

# MEDIEVAL INDIA

HISTORY AND HISTORIANS

**J.S. GREWAL**

GURU NANAK UNIVERSITY AMRITSAR



**Collection of Prof. Muhammad Iqbal Mujaddidi  
Preserved in Punjab University Library.**

پروفیسر محمد اقبال مجددی کا مجموعہ  
پنجاب یونیورسٹی لائبریری میں محفوظ شدہ



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Guru Gobind Singh : A Biographical Study* (conjointly with Dr S. S. Bal), Panjab University, Chandigarh 1967.

*The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar* (conjointly with Dr. B. N. Goswamy), Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla 1967.

*The Mughal and Sikh Rulers and the Vaishnavas of Pindori* (conjointly with Dr B. N. Goswamy), Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla 1969.

*Guru Nanak in History*, Panjab University, Chandigarh 1969.

*Muslim Rule in India : The Assessment of British Historians*, Oxford University Press, Bombay 1970.

*From Guru Nanak to Maharaja Ranjit Singh : Essays in Sikh History*, Guru Nanak University, Amritsar 1972.

*Miscellaneous Articles*, Guru Nanak University, Amritsar, 1974.

*In the By-lanes of History : Some Persian Documents from a Punjab Town*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla 1975.

*Early Nineteenth Century Panjab* (conjointly with Dr Indu Banga), Guru Nanak University, Amritsar 1975.

# Medieval India : History And Historians

J. S. GREWAL  
Ph.D., D.Litt. (London)



GURU NANAK UNIVERSITY

Amritsar

1975

©Jagtar Singh Grewal

136658

*Published by* : S. Bharpur Singh,  
Registrar, Guru Nanak University,  
Amritsar.

*1st Edition* : 1975

*Price* : Rs. 22.00

Printed at Mechanical Typesetters & Printers (P) Ltd.,  
64, Okhla Industrial Estate, New Delhi-20.

## F O R E W O R D

Guru Nanak University from its very inception has encouraged the dissemination of knowledge through publication of the results of research conducted by its faculty members. With the passage of time the pace of publication has become faster due to the efforts of the teachers and researchers of nearly all Departments of the University. As it may be expected, the research Departments have brought out a large number of books and pamphlets, but the teaching Departments have not lagged far behind. The Department of History in particular, with nearly a dozen publications to its credit, has shown a remarkable output during the past three years. The largest contribution has come from the Professor and Head of the Department of History, Dr J.S. Grewal. I congratulate him and his colleagues in the Department for establishing the laudable tradition of dove-tailing teaching and research in the interest of higher learning. I feel confident that other faculty members will emulate them in the near future and secure for this young University a prominent place on the intellectual map of the country.

Bishan Singh Samundri

Guru Nanak University,  
Amritsar.

*Vice-Chancellor*

March 10, 1975.



## P R E F A C E

The eleven essays which constitute this book may be regarded as almost a companion volume to the author's *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessment of British Historians* (Oxford University Press, 1970). Most of them were written in the early 1960s and published from time to time. It is primarily due to the interest of Sardar Bishan Singh Samundri, Vice-Chancellor of the Guru Nanak University, that these essays are being put together in the form of a book. In fact, he has promoted the publication of research work at this University as a major concern; and the present volume is only one of the many which have appeared in recent years. The all-round growth of this young institution is ensured by his equal zeal for books and bricks. I am deeply grateful to the Vice-Chancellor for his kind interest in this work.

J. S. Grewal

Department of History,  
Guru Nanak University,  
Amritsar.

January 1, 1975.



## C O N T E N T S

*Foreword*

*Preface*

I. Early British Interest in India's Past	1
II. Edward Gibbon on Islamic Civilization	12
III. Sir William Jones on Hindu Civilization	32
IV. James Mill on Hinduism	54
V. Advocacy of Change in India	67
VI. James Grant Duff on the Marathas	78
VII. James Tod on the Rajputs	88
VIII. The Medieval Indian State in British Historical Writing	102
IX. The Study of Indian Sufism : Major Trends	118
X. Medieval Indian History : Concepts and Interpretations	133
XI. Medieval India and the Present	141

## EARLY BRITISH INTEREST IN INDIA'S PAST

By the end of the eighteenth century, British historical writing on India was fairly launched. The character of early nineteenth-century writing was partly determined by this eighteenth-century background. Also, the broad under-currents of British interest in India's past are more easily discernible in the eighteenth than in the nineteenth century. Thus, quite apart from the intrinsic importance of eighteenth-century British historical writing on India, one may turn to it for an understanding of the nature of British interest in India's past.

The Portuguese who wrote about Asia and India within a century and a half of their arrival in India, though their interests embraced the geography, produce, commerce and politics of the East, wrote mainly of 'the deeds done by the Portuguese in the conquest and discovery of the lands and seas of the East'.<sup>1</sup> The early seventeenth-century Dutch writers too, though they described various features of the political, social or economic conditions of India, showed little interest in India's past.<sup>2</sup>

Before the seventeenth century closed, however, European travellers had begun to show some interest in India's past and their memoirs were published sometimes in a quasi-historical form. Bernier's *The Late Revolutions of the Empire of the Great Mogol* was translated into English in 1671 and Father Catrou's *The General History of the Mogol Empire*, based on the memoirs of Manucci, was trans-

---

1 J.B. Harrison, "Five Portuguese Historians", *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London 1961 (ed. C.H. Philips). 155-69.

2 K.W. Goonewardena, "Dutch Historical Writing on South India", *ibid.*, 170-82.

lated into English in 1695. These are two of the best examples of seventeenth-century travellers' memoirs published by the travellers themselves or by professional writers on the basis of travellers' accounts.

Such works, particularly Bernier's, remained popular during the early eighteenth century but some of the mid-eighteenth century writers on India came to regard them only as sources, and not as very good sources, of Indian history. In fact British historical interest in India had begun to increase by 1740. This change in British attitude toward India's past was marked clearly by James Fraser (1713-54). He had gone to Surat in 1730 and, having acquired a working knowledge of Zend, Sanskrit and Persian during his stay in Persia and India in the service of the East India Company, he had returned to England in 1740 with a collection of about two hundred Sanskrit and Persian manuscripts.

Like most of the travellers to India, Fraser also published a work dealing with contemporary events, namely *The History of Nadar Shah*. But, unlike the travel accounts, his work was a strictly historical narrative based on written as well as oral testimony; what was more significant, he gave 'a short history' of the Mughal Emperors, making use of some of the most valuable manuscripts in his possession: the *Waqi 'at i-Baburi*, the *Padshah Namah*, the *Tarikh-i-'Alamgiri*, for example. Fraser made 'no apology' for *The History of Nadar Shah* (1742) as he was aware of the importance attached to political happenings in Persia and India, particularly by the East India Company.

Fraser's own interest was not confined, however, to Indian politics. His manuscripts included works on Theology, Law, Ethics, Literature, Arts and Sciences as well as History. Before his pre-mature death in 1754, he had planned to publish translations of the sacred books of the Hindus and Parsis. He had been encouraged in his undertaking by a Fellow of the Royal Society. Fraser's manuscripts were purchased, after his death, by the Radcliffe Library. Probably the general intellectual interests

## EARLY BRITISH INTEREST IN INDIA'S PAST

of the time, as much as the practical interests of the East India Company, provided at this time the under-currents of British interest in India's past.

In Britain in the middle of the eighteenth century there was indeed a good deal of interest in human history as is evident from the *Universal History*, a colossal cooperative work published in thirty-eight volumes from 1736 to 1765. Its authors attempted to put together all that was then known about all the peoples of the world. The idea of a universal history was not new in Europe but the wide scope of this English *Universal History* was surely unprecedented. Regard for historical facts following upon the rise of empirical sciences and awareness of the British contact with nearly all parts of the world largely account for this wide scope.

Furthermore, though as a historical work it is no more than 'a rambling and discursive compilation',<sup>3</sup> the *Universal History* is a most revealing document for the nature of British historical interests during the middle of the eighteenth century.

For the compilers of the *Universal History*, world history could be divided into 'ancient' and 'modern': the rise of Islam and Muslim domination in the old world marked the advent of 'modern' history. The importance which they thus attached to Islamic history was a reflection at once of their medieval heritage and their appreciation of the political success of the Muslims. For several centuries Christian Europe had been challenged by the followers of Muhammad both as conquerors and as the propagators of a new, and from their point of view, the only true religion. Though the danger from Islam to the Christian faith was no longer there in the early eighteenth century, the rise of scepticism in Europe itself obliged many a student of Islam to continue the traditional polemical attitude towards the Prophet and his religion. But, now that the writers were appreciatively aware of modern European expansion, they came to have a good deal of praise also for

---

<sup>3</sup> H. Butterfield, *Man On His Past*, Cambridge 1955, 47.



the Muslim political success. Nevertheless, it was the confrontation of Muslim and Christian societies for nearly a thousand years that had endowed the Arabs and the Turks with a peculiar importance.

British interest in the past of the 'modern' non-Christian peoples and countries, arising out of the European contact with them, was a backward projection of the interest in their present. In the Indian portion of *Modern Universal History*, for example, the history of Hindustan was synonymous with Mughal history. And, with the beginning of British conquest in India greater attention was paid to the pre-Mughal period too. Thus, the nature of British interest in the 'modern' age was favourable for the study of the Indo-Muslim as well as Arab and Turkish past.

Though the compilers of *Universal History* knew little of ancient India, the nature of their interest in 'ancient' history was potentially favourable for the study of Hinduism and ancient India. For them, the Greeks and Romans formed the most important subject in ancient history. Interest in the peoples directly or indirectly connected with the Greeks and Romans was an extrapolation of their interest in Greek and Roman history. Greek contact with ancient India and the subsequent discovery of some affinity between the intellectual and literary pursuits of the Greeks and the Hindus endowed the latter with a peculiar interest. Furthermore, the antiquity of the Hindus brought them, as a subject of historical interest, into a sort of rivalry with the Biblical peoples, a subject to which the authors of *Universal History* had paid a good deal of attention. Indeed, the classical and Christian heritage of modern Europe is as much relevant for an understanding of the nature of British historical interests as the rise of empiricism, a natural consequence of the rise of modern science which was 'the most original, and in the long run the most influential new intellectual development of the early modern period in Europe'.<sup>4</sup>

---

4 A. Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, London 1960, 29.

## EARLY BRITISH INTEREST IN INDIA'S PAST

Nonetheless, the quickening of British interest in India's past may be attributed to the political activities of the East India Company. Already in 1759 the author of the Indian part of the *Universal History* was lamenting the paucity of material. In 1763, Robert Orme published his *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan* with a 'dissertation' on Muslim conquests in India. This very short dissertation clearly marks the sudden extension of interest from the Mughal to the pre-Mughal period. In the *Universal History*, pre-Mughal Indo-Muslim history had formed a series of unconnected episodes of Arab and Turkish conquests. When Orme, without consulting even a single new source, adopted a new point of view, he was able to underline the 'chasms' in pre-Mughal history as it was then known to its British students. The whole history of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in particular lay in obscurity and 'this obscurity must remain', Orme pointed out, 'until the original histories brought into England by Mr. Frazer, or other equivalent to them, shall be published'.<sup>5</sup>

Alexander Dow soon found one such 'equivalent' in the *Tarikh-i-Firishta* and hastened to publish it in 1768 as *The History of Hindostan*. He was particularly proud of his discovery of pre-Mughal Indo-Muslim history. Nonetheless, he tried to improve upon Firishta's knowledge of Hindu history and himself wrote a 'dissertation' on the religion and philosophy of the Hindus. Four years later, he brought the history of Hindustan 'from the death of Akbar, to the complete settlement of the Empire under Aurangzeb'.<sup>6</sup> Already in 1768 he had covered 'the History of Mogol Empire, from its Decline in the Reign of Mahummed Shaw, to the present Times'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Dow's work was intended to be a general history of India.

Dow wrote on Indo-Muslim past with an eye on the present. As a Captain in the Army of the East India Com-

5 "Dissertation", 17.

6 From the full title of Dow's *History of Hindostan*, 1772, III.

7 From the full title of Dow's *History of Hindostan*, 1768, I.

pany he had witnessed the battle of Buxar being fought and won before his very eyes. From his experience in England during the late 1760's he knew that a most important question before the British was to be or not to be an imperial power in India. His reading of Indo-Muslim history suggested that the time was ripe for the rise of a new empire in India. Therefore he advised the British nation and the Crown to supplant the Mughals in their Indian empire.

Just as Dow's knowledge of past Indian politics showed the path to present political success, so his knowledge of past Indian government suggested the line of policy along which the Company's government could develop for its own advantage as well as for the benefit of its Indian subjects. Dow analysed Indo-Muslim government in his interesting dissertation on 'the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan';<sup>8</sup> and then, conducting an 'enquiry' into the state of Bengal under the East India Company, suggested a plan for restoring that province to 'its former prosperity and splendour'.<sup>9</sup> Dow had great appreciation for the Great Mughals and their government: in safeguarding the interests of their subject peoples, they had secured their own interests. Dow advised the company to follow this policy of enlightened self-interest.

Enlightened self-interest undertowed the researches of the late eighteenth-century servants of the Company into India's past. The Company encouraged historical and legal studies through direct patronage; its salaried historiographers were easily the most considerable writers of the period. The Directors were never niggardly in rewarding intellectual labour and Warren Hastings made it possible for Francis Gladwin, Charles Hamilton and Nathaniel Halhed to publish their works on government and law. To restore government to its first principles meant, for

---

8 Prefixed to Dow's *History of Hindostan*, 1772, III.

9 From the full title of the "Enquiry" prefixed to Dow's *History of Hindostan*, 1772, III.

## EARLY BRITISH INTEREST IN INDIA'S PAST

Hastings, to make regulations similar to 'the original constitution of the Mogul Empire':<sup>10</sup> hence the value of Gladwin's *Ayeen Akberi*. Legal studies went hand in hand with the 'constitutional', for in the sphere of law, even more than in the sphere of government, past systems appeared to form the necessary basis of administration. *The Hedaya* by Hamilton and the *Code of Gentoo Laws* by Halhed could not have been published without Hastings' initiative and patronage.

As in government and law so in politics, the writers in the Company's service looked to the past for an enlightened action in the present. Jonathan Scott complemented Dow's work with the *Firishta's History of Dekkan* (1794) and all the historians, including Scott, concentrated their attention either on the fastly declining fortunes of the later Mughals or on the then recently rising Indian powers which had come, or were likely to come, into conflict with the East India Company.

However, the servants of the East India Company were not the only writers in Great Britain at this time who showed interest in India's past. There were also the Orientalists, whose interests and activities inspired some of the Company's servants themselves. The foundation by Sir William Jones of the Asiatick Society in 1784 expressed the comprehensive scope of late eighteenth-century British Orientalism. Alexander Dow had translated Persian prose tales, the *Bahar-i-Danish*. Jones himself had written a dissertation, a treatise, an essay and commentaries on Arabic and Persian literature. John Richardson had written a dissertation on the 'Language and Manners' of Asian nations; Jacob Bryant had written on their mythologies. The Royal Society had started inquiring into Asian Sciences, and the Society of Antiquaries had extended their interest to Asian Antiquities. With this background, the members of the Asiatick Society were to explore, as its founder-president put it, whatever had been produced by Nature

---

<sup>10</sup> Quoted, K. Feiling, *Warren Hastings*, London 1954, 85.



and performed by Man in Asia : its natural and civil history, antiquities, arts, sciences and literatures.

Jones' ambition now was 'to know India better than any other European ever knew'.<sup>11</sup> He attempted a rediscovery of the whole of Hindu civilization, and his work occupies a key position in the history of British historical writing on India. Before him, Indian history was almost synonymous with Indo-Muslim history; after him, it became almost synonymous with Hindu history.

The importance of Europe's classical heritage for the study of Hindu India is most apparent in Jones' work. The 'discovery' of Sanskrit as a 'sweet sister' of Greek and Latin had sparked off Jones' Indological studies. A similar affinity between the mythologies of Greece, Italy and India strengthened the belief in a common origin of the Greek, Latin and the Hindu races. The broad affinity between Greek and Hindu systems of thought and between Greek and Sanskrit literary forms appeared to Jones to promise a second Renaissance in Europe. At any rate, the value of Sanskrit literature for self-education appeared to be undeniable. It was valuable also for elucidating, by comparative studies, the intellectual history of mankind. The favourable opinion which Jones formed of Hindu civilization from Sanskrit literature was expressed in his treatment of Hindu history which, for Jones, covered all the aspects of Hindu society. The ancient Hindus were 'splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge'.<sup>12</sup> They were the Greeks of Asia, with a unique civilization of their own. Consequently, India for the West became synonymous with Hindu India.

Jones' influence was immediately felt in Britain as well as in the continent. William Robertson, for example, with the reputation then of one of the greatest historians in Europe, wrote his last work on the Hindus. It was a compli-

---

<sup>11</sup> Quoted A.J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> *The Works of Sir William Jones*, London 1807, III, 32.

## EARLY BRITISH INTEREST IN INDIA'S PAST

ment to his younger contemporary, Jones; for the 'early and high civilisation of India' had come home to Robertson through Jones' researches. For Robertson, 'the natives of India were not only more early civilised, but had made greater progress in civilisation than any other people'.<sup>13</sup>

Thomas Maurice, who professed to be a disciple of Jones, made Indian literature, that is writing on Indian subjects, a life-long literary pursuit. His 'ancient and classical' *History of Hindostan* was published thrice in his life-time and made his name 'known and respected, not only in Britain, but throughout Europe and to the farthest limits of our Indian possessions'.<sup>14</sup> Yet he took greater pride in the *Indian Antiquities*, his *magnum opus* published in seven volumes at the close of the eighteenth century.

The relevance of religious under-currents for Indological studies is evident from Maurice's *Indian Antiquities*. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe had witnessed a great outpouring of accounts of missions and voyages to America, Asia and Africa; and the diversity of human customs and ideas on religion and morality had given rise to scepticism which, later on, was strengthened by the increasing influence of the new scientific outlook. The religious version of the history of mankind came to be challenged by the secular traditions of antiquity. While textual criticism undermined belief in the historical accuracy of the Bible, the information obtained about ancient civilizations produced glaring anomalies in Biblical chronology. Jones himself in his annual addresses to the Asiatick Society and in his essays on Hindu chronology had attempted, among other things, to examine whether or not secular or non-Christian evidence could be reconciled with the religious version of universal history. All the seven volumes of Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* were meant to settle the question once for all. In retrospect, it is easy to see the futility of Maurice's vindication of the

---

13 *The Works of William Robertson*, London 1817, XII, 197.

14 T. Maurice, *Memoirs*, London 1819, 102.

'national religion', but its utility was never questioned by many of his contemporaries.

Just as Jones created a new image of the Hindu, so Edward Gibbon created a new image of Islamic civilization. The concept of civilization as giving unity and meaning to history was as natural to Gibbon as to Jones. For Gibbon, Islam had gradually diffused a general resemblance of 'manners and opinions' among its followers; 'the language and laws' of the Qur'an were studied with equal devotion by all the Muslim nations; and 'the Moor and the Indian embraced as countrymen and brothers' at Mecca. In the political and social institutions as well as in the language, literature, laws, manners and opinions of the Muslim nations resemblances were greater than differences. Indeed, Gibbon thought of the Islamic world as naturally as of the ancient Roman and the modern European.

*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was, in a sense, a comparative study of civilizations: the ancient Roman, the medieval European, the medieval Muslim, and the modern European. Gibbon compared the nature of unity in the Muslim World with that of the Roman and the European; he compared also their forms of government, the nature and scope of their scientific and literary pursuits, their philosophic speculations, their laws and the possibilities of civil, religious and intellectual freedom and of human happiness in these civilizations. Islamic civilization at its best appeared to be far superior to medieval European, inferior to ancient Roman and far inferior to modern European. In the last analysis, it was the world-view of the Muslims that made Islamic civilization essentially 'medieval'.

Gibbon's influence on British historical writing on India, though indirect, was as decisive as that of Jones. Henceforth, the Indo-Muslims were not simply the predecessors of the British in their Indian conquests; they were also the peoples whose way of life was quite distinct from that of any other people in the world except the Muslims. The formal division of India's past into 'Hindu' and 'Muham-

## EARLY BRITISH INTEREST IN INDIA'S PAST

madan' was a logical step from Jones' and Gibbon's concept of civilization. Thomas Maurice was still looking back to the *Universal History* for his periodization of Indian history into 'ancient' and 'modern'; but his immediate successor, James Mill, who regarded himself as a most serious student of civilization, divided pre-British Indian history into 'Hindu' and 'Muhammadan' periods. The relevance of Gibbon's and Jones' work for James Mill's *History of India* is evident from his conscious acceptance of Gibbon's evaluation of Islamic civilization and his deliberate rejection of Jones' view of Indian or 'Hindu' civilization. The Utilitarian (and Evangelical) polemics, against the late eighteenth-century British writers on India, were partly answered in the early nineteenth century itself by the Romantics who had been foreshadowed by Sir William Jones.

The eighteenth-century background is thus indispensable for the study of British historical writing on India. It is also clear that British historical writing on India was inspired by efforts at self-understanding as well as by self-interest.



## EDWARD GIBBON ON ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) by Edward Gibbon has been known perhaps to a larger number of people than any other work of history, ancient or modern. In any case, much has been written about the author, the almost universal scope of his work, his art, his scholarship, his style. His interest in Islamic history too has been noted or underlined. But no serious attention has yet been paid to his treatment of Islam and Islamic history.

To maintain the unity of his work, Gibbon had treated Muslim history in relation to the history of the Byzantine empire :<sup>1</sup>

As in his daily prayers, the Musulman of Fez or Delhi still turns his face to the temple of Mecca, the historian's eye shall be always fixed on the city of Constantinople. The excursive line may embrace the wilds of Arabia and Tartary, but the circle will be ultimately reduced to the decreasing limits of the Roman monarchy.

The eastern affairs, therefore, of the Muslims were for Gibbon 'a foreign narrative'.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Gibbon's interest in the whole of Muslim history had shaped decisively the final form of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. In the early 1750's, he had been swallowing the descriptions of India, China, Mexico and Peru with 'voracious appetite' until 'Mahomet

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ed. J.B. Bury), London 1896-1900 (hereafter cited simply as *Decline and Fall*), V, 171.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 225.

## EDWARD GIBBON ON ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

and his Saracens' became a fixed object of attention.<sup>3</sup> And then, 'some instinct of criticism', as Gibbon goes on to say, 'directed me to the genuine sources'. Simon Ockley first opened his eyes, and Gibbon was led from one book to another until he had 'ranged round the circle of Oriental history'. Before he was sixteen, he had exhausted all that could be learnt from English writers on the Arabs, the Persians, the Turks and the Mongols. He had purchased a copy of the *Bibliothèque Orientale* to guess at the French of D'Herbelot, tried 'to construe the barbarous Latin of Pocock's Abulfaragius', and even thought of learning Arabic.<sup>4</sup> In the early 1780's, having traced the decline and fall of the Roman empire down to the time of Heraclius (570-642 A.D.), Gibbon would have abandoned without regret, he says, the Greeks and their servile historians had he not reflected that 'the fate of the Byzantine monarchy is passively connected with the most splendid and important revolutions which have changed the state of the world'.<sup>5</sup>

Gibbon's treatment of the Arabs, the Turks and the Mongols in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* betrays his sense of their significance for world history. The connection of Muslim with Byzantine history was not the only, or the chief, criterion of their importance. Their intrinsic greatness and merit in the past and their contemporary importance demanded extensive historical treatment. Therefore, Gibbon devoted three chapters to the Arabs alone, but only one to the three nations of Scythia, notwithstanding their equally decisive relationship with Byzantium. His justification was that 'in the East, in the West, in war, in religion, in science, in their prosperity and in their decay, the Arabians press themselves on our curiosity', and a similar labour on the Bulgarians, the

---

<sup>3</sup> *The Memoirs of the Life of Edward Gibbon* (ed. G. Birkbeck Hill), London 1900, 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62, 63 n.

<sup>5</sup> *Decline and Fall*, V, 171.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 172.

Hungarians and the Russians would have been 'unworthily bestowed'.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, in Gibbon's *History*, the Normans and the Franks are overshadowed by the Turks and the Mongols. He reminds the reader that 'the disciples of Mohammed still hold the civil and religious sceptre of the Oriental world'.

Wars and the administration of public affairs were for Gibbon 'the principal subjects of history';<sup>8</sup> his narrative of the events which had led the Arabs to imperial power in Asia, Africa and Europe was more clear, concise and more detailed than any other writer's, whether Arabic, Persian, English, French or Latin. His chapters on the Turks and the Mongols were no less detailed. Indeed, the fascination of these principal subjects of Muslim history was so great for Gibbon that he devoted four pages to Mahmud of Ghazna although he was not directly connected with the history of Byzantium: he could have devoted, he said, a volume to Mahmud's Indian expeditions if the unity of 'design and composition' had not been all important.<sup>9</sup>

Then, the Indian campaign of Timur, like the rest of his career, was narrated by Gibbon almost for its own sake. His chief reason for including the Mongols in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was their rapid conquests comparable 'with the primitive convulsions of nature which have agitated and altered the surface of the globe'.<sup>10</sup> The 'civil' surface of the globe had been agitated and altered by the revolutions worked by the Muslims who, consequently, had created a new world, the Islamic.

Muslims were significant not for their conquests alone: Gibbon had little sympathy for the destroyers of mankind; a Chingiz or a Halaku was the veritable scourge of mankind. Gibbon's attitude towards mere conquest was exemplified in his treatment of Timur who was universally admired in

7 *Ibid.*, VI, 129.

8 Emery Neff, *The Poetry of History*, Columbia University Press 1961,

82.

9 *Decline and Fall*, VI, 225.

10 *Ibid.*, VII, 1.

the West in the eighteenth century. Gibbon was aware of what he believed was rather a belated eulogium on Timur's statesmanship in *The Institutes of Timour*; he deflated this swollen reputation of Timur. To establish peace and order, Timur had unnecessarily sacrificed 'millions of victims'; his most destructive wars were 'inroads' (like the one into Hindustan); *The Institutes* was 'the specious idea' rather than the actual achievement of his monarchy; and, whatever might have been the blessings of his administration, 'they evaporated with his life'. In short, he was 'rather the scourge than the benefactor of mankind'. By way of contrast, Gibbon points to the great Mughals of India as they had been celebrated in Alexander Dow's *History of Hindostan*.<sup>11</sup>

Muslim achievement in world history rested finally on their achievement in civilization. The history of the Arabs was a history of the rise of Islamic civilization. Long before the advent of Islam, the Arabs had emerged from the primitive and abject state of the human savage and risen to 'the more secure and plentiful condition' of pastoral life.<sup>12</sup> Unlike the hordes of Scythia, many of their tribes had been 'collected into towns, and employed in the labours of trade and agriculture'. Also, they had possessed 'some rudiments of arts and knowledge'.<sup>13</sup> The rise of Islam in Arabia was, however, the most decisive epoch in their history.

The political success of the Arabs under the first four Caliphs laid the foundation for their progress in civilization. They improved upon the public institutions of the civilized societies they had subdued. In the administration of Persia, 'an actual survey of the people, the cattle, and the fruits of the earth' conducted by the Arabs 'might have instructed the philosophers of every age'.<sup>14</sup> The conqueror of Egypt

---

11 *Ibid.*, VII, 68-71.

12 *Ibid.*, V, 314.

13 *Ibid.*, V, 316.

14 *Ibid.*, V, 411.



was ordered by the Caliph 'to reserve the wealth and revenue of Alexandria for the public service'.<sup>15</sup> A third of the state revenue was spent on the annual repairs of dykes and canals to improve irrigation; a new waterway was opened to facilitate overland transportation, for oversea trade had already been developed in Egypt by the Arabs. Revenue reforms were introduced in both agriculture and commerce. The Arabs paid attention to 'the public welfare' no less than to the means of improving state revenues.<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, the prosperity of the Arab empires was as notable in Spain and Transoxiana as in Egypt and Persia. The revenues of Spain in the tenth century surpassed the united revenues of the Christian monarchs of Europe. The palaces, the gardens, the mosques, and the public baths in a Cordova of two-hundred thousand houses; the large number of first and second order cities which had sprung up in Spain; the thousands of villages which had adorned the valley of the Guadalquivir alone in the days of the Saracens—all pointed to 'the most prosperous era of the riches, the cultivation, and the populousness of Spain', a result of Arab improvements in agriculture, commerce and industry.<sup>17</sup> A similar result was visible in Transoxiana after its conquest by the Arabs.<sup>18</sup>

The prosperity of their empires further civilized the Arabs. Abdul Rahman employed the most skilful sculptors and architects of the age on his buildings which were 'sustained or adorned' by twelve hundred columns of Spanish, African, Greek and Italian marble.<sup>19</sup> And yet he was only emulating the architectural glories of the Abbasides whose imperial splendour is so depicted by Gibbon that 'our imagination is dazzled by the splendid picture'.<sup>20</sup> While the glories of their court were brightened rather than

---

15 *Ibid.*, V, 451.

16 *Ibid.*, V, 455-57.

17 *Ibid.*, V, 484-86.

18 *Ibid.*, V, 414,

19 *Ibid.*, VI, 25.

20 *Ibid.*, VI, 26.

impaired in their decline, the subjects of the Caliphs were softened by time and prosperity; they sought riches in industry, and happiness in domestic peace. Seeking fame in the 'pursuits of literature', the Arabs converted the former camps into colleges of learning now.

With the growth of Arabian sciences and literature, Islamic civilization reached its zenith in the ninth and tenth centuries. The studies of the Arabs under the Ummayyads had been confined to the interpretation of the Qur'an and to Arabic poetry. Under the Abbasides, they were encouraged to cultivate 'profane science'; Al-Mansur patronized the astronomers no less than he encouraged the study of Muslim law.<sup>21</sup> Al-Mamun 'invited the Muses from their ancient seats' and Arabic translations of Greek works filled the shelves of the learned throughout the empire; the Fatimides in Egypt and the Ummayyads in Spain emulated the successors of Al-Mamun, and a general zeal for learning 'diffused the taste and the rewards of science from Samarcand and Bochara to Fez and Cordova'; the greatest seminary of learning in the whole world now was Baghdad; and, in 'every city the productions of Arabic literature were copied and collected by the curiosity of the studious and the vanity of the rich'.<sup>22</sup> The catalogues of the royal library at Cordova consisted of fortyfour volumes, listing six hundred thousand works, and there were over seventy libraries in the Andalusian kingdom which could boast, moreover, of its three hundred native scholars. The royal library of Egypt contained a hundred thousand manuscripts 'lent, without jealousy or avarice, to the students of Cairo'.<sup>23</sup> Even a private doctor could boast of a four hundred camels' load of books in his personal library. The Muslims indeed were the most learned people in the whole world at this time.

Thus, though Gibbon's principal subjects were wars and government, he was more truly a universal historian than

---

21 *Ibid.*, VI, 27.

22 *Ibid.*, VI, 28.

23 *Loc. cit.*

the 'self-sufficient' compilers of the *Universal History*.<sup>24</sup> His asides and reflections on the economic, social and cultural conditions of the Arabs enlivened his treatment with 'a spark of philosophy' and, consequently, the picture of a whole civilization emerged from Gibbon's treatment of Islamic history.

