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Spaces of Progress and the Challenge of “Mindfulness” in a Postcolonial World

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ABSTRACT

Progress implied both change and improvement in the colonial and postcolonial world. Such a concept of progress came to be enshrined in specific geographical places. The notions of development and underdevelopment in the postcolonial context thereafter supplanted this idea. Over time, while the structures of colonial domination dissolved, those of embedded regional inequalities came to be deeply entrenched, thereby urging for Thich Nhat Hanh’s approach to “mindfulness” in a “postcapitalist,” postcolonial world. The key question is whether postcolonialism has reached an impasse in its delivery and deployment of ideas across the widening gulf between the spaces of progress and stagnancy. The ideas of colonial and postcolonial “progress” have profound material consequences for the future of people, regions, and spaces.

Taking the cue in the call for an “empirical investigation” into postcolonial studies, the first part of this paper focuses on the history of ideas of Progress, its lapse into Providence, and the eventual rearticulation of Progress to include both the material and the moral. The battle between the traditionalist-liberal-secular versus the utilitarian-evangelical and the humanitarian is played out in the Indian subcontinent. The second part of this paper outlines the spaces of progress and thereby elucidates those regions which were used as exemplars in highlighting progress in the empire and of the empire. The material and moral progress reports from India produced masques of plenty in the colonial world of orderliness, and at the same time, the discourses brought to the fore the reality of dissatisfaction that continued to plague colonial authorities.

KEY WORDS Colonial-Postcolonial; Progress; Moral vs. Material; Mindfulness; Regional Disparity

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Imperialism was taken to mean the moral triumph of “civilization” over “barbarity.” As Kiernan noted, the 18th-century people’s understanding of the empire also changed radically with changes in the imperial overseas expansion and with greater political accountability enforced by the portal of democracy in the British Parliament. The 18th-century imperialists were seen as gentlemanly capitalists, paternalistic and benign towards the needs of the “natives.” Indeed, the economic foundationalism of the imperial context needed to be sensitized to the cultural and gender nuances of the period. The interrelational element of the new imperial history appears most attractive for future analysis; thus, the metropole is not separate from the colony, and each influences the other in a far more interdependent manner than has been credited. Imperial space was constantly transgressed by the rhetoric of empire, its practices, cultures, people, and value systems. The morality of the empire came into conflict with the sensibilities of the imperial-evangelical virtues. This was witnessed in the impeachment of governor-generals such as Warren Hastings, Lord Wellesley, Sir G. Barlow, and Elijah Impey (1885) who had transgressed the norms and laws of a civilized society.

The role of historical continuity in the persistence of spaces of development and underdevelopment is important. This is what the “postcolonial theory doesn’t say” (Lazarus 2011:3). The significant role of historical projects set in place almost three hundred years ago has not been appreciated in the postcolonial debates, and the fact that this has influenced the current features of India’s developmental morphology calls for acknowledgment in a postcolonial world. Here one can see a clear imposition of the “logic of unilateral capital” (Lazarus 2011:4) in the emergence of diverse projects associated with the material and moral progress of the empire. Indeed, progress and civilizational debates will have little relevance unless anchored in terms of their geographical referents.

Postcolonial discourse of late has reached an impasse, and this is reinforced because of the contradictory nature of the project, which somehow has not received the necessary focus over the period (see Procter and Morey 2004). What is at stake here is the continuity amidst the cataclysmic economic, social, and political transformation being rendered in former colonies. The rapidity of these changes is quite significant, and while attempts are made to dismantle the erstwhile structures of an era, the byproduct that has emerged or is emerging is far from stable. In this respect, one is not sure if a decolonized geography in a postcolonial world has been a game changer or has led to a dismissal of the entrenched structures which has continued since the pre- to the colonial and postcolonial eras.

The role of the location of such debates is critical in assessing the positionality of postcolonial geography. Going beyond the “tyranny of quotationality and citation” (Goldberg and Quayson 2002:xvii), my emphasis is on the nature of postcolonial continuity, which is based on a relentless engagement with the exploration of sources and material facts. As Parry (2004:66) and Procter and Morey (2004:60) note, the impasse has been achieved because of the “privileging of textualist over materialist analyses of colonial discourses.” The continued fetishization of colonial tropes, such as bondage and slavery, morphing into “woken” identities as a dematerialized metaphor for oppression has resulted in diminishing the distinctive role played by the ever-changing nature of capitalism. Lazarus addressed this very point. To distance from the postmodern injunctions against willful grand narratives, the present postcolonial discourses have sought to insulate
themselves from any engagement with the continued pervasive influence of capitalism in
determining the fate of the “postcolonial other.” These again reiterate Parry’s (2004:78)
admonishment of “sanctioned occlusions.” Have we missed the point of this material
relocation of current postcolonial debates? What is the historical evidence which provides
us with the established architecture of form and structure of postcolonial reality?

