in Western Europe'. The plan for a Privy Council, above all, he insisted, had to be abandoned. Such a body might evoke memories of the 'great power' once exercised by the English Privy Council and give rise to 'expectations' which could not be realized. More generally, Salisbury argued, the 'constitutional bodies' of medieval England could not be introduced into India because they formed part of a 'very different system of government'. India's 'feudalism', in sum, was not, like England's, to be a stage on the road to a modern nation state. Hence, Lytton had to be content with the naming of twenty 'Counsellors of the Empress' – a title with no meaning for a body which never met.[12]

The medievalist vision also found expression in the creation of orders of knighthood. In India, as throughout the empire, such orders, and with them the numbers of knights, grew throughout the later nineteenth century. Four years after the Mutiny, in 1861, as we have seen, the first Indian order, the Star of India, was created. By 1877 there were several hundred holders, British and Indian, of its three ranks; and in 1878 it was joined by a new order, the Order of the Indian Empire, established on the occasion of the Imperial Assemblage. For British officials in India the coveted knighthood represented the capstone of a successful administrative career. Few among them, however, in keeping with the medieval ideal, could hope after the age of conquest to join the ranks of imperial heroes, or win a chivalric title in the manner of James Outram, whose tomb in Westminster Abbey proclaimed him the 'Bayard of India'. Of necessity,

[11] For imperial assemblage, see Bernard Cohn, 'Representing Authority in Victorian India', in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 189–207; Lady Betty Balfour, *The History of Lord Lytton's Indian Administration* (London, 1899), pp. 106–33.

[12] Lytton to Salisbury, 5 October 1876, Salisbury to Lytton, 20 November 1876, and address of 1 January 1877, in NAI For. Pol. A, December 1877, no. 286–496.

therefore, the princes, and above all the Rajputs in their desert fast-nesses, given knightly rank, were made to take up the role of 'proud nobles'. In strikingly similar fashion, the Scottish Highlanders, newly bedecked in kilt and tartan, were created as a brave people with an ancient Celtic lineage. It is no accident that Victoria was herself drawn strongly to both the Highlands and to India's princes.[13]

Yet, as in the case of Lytton's proposed Privy Council, Indian membership of orders of knighthood on the British pattern forced India's rulers once again to confront the question of what it meant to describe that society as 'feudal'. Although the government endeavoured to maintain a rough parity in numbers between the British and the Indian members of the Indian orders, Indian initiates were rarely 'dubbed' as knights when they were invested with the insignia of the order. On this ground – and also because financial contributions were considered 'quite unsuited to India and Indian ideas' – the customary fees charged for the conferment of knighthood were remitted. But in consequence, as they were not properly 'knights', so officials such as H. M. Durand at the Foreign Office argued, the Indian members of these orders were not entitled to be called 'Sir'. In the end such an invidious distinction between the races in the mode of address could not be sustained, and the Indians were addressed by the usual titles.[14]

Hostility to the incorporation of Indians in ritual forms derived from medieval Europe nevertheless persisted, and even grew more intense as time went on, as we shall see in a subsequent chapter. The British peerage, for instance, with only a handful of exceptions, remained at all times closed to Indians. As Curzon wrote when he was planning his own durbar in 1902, however 'illustrious' the Indian chiefs, their traditions did not require, for their conservation, 'the varnish of a purely European invention'. I do not think, he continued, that 'Maharajas or Rajas will be any the better or the happier for being converted into Dukes, Marquises, Earls and Barons'. Such titles, with coats of arms of the sort Lytton had devised, represented ideas that were 'essentially foreign to Indian history and practice'. In similar fashion, Curzon eschewed a 'medieval' for what he regarded as a

Mughal, or 'Saracenic', decorative scheme for his durbar. As he wrote disdainfully of Lytton's banners and flags, 'so far as these features were concerned, the ceremony might equally well have taken place in Hyde Park'. In his view, Britain ought to represent its empire as Indian, not its Indian subjects as Europeans.[15]

Whatever its manifestations, medieval nostalgia was invariably shot through with irony. By its very nature it involved an effort to preserve that which the British were in the process of destroying, and indeed, as they built their empire, could not help but destroy. This destruction was visible, if with an ample measure of self-deception, to those engaged in the colonial enterprise itself. Tod, for instance, insisted that British 'generosity' had 'rescued' the Rajputs 'from impending degradation and destruction' at the hands of their Afghan and Maratha neighbours. Yet, he said, the British alliance was itself 'pregnant with evil', liable to 'lay prostrate' these 'ancient relics of civilization'. Tod nevertheless maintained that by a scrupulous policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of these states it was possible to restore the 'harmony and continuity' which had once existed, and so 'perpetuate this oasis of ancient rule'. Lyall, fifty years later, in similar fashion spoke of British rule as having 'rescued' the Rajput states from the anarchy that had followed the decline of Mughal rule. He recognized as well that the 'listless security produced by our protection' had brought about a 'rapid deterioration' in the effective functioning of the Rajput states. Yet he too clung to the hope, if not the expectation, that these 'ancient political structures' could be preserved.[16]

At one level, of course, such yearning for the past, and the consequent desire to keep 'the past' alive in India in the present, represented a disenchantment with Victorian British civilization itself. This was particularly evident, as we shall see in the next section, in patronage of India's crafts. Yet medievalism concealed as much as it revealed. No one was prepared, above all, to give up the 'progress' that had secured Victorian England its predominance, much less the Indian Empire itself, in pursuit of what can only be called a medieval fantasy. Renato Rosaldo has argued that 'imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of "innocent yearning" both to capture people's imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination'.[17] Medievalism

[13] Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven, 1981), pp. 220–29; Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, pp. 15–41.
[14] See note of H.M. Durand of 7 February 1889, and correspondence in NAI files For. Secret-I, March 1889, no. 56–76, and For. Intl-A, June 1887, no. 356–66.

[15] Minute of 11 May 1902, NAI For. Secret-I, September 1902, no. 1–3.
[16] Tod, *Annals*, pp. 100–5, 155–58; Lyall, *Asiatic Studies* (1884), pp. 204, 261–63.
[17] Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth* (Boston, 1989), chapter 3, especially pp. 68–74.

can perhaps best be seen as a form of theatre which was meant, through insistence upon the persistence of the past, to obscure, from the British themselves as much as from the Indians, the extent of change which occurred under British rule, and perhaps even the fact of colonialism itself. Certainly its theatrical character was readily apparent at the time to outside observers. As the painter Val Prinsep wrote with disgust of the arrangements for the 1877 Assemblage, 'They have been heaping ornament on ornament, colour on colour ... They have stuck pieces of needlework into stone panels, and tin shields and battleaxes all over the place. The size ... gives it a vast appearance, like a gigantic circus.' Of the ceremony itself he said, 'it was what is called a splendid sight, but so was Batty's hippodrome, and so is Myers's circus'. At its conclusion, he wrote simply, 'The curtain falls ... Turn down the lights.'[18] This grand assemblage, one might suggest, was not so different from the famous Eglinton Tournament of 1838, when a spectacular recreation of the Middle Ages, with armour, costumes, and horses, was brought to an abrupt halt by a downpour of rain that forced the knights to lower their lances and unfurl their umbrellas.

Lytton's 'medieval' India was not a sham in the manner of Eglinton, for the princes were being shaped to play a central role in the colonial order. What the British sought, one might say, was not to turn the clock back but rather to create a simulation of the Middle Ages, in which its institutions remained apparently intact even as they were fundamentally altered to suit the requirements of the new order. In so doing, perhaps, the British could convince themselves that they had bridged the gap between Maine's 'two longitudes'. In the end, however, medievalism illuminated only Britain's present, not India's past.

LANGUAGE, RACE AND HISTORY

Although the antiquity of India's past had been brought to light by the Oriental scholars of Warren Hastings's time, the process of recovering its rich and lengthy history was inevitably long drawn out. The path-breaking studies of the Sanskrit language undertaken by such men as Jones, Halhed, and Colebrooke in the 1780s and 1790s were followed in the first decades of the nineteenth century by exciting new discoveries. Among these were the decipherment of the Brahmi script,

[18] Val C. Prinsep, *Imperial India* (London, 1878), chapter 3.

which revealed the existence of the third century BC Asokan era; the uncovering of Gandharan art in the northwest, which pointed to ties linking India and classical Greece; and the translation of the account by the Chinese pilgrim, Fa Hsien, of his tour in the fifth century AD, which, together with the discovery in 1819 of the Ajanta caves, gave historical depth to the Gupta Empire and the Buddhist experience in India. Although much remained unknown, above all the existence of the Harappan civilization, by the middle of the nineteenth century the major outlines of India's history had been established.

Confronted with this history, the British could not simply dismiss India as a land of 'changeless' villages and feudal principalities. India's extended past had at once to be explained and made subservient to the needs of the Raj. The British could, of course, assert their own superiority, as James and J.S. Mill had done, by pointing to the values, such as individualism and liberty, embedded in Western culture. They could also recite evidence of their technological prowess. By this measure Britain's superiority was palpable. The British had, after all, conquered India; and by the 1850s they were engaged in building railway and telegraph networks whose principles had been devised in Europe, not India. As Michael Adas has argued, this technological superiority was taken, even by such a sympathetic observer of indigenous societies as the traveller Mary Kingsley, as a justification for imperial dominance. On her return from West Africa, Kingsley wrote that she was ready to embrace 'the first magnificent bit of machinery' she came across as 'the manifestation of the superiority of my race'.[19] Kipling too, despite his sympathy with much in Indian culture, in *Kim* proclaimed the 'te-rain' and even the museum keeper's spectacles, so gratefully received by the lama, as evidence of the West's superiority.

Yet the mere celebration of technology provided no way of explaining the course of India's history. Britain's mastery of nature – so long as one chose to accept technology as the appropriate measure for judging the worth of cultures – could perhaps be seen as marking out differing levels of achievement between itself and India, but by themselves such differences gave no indication of why India had been left stranded so far behind. To explain this apparent discrepancy many Victorian theorists in the latter half of the century turned to the Aryan theory of race, which joined England and India in a compelling discourse at once of history and of science. Initially, as Sir William

[19] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men* (Ithaca, 1989), pp. 146–53, 175–77.

Jones conceived it, what was to become the Aryan theory amounted to no more than perceived affinities in certain key words and forms of grammar between Sanskrit and most European languages. On the basis of these similarities, Jones then speculated that the peoples who spoke these languages must have shared a common origin. But these speculations were no more 'scientific' in character, or widely accepted, than Jones's other more fanciful theories linking the ancient Hindus with peoples as widely scattered as the Ethiopians and the Scythians.[20]

As a diffusionist, Jones insisted upon a common origin for all peoples; and he made no attempt to connect language with race. Nevertheless, over time, as comparative philology became more sophisticated, especially through the work of the German scholar Max Muller, Jones's loosely linked language family took on a new ethnic coherence and was given an ancestral home in southern Russia, from which the Aryans (as they were now called) were believed to have spread out to conquer and colonize vast tracts of land from northern India to western Europe. In this process language, culture, and the physical biological features that distinguish race became inextricably linked; and the Aryans as a race became sharply demarcated from other races such as the Semitic and the black African.

For the German Romantics who devised the theory, Aryanism was part of the search for the origins of the German *Volk*. They saw India as a land of ancient wisdom and the cultural cradle of mankind. In England, although many questioned the validity of Aryan racial categories and were unhappy about the use of linguistic affinities to define biological descent, the Aryan theory still had a powerful attraction in that its 'scientific' character allowed the similarities and differences of the Indians and the English to be assessed systematically. As such, Aryanism participated in the growing appeal, from the 1850s onward, of racial theory in general. Yet it was fundamentally different in character from that 'scientific' racism which sought to measure anatomical features such as the size of the brain and the shape of the head. To be sure, such classificatory schemes were not without adherents in India, for the Victorians, as their power came to encompass the entire world, sought to order that world in a coherent and 'scientific' fashion. H.H. Risley, census commissioner and ethnologist, for instance, denied the existence of any correlation between head size or shape and intelligence, but sought to demonstrate that the social status of the

[20] Marshall, *Hinduism*, pp. 15–16, 252–54, 260–61.

members of the various caste groupings varied 'in inverse ratio to the mean relative width of their noses'. Nevertheless the greatest utility of such 'sciences' as craniometry lay elsewhere, above all in the effort to assess the racial characteristics of Africans, and blacks more generally. Africans, in the British view, were deemed to have no history at all, because they lacked written records and ancient monuments. Hence, they were regarded as mere 'savages', whose bodies alone could define their enduring nature. India's extensive past could obviously not be treated with the disdain directed towards that of the African peoples. A place too had to be found in any racial theory for India's similarity with, as well as its difference from, Europe. Hence, as the British set out to place India in a racial hierarchy, they used philology to constitute a history, not biology to constitute a 'primitive' state of being.[21]

Aryan racial theory was itself not free of troubling difficulties. If the Indians and the British were alike Aryans, then how could the Indian people be marked out as inferior? How, indeed, could the British Raj be justified? The answer was to be found in evolutionary theory. Unlike the properly Darwinian view, in which weaker species suffered extinction, among human races, with perhaps such exceptions as the Tasmanians, those who fell behind in the struggle for survival instead experienced racial degeneration. While the European branch of the Aryan peoples triumphed over those of other races, those who went to India, as the amateur ethnologist and civil servant George Campbell wrote, 'lost their purity of race' by 'intermingling with the aboriginal races, and by the innate decay of enervation by the climate'.

The notion of Aryan decline in India was of course wholly dependent upon the characterization given to India's non-Aryan peoples. Victorian philologists categorized these people under the terms Turanian and Dravidian. The latter encompassed the major language grouping of southern India, first subjected to serious study by Robert Caldwell, in his *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* (1856); while the term Turanian was loosely used as a way of describing speakers of non-Aryan and non-Semitic languages, especially those of Ural-Altaic derivation. From mid-century onward these categories, like that of Aryan itself, took on racial connotations; and Turanian especially, perhaps because

[21] For Aryan theory, see Joan Leopold, 'British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850–1870', *English Historical Review*, vol. 89 (1974), pp. 578–603; Herbert Risley, *The People of India* (London, 1915; reprinted, Delhi, 1969), chapter 1.

of its inherent vagueness, was adapted to the need of creating within India a racial foil to the Aryan conquerors. Overlapping and incorporating the Dravidian speakers, it defined those low caste aboriginal races who served, and had corrupted, their Aryan superiors. They were, as Risley put it, the oldest and 'most primitive' of India's peoples; their 'birthright' was that of labour for those above them.

As the Aryans settled in India, a few favoured communities, especially in the country's northernmost reaches, were able to preserve themselves from this 'intermixture' with 'Turanian blood'. The Jats, for instance, were described by George Campbell as 'in no degree Tartar or Turanian, but on the contrary in every respect intensely Aryan in their features, in their figure, in their language, and particularly in their institutions'. Risley too insisted that the Aryans of the Punjab and Rajasthan, with their 'very light transparent brown' skins, retained a 'high degree of purity' distinct from the bulk of the Indian people. For the most part, however, as the Aryan invaders migrated down the Gangetic valley, they came in contact with the Dravidians. The results were disastrous. As the 'men of the stronger race took to themselves the women of the weaker', the amount of 'pure Aryan blood' flowing through the veins of India's peoples became ever less, until by the British colonial period it had become 'infinitesimally small'. As we shall see, this racial distinction between those of the northern plains and those of the lower Ganges was to have its counterpart in the category of gender, which opposed the 'martial' peoples of the north to the 'effeminate' Bengali.[22]

An account of India's evolution based on race created problems as well as solved them; for the Aryan thesis as applied to India's social institutions, by such men as Henry Maine, was used to deny that change of any sort had ever taken place. Far from declining, as we have seen, India's Aryan institutions, in Maine's view, remained as powerful at the end of India's historical development as at its beginning. Nevertheless, a racial theory had the great advantage that it could provide not only a 'scientific' account of the diverging paths followed by India and England, but it could also order England's 'progress' in relation to India's 'decline', and so mark out the precise stages of India's downward course. Despite the incompatibility of institutional 'changelessness' with racial 'decline', each served important purposes, and so their theoretical contradictions had to be ignored.

[22] Campbell, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, pp. 59, 194–95.

Similarly, in their depreciation of racial 'mixing' the British were not always consistent. They took pride after all in the mixture of racial strains from across northern Europe which were supposed to have given the British themselves their exceptional vitality. Nor was India all that different. Campbell himself admitted that the 'modern Hindoos' were 'in fact, taken as a whole, a mixed race like ourselves, with much the same varieties of features that are found in Europe'.[23] What was at issue, then, was clearly not race itself, but processes of history and culture for which 'race' was a convenient marker. These inconsistencies are readily visible in the history, at once racial and cultural, that the British constructed for India.

For the racial theorists, the spirit of the Turanian or the Dravidian stood opposed in every way to that of the Aryans. The Turanian peoples, above all, had never declined, but rather, isolated in the jungles and hills of the south, they had 'preserved their nationality pure and unmixed'. Furthermore, the coming of Buddhism, from the fifth century BC, provided an occasion for these depressed peoples to rise up in opposition to Aryan, and Brahminical, domination. At the same time too, the era of Buddhist predominance, pre-eminently the two centuries before and after the coming of Christ, provided a new and attractive way of marking out India's ancient greatness. Untainted by the associations of Hinduism with 'superstition' and 'priestly despotism', which contributed so much to its disparagement at the hands of the Victorians, Buddhism had at its core a 'great teacher', who converted by persuasion to a 'rationalistic' faith. Buddhist art too, as revealed in such monuments as Sanchi, approached a European aesthetic which celebrated simplicity of design and a 'truthful' representation of nature. Impressed by the values associated with this 'classical' era, the British had to overlook the obvious paradox that those same people whom they had defined as racially inferior had created a religion, and an art, which represented the apex of India's cultural achievement.

The pre-eminence of the Buddhist era was further assured by the fact that one school of Indian Buddhist art, that of Gandhara in the far northwest, directly incorporated Western classical forms. As the art of European classical antiquity was for Victorians the measure of superiority for all art everywhere, art influenced by it had by definition to be superior to other Indian art. Alexander Cunningham, for instance,

[23] Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 2, 133.

who as first director of archaeology focussed his attention primarily on the excavation of Buddhist sites and the decipherment of Bactrian Greek coins, was convinced of the central role of Greece in providing inspiration for the finest Indian work. Vincent Smith too, with other historians, until well into the twentieth century argued for the superiority of the classically influenced Gandharan sculpture over that of Mathura and central India. In similar fashion, Alexander the Great's brief invasion of the Punjab in 326 BC was made the climactic moment of ancient India's history.[24]

The decay of Buddhism, together with the waning of Greek influence following the fall of the Bactrian kingdoms, enabled the Aryans, by now thoroughly mixed with the indigenous peoples, to reassert their dominance. They did so, however, only by adopting as their own 'the absurd fables and monstrous superstitions' of the Turanians. The result was the absorption of the 'pure' Vedic faith into these 'abominations', and the subsequent emergence of the two predominant Hindu sects of Shaivism and Vaishnavism. These, wrote the architectural historian James Fergusson bitterly, 'brought God to earth, to mix and interfere in mundane afairs in a manner that neither the Aryan nor the Buddhist ever dreamt of, and so degraded the purer religion of India into the monstrous system of idolatry that now prevails in this country'. Nor did the enduring encounter with the Dravidians shape religion alone. As Risley put it, 'By the stress of that contact caste was evolved ... and the whole fantastic structure of orthodox ritual and usage was built up.' In this view, contemporary Hinduism, as both a religion and a form of social organization, was the product of racial mixing and Turanian superstition. It had nothing to do with the 'genius' of the Aryan race. To be sure, some, with Fergusson, echoing Maine, insisted that the influence of Aryan 'intellect' remained 'powerfully impressed on every institution of the country'. Nevertheless, its racial history made India a fundamentally different place from Britain. As a society whose Aryanism had been overwhelmed by too intimate a contact with debased Turanians, it could never hope to emulate on its own the achievements of Europe.[25]

India's downward trajectory was most visibly manifested in its art and architecture. Unlike the obscure and difficult Sanskrit texts, whose study in Victorian times was confined primarily to German scholars like Max Muller, the looming temples and intricate carvings which the English found all about them in India were easily accessible, even, with the invention of photography, in Britain itself. As Fergusson put it, announcing his study of India's monuments, they could be regarded 'as a great stone book, in which each tribe and race has written its annals and recorded its faith'. Architecture, one might say, provided, with philology, another language in which could be read the story of India's decline. The Turanians, in this view, though incapable of producing great literature, were 'extensive and enthusiastic builders', and so inaugurated India's architectural traditions. The results were, however, as Fergusson described them, not very impressive. All the south Indian builder sought, he wrote, was 'a place to display his powers of ornamentation, and he thought he had accomplished all his art demanded when he covered every part of his building with the most elaborate and difficult designs he could invent'. Nowhere was there to be found 'those lofty aims and noble results which constitute the merit and greatness of true architectural art'. The logic of decline further demanded that later structures be more 'degraded' than those of earlier times, so that the seventeenth-century Madurai temple became 'the most barbarous, it may be said the most vulgar' building to be found in India. Nor, in this degenerate period, could even borrowing from the West, of the sort undertaken by the later nawabs of Avadh, redeem Indian design. The Western forms would themselves only be tainted by, and so further degrade, a 'dying art'.[26]

These judgements were informed not only by a theory of history, but by arguments drawn from the science of aesthetics. From the time of the Renaissance onward, Europeans had conceived that there existed a universally valid aesthetic shaped by certain principles of balance and proportion. By this standard India's architecture, above all such structures as South India's temples, were judged wanting. Instead of a 'tall central object to give dignity to the whole', most of them possessed lofty gateways surrounding inconspicuous central shrines. Such an arrangement of architectural elements was, as Fergusson asserted flatly, 'a mistake which nothing can redeem'. In the end, the lessons of science and of history were the same: temples that

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[24] Vincent A. Smith, 'Greco-Roman Influence on the Civilization of Ancient India', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 58 (1889), pp. 112–37.