Indeed, the concept of civilization as giving unity and meaning to history was natural to Gibbon. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* opens with a general picture of Roman civilization in 'the Age of the Antonines' as the culmination of a long historical process. In the second century A.D., 'the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilised portion of mankind'.<sup>25</sup> The unity of the empire was cemented by the Greek and Latin languages and literature, Roman laws and manners, arts and architecture no less than by the spirit of Roman government; 'the nations of the empire insensibly melted away into the Roman name and people'.<sup>26</sup> Gibbon thought of Europe as one great republic rather than a number of separate and conflicting units. The 'great republic of Europe' (and European colonies) was distinct from the rest of the world for its 'system of arts, and laws and manners', for 'the progress of knowledge and industry', 'the arts of peace and civil policy', and for 'our general state of happiness'.<sup>27</sup> The 'civilised societies' of India, China and Persia were for Gibbon some other units of universal history.<sup>28</sup>

Gibbon thought of the Islamic world as naturally as of the ancient Roman and the modern European. Islam had gradually diffused a general resemblance of 'manners and opinions' among its followers; 'the language and laws' of the Qur'an were studied with equal devotion by all the Muslim nations; and, 'the Moor and the Indian embraced

24 *Ibid.*, V, 396 n 204.

25 *Ibid.*, I, 1.

26 *Ibid.*, I, 39, 43-44, 46-47.

27 *Ibid.*, IV, 163-64.

28 *Ibid.*, IV, 166.

## EDWARD GIBBON ON ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

as countrymen and brothers' in Mecca.<sup>29</sup> In their political and social institutions as well as in their languages, literature, laws, manners and opinions, the Muslim nations' resemblances were greater than their differences.<sup>30</sup> Gibbon's observations on the quality of Islamic civilization, with slight modifications, were valid for all the Muslim nations.

Gibbon compared the Islamic with the Roman and modern European civilizations. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was designed to 'connect the ancient and the modern history of the world', to connect, in effect, the classical and modern European civilizations. The middle period of European history was summed up as 'the triumph of religion and barbarism', one might add, over civilization.<sup>31</sup> On the revival of classical letters, the youthful vigour of the imagination, national emulation, a new religion, new languages, and a new world, called forth the genius of Europe; and with the experimental and speculative philosophy, modern European civilization came into its own.<sup>32</sup> The rise of Islam in, and its consequences for, the middle period of European history, the contrast of Islamic civilization with the 'darkness' and 'barbarism' of medieval Christendom, and its comparison with the classical—a European civilization whose rediscovery appeared to have helped the birth of the modern—were invaluable subjects for 'self-understanding'.

First, the unity of the Islamic world was different from that of the Roman or of the modern European. In the empires of the Arabs, 'we should vainly seek the indissoluble union and easy obedience that pervaded the government of Augustus and the Antonines'.<sup>33</sup> The union even of the Roman world had been based on a 'perpetual violation of justice', for the Romans had imposed their political yoke over foreign nations before 'some beneficial

---

29 *Ibid.*, V, 493-94.

30 *Ibid.*, V, 395.

31 *Ibid.*, VII, 308.

32 *Ibid.*, VII, 129-31; also I, 57.

33 *Ibid.*, V, 493.



consequences' followed upon their conquest.<sup>34</sup> Only in modern Europe had the aims of civilization been reconciled to the claims of national independence.<sup>35</sup> The Muslims had been guilty of a double injustice : like the Romans they had subdued alien nations; but unlike the Romans, they had also imposed a religious yoke on the nations they had subdued. Gibbon had little appreciation for what Gustave E. von Grunebaum has called the great innovation of the Islamic state or states: to 'make the area of Muslim political domination and that of Muslim religion coextensive'.<sup>36</sup>

Gibbon had little appreciation also for the form of government in Muslim states. Though Qur'anic form of polity was obligatory in theory, in practice the Muslim rulers were the 'supreme judges and interpreters of that divine book'; and, therefore, the most absolute of despots.<sup>37</sup> The Persian language did not even possess a word for any form of government other than 'absolute monarchy'.<sup>38</sup> Its 'prerogative was not circumscribed, either in right or in fact, by the power of the nobles, the freedom of the commons, the privileges of the church, the votes of a senate, or the memory of a free constitution'.<sup>39</sup> An absolute ruler could invigorate public affairs but that was a poor compensation for the absence of the rule of law.

The greatest achievement of the Muslims was in the sphere of science; but this was a field also of their most significant failure. They had recovered mathematics, physics and astronomy from the classical sources; they had made original contributions to medicine and chemistry. Their creative capacity, however, had been limited to small successes.<sup>40</sup>

---

34 *Ibid.*, I, 51.

35 *Ibid.*, I, 81 ; IV, 161.

36 *Medieval Islam*, The University of Chicago Press 1961, 6.

37 *Decline and Fall*, V, 493.

38 *Ibid.*, I, 80.

39 *Ibid.*, V, 493 ; also, I, 59.

40 *Ibid.*, I, 59.

## EDWARD GIBBON ON ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

The modest success of Muslim sciences was due chiefly to the lack of a truly empirical approach. The method of 'observation' was not unknown to them, but Muslim scientists had never realized the importance of the experimental method for advancing scientific knowledge; 'the physics, both of the Academy and the Lycaeum, as they are built, not on observation, but on argument, have retarded the progress of real knowledge'.<sup>41</sup> and the Muslims advanced no farther than the Greeks. Since the science of optics was unknown to the Muslims, 'from the reign of the Abbasides to that of the grand children of Tamerlane, the stars, without the aid of glasses, were diligently observed; and the astronomical tables of Baghdad, Spain, and Samarcand correct some minute errors, without daring to renounce the hypothesis of Ptolemy, without advancing a step towards the discovery of the solar system'.<sup>42</sup> Though the science of chemistry owed its 'origin and improvement' to the Saracens, their actual knowledge of the subject compared to that of the European scientists was small.<sup>43</sup> In medicine, a Razi or an Ibn Sina ranked easily with the greatest of Grecian masters but 'a superstitious reverence for the dead confined both the Greeks and the Arabs to the dissection of apes and quadrupeds; the most solid and visible parts were known in the time of Galen, and the finer scrutiny of the human was reserved for the microscope and the injections of modern artists'.

The world-view of the Muslims was responsible as much for the sterility of much of their scientific endeavour as for their failure to develop a truly scientific method. They had preserved much of the ancient science, contributed something of their own through 'observation'; but they had failed to grasp the 'natural laws' of the whole phenomena of the universe. Alchemy for the Arabs remained more important than their chemistry: the transmutation of

---

41 *Ibid.*, VI, 30.

42 *Ibid.*, VI, 31.

43 *Ibid.*, VI, 32.

metals and the elixir of immortal health were the objectives of a 'most eager search of Arabian chemistry'. Consequently, the fortunes and researches of thousands of Muslim scientists were 'evaporated in the crucibles of alchemy'. Empirical induction was impossible in the absence of 'Reason' which the Muslims lacked: 'the consummation of the great work was promoted by the worthy aid of mystery, fable, and superstition'. Similarly, the wisdom of the best of Arabian astronomers was debased 'by the vain predictions of astrology'.<sup>44</sup> Much of Muslim scientific effort had thus been sacrificed to popular superstition.

Muslim speculation too had been sacrificed to superstition. For Gibbon, 'the metaphysics of infinite, or finite spirit, have too often been enlisted in the service of superstition'; and, metaphysics was the mainstay of Muslim philosophers. The only discipline meant for 'the human faculties' and cultivated by the Muslims was logic; but, 'as it is more effectual for the detection of error than for the investigation of truth, it is not surprising that new generations of masters and disciples should still revolve in the same circle of logical argument'. The whole theological tribe of the 'mystics, scholastics, and moralists' were the last to be ranked among philosophers, for they possessed only 'imaginary merit',<sup>45</sup> for the very foundation of their philosophical superstructures rested on the existence of God, a dubious assumption.

For Gibbon, the greatest of the Enlightenment historians, the world-view of the Muslims made Islamic civilization essentially 'medieval'. They had resembled the Romans in creating great states and empires as well as in possessing the light of knowledge. For five hundred years, when Europe was still sunk into the darkness and barbarism of medieval Christendom, the Arabs and Islamized Persians and the Persianized Turks had distinguished themselves in both camps and colleges.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Islamic

44 *Ibid.*, VI, 31.

45 *Ibid.*, VI, 29.

46 *Ibid.*, VI, 28. Also, *Memoirs*, 56 n 3.

136658

## EDWARD GIBBON ON ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION

'civilization' was more akin to the medieval Christian 'barbarism'; both of them were theocratic; religion was the core of their attitudes towards life and thought. Gibbon could find only one instance of a Muslim philosopher 'despising the religions of the Jews, the Christians, and the Mohammedans'.<sup>47</sup> The exception of Ibn Rushd proved the rule that the thought of Muslim thinkers was as theologically oriented as the life of less erudite Muslims.

The Islamic world, as Gibbon saw it, was more significant for its failure than for its success. Nothing comparable to 'the revival of letters' in Europe had happened in Islam. The Arabs, with all their curiosity for classical learning, had neglected classical 'literature'. Muslim shelves were 'crowded with orators and poets, whose style was adapted to the taste and manners of their countrymen'.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, they had much to learn from the classics of Greek literature: 'the temperate dignity of style, the graceful proportions of art, the forms of visible and intellectual beauty, the just delineation of character and passion, the rhetoric of narrative and argument, the regular fabric of epic and dramatic poetry'. Gibbon's decided preference for the classical and neoclassical literature was not merely a question of aesthetics. When he said that the classics had much to teach and the Muslims, much to learn, he had the spirit of the whole of classical literature in mind.<sup>49</sup>

The philosophers of Athens, and Rome enjoyed the blessings, and asserted the rights, of civil and religious freedom. Their moral and political writings might have gradually unlocked the fetters of Eastern despotism, diffused a liberal spirit of inquiry and toleration, and encouraged the Arabian sages to suspect that their caliph was a tyrant, and their prophet an impostor.

Islamic civilization, as Gibbon saw it, had foundered on the rock of despotism, both civil and spiritual. The decline of Muslim learning as well as of Muslim civilization during

---

<sup>47</sup> *Decline and Fall*, VI, 33 n 83.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 29.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 33.



and after the thirteenth century was inevitable since the Muslims had lost irrevocably the benefits of 'a familiar intercourse with Greece and Rome'.<sup>50</sup> A sustained curiosity for progressive knowledge was impossible in the absence of civil and religious freedom. In the Muslim courts, 'truths of science could be recommended only by ignorance or folly', and the popular 'instinct of superstition was alarmed by the introduction even of the abstract sciences'.<sup>51</sup> The rigid *ulama* were ready always to condemn the 'rash and pernicious' curiosity of an Al-Mamun for profane knowledge.<sup>52</sup> The most efficacious instrument of civilization was lost no sooner than it was discovered.

Paradoxically, both the rise and decline of Islamic civilization could be attributed to the religion of Muhammad. Though the precepts of Islam were in harmony with the natural inclinations of the Arabs, yet their political success was made possible only by a sense of common purpose and drive which Islam imparted to them. Islam had failed to change the national character of the Arabs; their religious enthusiasm had added intensity and extravagance to their tribal discords. The Shi'a-Sunni conflict, the Carmathian and Isma'ili heresies, and the 'monkish' *darveshes* had undermined the political solidarity of the Muslims and increased their 'fanaticism'.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, the union of 'sacerdotal and regal' functions in the Muslim states sanctified by Muhammad's example, had proved fatal to the progress of civilization in the Islamic world: the Muslim states were more 'tyrannical' for being theocratic.<sup>54</sup> For Gibbon, no great progress in civilization was possible without the freedom of thought and civil liberty. After the tenth century, the history of Islamic civilization was a history of its decline in quality, notwithstanding the large

---

50 *Ibid.*, VI, 32.

51 *Ibid.*, VI, 31.

52 *Ibid.*, VI, 33.

53 *Ibid.*, V, 323, 324, 382, 387, 396, 397 ; VI, 48-51 ; VII, 13.

54 *Ibid.*, V, 395.

increase in the area of its supremacy.<sup>55</sup> Gibbon's description of the Middle Ages as the triumph of barbarism and religion was meant only for the European 'middle period', but it was no less applicable to Islamic civilization. Whereas in Islam, religion was responsible for both success and failure, in Christendom religion was responsible for failure alone.

Gibbon examined religions with scientific curiosity but without imaginative sympathy. Having read the translation of the *Edda*, the sacred book of the Celts, in Mallet's *Introduction to the History of Denmark*, Gibbon noted in his *Journal*:<sup>56</sup>

We have at present half a dozen of these bibles including our own. It would be a pretty work to make a philosophic picture of the religions, their spirits, their reasoning and their influence on the manners, government, philosophy and poetry of each people.

In *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon's 'philosophic picture' of Christianity and Islam was intended to portray their respective influence upon the Roman and Islamic civilizations.

For Gibbon, the effect of Islam upon Muslim civilization was very different from the effect of Christianity upon Roman civilization. The introduction and abuse of Christianity had influenced the decline and fall of the Roman empire. 'The clergy successfully preached the doctrines of patience and pusillanimity; the active virtues of society were discouraged'.<sup>57</sup> The progress of the monks was as rapid and general as that of Christianity itself; and, it 'seriously affected the reason, the faith, and the morals of the Christians'.<sup>58</sup> The spirit of Islam, on the other hand, encouraged the indulgence of human passions 'in this world' as well as the hopes of 'the other'; a spirit of charity and friendship and 'the practice of social virtues'

---

55 *Ibid.*, VI, 28-29.

56 Quoted, E., Neff, *The Poetry of History*, 80.

57 *Decline and Fall*, IV, 162.

58 *Ibid.*, IV, 61, 75.

were the great merits of Muhammad's religion. Its 'simple and rational piety' presented no obstacle to 'business or pleasure': Muhammad 'would suffer no monks in his religion'.<sup>59</sup> Islam was, in brief, more 'this-worldly' than Christianity.

For Gibbon, Islam was commendable in so far as it was in harmony with the aims of secular civilization. Gibbon was one of the greatest philosophers of the Enlightenment, if by that is meant the eighteenth-century *philosophers'* endeavour to secularize all departments of life and thought. For him, the aim of civilization was to increase the wealth, the knowledge, the virtue and, finally, the happiness of mankind.<sup>60</sup> Knowledge was nothing, if not rational; virtue, if not social; and happiness, if not meant to be enjoyed on earth. The 'deism' in Islam, the simplicity of its practices, its social ethic, its ideal of brotherhood met Gibbon's appreciation, and accounted for Islam's relative incorruptibility. Islam therefore was preferable to earlier religions.<sup>61</sup>

Though comparatively rational and simple, Islam fell far short of 'philosophic theism'. Muhammad's rational enthusiasm was carried to excess when he made the Author of the Universe 'an infinite and eternal being, without form or place, without issue or similitude, present to our most secret thoughts, existing by the necessity of his own nature and deriving from himself all moral and intellectual perfection'. Muhammad's creed, that there was no god but God, was rational enough. The omniscience, the omnipotence, the omnipresence, the perfection, the goodness, the infinitude, the eternal self-subsistence of Muhammad's Allah were incomprehensible, however, to Gibbon's 'present faculties'; for, 'what object remains for the fancy, or even the understanding, when we have abstracted from the unknown substance all ideas of time and space, of motion and matter, of sensation and reflection'? The

---

59 See, for instance, *ibid.*, V, 346-48.

60 *Ibid.*, IV, 169, *passim*.

61 *Ibid.*, V, 395, 296, 398, *passim*.

prophet was indeed a poor philosopher, and the most philosophic of his followers failed 'to reconcile the pre-science of God with the freedom and responsibility of man'; they also failed to explain 'the permission of evil under the reign of infinite power and infinite goodness'.<sup>62</sup>

A major shortcoming in Islam was the inability of its followers to develop a spirit of toleration. Religious tolerance was one of Gibbon's most cherished ideals. The universal toleration of all religions in the Roman world was one of its greatest merits.<sup>63</sup> Too scholarly to ignore his evidence, Gibbon was quick to point out several passages in the Qur'an which had been pronounced 'in behalf of toleration'. Also, the caliphs had selected 'the lessons of toleration' from Muhammad's own life. The presence of non-Muslims in the dominions of the Turks and the Mughals testified to the 'public toleration' of non-Muslim religions in the areas of Muslim political domination.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the 'private zeal' of the Muslims had never abated, once their prophet had 'sanctified' religio-political wars. Non-Muslims in the Muslim states always remained inferior subjects; and they were occasionally persecuted.<sup>65</sup>

Gibbon's comprehensive treatment of Islam was all the more important for being erudite and almost impartial and scientific. For all his intellectual affinity with Bayle and Voltaire, Gibbon ridiculed their disregard for evidence: 'how indifferently wit and philosophy supply the absence of genuine information'.<sup>66</sup> Gibbon's scholarly impartiality in his discussion of Muhammad's character, a subject much discussed in the eighteenth century, singled him out from most of his predecessors. Before Gibbon, Muhammad had been treated by orthodox theologians as a wicked impostor, and by the anti-religious, anti-clerical *philosophes* as a hero. Gibbon tried to rise above the level of polemic. The

62 *Ibid.*, V, 339.

63 *Ibid.*, I, 28-29.

64 *Ibid.*, V, 486.

65 *Ibid.*, V, 491-492.

66 *Ibid.*, V, 351 n 118.



adverse wish of a Prideaux to find an impostor in Muhammad had corrupted, thought Gibbon, the learning of many a doctor; and the wish of a Boulainvillers to find a hero in Muhammad had marred the ingenuity of many a *philosophe*.<sup>67</sup> With Sale and Gagnier, Gibbon attempted to discover the historical Muhammad. But for his mockery and 'the weapon of grave and temperate irony',<sup>68</sup> Gibbon's account of the Prophet's life was, paradoxically, the first serious study of the founder of Islam to appear in English.

Muhammad the man rather than Muhammad the Prophet enjoyed first place in Gibbon's choice of outstanding personalities in history. Gibbon had deliberately excluded Providence or Fortune from human affairs: national manners, the spirit of times, and men themselves were the main agents of historical change. The more extraordinary the man, the greater was his capacity for influencing the course of history 'since, in human life, the most important scenes will depend on the character of a single actor'.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, exceptional individuals could not fly in the face of their times: 'it is an obvious truth that the times must be suited to extraordinary character'.<sup>70</sup> For Gibbon, therefore, the 'genius of the Arabian Prophet' and 'the spirit of his religion' as well as the manners of his countrymen were the causes which had 'impressed a new and lasting character on the nations of the globe'.<sup>71</sup> At the head of Islamic history was thus 'that extraordinary man', Muhammad.<sup>72</sup>

Gibbon provided a most comprehensive context for his elucidation of Muhammad's 'character'. The religious and political conditions in the late sixth-century Byzantium and Persia, the economic and climatic conditions of 'the sandy, the stony and the happy' Arabia, their influence

---

67 *Ibid.*, V, 352 n 119.

68 *Memoirs*, 97.

69 *Decline and Fall*, VII, 78.

70 *Ibid.*, VII, 293 ; also, V, 171 ; IV, 340-41.

71 *Ibid.*, V, 311.

72 *Ibid.*, V, 375.

upon 'the social character' of the Arabs, the long tradition of 'national independence' in Arabia and of 'public freedom' in Mecca and Medina which possessed 'the substance of a commonwealth', the religion of the Arabs, the presence of the 'Sabian', 'Magian', 'Manichaeian', Christian and Jewish faiths in the Arabian peninsula- all provided a setting for the rise of Muhammad to prophethood and power.<sup>73</sup> The honourable birth of Muhammad, his natural gifts and genius for self-schooling, his sincerity in wishing well of his countrymen, the superiority of his creed over the prevailing religious ideas and his relentless, yet peaceful, preaching in Mecca characterized Muhammad as the mere 'prophet'.<sup>74</sup> After his *hijrat* to Medina, he became also a 'prince' and the deterioration in Muhammad the man was proportionate, subsequently, to the success of Muhammad the Prophet-prince.<sup>75</sup> At his death, Muhammad commanded the respect and loyalty of those who were both his fellow Muslims and subjects to a degree which would have astonished the Byzantine Caesars and Persian Khusraus.<sup>76</sup>

Was Muhammad an 'enthusiast' or an impostor? That was the much-debated question which Gibbon finally posed. Muhammad's sound practical judgment and his exceptional political acumen ruled out the 'specious' allegation that he was mad ('enthusiast'). His enthusiasm meant, for Gibbon, his zeal for the propagation of Islam; it was largely justified by 'the importance and justice of the end', for Islam was better than pre-Islamic religions.<sup>77</sup> At Mecca, Muhammad's preoccupation with the welfare of his 'nation' had converted his general obligation into a particular call, the call to prophecy. In assuming himself as the apostle of God, Muhammad had sincerely deceived himself. But as 'a wise man may deceive himself', so 'a good man may

73 *Ibid.*, V, 311, 312-14, 314-24, 327-33.

74 *Ibid.*, V, 336, 337, 338, 352-55;

75 *Ibid.*, V, 376-77.

76 *Ibid.*, V, 358.

77 *Ibid.*, V, 377.

deceive others'; and from involuntary self-delusion Muhammad advanced gradually to the conscious delusion of others.<sup>78</sup> In his later life in particular, the 'use of fraud and perfidy, of cruelty and injustice, were often subservient to the propagation' of Islam. Such moral failings were redoubled until he 'secretly smiled (the victorious impostor!) at the enthusiasm of his youth, and the credulity of his proselytes'.<sup>79</sup>

Gibbon's verdict on Muhammad's Revelation was the same as Prideaux's; but, it was grounded differently. Prideaux had assumed the divine character of the Christian Revelation; and, Muhammad's wickedness and imposture proved to the readers of Prideaux's work that the Muhammadan revelation was a human fraud.<sup>80</sup> For Gibbon, Muhammad's Revelation was a fraud because all Revelation was fraud. In the rational philosophy of the Enlightenment, there was no place for 'revealed' truths.

Indeed, in Gibbon's presentation, the failure of the Muslims lay ultimately in their betrayal of Reason. For him, 'the different characteristics which distinguished the civilised nations of the globe may be ascribed to the use and the abuse of reason'.<sup>81</sup> The rise of Islam was a kind of reformation in religion; and a renaissance in learning had happened in the Muslim world during the ninth and tenth centuries. But nothing comparable to the Enlightenment had occurred in Muslim history. In Gibbon's 'epic of the Enlightenment', as *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* has been called recently,<sup>82</sup> Islamic civilization found its appropriate place in the Middle Ages. The wealth, the knowledge, the virtue, or the happiness of the Muslims was brought into sharp relief only by the darkness and misery of the Middle Ages in Europe. The contemporary

---

78 *Ibid.*, V, 376.

79 *Ibid.*, V, 377.

80 Cf. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West*, Edinburgh 1960, 276.

81 *Decline and Fall*, III, 71.

82 H.L. Bond, *The Literary Art of Gibbon*, Oxford 1960, 160.

Muslim world was nevertheless marked by the absence of freedom and reason, by 'despotism and ignorance'.<sup>83</sup>

*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was a highly finished master-piece<sup>84</sup> and it was soon to be found, as Gibbon himself noted with gratification, on every table, and almost on every toilette: 'the historian was crowned by the taste or fashion of the day'.<sup>85</sup> In fact, this classic work of history was to exercise influence on a large number of historians in the future, including the historians of India.

In the early nineteenth century there was hardly a British historian of medieval India who had not read, or re-read, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and its author became for them a veritable 'institution'. His lively and readable and yet erudite presentation of Muslim wars and governments made them a subject of more or less general interest; his picture of Islamic civilization provided a comprehensive context for Indo-Muslim history; and his evaluation of Muslim cultural achievement placed it above that of medieval Europe, but much below the achievement of ancient or modern Europe. Above all, his work schooled many a British historian of medieval India in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, for there is hardly any of its ideas which has not found expression in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

In a very real sense, Gibbon's work embodies the judgment of the Age of Reason in modern Europe on medieval Islam; and, as such, his judgment is inseparable from the values and assumptions of that age.

---

83 *Decline and Fall*, I, 23, *passim*.

84 Herder, quoted, E. Neff, *The Poetry of History*, 79.

85 *Autobiographies*, 267.



## SIR WILLIAM JONES ON HINDU CIVILIZATION

The work of Sir William Jones, the greatest of eighteenth century British orientatalists, occupies a key position in the history of British historical writing on India. Before Jones, Indian history had been almost synonymous with Indo-Muslim history, after Jones, it became almost synonymous with Hindu history. The Muslims were moved from the centre to the periphery of the history of the sub-continent. The image of ancient India which he invoked came to influence the minds not only of those who wrote on ancient India but also of those who wrote on medieval India. He added altogether a new dimension to British historical thinking on India.

The foundation of the Asiatic Society by Jones in 1784 expressed the now comprehensive scope of late eighteenth century orientalism, and marked the beginning of a new phase of British orientalist studies. John Swinton had shown interest in the natural resources of India and in the religion of the Hindus. Alexander Dow had written a 'dissertation' on Hindu religion and philosophy, and translated Persian prose tales. Jones in the early 1770's had written a treatise, an essay, a dissertation and commentaries on Asian poetry or literature; John Richardson had written a dissertation on the 'language, literature and manners' of Asian nations. As some of the articles in the *Philosophical Transactions* show, the Royal Society had started inquiring into Asian sciences;<sup>1</sup> the Society of Antiquaries of London had extended its interest to Asian antiquities.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Jones' inspiration for founding the Asiatic Society was the Royal Society itself: *The Works*, III, 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeologia*, VII, 323-36, on Indian pagodas; VIII, 251-189, on

## SIR WILLIAM JONES ON HINDU CIVILIZATION

With this background, the members of the Asiatic Society were to explore whatever had been produced by nature and performed by man in Asia: its natural and civil history, antiquities, arts, sciences and literature. Thus, whereas the approach of the authors of the *Universal History* had been largely political, that of the founders of the Asiatic Society was truly universal.

'It is my ambition', wrote Sir William Jones in 1787, 'to know India better than any other European ever knew it.'<sup>3</sup> Thirty years later, James Mill in his discussion of Hindu civilization found himself confronted with the work and influence of Sir William Jones, almost as with a school.

Already, before 1784, Johnson had regarded him as 'the most enlightened' man.<sup>4</sup> For Gibbon, Jones was a 'wonderful linguist'.<sup>5</sup> Many another lesser man thought of Jones as 'far the foremost in a learned age',<sup>6</sup> 'a phenomena in literature', 'one of the greatest ornaments of the English name'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Jones made the British orientalist respectable in Europe.<sup>8</sup> The re-publication in 1807 of his complete works in eleven volumes, together with a biography in two volumes, was a recognition of 'the universality of his genius'.<sup>9</sup> In the early nineteenth century, Jones had his 'disciples'.

Today the variety of Jones' practical interests is obvious from the fact that modern orientalists, philologists, Indolo-

---

cave temples, IX, 81-83, on Roman coins in India ; XXI, 1-4, on Indian coins.

3 William Jones to Lord Althorp, quoted, A.J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 23.

4 *Proceedings Sir William Jones Bicentenary Conference*, Oxford 1948, 7.

5 Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, VI, 33 n. 82.

6 Eyles Irwin, quoted, A.J. Arberry, *Proceedings (Bicentenary Conference)*, Oxford 1948, 5.

7 James Elves, quoted, A.J. Arberry, "Persian Jones", *Asiatic Review*, XI (April, 1944), 186-96.

8 *The Asiatick Researches* 'created a furore in learned Europe' : Alfred Master, *BSOAS*, XI, 1943-46, 801.

9 Quoted, A.J. Arberry, *Proceedings (Bicentenary Conference)*, Oxford 1948, 5.

gists, jurists, journalists and literary critics have re-appraised his achievement. R. M. Hewitt maintains that it is easy to rescue Jones from the philologists to replace him among men of letters.<sup>10</sup> A. J. Arberry finds him an admirable scholar of Persian;<sup>11</sup> and A. S. Tritton holds that Jones so succeeded in feeling the spirit of Arabic literature that 'there is little to set right in his general ideas'.<sup>12</sup> Alfred Master evaluates Jones' influence upon Sanskrit studies;<sup>13</sup> G. H. Cannon, his share in educating public opinion in political liberalism.<sup>14</sup> R. K. Das Gupta says that Jones was pre-eminently a jurist;<sup>15</sup> and S. G. Vesey-Fitzgerald compares Jones' genius with Bentham's.<sup>16</sup> Aware of the 'renewed interest in Jones' writings' G. H. Cannon has published an annotated bibliography of his works;<sup>17</sup> and his 'life' has been re-written.

Jones' work has not yet been studied, however, in the context of British historical writing on India. Hewitt pointed out that 'the wide and enduring influence' of Jones' work was due chiefly to miscellaneous writings such as the discourses to the Asiatic Society; and also, that Jones altered 'our whole conception of the Eastern world'; but Hewitt's interest was only in Jones the man of letters.<sup>18</sup> Jones' work appeared to belong, as Hume said about Berkeley's philosophical works, to 'the republic of letters'. For his contemporaries the chief merit of the 'harmonious Jones' was to blend science with taste. That verdict would

10 "Harmonious Jones", *Reginald Mainwaring Hewitt (1887-1948), A Selection from his Literary Remains*, (edited by Vivian de Sola Pinto), Oxford 1955, 46.

11 "Persian Jones", *Asiatic Review*, XI (April 1944).

12 "The Student of Arabic", *BSOAS*, XI, 1943-46, 695-98.

13 "The Influence of Sir William Jones on Sanskrit Studies", *Ibid.*, 798-806.

14 "Freedom of the Press and Sir William Jones", *Journalism Quarterly*, 33, No. 2 (Spring, 1956).

15 "Sir William Jones as a Poet", *Proceedings Asiatic Society Bengal*, 1948.

16 "Sir William Jones, the Jurist", *BSOAS*, XI, 1943-46, 807-17.

17 *Sir William Jones, Orientalist*, Honolulu, 1952.

18 *Reginald Mainwaring Hewitt, 1887-1948*, 47.

have pleased Jones himself whose chief ambition in life was relentlessly to pursue literary glory. But, though Jones thought of himself primarily as a man of letters, the acquisition of 'new knowledge' became a passion which increased with years. Always a creative writer, he maintained his interest in 'universal' literature while evincing serious interest in philosophy and 'universal' history.

Jones' interest in universal history synchronised with his interest in India. For some ten years before 1773, he had tried to establish himself as a man of letters; from 1773 to 1783 he had said farewell to oriental literature in order to devote himself to a serious pursuit of his legal career; from 1784, with an Indian judgeship in his pocket, he wanted to give 'the finishing stroke' to his oriental knowledge.<sup>19</sup> The Asiatic Society was now founded to explore the civil and natural history of Asia, its sciences and its arts.<sup>20</sup> In his presidential discourses delivered annually to the Society, Jones tried to explore the civil history of Asia; but the bulk of his work now was related to India. It was the achievement of these Indian years, the last ten of Jones' life, when his intellectual powers had fully matured, that exerted a wide and enduring influence.

With Jones' arrival in Bengal in 1784, the stage was set 'for the discovery of the forgotten early history of India'.<sup>21</sup> On his voyage to India he was looking forward to several years of studies of 'whatever relates to India', besides Persian and Law.<sup>22</sup> He had been thinking of 'modern' politics and geography of India, its trade, manufacture, agriculture and commerce, of the 'best mode of governing

---

19 Jones to Count Reviczki, *The Works*, I, 166-67.

20 Jones to Lord Althorp: 'This then is my rule: I hold every day lost, in which I acquire no new knowledge of man or nature': A.J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 23.

