

Orientalism and Neo- Hinduism

Lecture 1

Cultural Consequences of British Presence in India

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Orientalism

E. Said:

whatever kind of interest – literary, academic or educational – in Orient. No knowledge about Orient is possible without preliminary interest in the subject, without questioning which already presupposes certain answers. Thus this seemingly theoretical preoccupation is bound to power relations between that who wants to know and his subject. Representing Orient is inevitably bound to domination and representations of Orient express more about those who study it than about what is denoted by the term.

David Kopf - Orientalism vs Anglicism/Evangelicism

two kinds of cultural policy in India, both based on the idea of contemporary degradation of Indian society, difference in educational policy – combination of 'traditional' learning with western education (Sanskrit College)

- **Orientalism** – it is possible to regenerate India from its own sources
- **Anglicism** – there is nothing to build on in Indian tradition, to deliver India up to the high plane of civilization it is necessary to convert it completely to western manners, knowledge and religion.

Neo-Hinduism and Traditionalism

Paul Hacker, *Kleine Schriften* – according to W. Halbfass (1990)

- **"two ways of relating to the Hindu tradition while encountering the West." First of them has more publicity abroad the second is more vital in India(Halb, 219)**
- **Background: British presence in India - "was not just another case of foreign invasion" but "encounter between tradition and modernity"(Halb 217)**
- **Modern traditional Hinduism has preserved an essentially unbroken continuity with the tradition, and it builds upon this foundation, carries on what is already present in the tradition, even though additions are made and extrapolations occur." (Halb. 220)**
- **For Neo-Hinduism, return to tradition "is the result of rupture and discontinuity. [...] [here] the basic concepts and principles of this tradition have been reinterpreted and provided with new meanings as a result of the encounter with the West: [...] [Neo-Hindus] first adopt Western values and means of orientation and then attempt to find the foreign in indigenous." (halb., p. 220)**

British Cultural Imports to India...

P. Spear: "The Mughals and the British", in: A.L. Basham (2006), 359-60.

- 1. Judicial system with secular and independent** (on executive power) law and secular and character of state administrative.
- 2. Social-welfare government positive action** – promotion of idea that "**positive promotion of public welfare was a normal duty of government.**" Prior to British rule the government's duty was to protect socio-religious organism, which would work itself. EIC first took also this view, "[b]ut pressures, religious, rational, and utilitarian" in Britain led to change and "The India debates of Hasting's time [...] had enforced the principle of responsibility of the government for good administration." [...] [Under Bentinck than] The first steps towards this direction were the negative ones of the prohibition of *satī* (suttee), the suppression of thuggee, and the discouragement of infanticide. But they were followed by new educational policy, the introduction of English, irrigation projects and the building of roads and railways, and health measures." **The principle thus was here which nationalist used in argumentation against foreign government and which they followed afterwards.**
- 3. Representative and parliamentary government** introduced in later stage of their rule, which laid the solid basics for Indian democracy.
- 4. Nationalism** – caught by new Indian intellectuals by observing the habits of British, studying their literature, Mazzini etc. **Gāndhī - bringing it to the people at large, and presenting it as a religious but not sectarian cult."**

...British Cultural Imports to India

5. **Western education** – English, western literature and philosophy.

6. **Western science**

7. **Intellectual concepts of**

- **critical reason** – product of enlightenment "**introduced by the cloak of criticism of Indian customs, institutions and ideas.**
- **universal human rights and duties**, rights of individual as a person, and his responsibility for the society as a whole – "These things came in the British forms of evangelical and radical humanism, of the radical rights of man, and of Whig contractual civil rights." "**To this source must be ascribed social criticism of such things as *satī*, infanticide, Hindu widowhood, caste, and popular religious cults. [but also] positive aspect of these ideas, the equality of all not only before God but also before law, the personality and citizenship of women as well as men, the principles of democracy.**"

8. Whatever the influence of West on India or of India to the West, "**One thing is certain: the traditional brāhmanical attitude of 'neither a borrower nor a lender be' is gone for good.**"

Principles and Ways of Encounter

- Trade, administration, education – restructuring of Indian society, revenue collection, permanent settlement » new elite (English language) – *bhadralok* and new means of support in culture
- Warren Hastings policy » oriental studies and court – employment of the pandits
- Lord Wellesley – College of Fort William – employment of pandits – language revival – modern literature – printing press and book market
- Missionaries
- criticism of Hinduism as a cause of decline of the society (based on European concept of religion)
- printing press – spread of the Bible (Serampore mission – William Carey)
- missionary schools for boys and girls
- Replication of *bhadralok* (*Baramanush* or *bhadralok* - literary big people) – education – colleges conducted by government or *bhadralok* itself
- 1830s – gov. gen. Bentinck – dissolution of the College of Fort William, Anglicist cultural policy and interference into social order (abolition of *sati*) – **one way of awakening nationalism, the second way of awakening nationalism** – development of social and religious reform movements

Religious and Social Reform in British India...

