The Beginnings of English Literary Study

As soon as [the Indians] become first-rate European scholars, they must cease to be Hindoos.


English literature made its appearance in India, albeit indirectly, with a crucial act in Indian educational history: the passing of the Charter Act in 1813. This act, renewing the East India Company’s charter for a twenty-year period, produced two major changes in Britain’s relationship with her colony: one was the assumption of a new responsibility toward native education, and the other was a relaxation of controls over missionary activity in India.

Without minimizing the historical importance of the renewal of the Company’s charter, it would be safe to say that the more far-reaching significance of the Charter Act lay in the commitment enjoined upon England to undertake the education of the native subjects, a responsibility which it did not officially bear even toward its own people. Hitherto, measures to educate the Indians were entirely at the discretion of the
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governor-general at Calcutta and the Company was in no way obligated to attend to their instruction. Indeed, reluctant as it was to spend any more money on the natives than necessary, the East India Company was all too willing to abide by the practice in England, where education was not a state responsibility. The Charter Act, however, radically altered the prevailing state of laissez-faire in Indian educational matters. The 13th Resolution categorically stated that England was obligated to promote the "interests and happiness" of the natives and that measures ought to be adopted "as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement."¹

The pressure to assume a more direct responsibility for the welfare of the subjects came from several sources. The earlier and perhaps more significant one, decisively affecting the future course of British administrative rule in India, was the English Parliament. Significantly, the goal of "civilizing the natives" was far from being the central motivation in these first official efforts at educational activity. Parliamentary involvement with Indian education had a rather uncommon origin in that it began with the excesses of their own countrymen in India. The extravagant and demoralized life-styles of the East India Company servants, combined with their ruthless exploitation of native material resources, had began to raise serious and alarming questions in England about the morality of the British presence in India. Henry Montgomery, a speaker in the House debate, relentlessly exposed the hypocrisy of the English people in daring to reform Indians when their own behavior was not beyond reproach: "If we wished to convert the natives of India, we ought first to reform our own people there, who at present only gave them an example of lying, swearing, drunkenness, and other vices."²

Montgomery's disenchantment with British behavior led him to see the customary British association of Hindu practice with Hindu religion as a device to forestall introspection and self-scrutiny. The practice of "women burning themselves on the death of their husbands," he pointed out, "[was not] any more a religious rite than suicide was a part of Christianity."³ British greed was a reality of the Company's presence in India that was too embarrassing for Parliament to ignore without appearing to endorse Company excesses. But unable to check the activities of these highly placed "Nabobs," or wealthy Europeans whose huge fortunes were amassed in India, it sought instead to remedy the wrongs committed against the Indians by attending to their welfare and improvement.⁴
The English interest in Indian improvement was informed from the earliest period with the need to come to terms with its own depredations in India. Even when religious sentiment later overtook the educational enterprise, no British administrator ever lost sight of the original, compensatory reasons for intervention in Indian education. Charles Grant, who made perhaps one of the most impassioned pleas for missionary activity, was amazingly candid in spelling out the two most important motives. The first was abuse of power by the Nabobs, who not only acquired illicit fortunes but showed a shameful dereliction of responsibility by delegating authority loosely to sycophantic local leaders. Challenging the complacency of those who believed that "British genius and principles" simply radiated from the center, Grant urged British penetration into all sectors of Indian society, provinces and towns alike, to diffuse central authority. In this way he hoped to correct the self-centeredness of a pampered Company that had become insulated from the rest of Indian society, causing it to place power in the wrong hands.

The other factor Grant cited for necessitating British action in the education of Indians was the damage done to India following early British conquests.

Certainly a great deal was due from us to the people in compensation of the evils which the establishment of our power had introduced among them; and in return for the vast advantages which we reaped from the change, it was but fit that what the country had suffered, or was subjected unavoidably to lose by being dependent upon us, should be repaid by all the benefits which good government, in consistency at least with that dependence, could bestow.5

In a brashly manipulative explanation that was basically a thinly disguised appeal for increased territorial control, Grant attributed the irresponsible behavior of early English administrators to British uncertainty about the durability of colonial rule. Britain's anxiety about the permanence of its rule was so intense, he suggested, that India had meaning only as an object of appropriation. The land had not yet acquired a value that develops through an activity akin to aesthetic contemplation of the colonial experience: "Those provinces which we professedly held in perpetuity cease to be regarded here as permanently our own. A secret idea of their insecurity prevailed, and our conduct towards them was perhaps influenced by this apprehension. We were eager to acquire, but slow to cherish."6 In the same way that aesthetic appreciation involves the valuing of experience embodied in a work of
art, through which that work becomes one's own, so the act of conquest too involves valuing as a result of which the ambiguity of the colonial situation begins to find resolution. It is the moment at which self-interest fuses with and becomes indistinguishable from a sense of discharging one's duty toward the other. Grant's intense disenchantment with British avarice left room for a commingling of altruism and paternalism, as in the following passage:

The primary object of Great Britain, let it be acknowledged, was rather to discover what could be obtained from her Asiatic subjects, than how they could be benefited. In process of time it was found expedient to examine how they might be benefited in order that we might continue to hold the advantages which we at first derived from them. . . . [Their] happiness is committed to our care.7

But at the same time valuing is a process that selects what is useful or meaningful and rejects everything else. As a selective process it detaches the portion that is valued from the totality of which it is a part. By valuing the happiness of the people, Grant performs a similar operation of disengagement from the whole, objectifying a subjective state that is exclusive to and inseparable from the individual into a separate, autonomous entity also to be appropriated and made one's own.

