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8. Orientalist Empiricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge

Uncertainty about what constitutes truth underlies the pursuit of knowledge and logically entails critical scrutiny of the means by which some representations of reality and not others become established as true. In this endeavor, the veracity of statements about reality is not at issue so much as their epistemological authority, their power to organize understandings of the world. In this vein, I join authors in this volume to pursue a proposition derived from Edward Said: there is knowledge constituted as truthful by the authority of a system of representations called "orientalism," which arose from and bolstered European supremacy.

Michel Foucault provides a point of departure for many authors in this volume, as he does for Said (1978: 23). Said recognizes that Foucault's method is deficient for historical studies, because "the individual text or author counts for very little" (Said 1978: 23). Thus Foucault can conjure discursive formations in history but cannot write their histories, having blinded himself to dynamics of creation, tension, contest, and change. Said only partially liberates himself from Foucault (Said 1984, 1986). Seeing orientalism in descriptive, literary terms, he makes provocative associations among texts that constitute orientalism and dynamics of European power. But the particulars that connect histories of imperialism and knowledge are missing. In this essay, I consider connections between histories of political power in South Asia and knowledge about Indian tradition. Though my goal is not a critique of Said, I do conclude that by detaching his chosen texts from history, in the manner of Foucault, Said has lost sight of the politics that reproduce the epistemological authority of orientalism today.

Orientalism

Said conflates three formations of "orientalism" that have very distinct relations to colonial power. Most narrowly, orientalism is a field of scholarship with a distinct academic genealogy and tradition. I designate only specialists in this field as "orientalists." Most broadly, orientalism is a vast set of images in scholarship, painting, literature, and other media—a sprawling formation in which the works of William Jones, orientalist painters, Rudyard Kipling, and Henry Kissinger mingle in a multimedia text that conjures the essences of the East. This constitutes orientalism for Edward Said. Between these two extremes—the first formation being small and defined rigidly by scholarly norms, the other being huge and defined loosely by the implications of its imagery—there is a third formation: a venerable set of factualized statements about the Orient, which was established with authorized data and research techniques and which has become so widely accepted as true, so saturated by excess plausibility (Ludden [1988] 1990), that it determines the content of assumptions on which theory and inference can be built. This body of knowledge did originate in part in the work of orientalists, but it grew far beyond their scope by contributions from other authorities. Now shared and disseminated within a multicultural world, where many disciplines add to its authority (Abdel-Malek 1963), this last formation—orientalism as a body of knowledge—is the subject of this essay.

The three formations of orientalism overlap and share historical space. They all presume a fundamental divide between East and West and observe the East through western epistemologies in cognitive relation to the West. That they have common substance defined by a single attitude toward the East and common links to western domination is an argument Said makes but I do not. For, despite a history that unites them, they have separate histories that account for their distinctive substance and interactions with power. Orientalists, for instance, played a more distinct, powerful role in the production of official colonial knowledge about India before 1830 than after. By 1830, Parliament and political economy provided independent authority for the determination of truths about the "real" India. By 1880, imperial government and European social theory were arguably more important than were orientalists for the production of orientalist images like those in Kipling's work, as well as for the authority of conventional wisdom about India, such as that enshrined in census reports

and ethnological tradition (Cohn 1983, 1989). By 1900, high imperialism, social Darwinism, and scientific racism gave orientalism meanings quite contrary to orientalist scholarship (Stepan 1982).

For Said, imperialism is inherent in orientalism. Knowledge is power. But this begs many important questions. How does orientalism support imperialism? How does imperialism explain the substance of orientalism in different world areas? How has orientalism survived and even thrived in a world of nation-states and national movements? By separating knowledge and power (which Said does not do, following Foucault), we can address issues like these and historicize orientalism more effectively. By locating forces at work in the production of orientalism, we can show how its reproduction has transformed its composition and political meanings over time. Doing so, we find orientalism much more diverse and vital than Said makes it out to be.

Orientalism as a body of knowledge about India dates back to classical antiquity and has many early-modern precursors (Halbfass 1988; O'Leary 1989). But eighteenth-century European expansion in India generated qualitatively new knowledge. Much of it served instrumental functions for capitalist, military, and administrative expansion by the English East India Company. Yet methods to produce this knowledge were not specific to India, nor was its substance understood to be dictated by utility. Even the most instrumental knowledge, produced to sustain technologies of colonial rule—what I will call colonial knowledge—was produced under the Enlightenment rubric of objective science. Additions to knowledge about India were understood as scientific discoveries whose veracity was based on methodologies authorized by scientific standards of the day. Orientalism as a body of knowledge drew material sustenance from colonialism but became objectified by the ideology of science as a set of factualized statements about a reality that existed and could be known independent of any subjective, colonizing will. Thus detached epistemologically from politics by a culture that objectivized the world as a collection of scientific observations with universal validity, orientalism floated free of its original moorings; it could therefore serve diverse political purposes and receive new sustenance from many quarters. By 1900, it was even deployed against European dominance by Indian nationalists. Its substance also changed with time: because it ordered knowledge about India in relation to the West, orientalism changed substantively through the production of new "facts," with advances in science and changing structures of world power.

Colonial Knowledge

Foundations of orientalism lie in the transition to Company rule in India, circa 1770–1820, when producing new knowledge about India was bound tightly with political patronage. As Company territory grew, centralization became a policy imperative; as the Company became a ruling power, its autonomy decreased (Spear 1978: 85–6ff). Intellectual labor became implicated in struggles to subordinate Company to Parliament, Indian provinces to Calcutta, and districts to provincial capitals. The centralization that accompanied colonial expansion involved the subordination of many intermediaries, "partners in empire," and "loose cannons" who had been critical for the Company in earlier decades but were now seen as detrimental (Furber 1948; Kling 1976; Sutherland 1952; Nightingale 1970). The fathers of orientalism in India furthered colonial centralization by subordinating the Indian intelligentsia to English epistemological authority.