[25] James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (London, 1876; 2nd edn, 1910), pp. 10–12, 34–47.

[26] Fergusson, *History*, pp. 323–24, 341–42, 362–65, 604; see also Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley, 1989), chapter 2.

housed the deities of a 'degraded' faith were, not surprisingly, constructed according to 'false' principles, while the use of a 'false' architectural design testified to the existence of a 'degraded' civilization.[27]

Nor was architecture alone seen as flawed. George Birdwood, the premiere patron of India's arts in late-nineteenth-century Britain, argued that while the creative spirit had flourished in the era of India's 'archaic beginnings', it had then been stifled by Turanian influence. As a result, the 'nobler lovelier forms of flowers and trees' inherent in the Aryan 'love and worship of nature' were discarded in favour of a meaningless elaboration of form. Only on those rare occasions, above all during the Buddhist era and subsequently during the years of Islamic predominance, when the artist was free of the 'trammels' of Puranic mythology, could India's art escape what John Ruskin in 1858 called its wilful and resolute opposition to 'all the facts and forms of nature'. Yet the accurate representation of 'Nature' was hardly the real issue. What was at stake, in the discussion of art as much as of architecture, was not aesthetics, but politics. Neither India's art, nor the larger culture in which it was embedded, could be allowed to challenge Britain's, and Europe's, predominance.

In this historiography only intervention from without could halt India's spiral of decline. '*Ex Occidente Imperium*', as Risley put it, 'the genius of Empire in India has come to her from the West.' This was the 'determining factor' both of India's ethnology and its history. Yet no set of invaders could for long remain aloof from India's peoples, and its institutions. 'As each wave of conquerors', Risley wrote, 'Greek, Scythian, Arab, Moghul, that entered the country by land became more or less absorbed in the indigenous population, their physique degenerated, their individuality vanished, their energy was sapped, and dominion passed from their hands into those of more vigorous successors.' Even those warriors who seemed to emerge from within India, like the Marathas, could claim their 'individuality of character and tenacity of purpose' only as part of an inheritance which had come to them from supposed 'Scythian ancestors'.[28]

India's Muslim conquerors, above all, were made to share with the Aryans the task of revitalizing a decadent society. To be sure, these

27 Partha Mitter, 'Western Bias in the Study of South Indian Aesthetics', *South Asian Review*, vol. 6 (1973), pp. 125–36.
28 Risley, *People of India*, pp. 53–61.

men were 'Oriental despots', subject to the 'effeminacy and corruption inherent in Eastern dynasties'; so that each of the Muslim states of India, despite a 'brilliant beginning', gradually sank into 'inevitable decay'. Still, as both Muslims and conquerors, their perceived role in shaping India's history was markedly different from that of the indigenous Hindus. For Europeans, as we shall discuss more fully in chapter 4, Muslims were always, unlike Hindus, a worthy adversary. As Lord Napier insisted, 'the progress of Mahomedanism was not entirely destructive'. Throughout the Muslim world its rulers, he argued, despite conquest and rapine, discovered 'generous abilities and tastes', which made their courts centres not only of warfare but of artistic patronage. These men adhered as well to a rigorous monotheism that was 'no vain superstition, but a true religion', and hence was deserving of respect.

The Mughal dynasty which preceded the British conquest was accorded an exceptional status. It contained 'liberal and humane' rulers such as the emperor Akbar; and these men constructed such buildings as the Taj Mahal, an architectural 'jewel' Fergusson considered almost, though not quite, on a level with that masterpiece of Western art, the Parthenon. Yet precisely because it had reached such illustrious heights the collapse of the Mughal Empire was all the more devastating. As Alfred Lyall wrote, 'assaulted by foreign invaders from outside, and distracted by internal revolts, it fell with a crash, and was torn to fragments by usurpers, successful rebels, and military adventurers'. In the 'anarchy' that resulted during the eighteenth century the Indian people were left a 'masterless multitude swaying to and fro in the political storm, and clinging to any power, natural or supernatural, that seemed likely to protect them'. In short, Lyall concluded, 'the people were scattered without a leader or protector; while the political system under which they had long lived was disappearing in complete disorganization'. Eventually, as the Viceroy Lord Lytton told the Imperial Assemblage in 1877, 'Providence' called upon the British to 'replace and improve' the 'constantly recurrent' anarchy of its strife-torn predecessors. India, in other words, had to be saved from itself.[29]

Critically important in this creation of a history for India was not, of course, the mere fact of decline. What mattered, and what set the

29 Alfred Lyall, *The Rise and Expansion of the British Dominion in India* (London, 1894; reprinted, New York, 1968), pp. 62–65.

late-Victorian theorists apart from those, say, of the eighteenth century, was the description of this decline in racial, rather than environmental or cultural, terms. This alternative mode of explanation had far-reaching consequences. As the effects of racial degeneration could never be eradicated, India's peoples, even though Aryan in origin, had now to remain forever distinct, different, and inevitably inferior. Asserting 'difference' in such terms provided powerful theoretical underpinning for the larger post-Mutiny disillusionment with liberal idealism. Science and history together, so this ideology seemed to say, made all thought of reform pointless. Such ideas, in particular, reaffirmed the sense of Christianity, not as a faith to be shared with the world, but as a sign of England's intrinsic superiority. This took visible form in Indian church architecture. Even as the British were devising an architecture that endeavoured to represent the Raj as Indian, through the use of 'Saracenic' forms, church architecture remained rigidly confined within European, and particularly English Gothic, styles. The few attempts to create structures for Christian worship adapted to Indian forms, such as that of F.S. Growse in Mathura or the Cambridge Brotherhood in Delhi, provoked only a fury of opposition. As one correspondent wrote, criticizing the Delhi college of the Cambridge Mission, 'I cannot but regard as fatal the idea of carrying on Christian teaching in a building entirely surrounded with symbols, suggestions and associations which are opposed to Christianity.' The parallels the British delighted to find between themselves and the Romans were also shaped to the same end. Few of the British by the 1870s and 1880s expected what they called the 'ancient polytheism' of India to give way, as had occurred in the Roman Empire of antiquity, to Christianity. As Alfred Lyall put it, 'the seasons and the intellectual condition of the modern world are unfavourable to religious flood-tides'. In practice, Christianity was a faith meant for Europeans, to be housed in European-styled structures. In the India of the Raj, race and faith went hand in hand. India had to be accepted, and ruled, as it was.[30]

India's decline from an ancient Aryan glory did not, in the view of the late Victorians, degrade all elements of its culture. To the contrary, as men such as John Ruskin and William Morris argued, India kept alive in its crafts, as in its villages, cherished values of a shared past. Fergusson exulted that India's architecture was a 'living art' practised

[30] Lyall, *Asiatic Studies* (1884), pp. 159–60; Metcalf, *Imperial Vision*, pp. 98–104.

on the principles which caused its 'wonderful development in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', while Morris praised India's art works for being 'founded on the truest and most natural principles'. In so doing these men expressed a growing British disillusionment with the fruits of the industrial revolution. Although its industrial might had raised Britain to the position of the most powerful nation on earth and secured their own prosperity, it had at the same time, the crafts enthusiasts argued, enshrined the making of money, degraded English taste with its mass-produced ugliness, and isolated the labourer from pride in his work. 'Degrading' labour, as Morris wrote, must be replaced with work conceived in the spirit of the village blacksmith or carpenter. In its condemnation of Victorian individualism the crafts movement inevitably participated in the larger 'medievalist' critique of contemporary society. Although Morris as a socialist sought a revolution to usher in a new communal society, his romantic and backward-looking vision brought him close to those who sought to preserve distinctions of status and custom, and to assert the authority of the Crown, the landed elite, and the state.

The crafts enthusiasts' vision of India's past closely paralleled that of men like Henry Maine. The art critic Birdwood, in opposition to Maine, insisted that the perpetuation of the past in India was not a product of the growth of unwritten custom, but arose directly from the Code of Manu. This body of ancient Sanskrit law, in Birdwood's view, established both the caste system and the enduring village communities. Yet the end result was identical. Caught up in an ordered system which provided 'place and provision' for everyone, India's craftsmen had no 'stimulus to individual exertion', and so had handed down the industrial arts of antiquity 'through 5,000 years to modern times'. India was a land which had escaped an unattractive industrial order, yet remained confined within an 'invincible immobility' that disabled the country from participating, like England, in the 'advancement of art'.[31]

Despite their hostility to industrialism, the crafts enthusiasts in no way emancipated themselves from the fundamental assumptions that sustained the imperial enterprise. They fully accepted the Victorian belief that the 'whole organization of social life in India', as Birdwood put it, was 'theocratic' in character, with, at its centre, the 'monstrous

[31] George Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* (London, 1880), pp. 136–40; Metcalf, *Imperial Vision*, chapter 5.

shapes' of Hindu idolatry. Imbedded in this religion, India's art inevitably expressed its values. Truly creative art was therefore inconceivable. In 1910, reflecting on his 'experience of seventy-eight years' in the study of Indian art, Birdwood asserted that he had never found any work that sought to give 'perfected form to the artist's own ideals of the good, the beautiful and the true'; and he went on, in a memorable phrase, to compare an image of the Buddha to a 'boiled suet pudding'. For Ruskin and his associates, as much as for their opponents, aesthetics remained bound to the service of politics. No matter how much they might criticize their own society, the crafts enthusiasts were never prepared to abdicate their moral superiority, and with it the predominance of Europe. The work of the artisan craftsman alone, safely contained within the village order, posed no threat to the supremacy of the Raj, and so could secure unstinting praise. Everything else – whether of art or architecture – of necessity expressed only the 'barbarism' of a debased land.

Whether India's history was described in terms of 'decline' or of 'invincible immobility', in either case, then, the outcome was the same. Contradictions within the ideologies of race and language were ignored; the similarities demanded by the Aryan theory were accommodated; while difference was accentuated and shaped to insure a space in India for the Raj. Invariably, India was linked to Europe's past only in antiquity, and only where the ties to Europe were constituted within an unthreatening village society. The creation of an enduring 'traditional' India, in its crafts as in its village communities and among its princes, as we shall see later, carried with it as well a rigorous enclosure of the 'native' within this 'traditional' space. As the prince had to play the role of feudal 'vassal', so too did the craftsman have to work within what the British 'experts' who controlled the Schools of Art and the lavish *Journal of Indian Art* had determined was a properly 'traditional' style. In no way did the preservationist ideal simply involve the preservation of what existed.

GENDER AND THE COLONIAL ORDER

The British conceptualized the difference between Great Britain and India in terms not only of history and race, but also gender. Such distinctions had a long history. As far back as the 1750s, Robert Orme had entitled a chapter of his account of India, 'Effeminacy of the

Inhabitants of Indostan'. As he wrote, 'we see throughout India a race of men, whose make, physiognomy, and muscular strength convey ideas of an effeminacy which surprizes when pursued through such numbers of the species, and when compared to the form of the European who is making the observation'.[32] With the growth of empire, gender, like race, helped define the contrast between ruler and ruled, and so provided a way to order Britain's relations with its Indian subjects. Throughout, though the two are not identical, the categories of gender intersected with those of race. As a result, British men, British women, Indian men and Indian women were all fitted for distinct roles within the ideology of the Raj. Together they were made to enact a set of gendered notions of India's 'difference'. Yet these distinctions could be sustained only by rigorously containing, even disowning, the similarities of gender, of male and female, that cut across the hierarchy of race and rule.

Distinctions based on gender gained an avowedly 'scientific' rigor with the growth of a powerful domestic ideology in Britain during the early nineteenth century. According to this theory, innate and demonstrable biological differences defined a fundamental difference between male and female. By their very nature women were fragile, passive, and emotional, in contrast to men, who were held to be strong, active, and intellectual. These differences in the structuring of the body, in turn, dictated differing patterns of behaviour for men and women. Men were to be active in the public world, competing against each other for power and wealth; while women, from the sanctuary of the home, were to nurture their husbands and children, and so uphold the society's values. Women possessed great power, for their task was the moral regeneration of society; but it was a power that made itself felt indirectly, by shaping the consciences of men.

The existence of empire sharpened these distinctions of gender. By its very nature the British imperial experience, as Ashis Nandy has written, brought into prominence the 'masculine' virtues – such as control, self-discipline, and the like – and de-emphasized the 'feminine' virtues, such as tenderness and feeling, which were expressive of 'the softer side of human nature'. The everyday life of the British in India, with women for the most part secluded, though, as we shall see, by no means inactive, in darkened bungalows, and with men engaged

[32] Robert Orme, 'Effeminacy of the Inhabitants of Indostan', in *Of the Government and People of Indostan*, pp. 42–43.

in the work of empire in court and camp, reinforced the distinctions between home and the world, and between the private and the public, which lay at the heart of the British domestic ideology. The experience of the British in India under the Raj in this way reinvigorated dichotomies of 'masculine' and 'feminine', which then returned to England to nourish further the ideology of separate spheres.[33]

Although domestic ideology defined coherent, if contested, gender roles in Britain, the construction of gender within the empire did not take shape in any explicit formulation. Rather, theories of gender, though forming a consistent set of assumptions and expectations, were embedded in the ideology of the Raj in a variety of often only half-recognized ways. Hence, each must be examined separately. It is necessary to look in turn at British ideas of their own masculinity as they sought to 'rescue' India's 'degraded' women; at the notion of India as a 'feminized' land, at once seductive and dangerous; at the presumed effeminacy, as Orme described it, of Indian men; and at the ambiguous role of the white woman, caught up in the centre of the hierarchies of race and gender. For the most part, for obvious reasons, the voice that enunciated this vision was not only British but male.

For the Victorians, as heirs of the historical anthropology of the Scottish Enlightenment, the distinctive gender roles of their own domestic ideology were markers by which progress in civilization everywhere could be measured. The more 'ennobled' the position of women in a society, the 'higher' its civilization. By this measure, not surprisingly, India lagged far behind Britain. In contrast to the 'pure' and 'modest' demeanour presumed to define English women, India's women were not 'ennobled' by their men but instead 'degraded'. This state of moral degeneration, as we will see, was visibly represented by the *zenana* and the veil. Confined to a life of languid idleness in closed rooms, hidden from view, India's women were seen as suffused with an unhealthy sexuality and a disabling passivity. As India's men, so the British conceived, did not properly order their households – much as the country's previous rulers had failed to provide proper governance for the society as a whole – the British determined that they themselves should act as the protectors of India's women. In so doing they could not only, as they saw it, 'rescue' these unfortunate creatures; they could also make manifest their own 'masculine' character and proclaim their moral superiority over the Indian male.

[33] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi, 1983), pp. 31–34.

3 *Lord William Bentinck*, by Richard Westmacott (1835). This full length bronze statue of Bentinck, portrayed as aloof and serenely self-confident atop a circular drum, announces Britain's new commitment, recorded in an inscription on the rear of the base, to 'elevate the moral and intellectual character' of its Indian subjects. In the *sati* scene an Indian woman, oblivious to the cries of her children, is shown as she prepares to mount the pyre.

Few of their activities in India gave the British greater satisfaction than this vision of themselves as the reformers of Indian morality, which left as its legacy a range of enactments from the abolition of sati in 1829, through the Hindu Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, to the Age of Consent Act of 1891, and beyond. Though these acts were very different in character, none of them immediately affected large numbers of people. Satis, for instance, when enumerated in Bengal during the 1810s and 1820s, though sufficiently numerous to be readily visible at 500 or 600 a year, involved only an infinitesimal fraction of the millions of people in that province alone; while enforced widowhood and child marriage remained at least as prevalent after the enactment of British reform legislation as before. Yet the dramatic representation of these 'evils' was essential to the self-image of the Raj. The statue of Bentinck, for instance, erected soon after his departure from India in 1835, praised him for 'abolishing cruel rites'; on the base is depicted an affecting bas-relief of a half-clothed woman, her baby pulled from her exposed breast, being led to the funeral pyre. (See fig. 3.) None of Bentinck's other achievements, which include the introduction of Western education, gained such graphic representation.

From the earliest days of the Raj sati compelled widespread attention. Despite its infrequent occurrence, the fascination with this event is not surprising. With its immolation of a living woman in a raging fire, sati, even more than the public execution, catered to the English obsession with death as spectacle. In the British imagination the event was also highly sexualized. The scene on Bentinck's statue evoked a salacious mixture of sex and violence, for it showed the woman's sari slipping from her hips and her bare breasts, now rubbed smooth, pushing forward on the curved pedestal at the centre of the composition, while the governor-general presided majestically above. It was easy, as well, to conceive of sati as emblematic of much that was wrong with Indian society. Whether the widow walked by herself in a trance-like state onto the pyre or was pushed from behind by relatives and priests, the act of sati represented the Indian woman as the helpless victim of a blood-thirsty and superstitious faith. India, sati seemed to say, was at once an exotic and a barbarous land.

Yet the representation of sati as an embodiment of India's difference could succeed only by the suppression of similarity. This was not an easy task. In the late eighteenth century, and in the first years of the

4 *An Indian Woman Burning Herself on the Death of her Husband* (date and author unknown, but probably *c.* 1810). A product of the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century romanticized depiction of the Hindu widow's self-immolation as a heroic act, this drawing shows the widow, as the funeral pyre is lit, pouring oil over herself, while three British officers calmly watch from on horseback.

nineteenth, the British had frequently romanticized, as an ideal of conjugal fidelity, the self-sacrifice of the bereaved widow who selflessly braved the flames. Several paintings even show the widow as a heroic figure nobly transcending death in the manner of Captain Cook in Hawaii. (See fig. 4.) Nineteenth-century domestic ideology too, as it took shape in the 1810s and 1820s, presented the ideal woman as not only moral and innocent, but imbued with a spirit of self-renunciation. She was not to think of 'self-development', but was meant to sacrifice herself for her 'high and lofty mission' in society. For the British themselves, however, such female 'self-renunciation' was not meant to be that of the sati who followed her husband onto the pyre. From this act the British recoiled in horror. It was, nevertheless, as the ultimate 'self-sacrifice', not so far removed from the 'self-abasement' or 'self-annihilation' that, especially for feminist critics, defined the core of the domestic ideology. In a Britain where gender roles were contested, the existence of a connection between Indian self-immolation and the ideals of domesticity could not be avowed. To the contrary, only a vigorous attack on sati could effectively deny such similarities by displacing them onto an India seen as barbaric and inhumane. The suppression of sati had to be made an affirmation of Britain's superiority, and with it that of Christian civilization. Such a task fell with special urgency upon evangelicals, for they had played a central role in creating the notion of women as morally pure and self-sacrificing. Hence, from the outset, they took the lead in the campaign against sati, and they used the representation of its 'horrors' to induce English audiences to support evangelicalism. In time, as a 'moral' India was constructed in accordance with the ideals of Victorian liberalism, its women would presumably adopt an 'appropriate' mode of self-sacrifice – as 'angels in the house', not as victims upon the pyre.

