

## AFTERWORD

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This issue has been concerned with two problems. First, all the contributors have considered how ideas travelled to, from and within nineteenth- and twentieth-century India. It examines how these ideas were received and reinterpreted by India's English-influenced intelligentsia in the light of its own intellectual histories. Second, the volume is intended as a contribution to an emerging global and trans-national history of ideas that attempts to set the sophisticated traditions of European, Atlantic, Islamic and Asian intellectual history in a world context.

Intellectual historians have long been concerned with the question of how ideas formulated in one society are appropriated, domesticated and even rejected in others. Histories of the Muslim world, notably Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*,<sup>1</sup> showed how representative government, which was a relatively new concept over much of nineteenth-century Europe itself, was received and adjusted to existing ideologies in Egypt and the Ottoman Empire. Some authorities found an analogy to popular representation in the ancient Islamic concept of *shura* or consultation. Others claimed that modern institutions and knowledge represented a resurfacing of divine revelation and reason (*ilm*) that had been vouchsafed to humanity by the tradition of Prophecy (cf. Devji, above, for South Asia).

Another classic illustration of how ideas travel is to be found in J. G. A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment*.<sup>2</sup> In this case, ideas of civic republicanism, deriving from Aristotle and formalized by Machiavelli and the Venetians, were domesticated in England and later the American colonies, apparently far from their intellectual home. New ideas were appropriated because conceptual space had already been made for them. In England the hierarchy of church and royalty had been disrupted by the Puritan ideology that man stands before his maker unmediated. This understanding of the individual was complemented by the

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<sup>1</sup> A. H. Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

theme that England as a reformed polity took part, on its own responsibility, in the sacred drama of unfolding Christian virtue. To that was added, in time, the historic idea of the ancient constitution, which guaranteed “good counsel” to a legitimate, but by no means sacred, monarchy. The British—and in turn the Americans—found analogies for ancient Athens and renaissance Venice in their own traditions. Thus the idea of civic humanism bonded with existing forms of Christian spirituality to create new ideological patterns.

This issue has traced similar appropriations and adaptations in India in the context of the ancient and complex forms of knowledge and sacred ideology which had grown up in the subcontinent. India had its own liberal “moment” remarkably early in the nineteenth century when European ideas—a medley of Rousseau, Montesquieu, Locke, Hume, Kant and, later, Hegel—were received and transformed there. In this case again, a variety of existing religious ideologies, such as Islamic and Zoroastrian free-thinking, the this-worldly ethical tradition of Vedantaśastra and the empowering spiritual technique of Tantra, acted as bodies of thought with a similar role to that ascribed by Pocock to Puritanism. They provided intellectual redoubts, standing against Brahminical ritualism, in which civic republicanism and later European idealist thought could be received and transformed. Further, in India, the shock and humiliation of colonial conquest and suborning of indigenous monarchies greatly exceeded even the moral apocalypse of the English Civil War. In this context, Rammohan Roy and his descendants in Madras and Bombay developed their own Indian version of the “ancient constitution” to empower a new Indian public sphere in which to oppose the racial despotism of the East India Company.

This short period marked a crucial rupture in the history of ideas. In the longer term, “Western” ideas of liberty, sociability and humanity were transformed and even deepened in the Indian context, while at the same time ideas previously regarded as “Indian” were projected onto a world-historical stage and found resonances and disciples in the West. The careers of Swami Vivekanand, Rabindranath Tagore and Mohandas Gandhi were testimony to this outward journey.

All the contributors to this issue, then, address the question of the domestication, rejection or circumvention of exogenous ideas in the context of endogenous ones and the use of these ideas as arguments at a world level. A critical concept here is analogy: ancient Greek lawgivers were conceived as analogous to India’s Manu and Sankara. The historic European contest and accommodation between church and empire, with all its profound ideological consequences, became analogous in the minds of nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals to the supposed ancient contention between Brahmin and Rajput (Bayly, above). Western idealism found an analogy in Indian vedantism with its

emphasis on the development of spirit through history. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, professor and radical nationalist leader, found in his study of the *Bhagavad Gita* analogies with the thought of Herbert Spencer, though a further injection of this-worldly religion into social Darwinism was necessary to make good the parallel (Kapila, above).