Beginning in 1784, the year that Pitt's India Act was passed and the Asiatic Society of Bengal founded, and increasingly with reforms under Lord Cornwallis in the wake of Burke's denunciations of Company Raj (Furber 1987), new attention was paid to Indian intermediaries who stood between the Court of Directors and Indian subjects (Stein 1989). To subordinate these men, Europeans had to appropriate knowledge that was locked away in the minds of Indian commercial, judicial, military, and revenue specialists. By appropriating knowledge toward this end, Europeans discovered India for themselves, in their own terms, by converting knowledge from native sources into English language forms that were systematic, scientific, and accessible to means of truth-testing that were becoming the pride of European culture (Adas 1989). In addition, military operations and political centralization required that data which had never been produced by Indian rulers be generated and controlled by government; such data constituted new facts for the creation of orientalism as a body of knowledge. Colonialism reorganized India politically and empirically at the same time, and the two reorganizations supported one another.

The works of James Rennell, William Jones, and Thomas Munro show how military expansion and political centralization implicated colonial knowledge. Rennell joined the Royal Navy in 1756 at age fourteen, and went to the Philippines with Alexander Dalrymple at age twenty. He had been surveying harbors for the Royal Navy when the Company, in

1763, hired him to survey routes from Calcutta to the Bay of Bengal. He became Surveyor General of Bengal the next year; when he left India, in 1777, he literally put India on the map with his comprehensive *Map of Hindoostan*, whose accompanying *Memoir* appeared in three editions, the last in 1793. This compendium was not superseded for decades and was possible, Rennell says in the preface to his *Memoir*, because so few geographical facts were known when he began his work. He says also that he abandoned revising the *Memoir* because data multiplied too rapidly with the expansion of Company power and that the market for his work arose from public curiosity in England stimulated by Company wars.

The lithograph adorning Rennell's map (this volume: following p. 249) symbolizes the progress of geography during Rennell's career. It shows the surveyor's and map maker's tools on the ground and European civilians in the shadow of Britannia, as she receives texts from Brahmans, one text being labeled "Shastas" (Shastras), Hindu law books. The gesture linking Britannia and the central Brahman figure seems ambiguous and could be seen to depict a gift being made to him by Britannia. But Brahmans in queue with arms full of texts wait to give, not receive. And the temple tower behind Britannia presents her as a goddess/queen receiving gifts from supplicants who bear offerings/tribute. They offer knowledge, that special gift of India's literati, so critical for Britannia's transformation from conquering to ruling power (Bayly 1988; Dirks, this volume). The lithograph thus represents European merchants and surveyors dependent on Britannia's might, through which they gain knowledge from a suppliant India. The irony is that even as the lithograph represents the power of Britannia and pays homage to her from the vantage points of science and commerce, it implies that natives, especially Brahmans, hold knowledge that she needs. To loosen that grip became a political goal for Company Raj for the advancement of science and commerce. With military victories, more English surveyors marched into the interior every year. Observation and measurement by Englishmen supplanted "secondhand," "hearsay," and "traditionary" native accounts. In 1808, Rennell measured progress in surveying by looking back to the 1770s; he said to a gathering of surveyors, "At that day we were compelled to receive information from others respecting the interior of the country, but in your time you *explored* for *yourselves*" (Phillimore 1954–1956: frontispiece).

The shastras in Rennell's lithograph signify another branch of knowledge in which the Company sought to end its dependence on native experts. A letter from William Jones to Cornwallis proposing that Jones be commissioned to compile a "Digest of Hindu and Mohammadan laws" shows the importance of this project for colonialism. Penned in Calcutta in 1788, the letter reads like a grant proposal. It begins by arguing that civil law should accord with native practice, a principle enshrined in the 1781 Act of Settlement (Mukherjee [1968] 1987: 117ff.), with which Jones begins his proposal. He goes on to say that "the difficulty lies . . . in the application of the principle to practice; for the Hindu and Muselman laws are locked up for the most part in two very difficult languages, Sanscrit and Arabick, which few Europeans will ever learn." As a result, judges in Jones's day depended on native experts; and on his arrival in Calcutta as a judge, Jones "soon began to suspect the pandits and maulavis . . . ." In 1784 he wrote to Warren Hastings, "I can no longer bear to be at the mercy of our Pundits, who deal out Hindu law as they please . . ." (Mukherjee [1968] 1987: 118). His argument to Cornwallis—who once wrote, "Every native of Hindustan, I verily believe, is corrupt" (Spear 1978: 88)—proceeds accordingly.

> . . . if we give judgment only from the opinions of native lawyers and scholars, we can never be sure, that we have not been deceived by them. . . . my experience justifies me in declaring, that I could not with an easy conscience concur in a decision, merely on the written opinion of native lawyers, in any case in which they could have the remotest interest in misleading the court . . . . (Cannon 1970, II: 795)

Jones had devised "the obvious remedy for this evil" and communicated it to Burke and others before he left England. It is this plan that he submitted to Cornwallis for support.

> If we had a complete digest of Hindu and Mohammadan laws, after the model of Justinian's inestimable Pandects, compiled by the most learned of the native lawyers, with an accurate verbal translation of it into English; and if copies of the work were reposited in the proper offices of the Sedr Divani Adalat, and of the Supreme Court, that they might occasionally be consulted as a standard of justice, we should rarely be at a loss for principles at least and rules of law applicable to the cases before us, and should never perhaps, be led astray by the Pandits or Maulavi's (sic), who would hardly venture to impose on us, when their impositions might be so easily detected. (Cannon 1970, II: 795)

Jones then goes on to sketch a proper method for the project, estimate its cost, and modestly offer himself as "superintendent of such a work." His argument and offer were accepted. Jones could then seek what

S. N. Mukherjee calls "his greatest desire," to become "the legislator of the Indians" ([1967] 1987: 112). To fulfill his desire required disciplined devotion to divulging secrets buried in difficult texts in languages "few Europeans will ever learn" (see Rocher: this volume). The requisite esoteric skills became the orientalists' hallmark, which Nietzche subsequently criticized for its intellectual narrowness and which soon marginalized Indology as "it quickly became clear that the most interesting scholastic problems had no practical value at all" (Gaeffke 1990: 67, 69). But his language skill, his ability to systematize legal codes on Justinian principles, and the patronage of Cornwallis did give Jones real power in his day, enabling him to attempt a reversal of the power/knowledge relationship depicted in Rennell's lithograph. Through Jones, Britannia could generate knowledge of Hindu law that never existed before; she could give the "Shastas" to Indians who would rely on her for correct understanding of their own sacred texts and laws.