Among British officials in India a different perspective informed the campaign against widow burning. Unlike the British at home, they sought to challenge sati from within Indian tradition, and so make themselves the masters of that tradition. In India sati's opponents and supporters alike accepted the assumption, a product in large part of late eighteenth-century Orientalist scholarship, that India was a society ruled by 'scripture' and the self-interest of Brahmins, and that its people were so tightly bound by the constraints of religion that they possessed little independent agency. Thus, on the one hand, those who opposed the abolition of sati argued that the practice was a

cherished element of the Hindu religion with which it would be unwise, if not foolhardy, to interfere; while those who supported abolition equally denied any intention of introducing into India 'modernizing' notions of 'individual rights'. Instead of imposing outright their own ideals, so Bentinck and his supporters argued, they sought only to establish a 'purer morality' within forms of legitimation shaped by a vision of Britain as an indigenous Indian ruler. As Bentinck said, disavowing any intent to convert Indians to Christianity, 'I write and feel as a legislator for the Hindus and as I believe many enlightened Hindus think and feel.' Authority for suppression had thus to be found in Brahmanic 'scripture'. The British approached various pandits, and from them secured interpretations of selected Sanskrit texts which they used to support a claim that sati was not an essential part of the Hindu religion. In either case, the will of the widow mattered not at all; what was 'proper' was what could be defined as 'scriptural'. Bentinck's decision to outlaw sati was therefore, as he saw it, a 'restorative act' meant to enable Indians to act according to the 'purest' precepts of their religion. In practice, of course, this 'restoration' involved the introduction of 'modern', which is to say colonial, notions of the country's past and its religion. In the process too, not surprisingly, Hinduism was meant to give way to a 'higher' religion.[34]

The central assumptions of the sati debate continued in the later-Victorian era to inform legislation for the reform of Indian morals. Always, as in the case of sati, discussion of the condition of Indian women involved an outraged expression of horror at Indian degradation, and the consequent need for the British to save the Indians from themselves. The 1891 Age of Consent Act, for instance, which prohibited the consummation of marriage for girls below the age of twelve, provided an opportunity, as Mrinalini Sinha has written, for the British to 'demonstrate their liberal intentions in the face of the "uncivilized" and "unmanly" practices of the Bengalis'.[35] Similarly, in these later discussions, whether of widow remarriage or the age of marriage, 'scripture' always mattered more than custom, with the oldest texts accorded the greatest authenticity. At the same time, while

[34] Lata Mani, 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women* (New Delhi, 1989), pp. 88–126.
[35] Mrinalini Sinha, 'The Age of Consent Act', in Tony Stewart (ed.), *Shaping Bengali Worlds, Public and Private* (East Lansing, 1989).

religion was seen as permeating Hindu society, those practices the British sought to discountenance were defined as marginal to, if not wholly outside, its core traditions. As the viceroy, Lord Lansdowne, told the legislative council in the Age of Consent debate, early consummation of marriage was not one of the 'great fundamental principles' of the Hindu religion, but one of a number of 'subsidiary beliefs and accretionary dogmas which have accidentally grown up' around it.

Much in this reformist ideology was internally inconsistent, if not contradictory. Although the British looked to ancient texts to define their ideal Hindu society, in fact the practice of the courts, inasmuch as they enforced Brahminical norms, encouraged precisely the kind of behaviour, such as avoidance of widow remarriage, that the government sought to discourage through its legislation. Similarly, although not accorded an independent voice of their own, Indian women were viewed at one and the same time as the passive vessels of 'tradition', and the site on which colonial officials, and with them upper-caste Hindu reformers, proposed to constitute a reformed society more closely fitted to Victorian ideals. Despite their avowed concern to avoid unsettling Indian religious belief, British reformers were in no doubt that there existed an absolute standard of 'morality', and that where, as Lansdowne insisted in the debate on the Age of Consent act, 'religion' and 'morality' were in conflict, the former had to give way. In their vision of themselves as moral reformers, as in their attitude towards Indian society more generally, the British could not escape the enduring contradiction between their self-imposed 'civilizing mission', with its ideal of an India remade in Britain's image, and their insistence upon maintaining an imagined India of enduring 'difference'.[36]

As India's Hindu women, so the British conceived, were degraded by their sexuality and their vulnerability to priestly influence, so too was their religion itself feminized in its character. Above all, the British looked on in horror at a Hinduism that venerated female deities imagined as vicious and licentious in nature, such as Kali. Further, many Hindu devotional practices, especially those of India's

[36] Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India', in D. Haynes and G. Prakash (eds.), Contesting Power (California, 1991), pp. 62–108; Lucy Carroll, 'Law, Custom, and Statutory Social Reform: The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856', Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. 20 (1983), pp. 363–88; Proceedings of the Imperial Legislative Council, vol. 30, 19 March 1891, pp. 146–50.

peasantry, were stigmatized as 'mother goddess' cults. Drawing on the gender stereotypes of Victorian England, M. Monier-Williams described such 'guardian mothers' as 'more easily propitiated by prayer, flattery, and offerings', yet 'more irritable, uncertain, and wayward in her temper' than male salvation gods. At the same time, such deities, related, some thought, to Mesopotamian mother-goddesses, expressed the innate degeneracy characteristic of Dravidian peoples. Together, these characterizations, as they linked the discourses of race and gender, defined for the British a religion of unashamed sensuality and shallow emotionalism. This system of belief, by its very nature, stood in sharp contrast to the Protestant British conception of Christianity. Lacking the coherent belief and principled conviction that was taken to mark Christianity, Hinduism was of necessity effeminate because it was degraded, and degraded because it was effeminate. The Brahmin priesthood alone exercised authority within the religion. But theirs was not the self-mastered command of the properly masculine elite. It was only the guileful concealment and dissimulation of the weak.[37]

The contrast between India's degraded sensuality and the masterly redemption of the British nourished a larger, enduring, opposition between an ordering Europe and a feminized 'Orient'. Such an Orient, with its erotically charged excitation, was perhaps most visibly manifested in the French painting of the imagined world of the harem and the shapely figure of the odalisque. Though John Frederick Lewis created such scenes for English audiences, he, with the French 'Orientalist' painters, worked almost exclusively in the Middle East. In paintings of India, though the landscape was often evoked in soft and yielding tones, representations of the erotic were infrequent, and confined for the most part to scenes of the 'nautch', or dance. Colonial officials, especially in the early years of British rule, participated as observers in dance performances given by Indians; and to some degree the 'nautch' dancer in colonial painting can be seen as a sexual being presented for the privileged, and controlling, gaze of the European male viewer. Yet the British response to Indian dance, particularly in Victorian times, was ambivalent. Many, like G.O. Trevelyan, found the nautch 'extravagantly dull', while others reported that the dancers were, 'as usual, ugly'. At best, as one observer recounted a visit to Lucknow, 'the dancer slinks to and fro with panther steps on her white

[37] Inden, Imagining India, pp. 115–22.

cloth, raises her eyes to the heavens before closing them to smack her lips together, and sings verses from a sleepy lullaby, sways beneath her veils, stretches out her arms, writhing like a serpent in paradise until the highlight of her act is over, and another girl, more supple even than her ... takes her place and sways to and fro in her turn'.[38]

In the creation of a feminized India the figure of the prostitute took centre stage. For the British, the prostitute, alluring and dangerous, at once symbolized India's degradation and generated a set of practical problems of regulation and control. As a result, in contrast to the voyeurism common to the male European vision of the Middle East, where the British, on the outside looking in, were free of the day-to-day responsibility of maintaining order, in colonial India the play of male erotic fantasies had for the most part to be contained within the confines of a moralized imperial authority. Even so, an India seen as suffused with sensuality offered ample scope for the imagination; and the imagination, in its turn, often shaped administrative action. One arena, not surprisingly, in which the existence of prostitution revealed itself was the Hindu religion. There it took the shape of the devadasis, women married to a god and dedicated to his service in the temple. Unable, or unwilling, to conceive of a religious system in which the erotic and the spiritual could be joined together, the British called this practice 'temple prostitution'. Through the use of such a term the unimaginable could be contained, and so controlled, and appropriate righteous indignation mounted against its existence. Even though a Hindu petitioner in Madras claimed that girls dedicated to a temple lead a life 'very similar with that class of females called nuns in Roman Catholic churches', while British critics from their side captiously compared the 'immorality' of such women with that of 'ballet-girls' on the London stage, the Indian authorities insisted on India's essential difference. Temple prostitution, they argued self-righteously, was 'equally immoral and immemorial'. Unlike English ballet girls, who sometimes 'preserve their virtue in spite of trials and temptations', in 'the case of the pagoda girl prostitution is the object of her dedication to the temple, and practice it she must to the end of her existence'.[39]

Anxiety about the prostitute loomed largest in connection with the military. As British troops in India were not allowed to marry, and the

scourge of venereal disease regularly incapacitated large numbers of soldiers, the military authorities endeavoured to make available in cantonments a supply of prostitutes subject to medical inspection. This policy, formalized in the Contagious Diseases Act of 1868, modelled upon that in force for British ports, brought down upon the government the wrath of moralists at home, who disliked the official recognition of prostitution which these acts implied. Their opposition, together with that of British feminists, secured the reluctant repeal of both the British and the Indian Acts by 1888, although the Indian military authorities, ever anxious to contain the spread of venereal disease, managed to circumvent much of the effect of repeal by the promulgation of 'sanitary' regulations for cantonment areas.[40]

More was at stake in these controversies, however, than the simple provision of prostitutes for soldiers. Especially when contrasted with the comparable British acts, the Indian regulations make clear how the treatment of Indian prostitutes at once constituted, and was informed by, assumptions about enduring Indian 'difference'. In Britain, for instance, moral reformers, with their feminist allies, fought for the right of women, even as prostitutes, to be free of coerced bodily searches and registration; and they endeavoured to 'rescue' 'fallen women' by exhortation and recuperative treatment. No such concern for women's civil liberties cumbered the Indian debates, nor was there talk of redemption or 'rescue'. The Indian reformers were concerned only to secure an appearance of 'purity' in the behaviour of the British themselves. Prostitution itself mattered only where European women were involved, for their 'immoral' behaviour, by inverting the 'proper' hierarchies of race and gender, would bring discredit on the Raj. The fate of the common Indian prostitute evoked no interest. Prostitution was, after all, so the British commonly believed, an hereditary caste profession, recognized in the Hindu law books.

Furthermore, the Indian acts extended to major urban areas throughout the country, not just to selected ports, and hence implied that prostitution was a widely spread menace to the security of the Raj. While 'respectable' British women might openly traverse the city streets, if only in certain times and places, no such secure public arena existed for her Indian counterpart. Almost any Indian woman outside the seclusion of the zenana could thus potentially be suspect as a

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[38] Sten Nilsson and Narayani Gupta (eds.), *The Painter's Eye: Egron Lundgren and India* (Stockholm, 1992), p. 128.
[39] See correspondence in NAI Home Judl.-B, May 1874, no. 169–74.

[40] Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex, and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793–1905* (London, 1980), especially chapters 1–3.

prostitute, and a bearer of disease. As Lord Kitchener, the commander-in-chief, warned his troops in 1905, 'the common women as well as the regular prostitutes in India are all more or less infected with disease.' Venereal disease in India was regarded, moreover, as not just an unfortunate infection, but rather as a symptom of a 'diseased' society. As Kitchener wrote, 'Syphilis contracted by Europeans from Asiatic women is much more severe than that contracted in England.' It assumes, he continued, 'a horrible, loathsome and often fatal form'; and he proceeded to list an array of frightening symptoms, above all that of the body rotted and eaten away by 'slow, cankerous, and stinking ulcerations'. India was a land in which sexuality, disease, and degradation were linked together, and inscribed on the bodies of its women.[41]

The notion of a sexualized India was not, of course, exhausted by the figure of the prostitute. As we shall see later, in discussing Rudyard Kipling's Indian stories, the seductive attraction of India was by no means wholly contained by its enmeshment in the administrative concerns of the Raj. Furthermore, the contradiction between the vision of the prostitute as a contaminated being, and the urgency with which the government endeavoured to make prostitutes available to its soldiers, pointed to another fear, unacknowledged but haunting – that of homosexuality. Such an 'effeminate' pattern of behaviour among the members of the ruling race had to be avoided at all costs. Nevertheless, in the hyper-masculine society of the Raj, a barely suppressed homosexual tension can be seen shaping much of the erotic attraction of India. Such was the case, above all, in the British association with the 'martial' tribes of the Frontier. There alone, one might argue, did the British find in India a sense of excitement comparable to that aroused by the veil and the harem of the Middle East.

A society defined by sensual indulgence created, in the British view, 'effeminate' men as well as 'degraded' women. Indeed, the very opposition of a 'feminized' India to a 'masculine' Britain had as a central object the devaluing of the Indian male. Insofar as the British claimed for themselves the right to protect Indian women from the evil effects of 'tradition', Hindu males, denied a claim on 'masculinity', were reduced to a helpless ineffectuality. The growth of the idea of Indian 'effeminacy' can be traced in part to eighteenth-century theories of

[41] Philippa Levine, 'Venereal Disease, Prostitution and the Politics of Empire: The Case of British India', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 4 (1994), pp. 579–602.

climatic determinism, in which heat and humidity were seen as conspiring to subvert manliness, resolve, and courage. As Orme wrote, 'Satisfied with the present sense of ease, the inhabitant of Indostan has no conception of anything salutary in the use of exercise.' Diet reinforced this preference, for the Indian, in Orme's view, ate only rice, which was an 'easily digestible' food, obtained with little labour, and thus 'the only proper one for such an effeminate race'. The most famous depiction of the debilitating effect of India's climate is surely that of Macaulay, who wrote of the languor and indolence produced by the 'constant vapour bath' in which the Bengali spent his days. The result, not surprisingly, was that his 'physical organisation' was 'feeble even to effeminacy'. There had never perhaps existed, Macaulay tellingly concluded, 'a people so thoroughly fitted by habit for a foreign yoke'. Reprinting this passage in his authoritative *India* some fifty years later, John Strachey concurred. Bengal remained as Macaulay had represented it.[42]

The experience of Bengal, the area which they conquered first and knew best, powerfully shaped British views of Indian effeminacy. Not only the climate, but much in Bengali dress and customs confirmed this stereotype. The Bengali male's voluminous *dhoti* could easily be deprecated as a woman's dress; Bengalis, perhaps more than those of other regions, were devoted to female deities, among them Kali and Radha; and male devotees sometimes assumed the dress and demeanour of women as a mark of their submission to the god. In all of this, of course, the British, knowing little and caring less about Bengali belief, saw what they wished to see. Conquest itself reinforced this gender stereotyping. If not a land *of* women, for the 'sturdy' peasant gained British respect, India was a land ruled *by* women, or rather womanly men, who ran from battle, and so deserved their subjugation. To be sure, as their conquests reached northern India, the British encountered groups whom, as we shall see in chapter 4, they called 'martial races'. But praise of Punjabi 'manliness' did not eradicate the stereotype of Indian effeminacy. It only carved out an exception, which cast the larger Indian, and especially Bengali, 'effeminacy' ever more sharply into relief.

Within Bengal the British detested, above all, the English-educated Indians, known collectively as 'babus'. This term of respect among Indians, comparable to that of 'gentleman' in Britain, became in

[42] Orme, *People of Indostan*, pp. 42–45; Strachey, *India*, pp. 334–35.

British usage a title of disparagement denoting those, unworthy of respect, who sought to ape British ways. Behind this condescension lay unvoiced, anxious fears. By his mimicry of English manners, the babu reminded the British of a similarity they sought always to disavow; and, steeped in English liberalism, he posed by implication, if not by outright assertion, a challenge to the legitimacy of the Raj. As the seductive female had to be repudiated, so too, even more urgently, had the educated Indian male to be contained within the gender stereotype that portrayed him as no more than a caricature Englishman. He might be, as Kipling wrote in his story 'The Head of the District', filled with 'much curious book-knowledge of bump-suppers, cricket-matches, hunting-runs and other unholy sports of the alien'; but his 'extraordinary effeminacy' made it unnecessary to treat seriously his 'political declamations'. Possessed of manly self-control, the Englishman alone stood apart from, and so could legitimately rule, the peoples of India.

Characterization of the Indian male, especially the English-educated Bengali, as 'effeminate' gained further strength from Indian opposition to such measures as the Age of Consent Act. While many educated Indians, from Rammohun Roy onward, had joined the British in seeking reformation of Hindu society, others, as early as the time of the sati debate, sought to exclude the colonial government from what they regarded as their domestic and religious affairs so that they might carve out an autonomous arena which they could call their own. At the same time, educated Indians often accepted the British insistence upon a connection between the 'status of women and that of the country in general'. *The Hindu* of Madras was even prepared to admit, as its editors announced on 15 September 1890, that Britain's 'power and prosperity' dated from 'the time when women were accorded a higher status than is implied in the present Hindu conception of women's privileges and rights'. Hence, questions of the proper role for women, and of men's responsibilities toward women, evoked strong feelings on all sides.

By 1890, with the proposal to prohibit consummation of marriage for girls under the age of twelve, hostility to British interference had spread across India from Maharashtra, where the nationalist leader B.G. Tilak took the lead in mobilizing public opinion, to Bengal. Opposition was most intense in Bengal because the educated classes there commonly practised, in the *garbhadan* ceremony, consum-

mation of marriage at the time of a girl's puberty. Appalled, the British sought explanations for this 'debased' sexual behaviour in a variety of racial and climatic factors, including most prominently, as the secretary of the Calcutta Public Health Society put it, the fact that Bengalis were *not*, like the residents of northern India, a 'more' purely Aryan population'. Whatever the cause, however, for the British the effects of this early sexual activity were readily apparent in the 'degeneracy and deterioration' of Bengali society. Hence, opposition to raising the age of consent only strengthened their conviction that Indian men, above all Bengalis, were weak and 'voluptuous', and lacked 'manly self-control'. The argument was, of course, circular: for not only were effeminate men prone to premature sexual intercourse, but effeminacy, and with it the larger 'enervation' of the people, was itself a product of 'unnatural' early sexuality. In any case, such 'unmanly' men, like women, required the protection of a paternal superior.

The British refused to accept as legitimate not only arguments based on the character of the *garbhadan* as a religious ceremony, but those grounded in the belief, widespread among Indian men, that female sexual desire, if not satisfied within marriage immediately after puberty, would seek 'some other course' to satisfy its needs. For the British, female sexuality, at least among respectable women, simply was not supposed to exist. Similarly, Bengali protests that their 'male honour' was challenged by British infringements on their rights as husbands had to be ignored: not, of course, because the British refused to accept the notion of male superiority, but because the Bengali could not be allowed to claim more than a 'caricature' of masculinity. Even though it was clear from the outset that the Age of Consent Act could not be effectively enforced – the government openly acknowledged that its effect would be 'mainly educative' – this enactment nevertheless enabled the British effectively to display their superiority as rulers who were at once 'masculine' and moral.[43]

The discourse on gender in colonial India had to accommodate English women as well as English men. Although women had no formal place as rulers in the colonial order, Victorian ideology, with its exaggerated opposition of 'masculine' and 'feminine', shaped a central place for them, as sign and signifier, in the discourse of colonialism. Pure and virtuous, superior to 'degraded' colonial races of either sex,

[43] Sinha, 'Age of Consent Act'; and Correspondence relating to the Act in NAI Home Judl., October 1890, no. 210-13, and January 1891, no. 1-42.

5   *The Magistrate's Wife*, from G. F. Atkinson, *Curry and Rice ... or the Ingredients of Social Life at our Station in India* (1859). This drawing represents the enduringly popular vision of the English woman in India, surrounded by servants, as idle and self-indulgent.

the Englishwoman was meant to enact Britain's moral superiority. In so doing, her 'true' femininity showed forth most visibly in contrast to that of the Indian zenana woman. Hardly less than a prostitute, so the British conceived, the secluded woman of the zenana typified India's moral degeneracy in her behaviour. Not only did she live a life of idleness in closed and unhealthy rooms, but her entire existence was seen by many observers as suffused with sensuality. The 'sexual function', as Flora Annie Steel wrote, was necessarily 'the central topic of lives confined to twelve square feet of roof'.[44] Ironically, even the Indian woman's veil, which for her male relatives signified her inviolability, and for the woman herself, as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had appreciated long before, made possible an exhilarating freedom of

[44] Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity: The Autobiography of Flora Annie Steel, 1847–1929* (London, 1930), pp. 246–47.