The demands of a semiotic interpretation—i.e., of representations, meaning
making, and signification—of postcolonial conditions have overridden all assertions of the
stranglehold of structures thereby exposing the banality of explanations in a “real” world.
There is a sense that postcolonial explanations have become increasingly divorced from
the real, in favor of the imagined or the expected. Thus, “oversimplification, caricatures,
and trivialisation” have much to be blamed for this situation (Procter and Morey 2004:62;
see also Bartolovich and Lazarus 2002). The mobility of postcolonial discourses has failed
to keep up with the objective realities on the ground in the postcolonial state. The pervasive
exploitation, the regional underdevelopment, the existence of apathy for the plight of the
poor, the marginalized, and indeed the glorification of gratuitous violence perpetrated
in the name of progress have become deeply entrenched in most geographical spaces. Indeed,
Eurocentrism, multiculturalism, and the like have little meaning when faced with deeply
entrenched global and regional challenges. Postcolonialism will have to come to terms with
the geographical site more than an engagement with the semiotic voyeurism of the
developing world. The “fetishization” of the West is therefore as counterproductive as the
“semiotization” of the East.

“Postcolonial,” as Lazarus (2011:6) states, was a “periodising term, an historical
and not an ideological concept.” This paper is an attempt to provide a postcolonial-
historical and historiographical insight into the conditions of India’s development. The
texts analyzed in The Moral and Material Progress of India sought to engage with the
narratives and counternarratives which emanated in the subcontinent from the 1860s
onwards. Here, colonized identities were rebranded and rearticulated to subscribe to an
imperial progress narrative to justify colonialism. Native response was a way to restore
meaning to what they saw as progress (Fox 2008). Indeed, the material and moral
progression of India was a periodizing concept, a historical construct, and an underwritten
colonial/imperial ideological imperative. It started as a simple extension of lines of
communication, roads, railways, bridges, barrages, building, and the fortification of the
earliest settlement and gradually assumed a much more directed reinforcement of the
imperatives of colonial rule in India. The 18th-century idea that material progress can be
completed only with moral advancement, especially in transforming oppressive existing
social practices, such as sati, infanticide, oppression of lower castes, and so on, and
establishing policies and institutions that will endure for the future is something worth
pondering in a postcolonial context.

To go beyond Eurocentrism suggests the need for “mindfulness” of the postcolonial
conditions in space. Here, mindfulness as a construct is one of paying deliberate and careful
attention to our historical past, our context, our environment, and the communities we live
in. Thich Nhat Hanh, the renowned Vietnamese Buddhist scholar and teacher, described
mindfulness as being “at the heart of the Buddha’s teachings” (1991). This term has been
used in this paper to reiterate the importance of attention to the present moment, which is
a product of the past colonial/imperial and present postcolonial/decolonial. It also means “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally” (Kabat-Zinn 1994:4–5). In fact, in the Pali canon, mindfulness is never devoid of conceptualization (Bodhi 2013:8; Hyland 2015:172). In this paper, this “mindfulness” is about reworking our historical colonial and imperial past rather than “refraining from passing judgements” as was believed in its earlier iterations (see Dreyfus 2013:47).

We recognize the context, the responses in history, and its outcomes on geographical scales. What was entailed in the construction of modern India from a non-Westernized precolonial perspective? How was the object of knowledge structured? Situating historical projects of material and moral progress is critical to a postcolonial assessment of development. This material and moral progression of India through the late 18th century saw a “forced integration of hitherto non-capitalist societies . . . into a capitalist world system” (Lazarus 2012:11). It is easy to highlight what was destroyed in all that was indigenous; however, it will be far more pertinent to state what was transformed in this process. Today there are political leaders of the old school, who vociferously reinforce the distinction between rural, or “Bharat,” versus urbane, or “India.” The capitalist dimension of colonial and postcolonial development needs to be acknowledged in this context. We need to go beyond civilizational euphemism in the postcolonial constructs to address the key issues of liberalism, identity, poverty, inequality, rights and justice, and exploitation in a transforming world.

**PROGRESS AS AN IDEA AND AS A NORM**

This section attempts to locate the idea of progress in the Empire in the context of a particular space and time. During the Age of Enlightenment, the idea of progress was a characteristic and important part of the worldview of the educated, literate citizens. This idea of progress underwent key convulsions as it was supplanted into the Indian empire. While the project of “progress” started with an intention to ameliorate the masses, there remained fractured spaces of underdevelopment, of historical neglect.