21 Jones to Lord Althorp, quoted, A.J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 17.

22 Jones' first discourse to the Asiatic Society, *The Works*, III, 1-9.



Bengal', and of Mughal and Maratha constitutions.<sup>23</sup> But, though he placed before the Society in 1784 this part of his project, he could never execute this plan himself. Already, his interest in Indian sciences like arithmetic, geometry, medicine, anatomy, surgery, and chemistry and in Indian poetry, rhetoric, music and morality had outweighed the immediately practical ones.<sup>24</sup> After 1784, Indian chronology and mythology were added to his list of interesting subjects.<sup>25</sup>

The 'discovery' of Sanskrit had sparked off Jones' Indo-logical studies. Thanks to Hastings' wide intellectual outlook, a knowledge of Sanskrit was becoming desirable in 1784. Charles Wilkins had been encouraged by Hastings to study Sanskrit literature from the original works. Wilkins' rendering of the *Mahabharata*, Hastings championed in the Council, 'may open a new and most extensive range for the human mind, beyond the present limited and beaten field of its operation'.<sup>26</sup> But, Wilkins had left Bengal in 1785 and there was no other British scholar of Sanskrit in India who could meet even the practical demand of a comprehensive Hindu Code. Jones was quick to realize the great importance of Sanskrit; and to learn it. He was charmed by this 'sweet sister' of Greek and Latin which was 'more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either'.<sup>27</sup> The affinity of Sanskrit with Greek and Latin had been pointed out before Jones recognized their sisterly relation; but Jones made the relationship more significant by emphasizing a common origin for the Greek, Latin and the Hindu races.

Jones perceived a similar affinity between the mythologies of the Greeks, Romans and the Hindus. Jones had

---

23 C.H. Philip, "James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone and the History of India", *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, Oxford University Press 1961, 218.

24 Jones to Lord Althorp, *The Works*, II, 3-4.

25 "Chronology of the Hindus", "Supplement"; "On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India", *The Works*.

26 Quoted K. Feiling, *Warren Hastings*, 236.

27 Jones, *The Works*, III, 24-46.

always felt a great fascination for the creations of human imagination; he believed like the Romantics after him that 'myth' was the imaginative expression of human experience in the infancy of mankind. In his essay "On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India", in which he stressed the close parallels in those mythologies, he stated that early experience of mankind was 'highly interesting' to those who took 'interest in all that relates to mankind'.<sup>28</sup> Myths were not merely amusing; they symbolised the poetic truths of human life. Jones was inspired to write his hymns to Indra, Sraswati, Surya, Ganga, Kamdev and Narayana. The last hymn is believed to have converted Shelley's early atheistic materialism into the mystical pantheism of his late poetry.<sup>29</sup>

At any rate, Jones devoted himself to Hindu studies. Publicly, he could still suggest that a perfect history of 'Mughal India' could be compiled from the Persian sources, beginning with Ali Yazdi's *Zafarnama* and ending with Ghulam Husain's *Siyar al-Muta'khirin*.<sup>30</sup> Privately, he noted down history of India 'before the Mahomedan conquest' as the chief desideratum. The subjects he now had in mind were Hindu mythology, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, ancient Indian geography, a Sanskrit dictionary and grammar, Indian music, translation of the Vedas, the Puranas, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, Sanskrit dramas and the Hindu theatre.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, Indology was for Jones a specialization within orientalism, a culmination rather than a departure. In his 'Treatise on Oriental Poetry', appended to his French translation of a history of Nadir Shah in 1770, in the preface to his *Persian Grammar* and the *Dissertation on Oriental Literature* in 1771, in *An Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations* in 1772, and in the *Latin Commentaries on*

---

28 *Ibid.*, 324 & V, 182.

29 V. de. Sola Pinto, "Sir William Jones and English Literature", *BSOAS*, XI, 1943-45, 694.

30 *The Works*, III, 213-14.

31 *Ibid.*, 10.

*Asiatic Poetry* in 1774 Jones had aimed to stimulate annotated translations of oriental manuscripts in general. If oriental literature 'should ever be general', he reiterated in 1788, 'it must diffuse itself, as Greek learning was diffused in Italy after the taking of Constantinople, by more impressions of the best manuscripts without versions or comments, which future scholars would add at their leisure to future edition'.<sup>32</sup>

Jones hoped that the spread of oriental learning would stimulate yet another renaissance in Europe. The excellent writings of Greece and Rome were studied by every man of liberal education and had diffused a general refinement in Europe.<sup>33</sup> But ignorance of oriental literature, blindness to its merits, religious prejudice, inability to learn oriental languages, intellectual sloth, and absence of material incentive, lack of orientalists of taste and scarcity of books had been responsible, thought Jones, for what Dow had called 'a curious kind of self conceit'.<sup>34</sup> Dow had compared the intellectually indifferent to the Goths of a dark age. Jones thought of the philistine as a complacent ignoramus, 'like the savages, who thought that the sun rose and set for them alone, and could not imagine that the waves which surrounded their island, left coral and pearls upon any other shore'.<sup>35</sup> The love of learning which had prevailed in Europe during the Renaissance appeared to have exhausted itself in classical studies.<sup>36</sup> The 'silver age of the modern European Renaissance', as the age of Gibbon has been called,<sup>37</sup> needed new literary discoveries for self-fulfilment. Jones pointed to the East for rejuvenation.

The broad affinity between the literature (in the eighteenth-century connotation) of classical Europe and of ancient India endowed Sanskrit literature with immense

---

32 Jones' Preface to Hatifi's *Laili Majnun*, Calcutta 1788.

33 *The Works*, V, 166-67.

34 *Ibid.*, 165 ; Dow's Preface to *The History of Hindostan*, 1770.

35 *The Works*, V, 166.

36 *Ibid.*, 170.

37 A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 1961, 13.

possibilities. Like most of his contemporaries, Jones dated the Renaissance from the rediscovery of classical literature after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks. The literature of ancient India became more valuable than that of Persia and Arabia. In the early 1770's he had been an exception in England 'in installing the lyric at the centre of poetry',<sup>38</sup> and his appreciation of Persian and Arabic poetry was enhanced thereby. Sanskrit too had its lyric, but its strength lay in the epic and the dramatic forms.<sup>39</sup> Sanskrit literature, therefore, most aptly compared with Greek. Not only in literary forms and mythology but also in philosophy, a broad affinity existed, Jones thought, between Sanskrit and Greek literatures. A Plato or an Aristotle was more likely to be discovered in Sanskrit than in Persian or Arabic literature.<sup>40</sup>

Sanskrit literature was valuable for elucidating, by comparative methods, the intellectual history of mankind as well as in facilitating a new 'renaissance' in Europe. With the French 'encyclopaedists', Jones divided all human knowledge into History, Arts and Sciences, corresponding to the three chief faculties of human mind: namely memory, imagination and reason.<sup>41</sup> The historical writings of Asia were indispensable for completing the 'universal history'; the imaginative creations of Asia could give a fillip to European arts; and a knowledge of Asian philosophies was necessary 'to complete the history of universal philosophy'.<sup>42</sup> Sanskrit literature was valuable to those interested in tracing the development of the human mind 'from the rudest to the most cultivated state',<sup>43</sup> precisely because that

---

38 Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, I, 133.

39 The Epic and Drama were 'the highest genres' in eighteenth century theories, though the literary successes of the age were not in those genres: *ibid.*, 116. Jones had projected an epic poem, and was one of the earliest admirers of Shakespeare.

40 In 1774 Jones had emphasized in his *Latin Commentaries* that European indifference to Oriental Literature meant an affront to the Plato, Socrates, Aristotle and Demosthenes of Asia: G.H. Cannon, *Sir William Jones, Orientalist*, 7.

41 *The Works*, I, 344; III, 1-9, *passim*.

42 *Ibid.*, III, 233-34.

43 *Ibid.*, V, 182.



literature was the product of a highly civilized and ancient society.

The favourable opinion which Jones formed of Hindu civilization from Sanskrit literature was expressed in his treatment of Hindu history.

History for Jones was more than a mere chronicle of events. In 1770, when he had translated Mirza Muhammad Mahdi Astarabadi's *Tarikh-i-Nadiri*, Jones had apologised for having laboured on a military chronicle.<sup>44</sup> Already he had 'the Ciceronean idea of perfection' to evaluate historical literature.<sup>45</sup> The first duty of a historian was to be free from prejudice; his first obligation, to accept nothing as fact without reliable evidence. Having established his facts, the historian should narrate them in a pleasing style, preserving a proper chronology. He should unfold the causes at work in the historical process, taking into account the characters of distinguished men as well as the interplay of 'chance' and human motives.<sup>46</sup> In short, 'an unbiased integrity, a comprehensive view of nature, an exact knowledge of men and manners, a mind stored with free and generous principles, a penetrating sagacity, a fine taste and copious eloquence' were the necessary qualifications of a good historian.<sup>47</sup> In European literature there was not a single 'perfect' historian; and only a few could be regarded as 'good'. Herodotus, Thucydides and Polybius among the ancients, Montesquieu, Voltaire and some recent English historians (probably Hume and Robertson) deserved to be ranked good.<sup>48</sup>

History for Jones was far more than political history; he had no sympathy with warriors and conquerors; his great men were the benefactors and not the destroyers of mankind.<sup>49</sup> The progress of arts, sciences and letters as

44 *Ibid.*, XII, 313-15.

45 *Ibid.*, 339.

46 *Ibid.*, 321.

47 *Ibid.*, XII, 323.

48 *Ibid.*, 331, 332, 325-27 ; II, 491-92.

49 *Ibid.*, XII, 315.

## SIR WILLIAM JONES ON HINDU CIVILIZATION

well as of virtue, wisdom and prosperity was a more fascinating subject than wars and conquests.<sup>50</sup> He doubted the value of history as philosophy teaching by examples;<sup>51</sup> history was rather a philosophy teaching by 'the accumulated experience and wisdom of all ages and all nations'.<sup>52</sup> Not merely the records of empires and states but also civil and religious institutions belonged to the province of history. Indeed all that had been performed in the past by man was the object of historical investigation.<sup>53</sup> 'Even law belongs to the History of Man';<sup>54</sup> and 'literary and civil history are very allied'.<sup>55</sup> As Jones explained in his discourse on "Asiatick History", by 'civil history' he meant all inquiries, which 'must of course be chiefly Historical', related to all human activities in the past.<sup>56</sup> The civil history of Asian nations was nothing short of the history of their civilizations.

It was the whole of Hindu civilization that Jones treated in his third discourse in 1786 and absorbed his attention until his death in 1794. For him the civil history of the Hindus meant their language, philosophy, religion, architecture, sciences and arts from the earliest known times to the eleventh century. Jones placed 'the dawn of true Indian history' in the third or the fourth century B.C.;<sup>57</sup> he conjectured, however, that the first 'Indian empire' had been founded at least a thousand years earlier.<sup>58</sup> The 'Indian Zodiack' was not borrowed, he tried to show, from the Greeks or the Arabs,<sup>59</sup> another 'fact' which went to prove both the antiquity and the 'inventive genius' of the Hindus.

---

50 *Loc. cit.*

51 *Ibid.*, III, 216.

52 *Ibid.*, I, 156-57.

53 *Ibid.*, III, 1-9.

54 *Ibid.*, I, 344.

55 *Ibid.*, V, 410.

56 *Ibid.*, III, 205-28.

57 *The Asiatick Researches*, II, 400.

58 *Ibid.*, 145.

59 "On the Antiquity of the Indian Zodiack", *The Asiatick Researches*, II.

The 'discovery' of ancient empire in India and the originality of Hindu genius confirmed the impression of a high civilization derived from their literature. The ancient Hindus were 'splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge'.<sup>60</sup> The decimal scale, apologues and the game of chess were inventions of which the Hindus themselves liked to boast; but, added to these their grammar, logic, rhetoric, and music, their claim to 'a fertile and inventive genius' was fully established. Their lively and elegant lyrics, their 'magnificent and sublime' epics and their 'noble speculations' in the Vedas were perhaps but a foretaste of still greater discoveries. The Hindu 'Darashanas' had contained all the metaphysics of the Academy, the Stoa and the Lyceum; the Vedanta contained all the philosophies of Pythagoras and Plato.<sup>61</sup> The merit of the Vedanta was that it differed both from the 'pantheism' of Spinoza and from the 'insane philosophy of the base Toland'.<sup>62</sup> Jones could indeed 'venture to affirm, without meaning to pluck a leaf from the never fading laurels of our immortal Newton, that the whole of his theology and part of his philosophy may be found in the Vedās'.<sup>63</sup>

For Jones the ancient Hindus were the Greeks of Asian civilization. Jones' discourses, though meant to investigate in an impartial manner how far the Biblical version of creation, the Fall, the Deluge and the dispersion of nations found support from the civil histories of the five great nations of Asia,<sup>64</sup> were 'to omit nothing' that was important for expected 'discoveries' in their civilizations.<sup>65</sup> As a result, the Hindus emerged as the most civilized nation in ancient

---

60 *The Works*, III, 32

61 *Ibid.*, 24-46.

62 *Ibid.*, 229-52.

63 *Ibid.*, 246.

64 *Ibid.*, III, 24.

65 *Loc. cit.*

## SIR WILLIAM JONES ON HINDU CIVILIZATION

Asia. The Tartars had no letters, literature or philosophy;<sup>66</sup> love of poetry was a great merit of the Arabs but they too had no philosophy, science or art;<sup>67</sup> the Persians had been great theists, possessed metaphysics, great architecture and probably sciences and arts; they were civilized but appeared to have produced no great literature;<sup>68</sup> the Chinese were moderately civilized.<sup>69</sup> Jones even suggested that, since the Hindus were the more ancient, the Greeks were indebted to the Hindus wheresoever an affinity seemed to have existed between them;<sup>70</sup> or otherwise, they belonged to the same racial stock.<sup>71</sup>

With Jones' discovery of Hindu civilization, India for the West became synonymous with Hinduism. Indeed, he used the term 'Indian' interchangeably with the 'Hindus'. Jones' twin context of race and civilization confirmed the view generally held in the eighteenth century that the Hindus were a 'peculiar' people, and gave them a most honourable status in the history of mankind.

The 'civil history' of the Hindus did not end with the beginning of the decline of Hindu civilization. In Jones' treatment of Hindu history, it was implicit that the Muslim conquest of India was partly responsible for the degeneration of Hindu civilization. When others drew the 'logical' conclusion that the conquest of Hindustan by the Muslims was comparable to the overwhelming of the Roman empire by 'the northern nations', James Mill was impelled to refute, he said, 'so gratuitous a supposition as that of the degradation of the Hindus from an improved to a barbarous state of society by the calamities of conquest'.<sup>72</sup>

James Mill wondered why Jones had, to use Mill's terminology, placed the Hindus so high in the scale of civili-

---

66 *Ibid.*, 71-102.

67 *Ibid.*, 47-70.

68 *Ibid.*, 103-36.

69 *Ibid.*, 137-61.

70 *Ibid.*, 24-46.

71 *Ibid.*, 185-204.

72 James Mill, *History of British India*, II, 146, n.2.



zation as to make them the most civilized nation of Asia, comparing favourably with the Greeks. Mill suggested, among other things, that 'Sir William was actuated by the virtuous design of exalting the Hindus in the eyes of their European masters; and thence ameliorating the temper of the government'.<sup>73</sup> Jones himself had said in 1782 that the 'prospect of contributing to the happiness of millions, or at least of alleviating their misery' was one of his motives for obtaining an office in India.<sup>74</sup> Burke was never tired of reminding Jones that: 'The natives of the East, to whose literature you have done so much service, are particularly under protection for their rights'.<sup>75</sup> Jones felt that he was 'capable of doing some good in Asia'.<sup>76</sup> On his arrival in Bengal, Jones had many literary conversations with Hastings by which, said Jones, 'I am always the gainer'.<sup>77</sup> Whatever the influence of Burke or Hastings on Jones, he agreed with Burke that the Hindus had their 'rights'; and with Hastings that 'a generous sense of feeling for their writings' would eradicate British prejudices against them and 'imprint on the hearts of our own countrymen the sense and obligation of benevolence'.<sup>78</sup> His suggestions for the government of British India were as 'conservative' as Hastings'.<sup>79</sup> If the Hindus were to be 'indulged in their own prejudices, civil or religious, and suffered to enjoy their own customs unmolested', a favourable view of their civilization had indeed its practical implications;<sup>80</sup> and Jones' observations leave no doubt that he was aware of them.<sup>81</sup>

73 *Ibid.*, II, 138.

74 Jones to Lord Althorp, quoted, A.J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 18.

75 Edmund Burke to Jones, *The Works*, I, 360 ; and Priyaranjan Sen, "Sir William Jones", *A.S.B. Bicentenary Proceedings*, 159.

76 Jones to Lord Althorp, quoted A.J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 17.

77 Quoted, K. Feiling, *Warren Hastings*, 236.

78 Hastings to Wilkins, Preface to Wilkins' translation of the *Gita*.

79 Jones, *The Works*, III, 154 & 216 ; VII, 89-90 ; VIII, 208-10.

80 *Ibid.*, VII, 4.

81 *Ibid.*, II, 55 ; Jones to Lord Althorp, quoted, A.J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 22.

## SIR WILLIAM JONES ON HINDU CIVILIZATION

Nevertheless, the 'humanitarian' motive alone did not account, as James Mill himself recognized, for Jones' attitude towards the Hindus. Mill believed that 'the illusions with which the fancy magnifies the importance of a favourite pursuit' had deluded Jones;<sup>82</sup> he praised the Asians simply because he was an 'orientalist'. His favourite pursuit oriental literature and learning was indeed; for, as he wrote in 1784 to a friend, 'Every day supplies me with something new in Oriental learning, and if I were to stay here half a century I should be continually amused'.<sup>83</sup> Jones' insistence on drawing parallels between his oriental 'masters' and the 'classics' of Europe, between a Firdausi, Rumi, Hafiz or a Nizami on the one hand and a Homer, Shakespeare, Spencer or a Petrarch on the other, was a way, among other things, of underlining the importance of his favourite pursuit.<sup>84</sup> And the comparative indifference of his contemporaries towards orientalism impelled him to write what Hewitt has noticed as manifestoes in praise of oriental literature.<sup>85</sup> Praise of Sanskrit was all the more desirable because Jones had wished Britain to lead in Sanskrit studies just as the Dutch had led Europe in the Arabic.<sup>86</sup> In 1771, he had defended British orientalists against the French;<sup>87</sup> in 1785, he was strongly moved by the wish 'that the activity of the French in the same pursuits may not be superior to our'.<sup>88</sup> Sanskrit studies for Jones were almost a national project; the most important, therefore, 'of all the public and private projects' which he had in mind to execute in 'two lives'.<sup>89</sup> Whether or not the 'illusions' of his fancy magnified the importance of the Hindus, Jones' allusions to a high state of Hindu civiliza-

82 James Mill, *History of British India*, II, 138.

83 Jones to Patrick Russel, *The Works*, II, 33-34, *passim*.

84 Jones, *The Works*, V, 424, *passim*.

85 Reginald Mainwaring Hewitt, 53.

86 Alfred Master, "The Influence of Sir William Jones upon Sanskrit Studies", *BSOAS*, XI, 1943-46, 798-806.

87 Jones, *Dissertation on Oriental Literature*.

88 Jones, *The Works*, III, 20.

89 Jones to Count Reviczki, *The Works*, I, 166-67.

tion in early times were partly the expression of his hopes of great 'discoveries' in the future.

Mill's main indictment of Jones' treatment of Asian societies was that Jones' ideas on the subject were crude, vague and indeterminate.<sup>90</sup> His praise of the Arabs, as Mill ironically remarked, had resembled Rousseau's rhapsodies on the savage.<sup>91</sup> A. S. Tritton has suggested that the pre-Muhammadan Arabs had for Jones a touch of the 'Noble Savage' in them.<sup>92</sup> The idea of the Noble Savage, the idea of the 'natural' man as both happy and virtuous, was becoming increasingly popular in late eighteenth-century England. Johnson in later life savagely denounced the Noble Savage. Rousseau's social ideas were interpreted in favour of the Noble Savage.<sup>93</sup> Jones was familiar with Rousseau's works. On his voyage to Bengal, he had visited the 'savage' chief of the island of Johanna; immensely pleased with the visit, he had remarked 'the farther our species recedes from nature, the farther they depart from true beauty'.<sup>94</sup> He was predisposed to admire 'the perfect society' and the 'exalted virtues' of, as he confessed, his favourite Arabs;<sup>95</sup> also, they were eminently civilized for many ages before their conquest of Persia.<sup>96</sup>

Jones did not have a consciously evolved concept of civilization, and, as Mill rightly surmised, he had given little thought to its formulation.<sup>97</sup> 'Sociological' studies had been appearing in England after 1760, but Jones read Adam Ferguson's historical essay on Civil Society only after his arrival in Bengal, and, though he was 'extremely pleased' with the book, his appreciation was for single ideas torn from the general sweep of the work.<sup>98</sup> Ferguson had tried

90 James Mill, *History of British India*, II, 138-39.

91 *Ibid.*, 139.

92 Cf. "The Student of Arabic", *BSOAS*, XI (1943-46), 695-98.

93 A. N. Fairchild, *The Noble Savage*.

94 *The Asiatick Researches*, II, 86.

95 Jones, *The Works*, III, 30.

96 *Loc. cit.*

97 James Mill, *History of British India*, II, 138.

98 Jones to Macpherson, *The Works*, II, 86.

## SIR WILLIAM JONES ON HINDU CIVILIZATION

to underline that 'civilization' was a gradual progression from simpler modes of society to more complex ones.<sup>99</sup> Jones did not much like this idea. and, probably with Ferguson in mind, remarked that men 'will always differ in their ideas of civilization, each measuring it by the habits and prejudices of his own country'.<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless Jones' assumptions required him to judge the value of human achievement in Asia, even if unconsciously.

The intellectual superiority of European nations over the Asian was as evident to Jones as to most of his contemporaries. With the philosophers of the Enlightenment, he saw the history of mankind as a progress of human reason, the faculty of the human mind which exerted its power in 'philosophy'. Like Vico, he believed that 'fancy' or the faculty of combining our ideas agreeably by various modes of imitation and substitution, is in general earlier exercised, and sooner attains maturity, than the power of intellect.<sup>101</sup> That was why, he thought, all the nations of the world had their poets before they came to have their philosophers.<sup>102</sup> The scientific philosopher was the last to appear in the intellectual history of mankind. Jones had great admiration for Newton whose *Principia* he had tried to master.<sup>103</sup> Newton's achievement in 'philosophy' was indeed unparalleled in the whole history of mankind.<sup>104</sup> Reason, indeed said Jones, was the grand prerogative of European minds;<sup>105</sup> in all kinds of useful knowledge Europe was far more advanced than Asia where scientific method was unknown.<sup>106</sup> In the sciences proper, therefore, the

---

99 W.C. Lehmann, *Adam Ferguson and the Beginnings of Modern Sociology*, 194; J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress* 221, n 3.

100 Jones, *The Works*, III, 30.

101 *Ibid.*, III, 229-30.

102 *Loc. cit.*

103 *Ibid.*, I, 409.

104 *Loc. cit.*

105 *Ibid.*, 12-13.

106 *Loc. cit.*



Asians, 'if compared with our Western nations, are mere children'.<sup>107</sup>

Had Jones compared Asian nations with European he would have found European superiority equally evident in government. Jones had as much admiration for Locke as for Newton.<sup>108</sup> He believed in the eternal, natural rights of man, and in his natural liberty.<sup>109</sup> Jones' dialogue on government, written in 1782, demonstrates the desirability and justification of armed resistance to irresponsible rulers.<sup>110</sup> He agreed with Montesquieu that the despotic form of government was the worst. As he said of the reader of universal history,

He could not but remark the constant effect of despotism in benumbing and debasing all those qualities, which distinguish men from the herd, that grazes; and to that cause he would impute the decided inferiority of most Asiatick nations, ancient and modern, to those in Europe who are blest with happier governments.<sup>111</sup>

Europe was in short, as Jones put it, the fair princess of the world, and Asia her handmaid.<sup>112</sup>

However, in common with the rest of mankind, Asian nations possessed the 'pure unsophisticated reason' which was the same everywhere and at all times.<sup>113</sup> Jones did not identify 'philosophy' with science, a specialization within philosophy. What he appreciated most in the natural sciences was their method and utility, a great achievement of the human reason which expressed itself, nonetheless, in purely speculative philosophy as well. It was the possession of pure reason that enabled men to discover some 'great and fundamental principles, which being

107 *Ibid.*, 19.

108 *Ibid.*, I, 292.

109 *Ibid.*, 334.

110 Jones' *Dialogue on Government* was published on the eve of his departure to India by the Society for Promoting Constitutional Information.

111 Jones, *The Works*, XIII, 12.

112 *Ibid.*, III, 229-252.

113 *Ibid.*, 245.

clearly deduced from natural reason, are equally diffused over mankind, and are not subject to alteration by any change of place or time.<sup>114</sup> The mere fact of the existence of philosophical speculation in a nation was a sufficient evidence, for Jones, that it had exercised the natural reason and hence, its due claim to recognition as a civilized nation.

Ethical principles, first, were discoverable through natural reason and had, therefore, been discovered by all nations. In his discourse on Asian philosophy Jones emphasized that morality was not an inductive science. Ethical principles were so few and luminous that no scientific progress was required for their discovery.<sup>115</sup> Revealed religion was necessary 'in the great system of providence' in order to enlighten only the ignorant and Christian ethics were no part of the proofs of revelation.<sup>116</sup> 'Our divine religion, the truth of which (if any history be true) is abundantly proved by historical evidence', had no need, said Jones, of the aid of its ethical principles in order to establish its divine origin. The wisest men of the world were not ignorant of the best maxims of the Christian religion, for the wise had known them in India, Persia and China.<sup>117</sup> Even the Code of Manu, which had many an other blemish, was full of 'a spirit of sublime devotion, of benevolence to mankind, and of amiable tenderness to all sentient creatures'.<sup>118</sup> Some of the most excellent morality was present in Arabic and Persian poetry.<sup>119</sup> Jones 'could not but respect the temple even of a false prophet' in which he found excellent morality.<sup>120</sup>

In religion too, all mankind had been given a share more or less of natural theism. Jones' religion, it has been

---

114 *Ibid.*, III, 243.

115 *Ibid.*, VII, 88-89; cf. Jones' epitaph composed by himself: 'wishing peace on earth and with good will to all creatures': *The Works*, II, 229-52.

116 *Ibid.*, III, 229-52.

117 *The Asiatick Researches*, II, 80.

118 A. J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 37.

119 Jones, *The Works*, I, 113, *passim*.

120 *Ibid.*, III, 125 & 320.

observed, was 'universal in theology'; neither a deist, nor an orthodox Anglican, Jones was 'a deeply religious man'.<sup>121</sup> Unwilling to accept anything as true if it did not satisfy his reason,<sup>122</sup> he had come to believe with Newton that the oldest religion of mankind, the primeval religion, was 'a firm belief that One Supreme God made the world by his power, and continually governed it by His providence; a pious fear, love and adoration of Him'. Jones added that this primeval theism was also 'the noblest'.<sup>123</sup> The Author of Nature (for all nature proclaims its divine author) could be deduced, said Jones with the deists, by human reason from 'all the various branches of science'; botany and chemistry were the languages of God 'in the stupendous volume of nature'; but this 'Almighty Chemist' was also the 'all creating and all preserving spirit, infinitely wise, good and powerful'.<sup>124</sup>

Jones had, therefore, a positive appreciation for what he thought was the theosophy of some Asian religions. With the exception of the ancient Hebrew, no language contained 'more pious and sublime addresses to the being of beings, more splendid enumerations of his attributes, or more beautiful descriptions of his visible works' than the Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit.<sup>125</sup> Jones' essay "On the Mystical Poetry of the Persians and Hindus" showed his appreciation of mystical theosophy; Rumi in his *Masnavi*, Hafiz in his *ghazals*, and Jayadeva in the *Gita Govinda* had given an immortal expression, in a figurative mode, to 'the fervour of devotion, or the ardent love of created spirits towards their beneficent Creator'.<sup>126</sup> The Vedanta appeared to Jones to have resembled the philosophy of some eighteenth-century thinkers of the West who had been neglected or misunderstood.<sup>127</sup> Jones was disposed to see

121 *Ibid.*, 250.

122 *Loc. cit.*

123 *Ibid.*, IV, 211.

124 *Ibid.*, III, 229-52.

125 Jones to Earl Spencer, quoted, A. J. Arberry, *Asiatic Jones*, 37.

126 *The Works*, III, 13.

127 *Ibid.*, 1-9.

the merit of some non-Christian doctrines if they appeared to him 'more rational, more pious and more likely to deter men from vice' than some of the Christian doctrines.<sup>128</sup>

The grand prerogative of Asia for Jones, however, was in the sphere of imagination.<sup>129</sup> According to Jones' classification, the sphere of the imagination comprehended all the fine arts, the 'imagery' and 'invention' conveyed in modulated language, colour, figure or sound;<sup>130</sup> poetry, painting, sculpture and music. Jones' view of the fine arts, more than anything else, seems to have informed his evaluation of the achievement of Asian nations.

It was Jones' attitude towards the arts which impelled him not to identify 'civilization' with the march of the mind. He was aware that D'Alembert, indeed the majority of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, had deliberately placed sciences before the arts.<sup>131</sup> Ever since the seventeenth-century literary battle between the 'ancients' and 'moderns' had been won by the latter in France and England, there had been a strong presumption in favour of the view that 'arts' progressed with the progress of knowledge. But the 'moderns' had won their victory at a great cost, for the instrument of knowledge was not the same, it was believed, as that of art; Imagination or fancy delivered only a brazen world, while the golden was reserved for the intellect. Sciences took priority over the arts. For Jones, however, the question of priority was irrelevant.<sup>132</sup> And, since he believed that the human imagination reached its maturity earlier than the human reason, it was easy for him to believe with Hugh Blair that the 'times which we call barbarous are the most favourable to the poetic

128 *Ibid.*, 229-30.

129 *Ibid.*, 230.

130 Blair's "Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian", quoted Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, I, 28-29.

131 Jones, *The Works*, III, 30.

132 *History of British India*, II, 139-40.

133 Jones, *The Works*, III, 71-102.

134 Jones to Reviczki, *The Works*, I, 164.



spirit'.<sup>133</sup> The chief reason why Jones regarded the pre-Muhammadan Arabs as 'eminently civilized' was their 'love of poetry and eloquence',<sup>134</sup> for the Tartars, as Mill pointed out,<sup>135</sup> had resembled the Arabs in many important ways; but, instead 'of poetry, the most universal and most natural of the fine arts' they had produced only 'some horrible war-songs'.<sup>136</sup> What Mill failed, or refused, to see was that much of Jones' praise for the Asians sprang ultimately from his general attitude towards the fine arts. In reclaiming, thus, the sphere of imagination, Jones foreshadowed the Romantics.

Jones' appreciation of Asian arts was based on an aesthetic theory which foreshadowed the Romantic. His spontaneous liking for Arabic and Persian poetry, unmistakable in his letters to Count Reviczki,<sup>137</sup> had synchronised with the beginning of a literary revolt against neo-classicism. Indeed, Jones repudiated the time-honoured conception of arts as 'imitation'.<sup>138</sup> In his *On Arts Commonly Called Immitative* (1771), written at the same time as he was amusing himself 'with the choicest of the Persian poets' (and writing his *Dissertation on Oriental Literature*), Jones expressed his decided view that art was essentially 'a strong and animated expression of the human passions'.<sup>139</sup> That was what he appreciated most in Hafiz and in the *Mu'laqat*. Music and painting, no less than poetry, Jones reiterated in his essay, "On the Musical Modes of the Hindus" (written in 1784 and enlarged later), pleased the senses and captivated the imagination by 'speaking, as it were, the language of beautiful nature, to raise corresponding ideas and emotions'.<sup>140</sup> Jones believed that Hindu

---

135 V. de Sola Pinto, "Sir William Jones and English Literature", *BSOAS*, XI, 689.

136 Jones, quoted, *ibid.*, 690.

137 *The Asiatick Researches*, III, 55.