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[44] Flora Annie Steel, *The Garden of Fidelity: The Autobiography of Flora Annie Steel, 1847–1929* (London, 1930), pp. 246–47.

movement, suggested to the British what it was meant to hide – her sexuality. The English woman, by contrast, veiled in modesty, remained vigorous but delicate, active but demure. (See fig. 5.)

In these circumstances British women established space for themselves in a variety of ways – by writing, by travelling, and, most commonly, by undertaking religious and philanthropic activity. Such activity, seen as helping their 'degraded' colonial sisters, appealed especially to liberal Victorian feminists, for it gave them scope for independent action, without presenting a frontal challenge to the ideologies of either domesticity or empire. Nonetheless, such activity inevitably blurred gender roles. The 'lady missionary', or the 'lady doctor', was needed because she alone could visit the women's quarters of Indian homes and care for Indian women. Yet she ran the risk by virtue of her independent movement of being implicated in 'indelicate' behaviour with men, or simply of being seen as acting 'improperly'. The negotiation of such conflicting demands was never easy. Most successful perhaps was Florence Nightingale, who, as she created a nursing corps, acted out a dominant 'masculine' role in the imperial arena, yet as the nurturing 'lady with the lamp' participated in the creation of a 'mythic' figure compatible with Victorian domestic ideology. In the process she could further represent an aggressive English imperialism in the guise of a mother's curative care for the 'sickly child' that was India.[45]

Even the English woman who did not venture outside her bungalow, as we shall see later, could not wholly escape a similar conflict. While embodying the ideals of Victorian womanhood, she had also in practice to enact within the bungalow a role similar to the one her husband played outside – that of a masculine assertion of ordering rationality in the face of an India where disease and disorder raged unchecked. This was especially evident in the disciplining of Indian servants, who, 'accustomed to it for thousands of years', as Flora Annie Steel wrote, needed to be treated firmly. By pitting against each other the extremes of decorative seclusion and vigorous activity, the female roles set out within the Raj enforced upon the white woman exceptional tensions of race and gender. Caught between masculine assertion and feminine modesty, between identification with English men and with Indian women, the English woman, within the private

[45] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago, 1988), chapter 6.

sphere she presided over, bore the unenviable responsibility – what one may call the 'white woman's burden' – of both representing the virtues of domesticity and extending the authority of the Raj.

Some few English women sought to create a space for female authority within an India free of colonial domination. The arena in which this took place was the practice of spiritualism. Although English spiritualists sought to portray themselves as properly 'feminine', still by its very nature female mediumship, or spirit possession, as Alex Owen has put it, 'effected a truly radical subversion' of nineteenth-century femininity.[46] Such 'subversion' came to encompass India with the founding in 1875 of the Theosophical Society. Through a set of occult practices drawn in large part from Hinduism, women like Madame Blavatsky, and subsequently Annie Besant, defiantly asserted a power of their own. Building upon, but inverting, the stereotypes which depreciated India as a 'spiritual' land, and women as 'religious', they challenged the accepted discourses of both empire and gender. Establishing the headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar, near Madras, Blavatsky openly consorted on an equal footing with Indian males, whom she accepted as disciples; while Besant, with her support of Home Rule in the early decades of the twentieth century, extended the challenge from the realm of the spirits to that of nationalist politics. In so doing these women gave the creation of 'difference' a new meaning – as a set of values that could be used against the Raj as well as on its behalf. Nor was it long before Indians were to do the same, above all under the leadership of Gandhi, as he appropriated for the purposes of the freedom struggle the 'feminine' virtues assigned to India by the Raj. Such strategies of inversion nevertheless invigorated, rather than overturned, the gendered assumptions that had fortified the Raj.

Together with the construction of a distinctive history that sustained them, ideas of gender and race, then, were employed to constitute a set of fundamental differences between India and England. There existed a 'changeless' India inhabiting a past that endured in the present; an India of racial 'decline' marked by the triumph of Dravidianism and the anarchy of the eighteenth century; and an India of a gendered 'effeminacy' which made its women and men alike dependent on a benevolent British 'masculinity'. Each of these descriptions of India's difference had its own theoretical, even 'scientific', rationale;

[46] Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room* (Philadelphia, 1990), chapters 1 and 8.

each too was rent with deep contradictions both within itself, and in relation to the others. Above all, race and gender provided explanations of very different sorts for India's plight. The theory of racial decline announced a process of irreversible physical deterioration brought about by the mixing of blood, while the degeneracy defined by effeminacy was one of character and morals.

In each case the creation of difference involved an acknowledgement, either avowed or implicit, of similarity as well as of difference. These similarities were then reconstituted to secure the results which the British required of them. Least troubling was Aryan racial theory. Though it implicated the British with the Indians in a common origin, the similarities were sufficiently distant, and India's subseqent history of 'decline' sufficiently convincing, that, whether examined in terms of language, architecture, or religion, India's racial history clearly stood apart from that of Britain. This distance was less apparent in the context of the village community and Indian feudalism. The ideal of the village community, in particular, resonated with nostalgia for the 'world we have lost'. Medievalism too was an English category imposed upon India to serve the requirements of English nostalgia as much as those of empire. Hence, this vision of India's past could not escape being caught up in a conflict between the need to 'civilize' India, and the opposing desire to preserve a still 'medieval' land. As the elements of this 'traditional' India were fitted into the working of the Raj, as we will see in chapter 4, they consorted uneasily with a commitment to progress which could not be disowned without disavowing the empire itself.

The British were much less willing to accommodate similarities of gender than of race or history. In part this was because gender distinctions were tangled in deeply seated British self-perceptions. Unlike Aryan racial theory, where similarities could be acknowledged and then shaped to the needs of empire, contested notions of women's roles in Britain, shaped by ideals of purity and domesticity, made impossible any acknowledgement of a shared female sexuality or the larger implications of women's self-sacrifice. Similarly, the reluctance of British men to acknowledge the feminine side of their own nature, or to accord Indian men more than a caricatured masculinity, meant that similarities of gender among males were consistently masked or denied. At once psychologically and politically threatening, any avowal of such shared ties was unthinkable. Conceptions of gender

therefore found expression not so much in a coherent ideology as in the ways they were enacted in British relations with their Indian subjects. Despite their inherent contradictions, however, all these varied notions of Indian 'difference' were made to fit together; and all alike helped to define the British as a 'superior' race. Sustained by Victorian 'masculine' and 'feminine' virtues, they possessed an incontestable right to rule over India's peoples.

THE ORDERING OF DIFFERENCE

The strategies devised by the British to comprehend India were never simply intellectual exercises, nor were they meant only in some general way to justify British rule over the subcontinent. Always these theories, whether of race or gender, of an unchanging or of a feudal India, found meaning as they were used to order India's peoples and their past. Through them what the British conceived of as India's enduring difference was given shape in administrative practice. This process of ordering India was not driven wholly by political objectives. It was also part of the larger Enlightenment endeavour, by observation and study, to understand the world outside Europe, as Europeans came to know it more fully. A relentless need to count and classify everything they encountered defined much Victorian intellectual activity. For the most part too, as they set out to order the peoples who inhabited their new Indian dominion, the British sought to fit the categories they used to the society they purported to describe. Indeed, Indians themselves, especially the Brahmin informants and assistants who worked with the British, by the information they provided shaped much of the ethnographic project. Still, under the Raj the knowledge the British amassed can not be separated from its role in the successful working of colonial rule. India was 'known' in ways that would sustain a system of colonial authority, and through categories that made it fundamentally different from Europe.

The theories of 'difference' the British devised, as we have seen, despite their claims to scientific precision, were never wholly coherent, nor were they free of internal contradiction. As they were deployed by India's colonial administrators, these contradictions became ever more difficult to contain. Often mutually inconsistent theories were cobbled together to achieve particular political purposes, and controversy frequently erupted over how best to fit the ungainly facts of India's social order into the 'proper' modes of explanation. Inevitably, the endeavour to create a coherent social order involved the creation everywhere of what could only be called 'exceptions'. Furthermore, as the colonial sociology of India was tied to a system of

power, the British necessarily eschewed at once those categories which would announce India's similarity to Britain and those which might threaten the colonial order. To be sure, classificatory schemes familiar to the British at home were not entirely absent. Occupation, for instance, played an important role in the British ordering of Indian society. Nevertheless, categories meant to denote India's difference, above all those of caste, community, and tribe, were placed at the heart of the country's social system. Class, by contrast, which Victorian Englishmen regarded as the great divide in their own society, was nowhere to be found in British accounts of India's peoples. Despite its inconsistencies and its subordination to the needs of colonial rule, the British ethnographic enterprise had far-reaching consequences, for these various categories – of caste and community, of race and sect – informed the ways in which the British, and in time the Indians themselves, conceived of the basic structures of their society.

ORDERING INDIA'S PEOPLES

Initially, as they first came to know India in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the British described its peoples through a variety of classificatory systems in which occupational and caste rankings jostled with one other. There was unanimity on little more than the superior position of the Brahmin. Such views gained force from the textual studies of the early Oriental scholars, who adopted as their own the Brahminical view of India as a land whose peoples were forever fixed into positions defined by the four great *varna* categories of Brahmin, *ksatriya*, *vaisya*, and *sudra*, with the untouchables set beneath them all. By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, above all in the wake of the conquests of Lord Wellesley, when the British began to make their way into the Indian countryside, direct observation began to assume greater importance in the gathering of information on Indian society. The extensive tours of Francis Buchanan through Mysore and eastern India, and of Colin Mackenzie throughout southern India, can be said to have inaugurated the era of 'scientific' understanding of India based on detailed local knowledge.

Both Buchanan and Mackenzie amassed vast amounts of information on the working of Indian society. In his survey of Bihar, Buchanan collected statistics on housing, health, occupation, family size, and education, among other subjects, and even attempted to

6 Detail from *A Company Officer About to Sketch a Ruined Temple*, in the collection of Colin Mackenzie, c. 1810. Emblematic of the British determination to master India, this drawing shows a massive, once richly ornamented temple, now in ruins, with a tree rending the stone structure. A British officer, perhaps Mackenzie, with native assistants bearing a portfolio, ink, and a chair, has come to draw the ruined temple and so preserve it from India's inexorable decay.

estimate standards of living for various classes of labourers. So detailed are his statistics that modern researchers have sought to use them as a baseline from which to measure changes in economic well-being in the subsequent colonial era. In similar fashion, with the help of Brahmin assistants, Mackenzie collected local histories, religious and philosophical texts, coins, images, and antiquities, and made extensive plans and drawings wherever he went. Mackenzie's collecting enthusiasms far exceeded even the requirements of the colonial state, which remained always dubious of the value of his vast hordes of material. Although his collections announced Britain's control over India,

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Mackenzie's activities participated as much in the omnivorous empiricism characteristic of nineteenth-century British amateur science. (See fig. 6.)

Neither Buchanan nor Mackenzie, as they toured India, paid much attention to what was later to define India's distinctiveness – the caste system. References to caste in the work of both men are haphazard and unsystematic. For Buchanan occupation largely defined the nature of caste, while Mackenzie's local histories for the most part recount the origins and doings of the chiefs and rajas of southern India, not its castes. The British in India in these years of discovery also commissioned extensive collections of drawings of various castes and peoples of India. But these too, informed by romanticism and the cult of the picturesque, sought primarily to capture the likenesses of colourfully dressed soldiers and courtiers, itinerant merchants, and exotic holy men, as well as those, identified by occupation, with whom the British came into daily contact, such as their own vast array of household servants. These lists and drawings were, moreover, highly idiosyncratic. No attempt was made to organize them into a coherent caste 'system'.

The lack of interest in a systematic ordering of caste during the early decades of the nineteenth century was not surprising. Engaged as they were in conquering the country, the British sought, above all else, immediately useful information about India's resources and the character of those chieftains whom they were endeavouring to subdue into revenue-paying subjects. While the drawings in such collections as Mackenzie's made India's 'difference' readily visible, British notions of the character of that 'difference' were not as yet clearly established, so that caste existed as no more than an ethnographic curiosity. Insofar as it claimed any meaning for the men of the generation of Macaulay and Trevelyan it was as an emblem of India's degradation, and as a barrier to its improvement.

As British rule by mid-century became increasingly secure, and as the reforming impulse waned, the colonial search for knowledge took on a new shape. After the Mutiny, anxious to rule India without disrupting its established social institutions, and driven by an ever more compelling commitment to 'scientific' understanding, the British set out to reduce to a comprehensible order what they saw as the baffling variety of India's myriad peoples. By the 1860s, as we saw in chapter 3, ideas of 'difference' defined an India that had become a

'laboratory of mankind' or 'living museum', where ancient customs, habits, and practices endured up to the present. Denied a history of their own, the peoples of India were defined by unchanging racial and cultural identities. The most important of these, by far, was caste. As Bernard Cohn has written, for late Victorian anthropologists 'a caste was a "thing", an entity which was concrete and measurable; above all it had definable characteristics – endogamy, commensality rules, fixed occupation, common ritual practices'; and these 'things' could be ascertained and quantified for reports and surveys. Once fitted together in an organized hierarchy, this 'system' could be taken as providing a comprehensive and authoritative understanding of Indian society. India was, in this view, no more than the sum of its parts, and the parts were castes. Of course, as we shall see, the apparent rigor was deceptive, for this 'system' had to accommodate kinship and 'tribe', and at times 'religion' as well.[1]

This increasing systematization of caste was intimately connected with the development of photography. As much of the effort of ethnological classification was directed by a search for 'scientific' precision, the recording of 'exact' images by photography logically complemented the compiling of statistical information. Insofar as different castes were conceived of as representing distinct racial types, a photograph of a 'typical' member of an ethnic group could be used to identify the precise characteristics, of physiognomy, dress, and manners, that defined the group as a whole. Although photography had been used to record the 'ethnic types' of India from the early 1850s, the first full scale compilation was *The People of India*, an eight volume work of 468 photographs published by the Government of India in 1868. Initially conceived by the governor-general, Lord Canning, and his wife as a collection of souvenirs for their own personal use, the work was transformed by the Mutiny of 1857, with its challenge to Britain's presumed knowledge of India, into an official project. Accurate information about India's peoples now mattered as never before.

Although *The People of India*, like earlier collections, idiosyncratically mixed caste, varna, and occupational categories, and occasionally

[1] Bernard Cohn, 'Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture', in Milton Singer and Bernard Cohn (eds.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 3–25, especially pp. 15–16; Nicholas Dirks, 'Castes of Mind', *Representations*, no. 37 (Winter 1992), pp. 56–78; and his 'Colonial Histories and Native Informants', in Breckenridge and Van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism*, pp. 279–310.

7 *Brinjara and Wife*, from J. Forbes Watson and J. W. Kaye, *The People of India* (1868).

betrays what Christopher Pinney calls the 'moral preoccupations' of the reforming era, for the most part the work marked out a stage in the transformation of ethnological curiosity into 'a structured framework – the sort of "grid" to be found in museums and exhibitions – in which scientific theory and normalizing judgment predominate'. In its initial request for photographs, for instance, the Foreign Department asked the provincial governments to supply likenesses of 'characteristic specimens' of each tribe within their jurisdiction, and to include for each not only the 'peculiar characteristics of costume' but 'the exact tint of their complexion and eyes'. Nor did the photographs stand alone. Each was accompanied by a brief account of what purported to be that group's essential character. Gujars, for instance, were described as 'given to indiscriminate plunder in times of disturbance', while Banjaras had 'a reputation for perfect honesty'. (Consistency, however, was always elusive, for the Banjaras were later classified as a 'criminal' tribe.)[2] (See fig. 7.)

Those, above all the educated Indians, who rejected the notion of their country as an ethnographic 'museum', vigorously endeavoured to distance themselves from this collection. Shown the volumes in the India Office in 1869, Sayyid Ahmad Khan was horrified to see his countrymen portrayed as 'the equal of animals'. With considerable embarrassment, his son Sayyid Mahmud told an inquiring official that, while he was a Hindustani, he was 'not one of the aborigines'. What, Sayyid Ahmed reflected sadly, could the young English official on his way to India think 'after perusing this book and looking at its pictures, of the power or honour of the natives of India?'[3]

As time went on Indian ethnography asserted ever more rigorously its scientific claims. Its categories, embedded in censuses, gazetteers, and revenue records, became ever more closely tied to the administrative concerns of the colonial state. At the heart of this ethnography remained always the study of caste. As H.H. Risley pronounced with vigour, in his own account of *The People of India*, caste 'forms the cement that holds together the myriad units of Indian society'. Were

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[2] Christopher Pinney, 'Classification and Fantasy in the Photographic Construction of Caste and Tribe', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 3 (1990), pp. 259–88; and C.A. Bayly (ed.), *The Raj: India and the British 1600–1947* (London, 1990), p. 254–55; see also the correspondence in NAI For. Dept. Part A, June 1861, no. 278–79, and Home General A, December 1861, No. 43–45.

[3] G.F.I. Graham, *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (1885. Reprinted, Karachi, 1974), p. 129; and David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India* (Princeton, 1978) pp. 4–6.

its cohesive power withdrawn or its essential ideas relaxed, he continued, the change 'would be more than a revolution; it would resemble the withdrawal of some elemental force like gravitation or molecular attraction. Order would vanish and chaos would supervene.'[4]

Despite this general agreement on the centrality of caste as an organizing principle for Indian society, what caste actually consisted of remained always a source of controversy. Several ethnographers, among them J.C. Nesfield and William Crooke, argued that castes were defined by the occupations pursued by their members. Others, most notably Risley, insisted on a physical basis for caste. In his view, by contrast to other areas such as Europe, where 'anthropometry has to confess itself hindered, if not baffled, by the constant intermixture of types obscuring and confusing the data ascertained by measurements', in India 'the process of fusion has long ago been arrested, and the degree of progress which it had made up to the point at which it ceased to operate is expressed in the physical characteristics of the groups which have been formed'. Caste, that is, like race, was immutably inscribed on the bodies of India's peoples, and could be ascertained, so Risley argued, by measuring the nasal index. If, he said, 'we take a series of castes ... and arrange them in order of the average nasal index, so that the caste with the finest nose shall be at the top, and that with the coarsest at the bottom of the list, it will be found that this order substantially corresponds with the accepted order of social precedence'.[5]

While few were as confident as Risley of the explanatory value of particular measures such as the nasal index, most late-nineteenth-century ethnographers, in India as elsewhere, accepted the notion that anthropometric research had some value. Almost all measured skulls – if only, as the case of Crooke, to contest Risley's more extravagant claims – took casts and photographs, and developed techniques of fingerprinting to identify criminals. In similar fashion, British ethnographers universally insisted that, whatever their defining characteristics, castes were discrete and distinct; and until after the First World War their mapping remained an enduring preoccupation. Nevertheless, despite the enthusiasm which drove forward the process of

measurement, in administrative practice caste proved to be an awkward and unwieldy classificatory category. Even the mere enumeration of castes in the decennial census was a project of formidable difficulty. Constant efforts had to be made to reduce the bewildering array of caste names returned by individuals to a consistent order, and to fit all enumerated individuals properly into the assigned categories. Nor was it a simple matter to devise systems of classification which could contain the vast array of caste data.[6]

Most controversial was the effort to arrange castes hierarchically by 'social precedence'. In the various provincial 'Castes and Tribes' volumes, the authors sidestepped this nettlesome question by arranging the entries alphabetically. The 1891 census made some effort within larger occupational categories to list groups in accordance with their 'social estimation', but the self-confident Risley, as census commissioner a decade later, determined to secure an accurate ranked listing. To aid his own research, and to insure that his lists accorded with 'native public opinion', he even consulted a wide array of Indians. The prescriptions found in Sanskrit legal textbooks, together with the opinions of Brahmin pandits, shaped the responses of most of these informants; while the whole enterprise generated a vast outpouring of claims to higher status, especially among the members of middling castes such as Kayasthas and Khatris who felt entitled to rank as ksatriya. Risley, however, had long since made up his own mind. What mattered was race. On the first page of the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Risley illustrated a stone panel from the Buddhist stupa at Sanchi depicting three women at prayer in front of an altar. In the background 'four stately figures ... of tall stature and regular features ... look on with folded hands in apparent approval'. The whole shows us, as Risley interpreted the scene, the 'higher' Aryan race on friendly terms with the 'lower' Dravidian, but 'keenly conscious of the essential difference of type'. 'Race sentiment', he concluded, resting upon a 'foundation of fact which scientific methods confirm', at once 'shaped the intricate grouping of the caste system, and has preserved the Aryan type in comparative purity throughout Northern India.'[7]

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[4] Risley, *People of India*, p. 278.

