



Occasional Paper
May 2013

Alternate Perceptions of India: Arguing for a Counter Narrative

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Introduction

Descriptions of India and of Hindus that have assumed a dominant position in the discourse on Indian civilisation and culture have mostly been those which have distorted the perception of India. Written and expounded with a clear objective of undermining the Indian self-image and self-estimation, these portrayals of India's traditions and life are the ones which have largely influenced and shaped the understanding of India not only among generations of colonial administrators who came to India but among Indians themselves.

The image and narrative of a depraved and degraded people who were eventually rescued from near certain dissolution by the civilising tendencies and mission of Western civilisation thus became standard in any assessments of non-Western cultures and traditions. These were hardly ever contested or challenged and over generations became institutionalised and embedded in a large section of the academia within India and beyond. The implanting of this multi-dimensional negative assessment within the Indian national psyche had a deeply debilitating effect on our national self-estimation.

However, not all these descriptions were allowed to go unchallenged. The last decades of the 1800s and the first half of the 1900s saw a challenge being put up by Indian cultural nationalists who began questioning the externally generated narrative of India. Amidst the political action for national

emancipation, the movement to attain cultural swaraj gathered momentum. The attempt to question the Western narrative of India gathered steam and the need to create scholar-teams which would work towards developing a counter narrative was acutely felt and advocated. These thinkers, some of whom have been discussed in the first part of the paper, not only challenged the narrative but were also active in encouraging and linking indigenous scholars who would create an alternate vision of Indian society and life, of the society and life as they were before colonisation. These scholars also began developing positions based on their own readings and assessment of Indian tradition, culture and civilisation, gradually turning the discourse from the insider to the outsider. That attempt may not have developed into a mighty stream but it nevertheless left behind an impression and inspired others to take to the task.

The present paper briefly looks at aspects and voices from that early nationalist attempt at creating a counter-narrative of India and essentially discusses certain dimensions of the process of subjugating the Indian mind while examining some thoughts of the key colonial players in this subterfuge.

The paper also puts forth certain counter positions and assessments of India, her systems and of the character, acumen and capacities of the Hindus as they have been described by another group of colonial observers who seem to have been genuinely fascinated by the expressions and manifestations of an

ancient and mature civilisation. The record of their encounters with such a civilisation and people makes an interesting reading and if put together promises to develop a formidable counter picture of India. However, these counter positions in the entire discourse on Indian civilisation have mostly remained marginal and subdued, preventing the growth and evolution of a more balanced assessment.

The paper presents a few examples of these counter narrations and calls for allotting these marginal voices a dominant position while making any assessment of India's civilisational achievements and expressions. It does not claim any kind of finality in the argument, nor does it profess to be exhaustive in its treatment of the theme, it is rather, a preliminary exploration in trying to develop an alternate perception of India and argues for the growth of such a counter narrative.

I. Advocating a Challenge to the Perception of India

Commenting on the need to make efforts at re-writing India's history, Swami Vivekananda, once pointed at the core challenge of Indian history writing and evaluation, "The histories of our country written by English writers cannot but

be weakening to our minds, for they tell only of our downfall."¹ For Vivekananda, the question was quite stark, 'how can foreigners', he asked his young audience, "who understand very little of our manners and customs, or our religion and philosophy, write faithful, unbiased histories of



Swami Vivekananda

India."² He saw this allowing "many false notions and wrong inferences"³ to find their way into the various interpretations of the Indian past.

Calling for "Indians to write Indian history"⁴ Vivekananda essentially set the stage for beginning to question the Western perception and interpretation of India, her traditions, culture and history. It was essential to question and to re-evaluate this external description and perception of India. Looking back at the past in order to start creating a counter narrative to the descriptions of India had to become a necessary habit for those who had decided to take up the study of India from an Indian perspective and along scientific lines. Vivekananda was

clear on the necessity of this too when he wrote to one of his benefactors, the Maharaja of Khetri:

Nowadays everybody blames those who constantly look back to their past. It is said that so much looking back to the past is the cause of all India's woes. To me on the contrary, it seems that the opposite is true. So long as they forgot the past, the Hindu nation remained in a state of stupor; and as soon as they have begun to look into their past, there is on every side a fresh manifestation of life. It is out of this past that the future has to be moulded, this past will become the future.

The more, therefore, the Hindus study the past, the more glorious will be their future, and whoever tries to bring the past to the door of every one is a great benefactor to his nation...⁵

Vivekananda saw that this urge to look back into one's past in order to make fresh civilisational and cultural assessments would eventually push for developing the habit of undertaking a new study of India and her traditions.



Ananda Coomaraswamy

(Source: <http://www.worldwisdom.com>)

The fundamental position thus was to challenge the descriptions of India, especially those made by Western observers in the 18th and 19th century. Those descriptions were debilitating enough; they constructed images of an Indian society with a history of “injustice, exploitation and anarchy” and of

India as an “immoral and corrupt” country.⁶ Pointing to such distortions in the descriptions of India, Indian art historian and cultural maven Ananda Coomaraswamy, for example, scathingly noted how “English education” imparted in India, deliberately perpetuated this them:

this education which Englishmen are so proud of having ‘given’ to India, is really based on the general assumption – nearly universal in England – that India is a *savage* country, which it is England’s divine mission to *civilize*. This is the more or less underlying principle throughout.⁷

Other Indian intellectuals of the period also expressed their concerns for the

manner in which Indian history was being presented to the Indian mind. Rabindranath Tagore was deeply concerned with the state of history writing in India and the such writings encouraged. For him the history of India that he saw being disseminated to



Rabindranath Tagore

young minds in the country and abroad for reading and memorization was “really a nightmarish account of India.”⁸ It combined all the ingredients that portrayed the land and its people as wallowing in a complex cycle of confusion and strife:

Some people arrive from somewhere and the pandemonium is let loose. And then it is a free-for-all: assault and counter-assault, blows and bloodletting. Father and son, brother and brother vie with each other for the throne. If one group condescends to leave, another group appears as if out of the blue; the Pathans and the Mughals, the Portuguese and the French and the English together have made this nightmare ever more complex.⁹

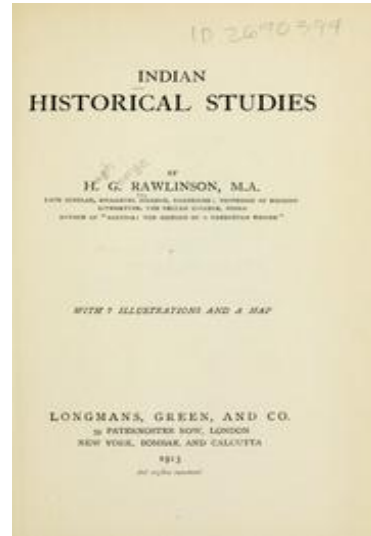
Such narratives, argued Tagore, did not allow the “real Bharatavarsha” to be glimpsed. They did not address the question “where were the people of India.”¹⁰ In these external narrations of India’s history, Tagore complained, one hardly got to read of the homes, of the people, of their essential civilisational continuity and of the “current of life that was flowing” throughout under the surface “dust” and “storms”:

Those histories make you feel that at that time Bharatavarsha did not exist at all; as though only the howling whirlwind of the Pathans and the Mughals holding aloft the banner of dry leaves had been moving round and round across the country from north to south and east to west. ... However, while the lands of the aliens existed, there also existed the indigenous country. Otherwise, in the midst of all the turbulence, who gave birth to the likes of Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, and Tukaram? It was not that only Delhi and Agra existed then, there were also Kasi and Navadvipa. The current of life that was flowing then in the real

Bharatavarsha, the ripples of efforts rising there and the social changes that were taking place — none of these find an account in our history textbooks.¹¹

The impression generated by such readings of India was, Tagore pointed out, “as if we are nobody in India; as if those who came

from outside alone matter.”¹² Tagore concluded that such versions of history generated a demeaning self-perspective, “By not viewing Bharatavarsha from Bharatavarsha’s own perspective, since our very childhood we learn to demean her and in consequence we get demeaned ourselves.”¹³ A remarkable analysis of the



Rawlinson’s Indian Historical Studies

psychology of colonial historiography, Tagore’s piece deserves a serious re-examination as part of efforts to question the Western narration of India.