Jones saw this reversal of roles, its attendant subordination of "pandits and maulavis," and the power it gave him both as scientific achievement and as testimony to his dedication and intellect. He also saw it as a paternal generosity that would also typify orientalists, as Wilhelm Halbfass indicates when he says of J. G. Herder that, "His sympathy for the people of India became ever more apparent in his friendly and glorifying view of the 'childlike Indians'" (Halbfass 1988: 70; see Mojumdar 1976). Jones described his feelings in a letter to G. J. Spencer, in 1791:

> I speak *the language of the Gods*, as the Brahmens call it, with great fluency, and am engaged in superintending a Digest of Indian Law for the benefit of the *twenty four millions* of black British subjects in these provinces: the work is difficult & delicate in the highest degree & engages all my leisure every morning between my breakfast and the sitting of the court; the natives are charmed with the work, and the idea of making their slavery lighter by giving them their own laws, is more flattering to me than the thanks of the company and the approbation of the king, which have also been transmitted to me. (Cannon 1970, II: 885; emphasis original)

Language learning also enabled Thomas Munro to perform a special role in the production of colonial knowledge, also under the patronage of Cornwallis, who appointed him to assist another military officer, Alexander Read, in administering the Baramahal territory ceded to the Company by Tipu Sultan in 1792. Cornwallis appointed these military men to perform this critical civilian duty on the frontiers of Company expansion in order simultaneously to subordinate Madras to Calcutta and native intermediaries to the Company. Cornwallis distrusted Madras civilians, because, as he reported to the Court of Directors in 1792, few men under the governor of Madras "are acquainted with country languages," so they

> are obliged, both from habit and necessity, to allow the management of their official, as well as their private business, to fall into the hands of dubashes, a description of people in the Carnatic, who, with very few exceptions, are calculated for being the most cruel instruments of rapine and extortion in the hands of unprincipled masters, and even of rendering . . . the most upright and humane intentions . . . perfectly useless to the interests of the company, and to the unfortunate natives who happen to be within the reach of their power and influence. (Stein 1989: 38)

Munro, appointed as revenue administrator, advanced his career for thirty years by applying the "political principle of destroying any and all intermediary authority between the Company and the cultivator as the best assurance of the securing of control by the Company over its new dominions." He sought "nothing less than the completion, by administrative means, of the military conquest of the Baramahal . . ." (Stein 1989: 59–60). From this arose the authoritative construction of village India enshrined in the "ryotwari system," which became an essential element of orientalism as a body of knowledge.

Politics and Empiricism

William Jones, Indologist and lawgiver, died in 1793, and Thomas Munro, soldier and administrator, died in 1827. Their legacies grew from intellectual constructions of India relative to Britain during the institution of that relationship as colonial. Though Munro died preoccupied by war in Burma, the conclusion of the Maratha wars had eliminated the Company's last major military threat. By 1820, "the acute moral crisis of a generation before—the time of Burke's attack—had passed" (Stein 1989: 138). When Sir Thomas was governor at Madras, fears of the French and revolution had also passed away, which had preoccupied Wellesley when he established the College at Fort William (Kopf 1969: 46–47) and which made Jones, whatever his own beliefs, "part of (a) revivified conservatism, which sought to define and defend British society in the terms employed by Burke" (Majeed 1990: 211). As the frontier days of colonial knowledge passed away, Company Raj became secure; pathbreaking discoveries be-

came authoritative wisdom; innovative methods became systems. Jones fathered a discipline and Munro an administration.

Like Indian administrative politics, which remained split into provinces and departments but became ever more centralized, colonial knowledge remained divided into specialized compartments but became increasingly integrated as a body of knowledge by forces centered in London. Continuities across this transition and beyond reveal major political victories and long-term trends in the history of knowledge that built empirical certainty into orientalism. Among political victories, none is more critical than Munro's triumph in constructing *The Fifth Report on East India Company Affairs*, which made him an architect of the modern understanding of agrarian India (Stein 1989, 138–77). Among long-term trends, the most critical is the expanding scope of empiricism, which made colonial knowledge into a set of factualized statements about reality. Indology, revenue surveys, and commission reports came to share the same epistemological terrain with positivist knowledge about all societies, cultures, and political economies. Separate streams of knowledge about India could thus intersect and enrich one another, and facts from investigations in India could be integrated with facts from around the world in political economy and world history.

Empiricism embraced ever more of the world with the expansion of British power. Encyclopedic compendia like Malachy Postlethwayt's *The Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (1766) organized data from treaties, laws, travel accounts, histories, and technical manuals on productions and trades in one authoritative, fact-filled format; but much of the world was still missing, including India. In their day, Rennell and later surveyors like Hamilton Buchanan and Benjamin Heyne published accounts of Indian journeys, and their volumes went beside others of the same sort, like that by Joseph Townsend, a rector from Cornwall who published his account of a journey in the 1780s, in France and Spain, advertising "particular attention to the agriculture, manufacture, commerce, population, taxes, and revenue." Rennell also drew maps for Mungo Park's best-selling account of an expedition to Africa. Such works made the world visible and usable for British enterprise. They were of a piece with efforts in art and literature to render the world as a unified landscape for intellectual and material appropriation by English capitalism (Cosgrove 1984).

In the early nineteenth century, pieces of colonial knowledge generated by experts as diverse as Munro and Jones, on subjects as diverse as Hindu law and agrarian administration, became situated side-by-side within one empiricist epistemology, in which they could be integrated into a unified construction of India. Authoritative sources produced diverse types of data that became factualized and located in a unified empirical domain where they could be formed into verified statements about Indian reality. "Hindu law books" became understood as accounts of legal practice and therefore of actual law-abiding behavior and thus of religious norms that guided traditional life. These could be then combined with accounts of observed practice and of history and lore to demonstrate how Indians obeyed or violated norms in practice. In short, once the authority of colonial knowledge was established in its power over English-language understandings of India, its veracity escaped the political nexus portrayed in Rennell's lithograph. Freed from politics, authoritative knowledge about traditional India could be designed from virtually any collection of authoritative data.