[5] Ibid., pp. 25–29; for William Crooke's criticism of Risley's views, see his introduction to the second edition, pp. xvi-xxii, and his own *Tribes and Castes of the Northwest Provinces and Oudh*, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1896).

[6] Bernard Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', *Folk*, vol. 26 (1984), pp. 25–49; Frank Conlon, 'The Census of India as a Source for the Historical Study of Religion and Caste', in N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), *The Census in British India* (Delhi, 1981), especially pp. 107–17.

[7] Herbert Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, vol. 1 (Calcutta, 1891), pp. i-ii; Risley, *People of India*, pp. 5, 109–20.

The persistence of fragmented ethnic identities at the heart of Indian society, in the view of most British ethnographers, foreclosed any effective unity amongst the country's peoples. Risley certainly was in no doubt about the political implications of a racially based caste system. Because castes, he insisted, were in India so sharply demarcated from each other, there existed 'no national type and no nation or even nationality in the ordinary sense of these words'. Risley nevertheless endeavoured to define a way by which India's castes could be reshaped so that they would play a role in the country's future political development. It may be said, he wrote, that the caste system 'with its singularly perfect communal organization, is a machinery admirably fitted for the diffusion of new ideas; that castes may in course of time group themselves into classes representing the different strata of society; and that India may thus attain, by the agency of these indigenous corporations, the results which have been arrived at elsewhere through the fusion of individual types'. The caste system, in this vision, could constitute a kind of civil society for India, which taught its peoples to work together. Ultimately, unlike the English language, confined to a tiny elite, caste might even help form a larger structure of shared values for the subcontinent. But Britain's presence would be needed for the foreseeable future to provide unity and leadership. In the end, of course, as the British patronage of caste helped embed it within Indian politics, Risley's vision found substantial realization in what has increasingly become independent India's caste-based political system.[8]

The valorization of caste difference as fixed and immutable found perhaps its most striking expression in the creation of the two opposed groups of 'criminal tribes' and 'martial races'. The notion that certain caste groups practised crime as a hereditary profession – that, as one British official wrote, 'crime is their trade and they are born to it and must commit it' – followed logically from the assumptions that sustained the British view of the caste system, and more generally of Indian society. As there existed those destined to be carpenters or cultivators, so too were there those 'destined by the usage of caste to commit crime and whose dependents will be offenders against the law'. Many of these so-called criminal tribes, furthermore, as wanderers and vagrants, were outside the normal networks of sedentary society; hence they were believed to challenge British efforts to

[8] Risley, *People of India*, pp. 26, 278–301.

order and control their Indian dominion. The outcome was the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871.

The notion that there existed groups in India predisposed to crime originated in the campaign against the thags during the 1830s. The thags, as we have seen, with their mysterious rituals of murder and worship directed to the goddess Kali, exerted a powerful fascination for the British, and so came to embody the 'mysterious' East. Inasmuch as thags were conceived of as being fundamentally different from ordinary criminals, W.H. Sleeman, as he set out to eradicate thagi, decided that no effort need be made to prove that a given individual had committed a particular crime. On the basis of thag genealogies which he put together, he argued that thagi was hereditary. Hence, it was sufficient for conviction to prove that an individual was a member of a thag gang. Although Sleeman successfully demonstrated the ability of the Raj to extirpate such gangs, largely through the use of informers' testimony, in the process the notion of distinct 'criminal communities', with its challenge to liberal ideas of individual responsibility and the procedural guarantees of the 'rule of law', became embedded in the legal framework of British India.[9]

In the wake of the 1857 uprising, the British determined to subdue all remaining low-status, wandering groups. Such concerns were not of course unique to India, for European governments had long been suspicious of gypsies and wandering vagabonds of all sorts. But for the Raj of the 1860s it was a matter of special urgency, as only a settled village society, wholly under the supervision of a conservative landed elite, could guarantee the British the security they required. In the process, the spectre of thagi was revived and blown up to ever greater proportions. As the inspector-general of the North-Western Provinces Police wrote in 1867, 'It must be remembered, in dealing with the wandering predatory tribes of India, that the fraternities are of such ancient creation, their number so vast, the country over which their depradations spread so vast, their organization so complete, and their evil of such formidable dimensions, that nothing but special legislation will suffice for their suppression and conversion.' Now, however, as part of the new ethnography, caste affiliation, not the fictive kinship of gang membership, defined collective criminality. The

[9] Sandria Freitag, 'Crime in the Social Order of Colonial North India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 25 (1991), pp. 227–41; Radhika Singha, 'Providential Circumstances', pp. 83–146.

1871 act listed four tribes as criminal, out of some twenty-nine proposed by the police, and provided a mechanism through which additions could be, and were, made to their numbers in subsequent years. The members of such tribes were registered, and their movements restricted by a system of passes and roll-calls. Those found outside their prescribed place of residence were liable to arrest without a warrant.[10]

This effort to define specific 'criminal tribes' did not escape criticism. Several officials, among them the judges of the Punjab Chief Court, committed to the procedure of the ordinary criminal law, with its denial of Indian 'difference', urged that only individuals should be registered, and then restricted in their movements only when charged with crimes actually committed. Others pointed to the likelihood that such legislation would confound the innocent with the guilty, and might even drive those deprived of their customary livelihood to take up crime, as well as offering the police great opportunities for abuse of their power. Further, the avowed goal of reforming these criminals by settling them in special colonies under surveillance stood sharply at odds with the theory, underlying the act, of a hereditary predisposition to commit crime. Nevertheless, as time went on, the act was extended to include ever more 'tribes', and was finally repealed only after independence.

The ideology sustaining the notion of 'criminal tribes' was not wholly a product of the colonial environment. Even in Victorian Britain the government feared the so-called 'dangerous' classes, who were conceived of as threatening public order. Hence in 1869, while discussions regarding the 1871 act were underway in India, the Habitual Criminals Act incorporated into English law exceptional powers for the surveillance and control of those denominated 'habitual offenders'. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, during the unsettled decades from Peterloo to Chartism, fear of the lower orders as inherently revolutionary was widespread among the members of 'respectable' society. By the 1860s, with the extension of the franchise, as we have seen, the regularly employed working class began to be brought into the constitution. There remained only the

[10] NAI Home Judl., April 1870, no. 9–14, and July 1870, no. 55–59; Legis. Dept. Papers Relating to Act XXVII of 1871. For a full account, see Sanjay Nigam, 'Disciplining and Policing the "Criminals by Birth", Part 1: The Making of a Colonial Stereotype – The Criminal Tribes and Castes of North India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 27 (1990), pp. 131–64.

'habitual offenders'. Conceived of as a separate criminal class, perhaps even biological degenerates born to a life of crime, these men required a separate coercive apparatus for their control. Yet the category of the 'habitual offender' remained always sharply differentiated from its Indian counterpart. Despite the notion of a genetic predisposition to criminal behaviour, the English legislation encompassed only those already convicted of a crime, and never their children. It involved, that is, the identification of individuals, not the proscription of defined 'tribes'. Even the assertion that criminal behaviour was 'racially' grounded was far removed from the stigmatizing of everyone in a 'racial' group as a criminal. Despite the superficial similarity of the two enactments, the Indian Criminal Tribes act marked out a distinctively colonial ethnography. Even India's criminals were not similar to England's.

Incongruous though it might appear, the 1871 act included among the 'dangerous' classes not only the so-called criminal tribes, but eunuchs as well. James Fitzjames Stephen, as Law Member drafting the act, insisted that there existed 'an organized system of sodomitical prostitution, of which these wretches are the managers', and that no measure to force them to adopt 'honest pursuits' would be too severe. Although the subsequent discussion on the bill evoked much righteous indignation with regard to the eunuchs' alleged kidnapping and castration of children, what clearly disturbed the government as much as criminal behaviour, and what the act forbad, was the practice of eunuchs appearing in public dressed in female attire. Everyone, so the act implied, had not only to adopt a settled livelihood, but to conform to accepted gender roles. Sexual ambiguity could no more be tolerated than a life of 'wandering without leave'.[11]

Far more consequential were India's 'martial races'. Although these groups never achieved full statutory definition, in the years after the Mutiny a perceived sense of a distinctive martial fitness came to distinguish various peoples of northern India from those elsewhere, above all in Bengal. This process was driven by the imperatives of the military, who sought an army organized 'with a view to the full development of race efficiency.' Inbred martial skill, as G. F. MacMunn wrote in his definitive study of India's armies, defined one of the 'essential differences between the East and the West'. In the

[11] Stephen, Note of 4 July 1870, Home Judl., July 1870, no. 55–59; and Papers Relating to Act XXVII of 1871.

'East' only 'certain clans and classes can bear arms; the others have not the physical courage necessary for the warrior'. In Europe, by contrast, 'every able-bodied man, given food and arms, is a fighting man of some sort', and hence capable of serving his country in time of war.[12]

Initially, as Clive and his successors recruited an army for the East India Company, considerations of racial ability mattered little. Many regiments, especially in the southern armies, accepted all recruits and intermixed them without concern for caste or religion. The Bengal Army after 1800 in large part confined its recruitment to the higher castes, above all Brahmins and Rajputs, whose customs the British took care to conserve, and it drew the bulk of its soldiery from rural Oudh and Bihar. Though the upper castes, regarded as generally superior within Indian society, might be presumed to be better soldiers, and though 'a fine physique and martial appearance' might gain an individual the attention of the recruiting officers, no attempt was made to portray the men of these castes or regions as inherently better suited than others for military service.

After 1857 the mutinous Bengal regiments were disbanded, and the recruiting grounds shifted to the north, to the area from Delhi across the Punjab to the frontier. Simultaneously, mixed regiments were largely abandoned in favour of those organized on a systematic grouping of men by 'race and sept and clan'. This transformation was not the result of any historical experience, apart from the Mutiny itself, nor was it wholly a matter of tactical considerations of 'divide and rule'. Madrasis, Marathas, and the sepoys of the Bengal Army had fought well, both for the Company and against it, over the preceding half-century; and even during the upheaval of 1857 the mixed regiments of the southern armies had remained loyal. As a result, following the recommendations of the Peel Commission in 1859, many officers argued for a mixture of castes within units in order to avert exclusive combinations that might once again lead to mutiny. Yet so compelling was the logic of 'martial races' that by the 1880s almost the entire army was organized into units based on caste or ethnicity.

The notion of 'martial races' drew sustenance from a variety of elements in the cultural baggage of late Victorian England. As the Aryans had once conquered northern India, it was assumed that those races descended from them possessed superior military capabilities.

[12] G.F. MacMunn, *The Armies of India* (London, 1911), pp. 2, 129.

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The Dogras, isolated in the hills, for instance, were presumed to retain the 'old Aryan Hindu stock'. Other groups, such as the Afridis, with close cropped fair hair and blue eyes of a 'distinctly European appearance', could well, so MacMunn reasoned, have kept intact 'traces' of Alexander's Greek soldiers. Where race failed – for MacMunn acknowledged that most 'martial' groups had lost their distinguishing racial characteristics – environment supplied an alternate explanation. Their 'hardy, active, and alert life' in a land of cold winters and often rugged mountains had 'inured' these northern peoples to hardship and thus fitted them for military life. A presumed camaraderie along the frontier, which we shall soon discuss more fully, also mattered. As MacMunn wrote of the Pathans, 'to the best type of Englishman their open, irresponsible manner and delight in all exercise and sport, with their constant high spirits, appeal greatly'. Whether defined by race, climate, or personality, 'martial races' were those who most closely resembled what the British imagined themselves to be. In similar fashion, 'martial races' existed in contrast to the Bengalis. Indeed, one might argue, the 'extraordinary effeminacy' of the Bengali, whom 'no necessity would induce to fight', alone gave meaning to the notion of 'martial races'. They were what the Bengali was not.[13]

In keeping with the larger principles informing the British idea of the caste system, each 'martial' race was conceived of as possessing its own distinctive set of characteristics – Jats, for instance, were 'proverbially thick in the uptake, but have served with distinction' – and these traits were all meticulously detailed in the various regimental recruiting handbooks. One group, however, that of the Sikhs, was not merely enrolled in the list of 'martial races', but came to predominate in the army, and in the process found their community transformed. As Richard Fox has made clear in his study of the 'Lions of the Punjab', the British, from the very outset, determined that only 'pure' Sikhs should be recruited. The British 'laboured hard to insure the religious conformity of the Sikh recruit', and not just to any version of Sikhism, but to what the British conceived was proper Sikh belief and practice. Potential recruits had to be baptised into the Sikh faith, while regimental commanders insisted upon a strict observance of those customs associated with reformed monotheistic Sikhism, among them unshorn hair, the wearing of the dagger and steel bangle, and taking the name of

[13] Ibid., *Armies*, chapter 5.

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'Singh', or lion. As MacMunn acknowledged, it was the 'British officer who has kept Sikhism up to its old [sic] standard'.

By distinguishing a select group of Sikhs in this way, the British believed they could keep Sikhism free of contamination by 'unorthodox' forms of Sikh belief and, more generally, by Hinduism. Sikhism, after all, as they saw it, was a religion distinct from Hinduism, and, as a monotheistic faith, superior. Hence, as one official wrote, 'with the relapse into Hinduism and readoption of its superstitious and vicious social customs, it is notorious that the Sikh loses much of his martial instincts and greatly deteriorates as a fighting soldier'. This 'colonially constituted Sikhism', as Fox describes it, was ostensibly marked out by religious belief, for in principle anyone could be baptised. Yet in practice it embodied British racial ideas as well. Only 'true' Sikhs, men of proper 'stock', which usually meant those of certain prescribed regions and classes, possessed the necessary martial skills; others, of lower class background or recent conversion to the faith, were of inferior or 'deteriorated' stock, and so, with a few exceptions, such as the Mazhbis, were not recruited into the army. As the British endeavoured to put their ideology into practice, in the army as elsewhere the categories by which Indian society was ordered inevitably became confused.[14]

The British did not view Indian society only through the prism of race and caste. Descent, or 'tribal' affiliation, mattered as well. For the most part such genealogical connections were important insofar as they facilitated the resolution of disputes over landholding and inheritance among individual families. Settlement officers, and the courts, needed to know the principles by which estates were to be apportioned among heirs or princely thrones awarded to claimants. In the Punjab, however, the British made kinship the organizing principle of the entire society. This reflected, in part, their perception that in a province with a Muslim majority, 'caste', as an inherently Hindu phenomenon, could not by its very nature appropriately order rural society. In part, too, the constitution of Punjabi society on a unique basis was a logical continuation of the 'Punjab school' style of governance, based on direct and personal rule, and with it the use of local customary law, rather than the Bengal regulations, with their

[14] Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley, 1985), chapter 8, especially pp. 140–52; MacMunn, *Armies*, pp. 133–40.

Sanskritic uniformities, for the adjudication of disputes. This determination to rule, so far as possible, in accordance with indigenous principles gained further strength from the unsettling experience of the 1857 rising, from which the Punjab had for the most part been exempt. Many officials, indeed, attributed this fortuitous escape from rebellion to the province's unique system of rule. As the British in the 1860s and 1870s studied the organization of Punjab society, the 'native institution' they found at its heart, as C. L. Tupper argued, while preparing his compendium of 'Punjab Customary Law', was the 'tribe', which he defined as a patrilineal descent group encompassing those who preserved the memory of a common ancestor. The British set out accordingly to define and systematize this 'tribal system', and so build it into their own imperial order. In so doing, so they believed, they could not only present themselves as legitimate indigenous rulers, presiding over an unaltered 'traditional' society, but they could also harness the Punjab's distinctive social forms, above all in the settlement of canal colonies, to the creation of a prosperous land.

Much in this endeavour involved an effort at self-delusion, for tradition, once systematized and enforced as 'tradition' in the courts, defined a new mode of governance far different from that which had gone before. Furthermore, even though the notion of a 'tribally' based Punjab was self-consciously grounded in British perceptions of local practice, it did not wholly accord with the social realities it purported to describe. Structures of descent varied across the face of the Punjab, as they did elsewhere; while few of the so-called 'tribes', especially in the central and eastern Punjab, had managed to preserve recognized traditions of leadership in the face of hostile Mughal and Sikh rulers. As a result, to provide an institutional footing for local leadership the British created the administrative unit of the *zail*, a grouping of five to forty villages found only in the Punjab. *Zaildars*, as heads of these local units, were meant to be simply existing leaders of locally dominant 'tribes' and 'clans', but in practice they were often created as the British sought to make Punjab society resemble the ideology that informed their conception of it. Nevertheless, by the end of the century, building upon existing patterns of contiguous settlement, grounded in bonds of solidarity among local kin groups, and reinforcing them where necessary by institutional means, the British had successfully brought into being a rural elite whose influence, as David

Gilmartin argues, 'was tied to the "ideology" of imperial authority on which the British had built their regime'.[15]

The final stage in the creation of a distinctive 'tribal' Punjab took place with the creation of the category of 'agricultural tribes' in the Land Alienation Act of 1900. The problem of land alienation, or, more precisely, the sale of land for debts owed to moneylenders, perceived as 'outsiders' in village society, had long concerned the British, in the Deccan and the Gangetic valley as well as in the Punjab. Though recent research has brought into question the scale and character of such transfers, their existence forced upon the British at the time an agonizing choice between, on the one hand, the 'modernizing' ideology of an India transformed by the free working of natural economic laws, which encouraged the transfer of property from the hands of 'unenterprising' owners, and, on the other, the ideal of a stable agrarian order kept in place by 'traditional' elites. In the Punjab there was little dissent from the notion that this strategic border province and recruiting ground for the army had to be preserved from agrarian upheaval. Hence, in a far-reaching assault on the privileges of those whom they saw as outsiders, the British prohibited the sale of land to anyone other than a member of a registered 'agricultural tribe'.

With the passage of the Land Alienation Act the British transformed the 'tribal' structure they had built up during the previous half-century. Grouped together into a single unit for the entire province, the 'agricultural tribes', as Gilmartin has pointed out, denoted no social reality, as each did to some degree in its own locality, but only a category which the British used to define who would have the right to own land, and hence the right to wield power within the colonial order. Despite its highly artificial character, however, the notion of 'agricultural tribes' soon took on a life of its own. Under the banner of the Land Alienation Act the province's rural elite, in cooperation with the British, successfully controlled Punjab politics throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Both the organization of the Unionist Party and the Punjabi response to Muslim nationalism before 1947, and even afterwards in Pakistan, demonstrated the enduring power of the ideology of a 'tribal' Punjab. No more than that of 'caste' could the notion of 'tribe' be contained within the colonial ideology that had originally shaped it.

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[15] David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (Berkeley, 1988), chapter 1.
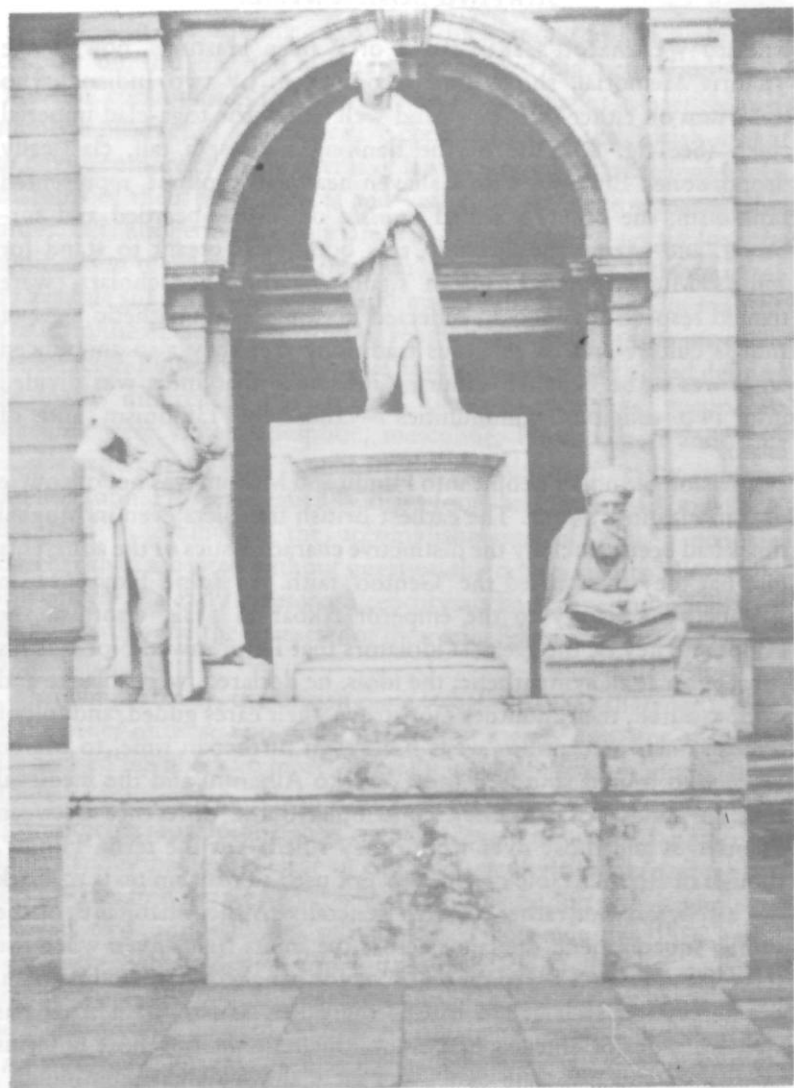
8   *Monument to Warren Hastings*, by Richard Westmacott (1830).