While a number of Western analysts of India propounded the spectre of a confused nation and people¹⁴ there were notable exceptions to the trend as well. Indologist and now a nearly forgotten historian H.G. Rawlinson, noted, for example, how biased Indian history writing and teaching was. In his “Indian Historical Studies” (1913) Rawlinson pointed to the lamentable fact that:

Under the system in vogue at most Indian universities, the student knows more about Julius Caesar or the Battle of Marathon than of Chandragupta or the

teaching of Gautama. We employ lecturers to instruct our pupils in western ethics; but we forget to encourage them to study the admirable “sermons in stone” of their own emperor Asoka, written as they were for the edification of the people at large. No student should be allowed to waste his time over Greek and Roman history, while remaining ignorant of what the Greek historians and the Chinese travellers have to tell him of his own country and her past.¹⁵

Rawlinson was one of those Western interpreters of India who, it appears, never let go an opportunity to rake up the alternative angle to the study of India. For instance, in his essay on “India in European Literature and Thought”, Rawlinson, while discussing the civilisational and cultural encounters between ancient India and Greece, pointed out that it “was more likely that Pythagoras was influenced by India than by Egypt.” It was because, he argued “almost all the theories, religious, philosophical, and mathematical, taught by the Pythagoreans were known in India in the sixth century B.C., and the Pythagoreans, like the Jains and Buddhists, refrained from the destruction of life and eating meat, and regarded certain vegetables, such as beans, as taboo.”¹⁶

As a partial remedy to this biased perception and reading of India Rawlinson advocated the need to “urgently” create a “source book of early Indian history” which would contain translations from various authors, Greek, Chinese, and Indian and would also include “the inscriptions – of all passages

bearing upon early Indian History.”¹⁷ Such a volume would form an “admirable text book for history students.”¹⁸ An effort in this direction, might, he hoped, arrest the “appalling decay of taste” in modern India and would more importantly check in the West “the spread of rubbishy ideas, propagated under the title of Oriental philosophy, by charlatans who often cannot read a line of Sanskrit.” It was this “nonsensical pseudo-Orientalism”, argued Rawlinson, which was responsible for more than anything else in alienating “serious people, and [in deterring them] from studying the really great civilisation and literature of the East.”¹⁹

A decade or so before Rawlinson and around the time Tagore was making his points on history writing in India, another keen observer of and participant in Indian political and cultural affairs, Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) the Hinduised Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda, argued that Indians ought to recognise the need to create alternative narrations of their past. Nivedita saw such an effort as an essential pillar of the nationalist movement in India which would quicken the general countrywide awakening which the movement pushed for.



Sister Nivedita
(Source: Wikipedia)

Re-examining India's history and re-writing it from the Indian point of view thus became one of the principal preoccupations of these leaders who saw in such a trend the possibility of providing a greater fillip to the Indian political question as well. In reality such an effort was but an early and concerted step towards trying to decolonize the perception and reading of India. As Nivedita wrote while discussing the "Influence of History in the Development of Modern India", it was necessary for Indians to "grasp the thought of India as India" and to "learn to live and work in expression of this idea alone."²⁰ One of the most important features of such an awakening towards an essentially Indian study of India, observed Nivedita, lay in a movement centered on the "study of Indian history." She thus called for writing the history of India which was till then unknown:

A national character is the *resumé* of a national history. If we would know what we are, or whither we tend, we must be made aware of our own antecedents. And the study of Indian history ought to possess unusual attractions for the Indian people, in as much as it is history which has never yet been written, which is even, as yet unknown.²¹

A study of the past, unencumbered by the burden of an external perspective, she argued, could alone enable the people to recognise themselves, “Only in the mirror of her own past can India see her soul reflected, and only in such vision can she recognise herself”²², only then could she determine “what are to be the essential elements of her own nationality.”²³



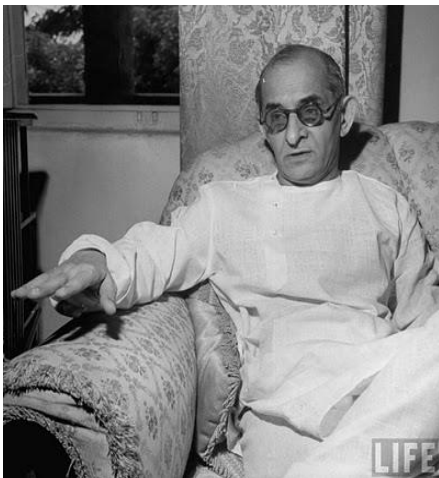
R.C.Majumdar

(Source:<http://bharatabharati.wordpress.com>)

Though Nivedita was talking of the uses of history writing, her position could have been very well applied to areas of culture and social sciences. The intellectual challenge that Indian cultural nationalists were envisaging had, as its over-arching objective, the decolonization of the perception and of the narrative of India. Since they saw the effect of colonization most starkly in the field of history-writing they advocated the need to first tackle that field.

Indian nationalist historian R.C.Majumdar has argued that when it came to the study and interpretation of India, most of the Western interpreters displayed a heavy bias. The “detached scientific spirit” which was so conspicuously present in the “European writers of the history of Egypt and ancient countries in West Asia” was “lamentably absent”²⁴ while dealing with the history of India. The bias was the result of a “psychological instinct and political prejudice” among some leading Western observers of India who “never

concealed [their] anxiety to prove the beneficence of the British Raj by holding before [their] readers the picture of anarchy and confusion, which, in [their] view, [had] been the normal condition in India with rare intervals"²⁵ before the advent of the British. To them, the history of India was merely a "pathetic tale of political chaos and internecine struggles", pointing to the conclusion that: "such was India and such it always has been till the British established a stable order."²⁶



K.M. Munshi
Courtesy: Life Magazine

K.M. Munshi, polymath, cultural-visionary and Indian statesman, who would, post 1947, launch, in collaboration with Majumdar, one of the most ambitious project of re-writing and re-assessing Indian history, admirably summed up the position that Majumdar was alluding to.

Describing the intellectual textures that most

histories of India, written under the colonial mantle, displayed, Munshi noted:

Most of our histories of India suffer from a lack of perspective. They deal with certain events and periods not from the Indian point of view, but from that of some source to which they are partial and which by its very nature is loaded against India. The treatments of such events and periods become disproportionately large and detailed, leaving a distorted impression of the times.²⁷

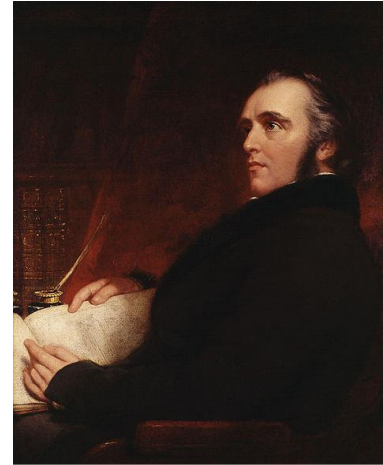
Through his assiduous study of India, her tradition and history Munshi came to the same conclusion as that of his other illustrious nationalist predecessors:

The time has arrived when India is entitled to have histories written afresh from an Indian point of view. A nation's evolution can rightly be understood only by those who can appreciate the genius behind its historical development.²⁸

What Vivekananda, Tagore and Nivedita among others, opposed and struggled against was a mindset which was carefully crafted, nurtured and stabilized decades earlier through active collusion between colonial policymakers, historians, administrators and evangelists. It was essential for these elements, keeping political considerations in mind, to evolve a colonialist perception of India which would primarily forward and perpetuate the line that Majumdar described.