**PROMINENT NOTIONS OF PROGRESS**

The doctrine of progress related naturally to Victorian optimism, especially in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. It remained the single most influential idea to measure the advancement of any civilization, territory, region, or state. This was like the 21st-century credit rating agency, canonizing the credo of progress through the mire of economic pessimism and optimism. The idea of progress maintained an unchallenged belief until the 1880s and gradually was replaced by other avatars of colonial modernity. As Livingstone notes, “Is progress to be measured by greater power over nature, the democratisation of happiness, higher gross national product, more information . . . ” (2006:560). The concept emerged in the late 17th century and reached its apogee by the middle of the nineteenth century (Bowler 1989; Bury [1920] 2006; Javary 1851; Nicholls 2011; Nisbet 1980; Spadafora 1990). All these scholarships reinforced the temporal over the spatial
dimensions of progress (see Livingstone 2006:562). Progress had to be grounded in space to make any sense for the living. This brings into sharp relief the distinction between progress, with a small $p$, and Progress, with a large $P$. The latter focused on major achievements since the Enlightenment, such as areas of metrology, and scientific and instrumental assessment of the globe. The former was more in terms of the translation of change in obscure spaces/regions (i.e., colonies). “At the heart of every theory of progress lies a conception of the ultimate good, and progress is thought to occur in proportion as the ultimate good triumphs in history” (Wagar 1967:56). It is a fact that the most common belief of 19th-century scholars was that the idea of progress was a product of the modern spirit and that humans became aware of progress as a “grand design of history” only in the 17th and 18th centuries. As Comte noted, in choosing between order and progress, the ancients opted for order because they considered both order and progress as antithetical principles. The influence of Christianity as a religion reinforced the significance of “social progress” and morality in the new era. It was with the advancement of the Renaissance period that one saw the idea of progress take off (Flint 1894:88, 90, 158, 104; Wagar 1967:58).

Bury ([1920] 2006) claimed that the idea of progress was an import from the French Enlightenment; however, Spadafora (1990:3) claims otherwise and has shown the prevalence of this idea being embedded through the Georgian and eventually Victorian “mental climate” (see the discussions led by Wagar 1967:61). The first recognized scientific ideas of progress came to be associated with the works of Turgot, Condorcet, and Comte, “[b]ut their thought grew in turn out of such fundamental conceptions as the Golden Age, organic evolution, the continuity and regularity of the cosmos, and Jesus’ prophecy of the gradual coming of the Kingdom of Heaven, all conceptions which had arisen in antiquity” (Wagar 1967:58). In this period, progress as a concept came to be closely aligned with faith (Bury [1920] 2006; Inge 1920; Mommsen 1951; Todd 1918; Troeltsch [1912] 2013). It was indeed Bury (Wagar 1967:60) who firmly established the foundations of the idea of progress as a “uniquely modern faith”. He was keen to ensure his idea of progress did not lapse into the ‘idea of Providence’ (Wagar 1967:60). For the idea of progress to take root in Imperial India, (1) the authority of the ancients had to be challenged and all thoughts had to be liberated, (2) the value of a secular life had to be acknowledged away from religious dogmas, and finally, (3) science had to be reinforced on strong foundations based on the invariability of the laws of nature. All these changes were ushered in gradually from the 18th and 19th centuries. As Wagar (1967:60) notes, “By the early [eighteenth] century, western civilisation was ready for its first theory of general progress, enunciated by the Abbe de Saint-Pierre [(Bury 1920, chapter 6)].”

**THE LAPSE OF PROGRESS INTO PROVIDENCE**

The theory of progress as a metaphysical claim reinforced the idea of being an inevitable process, of immanent change (Butterfield 1950:95–97; Spadafora 1990:5). The problem with this is the fact that sometimes, progress is presented as an abstraction, which ignores the spatial-social context, thereby resulting in what Livingstone (2006:577) called the vexatious problem of progress with a small $p$ and large $P$. Indeed, he aptly suggests that
everything “global is local at every point” (p. 577). What are the social, political, and geographical conditions which have led to the rolling out of the material and moral progress in India?

It is therefore important to identify political, social, and religious groups that allowed for the introduction and embedding of the idea and plan for progress in the colonial state; thus, progress has been defined as a movement over time and space toward the betterment of social, political, and material conditions. There is an implicit idea of improvement or advancement. This idea, while cautious of reification of people and spaces, also allowed a historical assessment of the postcolonial condition. As Spadafora (1990:7) notes, “Although there is only one idea of progress, there is a multitude of possible expressions of the idea . . . or doctrines of progress.” Eighteenth-century Britain saw the idea of progress being firmly established from the 1730s to the 1780s and thereafter with the rise of class consciousness and its related antagonism, creating a new departure towards ideas of “improvement” (Spadafora 1990:9). There was the emergence of ideas of “secularism, humanism, freedom,” all of which were embraced under the rubric of modernity, of reform and science. The demand for toleration reduced the tensions between the liberal secularists of critical reasoning (derived from the Newtonian and Lockean schools of thought) and the Evangelical Methodist or Nonconformist, High Anglican, and Utilitarians. Christian or eschatological progress therefore became a distinct form of modernity, apart from the notion of civilizational progress advocated by the secularists (Dawson [1929] 2001:190–91; Wagar 1967: 62–66). The question is, Why did the idea of religious moral progress take root in Britain and not in the French context? The answer lies in the period after 1760, the ascendancy of the British Empire, and the parallel rise of secularists and evangelicals. As Trevelyan notes, “Victorian belief in progress was a conditional affair” (Spadafora 1990:386). Progress in a colonial space, and indeed in the postcolonial contexts, emerged as a “regulative ideal” (Livingstone 2006:574). Initially, the idea of progress came to denote material improvement or general “Progress” and gradually lapsed into a “Providential” affair, encapsulated under the rubric of the moral, or improvement of humans.