SHAPING COMMUNITIES

Richard Westmacott's 1830 statue of Warren Hastings, now in the Victoria Memorial, shows him accompanied by two Indians, who flank him on either side, but stand well below the toga-clad imperial ruler. (See fig. 8.) One of the flanking figures, a tall, classically proportioned Brahmin with a shaven head and topknot, represented Hinduism; the other, a seated *munshi* or scribe, bearded and turbaned, and gazing thoughtfully at a book, was meant to stand for India's Muslim peoples. Both figures, garbed as scholars, were treated respectfully, and so reflected Hastings's sympathetic view of India's culture and its religious traditions. Yet they also announced what was to be Britain's enduring insistence that India was divided into two religious communities – those of Hinduism and of Islam.[16]

Division of India's people into Hindu and Muslim was not of course new in Hastings's time. The earliest British travellers even in Mughal times had been struck by the distinctive characteristics of the adherents of what they then called the 'Gentoo' faith. As Ralph Fitch, Queen Elizabeth's emissary to the emperor Akbar in 1584, wrote of the Hindus, 'They be the greatest idolators that I ever sawe.' Nor was his perception at all sympathetic; the idols, he declared, were 'blacke and evill favoured, their mouthes monstrous, their eares gilded, and full of jewels'. Such perceptions went back even further in time, to Marco Polo, who toured southern India, and to Alberuni and the medieval Muslim conquerors, as they contemplated the difference between themselves and those over whom they ruled. Yet the term 'Hindu', though of Perso-Arabic origin, was not used in Muslim texts to mark out a religion, but rather referred generally to the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, the lands across the Indus river. Even when the term 'Hindu' was used to set off those adhering to a non-Islamic faith, the perception each group had of the other, as Romila Thapar has written, 'was not in terms of a monolithic religion, but more in terms of distinct and disparate castes and sects along a social continuum'. From the Indian, or Hindu, side, the Central Asian invaders were

demonized, but, Sheldon Pollock has pointed out, as incarnations of the evil Ravana, or as Turks, not as Muslims.[17]

Only with the coming of British rule, from the late eighteenth century on, did the notion that there existed distinct 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' communities in India take on a fixed shape. In part this was simply a product of administrative convenience, as the British sought to devise comprehensive systems of law that would at once respect the customs of their new subjects and yet reduce them to a manageable order. It is altogether appropriate that Hastings, who set on foot the codification of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' law, should be commemorated by a statue showing him with a Brahmin pandit and a Muslim munshi. Yet from the outset distinctions of religion were seen as shaping those of character. Dow and Orme, as we have seen in chapter 1, had defined the basic differences demarcating the two religious groupings: Muslims were violent, despotic, masculine; Hindus were indolent, passive, effeminate. One fought by the sword; the other by cunning and litigation. However much William Jones and James Mill may have disagreed in evaluating the accomplishments of India's peoples, together they accepted without question their division into Hindu and Muslim. By the early nineteenth century authoritative conceptions of the two faiths, and the character of their adherents, had been set firmly in place.

More importantly, the British came to believe that adherence to one or the other of these two religions was not merely a matter of belief, but defined membership more generally in a larger community. To be Hindu or Muslim by itself explained much of the way Indians acted. Riotous behaviour, for instance, no matter what its actual character, as Gyan Pandey has made clear in his account of British reportage on riots in Banares, was often made to express enduring antagonisms between two opposed and self-contained communities.[18] In early nineteenth-century Britain too, of course, religious affiliation mattered intensely. Anglicans, Dissenters, and Catholics, from the time of the Reformation onward, had been set apart from each other by

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[16] For British statuary, see Barbara Groseclose, 'Imag(in)ing Indians', *Art History*, vol. 13 (1990), pp. 488–515.

[17] W. Foster (ed.), *Early Travels in India, 1583–1619* (New York, 1921), especially pp. 14–23; Romila Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 23 (1989), pp. 209–31; Sheldon Pollock, 'Ramayana and Political Imagination in India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52 (1993), pp. 261–97.

[18] Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Colonial Construction of "Communalism": British Writings on Banares in the Nineteenth Century', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi, 1989), pp. 132–68.

Sabbath observance, attitudes to liquor, marriage networks, and education, with each community maintaining its own schools. Until well into the nineteenth century the state awarded the right to vote on the basis of religious affiliation, and even the 1870 act, which committed the state to support of education, authorized only the disbursal of funds to religious bodies. Yet, however much religion may have informed British life, it was never imagined, apart from the exceptional case of Ireland, as having the power to shape the entire society into opposed 'communities'. Symptomatic perhaps of the difference was the prominence given to religious affiliation as a 'fundamental category' in the Indian census, while in Britain the census, apart from one survey in 1851, never recorded data on religion. The centrality of religious community, along with that of caste, for the British marked out India's distinctive status as a fundamentally different land.

British 'understanding' of Hinduism, unlike that of Islam, developed only with the discoveries of the Oriental scholars in the late eighteenth century. Whereas Europeans had since medieval times created a rich descriptive tradition for Islam, perceived as an enemy and an alternate religious system known from bitter experience, Hinduism long remained obscure, a mysterious faith of 'idols' and 'monstrosities'. Furthermore, as the British scrambled to understand Hinduism, they created for that religious system a degree of coherence that it had not possessed before. Indeed, one might almost say, by imposing their 'knowledge' upon it, the British made of Hinduism, previously a loosely integrated collection of sects, something resembling a religion – although, as they saw it, a religion that was not a 'proper' religion. To the present day scholars of religion still remain at odds over the extent to which the Hinduism of pre-colonial India can be described as a 'religion', with an orthodoxy that defines the faith of a set of believers, as distinct from a set of beliefs and practices embedded in India's larger social order.

Initially, the British sought an organizing principle for Hinduism in the Brahmin community. As the highest caste, as priests, and, in Jones's time, as collaborators in the study of the ancient Sanskrit texts, Brahmins were naturally perceived as the focal point of the faith, and with it of the Hindu community. Ever since Fitch's time commentators had singled out for notice the habits and customs of the Brahmins, whether their wearing of the sacred thread or, as Fitch announced, that they 'eatt no flesh, nor kill any thing; they live of rice,

butter, milke, and fruits'. For James Mill, the Brahmins, creators of the caste system, were a primary cause of the country's 'degradation'. 'By a system of priestcraft', he wrote, 'built upon the most enormous and tormenting superstition that ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind', the minds of the Hindus 'were enchained more intolerably than their bodies'. In all such descriptions of Hinduism, Victorian commentators, steeped in Protestantism, turned inevitably to Catholicism, with its practices ranging from 'popery' to saint worship, as providing a European parallel, and an appropriate vocabulary through which the Hindu faith might be understood.

As time went on Europeans extended and refined their knowledge of the texts that embodied the Hindu faith. Much of this was the work of German Indological scholars, from the philospher Hegel and the Romantic idealist Friedrich Schlegel to the Sanskritist Max Muller. Together these men fitted India's ancient philosophical texts into a larger vision in which, as Ronald Inden has indicated, Mill's 'more or less disconnected examples of Hindu irrationality and superstition' gave way to a view of Hinduism as a system of 'dream-like knowledge' dominated by a 'creative imagination'. These German scholars did not, of course, construct their philosophical systems with the aim of advancing the administrative objectives of the Raj. Nevertheless, as their world view made of the Indian mind, 'imaginative and passionate', a foil for Christian and Western 'rationality', it necessarily carried with it the assumption that the Hindus, unable to supply this element themselves, required an externally imposed 'rationality' to order their day-to-day lives. Hence, Germanic Indology, though never directly a part of the ideology of the Raj, by creating a coherent vision of the 'Hindu mind' that at once incorporated it into a larger ordering of the world and yet subordinated it to the West, played a critical role in sustaining the intellectual assumptions that bulwarked Britain's Indian Empire. The vision of a 'spiritual' India, in contrast to a 'materialist' West, was never incompatible with the existence of the Raj.[19]

Simultaneously, during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the British in India endeavoured to come to terms with the variety of Hindu religious experience they were encountering on the ground. The attempt to comprehend contemporary Hinduism was, however, a frustrating enterprise. Alfred Lyall, one of the more careful

[19] Inden, *Imagining India*, chapter 3, especially pp. 89–96.

students of Indian religion in the government, came close to throwing up his hands in despair. We can scarcely comprehend, he wrote, 'an ancient religion, still alive and powerful, which is a mere troubled sea, without shore or visible horizon, driven to and fro by the winds of boundless credulity and grotesque invention'. The range and diversity of worship, with beliefs undergoing 'constant changes of shape and colour' within an 'extraordinary fecundity of superstitious sentiment', made Hindu India, in his view, unlike anywhere else in the world.[20]

The British sought to make sense of this 'religious chaos' in two ways. First, rather like Maine's account of the village community, the British saw in Hinduism a 'survival' of the ancient world. Even Mill had argued that, 'by conversing with the Hindus of the present day, we, in some measure, converse with the Chaldeans and Babylonians of the time of Cyrus; with the Persians and Egyptians of the time of Alexander'. For Lyall the popular Hinduism of his day was very similar to the polytheism of the Roman Empire. Indeed, he wrote, 'We perceive more clearly what classic polytheism was by realizing what Hinduism actually is.' The second strategy was to insist upon the centrality of 'Brahmanism' as the historic core of the Hindu faith, and to regard so-called popular, or devotional, Hinduism as a 'whole vegetation of cognate beliefs sprouting up in every stage of growth beneath the shadow of the great orthodox traditions and allegories of Brahmanism'.

But why had Hinduism not progressed beyond ancient polytheism to a 'true' monotheism? To some extent men like Lyall found an answer in the absence of a central ecclesiastical structure capable of disciplining popular practice. But for a larger explanation the British turned to Aryan racial theory. Popular Hinduism, in this view, was the inevitable outcome of the settling of the Aryan invader in a tropical land, where his 'pure' faith became mixed with the fertility cults and superstitions of the subcontinent's aboriginal peoples. Contemporary Hinduism was, as the Sanskrit scholar Monier-Williams described it, using the metaphor of the jungle, 'Brahminism run to seed and spread out into a confused tangle of divine personalities and incarnations. The one system is the rank and luxuriant outcome of the other.' Lyall in similar terms compared religious practice in India to the 'entangled confusion of a primeval forest, where one sees trees of all kinds, ages, and sizes interlacing and contending with each other'. Above the tree

[20] Lyall, *Asiatic Studies* (1884), chapter 1, and the revised edition (London, 1904), chapter 5.

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tops a 'glimpse of blue sky' symbolized the 'illimitable transcendental ideas' of Brahmanic speculation above and apart from earth-born conceptions. India's essential Dravidianism, its 'femininity', and its popular Hinduism, were all the same and interchangeable; and together debarred forever any recovery of its former Aryan self.[21]

Such attempts at ordering Hinduism achieved only a partial success. Even Lyall's detailed account of the 'religion of an Indian province', that of Berar, where he had served in the 1860s, though it served as a model for subsequent studies of popular Hinduism, did little more than catalogue some eleven modes of religious practice, ranging from the worship of stones and animals to that of deceased persons and local heroes. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, with the Brahmins as collaborators, and the ancient texts to guide them, the British, and subsequently the German Indologists, had constructed a coherent notion of Hinduism, and of a Hindu community, that took shape in the codes of Hindu personal law. A century later, their knowledge of Hinduism no longer confined to a tidy set of texts, the British instead found themselves confronted with Lyall's 'tangled jungle of disorderly superstitions'. In such circumstances, to deploy the term 'Hindu', even as an overarching category, was always difficult. The decennial censuses, which from 1881 onward marshalled the members of India's religions into 'communities', mapped, counted, and above all, as Kenneth Jones has noted, compared each with its rivals. Yet, even so, the category 'Hindu' remained exceptionally elusive. As the Punjab census commissioner reported in 1881, 'Every native who was unable to define his creed, or who described it by any other name than that of some recognized religion ... was held to be and classed as a Hindu.'[22]

In many ways it suited British purposes not to press forward too vigorously with the consolidation of Hinduism. The adherents of that faith, after all, a majority of India's population, if accorded an autonomous sense of identity, posed a potentially menacing alternative to the Raj. The British thus turned instead to local custom and caste as more useful categories through which to make sense of Indian society. Though the codes of Hindu law still embodied the ideology of Hastings's time, more localized identities informed much of legal and

[21] Ibid., (1904), p. 318; Inden, *Imagining India*, pp. 109–22.
[22] Kenneth W. Jones, 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census', in Barrier (ed.), *The Census*, pp. 73–101.

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administrative practice outside Bengal. This process was perhaps most visibly manifested in the recording and codification of Punjab customary law. Here overarching religious identities, whether of Hinduism or Islam, as we have seen, were set aside in favour of principles drawn from the secular ordering of kin and clan. Caste, in particular, was convenient, for it afforded (or so the British thought) a precise way of knowing, and so controlling, Indian society at the local level, and it could be seen in any case as incorporating much that was distinctive about Hinduism. With the rare exception of such reformist groups as the Brahmo and Arya Samaj, seen as hopeful portents of a 'purer' faith, the late-nineteenth-century ethnographic enterprise was based upon caste, rather than sect. In many reports and statistical tables a commonly used heading was 'Caste if Hindu, otherwise religion'. The shaping of a compelling sense of 'Hindu' identity was to be a product only of the twentieth century, and the work of Hindus themselves.

Islam, by contrast, possessed for the British (if not always for its adherents) an established coherence. The long and intimate connection of Islam with Europe, from the time of the Crusades onward, had provided Europeans with an assured sense of 'knowing' Islam, and Muslims, that did not exist as they endeavoured to understand Hindus and Hinduism. As James Mill noted, 'With the state of civilization in Persia the instructed part of European readers are pretty familiar.' This contrasted sharply with the 'mysterious, and little known' state of civilization among the Hindus. One might argue that in India two different Orientalist discourses met: one derived from the European encounter with the Muslim Middle East; the other an attempt to describe distant Asian lands where a tropical climate shaped passive and effeminate peoples. Insofar as India's pre-colonial states were frequently constituted as Islamic polities, and Muslims provided the dominant elite within them, it was easy to project the stereotypes constructed in the Middle East upon India's Muslims. In so doing, Muslims were inevitably distinguished sharply from their Hindu neighbours, and included within the alternate set of Orientalist notions of the 'East'. Shaped by these two contrasting discourses, the two communities found themselves counterposed, at first imaginatively and then in the strife of 'communalism', one against the other.[23]

The distinguishing features of India's Muslims, as we have seen,

[23] Mill, chapter 10, esp. p. 304; see also Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist Constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 20 (1986), especially pp. 404–8, 423–24.

were laid out by Dow and Orme in the mid-eighteenth century. With 'despotism' as the central representational mode, the country's Muslims not surprisingly were depicted as fierce invaders, who as rulers alternated arbitrary violence with indolence and self-indulgence. While the Mughals, perceived as 'mild and humane' rulers, were largely exempted from severe criticism, such was not the case with their eighteenth-century successors. These, whom the British set out to supplant as they extended their own rule, had to be painted in the darkest colours. The archetypical representative of Islam in this period was unquestionably Tipu Sultan of Mysore (ruler from 1782 to 1799). As both a Muslim sovereign and an implacable opponent of the British Raj, he was portrayed (with no factual basis) as a man driven by a zealous fanaticism, while his regime was described as 'the most perfect despotism in the world'. In keeping with the differing characterizations projected onto Muslims and Hindus, his 'Mahommedan tyranny' was contrasted unfavourably with the 'ancient Hindoo constitution' allegedly enjoyed by Mysore before Tipu's father Haider Ali took over the throne in 1761. Tipu's fall at Seringapatnam in 1799 unloosed an orgy of self-congratulation among the British at their triumph, and seemed to justify alike British rule over India and the depiction of Muslims enunciated a half-century earlier by men like Alexander Dow.[24]

As Britain's Muslim opponents in India were either displaced or reduced to the status of pensioners, condemnation of their 'despotic' rule receded into the background, where it took its place as a part of the larger historiography of the 'misrule' and 'decadence' of the eighteenth century. Suspicion nevertheless continued to shape much of the way the British conceived their Indian Muslim subjects. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the British remained convinced that resentment at their supersession as rulers had generated among Muslims an inevitable and implacable hostility toward their successors. Hence, the 1857 revolt, though it originated in the army and found supporters among Hindus and Muslims alike throughout northern India, was widely viewed as a product of enduring Muslim animosity. The young Alfred Lyall, less than two years in India at the time, in the midst of the uprising wrote that 'the whole insurrection is a great Mahometan conspiracy, and the sepoys are merely tools in the hands of the Mussulmans'. He went on to differen-

[24] For British representations of Tipu, see Bayly, *Raj*, pp. 152–60.

tiate between the behaviour of Muslim and of Hindu rebels. For Hindus 'plunder always seems to be their chief object, to attain which they will perform any villainy, whereas the Mahometans only seem to care about murdering their opponents, and are altogether far more bloody minded'. These last, he insisted, 'hate us with a fanatical hate that we never suspected to exist'.[25]

Such hostility was not, however, so the British conceived, simply a product of the grievances of former rulers. As Lyall concluded of India's Muslims, 'there is something in their religion that makes warriors of them'. In similar fashion John Lawrence spoke of the Muslim mutineers as possessing 'a more active, vindictive, and fanatic spirit' than their Hindu compatriots; but, he argued, this was only to be expected, for these traits were 'characteristic of the race'. Such behaviour, that is, had its origin in the very nature of Islam as a religion, and it could be traced back to the religion's beginnings in Arabia. As William Muir, later author of a life of Muhammad, wrote in October 1857, among Muslims 'all the ancient feelings of warring for the Faith, reminding one of the days of the first Caliphs, were resuscitated'.[26]

Such views did not dissipate with the suppression of the uprising. Into the 1860s and 1870s this aura of suspicion remained a powerful force shaping British conceptions of their Muslim subjects. Constantly on the alert for outbreaks of violence, the British saw above all in the so-called 'Wahabi' movement, which sought a return to a purified Islam, evidence, as the Punjab government wrote in 1862, of the gathering together of 'the tribes of Islam' to 'wage a holy war against the Faringhi'. Increasingly, however, monolithic notions of Muslim hostility gave way, in part because the British began to enter into dialogue with Muslims themselves, and in part also because varied notions of who the Muslims were, and what interests they represented, began to emerge. The result was an ambivalence which at once revealed the contradictory visions of Islam the British themselves possessed, and opened the way to one of the more enduring imperial myths – that of the 'Frontier'. This re-evaluation was provoked by the publication in 1871 of W.W. Hunter's *The Indian Mussalmans*, a

volume which posed in stark terms the question of whether these British subjects were 'bound to rebel against the Queen'.