The template for a lasting design was devised in Munro's time and became increasingly ornate and codified by the routinization of the colonial administration; as knowledge production was systematized, individual explorations gave way to routine reports, native informants became employees and subjects of the Raj, and journey literature gave way to official correspondence. By 1820, colonial knowledge had begun to emerge as authoritative, official wisdom, and orientalism to take definite shape as a body of knowledge.

We have no complete account of this process and I cannot attempt one here. What I can do is illustrate how colonial knowledge generated authoritative "facts" that constituted traditional India within a conceptual template that would be progressively theorized within modern world history. These factualized representations of India became official wisdom. They were conventionalized and then fixed as a factual basis for inference and theory. Two vignettes illustrate how early colonialism produced two foundational ideas about traditional India: (1) India was "from time immemorial" a land of autonomous village communities in which (2) the force sustaining tradition was Hindu religion, with its complex social prescriptions, above all those pertaining to caste.

1. When Read and Munro went to Baramahal in 1792, their purpose was revenue collection. They found that by eliminating middlemen they could contract for revenue directly with village leaders. This was a major change in Company routines, and Read had to defend it to the Board of Revenue in Madras. From experience in Bengal and in Madras territories,

the Board assumed that it would collect its revenue from zamindars and contractors who would deliver revenue from the villages; indeed, in 1801, the Board confirmed erstwhile poligar chiefs as zamindar landlords in Madras territories. But Read argued that collecting taxes directly from villagers enabled him to lower tax rates and to collect more taxes, though this raised the cost of tax collection, which led to vehement objections from the Board. Eliminating the middlemen between the Company and village taxpayers became a crusade for Munro. By 1811 he had collected revenue and information from several parts of South India, and his influence in London enabled him to organize evidence for submission to Parliament as it considered the Company's 1813 charter renewal. Evidence for the *Fifth Report*, which Munro effectively compiled, helped to prove his case, with data from Company experts, that the village had always been the basic unit of administration in India, and peasant rights in villages had been usurped by thieving middlemen and tyrants like Tipu Sultan. Thus, for its own interests and to protect the rights of the people, the Company should establish the village as the basic unit of administration.

Munro argued for and effectively proved traditions in which village headmen administered villages composed of peasant families who had always enjoyed the equivalent of private property rights, though these had been abrogated by rapacious tyrants, poligars, and renters. To accomplish his victory, Munro had to best competitors in Madras, above all Francis Ellis, who commanded evidence that might have won the day, were the matter to have been settled scholastically. But this was not to be (Stein 1989).

2. For surveyors and revenue collectors throughout South India, as for Rennell, Brahmans were the most influential native informants, and they became key figures in Company administration. Even so, until 1810, it seems that Britons in Company service viewed Brahmans essentially as specialists in a complex division of labor. Early lists of castes from southern territories normally transliterate and translate caste names with occupational labels without ranking. By 1820, this pattern has changed; why, I cannot say exactly. But it seems that as the village became for the Company the foundation of Indian society, principles were needed for ordering that society without reference to political structures larger than the village. In principle, Munro's ryotwari system proposed that all citizen taxpayers were juridically equal; in practice, however, revenue collection and Company law rested on a logic of hierarchy, with the Company at the top adjudicating disputes based on precedent (Washbrook 1981). Company

courts established precedents, but common law tradition required logical basis for precedent in Indian society itself. Though Company officials collected evidence to confirm rights on the basis of charters from precolonial kings, this evidence was often inconvenient or lacking and positivist law required logic to fill in the gaps left by its silences and exclusions.

Hindu law codes and caste prescriptions therein provided that logic. By 1820, legal and revenue proceedings are filled with cases and reports on the traditional, religiously based, social order of village society, self-regulated by caste and village panchayats, demanding recognition in Company governance and law. Caste lists by 1820 uniformly use *varna* categories to rank *jatis*. By this time, of course, the Company was deeply embroiled in the administration of Hindu temples (Appadurai 1981). Hindu religion was in the early nineteenth century very much a part of Company Raj; the colonial construction of caste society in village India needs to be seen in this light (Bayly 1988). Practical experience proved and proved again that religion was the basis of social order in India.

These early moments in the making of colonial knowledge suggest how Company Raj produced factualized formulations that would populate orientalism as a body of knowledge. They also suggest the complex and contested, shifting role of native authority for Company experts who endeavored to establish truths about India. Though the distinctions between the intellectual work of Jones and Munro suggest a division like that which would later separate humanities from social sciences, it was the combination of these two streams of learning that created colonial knowledge and orientalism, by establishing epistemological privilege for European expertise deployed to establish concurrently the essential truth about India and policies for Indian governance. The utility of ideas about India for governance and their institutionalization by the state bolstered their epistemological authority.

Orientalism began with the acquisition of the languages needed to gain reliable information about India. Indian languages became a foundation for scientific knowledge of Indian tradition built from data transmitted to Europeans by native experts. Rennell's lithograph illustrates that texts were most the valued objects of transmission: properly studied, texts would reveal the positive facts of Hindu legal doctrine. For collectors as much as judges, precedent and principles of right were essential and could be positively determined from reputable witnesses through translation. Reliable evidence with which to establish a factual basis for Company Raj thus came initially from reputable natives whose authority was rooted in

their expertise and social status, as evaluated by Company authorities. Evidence from Brahman pandits and other Indian elites was essential for sound knowledge on which to base sound policies, and it established a bond between the Company and Indian elites that was used to stabilize the colonial state within a conservative mold (Bayly 1988).

Empirically sound and useful knowledge about India was not to be found only in classical texts. Even Jones himself indicates that properly constituted European expertise was required to discover the real truth in texts. For Rennell and the others, only British experts could determine veracity and therefore sound knowledge for government. Surveyors took great pains to distinguish data *gleaned* from the accounts of natives from data *produced* by direct observation; Munro necessarily used only evidence produced by collectors to establish the village as a traditional foundation of government. For Rennell and Munro, the real India experts were those scientists and trained administrators who worked and traveled in the countryside and absorbed local information and observed local conditions—those incipient social scientists who created "hard" objective data in surveys and settlements for policy decisions based on facts and political economy. A stray Sanskrit quote might be relevant here and there, but only to provide color for conclusions based on "real" data. For Munro, as for James Mill and many others to follow, skepticism about native sources combined with opposition to policies intended to preserve native elite privileges, associated with orientalists like Jones and Ellis.