II. Creating the Colonial Perception of India: Subverting the Indian Mind: Macaulay & Trevelyan

Interestingly this perception of an India plunged in rapine and desolation was built up assiduously on the floors of the House of Commons by a more eloquent brigade back home. To give an illustrious example, T.B. Macaulay, while speaking on the floor of the House on the Government of India Bill on 10th July 1833, gave a vivid description of how fallen the British found India and how they stooped to rescue her from oblivion and dissolution. Macaulay's description of that India went on to become



Macaulay in India
(Source: Wikipedia)

standard fare in dominant narratives on India and it became *de rigueur* for future generations to peddle that line:

In what state, then, did we find India? And what have we made India? We found society throughout that vast country in a state to which history scarcely furnishes a parallel ... Society was a chaos. Its restless and shifting elements formed themselves every moment into some new combination, which the next moment dissolved. In the course of a single generation a hundred dynasties grew up, flourished, decayed, were extinguished, were forgotten. Every adventurer who could muster a troop of horse might aspire to a throne. Every palace was every year the scene of conspiracies, treasons, revolutions, parricides... The people were ground down to the dust by the oppressor without and the oppressor

within...All the evils of despotism, and all the evils of anarchy, pressed at once on the miserable race. They knew nothing of government but its exactions. Desolation was in their imperial cities, and famine all along the banks of their broad and redundant rivers. It seemed that a few more years would suffice to efface all traces of the opulence and civilisation of an earlier age.²⁹

Such was the state of India, narrated Macaulay, when the “Company” took over the country and began “a great, a stupendous process, the reconstruction of a decomposed society.”³⁰ A close reading of his speeches reveals the earnestness with which Macaulay believed in England’s divine duty of uplifting the Asiatic continents. Macaulay was an articulate product of his time who was heavily conditioned by its world view. His speech on the “Gates of Somnauth” in 1843 exudes a clear disgust against the “Hindoo” religion of India and through his advocacy of the need for the state’s neutrality in religious affairs – an earliest case of secularism – emerges a clear bias in favour of the religion of the “Mahometans.”³¹ James Mill’s reading of India, it can be safely assumed, played a key role in shaping Macaulay’s perception of that country and in that especially his adverse views of the Hindus.³² For Mill Hindus were insincere, mendacious and perfidious and were “disposed to excessive exaggeration with regard to everything relating to themselves” while being “unfeeling and cowardly.”³³ Both, Mill and Macaulay worked closely to deconstruct all that they perceived to be “heathenism.”³⁴

Preceding Macaulay was another British politico-evangelist considered to be an authority of sorts on Indian affairs. Charles Grant (1746-1823) who served in India between 1767 and 1790, later became a Member of Parliament and rose on to become Director of the East India Company was an ardent advocate of Britain's Christianizing and civilising mission in India. As a member of an active political-evangelical group Grant had, as his close associate, among others, Zachary Macaulay (1768-1838) father of T.B. Macaulay. In fact Macaulay junior was "reared in Clapham, one of the two strongest Anglican evangelical centers in England"³⁵ and his father was "a close associate of William Wilberforce and Charles Grant, both noted evangelicals and residents of Clapham."³⁶

It may be recalled that it was to his father that Macaulay wrote from India famously describing the eventual and deep rooted effects on Indians that his proposed education system for India would have:

Our English schools are flourishing wonderfully...The effect of this education on the Hindoos is prodigious. No Hindoo who has received an English education ever continues to be sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as a matter of policy. But many profess themselves pure Deists, and some embrace Christianity.³⁷

Interestingly the Mahometan, according to Macaulay, proved an exception to this trend, "the best educated Mahometan often continues to be a Mahometan still." But the education that he suggested when imparted without "any efforts to proselytize, without the smallest interference with religious liberty" and merely

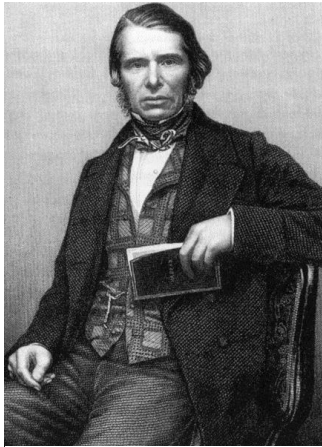
through the “natural operation of knowledge and reflection”, argued Macaulay, would eradicate “idolatry” among the respectable classes in Bengal within three decades. He heartily rejoiced at the prospect. ³⁸

Macaulay’s hopes may not have been fully realised but it pointed at a cardinal aspect, namely that the colonisers, in their new found zeal for spreading Christian light and European knowledge simultaneously aimed at deracinating Hindus from their milieu, their traditions, their language and their entire mechanism of self-expression. It would be a loss that would eventually incapacitate Indians to effectively look at themselves and to articulate their perceptions and self-view. The objective was, as Macaulay articulated it, to create and eventually consolidate the “imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws.”³⁹ The dominance

of the mind, the colonisation of the intellect was independent of the material existence of the “Empire.” The empire of the mind that Macaulay and his likes sought to build and perpetuate would prove to be, exactly as he described it, an “imperishable” one.⁴⁰



Macaulay’s Residence in Calcutta
(Source: British Library Online Gallery)



Charles E. Trevelyan

(Source: Wikipedia)

In fact through their efforts at colonising the Indian mind, the British colonizers had long worked towards creating such a class who would essentially echo their thoughts on India and perpetuate their reading of her society, culture and traditions. Macaulay's admirer and an old India hand who did much to lay the foundations of the British civil service,

Charles E. Trevelyan, described the gradual psychological effects on the Hindu elite that the disseminated colonial education had:

There is no class of our subjects to whom we are so thoroughly necessary as those whose opinions have been cast in the English mould ... This class is at present a small minority, but it is continually receiving accessions from the youth who are brought up at the different English seminaries. It will in time become the majority...⁴¹

And Trevelyan saw such a majority ensuring a thought-continuity even if the Indian empire were to physically dissolve at some future date. Through such an education "we shall exchange", he wrote, "profitable subjects for still more profitable allies."⁴² In order to turn them into "profitable allies" the "natives" had to be first exposed to a system which would awaken in them an yearning to be like the Westerner. The Hindus would have to perceive as their ideal the

English mode and manner, would labour to internalize those in their own living and would eventually make efforts to disseminate their new acquisitions in their own traditional milieu. It was through such a perpetuation that the security of the empire could be guaranteed. It was necessary therefore to render blur the “natives’” memory of a civilisational existence that was historically unique and apart from the colonisers; for if that memory was left intact it would intermittently act as a trigger propelling them towards self-hood:

As long as the natives are left to brood over their former independence, their sole specific for improving their condition is, the immediate and total expulsion of the English. A native patriot of the old school has no notion of any thing beyond this: his attention has never been called to any other mode of restoring the dignity and prosperity of his country. It is only by the infusion of European ideas that a new direction can be given to the national views. The young men, brought up at our seminaries, turn to the prospect of improving their national institutions on the English model. Instead of regarding us with dislike, they court our society, and look upon us as their natural protectors and benefactors: the summit of their ambition is, to resemble us; and, under our auspices, they hope to elevate the character of their countrymen...So far from having the idea of driving the English into the sea uppermost in their minds, they have no notion of any improvement but such as rivets their connection with the English, and makes them dependent on English protection and instruction.⁴³

A compelling desire for resembling the other made whole generations, particularly among Hindus, take to adopting wholesale the “five major assumptions of the 19th century Western mind,” namely, that reason alone could make sense of the reality, that the “physical domain of science constitutes the only area of valid knowledge, that the individual and his rationality were self-sufficient,” that a future for India could be shaped completely divorced from her past, and that “the Hindu tradition, like other oriental traditions, represents darkness, while scientific rationalism represents light.”⁴⁴ This belief in the “darkness” of the Hindu traditions is what gave rise to and nurtured a biased perception of India.

A number of leading Indian cultural nationalists writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, some of whom we have discussed above, pointed at a dilemma while attacking this bias. They highlighted the fact that a large section of the Indian intelligentsia was succumbing to this reading of India and were loyally replicating these in their writings and enunciations. Sri Aurobindo, for example, while writing his series on the Indian renaissance, wondered as to why a certain class of Indians were still hypnotised “in all fields by European [read Western] culture.” His answer was as stark as the question and went to the root of the affliction; it was because, he argued, these Indians “constantly saw all the power, creation, activity on the side of Europe, all the

immobility or weakness of a static and inefficient defence on the side of India.”⁴⁵ Unfortunately as time went by and colonial systems entrenched themselves, it was this class of Indians who became the most fanatic and vocal advocates of perpetuating the misperceptions of India. But that is an examination that requires a separate treatment altogether.