As Bowler (1989:vii) noted, “Material progress was also an age dominated by a fascination with the past.” The reason for this is because of the increasing ruptures/tensions which were emerging in Victorian-dominated societies across the empire, and it was imperative to resuscitate a sense of continuity with the past. Recognizing the purposeful direction of change or progress was important for this period, yet there were others, such as John Stuart Mill (1848), who were emphatic that the past was long dead and gone, consigned to the embers of history. Likewise, Jeremy Bentham took a far more ahistorical position towards progress and emphasized the primacy of “individualism” towards the realization of happiness and improvement. Thus, Bowler (1989:2) believed that “the very idea of progress was imposed upon history to create a sense of order (which) the Victorians craved.” The resultant effect was a lack of unanimity about the nature and character of progress among diverse groups. Progress, therefore, was multiple in form and content and was easily extendable to the regions of the vast empire. Material and moral progress was designed to create order out of chaos, leading to two distinct strands of progressionist-versus-cyclic views of development (Bowler 1989:8). The Victorians were keenly engaged
with the idea of a cyclic view of progress, which was focused on civilizational changes from period to period. The role of geography, of space, became critical in this form of analysis, which distinguished between progress visualized in diverse climatic regimes, among differentiated political entities, from despotic to democratic, and enlightened to secular societies. The rise of Whig interpretation of progress could be sharply contrasted with those of the evangelicals and secularists (see Bowler 1989 for an extended discussion on this theme). The only hope and salvation for Imperial India was to undergo a messianic, brutal intervention, the likes of which had never been seen or experienced before, and salvation was presented via modern science. Bury maintained that the idea of progress is comparatively recent, dating to the 16th century. Progress in knowledge did not automatically translate into improvement for humanity, because any development of arts and inventions promoted luxury and thereby vice. Progress was embodied in the shift from savagery to civilization, with the harnessing of fire, water, precious metals, agriculture, ships, walled townships, roads, and codified laws. The 19th century saw the emergence of the idea of “laws of progress,” as implied by Turgot and Condorcet, in which society will be remodeled on scientific principles. Darwin’s 1859 The Origin of Species reinforced this belief, and Herbert Spencer declared, “Progress therefore is not an accident, but a necessity. . . . What we call evil and immorality must disappear. It is certain that man must become perfect” (Spencer 1896:530).

**REARTICULATION OF PROGRESS TO INCLUDE THE MORAL WITH THE MATERIAL**

While material progress was conditional and achieved on the continued success of enterprising individuals, this perspective allowed for the replacement of a declining civilization/race with a superior race, i.e., the British. Such a view also reinforced the imperatives of colonialization and its associated modernity. There was a clear call for a change from the absolutism of the despots in India to that of a liberal form of governance (Bowler 1989; Embree 1962; Fischer-Tine and Mann 2004; Grant 1813; Mann 2004; Marriott 2003); thus, liberation from this Oriental despotism became the justification for the establishment of colonial rule under the Crown. It was justified that paternalistic government could remove unjust subjugation of the uncivilized population under the Moghuls and others. Moral and material progress was predicated and articulated by accommodating Indian idioms of sovereignty. What was material? What was moral?

The history of subjugation under unenlightened rulers in the subcontinent called for a new form of paternalistic government undertaken by the British colonial government. This was a form of “Philanthropic Enlightenment” (Mann 2004:5). Such a civilizing mission called for a patron-client or master-servant relationship. The emergence of Christian missionaries, or “Evangelicals,” from the Methodists to the Anglicans, and the Jesuits resulted in the call for a new “moral” order. This moral agency reinforced the Victorian sensibility of respectability. The Clapham Sect became a key influence on the moral ordering of not just the British nation but also of the colonies. This resulted in a vociferous campaign for the abolition of slavery, for education, and for the spread of the Bible in the colonies. The civilizing agenda for the Indian empire was based on the religious
and moral improvement of the “natives.” As Mann (2004) notes, this idea of improvement was not confined to the colonies but also was a major initiative to deal with the “outcasts” of the City of London. India became a space for experimentation of various moral strategies to be applied in the metropoles across the empire. Indeed, Mill (1826) ranked India among the “uncultivated nations,” especially because of the way women were degraded and portrayed in society. He also castigated the ceremonialism of pompous behavior, entrenched casteism, and general mildness of behavior. The defective legal system was unenlightened, produced general “rudeness,” and promoted barbarism under the Moghuls. Chatterjee (2011:687) averred that the idea of progress and improvement of the empire was based on a self-perpetuated myth by a liberal, democratic Britain keen to maintain a despotic stranglehold on the riches of the Raj. In India, by the middle of the nineteenth century, both Macaulay and Mill exerted major doctrinal influence on the idea of progress. India saw the adoption of a utilitarian vision of progress (Stokes 1990), which included general progress of improvement (material) and improvement of humans (moral).