My two vignettes also suggest how politics influenced not only the kind of data generated by Company expertise but also the logic of their integration into constructions of India. Colonial knowledge was seriously contested intellectual terrain. The Company collected data that could have been used to construct very different images of rural India (Ludden 1988). But alternative formations were obscured and marginalized in Munro's lifetime by the political process that wielded authority in the production of knowledge about India. This authority was centered in London. Munro worked within complex webs of influence connecting European trends, British politics, Indian administration, and orientalism. His prose shows the influence of logical positivism and utilitarianism. But his work is also tinged with conservative ideas about hierarchy and is inconsistent by standards of contemporary philosophy (Stein 1989). His victories in intellectual contests to construct rural India were not those of an ideology or philosophy. They were political. His formulations became fixed as factual knowledge about Indian reality by establishing effective official wisdom for

Company Raj. Victories in London made Munro judicial commissioner and then governor; his minutes became almost biblical in authority. His characterization of the village as "a little republic" dates from 1806. Published by Mark Wilks in 1810 during the campaign to shape *The Fifth Report*, it was by 1830 at the metaphorical heart of orientalism (Stein 1989). Its most famous formulation, in a minute by Charles Metcalfe read in 1830 as evidence for the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East India Company, had a powerful influence on Karl Marx. It reads in part:

> The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they 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, Sik, English are all masters in turn; but the village communities remain the same. . . . If a country remain for a series of years the scene of continued pillage and massacre, so that villages cannot be inhabited, the scattered villagers nevertheless return whenever the power of peaceable possession revives. A generation may pass away, but the succeeding generation will return. The sons will take the place of their fathers; the same site for the village, the same position for the houses, the same lands, will be occupied by the descendants of those who were driven out when the village was depopulated . . . . (Kessinger 1974: 25)

Metcalfe, like Munro, engaged fierce debates in Britain about colonial policy that rested on disputed facts about India and policy principles for Indian governance. Science and political disputation continued to work together in the formation of orientalism and within it to fix the essentially timeless self-reproduction of village India firmly in the modern mind. Although James Mill savagely criticized the East India Company in his *History of British India*, published in 1820, his work marshaled what he believed to be all necessary facts to show the necessity of British rule as a remedy for India's traditional tyranny and chaos, which the village had survived to enjoy Company protection.

Theory and Empire

Mill's *History* represents a starting point for the theoretical repositioning of India in relation to Europe that attended the growth of industrial capitalism. India's political and cognitive relation to Europe changed dramati-

cally in the process, and with it orientalism. Mill attacked orientalists and romantics and denied that anyone could reconstruct India's past from native myth and legend. He erased cultural traditions altogether from his understanding of India and Europe. For him the study of history and law were founded on rational philosophical principles with which both "Britain and India could be criticized and reformed" (Majeed 1990: 212). He disliked empire because it sustained aristocratic privilege, but he embarked on a systematic intellectual subordination of India to the universalist principles of European social theory that attended European imperial expansion and inscribed orientalism at the roots of modern social science. Mill—and subsequently Hegel, Marx, and Weber—did not merely elaborate orientalism as a body of knowledge; they transformed it and enhanced its vitality by theorizing India's changing relation with Europe.

Mill first theorized India within British imperial hegemony, but for him their connection was merely circumstantial: both Britain and India were places like any other for the conduct of government. India may have only suffered bad government, but this was not an explanation or a justification of empire; it was a condition to be rectified. Universal rationality, not history, put Britain and India in the same theoretical field. It just so happened that British officials could effect rational policies in India and in fact could do so more freely there than in Britain. For India was tabula rasa to be inscribed with rationality. Cultural and historical differences were irrelevant: "Indeed, it was crucial to the emergence of Utilitarianism as a rhetoric of reform to ignore any such distinction" (Majeed 1990: 222–23). Mill's *History* began the intellectual project of using orientalism to identify features of India that were necessary objects for rational policies of social reform. Just as Mill attacked orientalists for romantic attachments and for "aesthetic attitudes which underpinned . . . revitalized conservatism" (Majeed 1990: 218), he reformulated orientalism into a body of knowledge that revealed oriental irrationality, for which good government was to be the cure.

Mill's attack on orientalists, his repositioning of India as an object of reform, and his reformulation of orientalism indicate how "the emergence of new political languages in Britain in the early 19th century was closely involved with the British imperial experience" (Majeed 1990: 222). But for the history of orientalism it is also critical that shipments of colonial knowledge back to Britain were continuously reconstituted and reauthorized by European political discourse. Empirical data and factualized statements about India entered European intellectual life through Parliamentary debates, books, newspapers, pamphlets, art, and universities. Such venues for disseminating and reproducing orientalism widened the scope for participation in the history of orientalism far beyond the halls of India House. In this setting, orientalism was shaped by forces having little to do with India. For instance, Mill's India was a platform for utilitarian studies that dovetailed with his cognitive psychology. Likewise, Hegel, Marx, and Weber had preoccupations unconnected to India that conditioned their ideas about its essential character.

Orientalism became a versatile component of political discourse in Europe, as political disputes about India in relation to Britain shaped understandings of both India and Europe. Jones and Mill informed Hegel's study of India (Halbfass 1988: 87). Parliamentary evidence for the Company charter renewal and news dispatches from India informed Marx's reports for the *New York Tribune* and his sketch of an Asiatic Mode of Production (Krader 1975; O'Leary 1989). Weber's later work drew on a huge body of orientalist scholarship. As the hearth of orientalism was moving increasingly into the universities, social sciences were developing within the legacy of Hegel, Marx, and Weber, who put India and Europe side by side in universal theories of history that made sense of each in their relation to one other.

European superiority became more theoretically pronounced in Europe as European supremacy became a dominant political phenomenon in the modern world. Beginning with Hegel, Europe's dynamism and historicity expressed Europe's primacy as a force in world history and India's at best secondary stature. For Marx and Weber, capitalism revealed and contextualized India's stagnant backwardness, which they explained using facts about traditional village economy, despotic governance, religiously based social life, and sacred caste divisions. The facts behind their theoretical formulations about India were not questioned. Established as facts by colonial knowledge and by their conventional authority in European political discourse, they were there as truths for theorists to use in making sense of the world. Orientalism became the template for knowing an oriental other in contradistinction to European capitalism, rationality, historicity, modernity, and powers of self-transformation.