138 Jones, *The Works*, III, 10-23.

139 *Ibid.*, 185.

140 *Ibid.*, X, 204-05, *passim*.

music was founded upon truer principles than the European.<sup>141</sup>

Jones' sense of cultural nationalism strongly influenced his attitude towards the Asian 'families of mankind'.<sup>142</sup> Each Asian nation was distinguished by its language, literature, arts, religion, laws and manners from other Asian or European nations. The 'civilizations' of the Hindus, the Arabs, the Persians and the Chinese were products of their peculiar 'genius'.<sup>143</sup> The fact that the Persians produced more poetry than 'all Europe together' was related to 'the general character of the nation'.<sup>144</sup> Those who condemned Asian taste in poetry did not reflect 'that every nation has a set of images, and expressions, peculiar to itself, which arise from the difference of its climate, manners and history'.<sup>145</sup> About the Turks 'we can no more wonder, that their rules of composition are different from ours, than that they build their palaces of wood, and sit on sofas instead of chairs'.<sup>146</sup> The religion, laws and manners of the Indians were the expression of their own peculiar genius and therefore sacrosanct.<sup>147</sup>

The implication of Jones' attitude for Indian government and politics was conservative. He was as capable of admiring the ancient civilization of the Hindus as he was of admiring 'the stately edifice' of the laws of England. For him, the Hindus were the earliest Asian people to evolve civilized society. It was not for the British to interfere with a civilization three thousand years old. Here was a most formidable adversary for Mill to assail.

---

141 *Ibid.*, 348-49.

142 *Ibid.*, 347.

143 *Ibid.*, II, 483.

144 *Ibid.*, III, 216.

145 *Ibid.*, 347.

146 *Ibid.*, II, 483.

147 *Ibid.*, III, 216.

## JAMES MILL ON HINDUISM

Until recently the historians of utilitarianism have paid only a cursory attention to James Mill's *History of British India*, and the historians of historiography have more or less ignored the close bearing of his philosophy on his *History*, particularly in its 'Hindu' part which had exercised a formative influence on the minds and attitudes of many among at least two generations of Englishmen in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> To regard the 'Hindu' portion of his *History* as either an extrapolation of late eighteenth-century Scottish sociological writing or a Benthamite propaganda is to miss the full significance of Mill's approach to Hindu society. This has been emphasized by Mr. Duncan Forbes who recommends the joined hands of the history of philosophy and the history of historiography to catch the significance of Mill's treatment of Hindu civilization.<sup>2</sup>

However, Mr. Forbes has not followed his own useful clue to an understanding of Mill's approach to Hinduism. He suggests that Mill in his treatment of Hindu civilization was using the 'Persian Letters technique' as a subtle way of putting to shame those institutions which the Benta-

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, John Stuart Mill's Preface to James Mill's *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, London 1869, xiii-xiv; and Alexander Bain's *James Mill*, London 1882, 176-77. 'To the student of forty years ago', says Bain, 'the reading of this book was an intellectual turning point'. The Hindu portion, a grand sociological display, was 'the best product of the author's genius'.

<sup>2</sup> 'James Mill and India', *The Cambridge Journal* (1951), 25-26.

## JAMES MILL ON HINDUISM

mites were attacking in England ; his assault on Hinduism was, thus, an indirect attack on Christianity. 'It can hardly be doubted', says Mr. Forbes, 'that the harshness of Mill's description of Hindu religion was due in part to the fact that it represented an indirect attack on Christianity'.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, given his 'religious philosophy', Mill's depiction of Hindu religion could be nothing but harsh. Early in life and through 'his own studies and reflection', he had rejected revelation ; and though he did not become a dogmatic atheist, he was convinced that nothing whatever could be known concerning 'the origin of things'.<sup>4</sup> The metaphysics of God and Soul thus thrown overboard, he thought of religious beliefs as intellectual errors. His aversion to such errors 'partook, in a certain sense, of the character of a moral feeling'; and he was always prone to project his strongest feelings into his opinions.<sup>5</sup> His temperament inevitably sharpened the anti-religious edge of his philosophy.

Mill rejected religion on moral even more than on intellectual grounds. He found it impossible to believe that a world full of evil could be the work of a Being whose attributes were both Goodness and Omnipotence. He often wondered why in his own day the Manichean 'theory' of a good and an evil principle was not revived as a plausible account of the realities of the moral world. In his view Christianity, like any other 'superstition', was in no way conducive to the earthly happiness of men ; and he regarded 'Juggernaut' with the feelings 'due not to a mere mental delusion but to a great moral evil'.<sup>6</sup> Thus though his philosophy pointed only toward agnosticism, his temperament led him straight to battle with Ahriman whose chief incarnation for him was religion.

It was not Benthamism that informed Mill's attitude to

---

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>4</sup> J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, London 1873, 39.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



religion; it was rather his attitude to religion that led him to Benthamite philosophy. He had formed his ideas on religion much before he met Bentham or came under his influence. After a successful career at the University of Edinburgh, Mill had been ordained but, as he confided much later to David Ricardo,<sup>7</sup> he could not long continue to preach what he did not believe. His review in 1802 of Belsham's *Elements of Logic and Moral Philosophy* reveals the general trend of Mill's thought on religion: 'till you have first proved the moral attributes of God', he raises the fundamental objection, 'it is absurd to offer a proof of revelation'.<sup>8</sup>

Mill appears to have been familiar by this time with David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. His main objection to Belsham's exposition of moral philosophy is an echo of a crucial question in the *Dialogues*: 'to what purpose establish the natural attributes of the Deity, while the moral are still doubtful and uncertain'?<sup>9</sup> In Hume's discussion of the problem, Philo the arch-sceptic insists on having a satisfactory answer to Epicurus's old question;<sup>10</sup> namely, is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent? Is he able but not willing? then is he malvolent? Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil? For Mill, these questions had not been satisfactorily answered and he went on considering the Manichean

---

7 D. Ricardo, *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, Cambridge 1951, VII, 213. 'What a misfortune', wrote James Mill to Ricardo on the 3rd December, 1817, 'what a cruel misfortune, it is, for a man to be obliged to believe a certain set of opinions, whether they be fit, or not, to be believed! I too was educated to be a priest—but I shall never cease feeling gratitude to my own resolution, for having decreed to be a poor man, rather be dishonest, either to my own mind, by smothering my convictions, or to my fellow creatures by using language at variance with my convictions'.

8 *Anti-Jacobin Review* (May, 1802), 13.

9 *Hume on Religion*, The Fontana Library, London and Glasgow 1963, 173.

10 *Ibid.*, 172.

## JAMES MILL ON HINDUISM

'theory' as a plausible explanation of good and evil in the world. This favourite 'theory' too had been put forward in the *Dialogues*: 'the Manichean system', says Philo, 'occurs as a proper hypothesis to solve the difficulty'; for it was more satisfactory than the common (that is, Christian) hypothesis which did not present a plausible account of the mixture of good and evil in life.<sup>11</sup> It is most likely that Mill had read Hume's *Dialogues*.

There is no doubt that Mill had read Hume's *The Natural History of Religion*. In his *History of British India*, he does not refer directly to the *Natural History*, but at one place he quotes 'Mr. Hume'.<sup>12</sup> This quotation is from a passage in the concluding section of the *Natural History* where, as a 'general corollary', religious principles appear to be nothing but sick men's dreams; and a philosopher could regard them, as indeed Mill did regard the principles of Hinduism, 'more as the playsome whimsies of monkeys in human shape, than the serious, positive, dogmatical asseverations of a being, who dignifies himself with the name of rational'.<sup>13</sup>

Mill in his treatment of Hinduism was indebted to Hume much more than he cared to acknowledge. There is hardly any important idea in Mill's chapter on Hindu religion which he could not find in the *Natural History*. In fact Hume's 'anthropological account' of religion in the *Natural History* could serve as a model for James Mill. From a deistic and a utilitarian standpoint, Hume had already shown the history of religion to have been a tale of intellectual error and moral evil. All that was left for Mill to do was to apply Hume's ideas on religion in general, to Hinduism in particular.

In the *Natural History* Hume had conducted his inquiry into religion under two self-imposed limitations: he did

---

11 *Ibid.*, 186.

12 James Mill, *History of British India*, I, 298

13 *Hume on Religion*, 98.

not subject 'revelation' to rational analysis and he did not question the validity of the *a posteriori* argument from Design for the existence of God. His primary concern was with a historical explanation of the belief in the existence of God. For him, this belief had 'its origin in human nature' and not in reason. 'It seems certain that, according to the natural progress of human thought, the ignorant multitude must first entertain some grovelling and familiar notion of superior powers, before they stretch their conception to that perfect Being, who bestowed order on the whole frame of nature'.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in Hume's account of the origin of polytheism, the primitive man had not arrived at his notions of a divine being by reflecting on the orderly and spacious firmament; he had simply personified his hopes and fears. Each natural event was supposed by mankind in its infancy to have been governed by some intelligent agent; and everything prosperous or adverse that could happen in life had called for peculiar thanksgiving or prayer. Agitated, thus by hopes and more so by fears, men had seen 'the first obscure traces of divinity' in *unknown causes*.<sup>15</sup> They had conceived their gods in their own image, ascribing to them 'thought and reason and passion, and sometimes even the limbs and figures of men'.<sup>16</sup>

Theism, which followed upon polytheism, arose from men's anxiety to worship and placate the gods they had created in their own image. They admitted the existence of several deities but nevertheless represented one of them as supreme among the rest, much like an earthly sovereign among his vassals. Then 'by every art, to insinuate themselves into his favour; and supposing himself to be pleased, like themselves, with praise and flattery', they spared no eulogy or exaggeration in their addresses to him. As their fears or distresses became more urgent, they invented new

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

strains of adulation in newer and more pompous epithets of praise. 'Thus they proceed; till at last they arrive at infinity itself, beyond which there is no farther progress'.<sup>17</sup> But their real idea of this supreme deity remained 'as poor and frivolous as ever'.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, this theism for Hume was 'a species of daemonism'.<sup>19</sup> The polytheists, in his view, had been a kind of 'superstitious atheists' precisely because in their idea of a deity, there was no first principle of mind or thought, no supreme government or administration, and no divine contrivance or intention in the fabric of the world.<sup>20</sup> Those who seemingly assented to theism were incapable of conceiving those sublime qualities which they attributed to God. Their belief in the existence of one god was 'merely verbal'; and their conception of the divine nature was essentially impious. In exalting the idea of their divinity, it was their notion of his power and knowledge only, not of his goodness, which had improved. In fact the higher the deity was exalted in power and knowledge, the lower he was depressed in goodness and benevolence.<sup>21</sup>

Depicting the influence of religion on the morals of men, Hume underlines their failure to realize 'that the most genuine method of serving the divinity is by promoting the happiness of his creatures'.<sup>22</sup> In every religion, however sublime the verbal definition of its divinity, the bulk of the votaries had sought divine favour 'not by virtue and good morals, which alone can be acceptable to a perfect being, but either by frivolous observances, by intemperate zeal, by rapturous extasies, or by the belief of mysterious and absurd opinion'.<sup>23</sup> The monkish virtues of mortification, penance, humility and passive suffering had been represented as the only qualities acceptable to God. Thus whippings,

---

17 *Ibid.*, 57.

18 *Ibid.*, 60.

19 *Ibid.*, 87.

20 *Ibid.*, 45.

21 *Loc. cit.*

22 *Ibid.*, 93.

23 *Ibid.*, 91.



fastings, abject obedience, slavish submission and 'the excessive penances of the Brachman's had become the means of obtaining celestial honours among mankind'.<sup>24</sup>

Jame Mill in his History judges Hinduism first from a deistic standpoint. Rational views of God according to him could be obtained either from revelation or from 'sound reflection upon the frame and government of the universe'.<sup>25</sup> In the absence of revelation, the Hindus could obtain their views of God only from their reflection upon the universe. It was almost impossible for them to have a rational view of the author of the universe precisely because their views of his works were 'in the highest degree absurd, mean and degrading'.<sup>26</sup> In Mill's metaphor, it was impossible for the stream to ascend higher than the fountain.

Mill had nonetheless to explain the prevalence of theism among the Hindus. His 'outline of the first religion which is suggested to the human mind' is a paraphrase of Hume's exposition of the rise of polytheism: the human mind in the early stages of its history could not comprehend the universe as a whole; the objects of nature were severally forced upon its attention; and divinity was attributed to all natural objects affecting human life.<sup>27</sup> Mill's account of the transformation of polytheism into theism is a replica of Hume's.

The timid barbarian, who is agitated by fears respecting the unknown events of nature, feels the most incessant and eager desire to propitiate the Being of whom he believes them to depend. His mind works, with laborious solicitude, to discover the best means of recommending himself. He naturally takes his own sentiments and feelings; and as nothing to his rude breast is more delightful than adulation, he is led by a species of instinct to expect the favour of his god from praise and flattery.<sup>28</sup>

---

24 *Ibid.*, 68, 92.

25 James Mill. *History of British India*, I, 329.

26 *Ibid.*, 340-41.

27 *Ibid.*, 284.

28 *Ibid.*, 293.

## JAMES MILL ON HINDUISM

In due course, one of the deities was made to encroach upon the domains of others one by one until the language of unity appeared and then, through the ingenuity of fear and desire which invented higher and higher strains of flattery, the language came to possess God, all in all, the beginning and the end, all powerful, all wise, all good.<sup>29</sup>

But this language of theism was no more than what Hume had called the 'verbal assent'. 'It is well ascertained', says Mill, 'that nations, who have the lowest and meanest ideas of the Divine Being, may yet apply to him the most sounding epithets by which perfection can be expressed'.<sup>30</sup> In fact language had a much greater tendency to improve than ideas: the use of sublime epithets in praise of the deity had little connection with the real idea of God.<sup>31</sup> The Hindus had never thought of the universe as a system 'directed to benevolent ends'. Therefore their religion was no other than that primitive worship which was addressed to the designing and invisible beings who were supposed to preside over the powers of nature 'according to their own arbitrary will, and act only for some private and selfish gratification'. Mill therefore had no illusions about Hindu theism:

The elevated language, which this species of worship finally assumes, is only the refinement, which flattery, founded upon a base apprehension of the divine character, ingrafts upon a mean superstition.<sup>32</sup>

The services agreeable to the God of the Hindus as much as their idea of the nature of divine power exhibited for Mill the true character of their deity. In Hinduism as he saw it, more than in any other religion, the moral part was completely subordinated to the ceremonial. Purifications were regarded as the chief service of the deity. Mill condemned 'the meanness, the absurdity, the folly of the endless ceremonies in which the practical part of the Hindu

---

29 *Ibid.*, 296.

30 *Ibid.*, 290.

31 *Ibid.*, 291.

32 *Ibid.*, 331.

religion consists'.<sup>33</sup> These 'frivolous observances' could contribute nothing to 'the production of happiness' which ought to be the worship most acceptable to the Creator.<sup>34</sup> For Mill, Hinduism was what Hume had called a species of demonism. The penances, like the purifications, indicated the qualities really ascribed to the object of worship.

All penance consists in suffering. In the same degree in which the object of worship is supposed to be delighted with penance, in the same degree he is delighted with human suffering; and so far as he delights in suffering, for its own sake, so far he is a malignant being; whatever epithets in the spirit of flattery, his votaries may confer upon him. It is natural to a rude and ignorant mind to regard the object of its worship as malignant.<sup>35</sup>

Mill's discussion of the Hindu doctrine 'concerning the nature and destination of the human soul' reminds one of Hume's essay 'On the Immortality of the Soul'. Hume had argued that, whether on metaphysical, moral or physical grounds, it was difficult to prove the immortality of the soul by 'the mere light of reason'.<sup>36</sup> He had also considered and rejected metempsychosis as a 'hypothesis',<sup>37</sup> Mill, accepting Hume's position, tries simply to explain the origin of the belief in the immortality of the soul: the notion of metempsychosis was founded according to Mill upon a crude analogy from nature which though always in flux, was never annihilated.<sup>38</sup> Both for Hume<sup>39</sup> and Mill, belief in the immortality of the soul was at best amoral: 'rewards and punishments, very distant and very obscure, would be wholly impotent against temptation to crime'; but the idea of future rewards and punishments could serve

---

33 *Ibid.*, 340-44.

34 *Ibid.*, 341.

35 *Ibid.*, 346.

36 *Hume on Religion*, 263.

37 *Ibid.*, 268-69.

38 James Mill, *History of British India*, I, 370-74.

39 *Hume on Religion*, 264.

## JAMES MILL ON HINDUISM

the priests nonetheless to 'engage the people in a ceaseless train of wretched ceremonies'.<sup>40</sup>

Mill's account of Hindu theology is not much harsher than Hume's judgment on theology in general. For Hume all popular theology had 'a kind of appetite for absurdity and contradiction'.<sup>41</sup>

To oppose the torrent of scholastic religion by such feeble maxims as these, that it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be, that the whole is greater than a part, that two and three make five ; is pretending to stop the ocean with a bullrush.<sup>42</sup>

It could be argued in fact that ten thousand volumes of theological sophistry were 'not equal in value to one cabbage or cucumber'.<sup>43</sup> The harshness of Mill's judgment on Hinduism may thus be explained largely in terms of his philosophical assumption which he shared with Hume.

However, whereas Hume had been happy to enjoy the calm regions of philosophy and had been content to convince himself that the ignorant and the vulgar would always have their superstition in one form or another, Mill in the shining armour of his philosophy was eager to enter the lists against Ahriman to eradicate all forms of superstition. He was first and foremost a reformer who believed himself to know 'the art of revolution'.

Indeed, it has been observed that, though Mill's motives for writing on India were complex, uppermost was his desire to apply utilitarian doctrines in governing British India.<sup>44</sup> It has also been noted that his 'science' of civilization, closely linked with the utilitarian programme of reform, was a practical science: 'To ascertain the true state of the Hindus in the scale of civilisation' was, to the rulers of British India, 'an object of the highest practical impor-

---

40 James Mill, *History of British India*, I, 374.

41 *Hume on Religion*, 71.

42 *Ibid.*, 72.

43 *Ibid.*, 74.

44 C.H. Philips, *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London 1961, 219-20.



tance'.<sup>45</sup> It has been suggested that Mill's ultimate criterion for judging the Hindus was the principle of Utility, which automatically reduced the Hindus to a state of semi-barbarism. All this is of course relevant to an understanding of his attitude to Hindu society as well as to Hinduism. But his relation to his British predecessor on India which is equally relevant, has been completely ignored.

By the time Mill was writing his *History*, British historical writing on India had become nearly half a century old. He was keenly aware of the attitudes of his predecessors towards India and of the practical implications of their work for governing British India. His approach to Hindu society and Hinduism was determined partly by the work of his predecessors.

In the first place, Mill chose to give a thorough treatment to Hindu civilization not simply because he was an admirer of the Scottish sociological school of historians but chiefly because Hindu civilization had become a subject of great interest in Great Britain by the early years of the nineteenth century. The scope of British interest in India's past had been expanding throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>46</sup> Already, before Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society in 1784 with the object of exploring all that Asian man had achieved, many of the aspects of Hindu society and civilization had come in for attention. Jones in his attempt to rediscover the whole of Hindu past had made India almost synonymous with Hindu India.

Furthermore, Mill's predecessors on the Hindus had provided a strong intellectual support for conservative attitudes to British India by creating a brilliant image of Hindu civilization. Jones in particular had tended to place the Hindus at par with the ancient Greeks, if not above them. At any rate, Hindu civilization could compare well with

---

<sup>45</sup> James Mill, *History of British India*, II, 135.

<sup>46</sup> "Early British Interest in India's Past", *supra*.

## JAMES MILL ON HINDUISM

any other in the world. for the ancient Hindus were 'splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge'.<sup>47</sup> Jones's judgment had been accepted by many a late eighteenth-century writer on India. Thomas Maurice, for example, wrote voluminously on the Hindus as a professed disciple of Jones and in a Jonesian strain. William Robertson, then a historian of European repute, reinforced Jones's judgment on the Hindus: 'the natives of India were not only more early civilised, but had made greater progress in civilisation than any other people'.<sup>48</sup> Robertson was quite explicit that the Hindus deserved to be treated as a civilized people.<sup>49</sup> On such a view, the Hindus could retain, also perhaps revive, some of their ancient institutions. In fact the practical implications of the work of many a late eighteenth-century writer on India for the government of British India were conservative.

Consequently, Mill was 'constrained to controvert' Jones and his satellites.<sup>50</sup> Though he criticized most of his predecessors, he treated Jones as his chief adversary. Whereas others had appreciated one or another aspect of Hindu civilization, Jones had admired that civilization as a whole. For Mill, Jones's work was the epitome of British conservatism regarding British India. This intellectual support must be destroyed to clear the way for radical social change: it must be proved that civilized India was a 'myth' created by mistaken zealots.<sup>51</sup> For this eristic purpose, as Mill's biographer indulgently remarked, the bow was bent 'too far in the opposite direction'.<sup>52</sup>

---

47 *The Works of Sir William Jones*, London 1807, III, 32.

48 *The Works of William Robertson*, London 1817, XII, 197.

49 *Ibid.*, 136-37.

50 James Mill, *History of British India*, II, 138, *passim*.

51 *Ibid.*, 137-41.

52 A. Bain, *James Mill*, 177. Already in 1840, H.H. Wilson in his Preface to Mill's *History* had remarked that Mill 'sought to reduce' the Hindus as far below their 'proper level' as Jones had raised them above it.

For gauging the depth of Mill's preoccupation with his adversaries, one may profitably turn to the 'Muhammadan' portion of his *History*. Here he does not attempt to place the Indo-Muslims in the scale of civilization. His immediate predecessor on Islam, Edward Gibbon, had already done this for him. In Gibbon's evaluation Muslim civilization at its best was far inferior to modern European. Mill's task, therefore, is confined to showing that the Muslims in medieval India were far superior to the Hindus whether in government, laws, religion, philosophy, literature, science, arts, technology, historiography or morals and manners. And then, he argues that Hindu civilization could not have declined by coming into contact with a superior civilization. This argument was directed against his adversaries who had attributed the decline of Hindu civilization to the conquest of India by the Muslims. Evidently, Mill was deeply preoccupied with refuting his predecessors on the Hindus.

In his treatment of Hindu religion, Mill's animus may be explained partly in terms of this general eristic purpose. In his analysis, the Hindus appeared to be the most degraded demon-worshippers that were ever suffered to crawl upon the face of this earth, certainly because, inter alia, in Jones' description they had graced the world with their pure theism, profound theology, subtle metaphysics and sincere devotion to the Author of the Universe.

## ADVOCACY OF CHANGE IN INDIA

Charles Grant left India in 1790, twentytwo years after his arrival, and soon after his return to England he wrote his *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals, and on the Means of Improving it.*<sup>1</sup> He argued at length that British rule could never be reconciled to India until and unless the 'nature of Hindostan' was radically altered. About the 'nature' of Hindustan, he had no illusion :

It is the universality of great depravity that is here insisted on, a general moral hue, between which, and the European moral complexion, there is a difference, analogous to the difference of the natural colour of the two races.<sup>2</sup>

In his opinion, social reform was impossible without moral reformation. Therefore he advocated 'moral imperialism' through the introduction of Christianity which alone in his view, could give permanence to social and political reform in British India.

In his advocacy of radical social change in India Charles Grant was followed by James Mill who assailed Indian society on a much wider front in his *History of British India*. He argued that the state of civilization in India must be determined to decide what sort of government, laws

---

1 Written chiefly in the year 1792 and meant originally for Henry Dundas, it was presented formally to the Court of Directors in 1797 and was published by order of the House of Commons in 1813. By 1820 it was widely known in Evangelical circles as an 'indispensable and decisive authority' : A.T. Embree, *Charles Grant and British Rule in India*, London 1962, 142.

2 *Observations*, London 1813, 31.



and economy were needed for British India. He tried to prove that the Hindus had always remained in a very rude state of civilization. Indeed,

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.<sup>3</sup>

In his discussion of Indian government, laws and economy, James Mill propounded and, by implication, prescribed the 'art of revolution' for a 'semi-barbarous' society through better government, rational laws and economic prosperity.

Charles Grant and James Mill represented, respectively, the Evangelical and the Utilitarian point of view. Though widely different in their ideas and assumptions, the Utilitarians and the Evangelicals adopted nearly the same attitude towards India while advocating radical change. Our present purpose is limited to a brief exposition of their ideas and assumptions, without going into the question of what they actually did or tried to do for bringing about social change in British India.

It must be emphasized at the outset that the Utilitarians were the direct heirs of the Enlightenment, that eighteenth-century endeavour to secularize all departments of human life and thought. The philosophers of the Enlightenment had whole heartedly accepted the discoveries of modern science, tried to follow its methods in all human inquiry, and worked out or popularized its implications for philosophy, religion, ethics and politics. David Hume, for example, had attempted to introduce 'the experimental method' into moral subjects. In his theory of knowledge the metaphysics of God and Soul were not rational knowledge. Divinity and theological speculation were useless intellectual pursuits for they could add nothing to the knowledge of things as they were. Therefore, religion was irrational. The philosophers of the Enlightenment were

---

<sup>3</sup> *History of British India*, II, 190.

## ADVOCACY OF CHANGE IN INDIA

contemptuous of all institutional religion, including Christianity. Far from founding their ethics on religion or revelation, they would judge rather religious ethics from an independent, secular standpoint. Hume, for instance, expounded a Hedonistic and a utilitarian theory of morals. Naturally, the thinkers of the Enlightenment, like Hume, were contemptuous of 'monkish' morality. Politics, even more than ethics, were a secular activity for them. Science, with all its implications for technology, and reason, with its dominion over all spheres of life, promised to them an unparalleled progress in the future.

The idea of a progressive realization of human happiness on earth through the application of human reason to the problems of society found the most thorough elaboration in the works of Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. Between 1789 and 1815, the Utilitarian doctrine was fully evolved and popularized through Bentham's English and continental disciples. James Mill, a disciple who at times could teach his master, converted Bentham to democracy; and Utilitarian philosophy became politically radical. Bentham's alliance with James Mill, and Mill's friendship with Malthus and Ricardo, created almost a sect with compact formularies and inexorable conclusions in a Utilitarian creed of progress.

As a practical creed, Utilitarianism was an attempt to provide scientific basis for changing society for the better. The Utilitarians believed that knowledge could be power not only over nature but also over man himself. 'The age we live in', said Bentham, 'is a busy age; in which knowledge is rapidly advancing towards perfection. In the natural world in particular, everything teems with discovery and with improvement'.<sup>4</sup> Scientific knowledge was not contemplative and theoretical but active and practical, aiming at securing domination over external nature through the discovery of its laws. Could not the moral

---

<sup>4</sup> Quoted, A. Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, London 1960, 175.

world be improved by the discovery of its laws? 'What Bacon was to the physical world, Helvetius was to the moral. The moral world has, therefore had its Bacon; but its Newton is yet to come'.<sup>5</sup>

Bentham aspired to be Newton of the moral world. The pleasure-pain motivation was the gravitational law of Utilitarian ethics.

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of cause and effect, are fastened to their throne.<sup>6</sup>

A man might pretend to abjure the empire of pain and pleasure but remained in reality subject to it all the time. Bentham's law of psychological hedonism was at best a generalization from experience, but he tended to treat it as a self-evident proposition. His primary object was to draw the corollary that any theory of morals must recognize this fundamental law of the moral world. In his view, the principle of utility was founded upon this very recognition. It was 'that principle which states the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question, as being the right and proper, and the only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human action'.<sup>7</sup> Thus it was the greatest happiness of the greatest number that was the measure of right and wrong.

Assuming the principle of Utility to be the expression of an objective law of human nature, Bentham attempted to reduce ethics to 'moral arithmetic'.<sup>8</sup> Nothing was in itself desirable or capable of being desired except pleasure or the relief of pain; one man's pleasure was in itself as

---

5 Jeremy Bentham, quoted, E. Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism* (Eng. tr. Mary Morris), London 1952, 19.

6 Bentham, quoted, A. Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, 177.

7 Bentham, quoted, J. Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians*, Oxford 1949, 70.

8 E. Albee, *A History of Utilitarianism*, London 1900.

## ADVOCACY OF CHANGE IN INDIA

desirable as any other's; the right action was the one which in the agent's belief was productive of the greatest happiness under any particular circumstance. But both Bentham and James Mill regarded human nature as essentially self-regarding and, therefore, in their theories of morals they tried to reconcile egoistic hedonism with the principle of Utility.

For the Utilitarians, the reconciler of selfish interests was the state. Its function ended with the conciliation of interests and did not extend to the promotion of a good life otherwise conceived. The necessity of government for the existence of society could be taken for granted; the business of government was to promote the happiness of the society. The ultimate criterion for judging the worth of any political theory or practice was the principle of Utility, 'that reason, which alone depends not upon any higher reason, but which is itself the sole and all-sufficient reason for every point of practice what so ever'.<sup>9</sup>

For Bentham and James Mill, the state was authoritarian for it was not barred from acting in any manner considered to favour the ends of Utility. Bentham had no hesitation in rejecting 'equality' when it was opposed to 'security'. Nevertheless, the democratic was the form of government best calculated to serve Utilitarian aims. James Mill presented the case for democracy in simple and vigorous terms.<sup>10</sup> Representative democracy was Mill's great 'discovery' of which he spoke as if the system was sure to work like Watt's steam engine.<sup>11</sup> In its function of 'the mechanism of the egoistic passions',<sup>12</sup> it could promote public interest through legislation.

For the Utilitarians, the science of morals and politics was inseparable from the science of legislation. Indeed,

---

9 Bentham, quoted, A. Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, 178.

10 *Government* (Encyclopaedia Britannica article, published separately).