Thus in the course of the argument the question of how England can serve the people of India blends indistinguishably with the question of how power can best be consolidated. The shift has far-reaching consequences. Duty toward the people is seen less as a motive for involving the government than as the end point of a process of consolidation of territorial control. To the question, "What are the best means of perpetuating our empire there?" Grant provides two answers. One is "by securing to the people their religion and laws."8 But Grant rejects this solution, speculating: "What if the religion should be less favourable to our dominion than another system, and the people were induced voluntarily to make that other religion their own; would not the change be for our interest?"9 There is no suggestion in this statement that Christianity is intrinsically more meritorious than the native religions; the issue is simply one of taking action favorable to British rule.

However much parliamentary discussions of the British presence in India may have been couched in moral terms, there was no obscuring the real issue, which remained political, not moral. The English Parliament's conflict with the East India Company was a long-standing one, going back to the early years of trading activity in the East Indies, when
rival companies clashed repeatedly in a bid to gain exclusive rights to trade in the region. The East India Company, formed from two rival companies, eventually became the only group of English merchants entitled to carry on English trade. But the clamor for a broadening of commercial privileges in India never died down, and Parliament found itself besieged by Free Trade groups, lobbying to break the Company’s hold. In 1813 it had no choice but to concede them greater trading privileges.

Moreover, the English Parliament itself was becoming alarmed by the danger of having a commercial company constituting an independent political power in India. By 1757 the East India Company had already become virtual master of Bengal and its territorial influence was growing steadily despite numerous financial problems besetting it. But in the absence of any cause for interference in the activities of the Company, the British Crown could conceivably do little to reorganize the Company’s system of administration and win control of its affairs. Pitt’s India Bill of 1784 had earlier rejected an outright subordination of the political conduct of the Company to the Crown. Not until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, when reports of immorality and depravity among Company servants started pouring in, did Parliament find an excuse to intervene, at which point, in the name of undertaking responsibility for the improvement of the natives, it began to take a serious and active interest in Indian political affairs. It was a move that was to result in a gradual erosion of the unchallenged supremacy of the Company in India.

It is impossible not to be struck by the peculiar irony of a history in which England’s initial involvement with the education of the natives derived less from a conviction of native immorality, as the later discourse might lead one to believe, than from the depravity of their own administrators and merchants. In Edmund Burke’s words, steps had to be taken to “form a strong and solid security for the natives against the wrongs and oppressions of British subjects resident in Bengal.” While the protectiveness contained in this remark may seem dangerously close to an attitude of paternalism, its immediate effect was beneficial, as it led to a strengthening of existing native institutions and traditions to act as a bulwark against the forces of violent change unleashed by the British presence.

This mission to revitalize Indian culture and learning and protect it from the oblivion to which foreign rule might doom it merged with the then current literary vogue of “Orientalism” and formed the mainstay of
that phase of British rule known as the "Orientalist" phase. Orientalism was adopted as an official policy partly out of expediency and caution and partly out of an emergent political sense that an efficient Indian administration rested on an understanding of "Indian culture." It grew out of the concern of Warren Hastings, governor-general from 1774 to 1785, that British administrators and merchants in India were not sufficiently responsive to Indian languages and Indian traditions. The distance between ruler and ruled was perceived to be so vast as to evoke the sentiment that "we rule over them and traffic with them, but they do not understand our character, and we do not penetrate theirs. The consequence is that we have no hold on their sympathies, no seat in their affections." Hastings' own administration was distinguished by a tolerance for the native customs and by a cultural empathy unusual for its time. Underlying Orientalism was a tacit policy of what one may call reverse acculturation, whose goal was to train British administrators and civil servants to fit into the culture of the ruled and to assimilate them thoroughly into the native way of life. The great scholars produced by eighteenth-century Orientalism—William Jones, Henry T. Colebrooke, Nathaniel Halhed, and Charles Wilkins—entirely owed their reputations to a happy coincidence of pioneering achievement and official patronage. Their exhaustive research had ambitious goals, ranging from the initiation of the West to the vast literary treasures of the East to the reintroduction of the natives to their own cultural heritage, represented by the Orientalists as being buried under the debris of foreign conquests and depredations.