As it became integrated theoretically into modern discourse on Europe's place in history, orientalism as a body of knowledge became more detached epistemologically from colonialism; it wielded power over understandings of the world grounded not only in conventional wisdom but in social theory. From this position, it would inform both modernization

and Marxist theory in the twentieth century. This would not have been possible had not empirical reality in India been shaped on lines consistent with orientalism, so that "facts of life" apparent to the eye and institutional practices built into social experience in India would constantly verify perceptions of India guided by social theory. Colonial governance constructed this concordance between empirical evidence and social theory by weaving orientalism as a body of knowledge into the fabric of administration and law.

That the village constituted the basic unit of Indian social life became evident beyond critical questioning as government demarcated, bounded, surveyed, and studied villages, to make the village the basic unit of data collection and administration. Property rights and social order became officially grounded legally and textually in village traditions and village records. The village officer became the "keystone of the arch" of rural administration. Whatever its status in precolonial times, the village thus became the elemental unit of empirical and theoretical reference in British India through its construction as a unit of governance. Empirical evidence about the countryside based on village data and social theory positing village autonomy "from time immemorial" harmonized completely. The origin of this concordance in a colonial politics of knowledge—which had thrust Munro's theory of village India into social theory, on the one hand, and built an Indian system of village administration, on the other—became irrelevant for the authority of ideas about the status of village society in Indian civilization. In the twentieth century, the authority of these ideas increased further as they entered social science practice: first for economics, then for anthropology, village India became the elemental unit of empirical analysis and theory alike (Ludden forthcoming).

Similarly, Indian political culture became institutionalized in religious terms that made the division of Indian society between Hindus and Muslims an iconic principle of governance. That this religious antagonism was the fundamental challenge to law and order—to the social tranquility that benefited everyone—became conventional wisdom in Munro's lifetime, in part through the work of orientalists. But routine administrative practice produced data that accumulated over decades to bolster the concordance between theory and evidence pertaining to this fundamental division. A critical site for this construction of communalism was the writing of riot reports. To represent riots as communal, pitting Hindus against Muslims, became a routine solution to administrative problems posed by urban unrest (Pandey 1990). By selecting and excluding data, and by insinuating

religious motives to crowds, official observers built a descriptive genre that evidenced unitary Hindu and Muslim communities fighting each other head to head, in situations, such as the Banaras riots of 1809, where evidence abounded to show that various local groups confronted one another for various reasons and with various ends. This body of official evidence thus harmonized with the theory on which it was based and which it substantiated (Freitag 1989: 51–52). Orientalism as a body of knowledge informed this empirical genre by establishing the analytic grid for description and explanation and locating the origin of conflict in the essential character of Indian civilization.

In addition, as with the building of village India as the basic unit of social life, official evidence that substantiated India's essential communalism removed the colonial state as an explanation of realities reflected in authoritative data and empirical facts. The state could thus be represented as an impartial arbiter of communal disputes, an attitude enshrined in imperial historiography, where government always does its best to mediate conflicts between Hindus and Muslims that originate in the Muslim conquest and spoliation of Hindu India centuries before British rule (e.g., Spear 1978).

The imperial state thus represented itself both as the origin of authoritative knowledge about India and as the protector of all Indian people, striving to maintain order in the realms of knowledge and social life and to facilitate modernization in a fundamentally divided oriental society. Orientalism bolstered the authority of the state and was in turn sustained as a body of knowledge about that society that gave the imperial state confidence in selecting Indian representatives on religious grounds for inclusion in governance. That representatives should be officially recognized leaders of religious communities, and that the interests of those communities as expressed by these leaders should be balanced in government, became a natural means to articulate the state and society. It provided a logic to guide the imperial construction of local and then regional institutions of political representation after 1880 (Brown 1985). Built into institutional politics, theory and evidence of Hindu-Muslim conflict harmonized more completely and reproduced the authority of orientalism as effective knowledge in political practice.

The age of high imperialism thus transformed colonial knowledge and orientalism. Before 1850, the politics of Company Raj had turned statements about traditional India formulated in accord with British power into facts authorized by the epistemological powers of science. By

1850, factual foundations for orientalism as a body of knowledge were firm. After 1850, a second transformation involved constructions of theory and institutions on those foundations that wove orientalism deeply into social science and social experience. The ideas that the village constituted the basic unit of social order in India and that Indian civilization was built on religion became institutionalized and theorized so as to obscure their colonial origins, which became irrelevant to their authority.

In social theory, the orient served as the "other" to capitalist Europe. This defined Europe and capitalism as much as it did India. Thus, social science and political practice built on this foundation reproduced its authority without reference to its colonial origins, and did so moreover while the one theoretical principle informed actors on all sides of imperial struggles. In India, the colonial invention of tradition became irrelevant to experience of the village and communalism, once their traditionalism was built into institutions that conditioned social life. The evidentiary base for substantiating village and communal traditions arose from the same institutional practices. The empire made orientalism as a body of knowledge appear as a verified representation of reality by building it into both the construction of empirical evidence and the social experience of people in governance and education. Imperial bureaucracy produced empirical data of an ever more scientific and modern sort, a data base so vast as to describe a reality of its own. Because the imperial bureaucracy defined reliable data, reliability became based on English training and imperial credentials commanded by a mass of technical specialists who gathered facts on economy, epigraphy, tribes, castes, religious practices, language, literature, and customs (Appadurai, this volume). The reality of tradition arose from evidence, theory, administrative ideology, art, and literature that described India's subordination and England's supremacy, Europe's modernity and India's backwardness (Adas 1989; Bernal 1987; Cohn 1983; Fieldhouse 1981; Moore-Gilbert 1986; Ludden, 1987).