III. Perceptions and Counter Perceptions: Variations in the Narrative

III.A. Charles Grant & Thomas Munro

In their zeal to Christianize and civilise the world some of the leading public figures in the West misread and misrepresented the Indian temper and character. Grant’s 1792 tract “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” and in it especially the second chapter which discussed the “View of the State of Society among the Hindoo Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals” seemed to have heavily influenced those like Macaulay and Mill who were to follow him later on the British political scene. Grant, unlike Mill, supported his contentions with the weight of his Indian sojourn; he was speaking as one who had spent ‘many years in India, and a considerable

portion of them in the interior of [the] provinces, inhabited almost entirely by natives."⁴⁶

For Grant, the "Indian environment was all bad because it was based on Hinduism" which he argued was a "false religion." He saw the Hindus as the most "depraved people in the world", people who were "completely selfish, servile, brutal, and unpatriotic", patriotism, he conclusively declared, was "absolutely unknown in Hindoostan."⁴⁷ Only a Christian education imparted in the English language could redeem the people of this fallen land.⁴⁸ Of course, it may be recalled here that during his sojourn in this god forsaken land Grant had himself amassed quite a fortune! Around the same time as Grant was trying to convince lawmakers at home to push forward the agenda of Indian intellectual subjugation, one sees another dynamic imperial representative in India, Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras between 1820-27, describing the character of the Indian people thus:

If ... the general practice of hospitality and charity amongst each other; and above all, a treatment of the female sex, full of confidence, respect and delicacy, are among the signs which denote a civilised people, then the Hindoos are not inferior to the natives of Europe.⁴⁹

Despite his commitment towards consolidating Company rule in India Munro



Thomas Munro

(Source: <http://www.columbia.edu>)

was at times fascinated with the agility and practicality of the Indian mind and its ways. In his evidence before the select committee of the House of Commons on 15th April 1812 Munro referred to the resilience of the Hindus and of their customs and ways – especially among those living in the countryside – in face of the percolation of European ways of living. Munro’s statement is interesting in

that it demonstrates how the vast majority of this land actually remained unaffected for a quite a while from Western ways:

It is said that the Hindu there [Bombay] likewise conforms to the European modes of life, followed by Parsees and Europeans. It is possible that he may in some instances do so to accommodate his European visitors; but I can have no doubt that, after the ceremony of the visit is over, he retires from his lustre-hung hall to his Hindu family, in their own Hindu house, sprinkled with cow-dung and water. The influence of the society of Bombay upon the continent of India can have no more effect than that of the island of Heligoland. Let any man take a boat at Bombay, and land upon the nearest point on the coast – the Mahratta village of Panwell; he will find everything unchanged, everything Hindu... If any person leaving Madras goes to the nearest Hindu village, not a mile in the

country, he is as much removed from European manners and customs as if he were in the centre of Hindustan, and as if no European foot had ever touched the shores of India.⁵⁰

The tone of his evidence suggests that there was nothing pejorative in Munro's fascination with this resilience of Hindu society; it seems to have genuinely caught his attention. But such resilience was anathema to the majority of the colonial administrators and to their controllers at home. They wished to alter this state of things and ready India and her people for a greater and a more complete domination.

The "Hindoo" mind that Munro saw and interacted with had, by his own admission, a great corporate sense and was quick to grasp and understand business realities and practicalities. The European businessman, Munro surmised, would be no match for the "Hindoos" in the long run. For a people who have been repeatedly fed theories of their corporate incapacities during the last two odd centuries, Munro's testimony, of as late as 1812, is indeed revealing:

The People of India are as much a nation of shopkeepers as we are ourselves. They never lose sight of the shop ... It is this trading disposition of the natives which induces me to think it impossible that any European traders can long remain in the interior of India, and that they must all sooner or later be driven to the coast. What the European traders eat and drink in one month, would make a very decent mercantile profit for the Hindu for twelve. They do not, therefore,

meet upon equal terms ... The Hindu will wait till he sees the success which follows the undertaking: if it is likely to be successful and to be permanent, he will engage in it, and the European must quit the field. There can be no doubt, I think, that this cause will in time operate so as to force all Europeans to the sea coast; and I can have little doubt but that hereafter, when the Hindus come to correspond directly with the merchants in England, many of the agents now settled upon the coast will from the same cause, the superior economy and the diligence of the Hindu, be obliged to leave India.⁵¹

III.B. Alexander Walker & James Mill

As we have argued Grant's, Mill's and Macaulay's were not the only narrative of India, dominant as they may have been. There were other Western observers, who also served and travelled in India for decades but who came up with alternate descriptions. Since these alternate narratives refused to fit into the colonizers' political objectives of intellectual subjugation and the creation of an anglicised elite in India they were best left marginalised. Dharampal, a leading Indian historian and political scientist who meticulously documented the subjugation of India noted that by 1770s there were three approaches that were in operation in the British held areas of India vis-à-vis "Indian knowledge, scholarship and centres of learning."⁵² The first resulted from "growing British power and administrative requirements which needed to provide a garb of legitimacy and a background of previous indigenous precedents (however

farfetched) to the new concepts, laws and procedures which were being created by the British state.”⁵³ This was primarily the origin of “British Indology.” The second approach, and one which is crucial to our discussion on trying to trace alternate perceptions of India, was a result of the movement known as the Edinburgh enlightenment which began sometime around 1750. Scholars and administrators inspired or influenced by the ideals of this movement were the ones who mostly argued in favour of preserving the knowledge systems and traditions of India. It is their records and narrations of India that, at times, vastly differed from those of the evangelists and the colonial administrators. Members professing this second approach:

had a fear, born out of historical experience, philosophical observation and reflection (the uprooting of entire civilizations in the Americas), that the conquest and defeat of a civilisation generally led not only to its disintegration, but the disappearance of precious knowledge associated with it. They advocated, therefore, the preparation of a written record of what existed, and what could be got from the learned.⁵⁴

The third approach was the evangelical approach which sought to bring the people of India into the folds of an “institutionalised, formal, law-abiding Christianity.” For this literacy and teaching was necessary and to achieve that larger purpose in India and to “assist evangelical exhortation and propaganda for extending Christian ‘light’ and ‘knowledge’ to the people, preparation of the

grammars of various Indian languages became urgent.”⁵⁵ It is with the second approach that we are primarily concerned in the present discussion; it is there that we find some of the most interesting descriptions of India, descriptions that hardly fit into the evangelical-colonial mould and hence have remained remarkably free from distortion and misrepresentations.

Alexander Walker (1764-1831)⁵⁶ who served in India for decades was one of those who kept meticulous records of his sojourn in the country. A little remembered figure today, Walker was among those Indophiles who was perceived to be part of the Edinburgh enlightenment movement and who countered the redoubtable James Mill in his description of India, especially of Hindu society, culture and manners.⁵⁷ Walker’s description of Indian society as he saw it introduces an alternate perspective to the grand Millian and Macaulyan reading of India.



Alexander Walker

(Source: christchurchartgallery.org)

It would be useful, for example, to have a look at a fragment of Walker’s argument against the contention that India was divided into a multitude of principalities and hence lacked coherent unity and proper governance before the British took charge. There may be disputes over Walker’s position but it nevertheless provides an alternate insight into the state of things. It was such

alternate insights that nationalist Indian intellectuals in the early part of the twentieth century sought to retrieve and project.

Writing to Mill on 6th March 1820⁵⁸ Walker argued that it was only under British subjection that Indians were reduced to “wretchedness and penury.” He also provided an alternate argument to Mill’s and later Macaulay’s position on Indian disunity, arguing that if the small principalities system among the Grecian was seen as the origin of freedom and rights why couldn’t such a system among the Hindus give rise to a similar perception:

It seems to be perfectly established both from its ancient history and its present state, that India was divided into a great many small governments. Every chief was called a Raja and exercised an independent jurisdiction. What must have been the effect of this multitude of authorities on the government and condition of the people? Was it calculated to produce in the rulers, a moderate or an arbitrary use of power? In this division into small societies, the communities are checks upon the princes, and the princes on each other. Would this tend to abate the violence of these petty sovereigns, as far as the property of their subjects was concerned, and would it render them less liable to encroach on their priviledges.

The division of a country into small governments was favourable in Greece.⁵⁹

Walker’s perception seemed to have vastly differed from those of Mill and Macaulay. As a first hand observer of Indian affairs and as one who participated in consolidating Company rule over of India, one can impute to him a greater

degree of authenticity. Mill never set foot on Indian soil and Macaulay, though he served in India, came at a later stage when English rule had been already consolidated and colonisation had progressed apace. Moreover Macaulay does not seem to have been as widely exposed to the Indian terrain as Walker was during his services in the country.