Yet no matter how benign and productive its general influence might appear, as David Kopf among other historians has insisted to the point of urging it as fact, there is no denying that behind Orientalism's exhaustive inquiries, its immense scholarly achievements and discoveries, lay interests that were far from scholarly. Whether later Orientalists were willing to acknowledge it or not, Warren Hastings clearly understood the driving force of Orientalism to be the doctrine that "every accumulation of knowledge, and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity." Hastings' argument of course is an overt and unabashed rationalization of "the dialectic of information and control" that Edward Said has characterized as the basis of academic Orientalism, though even Said's by now well-known argument does not quite prepare one for the pro-
grammatic assurance with which Hastings promotes his cultural ideology. Aside from his obviously questionable assumptions about the “right of conquest,” what is most striking about this statement is the intellectual leap it makes from knowledge that is useful to the state to knowledge that becomes the gain of humanity. The relationship of power existing between England and India is certainly one condition allowing for such a leap, but more to the point is the role of the state in mediating between the worlds of scholarship and politics. For Hastings, it was not merely that the state had a vital interest in the production of knowledge about those whom it ruled; more important, it also had a role in actively processing and then selectively delivering that knowledge up to mankind in the guise of “objective knowledge.”

A peculiar logic runs through the argument, and it has to be monitored closely if one is to appreciate Hastings’ keen understanding of the powerful reinforcing effect of Orientalist scholarship upon state authority. The acquisition of knowledge about those whom it governs is clearly perceived to be of vital importance to the state for purposes of domination and control. But the fact that this knowledge eventually passes into the realm of “humanistic” scholarship (again through the agency of the state) confers a certain legitimacy upon the quest and, by extension, upon the state that promotes it. In other words, even though “social communication” may have its roots in the impulse to enforce dominion over the natives, as Hastings had no hesitation in acknowledging, its political motivation is nullified by virtue of the fixed body of knowledge it produces and makes available to the rest of mankind. The disinterestedness and objectivity that this now shared and therefore “true” knowledge purports to represent help to confirm the state’s “right of conquest,” which duly acquires the status of the sine qua non of knowledge production. What therefore appears on the surface as a rhetorical leap is in fact the carefully controlled effect of a self-fortifying dialectic.

As a candid acknowledgment of the implicit political goals of Orientalism, Hastings’ argument belies some of the arbitrary distinctions that are at times made between Orientalism and Anglicism, the countermovement that gained ascendancy in the 1830s. Briefly, Anglicism grew as an expression of discontent with the policy of promoting the Oriental languages and literatures in native education. In its vigorous advocacy of Western instead of Eastern learning it came into sharp conflict with the proponents of Orientalism, who vehemently insisted that such a move would have disastrous consequences, the most serious being the
alienation of the natives from British rule. However, while it is true that the two movements appear to represent diametrically opposed positions, what is not adequately stressed in the educational literature is the degree to which Anglicism was dependent upon Orientalism for its ideological program. Through its government-supported research and scholarly investigations Orientalism had produced a vast body of knowledge about the native subjects that the Anglicists subsequently drew upon to mount their attack on the culture as a whole. In short, Orientalist scholarship undertaken in the name of "gains for humanity" gave the Anglicists precisely the material evidence they needed for drawing up a system of comparative evaluations in which one culture could be set off and measured against the other. For a variety of reasons that will be outlined shortly, it would be more accurate to describe Orientalism and Anglicism not as polar opposites but as points along a continuum of attitudes toward the manner and form of native governance, the necessity and justification for which remained by and large an issue of remarkably little disagreement.

WARREN HASTINGS was succeeded in the governor-generalship by Lord Cornwallis (1786–1793), who found himself at the helm of a government seriously compromised by financial scandals and deteriorating standards. For this state of affairs the new governor-general squarely laid the blame on the earlier policy of accommodation to the native culture. In his view the official indulgence toward Oriental forms of social organization, especially government, was directly responsible for the lax morals of the Company servants. If the Company had sorely abused its power, what better explanation was there than the fact that the model of Oriental despotism was constantly before its eyes? To Cornwallis, the abuse of power was the most serious of evils afflicting the East India Company, not only jeopardizing the British hold over India but, worse still, dividing the English nation on the legitimacy of the colonial enterprise.

The most pressing task therefore was to ensure that no further abuse would occur. In the process of working toward this end Cornwallis evolved a political philosophy that he believed would be consistent with British commercial aims. His theoretical position was that a good government was held together not by men but by political principles and laws, and in these alone rested absolute power. The Oriental system
lacking a strong political tradition (and in this belief Cornwallis was
doing no more than echoing a view that was common currency), he
turned to English principles of government and jurisprudence for setting
the norms of public behavior and responsibility by which administrators
were to function. Determined to run a government that would remain
free of corrupting influences from the native society, Cornwallis concen­
trated his entire energies on the improvement of European morals on
English lines. The colonial subjects engaged his attention only mini­
mally; for the most part, he appeared wholly content to leave them in
their “base” state, in the belief that their reform was well beyond his
purview.

Clearly, the first steps toward Anglicization were aimed at tackling
the problem of corruption within the ranks. To this extent, as Eric
Stokes has rightly pointed out in *The English Utilitarians and India,*
Anglicism began as an entirely defensive movement. But even in this
form it was not without elements of aggression toward the native cul­
ture, as is apparent in certain measures that Cornwallis adopted to
streamline the government. Convinced that contact with natives was the
root cause of declining European morals, he resolved to exclude all
Indians from appointment to responsible posts, hoping by this means to
restore the Englishman to his pristine self and rid him once and for all
of decadent influences.