THE TRADITIONALIST-LIBERAL-ORIENTALIST-SECULAR VERSUS THE UTILITARIAN-EVANGELICAL-ANGLICIST

The secular credentials of materialist advancement in Britain and Europe encouraged Orientalists such as William Jones to justify a framework for moral progress in India, while Nathaniel Halhed emphasized the civilizational divide between Britain and India. They mastered the Indian language and culture and were at pains to emphasize the rise and decline of the ancient Indian civilization (see Marshall 1970); thus, a liberation from “oriental despotism” was the first stage in the resuscitation of India towards embedding colonial modernity. This spurred the incredible material advancement witnessed in the Raj. This resulted in the introduction of Western institutions of learning, hospitals, roads, railways, and telegraphs considered critical for the general improvement and amelioration of the country; thus, the colonial administration benefitted from these major interventions in the name of material and moral progress. The advancement of rational law since the 1860s under the Civil and Criminal Procedures Code was reflected systematically in the reports of the material and moral progress of the empire. Technology and science, too, emerged as the key tools for governance and material improvement of the subject race.

The Orientalists included William Jones, Nathaniel Halhed, and Warren Hastings, and the Anglicists included Charles Grant, Lord Cornwallis, William Bentinck, and Lord Dalhousie. The Orientalist-Anglicist controversy on the reforming agenda of India gained sharper focus from 1812 leading up to the renewal of the East India Company Charter. There were “Traditionalists,” namely Edmund Burke, who protested such a radical reforming zeal of the “Utilitarians.” He was emphatic that India could be effectively governed not by dismantling traditional institutions but by building on them. The underlying angst was reinforced by the incredible reforming zeal of evangelicals and utilitarians and the rebellion of 1857, which put to rest any liberal overtures by the East India Company towards India. It was Charles Grant who provided the backdrop for a major shift in attitudes to progress in India and presented a major challenge to the Traditionalist-Orientalist-Liberalist-Secular noninterventionist position in India. His Observation on the
State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain (1792) dismissed the Orientalist’s position of a civilizational response to the governing of ancient India. Instead, he called for radical reforms to transform the “depraved state of Indian society” (Embree 1962:141–57; see also Grant 1813:59–72). Of import was the emphasis on gender relations and the treatment of women in Indian society. Education and the introduction of the English language (Macauley) and of the Christian faith became the basis for the moral progression of India. Grant also believed that, unlike the Americans, the “effeminate” Indians lacked the “manly” instinct to demand independence from British rule and sought a permanent relationship that endured the test of time. This was translated into the idea of assimilation of Indian society into colonial forms of modernity rather than attempting to pursue a path of equality for the Indian subjects in the empire (Mann 2004:11). For this purpose, the “natives” were to be reminded of their subject status, one of subordination and obedience, and not of equality.

Education fostered a sense of individualism to fight against the degenerate tyranny of religion and despots. The reform of government, the rule of law, and the introduction of taxation policy were robust programs for the civilizing mission of material and moral progression of the Indian subcontinent. Western-orientated reforms were initiated from the 1820s to the 1850s; thus, British rule became synonymous with Progress and the betterment or improvement of society. Indeed, even after the First War of Independence of 1857, the volumes of Material and Moral Progress of India continued to highlight the achievements of the civilizing mission. The role of scientific technology, which spurred the growth of steamboats, railways, and telegraphs linking diverse cities and remote destinations, became key icons of material progress. The Victorian ethos of modernization of British India was at the heart of this enterprise.

MORAL PROGRESS

Tangible signs of material progress in the British Empire were visible by the establishment of railways, telegraphs, cities, ports, and lighthouses. The intangible aspect of colonial rule—that of moral improvement—was a greater challenge to pin down, except by highlighting the key strategic interventions at the social, cultural, and, indeed, ideological levels. These can be enumerated via the radical changes which were introduced in law and legality, in public instruction of education, thereby encroaching on the more embodied spaces in the form of a campaign for the abolition of sati/suttee, or voluntary immolation of widows, and of infanticide and feticide. Thus, “moral” as an entity was translated in diverse ways to ensure “progress” with a specific modern colonial ethos. There was, however, a distinction made between the secular and evangelical credentials of this moral mission, which raged through the subcontinent during the latter half of the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite the material improvement of Europe since the Industrial Revolution, the secular vision of progress never overwhelmed religious orthodoxy in Britain (Marriott 2003:10).