States and Nations

Voices articulating orientalism thus multiplied and diversified across the colonial period. Factual formulations drawn from colonial knowledge gained authority by being theorized, institutionalized, and empirically substantiated. Yet from its birth on the frontiers of empire, the empirical construction of tradition served political functions. By 1880, it was woven

deeply into the ideology of empire, capturing essences of South Asia in relation to Britain, to establish the fixity and timelessness of the essential India for intellectual manipulation by the imperial ruling class. And from Rammohan Roy to Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and beyond, orientalism as a body of knowledge informed the discourse of India's nationhood. For political discourse on both sides of the colonial encounter entailed the other. The colonial divide evolved as each side defined itself in relation to its "other" (Chatterjee 1986; Ludden 1992; Prakash 1990; Raychaudhuri 1988), and orientalism became a versatile component of national discourse, an authoritative base for India's self-definition. Both sides of the colonial divide were secure in the knowledge that village India had survived into modern times from ancient days, by its autonomous reproduction within a religiously prescribed caste society.

The role of orientalism in nationalism has not been studied adequately. But it seems evident that being grounded in a formulation of India in relation to Europe, orientalism contained vital elements for constructing national identity in India and in Britain alike. Vitality came from the longevity and the empirical and theoretical depth of these ideas, but also from their versatility in political debates conducted in the context of empire. The meaning and content of Indian "otherness" would be contested by nationalists, as they had been by Jones and Mill, Munro and Ellis, so that orientalism entered political rhetoric as a venerable set of analytic oppositions between Britain and India, with dispersed, fluid implications. Intellectuals in India never confronted a unified colonial construction of India, except when they devised it; and there was never a unified nationalist construction of India, except that devised by its proponents and their adversaries. Ideological terrain inscribed by orientalism provided rich ground for invention, wide ground for maneuver and opposition.

Foundational ideas established in early colonial decades, such as the religious basis of Indian social order, could be powerfully deployed for opposing purposes. This is sharply represented in successive editions of Mill's *History*, with editorial additions by Horace Hayman Wilson, the first professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, who defended Jones and criticized Mill. Wilson's Preface to the fourth edition calls it "the most valuable work on the subject which has yet been published," but he then raves against its rash statements based on insufficient evidence and its "evil tendency" to depict Hindus as "plunged almost without exception in the lowest depths

of immorality and crime," which is "calculated to destroy all sympathy between the rulers and the ruled." Wilson then ventures that "There is reason to fear that these consequences are not imaginary, and that a harsh and illiberal spirit has of late years prevailed in the conduct and councils of the rising service in India, which owes its origins to impressions imbibed in early life from the History of Mr. Mill." Wilson blames Mill for the growth among the impressionable youth who became colonial servants of feelings of "disdain, suspicion, and dislike" toward Indians "wholly incompatible with the full and faithful discharge of their obligations to Government and to the people" (Mill [1820] 1968: viii; also Majeed 1990: 222).

Students who entered the colonial service, however, did not only read Mill. Racism became science (Stepan 1982; LaCapra 1991). Social Darwinism made poverty, weakness, and technological backwardness characteristic of all nonwhite peoples, who became degraded in the eyes of Europe (Adas 1989). In the 1850s de Tocqueville "found it incomprehensible that the 18th-century Physiocrats should have had such an admiration for China" (Bernal 1987: 238). Whereas for orientalists the essence of India came from ancient family relations among the Indo-European languages, by Queen Victoria's death in 1901, the essence of India included prominently its religious irrationality and fractiousness. Thus orientalism as knowledge shifted meanings with India's changing relation to Britain, until the dominant fact, which made sense of all others—including subjective facts like imperial paternalism and liberal outrage, as well as disdain and distrust among colonial officers—ordering them all in a coherent discourse, was that India lived under the Crown.

Victorian empire also generated knowledge that could be used to defend Indian tradition in counterattacks against imperialism and its denigrations. Orientalists built a body of texts to document the grandeur of Indian culture. In the heyday of empire, Max Müller produced the *Sacred Books of the East*, which would number over fifty volumes, and argued in *India: What Can It Teach Us?* (1883) that Indian thinkers could edify all mankind. An imperial administrator, Alfred Lyall, even questioned the morality of imposing materialism on an inherently spiritual Indian people (Adas 1989: 351ff). At this juncture, Dadabhai Naoroji in the 1870s and Romesh Chandra Dutt in the 1890s began to nationalize orientalism by positing a British imperial assault on traditional India, employing colonial knowledge to criticize the Raj for impoverishing India. Like Mill, Munro, and imperial commissions, they used colonial knowledge to criticize colonial policy. As Wilson charged the liberal Mill with illiberal attitudes toward India, Naoroji castigated "un-British rule" and Dutt charged Munro with oppressive land taxation (Chandra 1966).

The nationalist critique inverted the imperialist claim to have brought India moral and material progress. Orientalism provided a framework for this effort. Dutt and Naoroji targeted oppressions heaped on formerly self-sufficient villages by imperial policy. Gandhi negated and inverted myths of western superiority with his version of traditional Truth. Ideas that Gandhi used to conjure the essential India—with its ageless rural simplicity and moral continuity—came from the treasure chest of orientalism. Gandhi concludes *Hind Swaraj* with a list of "authorities"—including Naoroji and Dutt, but also Henry Maine's *Village Communities*—and "testimonies by eminent men," quotations from the likes of from Müller, Frederick Von Schlegel, William Wedderburn, and Thomas Munro. Nehru's *Discovery of India* is a more systematic use of orientalism to craft a charter for nationhood. Nehru discovers a wise and ageless Indian nation, invaded, conquered, exploited, and divided over centuries of foreign rule, but still surviving in the essence of its traditions and still struggling for freedom. Nehru's *Discovery* is a journey toward national self-awareness; as he discovers India's identity in knowledge constituted by orientalism, he finds himself.

In nationalism we find the vitality of orientalism today. This conclusion is at odds with Said and suggests that his work inhabits a place inside the history of orientalism. For to imply, as he does, that orientalism sustains a body of false, colonial images of the East and its peoples leaves us with the implicit promise that a true image would be constructed if these peoples were free to render images of themselves. Such oppositional moments are many in the history of orientalism. Opposing claims to represent the real truth about the East and disputes over the authentic, authoritative voices and evidence that establish that truth animate orientalism historically. By presuming that there is to be found in the East a real truth about its self-existent peoples, Said employs the very positivist logic that gives orientalism life. And behind his back, nationalism has claimed authority over this truth and appropriated orientalism in the name of national self-representation. Today, orientalism is most defensible on the ground that people in India and elsewhere believe its imagery to represent the truth about themselves.