Hunter opened his account with a stirring vision of seething discontent among India's Muslims. For years, he said, 'a Rebel Colony has threatened our Frontier; from time to time sending forth fanatic swarms, who have attacked our camps, burned our villages, [and] murdered our subjects'. From this 'hostile settlement', he continued, 'a network of conspiracy has spread itself over our Provinces', so that 'the bleak mountains which rise beyond the Punjab are united by a chain of treason depots with the tropical swamps through which the Ganges merges into the sea'. This 'fanatic colony', Hunter asserted, owed its origin to the reformer Saiyyid Ahmad Barelvi, whose preaching of a purified Islam during the 1820s, after his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca, had roused 'frantic enthusiasm' among those 'most turbulent and most superstitious of the Muhammadan Peoples', the Pathan tribesmen of the northwest. No one could predict, he wrote, 'the proportions to which this Rebel Camp, backed by the Musalman hordes from the Westward, might attain, under a leader who knew how to weld together the nations of Asia in a Crescentade'. Here, within his first pages, Hunter evoked a number of what were subsequently to become central elements in British imagery as it related to India's Muslims: an obsession with 'conspiracy', an acknowledgement of the power of reformist preaching, and an assertion of a unique character setting off the Pathans from the other Muslim peoples of the subcontinent.

The central objective of Hunter's work was to urge upon the government a policy toward Muslims less unyieldingly hostile than the condemnation that had marked the period from Tipu Sultan to the Mutiny. In so doing Hunter sought to distinguish between the 'fanatical masses', and the 'landed and clerical interests'. The latter, he insisted, 'bound up by a common dread of change', had no interest in the reformist enthusiasms of the Wahabi movement, for such 'dissent' was necessarily 'perilous to vested rights'. Hence by a more equitable treatment of these classes, especially in Bengal where a century of dispossession had stored up a host of grievances, they could be prompted to support the British government. More generally, Hunter urged upon the government a broad support for Muslim education, and held out the vision of a 'rising generation' of Muslims, no longer 'imbued solely with the bitter doctrines of their

[25] Letters to his father, 11 July and 30 August 1857, in IOL MS. Eur. F132/3.
[26] Cited in Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972), chapter 3, especially pp. 62–63, 71–73.

own medieval Law, but tinctured with the sober and genial knowledge of the West'.

Despite its obsession with 'conspiracy', Hunter's *The Indian Mussalmans* laid out a new policy initiative that, pushed forward by the successive viceroys Mayo and Northbrook, was to lead to a new alliance with India's Muslim elites, above all with men such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, whose Cambridge-styled Aligarh college gave visible shape to Hunter's vision. Yet this vision was not itself free of ambivalence. Though Hunter sought an alliance with the 'comfortable classes', those 'of inert conviction and some property', for he appreciated that the support of these men was essential for the stability of the Raj, at the same time he could not shake off a sympathy for the Frontier reformers themselves. As representatives of 'the bravest races in the world', they had from their mountain fastnesses time and again successfully defied the 'combined strategy and weight of a civilized Army' sent to subdue them. It was, he said, 'inexpressibly painful' that these, 'the best men', were not 'on our side'. Nor was their religious zeal, with its cry for a purification of Islamic practice, wholly unattractive. In Hunter's view the Wahabi faith was a 'simple system of puritanic belief', whose adherents devoted themselves to bringing their countrymen to a 'purer life and a truer conception of the Almighty'. Expressing his own Protestant sympathies, Hunter compared the Wahabis, engaged in the 'great work of purifying the creed of Muhammad', to Hildebrand's monks, who had 'purged the Church of Rome'.

Islamic reform, then, represented an ideal both of faith and of practice toward which, even as they denounced it, the British found themselves drawn. In part this attraction involved a romantic yearning for a simpler life of the sort they imagined to have existed in the 'merry England' of old, and which they sought now, as we shall see presently, to reconstruct on the Frontier. But Islam exerted an appeal of its own. The spread of Western education would, to be sure, help make Muslims 'less fanatical', and so propel them away from a 'mistaken' religion to a 'higher level of belief' in Christianity. Yet it also would mean, as Hunter saw it, that the Islamic faith, like that of his own Christian contemporaries, would become 'less sincere', with the educated sons 'less earnest' in their belief than their untutored fathers. Such a transformation was an occasion not only for rejoicing but for regret; for among late-Victorian Englishmen, who doubted their faith but still wished to believe, the rigorous monotheism of the Wahabi

preacher offered a reassurance they could no longer find in themselves. As Alfred Lyall wrote, 'The Mahomedan faith has still at least a dignity, and a courageous unreasoning certitude, which in western Christianity have been perceptibly melted down ... by long exposure to the searching light of European rationalism.' The 'clear, unwavering formula of Islam' by contrast 'carried one plain line straight up toward heaven like a tall obelisk pointing direct to the sky'.[27]

Lyall was critical of Hunter's insistence that British policy had antagonized India's Muslims. The Muslims were, he argued, by the very nature of their faith 'distinctively aggressive and spiritually despotic', prejudiced against Christians by 'the religious rivalry of a thousand years'. For this reason there was no point, as Hunter had suggested, in endeavouring to conciliate them. All that the British could profitably do was 'to keep the peace and clear the way' for the 'rising tide of intellectual advancement'. As for himself, Lyall never ceased being mistrustful of Muslims. As he wrote in his poem 'Badminton':

> Near me a Mussalman civil and mild,
> Watched as the shuttled cocks rose and fell;
> And he said, as he counted his beads and smiled,
> 'God smite their souls to the depths of Hell.'

Still, unlike the effeminate Hindus, the Muslims were 'worthy' opponents. Hence, despite his administrator's pride in the 'progress' the Raj had brought to India, Lyall could not resist the romanticized vision of the 'sturdy' Muslim who defied Hindu and Christian alike. In 'The Pindaree' he expressed this enduring tension through the voice of an old warrior who had fought the British in Central India, but who now saw his children in school and the 'Settlement Hakim' come 'to teach us to plough and to weed'. As Lyall wrote in the final verse of the poem:

> And if I were forty years younger, with my life before me to choose,
> I wouldn't be lectured by Kaffirs, or bullied by fat Hindoos;
> But I'd go to some far-off country where Musalmans still are men,
> Or take to the jungle, like Cheetoo, and die in the tiger's den.

Others too, as they confronted Islam, found themselves torn between condemnation and admiration. Sir Richard Temple, for instance, described Islam bitterly as a religion that 'withers human

[27] Lyall, *Asiatic Studies* (1904), p. 289.

character as with a blight, warps all the feelings and sentiments ... and rivets all customs and opinions in a groove'. Still, he acknowledged, 'there remains something of grandeur about it'. Though 'really opposed to human progress', he wrote, echoing Hunter and Lyall, 'yet it reigns in the affections of many millions of bright-eyed and strong-handed men'. Above all, it had not 'the many absurdities about it which Hinduism has'.[28] Thus this faith, and its adherents, were inevitably set apart, with Christianity, from the 'vast swamp', as Lyall called it, of Indian religious belief. Islam in the end was a religion which commanded respect, even a covert envy, among the British in India. From the views of men like Lyall it was but a short distance to the Islamic enthusiasms of Sir Richard Burton and Wilfred Scawen Blunt.

As Hunter urged upon the government a policy of conciliation toward India's Muslim elites, at the same time his writing gave new life to the idea of the Frontier as a land set apart, where conspiracy and 'fanaticism' flourished. To be sure, this vision of 'conspiracy' was grounded in the reality of a frontier always hard to control. Many frontier districts, left in the hands of tribute-paying chiefs, were never fully subdued, and two Afghan wars, in 1838–42 and 1879–80, had cost Britain dearly. Very rarely, however, did Islamic movements by themselves, even that of the Wahabis, pose a significant threat to the Raj. As James Fitzjames Stephen observed, by the time Hunter's book was published the Wahabi movement had been in existence 'for forty years more or less and would probably become formidable only if it came to be connected with other causes of disaffection'. Yet, as he pointed out, on the one recent occasion when their participation might have made a difference, that of the 1857 Mutiny, these 'conspirators' had remained aloof.[29] Nevertheless, the romanticized 'myth' of the Frontier grew ever more compelling as the years went by. The young Winston Churchill, for instance, described the origin of the 1897 rising in the following terms: 'Messengers passed to and fro among the tribes. Whispers of war, a holy war, were breathed to a race intensely passionate and fanatical.' Curzon too spoke of the frontier tribes as 'inured to religious fanaticism and hereditary rapine'.[30]

[28] Richard Temple, *Oriental Experience* (London, 1883), pp. 147, 315.
[29] Cited in Hardy, *Muslims*, p. 87.
[30] David B. Edwards, 'Mad Mullahs and Englishmen: Discourse in the Colonial Encounter', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31 (1989), pp. 649–70; Curzon of

Behind the fascination with the Frontier lay of course the looming menace of a Russian advance into Central Asia, and the consequent necessity to secure a friendly Afghanistan as a buffer state. Yet, even in Tashkent, the Russians were far away, separated from India by the towering Hindu Kush mountains. Considerations of strategic rivalry alone therefore cannot wholly account for the imaginative appeal of the Frontier. Rather, one might argue, the Frontier embodied, in compelling fashion, the enduring tension between the ideas of similarity and difference that shaped the British vision of India. This tension is perhaps most clearly captured in Kipling's famous poem 'The Ballad of East and West'. The opening stanza insists on difference, and yet, in the context of the Frontier, on similarity as well:

> Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
> Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat,
> But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
> When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

The poem goes on to describe the pursuit of an Afghan horse thief by a young British officer. Led deep into rebel held territory, the officer is spared by his antagonist, who in turn entrusts his own son to his charge. In the end:

> They have looked each other between the eyes, and there they found no fault.
> They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood on leavened bread and salt:
> They have taken the Oath of the Brother-in-Blood on fire and fresh-cut sod,
> On the hilt and the haft of the Khyber knife, and the Wondrous Names of God.

Upon this imagined Frontier the Pathan, while continuing to express much of the religious zeal the British saw as characteristic of Islam, was made also to play a distinctive role as a foil to the British themselves. Initially, in the years immediately after conquest, the Pathans, their hardy defiance sustained by remote mountain retreats, were portrayed as 'bloodthirsty, cruel, and vindictive', or as Richard Temple put it, 'thievish and predatory to the last degree'; and they

Kedleston, *Speeches on India Delivered while in England in July–August 1904* (London, 1904), pp. 8, 16.

were granted only a grudging recognition of their 'courage and gal-lantry'. Soon, however, the positive elements in this 'mixture of opposite vices and virtues' came to be ever more enthusiastically embraced. As men moved by passion rather than reason, the Pathans might possess the qualities belonging to 'savages', but they were a type of the 'noble savage'. If the Bengali, as Lewis Wurgaft has argued, was the 'spoiled child' of British India, the Pathan was, by contrast, the 'natural' child. In his 'barbarity and utter disregard for instinctual limitations' he embodied a 'fierce and admirable independence of spirit'. On the Frontier, so the British believed, they and their oppo-nents, like the British officer and the Afghan of Kipling's poem, could look each other in the eye, and, moved by codes of heroism and honour, fight as men. Whereas the Bengali threatened the Englishman by caricature, the Pathan was an idealized alter-ego, the 'half-barbarian' warrior lurking in himself.[31]

This insistence on the Frontier's unique character, set apart from India, extended to the landscape itself. At once harsh and beautiful, 'indescribeable in its clarity and contrast with the barren emptiness that went before', its climate marked by 'sharp, cruel' extremes, this land, 'woven into the souls and bodies of the men who move before it', as the Frontier governor Olaf Caroe wrote, moved the British by its contrast with a 'soft' and 'civilized' India. As much of the attraction of Islam was its similarity to the faith they wished they still possessed, so too did the Frontier, even as the British denounced its 'savageness', evoke a romantic ideal of simplicity, together with an untrammelled masculinity. On the Frontier it was possible to escape the confining life of rules and regulations, of artifice and effeminacy, of the India of the plains. The 'clean, manly, vigorous life' of the frontier, as Wurgaft has put it, where women were altogether absent, and where Englishman and Pathan confronted each other in open warfare, 'allowed the most unconflicted expression of male aggressiveness'. At the same time, away from the 'dust and stink' of an India suffused with a debilitating female sexuality, the Frontier provided an arena where a suppressed homoerotic excitement might find an outlet.

The purely male world of the Frontier evoked too for the British the days of their boyhood. The Frontier, so they believed, like the public school, 'tested the man'. Its encounters, in this view, were like games, in which one fought to win, but in which there was no malice when the whistle blew and the game was over; it was 'our chaps' versus 'your chaps'. On a larger scale, involving the Afghans and the Russians, the Frontier was of course the locale of the 'Great Game', of which Kipling wrote so evocatively in *Kim*, and whose ideal Pathan was Mahbub Ali the horsetrader, wild yet tamed to the service of the Raj. The Pathan's own code of behaviour, as the anthropologist Akbar Ahmed has shown, was of crucial importance in facilitating the enact-ment of these schoolboy fantasies; for the concepts of honour, courage, and loyalty which shaped Pathan life were not wholly at odds with those the British cherished themselves. Hence it was possible to conceive of the Pathans as 'someone not at your school but who could take a beating in the boxing ring or rugger without complaining, who could give as good as he got'. For the Pathans, however, the colonial encounter was no game, but a struggle for survival. They did not play it as a matter of choice.[32]

Even for the British, the 'Great Game' was never just a game, for death was always possible on the recurrent border raids. Apart from the two deadly Afghan Wars, however, there was never desperate combat on the frontier. Fantasies could thus be safely indulged, conspiracies imagined, and tribal risings confronted with a display of manly heroism. The Muslims, eternally plotting on the border, even the occasional raids themselves, provided a *frisson* of excitement not to be found in the dull round of life in court and camp. They provided a distraction too from the onerous task of coming to terms with the challenge posed from within, after the 1880s, by the educated Indians. One might argue that the existence of a safely distant threat gave the British a necessary sense of duty, validating the Raj in its self-appoin-ted task of securing the peace of the subcontinent.

At once opponents and allies, a romanticized Self and a threatening Other, the Muslims were, during the later decades of the nineteenth century, shaped into a community strikingly different from India's Hindus. This vision was never free of ambivalence, nor did it accord at all closely with that of the Muslims themselves. While Hunter saw in the Wahabi reformers men of a 'pure' faith, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, as a self-styled 'cosmopolitan' Muslim, found nothing attractive in these

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[31] Lewis Wurgaft, *The Imperial Imagination: Magic and Myth in Kipling's India* (Middle-town CT, 1983), chapter 1.

[32] Akbar S. Ahmed, 'The Colonial Encounter on the North-West Frontier: Myth and Mystification', *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, vol. 9 (1978), pp. 167–74.

'wild denizens of the hills', worshippers of tombs and saints. Muslims, he insisted, should work peaceably alongside the British as they 'purified' their faith. Yet Sayyid Ahmad, with Hunter and the British, accepted as fact the existence of enduring differences between 'the two races' of Hindus and Muslims. By the end of the nineteenth century, this insistence that India was divided into two opposed religious communities shaped the way not only the British, but increasing numbers of Indians, viewed their society. Nor did even those liberal dissenters who refused to abandon the ideals of an India remade ever question the country's division into Hindu and Muslim, or challenge the stereotypes defining these communities. For E.M. Forster, as much as for Lyall or Hunter, Hindus and Muslims were set apart from one another. The characters of Dr Aziz and Godbole in *A Passage to India* represented conventions of descriptive writing about the two communities whose origins could be traced back to Alexander Dow.

ORDERING INDIA'S PAST – AND ITS PRESENT

As part of their larger project of defining the enduring elements of India's society, the British set out to order its past, and its present. It was not enough simply to assert the existence of a continuing 'decline' from antiquity, nor to insist upon the recurrence of 'anarchy' whenever the strong hand of the invader was lifted. The British were determined not only to recover India's past, as part of the larger Victorian fascination with the ancient world, but to order this past into a coherent narrative that extended up to the present. In so doing, the British could, or so they imagined, create a secure and usable past in India for themselves. They were to be at once invaders from outside, and rulers from within. India's history was to comprehend alike the stupa of Sanchi and the ruins of the Lucknow Residency, India's enduring 'difference' and Britain's 'civilizing' mission.

At the heart of this enterprise was a massive archaeological survey in which all of India's ancient sites and monuments were to be authoritatively described, evaluated, and related to each other. The earliest archaeological work, in the years before the Mutiny, was at once haphazard and driven largely by individual expectations of unearthing objects of rarity and value. Likely looking mounds were dug open, while coins and statues were removed to private collections even by British officials. The East India Company's government, preoccupied

with conquest and administration, paid little attention. As the viceroy, Lord Canning, wrote in 1862, when establishing the post of archaeological surveyor, the Indian government had neglected the 'duty' of 'placing on record, for the instruction of future generations', the 'early history of England's great dependency'. It will not be to our credit, he argued, 'as an enlightened ruling power, if we continue to allow such fields of investigation as the remains of the old Buddhist capital in Behar, the vast ruins of Kanouj, the plains round Delhi, studded with ruins more thickly than even the Campagna of Rome, and many others', to remain unexplored and unprotected. During the subsequent four years, until 1865, Alexander Cunningham, military officer and self-made archaeologist, undertook the series of tours which marked the beginning of organized archaeological activity in India.

On his tours Cunningham determined to 'follow the footsteps' of Alexander the Great and the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Huen Tsiang, who travelled in India in the seventh century AD. For the first two years, starting at Mathura, Cunningham followed Huen Tsiang down the Gangetic valley; then in 1863–4 he began in the western Punjab near the Indus river, and gradually 'worked my way to the eastward in company with the Macedonian soldiers of Alexander'. Cunningham justified this selection of routes by arguing that they would lead him directly to the great sites of antiquity. Yet in following Alexander he clearly sought as well to associate the British, though they had conquered India from the east and south, with the historic invaders of the subcontinent, who, in his view, had brought it enlightenment and order, and had 'entered India from the West'.[33]

In retracing these ancient routes Cunningham inevitably let the Chinese pilgrim and the Greek conqueror determine the places of historic importance in northern India. As he wrote of the Punjab, the 'most interesting subject of enquiry' was 'the identification of those famous peoples and cities whose names have become familiar to the whole world through the expedition of Alexander the Great'. In similar fashion, he argued, the 'travels of the Chinese pilgrim' hold 'the same place in the history of India which those of Pausanias hold in the history of Greece'. The sites visited by these two ancient travellers, and thus described by Cunningham, were largely those associated

[33] Archeological Survey of India, *Four Reports Made During the Years 1862, 1863, 1864, and 1865 by Alexander Cunningham*, 2 vols (reprinted, Delhi, 1972).

with the era of Buddhist predominance in India. Cunningham's pre-occupation with such sites was, however, not surprising; for, as we have seen, the great Buddhist monuments, especially those of the far northwest influenced by Greek aesthetic ideals, defined for the British of the Victorian era the high point of ancient India's civilization. The Buddhist monuments too, as the Harappan civilization was as yet unknown, marked out the oldest sites to be found in India, and hence claimed the attention of a British public fascinated by the search for origins.

After his 1865 tour Cunningham was dismissed and sent home by a government, that of John Lawrence, loath to spend money on such pursuits. During the subsequent few years the provincial governments sponsored photographic tours by various amateurs, such as Captain Edmund Lyon in Madras, and drew up extensive lists of 'ancient architectural structures or remains' within their territories. During these years too the government sought to make available for the British public the finest of India's antiquities. From among the ruins of Sarnath, for instance, some sixty-five objects, deemed to 'possess the greatest interest and throw the most light on the manners and habits of former ages', were set aside for shipment to England by the East India Company directors in 1858. Enterprising officials devised schemes as well to take casts of the largest monuments. Most ambitious was the complete casting of one of the massive gates of the Sanchi stupa. Bearing orders from three British museums and the French and Prussian governments, Lt. H. H. Cole came to India in 1869 accompanied by some 28 tons of gelatin and plaster of paris. From Jabalpur, at the end of the railway line, the material was conveyed to Sanchi in 60 carts, and the whole casting, when completed, consisted of 112 separate pieces. The subsequent year Cole returned to India with the aim of casting portions of the Qutb Minar at Delhi and the sculpture of Fatehpur Sikri, but the Government of India refused to support the project. The government also denied Cole permission to take away to England the gates of the temple of Somnath, which had been retrieved from their previous Muslim captors with great fanfare by Lord Ellen-borough, but were then left to languish in the Agra Fort. Henceforth India's antiquities were to remain in India, where, displayed in museums newly established from Calcutta to Lahore, they announced Britain's mastery over the country's past.