Predictably, the exclusion of Indians from public office had serious
repercussions on Anglo-Indian relations. The personal contact that En­
glishmen and Indians had enjoyed during Hastings’ administration van­
ished with Cornwallis, and the result was that a more rigidified master­
subject relationship set in. One historian, Percival Spear, has gone so far
as to suggest that this event marks the point at which there developed
“that contempt for things and persons Indian . . . and which produced
the views of a Mill or a Macaulay.”13 Denied all opportunities for
expression as a result of the harsh measure, public ability declined stead­
ily. But curiously, when this occurred it was taken to mean that civic
responsibility had never existed in India, thus giving rise to one of the
most durable legends of British rule: that the Indian mind was best
suited to minor pursuits of trade, but not to government or administra­
tion.

With Cornwallis charting an apparently serious course for administra­
tive rule on English principles, one would expect Anglicism as a cultural
movement to have triumphed much earlier than it actually did (i.e., the
Its momentum was badly shattered, however, by the cultural policy of his immediate successors, a group of skilled and politically astute administrators who had all at one time served under Lord Wellesley, a governor-general (1798–1805) noted for his caution and reserve, and later under the Marquess of Hastings, under whose governor-generalship (1812–1823) British rule was more firmly consolidated. Conservative in their outlook and fiercely Romantic in their disposition, these accomplished officers—John Malcolm, Thomas Munro, Charles Metcalf, and Mountstuart Elphinstone—had no use for the impersonal, bureaucratic system of government carved out for India by Cornwallis. It is important to know that these officers assumed power at a time when England’s wars both abroad and within India had come to an end and the task of consolidating the empire lay before them. Under such altered circumstances the earlier Company policy of expediency and caution was clearly outmoded.

But for reasons pertaining to their aristocratic backgrounds, feudal beliefs, and romantic temperament, this new generation of administrators was fiercely resistant to replacing the rule of men with the rule of law. It is true that in certain respects the form of government they favored was no different from their predecessor’s particularly in its commitment to the liberal doctrine of protection of property rights. But the kind of relationship they envisaged between ruler and ruled was an outright rejection of the abstract and impersonal one of the Cornwallis system in which the mechanistic operations of law had ultimate authority. Distrusting the power of law to effect changes either in individuals or in society, they belonged to an older tradition, which, as Eric Stokes points out, “saw the division of society into ruler and ruled as a natural ordering, and which envisaged submission to authority as necessary to the anarchic nature of man.”

With its strong feudal overtones, the form of government they wanted for India was a frankly paternalistic one, firm, yet benevolent, and open to the native traditions of law, government, and religion.

While Cornwallis had no particular interest in either promoting or discouraging Oriental learning, as long as Englishmen were not compelled to go through its studies, his successors decidedly did not share his indifference. Indeed, they were shrewd enough to see that it was entirely in their interest to support Orientalism if it meant the preservation of the feudal character of British rule. Their espousal of Orientalism might lead one to suspect a return to the earlier Company policy of
Warren Hastings. But to do so is to ignore the changed political circumstances under which the Orientalist policy now received patronage. Hastings' wholehearted enthusiasm for Orientalism was in large part a response to the volatile and uncertain political position of Britain in India. A touch of ad hocism was unmistakable in his approach, as is evident in an educational policy that failed to show any signs of being informed by a clear conception of government or a distinct political philosophy. Gaining the affection of the people was his primary goal. If that meant British patronage of the native traditions and systems of learning, he could conceive of no better tactic than to allow the immediate situation to guide and shape policy.

But Wellesley's officers were too conscious of England's by then strengthened position in India to resort to the promotion of native culture as a purely defensive measure. Rather, Orientalism represented for them the logical corollary of a precise and meticulously defined scheme of administration. In that scheme, as was noted earlier, the British government was to function as a paternal protectorate governing India not by direct rule (that is, through the force of British law) but through various local functionaries. In other words, the Cornwallis system of centralized administration was spurned in favor of one that was more diffuse and operated through a network of hierarchical relationships between British officers at one level and between the British and the Indians on the other. In order to draw the Indians into this bureaucratic structure it was imperative for the British administration to maintain an alliance with those who formed the traditional ruling class. This was essential partly to conciliate the indigenous elite for their displaced status, but partly also to secure a buffer zone for absorbing the effects of foreign rule, which, if experienced directly by the masses, might have an entirely disastrous impact.

This scheme of administration, at once more personal and more rigidly stratified in its conception, was further bolstered by the philosophy that no political tradition could be created anew or superimposed on another without a violent rejection of it by the preexisting society. For a new political society to emerge the native tradition and culture were increasingly viewed as vital in providing the soil for its growth. The imagery of grafting that permeated the discourse around this time pointed to an emerging theory of organicism that conceived of political formation as part of a process of cultural synthesis.15

These theoretical and practical considerations made Orientalism a
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highly appealing cultural program to Wellesley’s subordinates. In it may be seen the first seeds of what came to be known as the Filtration Theory, which was predicated on the notion that cultural values percolate downward from a position of power and by enlisting the cooperation of intermediate classes representing the native elite. The Filtration Theory is conventionally associated with Macaulay’s Anglicism, and it is in his famous 1835 minute that it is advanced most forcefully as a theory of culture. But its unacknowledged forebear is the Orientalism of Wellesley’s administration. The differences between an intermediate class of native elite educated in the vernaculars and one in English are of course by no means inconsequential, nor is it the intention here to minimize them in any way. But all the same it is essential to recognize that despite the conflict over language, the Orientalist and Anglicist programs assumed a common method of governance; in both, an influential class was to be coopted as the conduit of Western thought and ideas.