Walker noted that though policymakers back home habitually waxed eloquent on the beneficent governance system introduced by superior English rule in India, he had actually witnessed the opposite happening:

Lord Cornwallis⁶⁰ had a high regard for the principles of justice, and an earnest desire to unite the honour of his country with the interests of the people of India. But while he represented that one third of the Company's territory was a jungle, inhabited only by wild beasts, he declared that there was no hopes of its improvement by the natives, refusing in this instance to acknowledge the fact which every traveller attested, of the flourishing state of agriculture and the comparative comforts of the people in those parts of India, which remained under the jurisdiction of its own Princes. Almost every where these presented, a country highly cultivated, and abounding in population. It was only in those countries, [districts/regions] which were either under the direct subjection of the British Government, or controlled by its influence, that the inhabitants were reduced to wretchedness and penury. This would prove the reverse of the

assertion that the natives were totally unfit for the administration of justice, or for the management of public affairs.⁶¹

Walker's was not an isolated reading in this matter. A few years later Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta and an influential opinion maker in the Company's India came up with a similar perception. In a March 1826 letter from the "Karnatik", Heber wrote, how "In Hindusthan" he "found a general feeling among the king's officers" that "the peasantry in the company's provinces are, on the whole, worse off, poorer, and more dispirited, than the subjects of the Indian princes." Heber was himself led by circumstances to agree with them, "the fact is, no Indian prince demands the rent which we do" he noted and observed how most public men he met confided "their belief that the people are over-taxed, and that the country is in a gradual state of impoverishment."⁶²



The Indian Villager, 1800s
(Source: British Library Online Gallery)

Had Walker's exchanges with Mill, which provide an altogether another dimension to the perception of India, been allowed entry into the mainstream discourse on understanding India it could have encouraged a more

balanced and historically fair appraisal of the colonised people and society. As he advanced in years, Walker increasingly expressed his concerns on the Indian situation and on "Britain's role in India" and called for relinquishing the "fruits of conquest."⁶³ He argued that that role had only served to give rise to a "deep-rooted hostility and degrading dependence" among the vast subjugated populace of India:

We have left wounds in every quarter, and produced everywhere discontent: the confidence which was once reposed in our moderation and justice is gone. We have made use of treaties, contracted solely for protection, as the means of making violent demands... Every individual almost above the common artisan and labourer suffers by our system of government.⁶⁴

Walker had raised a fundamental point: was English rule and its systems, working towards liberating India or was it, while providing occasional material sops, degrading and condemning to material penury and intellectual poverty an entire civilisation?

III.C. Sketching the “Hindoo” Character: Alternate Perceptions

Even earlier, around 1790s, just about the time when Grant was busy deconstructing the Hindu character, another observer had said much the same as Walker, while discussing the condition of “Hindustan” under the native “rajah.” In line with what Walker described a good two decade later, Q. Craufurd in his “Sketches of the Hindoos” attested to the happy state of the people under the rule of their princes:

if we may judge from the apparently happy fate of those countries where the destructive hand of the conqueror has not yet been felt, and the inviolable attachment which the Hindoos bear to their princes, we must conclude, that, under their native sovereigns, they were governed on principles of the most just and benevolent policy. In those countries the lands were highly cultivated; the towns and their manufacture flourish; the villages were composed of neat and commodious habitations, and filled with cheerful inhabitants; and wherever the eye turned, it beheld marks of the mild protection of the government, and of the ease and industry of the people. Such was Tanjore, and some other provinces, not many years ago.⁶⁵

Variations in the perception and the narratives were quite extensive. Interestingly most of these came from Western observers, all imperialists and under the employment of the Company but who nevertheless expressed a certain fascination and admiration for the people whom they were destined to govern.



Indian Peasant Women & Indian Soldiers: 1780s

(Source: British Library Online Gallery)

Even when their observations were not complimentary, they hardly spewed the venom that some of their more distinguished and celebrated countrymen did at home.

A number of these observers of

India, having closely followed the

ways of Indian society and tradition, having closely mingled with the people and their lives, were in fact, authentic voices of the Indian narrative. The authenticity of their descriptions based on their empirical experiences, were perfect challenges to attempts that were made to distort the perception of India. One, however, hardly gets to read of assessments, such as this one:

With the first accounts we have of Hindostan, and as far as inquiry has yet been able to go, a mighty empire at once opens to our views, which, in extent, riches, and the number of its inhabitants, has not yet been equalled by any one nation on the globe. We find salutary laws, and an ingenious and refined system of religion, established; sciences and arts known and practised, and all of these evidently brought to perfection by the accumulated experience of many preceding ages. We see a country abounding in fair and opulent cities, magnificent temples and palaces; useful and ingenious artists employing the precious stones and metals in curious workmanship; manufacturers fabricating

cloths, which, in the finest of their texture, and the beauty and the duration of their dyes, have, even yet, been but barely imitated by other nations. The traveller was enabled to journey through this immense country with ease and safety; the public roads were shaded with trees to defend him from the scorching sun; at convenient distances buildings were erected for him to repose in; a friendly Brahman attended to supply his wants; and hospitality and the laws held out assistance protection to all alike, without prejudice or partiality.⁶⁶

Much before Macaulay loudly proclaimed his assessment of the Hindus' incapacity for self-governance, much before many of our own leaders pleaded for being allotted some form of autonomy because they believed that the people of India were now ready to look after themselves, the alternate assessment of the Hindus' capacity to look after themselves was this:

Their [Hindus] laws and government tended, as much as any others we are acquainted with, to procure peace and happiness.

They were calculated to prevent violence, to promote benevolence and charity, to keep the people united among themselves, and to hinder their tranquility from being disturbed by the introduction of foreign innovations.⁶⁷

Another Western observer, Hendrik Van Rheede (1636-1691), colonial administrator of the Dutch East India



Hendrik Van Rheede
(Source: Wikipedia)

Company and Governor of Dutch Malabar between 1670 and 1677 also described the manners and ways of the Hindus. In his description of their government Van Rhee de came much to the same conclusion. Alexander Walker, who had made extensive notes from Van Rhee de's then celebrated book "*Horti Malabarici*", cited some of these passages in his correspondence with Mill, trying to convince the latter of his erroneous perception of the Hindu character and capacity:

Speaking of their government of which Van Rhee de was a competent judge, he calls it a republic and talks of a free people blessed with such privileges, that it may seem to be a democracy; it is sufficiently strong to preserve peace and to suppress sedition. Van Rhee de pays the follow(ing) tribute to the people of India which certainly places them high above all Indo-Chinese nations. "... They most willingly suffer people of all nations, and all religions to live among them. They never overpass their paternal boundaries, nor do they suffer the aggressions of strangers to be repeated with impunity."⁶⁸

This stands in stark contrast to Grant's, Mill's and Macaulay's depiction of the supposedly "degenerate Hindoo" nature. It would be interesting, in order to further support our position on the variations of perception and the need to explore this alternate description of India, to provide a few more examples.

William Hodges, English painter, who travelled in India between 1780 and 1783 at the invitation of Warren Hastings, then Governor General, seemed to have developed a fascination for the "Hindoo" character. Describing his arrival

at Fort St. George, Madras, in 1780, Hodges wrote thus of the “Hindoo” character in his “Travels in India”:

The natives first seen in India by an European voyager, are Hindoos. In this part of India [South India] they are delicately framed...Correspondent to this delicacy of appearance are their manners, mild, tranquil, and sedulously attentive: in this last respect they are indeed remarkable, as they never interrupt any person who is speaking, but wait patiently till he has concluded; and then answer with most perfect respect and composure.⁶⁹

Hodges descriptions of Indian life are varied and detailed. Seeing with the artist’s eye he caught a great deal of details which would otherwise have gone unrecorded. The great mobility of the Indian people is one description that repeatedly emerges through Hodges records. Indians, whether they were pilgrims or people on business, greatly travelled and while on the move were well taken care of through facilities put in place by the native administrative system. This was at a time when the colonial system had just about begun making itself felt and the process of deconstruction of the Indian way had not yet begun apace. But what concerns us more in the present discussion is the depiction of the character of the



William Hodges’s sketch of a “Hindoo Monument”, 1780s
(Source: British Library Online Gallery)

Hindus as seen by these observers. Hodges description of the land from Calcutta to Bihar, as he rode on a "pallankeen" is full of pictures. On his return journey on the "Ganges" from "Mongheir" (Munger) to Calcutta, Hodges had more to say of what he witnessed first hand of the Hindu character, he was struck by their habit of cleanliness, "A surprising spirit of cleanliness is to be observed among the Hindoos: the streets of their villages are commonly swept and watered, and sand is frequently strewed before the doors of the houses."⁷⁰

Hodges also perceived in the Hindu character an intrinsic spirit of cooperation, generosity and accommodation:

The simplicity, and perfectly modest character, of the Hindoo women, cannot but arrest the attention of a stranger. With downcast eyes, and equal step, they proceed along, and scarcely turn to the right or to the left to observe a foreigner as he passes, however new or singular his appearance. The men are no less remarkable for their hospitality, and are constantly attentive to accommodate the traveller in his wants. During the whole journey in my pallankeen, whatever I wanted, as boiling water for my tea, milk, eggs, &c. &c. I never met with imposition or delay, but always witnessed an uncommon readiness to oblige, and that accompanied with manners the most simple and accommodating.⁷¹

Reverting back to Alexander Walker's correspondence with James Mill on the assessment of the Hindu character, one comes across a similar description of the character of the Hindu sepoys who, Walker wrote, were courageous, had a

“large share of moral virtues”, and were “sober”, “frugal” and “modest.”⁷² Walker also observed that it would be wrong to think that these qualities were acquired from their European officers, “who take no pain to instruct them in any thing except their mere military exercises”; the sepoys were seen to display similar traits in service under “native princes.”⁷³ If the sepoys displayed such healthy personality traits, argued Walker, how can one doubt the fact that “this population, of which these sepoys are a part not even selected, but enlisted as in England, should possess the same qualities and good dispositions?”⁷⁴

The deeper issue, however, was the treatment of Indians that resulted from the institutionalisation of a distorted perception of India and of the Hindu character. Walker starkly brought it out when he wrote in the same letter to Mill

that only “servile and mean offices” were confided to Indians, their society was “despise[d] and neglect[ed]” by a majority of the colonisers and they were kept “under the constant fear of change and insult.”⁷⁵



The Indian Soldier

(Source: British Library Online Gallery)

It was a vicious cycle, in order to subjugate a civilisation which in many respect was much superior to theirs, the Western colonisers assiduously worked at first, to alter the self-image of the people and then

made certain that, that image was handed down, uncontested, to future

generations. Walker enumerated the false characteristics attributed to the Hindus by Western observers and argued against them. For example, one of the common negative traits that they sought to impose on the Hindu personality was that of “covetousness”, against such a portrayal Walker wrote:

The charge of covetousness is another favourite theme against the Hindus; but by whom are they charged with this vice? By Europeans the most covetous race of men; by those who visit India for a gain, who strip the natives of their wealth and then accuse them of avarice because they withhold the remainder.⁷⁶

Walker turned the scanner and focused on the rapaciousness of Western rule in India when he wrote, referring to the physical degradation that British rule brought about among the people:

It has been computed that Nader Shah carried out of India 30 million sterling; this was besides all that was consumed, destroyed and plundered; but the spoils which we have brought from India probably exceed a hundred fold all that our predecessors have taken by fits and starts. It would be a curious calculation to ascertain the amount of the wealth which has been brought by the Company and individuals from India. ... The drains which we have made from India have been less violent than the exactions of other conquerors, but they have perhaps in their operations proved more destructive and deadly to the people. We have emptied gradually, but the pitcher has gone constantly to the well.⁷⁷

Surely a degraded, disorganized and marginalised civilisation and its systems would be incapable of continuously filling in the pitcher that was repeatedly dipped into the well of its wealth. The systems that were put in place primarily served to degenerate, decay and degrade an entire civilisation. As Thomas Munro, in a fit of frankness, once confessed:

Let Britain be subjugated by a foreign power tomorrow; let the people be excluded from all share in government, from public honours, from every office of high trust and emolument, and let them in every situation be considered as unworthy of trust, and all their knowledge and all their literature, sacred and profane, would not save them from becoming, in another generation or two, a low-minded, deceitful, and dishonest race.⁷⁸

IV. Need for a Counter-Narrative

In between the distortions of the images of India, her people and tradition lay another dimension which, if sufficiently explored and collated, does offer an alternate perception of the Indian character, mind and ethos. Our nationalist thinkers and other astute historians who propounded the need to challenge the non-Indian perspective of India were essentially trying to create an Indian counter-narrative to the understanding and to the interpretation of India. Some of them focused on the need to re-write Indian history as a first step towards the

creation of such a narrative while others spoke for the need to re-state, re-interpret and re-evaluate the traditions of India.

Referring to Western attempts at understanding India, Dharampal, one of the pioneers of reversing the narrative, has rightly pointed out in his essay on the Indian mind and time, that the West which had been studying “various aspects of India for the last four to five centuries” has always tried to “comprehend our polity, our customs, our religious and philosophical texts, and our sciences, arts and techniques” guided by their “interests and concerns” at various times. “They read into Indian literature what suited and concerned them at any particular time.”⁷⁹

For a long time there was hardly any challenge or any questioning of this externally created image of ours. We were happy to allow ourselves to drift into a state of sedate quiescence in face of such assessments of our self-image. However, the early nationalist movement in India and the period immediately preceding it threw up a number of thought-leaders who were vocal in their call for a repositioning of the image and of the perception of India. This call for repositioning the Indian image was a vital component of their politics and political thought as well. Much scope still remains for undertaking a detailed study of this period and of the voices that spoke for the creation of this self-image.

A comprehensive decolonization of the perception of India has however not taken place, and when it comes to it and to the interpretation of India's traditions the "old mental slavery continues" and the "cultural and intellectual independence" is still to be won.⁸⁰ But the fundamental pre-requisite for this entire effort of trying to deconstruct an externally generated multi-layered and multidimensional perception of India to be successful is to first try and make our own assessment and frame our own contours of this image. This does not seem to have begun in right earnest and most often we are satisfied with mouthing, disseminating and perpetuating a distorted and colonialist vision of India. We have rarely made our own estimates based on a true reading of ourselves and our ways, as philosopher K.C.Bhattacharya, in his seminal essay "Swaraj in Ideas" which advocated the need for creating an alternate self-image, argued:

We speak of world movements and have a fair acquaintance with the principles and details of Western life and thought, but we do not always sufficiently realise where we actually stand today ... We either accept or repeat the judgments passed on us by Western culture, or we impotently resent them but have hardly any estimates of our own, wrung from an inward perception of the realities of our position.⁸¹

The skewed scholarship that deliberately misrepresented the vision of India basically put forward the following three distortions, which, it believed, would greatly help in undermining Indian self-estimation. They were, one, that India,

at the “level of perception” was never geographically, culturally and civilisationally a whole, two that India had hardly any “systems of thought and knowledge” worth the name and that whatever existed were mostly importations. It was also argued that these never allowed Indians to develop a high self-consciousness and that it was therefore the ordained task of the colonisers to develop a presentable self-image for Indians. The third position was that the knowledge systems and traditions of India were pre and anti-modern, outdated and therefore needed urgent supersession and was of no use in mankind’s march towards modernity.

It is these principal positions – debilitating and degenerative in nature – which need to be challenged if an alternate perception of India is to be really pursued, developed and established. The creation of the counter narrative has to thus begin with looking for clues and directions in the other narratives of India, narratives which have hitherto remained neglected and marginal. Unless those marginal voices become dominant we can hardly ever begin creating an alternate narrative. The first effective step towards liberation and decolonization is to take ones own traditions seriously⁸² and the attempt to create an alternate perception of India may eventually prove to be a fascinating journey in the re-discovery of our own self.

Endnotes

¹ *Life of Swami Vivekananda by Eastern and Western Disciples*, vol.1, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama,), p.271.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p.272.

⁵ Vivekananda's reply to the address of the Maharaja of Khetri on 4th March 1895 in *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 16th imp., 2007), pp.231-232.

⁶ For a detailed discussion on this European/Western description of India see for e.g. S.N.Balagangadhara's keynote delivered at *Dharma & Ethics Conference*, Vivekananda Institute of Indian Studies, Mysore, January, 2011.

⁷ Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism*, (Madras: G.A.Natesan & Co, 1909), p.103. Coomaraswamy pointing at the actual intention behind this civilising mission cited that other observer and master distorter of Indian manners and customs Abbe Dubois, who had said: "To make a new race of the Hindus, one would have to begin by undermining the very foundations of their civilisation, religion and polity, and by turning them into atheists and barbarians." (Ibid., p.101).

⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Centre of Indian Culture' in Sisir Kumar Das edited, *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, vol.2, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, rpt, 2008), p.487.