Analogy was, above all, a way in which people tried to understand the world of rapid change and movement in which they were living. This passion for understanding was the product of conjuncture, the simultaneous explosion of global crisis—intellectual, economic, political and moral. It was a period when despotisms—the restored European monarchies, the tsars, the papacy, the sultanate, the despotic Company and later crown governments in India—all seemed to be under attack from worldwide movements of constitutional liberalism, democratic nationalism and international humanism. It was also a period when the state in India was forced by its own ignorance to create new rules and codes to try to discipline the flux beneath it (Wilson, above). This historical conjuncture, for instance, made the Permanent Settlement of the revenues of Bengal in 1793 seem, for a time, like the post-revolutionary settlement in France, or seemed to make Hegel an *avatar* of modern Bengal, where the people, their land and their labour needed to be understood as a single entity since they were all part of one being moving in world history (Sartori, above).

Some situations, however, defied analogy and some political ideas could not easily be transplanted or domesticated in Indian soil, or were choked by the ideological growths surrounding them. Soulless Benthamism, mechanical “Smithianism” and the materialist version of Darwinism were all rejected by Indian intellectuals, or else they were appropriated and reconstructed in such a way that they bore little relation to the originary texts and interpretations. John Stuart Mill was intellectually dismembered, his emphasis on liberty and education retained, but his disparaging views of civilizations outside the modern West were silently discarded. The translations and interpretations of Western oriental scholars were appropriated and fed into India’s reconstructed past when, like Friedrich Max Müller, they put ancient India on a pedestal, but were rejected wholesale when they did not accord with that vision (Dodson, above). Western intellectuals and public moralists were used strategically as weapons to fight even more opprobrious ideological enemies. Thus John Stuart Mill was used by Ashutosh Mukherjee to damn James FitzJames Stephen’s moralized new imperialism.<sup>3</sup> German and French authorities were consistently employed to disparage British paternalists writing about India. Sometimes European writers were cited merely as successors and pale imitators of the great tradition of

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<sup>3</sup> Ashutosh Mookerjee (*sic*), “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity by James FitzJames Stephen” (London, 1873), *Mookerjee’s Magazine*, 2 (1873), 372–92.

Sanskrit sages that stretched from Manu to Sankara and on into the middle ages of Indian history. Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the Muslim modernist writers (Devji, above) adopted yet another tactic by creating a genealogy for Islamic modernist thought that related it back to the great age of Greek rationality and Semitic prophecy which culminated in Muhammad's revelation. Here, despite the appearance of "dialogue" between East and West, Western modernity was simply "provincialized", to use the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty.<sup>4</sup> But it was provincialized by reason and history, rather than by any appeal to a vague popular authenticity. Thus analogy, incorporation, translation, circumvention and rejection were all modes of appropriation used by Indian public men at different times in the overall attempt to understand the alarming new world in which they lived.

In addition to considering how ideas were generated in India and appropriated from outside, this issue has the wider aim of contributing to the project of a global or trans-national history of ideas for the modern period. This is not, of course, to argue that India did not generate, transmit and receive ideas from the wider world before the late eighteenth century. On the contrary, India's traffic in ideas with the Buddhist, Islamic and even Christian ecumenes had produced vibrant traditions of debate and textual analysis stretching back many centuries. These debates ran parallel to and sometimes intersected with India's own long-standing traditions of Sanskrit learning. For instance, Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, domesticated in the Islamic world, found their way to India, where they were in turn modified by Indian concepts of right political conduct.<sup>5</sup> However, the eighteenth century transition from the old world empires—the Ottomans, Mughals, Safavids and Qing—to the new European and American national empires created a profound set of ideological changes. Of course, many Indian social and economic forms persisted over this divide. But they were viewed from very different ideological perspectives by the new men of the nineteenth century. This reflected, in part, a massive geographical expansion of the range of ideological appropriations made by Indian thinkers. Rammohan pondered the Italian Carbonari, the Irish Liberator and Simon Bolivar; he read and later met Jeremy Bentham. The Bengal democrats and humanists of the late nineteenth century felt they were intimate with Mazzini, Hegel and Comte. A satirical editorial in an Indian journal chided the young Bengali intelligentsia for being poised "between Kali and Kant", debating German philosophy before dutifully attending sacrifice to the goddess

<sup>4</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Muzaffar Alam, *Languages of Political Islam in India, c. 1200–1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004).

of destruction and renewal. Pan-Islamists had begun by the twentieth century to trace the fates of their co-religionists in places as far distant as Algeria, the Caucasus and Tripoli, while even up to the 1880s Islamic thought was, by and large, centred on its Indian homeland, particularly the Gangetic basin of north India (Jalal, above).