The policy in the years immediately following the Charter Act was to establish institutions devoted to the teaching of Oriental languages and literature, “freed as much as possible from its lumber.”16 From the beginnings of British involvement with Indian education the effort was toward pruning Oriental literatures of their undesirable elements, with a view to reviving the indigenous learning in its practical, useful aspects. Colleges were set up from the money that came in from endowment of lands and funds, sometimes yielding an annual income of more than twenty thousand rupees.17 The argument given at the time was that the money came from the people and that some attempt therefore should be made to give the people something in return. This education was open to all classes of the native population and was directed to those branches of instruction of most use to Indian society. The introduction of European science and English as a medium of instruction was deferred on the grounds that the people were not yet ready for it.

Roughly spanning the first two and a half decades of the nineteenth century, the phase of British rule dominated by the group around Wellesley appears as a period of relative inactivity in education. But it nonetheless acquires a special significance in this narrative for marking the historical moment when political philosophy and cultural policy converged to work toward clearly discernible common ends. The promotion of Orientalism no less than Anglicism became irrevocably tied from this point onwards to questions of administrative structure and governance. For example, how were Indian subjects to be imbued with
a sense of public responsibility and honor, and by what means could the concept of a Western-style government be impressed on their minds to facilitate the business of state?

Such questions also implied that, with the reversal of the Cornwallis policy of isolationism from Indian society and the hierarchical reordering of the Indian subjects for administrative purposes, the problem of reform was no longer confined to the British side, but extended more actively to the Indian side as well. The more specialized functions devolving upon a government now settling down to prospective long-term rule brought the Indians as a body of subjects more directly into the conceptual management of the country than was the case in either Hastings' or Cornwallis' time. As a result, the "Indian character" suddenly became a subject of immense importance, as was the question of how it could best be molded to suit British administrative needs.

But curiously, it was on this last point that Orientalism began to lose ground to Anglicism, for even though it appeared to be the most favorable cultural policy for an administration that resembled feudalism, its theoretical premises were seriously undermined by the gathering tide of reform that accompanied the restructuring of government. This was a government that had grown acutely aware of both its capacity for generating change (thus far internally) and its own vested authority over the natives. The Orientalist position was that a Western political tradition could be successfully grafted upon Indian society without having to direct itself toward the transformation of that society along Western lines. But as a theory it found itself at odds with the direction of internal consolidation along which British rule was moving. The strengthening of England's position in India, as exemplified by a recently coordinated and efficient administrative structure, put the rulers under less compulsion to direct change inward than to carry over the reformist impulse to those over whom they had dominion.

That tendency was reinforced by two outside developments. One was the opening of India to free trade in 1813, which resulted in the Private Trade and City interests steadily exerting stronger influence on the Crown at the expense of the Indian interest. The "Private Traders" had no tradition of familiarity with India behind them and, according to the historian C. H. Philips, "could hardly expect to retain the good opinion of either the Board of Control or of their governments in India." Removed from direct knowledge of the country they were ruling, these new political groups were more prone to taking decisions that reflected
their own biases and assumptions about what was good for their subjects than what the current situation demanded.

A second and more important influence in the thrust toward reform was exerted by a group of missionaries called the Clapham Evangelicals, who played a key role in the drama of consolidation of British interests in India. Among them were Zachary Macaulay, William Wilberforce, Samuel Thornton, and Charles Grant, and to these men must be given credit for supplying British expansionism with an ethics of concern for reform and conversion. Insisting that British domination was robbed of all justification if no efforts were made to reform native morals, the missionaries repeatedly petitioned Parliament to permit them to engage in the urgent business of enlightening the heathen. Unsuccessful with the earlier Act of 1793 that renewed the Company's charter for a twenty-year period, the missionaries were more triumphant by the time of the 1813 resolution, which brought about the other major event associated with the Charter Act: the opening of India to missionary activity.

Although chaplains had hitherto been appointed by the East India Company to serve the needs of the European population residing in India, the English Parliament had consistently refused to modify the Company charter to allow missionary work in India. The main reason for government resistance was an apprehension that the inhabitants would feel threatened and eventually cause trouble for England's commercial ventures. The insurrection at Vellore, near Madras, in 1806 was blamed on proselytizing activity in the area. The fear of further acts of hostility on religious grounds grew so great that it prompted a temporary suspension of the Christianizing mission. Despite assurances by influential parliamentary figures like Lord Castlereagh that the Indians would be as little alarmed by the appearance of Christian ministers as "by an intercourse with the professors of Mahometanism, or of the various sects into which the country was divided," the British government remained unconvinced that the Indians would not be provoked by interference with their religious beliefs. In keeping with the government policy of religious neutrality, the Bible was proscribed and scriptural teaching forbidden.