⁹ Rabindranath Tagore, 'The History of Bharatvarsha' (August 1903) translated from the original Bengali by Sumita & Sibesh Bhattacharya – accessed at <http://www.ifih.org/TheHistoryofBharatavarsha.htm> (14.12.2011)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ There were Indians too who went along with projecting this. They argued that Indians never had a sense of history and therefore could never really write a history of their land with an alternate perspective. Indians, they seem to argue, were not really bothered with their self-perception, even if that perception distorted their actual tradition and history. (See e.g. S.N.Balagangadhara, op.cit.) The instance of Dhan Gopal Mukerji (1890-1936) comes to mind in this context. A successful writer in the United States in the 1920s and winner of the Newbery Medal in 1928, Mukerji, though connected with the nationalist movement in India somehow appeared to have misread the Indian historiographical consciousness when he wrote: "Properly speaking India had no history. We as a race have no consciousness of it, for our history has been written mostly by foreigners – the Greeks, the Arabs and the Chinese. The consciousness of history, as an asset of life and as an expression of people does not seem important to us. History is the record of man's relation to time, but the Hindu does not believe in time, and all our life, according to the Hindu's vision is an illusion and something to be transcended." (Cited in Troy Wilson, *The Hindu Quest for the Perfection of Man*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1970), p.30, vide Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism and Its Sense of History*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.32.

- ¹⁵ H.G.Rawlinson, *Indian Historical Studies*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1913), p.x.
- ¹⁶ H.G.Rawlinson, 'India in European Literature and Thought' in G.T.Garrat edited, *The Legacy of India*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p.5.
- ¹⁷ *Indian Historical Studies*, op.cit., p.x.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., pp.x-xi.
- ²⁰ *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (CWSN), vol.4, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 3rd imp., 1996), p.305.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., p.306.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ R.C.Majumdar edited, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vo.1, (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan), p.39.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ K.M.Munshi, *Akhand Hindustan*, (Bombay: New Book & Co., 1942), p.113.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p.109.
- ²⁹ *Speeches of the Right Honourable Lord T.B.Macaulay, M.P. – Corrected by Himself*, (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1854), pp.142-143. But even within Macaulay's records of India one can perceive at times variations, variations which he himself contradicted at intervals. As for example on arriving in India his first long sojourn was in the Nilgiris and Macaulay noted, "I have as yet seen little of the idolatry of India; and that little, though excessively absurd, is not characterized by atrocity or indecency. There is nothing of the sort at Ootacamund. I have not, during the last six weeks, witnessed a single circumstance from which you would have inferred that this was a heathen country." (G. Otto Trevelyan, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, vol.1, (New York: Harper & Brother Publishers, 1876), p.332.) One could argue that this was perhaps because he had just arrived in India and had not yet formed a clear perception of the country but nevertheless it does provide a certain space to our argument on the need to explore the variations of the narrative of India. For a detailed and alternate discussion on Macaulay and his contributions to and understanding of India see e.g. Koenraad Elst, *A Dubious Quotation, a Controversial Reputation: the Merits of Lord Macaulay* accessed at: <http://koenraadst.bharatvani.org/articles/hinduism/macaulay.html> (10.12.2012).
- ³⁰ *Speeches of the Right Honourable Lord Macaulay*, op.cit., p.144.
- ³¹ See e.g. Macaulay's speech of 9th March 1843 in the House of Commons in *Speeches of the Right Honourable Lord Macaulay*, ibid. For Macaulay the great "majority of the population of India" consisted of "idolaters, blindly attached to the doctrines and rites which, considered merely to the temporal interests of mankind, are in the highest degree pernicious. In no part of the world has a religion ever existed more unfavourable to the moral and intellectual health of our race." (*Speeches*, ibid., p.274) His partial neutrality in matters of religion exposed itself when he openly stated on the floor of the House in the same speech that the "duty of our Government is, as I said, to take no part in the disputes between Mahometans and idolaters. But, if our Government does take a part, there cannot be a doubt that Mahometanism is entitled to the preference." (Ibid., p.281) There was a reason for proposing to accord a preferential treatment to the 'Mahometans', it was the fear of an uncontrollable back clash, "Nobody who knows anything of the Mahometans of India can doubt that [an] affront to their faith will excite their fiercest indignation. Their susceptibility on such points is extreme. Some of the most serious disasters that have ever befallen us in India have been caused by that susceptibility." (Ibid., p.281)

³² Referring to James Mill's epic contribution towards distorting the perception of India, Dharampal observed that Mill, through the instrumentality of his powerful pen, undertook the task of completely denouncing and rejecting "Indian culture and civilisation." His monumental volumes on the *History of British India* vastly contributed to the distortion of India. "It became an essential reading and reference book for those entrusted with administering the British Indian Empire." Since its publication and until recent times, the *History* "provided the framework for the writing of most histories of India." The impact of Mill's judgement on India and her people can therefore be never discounted. (Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree*, (Mapusa: other India Press, rpt, 2000), p.83)

³³ Ibid, p.83.

³⁴ Mourning Mill who died on 23rd June 1836, Macaulay, then serving in India, wrote to his father, "I have been a sincere mourner for Mill. He and I were on the best terms and his services at the India House were never so much needed as at this time." (Letter dated 12th October 1836, vide. Thomas Pinney ed., *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, vol.3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.193).

³⁵ Elmer H. Cutts , "The Background of Macaulay's Minutes" in *The American Historical Review*, vol.58, No.4 (Ju.1953), Oxford University Press & the American Historical Association, p.831.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Letter dated 12th October 1836, vide. Thomas Pinney ed., *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay*, vol.3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.193.

³⁸ Ibid., p.193.

³⁹ *Speeches of the Right Honourable Lord Macaulay*, op.cit., p.162.

⁴⁰ Referring to this deracinating process Ananda Coomaraswamy was unsparing in his assessment of the effects of this English education: "no more crushing blows has ever been struck," he wrote, "at the roots of Indian National evolution that those which have been struck in the name of Education. The most crushing indictment of this Education is the fact that it destroys, in the great majority of those upon whom it is inflicted, all capacity for the appreciation of Indian culture...the ordinary graduate of an Indian University is indeed a stranger in his own land." (*Essays in National Idealism*, op.cit., pp.96-97). Philosopher K.C.Bhattacharya (1875-1949) admirably described the effects of such an intellectual colonisation as hoped for by the Indians' European benefactors. Such a colonisation of the mind invariably led to an entrenched cultural subjection. It was a domination which was much more subtle in nature because it was primarily "exercised in the sphere of ideas by one culture on another" but it was a domination which was "all the more serious in the consequence, because it [was] not ordinarily felt." Thus cultural subjection was always of an "unconscious character" and such a subjection occurred when "one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments [was] superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which [possessed] one life a ghost.' Such subjection was the 'slavery of the spirit.' (K.C. Bhattacharya, 'Swaraj in Ideas', in S.K.Ghosh ed., *Four Indian Critical Essays*, Kolkata: Jijnasa, 1977), p.13.) At a deeper level through their colonisation of the Indian mind, the colonisers sought to effectuate just such a "slavery of the spirit."

⁴¹ Charles Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, (London: Green & Longmans, 1838), p.194.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., pp.191-192.

⁴⁴ See for instance, Kapil Kapoor, 'Rebirth of a Language: the Conceptual Structure of Vivekananda's Discourse', in M.Sivaramakrishna & Sumita Roy ed., *Reflections on Swami Vivekananda – a hundred years after Chicago* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1993), pp.99-108.

⁴⁵ *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA), vol.20, (Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997), p.62.

⁴⁶ Charles Grant, "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" in Printed Parliamentary papers – relating to the affairs of India: General Appendix-I, Public (1832), pp. 3-89 cited in Syed Mahmood, *History of English Education in India*, (Aligarh: M.A.O. College, 1895), p.3.

⁴⁷ Elmer.H.Cutts, op.cit., p.836. Also cited in Syed Mahmood, *History of English Education in India*, ibid., p.7.

⁴⁸ That Grant and the entire Clapham lobby had vocal support from missionary groups is evident from a letter "Redeeming the Heathen in India" that some of these groups had written to various churches across Britain on February 17, 1797. The missionary groups professed that they were "desirous of devoting" themselves "to the service of the Redeemer among the Heathen" and that "after mature deliberation" they had "fixed upon Bengal as the best field in the Pagan world for using the talents committed to us by God." The letter was basically aimed at building a pressure group which would in alliance with Grant's lobby convince the Government in pressurizing the Company to allow evangelical activities in India. They were anxious to proceed to India: "as soon as possible, to make ourselves acquainted with the language of the country, to preach the word to the native, to translate the Scriptures and circulate them extensively, and to erect schools in the populous cities for the education of their youth." And there was "sufficient funds to execute this design". These missionaries complained that the impediment was not the lack of funds but the attitude and indifference of the Government of India which: "calling itself Christian, and on different occasions expressing, in the most ardent manner, its attachment to that religion, prohibits and deprecates the preaching of the Gospel in its dominions, thus as it were establishing, idolatry." A sustained campaign would eventually see the Government abandoning that policy. [For letter vide Dharampal compiled, "Some Documents on Christianisation of India and Alterations in Strategies: c.1700 – 1900" in *Archival Compilation*, vol.14, (Sevagram: Ashram Pratishtan, 2000), pp.10-14].