Nationalism again transformed the transaction in Rennell's lithograph: India took Britannia's place. Though orientalism did originate in colonial knowledge and did bolster European power, its epistemological

authority—reproduced by its transformation in the nineteenth century—enabled orientalism as a body of knowledge to be deployed against European supremacy; thus it became ever more deeply woven into Indian politics. The continuity of Indian culture over millennia became a central theme in a national mythology that depicts India's religiously prescribed social order of self-reproducing villages as a foundation of Indian civilization. It is irrelevant that scholars dispute the truthfulness of such ideas. National culture bestows its own authority; these foundational ideas constantly emerge as pivots of debate. For some, that India was a land of self-sufficient villages signifies desirable stability; for others, it signifies backwardness and stagnation. For some, villages are ancient nodes of democracy; for others, they are sites of feudal oppression. For some, the fact that religiously prescribed social identities sustained traditional India represents India's cultural core and is a source of pride; for others, it signifies repressive coercion. Such struggles over the meanings of tradition, today as in the days of Jones, Munro, and Mill, have serious policy implications and political significance, of which the struggles over the Mandal Commission Report provide ample evidence. But above all, the unity, autonomy, and permanence of Indian tradition signify the unity, autonomy, and permanence of Indian nationhood, which defines its own context for debate, as British empire once did (Ludden 1986, 1992).

So orientalism is not the moribund legacy of colonialism that Said makes it out to be. In the transition from empire to nation, it attained new authority and vitality, to which scholars all across the spectrum have contributed. In the 1920s a brilliant administrator and historian, W. H. Moreland, took Hindu law as the basis of India's traditional agrarian system; an equally brilliant Indian nationalist historian, Surendranath Sen, pronounced that "Before the Marathas succumbed to their western rival, we find in their empire the same judicial system still in existence that prevailed in the days of Manu . . . the same village communities still flourishing that existed in the days of the Buddha" (Sen 1925: 296). In the 1980s venerable Marxist historians still based arguments on assumptions of a self-reproducing village economy (Sharma 1980; Habib 1963), and an ingenious free-marketeer from the World Bank has used algebraic equations to explain the "Hindu equilibrium" from ancient times to the present (Lal 1988). Such scholarship reinvigorates the authority of orientalism as a body of knowledge by reinvocation, as it marginalizes and obscures evidence supporting other images of precolonial India (Ludden [1988] 1990).

Orientalism as a body of knowledge is today not only embedded in a

vast corpus of official wisdom, scholarship, social theory, and empirical data. It is also embedded rhetorically and institutionally in political culture, revitalized by reinvocation in national histories that show South Asian peoples struggling for freedom and progress in their own terms. Now those histories are terrain for debates about the present and future. Scholars engage politics by constructing the past in terms that call out for particular lines of political action and policy formulation. In the same way as the fate of village India signified the denigrations of empire for nationalist scholars before independence, opposing interpretations of that fate hold implications for national policy today and express political oppositions among intellectuals (Lal 1988). As it did in the opposition between the orientalist William Jones and the utilitarian James Mill, orientalism provides icons around which political oppositions form today.

Those icons are also weapons in struggles for state power. From its early days, nationalism in South Asia has been wracked by tensions wrought by the institutionalization of political representation based on the religious categories enshrined in orientalism. The authority of primordial categories like Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh in the conduct of politics has been reconstituted and reinvigorated by invocation not only by leaders of political parties but in the popular literature and consciousness of subnational groups seeking self-determination. In the same way as nationalists used orientalism against imperialism, competing nationalisms use orientalism against one another inside and across national boundaries in South Asia.

The vitality of orientalism today thus emerges from its authority as a body of knowledge in a political context that demonstrates deep institutional continuities across the divide separating colonialism and national independence. The government of India is both an imperial and a national state; and like the Raj it represents itself as impartial protector of all people, standing above conflicts among communities, maintaining law and order as it deploys modern science and technology for modernization and development. But the state must also represent the nation, not merely lord over it. So government as representative of the people strives to represent itself as the embodiment of a "real India" that has been defined from the beginning by opposition to its European "other" in a political culture of competing nationalisms. The national state has imperial instruments of power for this purpose, not only the army and bureaucracy, but also technologies that shape a political culture by media representations of "the real India."

Media image-making was politically charged long before independence (see Barrier 1974, 1976; Bhaskaran 1981). The imperial government of India must use its powers of representation to mobilize support for its constituent parties in a milieu where divisions and oppositions among communities are institutionalized as political facts. Contenders for state power are caught in a situation like that of early nationalists facing imperialism; those in control of the state inhabit a position analogous to that of imperialists. They each deploy their powers to represent themselves as the embodiment of "the real India," and in this conundrum, orientalism is reinvigorated by its utility for many sides, in contests that produce the tumultuous contradictions of contemporary Indian politics. For instance, Indira Gandhi represented an essentialized Sikh nationalism as a threat to national unity, and concurrently sought to reduce the power of Sikh separatism by supporting the rise of a Sikh zealot whose career lead ultimately to her assassination (Tully and Jacob 1985). In 1989, during the national election campaign, Congress used its control of state television simultaneously to popularize Hindu epics; to identify Rajiv Gandhi with his grandfather, and thus with the birth of the nation; to identify Nehru with progress and prosperity; and to censor opposition parties (Farmer forthcoming).

When we situate representations of India in a political history of their deployment in struggles for power, from colonial times to the present, we see that claims about Indian reality can never be adequately understood as existential self-expressions of a people or as objective descriptions by scholars. For they are political acts. Orientalism remains political hostage and weaponry. Its epistemological authority did arise from colonialism, to be sure, but it was reproduced by anti-imperial, national movements and reinvigorated by Partition, in 1947, and the reorganization of Indian states, in 1956; it thrives today on conflict expressed in religious and ethnic terms. In its reification of tradition and of oppositions between East and West, nationalized orientalism suffuses postcolonial political culture and scholarship that claims to speak for India by defining India's identity in a postcolonial world (e.g., Nandy 1983; Prakash 1990). Having helped to make nations in South Asia what they are, orientalism fuels fires that may consume them. From this it appears that only intellectual labor that demolishes the nation as a cultural formation of social being and historical becoming can challenge the authority of orientalism as a body of knowledge.

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