Material and moral progression was advanced through a series of interrelated activities. William Jones attempted to codify the legal system in India, which led to the immanent discovery of India’s civilizational history. Likewise, Thomas Munro laid the
foundations for the administration of land settlements, thereby providing a precursor to the Permanent Settlement Act on tenurial rights and responsibilities of *ryots* (tillers) and *zamindars* (landlords). Finally, James Renell’s mapping of India also afforded the establishment of the enormous trigonometrical survey of the Indian subcontinent. As Marriott (2003) notes, these exercises were based on the ideas, knowledge, and methodologies derived from the West, yet they were adapted and implemented independently, without being a copy of the West (Edney 1997:27–28). On the inclusion of moral imperatives of progression, we can trace a clear alignment of ideas and intervention. William Robertson’s classic ([1791] 1817), while highlighting the significance of ancient Indian culture and the progress of science and arts, insisted that the Europeans had surpassed the ancients, “proud in their superior achievements.” He appealed to the European sense of morality to bring India to the same level of civilization (Marriott 2003:77; Robertson [1791] 1817:336).

**LIBERAL VERSUS UTILITARIAN OR HUMANITARIAN TO MISSIONARY PHILANTHROPY**

Eighteenth-century attitudes towards India were thus broadly shaped by Enlightenment thought (see Dyson 1978:19), and by the 19th century, these attitudes were replaced by a more rigid evangelicalism and radical utilitarianism, which sought to make interventions to shape the future of colonial society in the Raj (Marriott 2003:78). We also see evidence of how Enlightenment sensibilities influenced Kindersley (1777:180), a travel writer who suggested environment/climate, despotism, and superstition as key factors for the continuation of “laziness, stupidity, and lack of development” among Indians. Here again, we see aspects of environmental determinism and a call for moral reform. The emergence of a harsher morality-related discourse on Indian society came with the advent of the evangelicals and facilitated the production of knowledge in colonial India. The shift from humanitarian to missionary philanthropy caused a shift from secular-material to religious-moral provisions; thus, saving the “soul” became an immediate concern and a precondition of taking Indian society to the civilized world. This spurred the demand for scrutiny and increased classification and codification of Indian society (Thorne 1999:34). The earliest recorded instance of moral persuasion came from Joseph White when he urged the promotion of the universal and progressive message of Christianity “among our Mahometan and Gentoo Subjects” in India (White 1785).

Thus, Charles Grant, a prominent member of the East India Company (1768) reinforced the importance of *moral reform* in India as a precondition to *political reform*. He stated,

Inquiries into the evils that afflict the people and the means of addressing them are now deservedly become a business of Government, yet I shall fear that all remedies will prove ineffectual which have no respect to the moral and intellectual state of the inhabitants. . . . I am not, as you may believe for following the Mahomedan example of establishing opinions by the sword, but I certainly am for
Based on his interactions in Bengal, Grant highlighted cruelty, lack of benevolence and affection, gross laxity of behavior and principle, indecency, licentiousness, malevolence, and animosity as key traits afflicting Indians. He believed that moral instructions would help to rectify these degenerate traits. Grant therefore did not subscribe to the hardened position of the evangelicals, instead seeking a middle path of enlightened humanism. His vision for India concurred with that of Robertson, “that the original inhabitants of Hindoostan never existed in a savage state, and only internal improvement would raise their level of civilisation” (Grant 1813:75). While he advocated knowledge of Englishness, printing, natural philosophy, agriculture, and mechanics as critical for progress, he was unreserved in his assertion for “Hindoos” to receive western knowledge of religion, thereby leading to the happiness of humans (Grant 1813:112); thus, caste and mythology of the “Hindoo” character came under severe observation to help eradicate social ills such as “suttee/sati and infanticide.”

Lord Cornwallis had reservations regarding the extent of intervention, whereas Wilberforce espoused the cause of the Clapham Sect to support a nonaggressive moral reform based on a reformatory educational system through the medium of English. While the role of Providence became a clear mandate for the transformation of Indian society, they also faced the conundrum of “moral laxity” among the colonialists in India (Buchanan [1805] 1812:201; Kumar 2005): “The natives of Hindostan are a divided people. They have no common interest. To disseminate new principles among them is not difficult. They are less tenacious of opinion than of custom” (Buchanan [1805] 1812:205). Thus, moral progression in effect was the fulfillment of Christian destiny, “not through the false creed of a Romish church sunk in the same darkness as Hinduism, but by the united efforts of Protestant evangelicals” (Bearce 1961:80; Marriott 2003:93). What put a spanner to the moral agenda was the tenuous relationship that existed between the imperial mission and the evangelical mission. It was only with the combined efforts of Grant, Buchanan, and Wilberforce that the establishment of the Clapham Sect, or Clapham Saints (1790–1830), and their key role in winning concessions during the renewal of the East India Company Act 1813 (Charter Act) resulted in the legitimation of evangelical work in India (Stokes 1990). The charter declared, “Whereas it is the Duty of the Country to promote the interests and happiness of the native inhabitants of the British dominions in India . . . such measures ought to be adopted as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement” (East India Company Charter Act 1813:53).