11 L. Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, London 1900, II, 83.

12 E. Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 203.



the most important of Bentham's works was entitled "Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation". A rational code of law was the core of Utilitarian reform. It could show what existing laws were to be abolished or amended and what new laws were to be made. Here, as elsewhere, the great criterion of good codification was the principle of Utility. All punishment was painful and necessarily evil ; therefore, punishment should always be so contrived that, with the least possible pain to the culprit, they should produce the greatest deterrent effect ; and, on the same principle, punishment should be certain and immediate. If the fine of one shilling, as James Mills says in his *History*, could obviate murder, one shilling must be the punishment for the crime of murder.<sup>13</sup> Both the laws and punishments in every society ought to be so adjusted that, with the least infliction of pain, they ensured that men from selfish motives should act in ways which would promote other men's as well as their own happiness.<sup>14</sup>

Bentham assumed and James Mill elaborated a theory of psychology which supported their confidence in the power of education as well as legislation to advance the progress of a society. There was nothing in human nature which was not the product of human environment and environment was something that could be reformed. Bentham was hostile to the fatalistic theory of climate popularized by Montesquieu ; both Bentham and James Mill regarded Helvetius, who had discarded all deterministic theories, as the greater philosopher. No climate and no soil could deny man happiness through moral influences.<sup>15</sup> Mill developed, in his *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind*, 'the doctrine of association' which found its application in his essays on education.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, as Sir Leslie Stephen has emphasized, the 'infinite

---

13 London 1820, (2nd. ed.), 6 Vols., I, 226.

14 J. Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians*, 72-73.

15 E. Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 68.

16 For example, *The Philanthropist* (1821) ; *The Edinburg Review* (1813).

## ADVOCACY OF CHANGE IN INDIA

modifiability of character' was the ground upon which the Utilitarians based their hopes of progress.<sup>17</sup>

The Utilitarians expressed their hopes of progress in commercial and industrial liberalism. In the economic sphere, there was no need of the artificial identity of interests because, by the beneficent arrangements of Nature, the pursuit of selfish individual interests coincided with the greatest happiness of the human race.<sup>18</sup> Bentham pointed out Adam Smith's self-contradiction in permitting the legislator to fix the rate of interest; Bentham's attack on the usury laws was logically grounded upon Adam Smith's own principle.<sup>19</sup> Ricardo, whose chief interest was in the 'laws' of distribution as Adam Smith's was in those of production, concluded that the cause of economic progress was, ultimately, the accumulation of capital; in spite of his forecast of a halt in economic progress, Ricardo remained true to the doctrine of *laissez faire*, because the capitalist economy was progressing.<sup>20</sup> In Malthus as well as in Ricardo, one can see, as Halevy puts it, 'collective thought using the thought of the individual tyrannically and for its own ends'.<sup>21</sup>

In Bentham's or Mill's moral theory there was hardly any room for religion, natural or revealed. Utilitarianism implied the rejection of all theology, for religion like everything else must be subjected to the test of Utility. On that test, it was either useless or positively pernicious. Indeed, the Utilitarians were anxious to crush the 'infamous', albeit indirectly. Bentham's *Church of England Catechism Explained* reveals the intensity of his animus against the Church. Christianity was nick-named 'Jug' from 'Juggernaut', that is Jagan Nath, where the victims of superstition

---

17 *The English Utilitarians*, II, 83.

18 L. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, London 1902, II, 321.

19 J. Plamenatz, *The English Utilitarians*, 61.

20 *Ibid.*, 120.

21 *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 342.

willingly crushed themselves under the wheels of its infamous chariot. All Churchmen were 'Juggical'.<sup>22</sup> The alliance of 'Church and State' was regarded by the Utilitarians as 'the unholy alliance' of 'sinister interests'.<sup>23</sup>

If the Utilitarians carried the secularization of life and thought to its logical extremes, the Evangelicals tended to subordinate everything else to their religion. They were the heirs of a religious movement, the Methodist. Just when David Hume was ridiculing 'our most holy religion' by showing its irrationality, John Wesley was converting his tens of thousands 'not by rational ethical suation' but by impassioned appeals to the heart.<sup>24</sup> He was 'as indifferent to the doubts expressed by Hume as if the two men had lived in different hemispheres'.<sup>25</sup> Wesley had reaffirmed the old Protestant certainties: inward assurance, private judgment, fear and hope which saved the soul from the devil and from the tyranny of vice and selfishness.<sup>26</sup>

The Evangelical movement ran parallel in time with the Utilitarian. In 1791, two years after the publication of Bentham's doctrine, Wilberforce received Wesley's exhortation to go on 'in the name of God, and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it';<sup>27</sup> already, Wilberforce had participated in practical reform. Hannah More as well as Wilberforce brought wit and fashion to the support of religious revival; Cowper brought his poetic gifts. Wilberforce's classic *Practical View* appeared almost simultaneously with a Utilitarian classic, Malthus' *Population*. The greatest victories of the Evangelicals and the Utili-

22 *Ibid.*, 294.

23 B. Willey, *Nineteenth Century Studies*, London 1949, 134-35.

24 B. Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background*, London 1957, 109.

25 L. Stephen, *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, I, 423.

26 *Ibid.*, 411.

27 Quoted, T.B. Shepherd, *Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, 57.

## ADVOCACY OF CHANGE IN INDIA

tarians, the Abolition of Slavery and Reform of the Poor Law, were won in 1833 and 1834. By this time, the Evangelical faith was hardening into a code. It had become, in Halevy's words, 'the moral cement of English society'.<sup>28</sup>

This Evangelical creed, above all ethical, was at once the basis of morality and the justification of wealth and power. The virtues of a Christian, after the Evangelical model, were among other things the virtues of a successful merchant or manufacturer. Self-reliance, seriousness, discipline in the home and regularity in the public affairs, responsibility, philanthropy and the sense of being the elect provided the ethical trenchancy for this 'new form of Christianity' at once practical, social, 'utilitarian and peitistic'.<sup>29</sup> In this 'hardy, serviceable, fruit-bearing and patrimonial religion' there were few pleasures allowed for the gratification of the senses; these were limited to the pleasure of a 'table lawfully earned and the embraces of a wife lawfully wedded'.<sup>30</sup> However, whatever the energies released for this life by the 'Vital Religion', the primary concern of the Evangelicals was with saving souls, those of others no less than their own; their ethical creed was a means to that end.

Evangelical morality was an expression of Evangelical faith. In theology, 'moderate Calvinists', the Evangelicals had a profound apprehension of the contrary states of Nature and Grace, 'one meriting eternal wrath, the other meant for eternal happiness'.<sup>31</sup> They felt the utter need of conversion and of divine grace; for them, the foundation of the Christian religion was not the Incarnation so much as the Atonement. They insisted that the demands of

---

28 E. Halevy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, Ernest Benn Limited, London 1961, III, 163.

29 E. Halevy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, 82.

30 J. Stephen, *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*, London 1850, II, 308; G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 2.

31 S.C. Carpenter, *Eighteenth Century Church and People*, London 1959, 218; G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 2.



eternity as well as of time could be met only by those who had the same faith as theirs.<sup>32</sup> The soul, naked and helpless, 'acknowledges its worthlessness before God and the justice of God's infinite displeasure, and then, taking hold of salvation in Christ, passes from darkness into a light which makes more fearful the destiny of those unhappy beings who remain without'. As the children of light, the Evangelicals believed themselves to be the willing agents of God's will. The fulfilment of God's will was 'effected by the ministry, sometimes spontaneous, at other time reluctant, of other wills subordinate to the Supreme'.<sup>33</sup>

A teleological view of the universe was the core of Evangelical faith. The spiritual significance of man's plight on earth was the 'protracted conflict between light and darkness', a conflict in which a general movement of events towards the final triumph of good over evil was the result of an all-controlling Providence, the instrument of God's mercy.<sup>34</sup> This 'economy of things', they believed, was coming to its close; for time had come now for the renewal of the primeval dawn of existence.<sup>35</sup> Man's redemption was now in sight for the religion of Christ was conquering the world. It was God's pleasure now to reveal the truth of Christ to all mankind.

Notwithstanding 'the intense introversion' of Evangelicalism, its relevance for secular progress was unmistakable. The theory of progress, it has been pointed out,<sup>36</sup> had recapitulated in a different language the main features of a theological interpretation of history. The Evangelicals thought of progress as a sign of God's grace, and mourned over the ills inseparable from the progress of society (without shrieks and hysterics).<sup>37</sup> To Hazlitt, they appeared to

32 G.R. Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 153.

33 J. Stephen, *Essays*, II, 344.

34 *Ibid.*, 378.

35 *Ibid.*, 345.

36 C. Frankel, *The Faith of Reason*, New York 1948, 154.

37 J. Stephen, *Essays*, II, 308.

## ADVOCACY OF CHANGE IN INDIA

serve 'God and Mammon',<sup>38</sup> but the society with its laws, ethics, economics and politics had an 'internal connexion' with the Evangelicals' science of God.<sup>39</sup> Secular progress was an instrument of divine providence to fulfil God's purposes.

The Evangelical movement complemented the Utilitarian. The former was conservative in those very spheres in which the latter was radical, namely in religion and politics. Education and philanthropy provided a common ground for both; with opposite premises, the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians could often come to the same or similar practical conclusions. The Evangelical ethic restrained indulgence of the senses; the Evangelical distrust of intellect imposed restraint on curiosity, on criticism and science. Nevertheless, the energy of Evangelicalism expressed itself in material, mundane pursuits. Both for the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians, poetry and the arts had little value; for Bentham 'pushpin is as good as poetry';<sup>40</sup> and for the Evangelicals, who discountenanced enjoyment and art, a novel or a picture could 'plant a seed of corruption in the most innocent heart'.<sup>41</sup> Intellectual knowledge was for the Utilitarians the only valid form of knowledge, as religious was for the Evangelicals. Poetic truth was either useless or harmful in so far as the Utilitarians or the Evangelicals concerned themselves with it at all.

---

38 *The Spirits of the Age* (World Classics, 57), 242.

39 J. Stephen, *Essays*, II, 308.

40 Bentham, quoted, A Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, 178.

41 G.M. Young, *Portrait of an Age*, 2.

## JAMES GRANT DUFF ON THE MARATHAS

James Grant Duff (1789-1858), the author of the *History of the Mahrattas* (1826), is known to almost every student of Maratha history. That his work has served as the foundation of modern historiography on the Marathas is evident from the fact that J. N. Sarkar in his study of Shivaji regarded Grant Duff as his direct predecessor.<sup>1</sup> Grant Duff was not the first British historian of the Marathas but his superiority over his British predecessors was established immediately upon the appearance of his work and it was never questioned afterwards. To question that superiority is not the purpose of this paper either; its purpose is to understand the secret of Grant Duff's success as a historian of the Marathas; not to resurrect him but to return him to his historical milieu.

Grant Duff's intellectual conquests were made possible, first, by the political conquests of the East India Company. After the final defeat of the Marathas, he was appointed British Resident to the court of Satara. One of his important duties was to preserve the records of the former government. He was encouraged by Mountstuart Elphinstone and Thomas Munro to collect materials on Maratha history. Their fear that 'the only chance of recovering the records of a very extraordinary power, the history of which was known in a very superficial manner' might be lost through indifference or negligence was in all probability shared by Grant Duff.<sup>2</sup> He felt obliged to employ agents for the collection of materials not only in Maha-

---

1 See his preface to *Shivaji And His Times*.

2 Grant Duff to H.E. Goldsmith, *JRAS* (Bombay Branch), X, 121-25.

## JAMES GRANT DUFF ON THE MARATHIAS

rashtra but all over British India. Mountstuart Elphinstone, who as the Governor of Bombay was now occupying a prominent position among the Anglo-Indian administrators, used his influence and prestige to help Grant Duff in his ambitious task of collecting all relevant materials for a comprehensive history of the Marathas. The papers in the Peshwa's *daftar* and in his palaces, his public and secret correspondence, the records of the Satara Government, the Surat Factory, the Bombay Government and of the Portuguese Government at Goa were made available to him. Over a hundred Marathi and Persian manuscripts some of them as voluminous as his *History*, were translated for his use.<sup>3</sup> He collected, with patience and perseverance, records from temples and private repositories, family legends, royal and imperial deeds, law suits and legal decisions as well as public and private correspondence and state papers in possession of 'the descendants of men once high in authority'.<sup>4</sup> The mass and variety of evidence thus collected by Grant Duff set him far above his predecessors and he was quite aware of this.<sup>5</sup>

The care and devotion which he personally brought to bear upon his work is a measure of his interest in the subject of his study. As he told his friend Goldsmid,<sup>6</sup> Grant Duff wrote the greater part of his *History* in India while he was otherwise employed for more than twelve hours a day and, consequently, he was 'subject to very severe headaches'. He refused at the cost of popularity and monetary gain to alter the title of his work. He did not expect the *History of the Mahrattas* to be either a popular or 'an outfit book' (for the Anglo-Indian administrator) yet he published it at his own expense. He was content to leave the recognition of his merit to 'time, and time only'. Grant Duff's devotion to his work sprang partly from the

---

3 *History of the Mahrattas* (1878), Preface, vii.

4 *Ibid.*, I, 284, n ; also, Preface, vii.

5 *Ibid.*, Preface, v, x.

6 *JRAS* (Bombay Branch), X, 120-25.



importance he attached to the knowledge of Indian history. Since many an institution 'now found in the country' had its roots deep in the past, it was impossible to understand the present without a knowledge of the past. And to govern India well, which was certainly in the interest of Great Britain, it was necessary for 'England to become acquainted with India'.<sup>7</sup> Grant Duff regretted the indifference of the East India Directors to his *History* precisely because he believed it to contain some practical implications for British rule in India. Without a good knowledge of Maratha history at any rate, 'we cannot fully understand the means, by which our own vast empire in that quarter was acquired'.<sup>8</sup> Grant Duff was frankly proud of the East India Company's political achievement in which he had played his, albeit minor, part.<sup>9</sup> He saw the British dominion in India as a source of national prosperity, power and prestige.<sup>10</sup> He admired his friend and guide, Mountstuart Elphinstone, for his sagacious settlement of the conquered territory.<sup>11</sup> In so far as Grant Duff looks upon the political achievement of the Marathas as poorly in comparison with the British imperial achievement in India, his *History* becomes a justification for the British Indian Empire.<sup>12</sup>

However, to look upon Grant Duff's work simply as a piece of imperialistic propaganda would be to miss the

---

7 *History of the Mahrattas* (1878), ix; I, 25, 35.

8 *Ibid.*, v.

9 *Ibid.*, I, 647; II, 74.

10 *Ibid.*, I, 645-46, 462, n.

11 *Ibid.*, II, 602-20.

12. Grant Duff looked upon the Maratha power as an 'engine of destruction'. A bi-valency in his attitude is embodied in the texture of his language and even in his metaphors: for example, 'like the parched grass, kindled amid the forests of the Syhadree mountains, they burst forth in spreading flame, and men afar off wondered at the conflagration'. About the expansion of the empire of the Marathas, he says explicitly that 'no other nation can sympathise in their conquests': *History of the Mahrattas*, (1878), I, 478, 594.

essential character of his *History*. One has only to compare his work with that of his immediate predecessor, Edward Scott Waring, to discover that Grant Duff's essential attitude towards the Marathas was sympathetic. To Scott Waring the Marathas had appeared to be 'a benighted and besotted nation'; their history showed only 'the fatal effects which result from false religions and the perverted principles which they instil'.<sup>13</sup> Grant Duff too underlined the destruction, rapine, oppression and tyranny which he believed were the concomitants of Maratha conquests; but, though the Marathas were unfeeling and ungenerous victors, they were not blood-thirsty and their religion had nothing to do with their rapacity.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, their political pre-eminence was animating and glorious for 'a conquered people in their native land'.<sup>15</sup> Grant Duff intended to pay the Marathas a great compliment when he referred to them as 'our immediate predecessors'.<sup>16</sup> He was the first British historian to present Maratha history as the dominant phenomenon of the politics of eighteenth-century India.

Grant Duff was interested in the rise and progress of the Marathas as a 'nation' more than in their decline and fall. In a paper read to the Bombay Literary Society, he had attempted to discover the origins of the Marathas in the ancient history of Maharashtra. He was uncertain of any connections between the ancient and the modern people of Maharashtra; the proper study of the Marathas began, therefore, with their political condition on the eve of Muslim domination in the Deccan, and the socio-political organization of the people of Maharashtra largely explained the genesis of Maratha power. At the close of the thirteenth century Maharashtra was divided into a number of

---

13 *A History of the Mahrattas*, London 1810, 90-110; reference 30; Preface, xi; 89.

14 *History of the Mahrattas*, I, 595.

15 *Ibid.*, I, 25, 594-95.

16 *Ibid.*, I, 36.

petty states or chieftainships. Indeed, every village was a 'small state in miniature'; the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandey*s, with their hereditary rights in land—their *watan*, formed the basic units of political power. They found a great ally in the physiognomy of their country: 'in a military point of view, there is probably no stronger country in the world'.<sup>17</sup> Under suitable conditions, the *deshmukhs* and *deshpandey*s were likely to assume independence as *naiks*, *poligars* and *rajas*.<sup>18</sup> The Muslim conquest of Maharashtra from the very beginning was partial; Muslim policy, conciliatory. The foundation itself of the Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan was 'aided by the native princes'.<sup>19</sup> The conciliatory policy of its founder was informed by his desire to bind 'all classes of his new subjects to his interest'.<sup>20</sup> The *deshmukhs* and *deshpandey*s were given, or confirmed in, *jagirs*; several of them were given a command of two to three hundred horse. They soon came to play their subordinate part in the politics of the kingdom. Bahram Khan Mazandrani, for instance, was supported in his revolt in A.D. 1366 largely by the natives of Maharashtra.

The process by which the Marathas were coming to hold political power at subordinate levels was accentuated by the decline of the kingdom of Bahmani and the rise of the kingdoms of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda. From about A.D. 1530, when Kunwar Sen became the *peshwa* of Burhan Nizam Shah, Maratha influence in the Nizam Shahi government began to increase.<sup>21</sup> Ibrahim Adil Shah enlisted 30,000 horsemen largely from among the common Marathas. He showed in fact 'a great preference for the natives of Maharashtra, both as men of business and as

17 *Ibid.*, I, 7.

18 *Ibid.*, I, 24-25, *passim*.

19 *Ibid.*, I, 43. Their contribution was more, says Grant Duff, 'than the Mussulman historian was aware of, or perhaps was willing to allow'.

20 *Ibid.*, I, 44.

21 *Ibid.*, I, 63.

soldiers'.<sup>22</sup> His decision to keep revenue accounts in Marathi 'of course, tended to increase the power and consequence of Mahratta Brahmins'.<sup>23</sup> In the reign of Yusuf Adil Shah, Moray Naik commanded 12,000 Maratha infantry. Jagpal, famous for his restless campaigning in the early seventeenth century, was the maternal uncle of Shahji Bhonsla who married the daughter of another Maratha general commanding 10,000 horsemen in Ahmadnagar. According to Grant Duff, the Mughal invasion of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda had 'a great influence on the rise of the Mahrattas'.<sup>24</sup> They served the Mughals as well as the Deccan sultans with a zeal inspired by self-interest and, consequently, they served themselves better than they served their new or old masters. That Jadav Rao in A.D. 1621 could be given, as a price of his leaving Malik Amber, the *mansab* of 24,000 was 'a proof of the great power and consequence which the Maharattas had by that time attained'.<sup>25</sup>

Grant Duff viewed Shivaji's career as the essential link between the Marathas as imperial auxiliaries and the Marathas as an imperial power. Viewed from this angle, Shivaji's work was more constructive than that of Aurangzeb. Just as the later empire of the Marathas could be traced to the military measures of Shivaji, so the later Maratha governments could be traced to his civil measures. By providing the Marathas with an example and an ideal Shivaji had in fact given them a kind of cohesion which made the Maratha people a nation. Grant Duff saw the last twenty years of Aurangzeb's reign as the period of a successful struggle of the Marathas for national independence. Before Aurangzeb's death in A.D. 1707 'a common sympathy' existed between all the Marathas; the Mughal emperor died a defeated man in his own empire. Within

---

22 *Loc. cit.*

23 *Loc. cit.*, See also, I, 67, 71-72, 78.

24 *Ibid.*, I, 78.

25 *Ibid.*, I, 81.



thirty years of his death a Maratha empire had come into existence. The Marathas were now the most formidable power in the whole of India. By 1760, they were its virtual masters.

The decline of the power of the Marathas, which could be dated from their defeat at Panipat, was attributed by Grant Duff largely to their character as a people. Although they had recovered their power by 1770, the character of their power had changed. Maratha unity had never been very strong and now the advantage of central direction too was lost.<sup>26</sup> This happened at a crucial moment in their history : the Peshwa was fast losing his influence over the Maratha chiefs just when the Marathas were coming into conflict with the English.<sup>27</sup> In the early 1790s the Maratha dominions consisted of 'numerous authorities and interests'.<sup>28</sup> The change in the external historical circumstance of the Marathas left little scope for the expression of their national genius. They would have extended their conquests and retarded the rapid rise of the English, had it been still possible to direct advantageously 'the peculiar genius' of the people 'to render its various parts subservient to its general strength'.<sup>29</sup> Regular warfare and pitched battles were 'unsuited to their genius' and no sooner were they accustomed to depend upon regular infantry and cannon than the Maratha cavalry lost its former activity and confidence during distant campaigns. The temper and the circumstance that had lured the Marathas to conquest were no longer there, for instead of enforcing *chauth* and *sar-deshmukhi* on 'foreign' territories they 'now lived under governments of their own'.<sup>30</sup> The downfall of the Marathas was not unrelated to their characteristic national traits.

---

26 *Ibid.*, I, 674.

27 *Ibid.*, I, 708.

28 *Ibid.*, II, 277.

29 *Ibid.*, II, 277-78.

30 *Loc. cit.*

## JAMES GRANT DUFF ON THE MARATHAS

Grant Duff's appreciation of the Marathas was informed in the last resort by his Romantic sense of nationality. In his eyes the Marathas had possessed a distinct genius and character and, for all their shortcomings, they deserved admiration for their qualities as a nation. Their hardihood and patience, their energy and love of enterprize, their national sentiment, their attempt at 'vindicating their civil and patience, their energy and love of enterprize, their character in history which compelled Grant Duff's sympathy and warm appreciation. Grant Duff's deep interest in the Maratha past is thus explicable essentially in terms of the influence of the Romantic movement on his emotional and intellectual life.

Grant Duff's romantic sensibility is revealed as much in his response to the beauties of nature and art as in his conception of nationality. The *ghats* in Maharashtra, for example, held great fascination for him. Their effect was particularly heightened during the rainy season by the extreme luxuriance of vegetation and the 'gleams of sunshine, reflected from the breaking mass of clouds, give a thousand evanescent tints to every hill they light upon. Tempests and thunderstorms, both at the commencement and close of the southwest monsoon, are very frequent, and in that region these awful phenomena of nature are, in a tenfold degree tremendous and sublime'.<sup>31</sup> The elegance and grace of the mosques and palaces at Bijapur reminded Grant Duff of its bygone magnificence; its ruins induced in him a feeling of melancholy.<sup>32</sup> His capacity for enjoying Indian music, his appreciation of the scenes at the *panghat* and his haunting interest in old fortresses may safely be attributed to the Romantic trait in his character.

Grant Duff's reluctance to generalize need not be attributed to some weakness in his intellectual apparatus. Speculation seemed to him a waste of time precisely because he was deeply interested in the factual detail; the

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 289.

abundance of facts made generalization both difficult and superfluous. He deliberately tried 'to supply facts' and not to offer commentaries.<sup>33</sup> Indeed the chief merit of the *History of the Mahrattas* in the eyes of its author was the 'strong and undeniable' authority of its facts.<sup>34</sup> This interest in the particular and the concrete was yet another gift of a Romantic temperament.

With his sympathy for the peoples of India, Grant Duff was indifferent to the policies of radical social change which were being advocated by many of his contemporaries for British India. He wished the Indians to be viewed without bias or prejudice; one could find meanness and corruption among them as among any other people in the world. In any case 'it would be better that the unfavourable side of the picture should not be viewed by any person' destined for India. Grant Duff's own experience of India suggested that its people 'really possess many virtues and great qualities; and that much of what is amiable in every relation of life, may be found amongst the natives of India'.<sup>35</sup> Inferior in civilization they may be; despicable, never.

The implications of Grant Duff's work for the government of British India were conservative. He did not favour any radical change; he favoured the liberal treatment of the privileged sections of the Indian peoples. It was for this reason that he admired the work of Mountstuart Elphinstone as the Governor of Bombay: 'the memory of benefits conferred by him on the inhabitants of Maharashtra will probably survive future revolution, and will do much in the mean time to preserve the existence of British India'.<sup>36</sup> Grant Duff's sympathy with the Marathas went hand in hand with his instinct to preserve as much of the Maratha social order as it might be possible.

---

33 *Ibid.*, Preface, x.

34 *Loc. cit.*, Grant Duff did not feel inclined even to 'contradict previous misstatements'.

35 *Ibid.*, I, 595.

## JAMES GRANT DUFF ON THE MARATHAS

Did the *History of the Marathas* in any appreciable manner affect the attitude of the Anglo-Indian administrators towards the Marathas? That certainly is an interesting question. The more important question, however, is that of the nature and extent of the influence of Grant Duff's work on the outlook of the people of Maharashtra on their own past.



## JAMES TOD ON THE RAJPUTS

James Tod (1782-1835) had a wide and pleasant experience of Rajasthan and its people.<sup>1</sup> After going to India in 1799 as a cadet, being commissioned lieutenant the year following and being posted to Delhi in 1801, he was attached in 1806 to the embassy sent to Sindhia's court then in Mewar, and moved with it until 1812 when the court became stationary. He was promoted Captain in 1833 and, within two years, he became second assistant to the Resident. In 1818, he was appointed political agent to western Rajputana states, a post which he held for over four years. Thus he had lived, as he said, in the vicinity of the Rajputs for twelve years before he 'lived familiarly among these people'. He could converse in Rajasthani with ease and fluency; 'its tropes and metaphors were matter of colloquial commonplace'; and he liked to think that he had come to feel like the Rajputs.<sup>2</sup>

Tod took great interest in the geography, history, antiquities and the arts of Rajasthan. In 1806, when he had escorted the embassy to Sindhia's court, the geography of Rajasthan was very imperfectly known to the British Indian government; Tod was encouraged by the Resident-envoy to work on geographical surveys, a work which he continued until 1822. By 1810-11, he had despatched survey parties to the Indus and to the Rajputana desert; by 1815 'the geography of Rajasthan was put into com-

---

1 For Tod's life, see, the *D.N.B.* article by Stephen Wheeler; "Memoir of the Author", prefixed to Tod's *Travels in Western India* (1839); the first chapter of his *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829-1832) and his "Personal Narrative" in Vols. I and II.

2 James Tod, *Travels in Western India*, xxxiii, n.

## JAMES TOD ON THE RAJPUTS

bined form'; and the maps he presented to Lord Hastings on the eve of British operation in central India became 'in part the foundation of that illustrious commander's plan of the campaign' against the Marathas.<sup>3</sup> Tod's information on Rajput history too was sent to Hastings, so as to make his own work sufficiently accurate for 'every political and military purpose'.<sup>4</sup> After 1818, he paid as much attention to materials for Rajput history and sociology as to detailed geographical surveys. Easy access to Rajput territories provided ample opportunities for collecting coins, inscriptions, manuscripts and social statistics like customs, beliefs and manners of the Rajputs.<sup>5</sup>

Tod's interest in Rajput society was 'consequent and subordinate' to his practical interest in geography, but the publication of Hallam's history of the Middle Ages in 1818 heightened his interest in the Rajputs. Already, his observation in Rajasthan had suggested similarities between its institutions and some of the institutions described by Montesquieu, Hume, Millar and Gibbon. On the appearance of Hallam's *Middle Ages* he felt convinced that the general resemblances between European society as Hallam described it and Rajput society as Tod observed it were too strong to be mere coincidence.<sup>6</sup> Rajasthan now became all the more interesting for its analogies with medieval Europe in rediscovering his own past.

The seven years between 1822, when he resigned his political appointment on grounds of ill health, and 1829, when the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* appeared were spent in acquiring the reputation of an authority on

---

3 *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, I, 3.

4 *Ibid.*, 7; also, II, 346, n 1. The account of Jaipur state was 'nearly what I communicated to the Marquess of Hastings in 1814-15'.

5 Tod's coins and manuscripts were deposited with the Royal Asiatic Society: *Travels in Western India* xlvi; "Introduction", *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, I, viii, n 2.

6 *Ibid.*, I, 29-30.

Rajasthan. Tod had travelled through western India in search of still more materials; and reaching England in 1823, he became a member of the Royal Asiatic Society founded in the same year; subsequently, he was appointed its librarian.<sup>7</sup> He read his first paper in 1824, on an inscription relating to the last Hindu king of Delhi. The year following, he gave his account of Greek, Parthian, and Hindu coins, twenty thousand in number, collected in Rajasthan.<sup>8</sup> Having contributed an essay on the origin of ancient Asian and European nations to the *Journal Asiatique*, he read two more papers to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1828: an account of religion in Mewar, and remarks on the Ellora sculpture.<sup>9</sup> Two of the eleven Books of the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* are devoted to geography, two more to the origin of Rajput nations and their socio-political organisation, and seven to the annals of the seven states of the Rajputs: Mewar, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Jaipur, the Shaikhawat Federation and Haravati states. In 1920, the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* was re-published as 'a classic'.<sup>10</sup>

Tod's discussion of the origin of Rajput nations had an important bearing on his elucidation of their socio-political system. He examined the Puranic geneologies of the solar and lunar races, and tried to bring out the connection between the Rajput states of medieval India and the thirtysix royal races of Rajasthan. From his discussion of Rajput ethnology, he drew 'the inference of a common origin between the Rajput and early races of Europe: the Cymbrians, Celts, Gauls, for example. For him the Goths, Huns, Swedes, Vandals and the Franks were 'swarms of the

<sup>7</sup> *Travels in Western India*, xlvii.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xlviii. It was reviewed by A.W. Von Schelegal in the *Journal Asiatique* (1828).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xlix.

<sup>10</sup> Edited by William Crooke, Oxford University Press, 1920. Tod's work had been 'several times reprinted in India and once in this country'.

same hive'. He adduced the evidence of mythology, martial manners and poetry, language and even music and architectural ornaments in support of his inference. His 'scythic Rajput' was a member of the Scythian societies of ancient Europe and Asia.<sup>11</sup>

Tod's discussion of the origin of Rajputs prepared the ground for his hypothesis that a feudal society, similar to the feudal society of Europe, existed in Rajasthan. When he compared the essential features of Rajput society with 'the finished picture' of medieval Europe in Hallam's *Middle Ages*, he was satisfied that he could substantiate 'the claim of these tribes to participation in a system, hitherto deemed to belong exclusively to Europe'.<sup>12</sup> The incontestable proofs of his hypothesis were: the tribal system of Rajasthan, the 'feuds', the estates of chiefs and fiscal lands, the revenues and rights of the crown, the Rajput pride in noble ancestry, the rivalries of clans, the armorial bearings, the tribal palladium and banners, the feudal militia, the feudal incidents and the principle of *rakhwali*.<sup>13</sup>

Tod's appreciation of the Rajputs thus became the observe of his appreciation for medieval European society. The forts and temples of Rajasthan kindled his imagination, and induced in him the 'indescribable emotion' which the castles and cathedrals of Europe, he believed, were sure to generate in the heart of every imaginative person. The 'Gothic' gloom and silence of Rajasthani architecture heightened for him its beauties.<sup>14</sup> The rich tracery of a temple 'might be transferred, not inappropriately, to the Gothic cathedrals of Europe'.<sup>15</sup> He was 'fully impressed' with the beauty of Rajasthani sculpture:<sup>16</sup> the graven

---

11 *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, I, 59-60.

12 *Ibid.*, I, 130.

13 *Ibid.*, 130-75.

14 *Ibid.*, II, 472.

15 *Ibid.*, 780.

16 *Ibid.*, 704.



images were 'the joint conceptions of the poet and the sculptor' who had elegantly used Rajput mythology as a source of inspiration.<sup>17</sup> Tod had a hearty admiration for 'these masterpieces of sculpture and architecture' in Rajasthan.<sup>18</sup> Sir James Mackintosh, reviewing Tod's *Rajasthan* in the *Edinburgh Review*, conceded greater perfection to Indian architecture than ever before the publication of this work.<sup>19</sup>

Tod adopted an indulgent attitude towards Rajput superstitions, mythology and religion, and had a positive appreciation for Rajput morals. Priestcraft in Rajasthan and 'the lavish endowments and extensive immunities of the various religious establishments' proved in most cases the sway of superstition and the low state of morals.<sup>20</sup> 'But the evil was not always so extensive; the abuse is of modern use'.<sup>21</sup> The Jains, who shared with the Brahmans their ascendancy in Rajput society, were the ancient 'theists' of Rajasthan;<sup>22</sup> the modern cult of the worshippers of Krishna, 'the mildest of the gods of Hind', was 'doubtless beneficial to Rajput society'.<sup>23</sup> For the refined Hindus, Krishna in Jayadeva's mystical poetry was a lovely personification of the object of 'pure spiritual love'; Vindraban on the Jumna, the original abode of this Appollo of the Rajputs, was still 'the holy land of the pilgrim, the sacred Jordan of his fancy, on whose banks he may weep, as did the banish Israelite of old, the glories of Mathura, his Jerusalem'.<sup>24</sup> It was Tod's pride and duty to declare that he had 'known men of both sects, Vaishnava and Jain,

---

17 *Ibid.*, 784.