⁴⁹ House of Commons, Sessional Papers, VII pp.131, 169 cited in Elmer H.Cutts, op.cit., p.836.

⁵⁰ Thomas Munro's evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 15th April, 1812 in Alexander J. Arbuthnot edited., *Thomas Munro: Selections from his Minutes & Official Writings*, vol.2, (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), pp.234-235].

⁵¹ Munro's evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons, 13th April 1812 cited in Alexander J. Arbuthnot edited, *Thomas Munro: Selections from his Minutes & Official Writings*, vol.2, (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), pp.232-233.

⁵² Dharampal, *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*, (Mapusa: Other India Press, 3rd ed. 2000), p.15.

⁵³ Ibid., pp.15-16.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.16.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Alexander Walker served a total of thirty years in India between 1780 when he was appointed a cadet in the service of the East India Company, and 1810 when he retired having attained the rank of a Lt. colonel. In these three long decades Walker had a varied exposure to India. In 1782 he took part in the campaign against Hyder Ali's forts along the Malabar coast, he was present with the 8th battalion at Mangalore during Tipu Sultan's siege and offered himself as a hostage on the surrender of the fortress on 30 January 1784. After British dominance over the Malabar was complete Walker was asked to assist the special commission appointed to regulate the affairs of the region. In 1798 he became a deputy auditor-general, took part in the fourth Anglo-Mysore

war and was appointed as political resident at the court of the Gaekwad at Baroda. Walker was called out of his retirement in 1822 and asked to head the administration of St. Helena, then under the Company's jurisdiction. While in India, he put together not only a valuable collection of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic manuscripts but also maintained extensive notes of all that provided him with insights into the actual life of the people and their culture. The National Library of Scotland "holds a vast archive of Walker's correspondence and papers, running to almost 600 large volumes, many of which he had prepared for publication." [Vide. Sidney Lee edited *Dictionary of National Biography*, (DNB) vol.59, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1899), pp.42-43.

⁵⁷ For a description and background of the Walker-Mills debate see e.g. my "Indophobia and Its Expressions", VIF paper, 26th February, 2013 at:

<http://www.vifindia.org/article/2013/february/26/indophobia-and-its-expressions>.

⁵⁸ Mill had begun sending Walker portions of the manuscripts of his History of British India and invited the latter to proffer comments, advice and guidance. Mill wrote to Walker expressing his desire to have his 'ponderous' volumes perused: 'The liberty which I have taken of addressing you, is for another purpose than that of expressing my gratitude. You intimate that you are about to begin the perusal of my ponderous volumes; and there is a service of very great importance, which you will be able to render me...I am persuaded that I should profit more than I will venture to say by your remarks. I therefore hope and earnestly request, that you will place a sheet of paper by your side when you read, and jot down your strictures as you proceed – above all that you will mark well the points on which you think that I am materially wrong. I will not promise that I shall adopt all your opinions...but I do promise that I shall carefully reconsider the grounds of these opinions from which you dissent...and shall faithfully adhere to the side to which the balance of evidence appears to me to incline. I am perfectly sincere when I say I shall like better to hear from you the flaws.' (James Mill letter dated, 14th September 1819, vide, Dharampal, *Archival Compilation*, vol.9 – 'British Narrations on India, Its Conquest, Dominance and Destruction 1600-1900 A.D.', (Sevagram: Ashram Pratishtan, 2000), pp.70-71.

⁵⁹ Walker to Mills 6th March 1820, in *ibid.*, p.79.

⁶⁰ Walker had closely watched Cornwallis who served as governor general in India between 1786 and 1793.

⁶¹ Walker to Mills 6th March 1820, *op.cit.*, p.80.

⁶² Bishop Heber's letter to C.W.Wynn, March 1826 cited in *British Rule in India: condemned by the British Themselves*, (London: published by The Indian National Party, 1915), p.24. It has been argued that it was under Heber that "evangelical imperialism reached its highest point" in India and that he himself was an active disseminator of that imperialism. In a sermon e.g. delivered on September 5th, 1824, Heber announced, "My brethren, it has been pleased the Almighty that the nation which to which we ourselves belong is a great, a valiant and an understanding nation; it has pleased Him to give us an empire on which the sun never sets." (Cited in Elmer H.Cutts, *op.cit.*, p.849).

⁶³ Correspondence between B.S. Jones, Esq., and Lt.-Col. Walker, *Appendix to Report from Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company*, House of Commons papers, HMSO, vol.14, 1832, pp.295–324. Quote from 1818, p.304 vide 'The East India Company Man: Brigadier-General Alexander Walker' accessed at: <http://christchurchartgallery.org.nz/bulletin/170/the-east-india-company-man-brigadier-general-alexa/> (9.1.2013)

⁶⁴ Letter of Lt.-Col. Walker to B.S. Jones, Esq., Jan.31, 1818, *Appendix to Report from Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company*, House of Commons papers, HMSO, vol.14, 1832, p.302 cited in *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Q. Craufurd, *Sketches of the Hindoos*, vol. 1 (London: T.Cadell, 1790), pp.89-90. Also cited in Dharampal, *Archival Compilation*, vol.1, (Sevagram: Ashram Pratishtan, 2000), p.35.

⁶⁶ *Sketches of the Hindoos*, vol.2, (London: T.Cadell, 1792), pp.106-113.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.115.

⁶⁸ Walker to Mill, 8th April, 1820, vide Dharampal, *Archival Compilation*, vol.9 op.cit., p. 85. Walker also clarified why he considered Van Rhee to be an authentic source: "As Van Rhee wrote more than 130 years ago, long before any of the topics of Indian controversy were thought of, and was a man of great judgement and candour much weight is due to his authority" even though "his acquaintance was chiefly, if not entirely, with Malabar, where foreign manners had made no impression nor had the Mahommedan arms as yet penetrated into that country." (*Ibid.*, p.85)

⁶⁹ William Hodges, *Travels in India during the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, 1783*, (London: J. Edwards, 1794, 2nd revised edition), pp.3-4. Also cited in Dharampal, *Archival Compilation*, vol.1, op.cit., pp. 28-30. Even ancient accounts of India by foreign travellers who had come in search of knowledge testify to this transparency of the Indian character. As the Chinese scholar-traveller, Hiuen Tsang observed of the Hindus: "They are not deceitful or treacherous in their conduct, and are faithful to their oaths and promises. In their rules of government there is remarkable rectitude, whilst in their behaviour there is much gentleness and sweetness." [Vide Samuel Beal translated, *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, [translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsang's records of his travels in India], vol.1, (London: Trübner & Co, Ludgate Hill, 1884), p.83] Even earlier Strabo, the Greek historian and geographer wrote of the Hindus: "...The Indians all live frugally. They dislike a great undisciplined multitude and consequently they observe a good order. Theft is of very rare occurrence...The simplicity of their laws and their contracts is proved by the fact that they seldom go to law. They have no suits about pledges and deposits, nor do they require either seals or witnesses, but make their deposits and confide in each other. Their houses and property they generally leave unguarded. These things indicate that they possess good, sober sense." [J.W.McCrimmon, *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, (London: Trubner & Co., 1877), pp.70-71]

⁷⁰ *Travels in India*, op.cit., p.34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Walker to Mill, 8th April, 1820, op.cit., p.84.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.86.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.87.

⁷⁸ Alexander J. Arbuthnot, *Sir Thomas Munro – Governor of Madras: a Memoir*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1889), p.151

⁷⁹ Dharampal, *Bhāratiya Chitta, Mānas and Kāla*, (trans. J.K.Bajaj), (Madras: Centre for Policy Studies, 1993), p.30.

⁸⁰ Ram Swarup, *Hindu View of Christianity and Islam*, (New Delhi: Voice of India, 3rd rpt., 2000), p.112.

⁸¹ K.C.Bhattacharya, *Swaraj in Ideas*, op.cit., p.15.

⁸² See. e.g. Makarand Paranjape, *Decolonising English Studies: Attaining Swaraj* accessed at: http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/s_es/s_es_paran_swaraj_frameset.htm (20.1.2013)

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