**MATERIAL PROGRESS AS INSCRIBED ACROSS SPACES**

The Indian Office periodically issued a Blue Book purporting to describe the moral and material progress of India under British rule. Material progress is easily demonstrated:

> There can be no doubt that trade is flourishing, cultivation is extending, and all the industrial pursuits have increased...
and multiplied, while we have been taught many things that our fathers never knew. I am not so sure; by the way, whether progress is demonstrable in art, and I fear that you have not enhanced the poetical aspect of things in India. Art in its higher orders has hitherto, like morality, preferred a religious to a utilitarian motive: and when utility comes too obtrusively into the foreground, the artistic like the religious spirit becomes depressed and loses grasp of its principle. At this hour, a Hindu sculptor in outlying places will execute temples beautiful in design and detail because the subject only inspires and exalts inspiration but leaves it quite free. The introduction of your European patterns is confusing to the spiritual instinct as to form and colour; the imaginative faculty becomes superfluous: and then the immense European demand for “Indian curiosities” has demoralised our artisans, who instead of endeavouring to express the multiform religious idea, however grotesque are now employed in executing wholesale commercial orders according to sample. (New York Times 1885)

The earliest documented text on the material and moral progress of the British Empire for India was by James T. Callendar in The Political Progress of Britain or An Impartial History of Abuses in the Government of the British Empire (1795). This was followed by Robert Chatfield’s (1808) A Historical Review of the Community, Political and Moral State of Hindoostan from the Earliest Period to the Present Time. Systematic reporting of progress was thus presented and made available from 1795 to 1923. Major reports that emerged during the period were for 1859, 1874, 1879, and 1882. The Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India of 1859–60 highlighted the fatality of railway accidents in the East Indian Railways. The accidents were attributed to willful neglect of duty on the part of British-born subjects, key railway officials. Stringent punishment was supported in such cases (HMSO 1859–60:244). The overcrowding of trains in the third class was a major irritant (HMSO 1859–60:254). There was enhanced punishment to contractors for willful breaches of contract, especially those who received the money in advance to complete the work and disappeared (HMSO 1859–60:4–7).

The report discussed the suppression of the Moplah rebellion of 1859. Police administration and separation of judicial and police functions of the magistrate were highlighted in this report. There was also a slew of complaints made against the Postmaster General Office in Bengal for letters and parcels that went missing en route to England. There were also instances of unfounded complaints against a missing atlas to be delivered to Colonel Yule’s office, which was eventually traced. Obtaining trustworthy letter carriers was a major headache for the post office. (HMSO 1859–60:30). The posting of a native student at Thomason College to the Department of Public Works was a source of consternation because having qualified and given the lowest pay in the starting grade was
considered enough incentive “to deprive the indolent and unambitious of any incentive to exertion. Complaints were universal of the practical inefficiency of the young men” (HMSO 1859–60:86). Accidental deaths on railways were reported. One sad incident reported was that “Inspector Thompson went to sleep lying on the railway when some empty wagons started to roll down without brakes. The coolies who were with him did not wake him in time, resulting in both his ears being chopped off” (HMSO 1859–60:133).

The frequency of murders in Singhbhoom in Chotanagpur (today known as Jharkhand) was said to have diminished because of the advancement of modern civilization. The report stated that the aboriginal people were lawless and it was only by 1833 that they were brought under control. Most murders were related to witchcraft, in that a suspicion of an evil eye could result in the decimation of families by rival families in the region. The rise of pauperism among Europeans and Eurasians emerged as a major concern, and a committee was established in 1892 to engage with measures to stem this situation; thus, uneducated Europeans inevitably became idle, profitless, and dangerous individuals and it therefore became necessary for the government to support the European individual (Pauperism Committee 1892:12). Suppression of the “Churruckh Poojah,” or “hook swinging festival,” of 1856–57 was another instance of moral reform. Here, the colonial authorities used administrative procedures to ban the festival in public spaces but also used their moral authority to persuade key persons in the community to induce the abandonment of the practice (HMSO 1859–60:62). The Santhal rebellion of 1855 and the Cossiyah rebellion of 1821, 1832 and of the Kookie rebellion in Chittagong and the Arracan Valley were reported. The policing of wild, head-hunting tribes was a major concern in the marginal spaces of the empire, northeast of India.

The Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India of 1870-7 noted the key challenges that were being perpetrated in the margins of the empire where colonial modernity was yet to be established. Ironically, it was partial and remained a fractured project of discontinuity in the postcolonial period. Key questions of infanticide and caste and religious riots were in focus. The report presented interesting insights into the suppression and domination of the Looshais (Lushais) of Mizoram in Northeast India. The frequent raids by diverse hostile tribes were a major source of irritants for the East India Company (Bayly 1999; Kumar 2006).