18 *Ibid.*, 734.

19 *The Edinburgh Review*, III, Art. V, 106.

20 *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, II, 507.

21 *Ibid.*, 508.

22 *Ibid.*, 520.

23 *Ibid.*, 522, 531.

24 *Ibid.*, 522.

whose integrity was spotless, and whose philanthropy was unbounded'.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed for Tod, 'the grand features of morality' in Hinduism, as in all religions, and the manners of the Rajputs, which reflected their morals, were highly commendable.

The Koran we know to have been founded on the Mosaic Law ; the Sastras of Manu, unconsciously, approaches more to the Jewish Scriptures in spirit and intention ; and from its pages might be formed a manual of moral instruction, which, if followed by the disciples of the framer, might put more favoured societies to the blush.<sup>26</sup>

These excellent maxims of morality had been the product of high state of refinement visible in ancient Indian philosophy, astronomy, architecture, sculpture and music ; and, though Tod could see a marked deterioration among the Rajputs of his time, 'the homage paid by Asiatics to precedent has preserved many relics of ancient customs, which have survived the causes that produced them'.<sup>27</sup> For example, the Rajputs treated the fair sex with deference and respect, which was not incompatible with the 'seclusion' of women in Rajput society.<sup>28</sup> *Sati* and female infanticide were no proof of a degraded state of women in Rajasthan, for really, 'the women are nearly everything with the Rajput'.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the monogamy, the mutual fidelity and the marked influence of women in Rajput history and society proved beyond doubt that 'the age of chivalry is not fled'.<sup>30</sup> Rajput morals were most clearly visible in their actions.

The chivalrous character of the Rajputs appealed most to Tod. The age of chivalry in Europe held a great fascination for one whose family motto commemorated the courage

---

25 *Ibid.*, 532.

26 *Ibid.*, I, 608.

27 *Ibid.*, 609.

28 *Ibid.*, 609-10.

29 *Ibid.*, 611.

30 *Ibid.*, 631, 609.

and honour of his ancestors: the Tods of Scotland had been permitted to use *Vigilantia* as their motto after their ancestor John Tod rescued Robert Bruce's children from captivity in England.<sup>31</sup> 'The Rajput chieftain was imbued with all the kindred virtues of the western cavalier'.<sup>32</sup> The most prominent traits of Rajput character were courage, honour, loyalty, hospitality and devotion to the fair sex. Rajputi was synonymous with chivalry.<sup>34</sup>

Rajput history displayed the struggles of a brave people for their national independence. For many centuries and in spite of many temptations, the Rajputs clung to 'their rights and national liberty' with an unparalleled tenacity.<sup>35</sup> 'Rajasthan exhibits the sole example in the history of mankind of a people withstanding every outrage barbarity can inflict, or human nature sustain'.<sup>36</sup> Political calamities were the whetstone to the Rajput's courage who valued his own way of life above everything else. There was not a petty state in Rajasthan that had not had its Thermopylae, and scarcely a city that had not produced its Leonidas.<sup>37</sup>

Tod excelled in narrating the tales of Rajput chivalry, the most glorious aspect of Rajput history. Love and war were the favourite themes of the Rajput bards,<sup>38</sup> and Tod related their tales with animation and gusto. 'The annals of no nation on earth record a more ennobling or more magnanimous instance of female loyalty than that exemplified by Dewaldai'.<sup>39</sup> Sanjugta was the Helen of Raja-

31 *Travels in Western India*, xvii n.

32 *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, II, 119.

33 *Ibid.*, II, 642 ; I, 276.

34 *Ibid.*, II, 601.

35 *Ibid.*, I, xvii.

36 *Ibid.*, 259.

37 *Ibid.*, xvi.

38 *Ibid.*, xii.

39 *Ibid.*, 614.

sthan ;<sup>40</sup> the queen of Ganor, its Lucretia.<sup>41</sup> The examples of 'the romantic chivalry' of Rajputs could be 'multiplied *ad infinitum*'<sup>42</sup> and Tod never lost the opportunity of relating them.

Mewar, above all the other states of the Rajput Heph-tarchy, represented the quintessence of Rajput chivalry.

Some of their States have been expunged from the map of dominion; and as a punishment of national infidelity, the pride of the Rathor, and the glory of the Chalukya, the overgrown Kanauj and gorgeous Anhilwara, are forgotten names! Mewar alone, the sacred bulwark of religion, never compromised her honour for her safety, and still survives her ancient limits; and since the brave Samarsi gave up his life, the blood of her princes has flowed in copious streams for the maintenance of this honour, religion, and independence.<sup>43</sup>

The romantic tale of Bhim Singh and Padmini, the gallant defence of Chitor against Alauddin Khalji, the exploits of Hamir Singh, and Rana Kumbha, the wars of Rana Sangha, the resistance of Jai Mal and Fatta to Akbar's arms, all these formed the golden chain of Sesodia chivalry which led to the career of Rana Partap.<sup>44</sup>

Had Mewar possessed her Thucydides or her Xenophon, neither the wars of the Peloponnesus nor the retreat of the "ten thousand" would have yielded more diversified incidents for the historic muse, than the deed of this brilliant reign amid the many vicissitudes of Mewar.<sup>45</sup>

Undaunted heroism, inflexible fortitude, perseverance, national fidelity, and 'unconquerable mind' of the Rajputs of Mewar were the essence of its history.<sup>46</sup>

There is not a pass in the Alpine Aravalli that is not sanctified by some deed of Partap, some brilliant victory or, oftener, more glorious defeat. Haldighat is the Thermopylae of Mewar; the field of Dawer her Marathon.

---

40 *Ibid.*, 623.

41 *Ibid.*, 625.

42 *Ibid.*, 627.

43 *Ibid.*, I, 259.

44 *Ibid.*, 262-66, 268-73, 286-89, 299-306 & 326-28.

45 *Ibid.*, 349.

46 *Ibid.*, 350.



Tod was an inspired bard when he wrote of Mewar. Among the ruins of ancient cities in Rajasthan, with 'enthusiastic delight', he listened to the traditions of their fall; he heard the exploits of their illustrious defenders related by their descendants near the altars erected to their memory; and he was transported to the age of chivalry.<sup>47</sup> He felt like a Rajput for the fair land of Mewar.<sup>48</sup> Reaching its borders, he could not look upon its alienated lands without the deepest regret or without a kindling of the spirit towards the heroes of past days. He looked upon Mewar indeed 'as the land of my adoption'; and of this region and noble race, he might say, as Byron does of Greece:<sup>49</sup>

'Tis Greece, but living Greece no more.

Tod candidly avowed himself to be an advocate and apologist of the Rajput race.<sup>50</sup> Though he was not blind to the miseries of the Rajput society of his day, he loved to celebrate its past virtues. Even at their worst, the Rajputs of his day were 'not worthless'. Tod denied to the Rajputs the vice of deceit and falsehood, 'which the delineators of national character attach to the Asiatic without distinction'.<sup>51</sup> He was prepared to forget any unpleasant personal experiences of the Rajputs, for there was 'something magical in absence; it throws a deceitful medium between us and the objects we have quitted, which exaggerates their amiable qualities, and curtail the proportion of their vices'.<sup>52</sup> Thinking of Mewar, with her unmanageable children, Tod exclaimed: 'Mewar: with all thy faults, I love thee still'.<sup>53</sup>

---

47 *Ibid.*, I, xvii.

48 *Ibid.*, II, 627.

49 *Ibid.*, 635.

50 *Ibid.*, 743.

51 *Ibid.*, 642.

52 *Ibid.*, 601.

53 *Ibid.*, 602.

## JAMES TOD ON THE RAJPUTS

Tod's feeling for Rajput society was inseparable from his desire to influence British policy towards the Rajputs. For all his 'idolatrous affection' for the subject, he thought of his *Rajasthan* as a work of practical value.<sup>54</sup> If he did not treat the subject in 'the severe style of history', it was because of his desire to exclude nothing which could be 'useful to the politician as well as to the curious student'.<sup>55</sup> When Tod claimed for his work 'a higher title than a mass of mere archaeological data', he had its practical usefulness in mind; his copious collection of materials in the *Rajasthan* was meant as much for the statesman of his day as for 'the future historian' of India; he was anxious to give 'too much' rather than to risk the suppression of 'what might possibly be useful'.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, Tod was impatient to 'apply history to its proper use': imperial policies in India must be founded on a knowledge of India's past.<sup>57</sup> Though Tod admired the 'prophetic views' of Wellesley and criticized 'the timid, temporizing policy' of Cornwallis, the peace and stability of British empire was more important to him than merely the extension of British influence in India.<sup>58</sup> He feared that 'our strides have been rapid from Calcutta to Rajputana'; and he was anxious to safeguard this 'over-grown rule'.<sup>59</sup>

Indian history taught 'a political lesson of great value': the highest order of talent, either for government or for war, though aided by unlimited resources, would not suffice for the maintenance of power, 'unsupported by the affections of the governed'.<sup>60</sup> Akbar, the greatest of Indian emperors, knew how to conciliate the governed, particularly the Rajputs; he had felt 'that a constant exhibition

---

54 *Travels in Rajasthan*, vii.

55 *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, I, xix.

56 *Ibid.*, II, Introduction.

57 *Ibid.*, I, 196.

58 *Ibid.*, II, 378.

59 *Ibid.*, I, 766.

60 *Ibid.*, 396.

of authority would not only be ineffectual but dangerous, and that the surest hold on their fealty and esteem would be the giving them a personal interest in the support of the monarchy'.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the most brilliant conquests of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb as well as of Akbar were made by 'their Rajput allies'.<sup>62</sup> When Aurangzeb neglected 'the indigenous Rajputs', he endangered 'the keystone' of his power; long before his death the grand edifice of Mughal empire was tottering to its foundation.<sup>63</sup> Yet, Aurangzeb 'had less reason to distrust the stability of his dominion than we have'.<sup>64</sup>

In Tod's judgment, the Rajputs were the best allies the British could have in India.

We have nothing to apprehend from the Rajput States if raised to their ancient prosperity. The closest attention to their history proved beyond contradiction that they were never capable of uniting, even for their own preservation.<sup>65</sup>

The Rajputs, as their history again revealed, were even less likely to unite with others, once they had been befriended by the British. 'Gratitude, honour, and fidelity, are terms which at one time were the foundation of all the virtues of a Rajput'.<sup>66</sup> Protected by the British Indian government, the Rajputs would recover from the wounds inflicted on their body-politic by the mean Marathas and the ruthless Afghans. 'Our friendship has rescued them from exterior foes, and time will restore the rest'.<sup>67</sup> Then, if a Tartar or a Russian invasion threatened the British Indian empire, 'fifty thousand Rajputs would be no despicable allies'.<sup>68</sup> Sound policy dictated Rajput independence under British

---

61 *Ibid.*, 152.

62 *Ibid.*, 195.

63 *Ibid.*, 396.

64 *Ibid.*, viii.

65 *Ibid.*, 193.

66 *Loc. cit.*

67 *Ibid.*, 192.

68 *Ibid.*, 193.

protection. Non-interference in the internal affairs of the Rajput states was the requisite of 'well-cemented friendship' between the Rajputs and the British, a policy which Tod had tried to follow during his political appointment, and which, he believed, he was highly competent to pursue.

Justice, no less than policy, demanded that 'the most ancient relics of civilization on the face of the earth' should be preserved.<sup>69</sup> Tod's Rajputs, like the Scythians of his favourite Herodotus, possessed the supreme virtue of self-preservation. The Arabs, the Ghaznavides, the Ghurides, the Khaljis and the Mughals had been more or less successful in their wars with the Rajputs; but they had failed to annihilate the Rajput nations and states. Mewar and Jaisalmer survived the rise and fall of the Turkish and Mughal domination in India; other Rajput states arose during that period itself to outlive the Mughal empire. Whatever the differences of detail in their annals, the undercurrent of Rajput history was 'the mental similarity' which enabled the Rajputs to preserve 'as nations, the enjoyment of their ancient habits to this distant period'.<sup>70</sup>

Tod believed that Rajput society had survived largely because of its feudalism and chivalry. The martial system which he discovered in the Rajput states was 'so extensive in its operation as to embrace every object of society'<sup>71</sup> and 'must have attained a certain degree of perfection' in the past. And, whatever its defects, it was based on 'loyalty and patriotism, which combine a love of the institutions, religion, and manners of the country'.<sup>72</sup> Even the imperfect government in Rajasthan was redeemed by the impulse it gave under perilous conditions to 'rivalry of heroism'.<sup>73</sup> That their socio-political organisation was the best suited to the genius of the people, could be presumed from its

---

69 *Ibid.*, 127, *passim*.

70 *Ibid.*, 122.

71 *Ibid.*, 129.

72 *Ibid.*, 148.

73 *Ibid.*, 149.



durability, which war, famine, and anarchy had failed to destroy.<sup>74</sup>

It was not for the British to undermine the foundations of a society that had braved the storms of over ten centuries. The desire of 'every liberal mind' in Great Britain was, or ought to have been, the renovation of Rajputs whose noblest virtues were unimaginable without the feudal character of their society.<sup>75</sup> A 'great moral change' was affected by British alliance with the Rajputs;<sup>76</sup> but 'the ill-defined principles which guide all our treaties with the Rajputs, and which, if not early remedied, will rapidly progress to a state of things full of misery for them, and of inevitable danger to ourselves'.<sup>77</sup> A wise, humane and liberal policy demanded understanding of Rajput society. It was better not to meddle 'with what we but imperfectly understand'.<sup>78</sup> Justice, policy and humanity obliged the British to desist from applying their own 'monarchical, nay, despotic principles to this feudal society'.<sup>79</sup>

Tod, with his appreciation for 'human varieties' presents a contrast to the Utilitarians and the Evangelicals: he lived and moved in a world totally alien to them. Like many another contemporary Anglo-Indian, he showed a keen sense of imperial responsibility and emphasized the need of larger evidence on Indian society. Even mythology, on which the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians poured their indignation, was for him 'the parent of all history'. With his sympathy for the whole of human past, his sensibility for arts, his indulgent attitude towards myth and superstition, his positive appreciation for the beneficent social and moral influence of some non-Christian creeds,

---

74 *Ibid.*, 'Dedication' of the second volume, to William the Fourth.

75 *Ibid.*, II, 602, *passim*.

76 *Ibid.*, 657.

77 *Ibid.*, 160.

78 *Ibid.*, I, 193.

79 *Ibid.*, Introduction, viii.

## JAMES TOD ON THE RAJPUTS

and his admiration for the heroic virtues of the Rajputs, Tod was indifferent to moral imperialism in India. Whereas the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians made it their business to judge and largely to condemn Indian society, Tod's professed pre-occupation was to describe 'all the peculiar features of Hindu society' and to awaken sympathy for the people of Rajasthan.<sup>80</sup> Sympathetic treatment of his subject, if anything, lends the quality of a classic to the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*.

---

80 *Ibid.*, vii-viii.

## THE MEDIEVAL INDIAN STATE IN BRITISH HISTORICAL WRITING

No British historian has undertaken a formal study of the state in medieval India. Nevertheless, the state has generally remained the most important frame of reference with the British historians of medieval India. Their observations, reflections and asides on the nature and working of the medieval Indian state and their assumptions regarding its character, which are found incidentally in their historical works, give us a fair idea of their conception of the medieval Indian state.

The approach of the late eighteenth-century British historians of medieval India was influenced by two important factors: the general ideas of the Enlightenment and the practical problems of the East India Company. The Enlightenment has been characterized as an endeavour to secularize human life and thought; and its implications, in retrospect, are unmistakable. Politics, for instance, came to be considered as purely secular activity; and the subordination of politics to religion came to be regarded as highly undesirable. Earthly happiness obtained primacy over life hereafter; and human institutions came to be judged on utilitarian grounds. The state, at once the measure and a possible guarantee of earthly success, became the core of the historian's interests. At the same time, the East India Company had assumed political responsibilities in India and it became necessary, or so it was thought, to know the rights and obligations and the principles of past governments in India. At this stage, constitutional and legal studies of medieval India were directly

sponsored and patronized by the East India Company.<sup>1</sup>

The late eighteenth-century British writers, notably Alexander Dow, Francis Gladwin and William Kirkpatrick, who are no more than familiar names now to the students of medieval Indian history, left quite a few legacies for their successors. Alexander Dow, who has been erroneously regarded as merely a translator of the *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, chose what his contemporaries would call 'the imperial theme': he wrote a general history of the Muslim empires in India.<sup>2</sup> For him, an empire was a superior species of state as it embodied a greater political achievement. There were only two states of this category in medieval India: 'the Afghan empire' (from the time of Mahmud of Ghazna to the advent of the Mughals) and the Mughal empire. The latter was superior to the former, not because of the vastness of its territorial jurisdiction but chiefly because of its character; the Mughal empire was given this preferential treatment because of the broad outlook of its rulers and the broad base of its 'bureaucracy', both of which resulted in the prosperity and happiness of its subjects. The constitution of these states in Dow's view was absolutely despotic, which for him was certainly not a good form of government; and the subjects possessed no rights, not even the right of property in the land they cultivated. Dow almost confessed his ignorance about the origins of despotism, but he saw the relevance of physical environment, religious beliefs and social customs for the persistence of that form of government in India during the medieval times. At any rate, because of the scope that despotism left for exceptional talent, the government of the Mughals was benevolent, almost paternal.

Francis Gladwin and William Kirkpatrick re-inforced some and modified others of Alexander Dow's observa-

---

<sup>1</sup> For a brief analysis of these developments in the late eighteenth century, see "Early British Interest in India's Past", *supra*.

<sup>2</sup> *The History of Hindostan*, 3 Vols., London 1768-72.



tions on the character of the medieval Indian state. The *Ain-i-Akbari* was translated by Gladwin on the assumption that it embodied some of the best principles of government in India; and the chief commendation of the Mughal state under Akbar and his seventeenth-century successors was the conciliation of interests of the rulers and the ruled.<sup>3</sup> Kirkpatrick undertook to discuss the problem of proprietary rights in medieval India;<sup>4</sup> and, though he did not refute the contention that the cultivator possessed no legally defined right to the land, he tried to transcend the strictly legal position by invoking the actual working of a 'despotic' rule. In his view, despotism in medieval Indian history could not be equated with arbitrary government, for the government in the first place was conducted according to regulations promulgated by the rulers from time to time. Furthermore, the implicit or explicit commitments of the previous reign had to be respected and customary laws had to be honoured, unless the reasons of state clearly dictated their violation. The demands of human nature and expediency placed imperceptible restraint on the arbitrary proclivities of even the most absolute of the despots. Kirkpatrick believed with the philosopher David Hume that physical force ultimately resided with the ruled who possessed the inalienable right to revolt.

In the early nineteenth century, some of the British historians of India looked at the medieval Indian state not as divorced from the life of the peoples but as a part of an expression of that life. James Mill discussed all the aspects of Hindu and Muslim civilization and instituted a formal comparison between them. He found to his satisfaction that medieval Muslim civilization was superior to the Hindu in every way. Since civilization for Mill had

---

<sup>3</sup> Gladwin's preface to *The History of Hindostan*, Calcutta 1788; also, his preface to the *Aaen Akbery*, 2 vols., London 1800.

<sup>4</sup> "The Institutes of Ghazan Khan", *The New Asiatic Miscellany*, Calcutta 1789, 149-226.

## THE MEDIEVAL INDIAN STATE

meant the greatest happiness of the greatest number, his comparison of Hindu and Muslim civilizations was reduced to a comparison of Hindu and Muslim governments for, as already pointed out, the state for Mill was the chief instrument of augmenting the happiness of its members. An advocate of democracy at home, Mill had nothing good to say about the 'despotic' governments of medieval India.<sup>5</sup> But when it came to a choice between the Hindu and the Muslim government, he preferred the latter. His criterion was significant: the Mughal rulers of India had evolved an elaborate system of administration which was beneficial to a larger number of people now than ever before in the history of the Indian subcontinent. Mill assumed rather than studied the correlation between the governmental activity and life of the subjects of the Mughal state, largely because his conception of civilization was mechanistic rather than organical.

Some of the early nineteenth-century British historians approached the medieval Indian state with a more or less organic conception of society. James Tod, for example, thought of the Rajputs as a nation within the broad frame of Hindu society; for him the political organisation of the Rajputs was an expression of their national life at a given time in their history. The 'feudal' government of Tod's Rajputs was the best, because the only possible, form of government in 'feudal' society. It is not the accuracy of Tod's analysis that now commands attention but his willingness to understand the past political organisations in their own terms. Similarly, J. D. Cunningham,<sup>6</sup> who treated the Sikhs as a 'nation', thought of their political organization as best suited to their national needs, whether as the late eighteenth-century 'theocratic confederate feudalism' or as the monarchy of Ranjit Singh.

---

5. "Advocacy of Social Change in India", *supra*.

6 *A History of the Sikhs*, London 1849. For an analysis of this work, see, J. S. Grewal "J. D. Cunningham and his British Predecessors on the Sikhs", *Bengal; Past & Present* (July-December 1964), LXXXIII, 101-14.

Mountstuart Elphinstone applied the concept of 'nationality' to comprehend all the major communities of medieval India.<sup>7</sup> He was struck by the general harmony between the Muslims and Hindus in contemporary India and in his approach to the medieval Indian state his chief preoccupation was with the 'Indianization' of the Arab conquerors of Sind and the purely political motives of Mahmud of Ghazna. He paid a good deal of attention to the racial composition and character of the early conquerors and suggested that in due course the 'Indian' element had come to be the most dominant. Hindus were freely employed in the Indo-Muslim states and Muslims were given service by some of the Hindu rulers. This give-and-take in the sphere of politics and government was paralleled by a sort of *rapprochement* in the social and religious spheres. Elphinstone saw the Mughal state under Akbar as the culmination of this long historical process. The abolition of *jizya* by Akbar placed his non-Muslim subjects at par with the Muslims; by employing Hindus in high offices, he gave them a share in the government of the realm. Elphinstone thus, more than any other British historian of medieval India, underlined the 'national' character of the Mughal state under Akbar. Had Aurangzeb accommodated Shivaji in his early career, as Akbar had absorbed the Rajput princes in the imperial set-up of the Mughal state, the nascent Maratha 'nationalism' would not have taken root in the Deccan. The reversal of Akbar's liberal policies, by its very nature, was a retrograde step. The chances of a national state in medieval India were lost in Aurangzeb's attempts to assimilate the Mughal empire to his idea of an 'Islamic state'.

Mountstuart Elphinstone's attempt at seeing medieval India in the round was abandoned by the late nineteenth-century historians of medieval India. Sir H. M. Elliot,

---

<sup>7</sup> *History of India*, 2 Vols., London 1841. For an analysis of his work see J. S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, Oxford University Press 1970, 130-64.



## THE MEDIEVAL INDIAN STATE

for instance, equated medieval India with the political history of Muslims in India.<sup>8</sup> He did not deny that Muslims had ceased to be foreigners once they settled in the country of their adoption; but he underlined the fact that the vast majority of the subjects under the medieval Indo-Muslim states were Hindu. In Elliot's view, the power and the laws of the Muslim states in India were weighted against the non-Muslims. In justification of the 'foreign' British rule in India, he tended to belittle the achievements of Muslim rule in India. The British government had done more for the peoples of India in fifty years than what the Muslim rulers had done for them in five hundred years. Under the medieval Indo-Muslim states, there was little of material progress and less of individual freedom.

After Elliot, conscious or unconscious comparison of Muslim with British rule in India became a more or less general feature of British thinking on the medieval Muslim state. Consequently, most of the British historians have approached medieval India with the state as their general frame of reference to the exclusion of any other basic concept. William Irvine, for instance, was led on to his work on the army of the Mughals from his initially projected study of the Mughal government in general.<sup>9</sup> He studied the Mughal army in its own right and not in relation to the Mughal state, though he noticed the military character of the *mansabdari* system. Similarly, W. H. Moreland's *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, which is generally regarded as 'economic' history, was meant to be a study of the relationship between the agrarian classes and the state.<sup>10</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that Moreland's

---

8 *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India*, Calcutta 1849.

9 *The Army of the Indian Moghuls*.

10 J. B. Harrison, "Notes on W. H. Moreland as Historian", *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (ed. C. H. Philips), London 1961; cf. Moreland's preface to the *Agrarian System of Moslem India*.

Moreland's comparison of the conditions during the Indo-Muslim regimes with those under the British rule in India reveal his assumptions about the superiority of the latter; but they also reveal the difference from his point of view between the 'medieval' and the 'modern' state.



study of the agrarian policies of the Muslim rulers, executed through the intermediary official classes, and the effects of those policies on the agrarian classes did not add an altogether a new dimension to the study of the medieval Muslim state.<sup>11</sup> In fact Moreland, though he seldom abandons the administrative point of view, is the first British historian to pose some kind of relationship between the economic structure and the structure of political power in medieval India.

With a very few exceptions, the twentieth-century British historians of medieval India have accepted and combined or slightly modified the ideas received from their predecessors. In this connection, Stanley Lanepoole's general history of medieval India is both interesting and significant. The first notable thing in his work is the title itself : *Medieval India under Mohammedan Rule* (A.D. 712-1764); here 'medieval' India is identified with 'Muslim' India. A narrative of nearly five centuries flows from this identification alone for, as Lanepoole himself points out, the first Indo-Muslim state was established strictly speaking, only in the early thirteenth century. The whole history of medieval India is intelligible to Lanepoole in terms of the Sultanate of Delhi and the Mughal empire (Book II : The Kingdom of Delhi, 1206-1526 ; Book III : The Moghul Empire, 1526-1764). These two most impressive states are further identified with kings and their work.

In doing all this, Lanepoole starts with some important assumptions. For him, there was no organic or national growth in India ; the vast mass of the people enjoyed only the doubtful happiness of having no history, since they

---

11 J. B. Harrison has observed that Moreland's explanation of administrative structure in terms of physical limitation and economic need & of political collapse from an economic parasitism which destroyed productive energies, has not been followed up, nor improved upon : *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, 318. This statement may be debatable after the publication of Dr. Irfan Habib's *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, but Moreland's contribution to the study of the medieval Indian state is not.

showed no development. Asia was essentially different from Europe or the West. 'History in the East does not mean the growth of constitutions, the development of civic "rights", the vindication of individual liberty, or the evolution of self-governments'. The only form of government which could subsist in medieval India was despotism. 'To the Indian, power is a divine gift, to be exercised absolutely by God's anointed, and obeyed unquestioned by everyone else. A king who is not absolute loses in oriental mind the essential quality of kingship'. On such assumptions, Lanepoole could not only concentrate on a few conspicuous men, he could also by-pass the important shifts in the possession and distribution of political power. Furthermore, the 'difference caused in the royal's life by a good or a bad king is too slight to be worth discussing'. Thus, in Lanepoole's static image of the medieval Indian state, the kings are surrounded by a court of officers and functionaries who are raised or displaced at the royal pleasure; and beneath them toil incessantly the millions of patient peasants and industrious townfolk.

A historian's assumptions are intimately related to the significance he sees in his facts. It is not surprising, therefore, that Lanepoole sees in the institution of 'official slaves' only the influence of examples set by an exceptionally talented master; in the investiture by the Abbasid caliph, only a personal achievement of Iltutmish; in Raziya's struggle for supremacy in her realm, chiefly her un-Islamic position and her innocent preference for the Abyssinian Yaqut; in the pro-Ilbari sentiment of the nobles of Balban's court, the conservative character of the Indian people; in the expansion of the Sultanate under Alauddin, only the Sultan's ambition; in the failure of Khusrau Shah, the stigma of his low origin; in the extremely complex developments of Muhammad Ibn Tughlaq's reign, a tragedy of personal intentions self-defeated; in the personal character of Firuz Shah, the prosperity of his kingdom but in his policies, the disintegration of the Sultanate; and in the

establishment of powerful Indo-Muslim kingdoms away from the capital of the Sultanate, Lanepoole saw the weakening of Muslim power in India; and this he attributed to the degeneration of the Muslims.

Lanepoole saw the Muslim's zeal and his law as generally operative in the medieval Indo-Muslim states and he underlined only the exceptional deviations. Alauddin Khalji's enactments were promulgated 'without any reference to the legal authorities'. Consistent in his view of Alauddin as an autocrat, Lanepoole observed that the Sultan did not stop at repressive measures; 'he interfered with trade, and even meddled with the law of supply and demand'. But whereas this absolutism was commendable in Alauddin, it proved to be the basic flaw in Muhammad Ibn Tughlaq whose great mistake, a capital error in medieval India, was to create a loyal and well-knit 'bureaucracy', particularly when the vastness of the directly administered territories demanded such a governing class.

The problem was successfully solved by Akbar who associated the Hindus, along with the various classes of Muslims, with the government of his empire through an elaborate system of administration and a 'reasoned theory of government'. Lanepoole attributed strong political motives to Akbar for his alliance with the Rajputs and the consequent abolition of the *jizya* and other discriminating taxes. Akbar was led from catholicity to latitudinarianism and then, assumed 'the role of priest-king', a role which was unique in the whole history of Islam. Lanepoole mentions at the same time that Akbar came to think of himself as the Mahdi. At any rate, Akbar in his religion as well as his politics and government had adopted an un-Islamic posture and there was reaction among the orthodoxy. The champion of this reactionary orthodoxy was the puritan Aurangzeb, and it was 'the re-imposition of the tax on religion in the time of Aurangzeb that, more than anything else, uprooted the wise system established by his ancestor'. Nevertheless, Lanepoole points out that the



system of *mansab* and *jagir* which pervaded the whole empire resulted in extortion of 'the uttermost farthing from the wretched peasantry'. In fact, the Mughal state under Aurangzeb sacrificed the welfare of the people to the supremacy of an armed minority. However, Lanepoole does not postulate any connection between the tyrannically oppressive character of the Mughal state and its decay by the beginning of the eighteenth century.

S.M. Edwardes and H.L.O. Garrett, the joint authors<sup>12</sup> of *The Mughal Rule in India*, basing themselves mainly on the work of W.H. Moreland, attributed the decline of the Mughal state primarily to economic causes. The graded 'bureaucracy' of the Mughal empire under Akbar had been framed on definite military lines and the salaries of the government officials were paid either in cash or in *jagir*. Akbar had preferred cash payments and discouraged the grants of *jagir*. The officials on the other hand, preferred the *jagir* system, 'partly because it was often possible for an officer, by means of favouritism or roguery, to secure an estate yielding a larger revenue than was ascribed to it in the official records'. The *jagir* system was widely adopted by Jahangir and flourished unchecked under Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. The remuneration paid to the Mughal officials was very high and they were expected to maintain a high standard of living, an expectation which they were keen to fulfil all the more because no official was expected or permitted to bequeath rank or fortune to his heirs. 'Consequently, the average official spent on luxuries all and more than what he earned, and tended more and more to become a shameless exploiter of the poor'. The frequency of transfer, if anything, encouraged this tendency and the burden ultimately fell upon the agricultural and working population. Thus, the demand made by the government upon the producers was so heavy that

---

12. They may be regarded as reflecting significantly the thinking of their British predecessors on the subject. It is not suggested by their inclusion here that they were important historians in their own right.



they could barely support life; and while the surplus was largely spent on the bureaucracy (and by the bureaucracy in unproductive ways), there was little incentive left for the producer. In this way, the economic system of the state was strained to breaking point by the end of Shah Jahan's reign; its bankruptcy was assured by the beginning of the eighteenth century. 'We may therefore say, in conclusion, that the Mughal state owed its decline and ultimate downfall to a combination of causes of which perhaps the two most important were the uncontrolled domination of a selfish and extravagant bureaucracy and an inequitable economic system, which steadily impoverished the revenue producing classes of the population'.