Customized classification by **J. T. F. Jordens (2006)**

- **1st up to 1880**
- first period is connected with intelligentsia with English education, associated mostly with British administration or British trade, whom the contact with Britishers and European ideas made "look upon some social and religious characteristics of their own society with horror and disgust." They wanted rather to reshape their lives according to new standards and values, to clarify their ideas and propagate them "among their kindred intelligentsia. **Thus this first stage was a time of propaganda rather than of organization...**" and it was believed "that personal social reform needed to be based upon the solid foundation of religious reform."
- First this spread in Bengal where soon three groups can be distinguished: radicals – reformers – conservatives
- **Reform** should be carried from within the Hindu community:
Rammohan Ray, **Īśvarachandra Vidyāsāgar (1820-91)**, **Dayānanda Sarasvatī (1824 – 83)**
- **Radical: Henry Derozio (1809-31) and Young Bengal**
- **Conservative: Rādhākanta Deb (1794 – 1876) and Dharma Sabhā (1830)**

...Religious and Social Reform...

- **The second stage: 1880-1900**
- From now there was **identification of groups and individuals with Indian nation.** And this elite group "conceived its function as being **primarily one of political agitation and reform.**"
- **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-94) – Anandamath etc.**
- **Bál Gangádhar Tilak (1857-1920) - also wanted Indians to be strong again, proud and united in nationalism and saw Hinduism as the very basis of this new spirit. Published books and articles exulting antiquity and greatness of Hinduism. Was against social reform inspired by Western ideas because nationalist Hindu politics ought first extend to the masses.**
- **Prárthaná Samáj – educational work directed at women, low-cast workers, elementary schools and orphanages – "Although it was little preoccupied with religious life and reform, it retained, in an age when secularist humanism was strong, the vital connection between social and religious reform."**
- **Sádháran Bráhmo Samáj – philanthropic work on behalf of unprivileged but not engaged with social reform as such - "the all-absorbing intensity of political commitment and the passion of cultural revival relegated social reform into the background." (375).**

...Religious and Social Reform...

- **The Third Stage: form 1900**
- **objections of extremists to moderate leadership were basically two: that their reforms were British-oriented and therefore slow and unpatriotic; and that they did not reach down to the masses.**
- **In the second period social reform was dominated by nationalistic secularists. Revivalist extremists opposed it as being denationalizing and degrading because based on European ideas and models. "In their interchange with the reformers it became increasingly clear that, as far as the programme of reform was concerned, there was a very large area of agreement between the two groups. [...] The revivalist succeeded in demonstrating that a purely nationalistic motive and a Hindu model could be the inspiration for whatever reform the former envisaged. But they proved more than that: they showed that Hindu nationalism and an ideal Hindu society had a mass appeal that was absent in Western-type reform. These arguments were irresistible, and the reform movement as a whole changed its image and its model in the direction of revivalist Hindu nationalism."**
- **Vivekananda (1863-1902)**
- **Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950)**
 - education completely English cause he was educated in England – from age of seven he spent 14 years there

...Religious and Social Reform...

- **...Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950)**

- Early pamphlet *Bhāvanī Mandir* – strong influence of Bankim's ideas. Sakti, the Mother, represents India as focus of temple's monks. He also accused the Congress of non-attracting the masses and believed that through the religion of the Mother masses can be reached.
- Period in jail (1908) and experiments with yoga and Gita studies redirected his life, he established asram in Pondichery and achieved reputation as a great saint and mystic. Asram did not have much significance or influence on Indian life .

- **Lala Lajpat Rai (1856-1928)**

- first member of Brahmo Samaj, joined Arya Samaj – after split 1898 the leader of liberal branch, since 1900 powerful extremist leader in politics – accused by a-political Aryas of drawing the Samaj into politics against Dayanandas will.
- responsible for interest of AS in low castes, 1920 elected a president of All-India Trade Union Congress.
- after visiting Britain declared Congress foolish to expect British people and politicians to help India and declared that **Congress "should become a bold Hindu organization, building nation from below, based on a nationalism rooted in Hinduism."**

...Religious and Social Reform...

- **Madras**

- Revivalism – powerful stimulus by Vivekánanda's visit(1897) and speeches and writings of *Anie Beasant*.
- Beasant first **anti-reformist religious revivalist founded 1904 Madras Hindu Association "to promote Hindu social and religious advancement on national lines in harmony with the spirit of Hindu civilization"** - alliance of revivalism and social reform. Under her leadership, in conjunction with Tilak, between 1914 and 1918 agitational nationalism began for the first time to spread from the cities into the countryside on a nationwide scale. Under Gāndhī's leadership this process gathered momentum."
- **Back to Bengal**
- "Brāhmoism was the prototype of reform in Bengal, and it was intensely individualistic and Western-inspired. When cultural revivalism was set in motion by Bankim, and the intense political preoccupation was spurred to excess by partition of Bengal, these two took complete hold of Bengālī mind, and the appeal of reform movement in Bengal soon dwindled into insignificance."

...Religious and Social Reform

- **Since 1920 – religious and social reform movement disappeared as a distinct phenomenon. Gandhi confused it with his ideas on politics, religion and society and from now it was very closed with political awareness and action with the notion that social problems and reform of the society should be in-built into the legislation. This is best apparent in Nehrū's idea of Welfare State. Idea of social reform dissolved "into the practical business of organizing social service in different special fields."**