The opening of India to missionaries, along with the commitment of the British to native improvement, might appear to suggest a victory for the missionaries, encouraging them perhaps to anticipate official support
for their Evangelizing mission. But if they had such hopes, they were to be dismayed by the continuing checks on their activities, which grew impossibly stringent. Publicly, the English Parliament demanded a guarantee that large-scale proselytizing would not be carried out in India. Privately, though, it needed little persuasion about the distinct advantages that would flow from missionary contact with the Indians and their “many immoral and disgusting habits.”

Though representing a convergence of interests, these two events—British involvement in Indian education and the entry of missionaries—were far from being complementary or mutually supportive. On the contrary, they were entirely opposed to each other both in principle and in fact. The inherent constraints operating on British educational policy are apparent in the central contradiction of a government committed to the improvement of the people while being restrained from imparting any direct instruction in the religious principles of the English nation. The encouragement of Oriental learning, seen initially as a way of fulfilling the ruler’s obligations to the subjects, seemed to accentuate rather than diminish the contradiction. For as the British swiftly learned, to their dismay, it was impossible to promote Orientalism without exposing the Hindus and Muslims to the religious and moral tenets of their respective faiths—a situation that was clearly not tenable with the stated goal of “moral and intellectual improvement.”

Apart from the effect of thwarting the diffusion of Christian principles, the conflict of interests between commitment to Indian education on one hand and to religious neutrality on the other rendered the communication of modern knowledge virtually impossible. The impasse was created by what was perceived to be the sustaining structure of error embedded in Hinduism, blocking instruction in modern science, history, and other empirical disciplines. Because the knowledge of the West could not be imparted directly without seeming to tamper with the fabric of indigenous religions, British administrators were virtually paralyzed from moving in either direction. Since it was believed that knowledge could not be separated from religion in the Indian tradition, there was widespread fear among Council of Education members that Western scientific propositions opposed to the tenets of Hinduism would not merely be denounced as false, but would also be interpreted by overly suspicious Indians as deliberately hostile to the foundation of that religion. The more unambiguous, direct, singularly fixed the stance of a discipline toward objects of inquiry, the greater the likelihood that
learned Indians steeped in the indigenous tradition would perceive lines of opposition. On the other hand, a discipline with a double stance toward knowledge and belief, empiricism and intuition, reason and faith, suppressing at once its affiliation with Christianity on one side and with modern science on the other, was believed to be ideally suited to mediating the conflict of British interests.

The tension between increasing involvement in Indian education and enforced noninterference in religion was productively resolved through the introduction of English literature. Significantly, the direction to this solution was present in the Charter Act itself, whose 43d section empowered the governor-general-in-council to direct that “a sum of not less than one lac of rupees shall be annually applied to the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India.” As subsequent debate made only too obvious, there is deliberate ambiguity in this clause regarding which literature was to be promoted, leaving it wide open for misinterpretations and conflicts to arise on the issue. While the use of the word revival may weight the interpretation on the side of Oriental literature, the almost deliberate imprecision suggests a more fluid government position in conflict with the official espousal of Orientalism. Over twenty years later Macaulay was to seize on this ambiguity to argue that the phrase clearly meant Western literature and denounce in no uncertain terms all attempts to interpret the clause as a reference to Oriental literature.

It is argued, or rather taken for granted, that by literature, the Parliament can have meant only Arabic and Sanskrit literature, that they never would have given the honourable appellation of a learned native to a native who was familiar with the poetry of Milton, the Metaphysics of Locke, the Physics of Newton; but that they meant to designate by that name only such persons as might have studied in the sacred books of the Hindoos all the uses of cusa-grass, and all the mysteries of absorption into the Deity.

The first rumblings of discontent with the policy of supporting Oriental seminaries came well before the time of James Mill, but from his official position with the East India Company as examiner of correspondence he succeeded more than anyone else in stirring up debate on the wisdom of encouraging an apparently nonutilitarian system of learning. In a dispatch to the governor-general-in-council of Bengal dated February 18, 1824, he called attention to the state of the Madrassa (Moham-
medan College) in Calcutta and the Hindu College in Benares set up during the tenure of Warren Hastings. Recalling the ends proposed at the time, “to make a favourable impression, by our encouragement of their literature, upon the minds of the natives,” he charged the government with failure to reach the intended objectives, particularly that of utility. Mill questioned whether Oriental poetry was a worthwhile objective for establishing colleges in the first place, for “it has never been thought necessary to establish colleges for the cultivation of poetry, nor is it certain that this would be the effectual expedient for the attainment of the end [of utility].” While Mill’s dispatch commended the government for making all possible attempts to achieve the desired goals, its central thrust was that the original aim of imparting Oriental learning was fundamentally erroneous and that the great end should have been “useful learning.”