For the rest, Edwardes and Garrett repeat the familiar ideas: Akbar's Rajput policy to broad-base his expanding political power, the abolition of the *jizya* for winning Hindu loyalty and support, orthodox reaction to Akbar's liberal and politic measures as reflected in some of Jahangir's acts of persecution on religious grounds and in Shah Jahan's orthodoxy leading eventually to the decline of the state through Aurangzeb's bigotry, for example. However, they see an inter-connection between the problems of politics and government, the liberality of Akbar's policies and catholicity of his religious outlook and experience. In their view, to the vast majority of the people of India the Mughal empire, even at its best, embodied essentially a 'foreign' rule. The aims of the rulers were limited to the perpetuation of their own power through the maintenance of internal order, whether by force or through the administration of justice. The activities of the Mughal state were, therefore, limited to those spheres which affected the power of the state itself. Public welfare was a matter not of duty but of grace on the part of the emperor in whom the power of the state was primarily vested. He had absolute power and was bound by no laws, except perhaps the *shari'at*. Edwardes and Garrett, like all their British predecessors, do not concern themselves with the *shari'at*,

though they take notice of Akbar's deviations from it. In fact, like the majority of the British historians of India, they are totally unconcerned about Muslim ideas on politics and government.

As if in compensation, Dr Peter Hardy has recently devoted his attention to the dominant assumptions of medieval Muslims about the nature and ends of political activity.<sup>13</sup> His account aims at being 'a study of theory not of practice, of the ideas and pre-suppositions of academicians rather than of the working assumptions of practising rulers and administrators'. The activity of forming human aggregates and of reaching decisions within those aggregates which are enforced by penalties generally applicable throughout the aggregate in question is, for Dr Hardy, the essence of politics. In the theocentric outlook of the Muslim jurists before the foundation of the Sultanate of Delhi, man's juridical existence was conditional upon his religious beliefs for the authority of men over men could exist only as a consequence of a right relationship between individual men and Allah. Thus, it was not a man's human personality, not his psychology, not his policy but his piety that rendered him a social and political being. His rights and obligations were prescribed in or could be deduced from the *Quran* and *Sunna*. All those who accepted the authority of the *shari'at* belonged to one ideal community in which there was no authority other than that of God. There was no aspect of individual or social life which escaped the divine law. The needs of the community did not shape the *shari'at*; it was rather the *shari'at* that shaped the needs of the community. The beginning and end of the political life of the Muslim community was obedience to God in the ways which Allah had positively commanded; any moral autonomy outside Revelation was de-

---

13 Besides his "Islam in Medieval India" in the *Sources of Indian Tradition* (ed. Wm. Theodore de Barry) see his "Traditional Muslim View of the Nature of Politics", *Politics and Society in India* (ed. C. H. Philips), London 1963.

nied to men. It is true that *ijma*, or consensus of the community, was recognized as a source of the *shari'at*; but *ijma* was not reached by a process of conscious decision at all; it was something which could be detected in retrospect for it was sanction of an opinion already acted upon. The only individual to exercise powers of initiative in the present and to take 'political' decisions was the *khalifa*; and he too did this by drawing attention to the demands of the *shari'at* and to the penalties for non-compliance with those demands. Thus, in theory, it was almost impossible to take political relationships out of the sphere of religion.

In Dr Hardy's account of the theory of medieval Indo-Muslim government it is underlined that Muslim thought on temporal government was concerned primarily with 'how the pious Muslim might recognize that the government of the community is in the right hands and be assured that it is being exercised for the right purposes'. The rise of virtually independent Muslim states in the tenth century in particular had raised the problem of their legal position while the *khilafat* was still a going concern. Their legitimacy, which could not be questioned in practice, was accepted in theory provided that the rulers of these kingdoms paid deference to the nominal headship of the *khilafat*. In India, in due course, since the Abbasid *khilafat* at Baghdad had come to end in 1258 Muslim theory met the new situation 'by stressing the divine ordination of the function of temporal government, the duty of obedience and the desirability of the Sultanate in India acting as caliph de facto for its own dominion'. Thus, the test of the Muslim ruler in India was not how he came into power but what use he made of that power. According to Dr Hardy, the bulk of Indo-Muslim writing on government embodies, in essence, 'a conception of partnership between the doctors of the holy law and the Sultan in the higher interests of the faith, a partnership between pious professors and pious policemen'.

Basing himself on the writings of Fakhruddin Mubarak



Shah, Ziauddin Barani and Shaikh Hamdani. Dr Hardy has illustrated the political thinking of the Sultanate period. He does not establish the point that these writers were the 'representative' exponents or, that they were popular during this period. Nor does he set out to examine or postulate any relationship between their 'theory' and the 'practice' of those who actually held power. Therefore, the scope of Dr Hardy's discussion is extremely limited. However, his exposition of the theoretical position of these writers is illuminating and raises issues relevant for the study of medieval Indo-Muslim states. The final end of human society, for these writers who accepted the Sultanate as a necessary fact and wished to consecrate it to Islamic purposes, was the worship of God. All power was ultimately that of God and it was exercised over human beings through prophets, the learned, and kings. Though for Ziauddin Barani, kingship was incompatible with Islamic ideals and, consequently, the Sultanate was un-Islamic, it was generally propounded that obedience to the Sultan was commanded by God. The Sultan, in his turn, was not to be the legislator but only a follower of the *shari'at*; in this, as in much else, his duties and responsibilities were those, or nearly those, which formerly had been attributed to the *khalifa*. The subjection of the unbelievers (which in medieval India meant, of the Hindus) was one of the most important duties imposed on the Sultan by the theorists. Another important duty imposed on him was that of administering justice, for justice was indispensable to temporal authority. In fact, rulership was regarded as a sacred trust for which the Sultans were answerable to God. They must employ Godfearing men of right religion as their officials and consult them as their counsellors. In India, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, the political writers stressed the necessity of a large and efficient army for the Sultan.

Muslim ideas on the nature of politics and the ends of government during the Mughal period were not essentially



different from those of the Sultanate period. Abul Fazl was an exception, not so much however in allowing a larger share of administrative discretion to the ruler as in associating some of the sanctity which had been attached only to the office of the just Imam with the person of the just ruler. In his intellectual support to Akbar, Abul Fazl was drawing upon the basically Shi'a concept of the Imam and the Platonic concept of the 'philosopher king' as it had been mediated from Greek philosophical literature by the Muslim philosophers themselves. Akbar was not unwilling to exercise the initiative allowed by Abul Fazl to the 'true king'. Abul Fazl's departure from the orthodox position is notable, but what is equally remarkable is the fact that his theory of kingship is as theocentric as that of his predecessors.

In retrospect it is possible to see that, though the British historians of medieval India did not undertake any formal studies of the medieval Indian state, they tended to take its importance for granted and used the concept of the state as their major frame of reference. Consciously or unconsciously, they treated the 'empire' as a superior species of statehood, without trying to examine the difference, if any, between the large and the small states of medieval India. Their neglect of the non-Muslim and 'provincial' kingdoms, relative to the Sultanate of Delhi and the Mughal empire, sprang also from their own conscious or unconscious identification with the 'empire-builders' of medieval India. Most of the British historians were nonetheless keen to demonstrate the inferiority of the medieval Indian state to the United Kingdom or even to the British empire in India. The most glaring difference between the medieval Indian states and Great Britain appeared to be constitutional: the existence of an absolute despotism in medieval India was underlined or assumed by many a British historian, though some of them attempted to show the gulf between this 'theoretical' despotism and the actual restraint imposed by the exigencies of historical circum-

## THE MEDIEVAL INDIAN STATE

stances on the 'despots'. Similarly, it was generally assumed that Muslim law was zealously applied in the Indo-Muslim states, though the indifference of some of the rulers to that law was also pointed out by many of the historians. In fact, the idea that the Mughal state under Akbar was virtually both secular and national was first put forth by a British historian. The position of the non-Muslim subjects in the Indo-Muslim states and the treatment given to them by the Muslim rulers came in for special comment. In spite of the elaborate administrative machinery of the Mughal government, its actual operation appeared to have only a limited scope, particularly in the sphere of 'welfare' services. Some of the British historians showed interest in the economic factors and their relevance for the nature and end of politics during the medieval times. But one thing which was almost completely neglected by the British historians was the problem of the *umara* in their relationship with the *sultans* and the *padshahs*. The tendency to treat the holders of political power at subordinate levels simply as 'bureaucracy' went hand in hand with the inability of the British historians to ask many relevant questions.

After this brief survey of some of the British historical writing on medieval India, a few suggestions may be made in connection with the study of the medieval Indian state. We must primarily look for the locus of political power and the problems of its distribution or delegation through some institutional framework. The relation of the structure of power to economic structure on the one hand and to 'ideas' on the other is always worth examining. The medieval Indian state must be studied in terms of its function in the contemporary society.

## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM: MAJOR TRENDS

Until recently, the historians of medieval India had paid only a cursory attention to Indian Sufism. As if in compensation, its importance has been emphasized during the past thirty years more perhaps than of any other aspect of medieval Indo-Muslim life. Both the recent interest in Indian Sufism and its relative neglect earlier endow the history of its study with an intrinsic interest. That alone however is not the justification for undertaking this brief survey of the study of Indian Sufism. It may be assumed that the history of the study of a subject is useful for further advances in the study of that subject. Not only the major trends of historical and sociological studies but also the extra-academic currents of thought and feeling appear to have helped or hindered the historical study of Indian Sufism. A present-day student of the subject may therefore become more self-aware in his task of studying Indian Sufism through a knowledge of his heritage.

The study of Indian Sufism may be said to have begun in the late eighteenth century when the famous British orientalist Sir William Jones made a new departure in orientalism by an essay on the mystical poetry of the Persians.<sup>1</sup> Though his chief concern was with the aesthetic qualities of Persian poetry, he discussed its contents in a manner that made his essay more or less a study of Islamic mysticism. For Jones, mysticism was a general feature of all religions and Sufism was more akin to Jewish, Christian or Hindu mysticism than to Islam as it was understood in his own day in Europe. From his reference to Amir

---

<sup>1</sup> *Asiatick Researches, III.*

## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM

Khusrau and Kabir (whom he regarded as a Muslim mystic), it is evident that he regarded Indian Sufism as merely the extension of Persian mysticism into India. Jones was a theist and for him the most commendable aspect of Sufism was its theosophy.

Jones's immediate successors too found much to commend in Sufism. John Malcolm thought of Kabir as a celebrated Sufi and appreciated him as a 'philosophical deist' who preached benevolence and philanthropy.<sup>2</sup> For Mountstuart Elphinstone, the Sufis were a 'class of philosophers'; they were remarkable for their religious catholicity.<sup>3</sup> Inspired by the example of Jones and encouraged by Malcolm, James William Graham wrote a treatise on Sufism for the Bombay Literary Society. He associated Sufism with wisdom, piety and ardent devotion.<sup>4</sup> His hagiological sources reminded him constantly of *The Bible*. Without any 'intentional irreverence', he saw 'the mystery of the Trinity' in the mystical terminology of the Sufis.<sup>5</sup> Many passages from the Holy Scriptures, on the other hand, appeared to Graham to speak the language of Sufism; its system of spiritualism was for him 'nearly the doctrine of grace'.<sup>6</sup>

For its early British students, Sufism was important not only because of its value for a comparative study of religions but also because of the hold it appeared to have on the lives of contemporary Indo-Muslims. John Malcolm believed that a knowledge of the customs and manners as well as the religions of Indian peoples could be useful to the British administrator in India. In his *History of Persia* (1815), in which he found it 'impossible to pass over' the Sufis, he refers to their greater influence and importance in India.<sup>7</sup> Graham's treatise on Indian Sufism was written

---

2 *A Sketch of the Sikhs*, London 1812, 145.

3 *An account of the Kingdom of Caubul*, London 1815, 207-09.

4 *Transactions of the Bombay Literary Society* (London, 1819), I, 90.

5 *Ibid.*, 109, 118, 119, n.

6 *Ibid.*, 100.

7 John Malcolm, *History of Persia*, Lahore 1888, 140, 141, 159.



on the assumption of its great popularity among the Muslims in India.<sup>8</sup> This interest in Sufism as a part of the general interest in the non-political life of the Indo-Muslims is evident also from Mrs Mir Hasan Ali's *Observations on the Mussulmans of India, descriptive of their Manners, Customs, Habits and Religious Opinions* and from G.A. Herklots' *Kanoon-i-Islam or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India*, both published in 1832.

Some of the early nineteenth-century British historians of India recognized the relevance of Sufism for the study of medieval Indian history. John Leyden, though he did not write as a historian, noted the affinities of the Raushaniya movement with Sufism and produced evidence from Pashtu and Persian sources on the role of Bayazid and his followers in the Afghan risings against the Mughals.<sup>9</sup> John Malcolm believed that the Sufis had played a considerable role in softening the mutual antipathies of Hindus and Muslims in medieval India. The rise of Sikhism was explained by him largely in terms of the influence of the Sufis on Hindu religious reformers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Mountstuart Elphinstone in his *History of India* (1841) reviewed the social and cultural conditions of India before Akbar's accession to the throne and marked the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a period of the most celebrated Indian Sufis. In his view, Sufism in India had lost its ascetical character by the end of the fifteenth century and it came to have a decisive influence on the religious attitudes of Akbar and Dara Shukoh.<sup>11</sup>

The earliest British students of Indian Sufism found few successors during the nineteenth century. Jones was followed as an admirer of mystical poetry by the English translators of Umar Khayyam, Jalaluddin Rumi and Hafiz but

8 *Transactions of the Bombay Literary Society* (London 1819), I, 89, n.

9 *Asiatick Researches* (Calcutta 1810), XI, 363-428.

10 *A Sketch of the Sikhs*, 144.

11 II, 415, 416, *passim*.

## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM

not as a student of mystical theosophy. The British students of Islam turned their attention to its cradle-lands, while the study of Sufism was taken up by the Continental scholars. The British historians of India as a rule confined their attention to political history. John Briggs, translating the *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, deliberately omitted the portion dealing with the Sufi saints as irrelevant to an understanding of medieval Indian history. This interest in only the political history of 'Muslim' India is most remarkable in the monumental work of H.M. Elliot and John Dowson who, in the *History of India as Told by its own Historians* (1867-77), identified medieval Indian history with Indo-Muslim politics. They had assumed of course that the political history of 'Muslim' India was an intelligible field of study without any reference to the non-political activities of the Indo-Muslims. J.T. Wheeler however recognized the relevance of religion for medieval Indian politics, but only to trace out the 'political results' and 'the lessons' of Indian history for the government of British India. History for the majority of late nineteenth-century British historians of 'Muslim' India meant little more than past politics.<sup>12</sup>

It is not easy to account for this lack of British interest in the social and cultural aspects of 'Muslim' Indian history; but the lack of British interest in Indian Sufism may be attributed partly to the dominance of Utilitarian and Evangelical ideas and attitudes in British intellectual and religious life in the nineteenth century. James Mill, for example, gave a short shrift to Jones and Elphinstone for their appreciation of Muslim mystics.<sup>13</sup> The Utilitarians had nothing but contempt for the mystical and the ascetical on both intellectual and moral grounds. The Evangelicals had little sympathy for, and less inclination to study, the non-Protestant religions; they took no notice of Sufism ex-

---

12 For a discussion of the point, P. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*, London 1960, 'Reflections'.

13 *History of British India*, London 1820 (2nd. ed.) , II, 76 n.

cept for polemical purposes. The primary concern of both the Utilitarians and the Evangelicals was with how radical social change could be introduced in the present; and, for all their interest in Indian societies, they neglected the study of past social organizations precisely because they tended to treat individuals as atoms. Furthermore, with their deep concern with morality, they lent a strong support to Positivism which, according to Noel Annan, was responsible for the British failure to evolve the interests or the techniques of a Durkheim.<sup>14</sup>

However, a few of the British administrators in India, influenced by the work of the social anthropologists at home, by *The Golden Bough* in particular, began to study the beliefs and superstitions of the common people and the influence of Sufism also came in for their attention. R.C. Temple's *Legends of the Punjab* was meant to be a study of folk-lore as 'a science'.<sup>15</sup> His manuscript papers, collected for a study of the cult of the *zinda-pir*, reveal his interest in many of the prominent Sufis of early medieval India.<sup>16</sup> The social anthropologist's interest in the Sufis is evident also from William Crooke's *The Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India* (1893). Anthropological interest in saints and shrines survived into the first quarter of the present century.<sup>17</sup> The works of Mrs Mir Hasan Ali and G.A. Herklots were now edited and published, significantly by William Crooke.

---

14 N. Annan, *The Curious Strength of Positivism in English Political Thought*, London 1959.

15 Preface.

16 Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

17 See, for example, J. Horowitz, "Baba Ratan, the Saint of Bhatinda", *Journal Punjab Historical Society*, II, 97-117; H. A. Rose, "Hypaethral Shrines in the Punjab", *ibid.*, III, 144-146; M. Irving, "The Shrine of Baba Farid Shakarganj of Pakpattan", *ibid.*, I, 70-86; W. Crooke, "Notes on some Muhammadan Saints and Shrines in the United Provinces", *The Indian Antiquary*, LIII; A. J. O'Brien, "The Muhammedan Saints of the Indus Valley", *Journal Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, XLI.

## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM

At the same time, some of the British orientalists and Christian missionaries re-underlined the important of Sufism in medieval Indian history. Sir Thomas Arnold pointed out the survival of Hindu customs and usages among Indian Muslims as a testimony to the successful missionary work by the Sufis; their role as the peaceful missionaries of Islam was emphasized by him in his well-known work *The Preaching of Islam* (1896). Edward Sell paid a considerable attention to the Sufis and their Orders in his *Essays on Islam* (1901). In the beginning of the present century Christian missionaries were coming to feel that in order to be successful in their own mission they had to reckon with the Sufis and their influence among the common people.<sup>18</sup> An understanding of the religion they were thus confronting became the first requisite of their work as missionaries. By 1930, when Titus Murray published his *Indian Islam*, he was keen to show, among other things, 'the place that Sufism and the religious orders hold in relation to Islam in India, and the influence they have had on its development and spread'.<sup>19</sup>

A notable aspect of this increasing interest in Indian Sufism was the rediscovery of hagiological literature. Macauliffe, in *The Sikh Religion* (1909), made use of mystic literature in order to elucidate Guru Nanak's relationship with the Sufis, hagiological literature came to attract the attention also of the historian and the social anthropologist. Henry Beveridge, for example, analysed the *Rashhat-i-'An-ul-Hayat* and pointed out the decisive influence which the Naqshbandi Khwajas had over the Mughal princes of their time.<sup>20</sup> Some of the problems of Naqshbandi history were discussed by H.A. Rose in 1923.<sup>21</sup> By now,

---

18. See the "Survey compiled by the National Missionary Council of INDIA, *The Muslims of India, Burma and Ceylon and the extent of Christian Missionary Enterprise among them* (1927).

19 110; see also *The Moslem World*, XII, 129.

20 *Journal Royal Asiatic Society* (1916), 59-75.

21 *The Indian Antiquary*, LII.



Indian scholars had started taking interest in the Sufis simply by bringing to light more hagiological literature having a bearing on those subjects in which the British writers had shown some interest.<sup>22</sup>

Before coming to the study of Indian Sufism by scholars of the Indian subcontinent, it may be noted that the earliest British students of Sufism were interested in mystical literature and theosophy without making any distinction between Sufism in India and elsewhere. Nevertheless they were impressed by its importance in the life of the Indo-Muslim community, past and present. During the latter half of nineteenth century, while the British historians of medieval India confined their interest to political history or showed some interest in religion only where it appeared to touch politics, the British orientalists turned either to the original lands of Islam for an understanding of Islam, or to Persia for its poetry. The chief British orientalists of the present century too, like many of the important Continental scholars, have concentrated their attention on Arabic and Persian studies.<sup>23</sup> Indian Islam or Sufism has come in for their attention as a subject from which examples could be taken to illustrate some general themes of Islamic history and culture. The anthropologist's interest has not been in the Sufis themselves but in the nature of their influence on the beliefs of the common people so as to provide fuller data for confirming or evolving the general principles of their 'science'. The Christian missionaries approached Indian Sufism mainly with a view to assessing its role either in the propagation of Islam in India or in the religious life of the Indo-Muslim community.

---

22 See 'for example, "Two Moslem Saints and Mystics", *The Moslem World*, XV; "The Pirs; or, The Muhammadan Saints of Bihar", *Journal Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, III; "The Nur Bakhshi Sect", *Proceedings and Transactions Third Oriental Conference*, 683-705; and *Oriental College Magazine* (1925 & 1929).

23 E. G. Browne, R. A. Nicholson, Sir Hamilton Gibb, Professor A. J. Arberry, for example.

## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM

For comparative studies in civilization, religion or mysticism, western students of Islam have treated 'Muslim' India as almost a backwater. For them, the study of Indian Sufism did not exist in its own right. The first British contribution directly to the study of Islam and Sufism in India has appeared only recently.<sup>24</sup>

Interest in Indian Sufism has increased in the Indian subcontinent immensely in a few decades. In fact in the past thirty years Indian scholars have written about the subject more than all that had been written about it in the previous hundred and thirty years. This in itself is a significant development. The character of the work done in the past thirty years and the nature of this new interest in Indian Sufism throw some light on each other.

In a considerable number of articles, the chief aim has been either to bring hagiological material in manuscript to the notice of the student of medieval Indian history or to present biographical sketches of saints on the basis of such material.<sup>25</sup> Whereas British historians, generally speaking, had neglected non-historical literature and had made little attempt to use hagiological material for the kind of history they were most interested in writing, some of the Indian historians who were familiar with the methods of modern European historiography emphasized the need of utilizing non-historical literature—legal treatises, theological works, literary histories and compositions, and 'such non-political writings as biographies of saints'—for the political and social history of medieval India.<sup>26</sup>

---

24 P. Hardy, "Islam in Medieval India", *Sources of Indian Tradition* (ed. Wm. Theodore de Barry), New York 1958, 367-523.

25 *Oriental College Magazine* (May, 1934), 109-116; *Islamic Culture*, XXV, 52-73; *Proceedings All Pakistan History Conference*, 211-16; *Journal Pakistan History Society* (1953), I, 46-55; *Bharat Kaumudi* (1945), 69-76; *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings*, XXVII; *Proceedings Pakistan History Conference* (1952) & (1953); *Oriental College Magazine* (1955), 1-66; *Journal Pakistan Historical Society* (1955), III, 268-72.

26 A.B.M. Habibullah, "Re-evaluation of the Literary Sources of Pre-Mughal History", *Islamic Culture* (1941), 213; see also, Riazul Islam, "A survey in outline of the Mystic Literature of the Sultanate Period" *Journal Pakistan Historical Society* (1955), III, 201-08.

The urge to write the social and political history of medieval India with the help of 'mystic records' is evident from a number of articles contributed by Indian scholars to contemporary periodicals.<sup>27</sup> Around 1930, some of the Indian historians broke a fresh ground by studying the social and cultural aspects of medieval Indian history.<sup>28</sup> Interest in Indian Sufism appears to have been encouraged partly by this general urge to rediscover some of the neglected aspects of medieval India.

The urge to study the non-political life of medieval India appears to have been supplied largely by contemporary politics which brought into focus the relations between the major communities of the Indian subcontinent. The choice of a theme like the "Cultural Relations between Hindus and Muslims" in the past reflects the author's concern with Hindu-Muslim relations in the present.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, one of the most urgent problems was to discover:

How did the Hindus and Muhammadans, alien to each other in every aspect of their religious and social life, arrive at a mutual understanding and a tolerant re-adjustment of their contradictory ideals?

At any rate, the historian's business should be to answer this vital question.<sup>30</sup>

The alleged or real role of the Indian Sufi in Hindu-

---

27 See, for example, *Proceedings All Pakistan History Conference*, (1951), 231-46; *Proceedings Indian History Congress* (1939), 649-60.

28 M.A. Ghani, *A History of Persian Language and Literature at the Mughal Court*, Allahabad 1929; K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Condition of the People of Hindustan (1200-1550)*, a doctoral thesis completed in 1932 and published in 1935 in the *Journal Asiatic Society Bengal* (1935); M.G. Zubaid Ahmad, *Contributions of India to Arabic Literature* (1946) originally a doctoral thesis completed in 1929; M. Wahid Mirza, *The Life and Works of Amir Khusrau* (1935), a doctoral thesis completed in 1929; for the beginning of interest in the work of Amir Khusrau, see the interesting Introduction to the *Prolegomena to an Edition of the Works of Amir Khusrau*, Delhi 1917. For Periodical contributions, see *Oriental College Magazine*, IX, X, XI and May, 1939; *Journal of Indian History*, XXV; *Islamic Culture*, XXX.

29 *The Calcutta Review* (May, 1935).

30 A.C. Bannerjee, "Early Indo-Persian Literature and Amir Khusrau", *The Calcutta Review* (1935, 1962 and 1963).



## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM

Muslim *rapprochement* in medieval India has endowed Indian Sufism with a peculiar interest. Its study has been pursued or recommended for its usefulness in discovering 'the real synthesis' of Islam and Hinduism taking place through *tasawwuf*.<sup>31</sup> Dara Shukoh has received great attention for being the 'ideal interpreter and reconciler of the deepest truths of the Hindu and Muslim religions'.<sup>32</sup> It has appeared to many a writer that one of the most powerful factors which contributed to this reconciliation was 'the historic role of mediators played by Muslim Sufis'.<sup>33</sup> It is worth remarking however that this general assumption is sometimes contradicted by the evidence produced by the writer himself.<sup>34</sup>

In fact enough of evidence has been presented which undermines the generalization that Hindu-Muslim *rapprochement* was taking place through the medieval Indian Sufis. The purifiers of Indian Sufism from its un-Islamic accretions have as much come in for attention as the adapters of Islam to its Indian environment.<sup>35</sup> Just as the struggle, on the ideological basis of cultural assimilation, to free India from British rule by a common Hindu-Muslim front gave Dara Shukoh his peculiar importance as a subject of study, so the struggle, on the ideological basis of cultural differentiation in India, to free Muslims from a possible Hindu political domination brought Shaikh Ahmad Sarhindi

---

31 S.K. Chatterji, "Islamic Mysticism, Iran and India", *Indo-Iranica* (October, 1946), I, 31.

32 Tara Chand, "Dara Shikoh and the Upanishads", *Islamic Culture* (Oct. 1943).

33 Abid Husain, *The National Culture of India* (Jaico, 1956), 56-57.

34 See, for example, S.A. Rashid, "Some Chishti Saints of Bengal", *Proceedings All Pakistan History Conference* (1952), 207-16.

35 B.A. Faruqi, *The Mujjaddid's Conception of Tauhid*, Lahore 1940; see also, *Islamic Culture* (1941); *Ibid.*, XXV, 43-51; *Proceedings Indian History Congress*, 1945; *Islamic Culture* (Oct., 1947); *Visva Bharati Annals*, IV; *The Moslem World*, XXXV, 346-58; *Oriental College Magazine*, XXXIII; *Proceedings Indian History Congress* (1960); K.K. Qanungo, *Dara Shukoh* 1935; B.J. Hasrat, *Dara Shikoh: Life and Works* (1935).



and Shah Waliullah into a parallel prominence with Dara Shukoh. The division of the subcontinent into two independent states has not weakened the attitudes previously adopted towards the religious and cultural problems of medieval India.

Only a small portion of the recent writing on the Sufis is directly related to the ideas, emotions, beliefs and practices of the Sufis.<sup>36</sup> Only a few Indian scholars have shown any deep interest in the history of Islam as a religion in India. The study of Islam in its extra-Indian setting has appeared to be more fruitful to its Indian students, as much as to European scholars, though not necessarily for the same reasons. The history of Islam in India appears to reveal nothing more than what can be learnt from its course elsewhere. In fact many a student of Islam from Edward Gibbon to Gustave E. von Grunebaume has believed that Islamic civilization had thrown up its peaks before the thirteenth century. For example, Professor Muhammad Habib believes not only that Muslim culture had reached its culmination by the beginning of the thirteenth century but also that 'on the existing ideological and economic basis no further substantial advance was possible except in the field of application'.<sup>37</sup> Sufism too had become institutionalized by that time and its spiritual or social efficacy was lost in the round of ritualistic beliefs and practices.<sup>38</sup> Professor Habib's own contribution to the study of Indian Sufism is remarkable for its quality, but on his general estimate of medieval Indian Sufism, its study is hardly worth the candle.

The largest contribution so far to the study of Indian Sufism has come from Dr Khaliq Ahmad Nizami who rightly believes that no study of medieval India can be

---

36 See, for example, "The Sufi Movement in India", *Indo-Iranica* (1948-49); "Sufism in India", *Islamic Culture*, XXX.

37 Introduction to *Elliot and Dowson's History of India*, Aligarh 1952, 20.

38 *Ibid.*, 25.

## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM

complete unless the activities of the Muslim mystics are taken into consideration.<sup>39</sup> He is the only student of Indian Sufism to have pursued the subject consistently for over twenty years. Even in a brief analysis of the study of Indian Sufism it is difficult to ignore his approach to the subject. It must be emphasized, however, that the comment offered here is meant to be purely illustrative of the recent trends in the study of Indian Sufism.

In common with many other students of the subject, Dr Nizami has underlined the importance of hagiological literature as an eminently useful source of medieval Indian history. In his notices of the *Sarur-us-Sadur*, the *Ahsan-ul-Aqwal* and the *Jawami-ul-Kilam*, he has tried to show how even the political history of medieval India may be made more intelligible in the light of these sources which are indispensable for the religious and cultural history of the Indo-Muslims.<sup>40</sup> He has edited the *Khair-ul-Majalis* which as it is evident from its use by Professor Muhammad Habib, is a valuable source for the history of Indian Sufism in the fourteenth century.<sup>41</sup>

Following Professor Habib,<sup>42</sup> Dr. Nizami has favoured the use only of authentic *malfuzat* against the practice of those writers who could innocently swallow all that has come down as hagiological literature. This distinction between genuine and fabricated *malfuzat* is of course an important discrimination to make. But, as Dr Nizami himself suggests, the fact that these works are later fabrications does not dictate that they are of no use to the historian; 'their *historical* value cannot be altogether denied' because they illustrate 'how mystic idea expounded by the

---

39 *Ibid*, Supplement, 776.

40 *Proceedings Indian History Congress* (1950); *Journal Pakistan Historical Society* (1955), *Islamic Culture* (1950).

41 "Shaikh Nasiruddin Mahmud Chiragh-i-Delhi", *Islamic Culture*, XX, 129-53.