In 1871 the archaeological survey was re-established with profess-

edly scientific objectives. As the Government of India told Cunningham, appointing him to the permanent post of director-general, he was to undertake a 'complete search over the whole country' and to compile a 'systematic record and description of all architectural and other remains that are remarkable either for their antiquity, or their beauty, or their historical interest'.[34] This survey was of course hardly shaped by scholarly concerns alone. Above all, these monuments, preserved in a state of arrested decay, testified to Britain's self-proclaimed role as guardian of India's past. Indeed, as Lord Curzon put it in a speech to the Asiatic Society in 1900, 'a race like our own, who are themselves foreigners, are in a sense better fitted to guard, with a dispassionate and impartial zeal, the relics of different ages, than might be the descendants of warring races or the votaries of rival creeds'. Even the palace of the Burmese kings at Mandalay, less than half a century old, had to be preserved, as at once a mark of respect for Burma's past sovereignty and a 'reminder that it has now passed forever into our hands'. Mute witnesses to a past whose achievements had been superseded by those of the Raj, India's antiquities could not be allowed to crumble into oblivion; nor, despite Lord Napier's endeavour to install district offices in the Tirumal Naik palace at Madurai, and so make it a 'machine of civilized administration', were they meant to be put to use by the British government.

The British conceived that India's buildings provided the best, if not the only, book from which long periods of its history could 'satisfactorily be read'. These structures, as the Royal Asiatic Society put it, told of 'the rise and fall' of the different religions of India, of the 'ethnological relations' of its various tribes and races, and of the ebb and flow of power as the north and south contended for mastery. Not surprisingly, the British insisted always that India's historic architecture, like its peoples, were 'naturally' divided, as Cunningham put it, into 'the two great classes of Hindu and Muhammadan, which are widely distinct from each other'. The first for Cunningham comprehended Buddhist and Jain, as well as Brahmin, structures; the Buddhist among them, as the 'earliest specimens of Hindu architecture', deserved complete protection. Among the Muslim buildings he singled out for recognition the imposing structures of the great capital cities of medieval India. The 'majestic beauty' of the Qutb Minar, the

[34] See NAI Home Public, 28 May 1870, no. 88–89, and 18 February 1871, no. 28–29.

'stern grandeur' of Tughlaqabad, the 'elegance' of the Taj Mahal, all commanded the attention of the new archaeological survey.[35]

More than antiquity or 'elegance' was, however, at stake in these discussions. Each site had its role to play in the drama whose final act was the coming of the British Raj. Delhi's Qutb Minar, for instance, told of the 'bold and daring' 'first Mussalman conquerors', who endeavoured by constructing this 'lofty column' to 'humble the pride of the infidel ... and to exalt the religion of the prophet Muhammad.' The Asoka pillar in the Firoz Shah Kotla provided Cunningham with an occasion for a tirade against what he saw as 'the unblushing mendacity' still too common in India. 'Almost everywhere', Cunningham wrote, 'I have found Brahmins ready to tell me the subject of long inscriptions of which they could not possibly read a single letter.' Always the triumphs of Indian art were ascribed to the influence of foreign invaders. Curzon, for instance, insisted in his speech to the Asiatic Society that the 'majority' of Indian antiquities, those of medieval times as well as those of the Buddhist era a thousand years before, were 'exotics, imported into this country in the train of conquerors, who had learnt their architectural lessons in Persia, in Central Asia, in Arabia, in Afghanistan'. Echoing Cunningham forty years before, he saw the British themselves, 'borne to India upon the crest of a later but similar wave', as the agents of a similar process of architectural transformation.[36]

Despite their insistence on classifying India's historic architecture in communal terms, as 'Hindu', 'Muslim' or 'Buddhist', the British did not in practice always find it easy to fit these categories to the buildings they were meant to describe. The architecture of north India's rulers from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, above all, created intractable problems of classification. As many of the buildings in the Mughal emperor Akbar's capital at Fatehpur Sikri were, so British critics argued, 'thoroughly Hindu' in outline and details, so too, by contrast, were the structures erected by the Hindu rulers of the surrounding region powerfully influenced by contemporaneous Mughal architecture. Difficulty of classification, as in the simultaneous

[35] See NAI Home Public, 30 July 1870, no. 204–16, and June 1874, no. 10–13.
[36] Archeological Survey, *Four Reports ... 1862–63 ... Cunningham*, pp. 163, 195; Curzon speech of 7 February 1900, in Sir Thomas Raleigh (ed.), *Lord Curzon in India* (London, 1906), pp. 182–94.

effort to order India's castes, bred controversy. While some, like Richard Temple, insisted, for instance, that the eighteenth-century palace of the Jat rajas of Dig, despite its 'Mohammedan' borrowings, was nevertheless a 'Hindoo' structure, others, with Cunningham, argued that the palace was in its architectural style 'purely Mahomedan', with 'very little if any trace of the real Hindu architecture about it'. For the most part, commentators like Fergusson, though with reluctance, classified these buildings as 'Hindu' because of the religious faith of their builders. Throughout these controversies no one ever questioned the assumption, so deeply embedded in the ideology of the Raj, that, as religious affiliation shaped India's society, so too must it – in timeless fashion – inform the elements of the country's architecture.

Alone among India's viceroys, Curzon devoted substantial energy to archaeological preservation. He reorganized the Archaeological Survey into an efficient administrative body and tirelessly toured India's ancient monuments. He was the first governor-general in eighty years to visit Gaur, Bengal's historic capital, and one of only two in a century of British rule ever to tour the Hindu shrines of Brindaban. Curzon's obsession, however, was the Taj Mahal, which he visited six times during the course of his viceroyalty. Convinced that the local engineers were 'destitute' of the 'faintest artistic perception', he set on foot a number of restoration projects, which he then supervised with a single-minded devotion to detail. Behind this commitment to precision lay, however, a world of 'Oriental' fantasy. Curzon dressed the hereditary custodians of the tomb, for instance, in the white suits and green scarf that he had decided was 'the traditional garb of Mogul days'; he ordered the removal of the 'garish English flowers' from the gardens and their replacement by a row of cypress trees framing the Taj at the end; and he determined to procure a hanging lamp for the domed chamber above the cenotaphs. As the style of the Taj was, in his view, Indo-Saracenic, 'which is really Arabic', he asked Lord Cromer, British proconsul in Egypt, to design a lamp for him modelled on those still to be found in the mosques of Cairo. Dissatisfied with Cromer's suggestion, Curzon then sought, unsuccessfully, to locate a copy of his childhood illustrated edition of 'The Arabian Nights' as a source for suitable designs. Finally, during his trip back to England, upon his retirement from the viceroyalty, he stopped in Cairo, where he selected the

design for the lamp, installed in the Taj in 1906, which still hangs over the tomb chamber.[37]

Although the Taj always stood forth for the British as, so Curzon put it, a 'vision of eternal beauty', nevertheless even this great monument had to be made to fit into the appropriate categories of the British discourse on India's past. As the Taj was by definition a 'Saracenic' design, a lamp from Cairo – or even one drawn from a Victorian illustrator's 'Arabian Nights'! – could alone suitably complement its soaring domes and arches. What mattered was not the Indian reality of shared architectural forms, but an 'Orient' constituted of opposed 'Saracenic' and 'Hindu' elements. In its majesty the Taj evoked too the grandeur of empire, against which the British sought always to measure themselves. Although Curzon insisted, when he set out to build the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta, that there could be 'no greater rashness than to attempt a modern Taj', and though he scrupulously avoided elements of 'Saracenic' design, still at every stage of construction the Taj remained his animating ideal. Sometimes it presented an unreachable goal – he could not, he admitted, aspire to the eighteen-foot-high terrace of the Taj. Yet he took pride in the fact that he had made the Queen's Hall larger than the tomb chamber of the Taj, and he insisted, despite objections on grounds of cost, that the marble for Victoria's memorial be taken from the same quarry as Mumtaz Mahal's.

It was not always easy to secure the preservation of India's ancient monuments in the proper state of arrested decay. Curzon bemoaned the use of whitewash on the medieval mosques and tombs of Bijapur and the unwillingness of the British military to vacate the Delhi and Lahore forts. Climbing up a ladder outside the temple of Bhubaneshwar to inspect the restoration work for which his government was paying, he denounced the 'supposed prejudices' of its guardians, who excluded, as they still do, non-Hindus from the shrine. Where religious structures had already come into the possession of government, he determined not to 'hand them back to the dirt and defilement of Asiatic religious practices'. Where worship had to be permitted, the devotions should be of a sort appropriate, as the British saw it, to the history and character of the site. At Bodh Gaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, the government was determined to restore

37 For Curzon's architectural activities, see correspondence in IOL Curzon Papers MS. Eur. F111/621.

the main temple to what it 'is undoubtedly, and always has been primarily, a Buddhist temple'. That the site had been in the control of a Hindu mahant since 1727 the Bengal authorities dismissed with the assertion that his religious observances were 'unreal and unorthodox'. Still, when the mahant obstinately refused to vacate, Curzon backed down. As the British found themselves, Curzon wrote in 1904, involved in 'so many sources of somewhat sharp disagreement with the native community in Bengal (arising out of our Universities Bill, the Official Secrets Act, and the suggested partition of Bengal), it did not seem to be worthwhile to add another to their number, or to provide a possible handle for a religious agitation'.

Despite this setback, the ideas which informed the challenge to the Bodh Gaya mahant remained compelling. History, so the British insisted, should determine what Curzon called the 'proper conduct of worship', and hence the oldest, or original, form of religious devotion ascertained to have taken place in any structure possessed an overriding claim to it. Taken up in the late twentieth century by the Indians themselves, this colonial ideology now informs, not a challenge to the mahant of Bodh Gaya, but the insistent demand that later, Muslim, religious structures must give way to presumably earlier, Hindu, ones. Based in large part on British archaeological excavations dating back to Cunningham's time, these claims sustained the long assault on the sixteenth-century Babur mosque in Ajodhya, culminating in its final tragic demolition by crowds of Hindu activists in December 1992. Alleged to be set on the ancient site of the birthplace of Ram, it could not be allowed to stand. The colonial notions of India's enduring division into Hindu and Muslim, and of 'history' as a mode of validation for one's actions in the present, had borne bitter fruit.
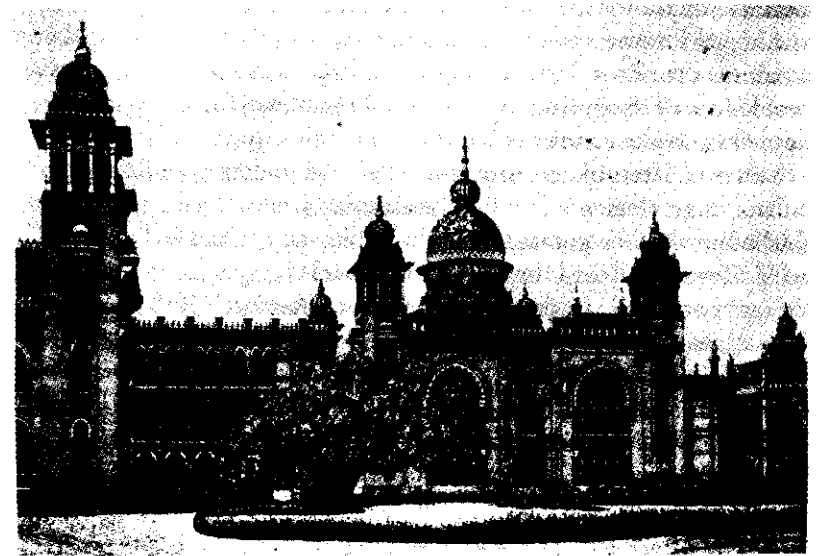
As the British defined India's past, they sought always to make room in it for themselves. The massive six volume *Cambridge History of India* can be seen in particular as a complementary enterprise to the archaeological survey, as it sought to comprehend all of India's past in a single narrative that led inevitably to the Raj. As we have seen in chapter 3, in this historiography the past was always the present. The ancient empires, as Ronald Inden has indicated in discussing the work of the historian Vincent Smith, were seen as the product of an 'active male and Aryan rationality' that arrived by conquest and imposed its order on an inherently divided non-Aryan populace. Following in the footsteps of these imperial rulers, the British, in this view, could take

pride in having erected a polity in India that 'was not only true to India's history, but even an improvement on it'. By contrast, in Smith's account, India's medieval history, with its petty warring kingdoms, was not just a story of decline, but 'a parable of the future, of what would happen in India if the British withdrew'.[38]

As they approached their own time, the British sought to define the Raj as itself truly Indian, while yet retaining a conception of themselves as Western, and the bearer of the values of 'civilization'. The history, the architecture, and the ritual of the Raj alike bore witness to this endeavour. The events of the Mutiny, for instance, in such monumental works as J.W. Kaye's three-volume *History of the Sepoy War* (1867) were cast in heroic form to create a 'mythic' triumph. For Kaye the British themselves, by their 'over-eager pursuit of Humanity and Civilization', what he calls the 'progress of Englishism', provoked the uprising; yet that same English 'self-assertion' alone made possible a victorious outcome. At the same time the monuments associated with the events of 1857 were organized in a sacral way, linking the Residency at Lucknow with the well at Kanpur and the Ridge at Delhi. Marked with British blood, these sites defined a landscape that for the British indelibly connected their Raj at once to an Indian past and to their successful mastery of an India stained by 'treachery' and 'savagery'.

The endeavour to mark out the distinctive character of the Raj took shape most visibly in the buildings the British themselves put up in India. As we have seen, during the era of Company rule most British building in India was fitted to the forms of European classicism. Such 'eternal' forms, with their origins in ancient Greece, asserted an aesthetic perfection that stood above the vagaries of time; while at the same time they proclaimed for all to see what were regarded as universal values of law, order, and proportion. The adoption of European classical forms did not, however, resolve the problem of representing Britain's empire as Indian. So long as a mercantile company controlled the government, and the Mughal emperor sat on his throne in Delhi, the British had but little choice other than to use a European, and largely classical, idiom in their imperial building. After the Mutiny, however, with the transfer of power to the Crown and the banishment of the Mughal ruler, the British began to construct for themselves a notion of empire in which they were not merely foreign
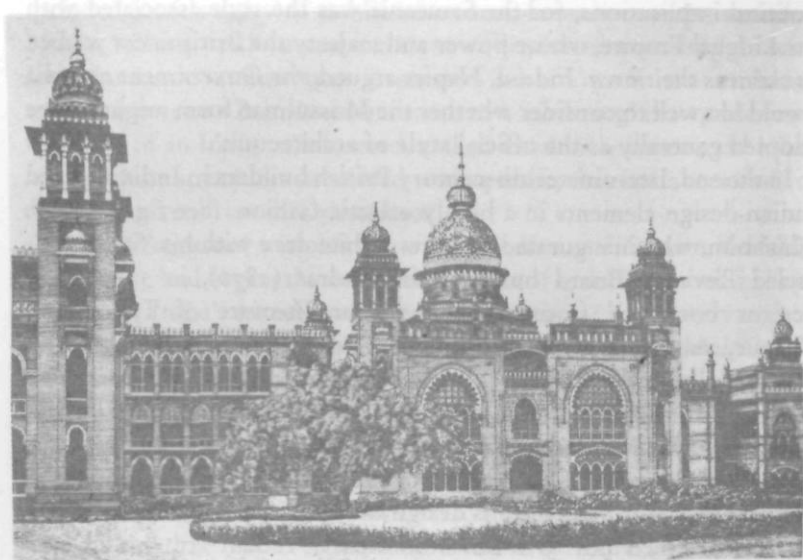
[38] Inden, *Imagining India*, chapter 5, especially pp. 180–88.

9 *The Madras Law Courts*, designed by J. W. Brassington and H. C. Irwin (1889–92). The structure, in the characteristic manner of the British Indo-Saracenic, joined together features, most notably arches and domes, from a variety of Indian styles, and incorporated as well arcaded verandas, colonnades, and a tower in the shape of a minaret containing a light to guide ships toward the nearby harbour. From *Indian Engineering*, 7 September 1895.

conquerors, like the Romans, but legitimate, almost indigenous rulers, linked directly to the Mughals and hence to India's own past. Part of this endeavour took the shape of the proclamation of Victoria as Empress of India. In architecture it involved the creation, from the late 1860s onward, of a new style, known as the 'Indo-Saracenic'.

As the British set out to incorporate Indic features into their architectural work, they were drawn especially to the forms, above all those of the arch and dome, that made up what they conceived of as the 'Saracenic' style. As they disdained the 'idolatrous' Hindu religion, so too did they disdain the architectural styles that, in their view, expressed its values in stone. Unlike the heavy, dark forms of post and lintel construction that informed Hindu temple architecture, the arch and dome were, as Lord Napier, governor of Madras, put it, 'the most beautiful, the most scientific, and the most economical' way of covering large spaces. Central to the appeal of that style, however, were its

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political implications, for the Saracenic was the style associated with the Mughal Empire, whose power and majesty the British now wished to claim as their own. Indeed, Napier argued, the Government of India would 'do well to consider whether the Mussulman form might not be adopted generally as the official style of architecture'.

In the end, late-nineteenth-century British builders in India adopted Indian design elements in a highly eclectic fashion. (See fig. 9.) R. F. Chisholm, who inaugurated the new architecture with his 'Saracenic'-styled Revenue Board buildings in Madras (1870), in subsequent designs borrowed features from the architecture of Travancore, Bijapur, Ahmedabad, and elsewhere. Similarly, Major C. Mant's Mayo College, Ajmer (1875), mixed Rajput and Mughal forms in a striking design capped with an ornate clock tower. Nor did British builders confine themselves to Indian forms. Chisholm incorporated Byzantine elements in his Madras University Senate House; while, as William Emerson wrote of his design for Muir College, Allahabad, he had 'determined not to follow too closely Indian art, but to avail myself of an Egyptian phase of Moslem architecture, and work it up with the Indian Saracenic of Beejapore and the northwest, confining the whole in a western Gothic design'.[39]

The mingling of elements from across India ideally suited the British vision of their role as colonial rulers. By drawing together forms distinctly labelled 'Hindu' and 'Saracenic', the British proclaimed themselves the masters of India's culture, able to shape a harmony the Indians, divided by caste and community, could not themselves achieve. This eclecticism reflected also, and itself constituted, British notions of India's enduring 'difference'. As India's society was unchanging, traditional, in a word 'Oriental', the elements of its architecture were, at the deepest level, similar and interchangeable. For the colonial builder its forms represented, not an on-going tradition within which he worked, but rather colours on a palette from which he could pick and choose to create the image he desired: that of order imposed on a backward and divided society.

At no time was Indo-Saracenic design ever conceived of as an exercise in antiquarianism. Central to its conception was always a combination of 'European science' and 'native art', of 'traditional' forms and 'modern' functions. The buildings constructed in this style were meant to advance the novel objectives of the Raj, and they

[39] Metcalf, *Imperial Vision*, chapter 3.

included a wide array of public structures, from law courts and post offices, railway stations and banks, to colleges and museums. Indeed, Indo-Saracenic architecture expressed within itself the enduring tension between a British commitment to a 'civilizing' enterprise, with its vision of an India transformed, and an insistence, announced in the facades these structures presented to the public, that India remained of necessity a 'traditional' Oriental society.

James Fergusson, with his *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876), had begun the extended process of ordering, labelling, and classifying India's historic architecture. This sense of mastery culminated with Swinton Jacob's *Portfolio of Indian Architectural Details* (1890). Comprising six massive volumes, containing some 375 plates of detailed architectural drawings – of brackets and capitals, arches and plinths – from historic buildings across northern India, this portfolio of 'working drawings', so Jacob announced, would enable the architect to take full advantage of features 'so full of vigour, so graceful and so true in outline'. The volume announced as well that the British had now made India's architectural heritage their own. No longer would the builder have to 'copy piecemeal and wholesale' structures of the past; rather, having mastered 'the spirit which produced such works', he could 'select, reject, and alter the forms to suit the altered conditions'.

By 1900, then, alike in ethnography, archaeology, and architecture, the British had, or so they thought, ordered, and so mastered, at once India's past and its present. Informed by an ideology that announced India's enduring 'difference', yet uneasily insistent upon communicating the 'principle of progress' to India, they had fashioned for India a past linked to a vision of empire in which, as the viceroy, Lord Lytton, told the Imperial Assemblage in 1877, 'Providence' had called upon the British to 'replace and improve' the 'constantly recurrent' anarchy of its strife-torn predecessors. The ordered India which the British had created could not, however, wholly obscure the contradictions that underlay its divergent elements, nor could an insistence upon 'difference' forever keep at bay the challenges posed in the name of 'similarity', above all by the educated Indian.