At the same time Mill made a careful distinction between imparting useful learning through the Sanskrit and Arabic languages, which he was willing to tolerate, and establishing institutions for the purpose of teaching only Hindu or Muslim literature, “where you bound yourselves to teach a great deal of what was frivolous, not a little of what was purely mischievous, and a small remainder indeed in which utility was in any way concerned.” But at the same time he conceded that if that small remainder contained enough that was useful, it had to be preserved at all costs. Undoubtedly Mill was cautious in pressing for any type of educational program that would offend native sentiments. Moreover, his main concern was to see India well governed in order to implement social reforms effectively and speedily. To that purpose English was not essential. Indeed, as Eric Stokes has pointed out, Mill was skeptical about any type of formal education, whether in English or the vernaculars, and this cynicism marked his isolation from the mainstream of English liberal thought. Yet, though he vested far greater faith in the power of law and government to produce social change, on the point of social utility he was inflexible, and it remained the criterion in his mind for mediating between existing interests and feelings of the Indians and the “pernicious” elements of Oriental learning.

Responding to Mill’s dispatch, the Committee of General Instruction agreed that the legitimate object was the introduction of European knowledge. But it expressed reluctance about debarring Indians, particularly the Muslims, from cultivating a native literature held in pious veneration—a literature that was deeply interwoven with the habits and
religion of the people and comprised valuable records of their culture. As a branch of study in all colleges, poetry was an integral part of the literary seminaries founded for Muslims and Hindus. To an administration officially committed to respecting the integrity of a proud civilization it was obvious that denying the Indians their poetry would in effect amount to cutting them off from a significant source of their cultural pride.

A group of Orientalists on the Committee (including Horace Wilson, Holt Mackenzie, and Henry Prinsep) responded in much sharper terms to Mill's dispatch. They had no quarrel with Mill's view that the Indians required a superior form of instruction than the one dispensed under their own system. But they were more pessimistic about the likelihood of Western knowledge taking root in India as long as European literature and science continued to be held in low esteem. As Horace Wilson observed: "A mere English scholar is not respected for his learning by the natives; they have no notion of English as learning, but they have a high respect for a man who knows Sanskrit or who knows Arabic." 26

This contempt for English was partly created by the maulvis and the pundits (men learned in Arabic and Sanskrit respectively) who viewed this new language and literature as a threat to their own power and influence over the people. "As long as this is the case," Wilson continued, "and we cannot anticipate the very near extinction of such prejudice, any attempt to enforce an acknowledgement of the superiority of intellectual produce amongst the natives of the West [can] only create dissatisfaction." 27 The import of his argument was somber: in the absence of prior steps to persuade Indians of the need for moral and intellectual improvement, European literature would continue to exert a culturally marginal influence. The Orientalists in sum urged that until such educational strategies were carefully worked out, a policy of deference be adopted to the political, cultural, and spiritual hold of the learned classes of India.

But increasingly there was less patience with a policy of conciliation. The initial wave of euphoria over the literary treasures of India, rapturously described as "so new, so fresh, so original, so unlike all the antiquated types and models of the West, that the mind was at once aroused and enraptured," 28 had by the 1820s given way to caustic criticisms of its systems of learning. Minto's minute of 1813, favoring the revival of Oriental learning, was harshly criticized for not making the slightest effort to introduce "in whole or in part, by implantation or
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engraftment, the improved Literature and Science of Europe, embody­ing, as these do, all that is magnificent in discovery, ennobling in truth, and elevating in sentiment. No! Orientalism—the whole of Orientalism, and nothing but Orientalism—is the sole burden of the Christian vice­roy of British India."29 Intent on unsettling Orientalism’s hold, Macau­lay, joined by his brother-in-law, C. E. Trevelyan, directed his energies at reviving the links between Hindu religion and Hindu social practice that had been severed in the heyday of Orientalist enthusiasm.

These are the systems under the influence of which the people of India have become what they are. They have been weighed in the balance, and have been found wanting. To perpetuate them, is to perpetuate the degr­adation and misery of the people. Our duty is not to teach, but to unteach them—not to rivet the shackles which have for ages bound down the minds of our subjects, but to allow them to drop off by the lapse of time and the progress of events.30

By the time of the 1835 English Education Act of Governor-General William Bentinck, which swiftly followed Macaulay’s famous minute of that same year,31 the teaching of English was taken out of the Sanskrit College and the Madrassa and confined to institutions devoted to studies entirely conducted in English. The grounds for doing so was the charge that the young men learned nothing in the native seminaries and failed to speak English fluently because they had to divide their time between the three languages.

The Orientalist Horace Wilson objected strongly to this move as an attempt to create a different kind of caste hierarchy in Indian education, claiming that these two native colleges produced many excellent English scholars who showed a mastery of the language for all useful purposes. Presenting the government with works translated into English by some of the boys who were Sanskrit scholars, he made a vain attempt to show that they learned the construction of the language much more rapidly and efficiently than the boys of the English college.

A more serious charge that Wilson and other Orientalists leveled against Bentinck’s Anglicist resolution was that in diverting funds from the Oriental seminaries to the institutions where English was taught exclusively they were promoting a scheme for the total extinction of native classical literature.

By annihilating native literature, by sweeping away all sources of pride and pleasure in their own mental efforts, by rendering a whole people
dependent upon a remote and unknown country for all their ideas and for the very words in which to clothe them, we should degrade their character, depress their energies and render them incapable of aspiring to any intellectual distinction.  