42. "Chishti Mystic Records of the Sultanate Period", *Medieval India Quartely* (Oct., 1950), I, 1-42.

great Chishti saints . . . were received, understood and interpreted by the succeeding generations'.<sup>43</sup> However, this aspect of Indian Sufism does not interest Dr Nizami; religious thought 'at a lower level' does not invite his attention. Here, Dr Nizami's approach to the subject stands in direct contrast to that of the social anthropologist.

According to Dr Nizami, higher mysticism as it was understood and interpreted by its best exponents was 'nothing but service of humanity'<sup>44</sup> and presented a contrast not only to the cheap mystic ideas current throughout the medieval period but also to contemporary politics. He has paid equal attention to the religious leanings of the politicians and the political role of the mystics.<sup>45</sup> The attitudes of the Chishtis, Suhrawardis and the Shattaris towards the state have been a favourite subject with him.<sup>46</sup> The Chishtis tenaciously stuck to their 'tradition of keeping aloof from temporal authority'; the Suhrawardis held high offices under the state and tried to influence the rulers; and the Shattaris almost staked their prestige on state patronage. Dr. Nizami's best sympathies appear to be with the Chishtis. Their own life of restraint and piety and the equality and fraternity of their *khanqah* present a contrast to the courtly life of luxury and indulgence and the social and racial prejudices of the governing classes.<sup>47</sup> At a time when struggle for political power was 'the prevailing madness', the Chishti saints reminded men of their moral obligations; to a world torn by strife and conflict, they tried to bring 'the harmony of a perfect

43 Supplement to *Elliot and Dowson's History of India*, 833.

44 *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakar*, Aligarh 1955, 2.

45 "Iltutmish, the Mystic", *Islamic Culture*, XX, 165-80; "The Religious Life and Learnings of Iltutmish", *Studies in Medieval Indian History*, Aligarh 1956, 15-47; "Shah Waliullah Dehlavi". *Islamic Culture*, XXV, 133-45.

46 *Islamic Culture*, XXII and the subsequent volumes.

47 "Some Aspects of Khanqah Life in Medieval India", *Studia Islamica* (1957).

## STUDY OF INDIAN SUFISM

orchestra'.<sup>48</sup> The cultural aspect of Indian Sufism was thus more valuable than the political conquest of northern India by the Turks.

Dr Nizami emphasizes that 'in a political and cultural estimate of the middle ages, the peculiar position of the Muslim mystics should not be forgotten'.<sup>49</sup> Uncorrupted by court life and unspoilt by wealth and power, they permeated the ranks of Indian society and aided 'the evolution of a common culture'.<sup>50</sup> By releasing 'syncretic forces which liquidated social, ideological, and linguistic barriers between the various culture-groups of India', they enabled their contemporaries to evolve a common cultural outlook.<sup>51</sup> Even the foundations of Muslim rule in India were stabilised through their work.<sup>52</sup> Dr Nizami's view of the Sufi's role in the cultural history of the Indian subcontinent is akin to that of those who have regarded the Sufi as the chief protagonist in Hindu-Muslim *rapprochement*.

From this brief survey of the study of Indian Sufism it is evident that the subject has a vast scope in terms of time and space and contents. Therefore, any generalized statement, in the present state of our knowledge of the subject, covering its entire range is extremely difficult. For its fruitful study, attention may be concentrated on important individuals, localities and regions. Only on the basis of a detailed study of the subject may it be possible eventually to write the history of Sufism rather than a history of the Sufis. The importance of hagiological literature for the study of Sufism may be taken for granted; but the proper interpretation of this literature demands a heightened awareness of its purpose, nature and function. At the same time, non-hagiological evidence must be brought to bear upon the subject as far as possible. The

---

48 *Shaikh Farid-ud-Din*, ix.

49 Supplement to *Elliot and Dowson's History of India*, 774-75.

50 *Studies in Medieval Indian History*, 74.

51 *Shaikh Farid-ud-Din*, 105.

52 "Jawami-ul-Kilam", *Islamic Culture* (Jan., 1950), 'conclusion'.



subject has many aspects—aesthetic, cultural, political, sociological for instance—all of which may be legitimately studied. But what is necessary first of all is to study the subject in its own terms and only then in terms of any contemporary problem. It may be useful to remember that past generations have lived in their own right.

## CONCEPTS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF MEDIEVAL INDIAN HISTORY

Since the conceptual adequacy of the periodization of Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern has been questioned by some of the medievalists themselves, the student of medieval Indian history should be aware of the limitations of 'medieval' India as a distinct period of Indian history, remembering all the time that a 'period' in history is a hypothesis about the past rather than a historical reality to be taken for granted.

The concept of 'medieval' India, notwithstanding its inadequacy, is not altogether an arbitrary or a 'crazy' notion. It may be relevant in this connection to point out how the concept has been generally accepted by the medievalists in the present century. The earliest British historians of India had looked upon its Muslim conquerors as their predecessors and to them the period between the beginnings of the Muslim and British conquests in India appeared to be a distinct period of Indian history from a political point of view. The nineteenth-century British historians of India treated the Indo-Muslims not simply as the conquerors of India but also as the members of a well-developed and distinct society or civilization. Thus, their concept of 'Muslim India' was based not merely on past politics but also on past civilizations which were different from their own. By the beginning of the present century (when the periodization of European history into ancient, medieval and modern had become fairly well established), 'Muslim' India came to be equated with 'medieval' India and the two terms have been regarded as more or less synonymous.

With a few significant exceptions, the twentieth-century historians of India have treated the period between the 12th and 18th centuries as 'medieval' on the basis of one or more of the following important assumptions :

(a) Muslim domination in Indian politics.

(b) The presence of two major and distinct communities in the Indian subcontinent.

(c) The significant interactions between two different societies on religious, social and cultural as well as political planes.

(d) The intellectual and institutional differences between the age in which the historians themselves have been living and about which they have been writing.

Not any single criterion but a combination of political, social, economic, cultural and intellectual criteria appear to make 'medieval' India a working hypothesis for the modern student of Indian history, a hypothesis which can be maintained until and unless a more rational criterion is found for presenting the historically significant phases of Indian history which makes them more intelligible.

The general acceptance of western concepts and methods by the twentieth-century Indian historians writing in English makes them more akin to the British historians of medieval India than to those Muslim and Hindu historians who wrote on medieval India before the nineteenth century. It is this continuity in historiographical tradition that enables us to treat all the work written in English as 'modern'. The modern historians of medieval India, generally speaking, have used one or more of the following basic concepts as their frame of reference: the state, nationality, civilization, society and culture.

The state has remained perhaps the most important concept for the modern historians of medieval India. The late eighteenth-century British historians were interested chiefly in medieval Indian politics and government; their constitutional and legal studies too had the state as their frame of reference. Then, in the nineteenth century, in

## CONCEPTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

the *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, medieval Indian history was identified with Indo-Muslim politics and this monumental work has left a decisive mark on subsequent studies of medieval India. As a corollary to the interest in past politics, institutional studies remained confined to administration, army and finance. W.H. Moreland's work on economic history, for example, was done in the framework of the medieval state rather than that of medieval economy. By far the bulk of modern historical writing on medieval India may be analysed in terms of politics and political and economic institutions. However, the study of the medieval Indian state as an institution is still a desideratum.

The early nineteenth-century British historians had used the concept of nationality, along with that of the state, in their approach to medieval India. In the classic works of James Grant Duff, James Tod and J.D. Cunningham, the Marathas, the Rajputs and the Sikhs were studied as 'nations' within the general framework of Hindu society. Mountstuart Elphinstone, who saw ten different 'nations' in India, saw nonetheless the existence of a 'national' state in India under Akbar. Many an Indian historian has approached medieval India with the concept of nationality without asking himself whether or not it can be fruitfully applied to the period. The urge, sometimes conscious but mostly unconscious, to make the past subservient to present politics appears largely to have been responsible for this rather anachronistic approach to medieval India.

Though only a few of the British historians of medieval India have shown interest in its non-political aspects, James Mill had made a most elaborate use of the concept of civilization in his attempt to analyse not only the government, economy and laws of the Indo-Muslims but also their religion, ethics, philosophy, sciences, arts, literature and historiography. His conception of civilization, however, was mechanistic and he did not attempt to see any inter-relationships between the various aspects of Islamic



civilization in India. Indian historians have paid a good deal of attention to some of the aspects of Indo-Muslim civilization but no major attempt has so far been made to see that civilization in the round. It appears in fact that Islamic civilization in India has been assumed rather than studied.

During the past forty years, Indian historians have extended the scope of medieval Indian studies through their practical interest in the social and cultural aspects of medieval India. Their conception of society and culture, however, has been as vague as that of civilization. It has been possible for some of the social historians to believe not only in the supreme value of a 'pots and pans' kind of social history but also in a single culture of two different societies or, conversely, in a single society with two distinct cultures.

The British historians of medieval India assumed the general moral and intellectual superiority of their own age and country over the age about which they were writing. However, they adopted different attitudes towards medieval India. The late eighteenth-century British historians, for example, appreciated the political success of the Indo-Muslims and their achievements in the sphere of administration. Though these historians thought of constitutional monarchy as the best form of government, they admired the vigour of despotic rule and the scope it gave to exceptionally talented rulers. To pass judgment on the individuals and their public actions was an integral part of their conception of historiography; their values of judgment were those of the Enlightenment—deism in religion, religious tolerance, worldly success, utilitarian morality and earthly happiness. The distinction between the Mughal and pre-Mughal periods of medieval Indian history, the image of Akbar as the greatest of medieval Indian rulers and that of Aurangzeb as the most 'bigoted', the decline of the Mughal Empire due to the religious policy of Aurangzeb and to the degeneration of his successors—these were some

## CONCEPTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

of the important legacies left by the late eighteenth-century British historians of medieval India on the basis of the then available evidence.

Some of the early nineteenth-century British historians of medieval India who represented, or came under the influence of, the Romantic movement in England appreciated medieval Indian peoples in terms of their own societies. James Tod, for example, was indulgent towards the religion of the Rajputs and admired their chivalry and their arts. James Grant Duff and J.D. Cunningham had a good deal of appreciation for the 'national' achievements of the Marathas and the Sikhs. Mounstuart Elphinstone, whose intellectual kinship with the Enlightenment is unmistakable, studied medieval India nonetheless with the imaginative sympathy of a Romantic. He tried to see medieval Indian history in the round and to enter the spirit of his characters and their age. Of all the nineteenth-century British historians of medieval India, Elphinstone came to be the most influential among the Indian students of medieval Indian history, though recently, and quite erroneously he has been criticised for his supposed Christian bias and political sectarianism. A sort of Hindu-Muslim *rapprochement* which culminated in the reign of Akbar was Elphinstone's most important legacy.

Elphinstone's sympathetic interpretation is evident from its contrast with that of the Utilitarian philosopher James Mill who virtually condemned the whole of the Indian past as a tale of barbarism, ignorance, superstition and misery. His essential judgment on medieval Muslim India was artfully concealed in a formal comparison of Hindu and Muslim civilizations. In his view, the state of civilization among the Indo-Muslims was much higher than among the Hindus. But that evaluation did not amount to much, because Mill had accepted Edward Gibbon's estimate of Islamic civilization as far inferior to modern European. Indeed, with his doctrine of progress, his extreme antipathy towards religion as the child of ignorance and the mother of evil,

his faith in the democratic form of government as the best, his adherence to the principles of Ricardian economy and his scant regard for literary or artistic achievements Mill could not be expected to have anything but contempt for things medieval.

Sir H.M. Elliot's scorn of Muslim rule in India was more direct than Mill's. In Elliot's view, the medieval chroniclers had glossed over the evils of despotic government and its sanguinary laws by studiously dwelling on the might and splendour of the court. Elliot was proud of English institutions and of the achievements of British rule in India which presented for him a contrast to medieval Indian institutions and to Muslim rule in India. It has been suggested recently that he wanted to create a wedge between the two major communities in India. This explanation, however, appears to be too simple to make his approach to medieval India intelligible. Elliot was not alone among the British administrators to adopt a contemptuous attitude towards medieval India. The interpretation of medieval India by the authors in the Oxford and Cambridge histories of India is not essentially different from Elliot's.

Some of the Indian historians have attempted to correct the British administrator in his view of medieval India. Ishwari Prasad, who may be treated as representing the norm in this respect, did not believe that the Indian Middle Ages could be characterized as 'dark'. Muslim rule in general and Mughal rule in particular compared tolerably well with the British. The Muslim conquest of India was not an unredeemed evil for the non-Muslims; its cultural impact, particularly in the fields of religion and art, was fruitful. In one respect Muslim rule was even better than the British: the Muslim rulers spent their wealth and riches in the country of their adoption and there was no economic drain. It appears that the 'nationalist' historians tend to go to the opposite extreme in redressing the balance with some of the British historians. The favourite theme with the nationalist historians has been the *rapprochement*



between the conquered and the conqueror. The thesis has been presented in subtle as well as in crude forms. The parallel thesis that medieval Indian history was only a prelude to the division of the subcontinent into two 'nations' has also been presented in equally subtle or crude forms.

A most significant contribution to the study of medieval India has come from Marxist historians. They have underlined the importance of the economic factor in medieval Indian history. They have extended the scope of historical investigation by attempting to relate economic conditions to the structure of society and even to politics. Sometimes, however, the Marxist philosophy of history is applied to medieval India in rather a mechanical manner and even the available evidence is omitted, or it is forced into a desirable pattern. Nevertheless a most fruitful work was presented by Professor Satish Chandra in his *Parties and Politics*; and more recently, by Dr Irfan Habib in the *Agrarian System of Mughal India*.

The earliest British historians of medieval India had depended entirely on medieval chroniclers and European travellers for testimony. Mountstuart Elphinstone was exceptional in making use of *farmans*, letters, coins and non-historical literature along with chroniclers and travellers, both Asian and European. Elliot and Dowson's work was professedly a history of medieval India as told by contemporary recorders. Though many of the modern historians of medieval India have utilized non-historical literature and the evidence from archaeology and numismatics along with the use of historical literature, it is fair to generalize that the bulk of modern historical writing on medieval India is based on the work of the medieval chroniclers themselves. Notwithstanding what is often called the 'critical use of original sources', it has been generally assumed that the medieval historians were writing the same kind of history that the modern historians are interested in writing. If it were so, perhaps the whole distinction between medieval and modern historiography



would be meaningless; and for some modern historians indeed there is no difference.

Dr Peter Hardy's study of five of the medieval historians in *Historians of Medieval India* is undoubtedly an important contribution to the cultural history of medieval India but its greater significance lies in the bearing which R.G. Collingwood's philosophy of history has come to have on medieval Indian studies. In a convincing analysis of the motives, assumptions and methods of these medieval writers, Dr Hardy has shown that their approach to the past was neither humanistic nor academic and that even in their allegedly political narratives their 'idiom' was not political in the modern sense. One may dispute with the author some of the detail of his analysis or arguments, but there is no escape from his general conclusion that these medieval writers cannot be used simply as 'sources'. They do present very valuable evidence but only when the modern historian asks them relevant and intelligent questions to which they have not necessarily provided ready-made answers.

## MEDIEVAL INDIA AND THE PRESENT

In accepting the invitation to participate in a seminar on 'The Meaning of History for Present Day India' and to talk of medieval India and the present, I have committed myself to a declaration of my creed as a student of medieval India history. This was both presumptuous and risky : presumptuous because in order to talk of the significance of medieval India for the present, one should have a thorough knowledge of the present as well as medieval India and I cannot claim to have either ; and risky, because on such a subject one can present only a viewpoint which may be no more than a personal bias. In presenting my viewpoint here I am aware of being highly selective, but I hope I am not being tendentious.

It hardly needs repeating that any historical process involves both continuity and change. Though the historian concentrates his attention primarily on the change, he can do so only by keeping the continuum in view. It is the historian's recognition of the magnitude of change that results in the 'periodization' of a particular historical process and it is his awareness of the continuities amidst change that impels and enables him to regard a 'period' in history as no more than a useful label. 'Medieval India' is a label used by the historians to designate certain characteristics of the period in question and to distinguish it from the dominant historical phenomena of a later time which, almost by contrast, is designated as modern. Our problem today is to examine if the transition from the 'medieval' to the 'modern' has finally taken place in India.

Much of what was there in medieval India has of course vanished without leaving a trace and even in some apparent

continuities one can discern a real change. Take for instance Batala of the days of Sujan Rai Bhandari. Batala was then an important administrative centre and, apart from the offices and residences of the pargana officials, it had the spacious houses and orchards of many a rich family ; its *pucca bazars*, which had been provided by one Wazir Khan in 1669, were a source of pride to its inhabitants ; its various parts were adorned by many mosques, rest-houses or *karwan-sarais* ; and there were several impressive tombs of such once-venerable men as Shihabuddin Bukhari, Shah 'Ismail, Shah Nimatullah and Shaikh Iahdad. Nearly all the Batala of those days is now dead and buried and what may still be surviving is so small or unobtrusive that we would not be able to recognize the present town if we were to land here with only Sujan Rai's description in our pockets.<sup>1</sup> Some of the long cherished traditions have also vanished. Even those which have come down to the present day have undergone a recognizable change. Where would we find in the neighbourhood of Batala in that exceptionally big fair at Achal those public and private men, women and children, medicants and spiritual guides, clever buffoons and eloquent story-tellers, jugglers and rope-dancers or the pantomime, music, song and dance which we find in the pages of the *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, or those pictures of horses, heroes, banquets and war which rivalled the picture-gallery of Mani ?<sup>2</sup>

I have given here only one instance of a virtual annihilation of the medieval past in an apparent continuity, but such examples can easily be multiplied and it may be suggested that changes of the obvious, palpable kind have occurred mostly in the spheres of politics and government. Now we may cite an example of a virtual continuity of a medieval institution into the present day—and more in-

---

1 For a translation of Sujan Rai's description of Batala, see Jadunath Sarkar, *The India of Aurangzib*, Calcutta 1901, 84-87.

2 *Ibid.*, 91-97.

stances of this kind can be added to show that the institutions which have survived into the present have been mostly of a social, particularly religious, character.

At a place called Jakhbar Jogian, which is not very far from Batala, there is a Jogi establishment. Its present *mahant*, Baba Brahm Nath, claims for his office an antiquity of nearly four centuries. This claim is verifiable from reliable evidence.<sup>3</sup> In the reign of Akbar there lived a *jogi* called Udant Nath who was important enough to attract the Emperor's notice. In 1571, Akbar conferred two hundred *bighas* of land by way of *madad-i-maash* on Udant Nath (this, incidentally, is one of the earliest revenue-free grants given by Akbar to a non-Muslim). After Udant Nath's death around 1600, one of his many disciples succeeded in his *gaddi* and the line of succession can then be traced to the present *mahant*.

Here therefore is an institution which in its essentials has survived from the days of Akbar. What is quite significant to note about the *jogis* of Jakhbar is that they were generally patronized by the contemporary rulers. Jahangir and Shah Jahan confirmed the grants given by Akbar to at least three *jogis* of this establishment and Aurangzeb increased their grants in the early years of his reign. In the fifteenth year of his reign, however, the grant made originally to Udant Nath was resumed. The land remained in the possession of the *jogis* who started paying the fixed annual revenue of hundred and seven rupees for those two hundred *bighas* of land. The grant was fully restored soon after Aurangzeb's death and, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the *mahants* of Jakhbar came to possess lands and other property at about two dozen places either directly under Mughal administration or under the vassal hill chiefs. In the late eighteenth century, when the Mughal authority in this part of the empire was replaced by that

---

<sup>3</sup> This evidence has now been published by the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, in the form of a monograph entitled *The Mughals and the Jogis of Jakhbar* by Dr B. N. Goswamy of the Panjab University, Chandigarh, and the author of the present paper.



of the Sikh chiefs, the *jogis* of Jakhbar continued to enjoy the patronage of the new rulers. It may be interesting to note in this connection that one of the Sikh chiefs sent a general instruction to his *diwan* against deviation from an established practice. The conservative among the British administrators of the Panjab were quick to realize the value of maintaining the *jogis* of Jakhbar in their established position and, thus, the present incumbents of the Jakhbar *gaddi* hold some of the lands that had been granted to their predecessors by the Mughal rulers.

Mahant Brahm Nath overshadows the local population in a manner in which his *dera* dominates the overgrown hamlet of Jakhbar. His influence is by no means confined to the neighbourhood of the village. Even his employees exercise a considerable influence in the town of Pathankot and command a good deal of respect. The support of the *mahant* of Jakhbar to a candidate for the state Legislature, or the Parliament, becomes a source of confidence. It may be safely suggested that the influence of the *mahants* with the local people during the medieval times was equally considerable, if not greater. "One need not deny to the Mughal rulers a measure of charity springing from humane consideration, but one may be equally justified in looking at their patronage of the *jogis* as a politic measure. The Jakhbar establishment, with its conservative and stabilizing character, became in due course a 'vested interest' favouring the contemporary rulers. However, the existence of this institution cannot be attributed simply to its patronage by them; its *raison d'etre* must be looked for in the religious sentiments of the people, if not of the rulers as well. The Mughal emperors who showed their tangible kindness to the *jogis* regarded them as 'deserving men' in terms of piety and sanctity; their prayers for the permanence of 'the conquering dynasty' were regarded as efficacious. What is quite obvious is that the continuity as well as the foundation of this institution was intimately related to the essentially religious outlook of the people

connected with it.

However, to be religious in outlook is not necessarily to be 'medieval'. Take for instance the institution in which this seminar on 'The Meaning of History for Present Day India' is being held. It proclaims in its very name to be a Christian institution. The existence of this institution is unthinkable without the religious sentiments of its founders. But to regard Baring Union Christian College as 'medieval' is equally unthinkable. If John C.B. Webster's paper on 'The Role of History in Christian Higher Education in India' is a fair indication of Christian thought today, which I think it is, a deep concern not only with the future but also with the past is almost an essential ingredient of that thought. Never before was such an important place given to the study of the human past in a system of religious thought. This deep concern of the modern Christian, which marks him out from the professors of other religions as much as from the medieval Christian, is very largely a reflection of the 'modern' outlook on life.

Indeed, the essential difference between the 'modern' and 'medieval' outlook may be conceived primarily in intellectual terms. Though the dominance of religious modes of thought and feeling in the life of the peoples of medieval India may be debatable, it is difficult to dispute that by far the bulk of the medieval Indian 'intelligentsia' was theocentric in outlook irrespective of caste, creed or community.<sup>4</sup> The prevalence of this outlook was perhaps

---

4 In connection with the rise of the 'modern' outlook in Europe, Dr S. C. Misra pointed out the relevance of the spirit of a fundamental kind of questioning arising from the disintegration of social and economic institutions of medieval Europe and Dr Fauja Singh pointed out that in India also 'from time to time there has been that kind of questioning'. As an example from the medieval period, Dr Fauja Singh cited the attitude of the *bhaktas* towards the caste. It is generally contended that the idea of equality was one of the basic ideas of the *bhakti* movement of the medieval times. It may be pointed out, however, that equality was not then conceived in social terms. The idea of equality in the *bhakti* movement amounted to little more than this: that all men, and with some of the *bhaktas* also women, were entitled to spiritual salvation.

not unconnected with the social situation in which the majority of people thought in terms of castes and communities. One was a Brahman, a Khatri, a Muslim or a Sikh first and anything else afterwards; only a few institutions could cut across the prevalent castes, creeds or communities, and then only partially.

To understand the full significance of the 'medieval' outlook and attitudes, it is necessary to underline some of the aspects of 'modern' outlook and its implications. At the risk of some simplification, the development of modern science may be given primacy among those factors which shaped the 'modern' outlook.<sup>5</sup> When Bacon advocated the efficacy of empirical observation in forcing nature to yield up its secrets, he was justified in equating knowledge with power. The mastery of nature was potentially ensured when Newton propounded his 'laws' by adopting a method which was to become 'the scientific method'; a general statement after 'experimentation' could be made about how things actually behaved and the validity of such a conceptualization could be checked against the actual behaviour

---

5 On re-reading H. Butterfield's *The Origins of Modern Science*, London 1957, I find that I am indebted to him for this impression. Referring to the scientific revolution in the introduction vii-viii, he says :

Since that revolution overturned the authority in science not only of the middle ages but of the ancient world—since it ended not only in the eclipse of scholastic philosophy but in the destruction of Aristotelian physics—it outshines everything since the rise of Christianity, and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes, mere internal displacements, within the system of medieval Christendom. Since it changed the character of men's habitual mental operations even in the conduct of the non-material Sciences, while transforming the whole diagram of the physical universe and the very texture of human life itself, it looms so large as the real origin both of the modern world and of the modern mentality that our customary periodisation of European history has become anachronism and an encumbrance.

of things.<sup>6</sup> The development of modern technology is a measure of the unprecedented mastery over the physical world obtained through modern science.

The impact of scientific discoveries on men's minds can hardly be exaggerated.<sup>7</sup> For one thing, God was displaced from the centre of the universe to the periphery even of human affairs. Men's ideas on religion had already begun to change in western Europe with the Renaissance humanism and the scepticism of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The scientific discoveries came as a revelation to those who were inclined to be sceptical about older forms of religious belief. If the universe was being governed by the natural laws of motion, as indeed it appeared to be to those who accepted the Newtonian universe as an 'established fact', there was no work left for God to do after he had given the first push to the universe. He thus, became simply the First Cause.<sup>8</sup> The more sceptical among the eighteenth-century philosophers went to the extent of denying even the First Cause and adopted an attitude of agnosticism bordering on atheism.<sup>9</sup> Henceforth.

---

6. Alfred Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, London 1969, 29-40. The author briefly discusses in these pages the rise of modern science and tries to discover the uniqueness of its method. What was essential to the development of modern science was the combination of 'conceptualization and experiment, or, in other words, of mathematical theory and empirical observation. The author underlines that a principle of development was inherent to the new scientific thought: 'Its theoretical patterns, or "laws" were a means of grasping and formalizing a great mass of empirical observations; but the very process which made their formulation possible ensured their progressive modification'.

7 For this crucial phase in the intellectual history of western Europe, see P. Hazard, *The European Mind* (tr. by J.L. May), London 1953.

8 Blaise Pascal, one of the most acute thinkers of the seventeenth century, noted with dismay: 'I can not forgive Descartes. He would gladly have left God out of his whole philosophy. But he could not help making Him give one flip to set the world in motion. After that he had no more use for God'. *The Pensees* (tr. J.M. Cohen), Penguin 1961-62.

9 As a good example of philosophic agnosticism, we may cite David Hume. For his relevant writings, see *Hume on Religion*. The Fontana Library, London and Glasgow 1963.



Christianity (and by implication, religion in general) was on the defensive: it has survived largely both by relinquishing its hold on many areas of human life and thought and by adjusting itself to the intellectual demands put upon it by the 'modern' outlook in which there is little room for supra-natural entities.

With the metaphysical supports of life hereafter thrown overboard, God as the centre of the universe was in a way replaced by man. What mattered more than anything else was man's happiness on this earth. The social scientist soon appeared on the scene to advocate mastery over the moral world. It was now believed by some of the foremost thinkers of the time that through the application of human reason (which had triumphed demonstrably over the physical world) to human affairs, a better world could be brought into existence. The old doctrine of Providence was replaced by the new idea of secular progress.<sup>10</sup>

Though the robust optimism of the early exponents of the brave new world now appears to be naive, the essential ingredients of the new outlook have been taken for granted rather than discarded.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is not yet possible to

---

10 For the emergence of this idea, see J.B. Bury. *The Idea of Progress*, London 1920.

11 In the paper read at the seminar, I had defined the three characteristics in the following terms: 'secularism, which tends to banish religion from public life and to reduce it more and more to a matter of personal belief; humanism, which assumes that man's life and his happiness on this earth is the most vital concern of the human beings; and rationalism, which induces and encourages men to apply their reason to all the problems which confront them'. The use of the terms secularism, humanism and rationalism proved to be a little misleading, though I had taken care to suggest the sense in which they were being used in the present paper. Dr W.H. McLeod pointed out that the age of 'rationalism' was passing away. In a certain sense, yes; but, as Dr Misra emphasized, we are still in the age which stresses a rational human approach. Incidentally, Dr McLeod remarked that the term 'built-in insurance' was a characteristic of the past and aptly underlines the naivete of early optimism about progress. However, I have used the term only for advancement in scientific knowledge.

think of the 'modern' outlook without associating with it the following three assumptions: (a) man's life and his happiness on this earth is the most vital concern of human beings; (b) to achieve that all-important goal, men have to cultivate and use their intelligence; (c) religion is more or less a matter of personal belief. Several important ideas and implications flow from a combination of these basic assumptions which characterize the 'modern' outlook. There is hardly an area of human life and thought that does not fall within the domain of human reason. The ideas of secularism in public life, democracy, socialism, economic prosperity, and a whole host of other ideas are rooted in the 'modern' outlook.

By comparison, it is possible to show that men in medieval India made use of their intelligence or that they concerned themselves with man's well-being. As a most conspicuous example of the first, one may safely turn to Abul Fazl and as a handy example of the second, to the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Both of them may be cited also as the exponents of religious tolerance and catholicity. But neither Akbar nor Abul Fazl can be called secular in the strict sense of the term; their outlook on life was essentially theocentric. Again, a fairly sophisticated science and technology were not unknown to medieval India, but there was nothing comparable to the modern science with its built-in insurance of advance. There was only a partial control over the physical world and a complete absence of the notion of a progressive control of the moral world. Man's well-being was not conceived in terms of his happiness on the earth alone. Thus, in spite of the shades of difference which one can see between the Mughal and pre-Mughal India, the prevalence of the 'medieval' outlook and attitudes is as palpable during the Mughal period as it was earlier.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Dr Misra suggested that there were some shades of difference between the Mughal age and the earlier centuries. For instance, there appears to have been a greater concern for politics then than earlier.

Present day India is relatively 'modern'. In the spheres of politics and government, for instance, there has been a sea-change. The Indian Union is ideally more 'modern' than most of the modern states. The ideal of a secular socialistic democracy would have been inconceivable in medieval times. The possibilities of evolving institutions in which competent persons may participate irrespective of their caste, creed or community have been increased. However, there is a gulf between the ideal and the actual. This may be attributed largely to the persistence of the medieval (or ancient) modes of thought as well as to the continuity of medieval institutions in a more tangible form. In the present day life of the Indian peoples there is thus a confrontation of the 'medieval' and the 'modern'. The adoption of modern ideals and institutions is not always accompanied by an awareness among the majority of the people that those ideals and institutions presuppose the existence of a new outlook on life. The social categories of caste and community can still be effectively evoked, although the more significant tussle is between those who have accepted both the new ideals and the outlook and those who are either unconsciously committed to the old or uphold the old ideas and attitudes in a modified form. This confrontation of the 'modern' and 'medieval' cuts across the labels of community and creed, and it is to be found sometimes in the thinking and attitudes of a single person.<sup>13</sup>

To this may be added the general empirical and humanistic concerns of the Mughals. However, these shades of difference do not make Mughal India 'modern'. As Dr Misra puts it rather strongly, the term science cannot be used strictly for the counterpart of modern science during the medieval period: 'There is absolutely no evidence of any growth of empirical knowledge'. In fact, the scientific method involving observation, conceptualization and verification was as unknown to the rest of the medieval and ancient world as to medieval India. What is quite unique to the 'modern' outlook is the willingness to learn more from 'experience' than from 'authority'.

<sup>13</sup> Instances can be found of 'scientists' persisting in their beliefs about astrology. In the field of politics, it is possible to meet a large number of honest 'nationalists' who unconsciously equate 'Indian' nationalism with simply 'Hindu' nationalism.