Yet the use here of the terms global or trans-national intellectual history does not simply refer to this massive widening of scale, it also seeks to convey the idea that the actual content of political, religious and ideological thought in India had become irrevocably global or trans-national by the early decades of the nineteenth century. There were two external conditions that determined this change: first, the expansion of print culture and its effect on the dissemination of ideas and, second, the trauma of colonial conquest. India had always been a “literacy-aware” society and information and ideas had travelled along complex routes serviced by newsletters, runners, petition writers and information specialists of various sorts. The sudden spread of the lithographic press, and the rise of newspaper and book publishing, redoubled the dynamism of information dissemination in the subcontinent. British libraries and reading circles in the major port cities were rapidly penetrated and imitated by the Indian intelligentsia. Irony, satire and surprisingly violent political comment had become the order of the day in Indian public circles by the 1830s. It is from newspapers and ephemera rather than merely from the canonical texts of leisured thinkers that we can reconstruct an Indian intellectual history. Consequently liberty of communication was not simply a political demand; it became, like liberty of trade, a political doctrine.

As already implied, India’s loss of political autonomy to an aggressive, expansionist European power inflicted an intellectual revolution on Indians as dramatic and devastating as the political destruction of its kingdoms and rulers. This was a wholly different political context from the one that confronted the English when they began to appropriate the ideas of Machiavelli. It was the English Civil War redoubled by foreign conquest. It was as if the Aztecs had somehow regrouped and occupied England. The foundations of South Asian thought had been destroyed and had to be rethought *de novo*. Political legitimacy, the ends of communal living, the nature of sovereignty and ultimately the meaning of the Indian self had to be wholly revised. If British nineteenth-century debates between Liberals and Tories about the proper extent of liberty were fierce, how much deeper were they in India, where all the participants thought of themselves as slaves. This was why the theme of slavery surfaced again and again in their understanding of the world from Rammohan’s denunciation of the Company as a slave-trader, through Aurobindo’s denunciation of India’s enslavement and yearning for an ethical polity (Bose, above), to Nehru’s speeches on the eve of independence. Liberty was an ineffable essence, rather than simply

a condition of civil society, in a situation where a whole civilization felt deprived of it.

As a result of this, Indian thought became globalized or trans-nationalized in a sense deeper than the purely geographical (Majeed, above). The history and contemporary politics of the world became a moral drama in which India had to compete. Were Indians to disappear under the impact of colonization like American Indians and Australian Aboriginals, as some writers feared in the 1830s?<sup>6</sup> Was the Hindu “race” degenerating, by comparison with not just Europeans and Americans, but even Muslims, as some of their descendants feared in the 1900s?<sup>7</sup> Here Indians, like Europeans a little before them, turned to an ever more elaborate understanding of history for the answer. Increasingly, Indian public moralists “historicized” political thought, religion, the status of women and relations between religious communities or castes. History explained not only the demise of Indian liberty and self-respect, but also pointed to the grounds of their recapitulation. If Indians had once been capable of creating the most ancient and sophisticated civilization on earth, then it was fortune, circumstance and poor judgement, rather than the weak mental and moral capacity ascribed to them by a James Mill or a FitzJames Stephen, that explained their present predicament.

By the 1920s and the end of the period discussed in these articles, other doctrines were being created or domesticated in South Asia. Gandhi, despite his reputation as a traditionalist, was propagating a radical and morally empowered version of the self that severed it from the historicist pathway (Kapila, above). Scientific Marxism provided a new, materialist version of the evolutionary schema, even though Indians thinkers tried constantly to “inject” it with immanent spirit, as they had earlier done with Darwin. These new doctrines, however, were received and transformed in the context of the new ideas about history, religion and civil society that had emerged in the subcontinent since about 1800. In this way, India, rather than being an exceptional culture, cast athwart the thrust of Western society and its ideologies, as was argued by orientalists through to Louis Dumont in the 1960s, was instead a critical example of a global process. “Religion” in nineteenth-century India was not an aspect of surviving hierarchical tradition, but yet another hybrid version of the spirit underlying ethical polity, as debated by thinkers from Aristotle through Machiavelli to Jefferson. The modern intellectual history of India, even more than that of China or Japan, complicates and subverts the distinction between the Western and the Oriental. Modern Indian intellectual history attests to the virtuosity of Indian thinking about modernity. While its thinkers were all afflicted by a melancholy born of

<sup>6</sup> “On the colonisation of India”, *India Gazette*, 12 February 1830.

<sup>7</sup> Lieutenant Colonel U. N. Mukherjee, MD, “A dying race”, *Bengalee*, 1 June 1909.

their subject status, they displayed an extraordinary receptiveness to outside forms combined with a capacity to authorize their own distinctive contributions to a global debate. The decolonization of the mind long pre-dated political decolonization and also transcended it in its concern with the rearmament of the self and humanity as a whole.