Wilson’s argument was not mere polemics. If the Sanskrit College and the Calcutta Madrassa had become mere vehicles of superstition, “temples of darkness which were falling of themselves into decay,” the Anglicists had to share responsibility for it, even at the moment they declared there was no point in supporting a learning that had sunk Indians in a deeper gulf of degradation. By denying learned men any honor or reward or marks of distinction and achievement, British policy virtually doomed these institutions to decay. The erosion of the traditional Indian respect for learning seriously affected its status in Indian society and progressively reduced native learning to an archaic institution. Yet though the British policy of withdrawing funds contributed distinctly to this situation, Anglicist explanations of the degradation of indigenous institutions curiously refrained from any mention of Anglicist accountability, instead preferring to interpret such decline as an effect of the fallacious content of Oriental learning.

For Wilson the preservation of the “national imagery” of a people was the key to their creative, moral, and intellectual development. But the Anglicist faction, denying the validity of such links for subject peoples, refused to acknowledge any connection between expenditures on English education and the annihilation of native literature. In a letter to the governor-general, Lord Auckland, the Scottish missionary Alexander Duff, himself an Anglicist sympathizer, chafed at suggestions of impropriety: “As well, surely, might we assert that endowments for encouraging the study of Latin and Greek in this island were destined to exterminate the language which Shakespeare and Milton and Addison had rendered classical, with all its provincial dialects.” Duff attempted to persuade his opponents that two distinct but not incompatible issues were involved in the debate, one being the patronage of native literature and the other the education of the native youth. Drawing analogies with the British situation, he argued that though ancient Scottish literature may have had claims on the patronage of the government to confer awards on those who rescued it from decay (after all, Walter Scott had collected and published border songs and ballads and MacPherson volumes of Celtic poetry), no government in its right senses would use money from revenues to “endow seminaries on the Tweed or on the
Tay, for the purpose of furnishing education to hundreds of youth, exclusively on border legends and Ossianic tales.\textsuperscript{35}

But however strong the Orientalists' condemnation of the policy of disbursing government funds for the exclusive study of English, the intensity of their feelings was not always shared by upper-caste Bengalis. The most striking example of differences between the Orientalists' objectives and Indian needs is that of the founding in 1816 of Hindu College, a college that sprang up entirely from the demands of a group of Calcutta citizens who wanted instruction not only in their own languages and sciences but also in the language and literature of England. Initially, the movement for English education, spearheaded by Calcutta's foremost citizen, Rammohun Roy, and the English watchmaker David Hare, was sparked by a need for translations of English literature into the vernaculars and not for a wholesale transfusion of Western thought. It is highly probable that no one expected to see introduced the full range of purely secular English literature and science through the medium of English. Sir Edward Hyde, chief justice of the Supreme Court, was not unappreciative of the irony of a situation where he found himself visited by a group of Calcutta citizens deploring the "national deficiency in morals" and requesting him for a college offering European education and imparting an English system of morals. Hyde reports that they were particularly insistent on receiving a classical knowledge of the English language and literature.

When they were told that the Government was advised to suspend any declaration in favour of their undertaking, from tender regard to their peculiar opinions, which a classical education after the English manner might tread upon, they answered very shrewdly, by stating their surprise that they had any objection to a liberal education, that if they found anything in the course of it which they could not reconcile to their religious opinions, they were not bound to receive it; but still they should wish to be informed of everything that the English gentlemen learnt, and they would take that which they found good and liked best.\textsuperscript{36}

The instrumental motives of the Bengali Brahmins, unambiguously seeking out the English language over the literature of England, were all too apparent to Hyde, as they surely must be to the modern reader. Bentinck's English Education Act of 1835 made note of the great rush for English places by Indians and offered the explanation that the study of English was accepted as a necessary part of polite education.\textsuperscript{37} The Calcutta Hindus seemed on the whole more eager for English than the
Muslims and, some Englishmen believed, were also much easier to instruct. A less flattering explanation was that they were fonder of gain and other lucrative employments that required knowledge of English. But British interpretations failed to take account of the extraordinary complacency the Bengali upper classes felt toward their educational futures, to the extent that the introduction of English was not cause for fear. A relationship of symbiosis between Oriental literature and English studies was much more easily conceivable for them (as the above passage indicates) than for their English patrons, for whom instrumental motives were less significant than motives of assimilation, acculturation, and amelioration.

The English Education Act of 1835, proposed by Governor-General William Bentinck on Macaulay's advice, made English the medium of instruction in Indian education. With the formal institutionalization of English as the language of instruction, the stage was set for a new direction to Indian education. But as the next chapter will elaborate, Bentinck's resolution was not as revolutionary in the introduction of a new language (the English language was already being taught in India even before 1835) as in endorsing a new function and purpose for English instruction in the dissemination of moral and religious values. In withdrawing funds from support of Oriental studies in favor of English, the act dramatically reversed England's commitment to a non-partisan, eclectic policy. Administrators preceding Bentinck, including Minto, Mountstuart Elphinstone, Charles Metcalf, Thomas Munro, and John Malcolm, had instinctively advocated a classical approach to the study of language and literature as an end in itself, resisting both Utilitarian and missionary pressures to enlist literary study as a medium of modern knowledge and as a source of religious instruction, respectively. With the Charter Act, the conflict between commitments to active intervention and neutrality pressed into existence a new discipline—English literature.