There was also concern about the progress in controlling infanticide, and the Infanticide Act came into existence in March 1870. As a result, any village having less than 40 girl children per hundred-child population was targeted for punitive sanctions by the colonial state. Two principal reasons assigned to the cause for infanticide were exorbitant marriage expenses for the bride’s family and that during the Mohammedan period, Rajput girls were kidnapped to serve the harem of these rulers and chieftains. Infanticide had therefore gained currency in specific spaces, among specific communities. Frequent riots between Hindus and Muslims were a headache for the administration. The secular solution was not to allow the celebration of the Mohurram and Ramnawmi festivals on the same day. This elision happens once every 33 years on the full moon, on the lunar calendar. It was also reported that the missionaries found it difficult to break through the opposition against conversion to Christianity in the cities, then in the villages. The rural population was moved to accept Christianity, especially...
among the tribals, and an indigenous population was less bound by caste ties. An extraordinary feature of Indian life that caught the attention of the administrators was the substantial number of human beings being killed by wild animals; thus, deaths by tigers, leopards, and snakebites were reported (HMSO 1870–71).

In 1879, Robertson noted the extent of population growth in the various regions of the empire. The census exercise has in effect changed the common perception and ideas of the vast population of India in terms of its races, regions, and religions. The text says that “Calcutta is drained and possesses a water supply far better than that of London, and as good as that of Glasgow” (Robertson 1879:47). In terms of the morals of the people, “whatever may be said of those in the larger towns, those who live in villages is no better and no worse than the same classes elsewhere. As a rule, the people of British India are temperate, chaste, honest, peaceful, singularly docile, easily governed and patient” (Robertson 1879:49). The establishment of the Indian universities in the Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay in 1857, during the aftermath of the Mutiny, was upheld as one singular achievement towards moral progress: “This was conducted befitting us, and worthy of the great name we have in the world as conquerors and as rulers” (Robertson 1879:50).

The female education system organized in the zenanas, or private houses, was highlighted even though there was a lack of real demand among the “natives.” Robertson states, “Progress is very slow in all eastern countries and the dead slumber of ignorance still shrouds the women of India” (1879:51). Robertson’s lecture also highlighted the rise of liberal native press and the progress of Protestant missions since 1873. In terms of material improvement, the rise in the collection of land revenue was highlighted across the provinces. The increase of opium production for trade to China was presented along with the key challenge of eradication of infanticide in northwestern provinces. It was recorded that in Punjab, out of 358 murders of girl children in 1872, 140 sentences of death were pronounced. The assumption was that this was a hereditary practice which needed to be outlawed. The endemic famines in the provinces, which had caused stupendous financial losses and death, were decried. Robertson thus belonged to the generation who reflected the sentiments of the Orientalist when he stated, “Let us study the past history of our country and especially of its connection with India and we will unquestionably arrive at a just and prudent course of action” (1879:84). Writing in 1880, Robertson noted, “Gentlemen, we have put down disorder, anarchy and confusion in British India and conferred upon all its diverse races the blessings of civil and religious freedom. British India is no longer the estate of a few British subjects. It is an integral portion of the British Empire.” Likewise, in 1874, he stated, “British India comprehends a population exceeding 240,000,000 composed of different races, speaking a great variety of languages and are in very diverse stages of civilisation. Not so long ago, infanticide and human sacrifices were common in many districts in India.”

There were serious critical responses to The Material and Moral Progress of India by the native Indians. The Hindu, the leading Madras native paper, on October 1, 1885, described the state of things: “English merchants during a sway of nearly a century rifled the land of all its wealth. A century of plunder! And now what has succeeded it? The ‘spoilation of India,’ has it ceased? Certainly not. It is going on as vigorously as ever” (Murdoch 1886:41).
It is lamentable how many reckless assertions are made, calculated to poison the minds of the people against the English.” The Liberals on November 8, 1885, made the following statement: “Doubtless, English enterprise, and capital are seeking out the valuable products of India, which can be worked for the markets of the world. But the result is that the whole gain in these enterprises goes with the English capitalist, while the native labourer is left to appropriate whatever he can pick up in gleaning” (Murdoch 1886:45). “India now absorbs one-fourth of the gold and one-third of the silver produced throughout the whole world” (Murdoch 1886:46). Sir George Birdwood stated, “Scarcely a copy of the native papers is published without some complaint of the discourtesy and harshness of Europeans towards natives” (Murdoch 1886:115). Sir Alfred Lyall in The Fortnightly said of Hindus, “Amongst most of those millions the religious conception has not yet reached the particular stage at which one object of divine Government is understood to be the advancement of morals. On the other hand, there is a considerable minority whose ideas have passed beyond this stage, and who conceive their Divinity as supremely indifferent to all things material as well as moral” (Murdoch 1886:119).

In response to the question of whether India was becoming richer or poorer under British rule, The Bengali opinion was that “the ancient civilisation of India was superior far to that which Europe ever had.” There is another idea still more prevalent: The Edinburgh Review said, “The assumption is spreading in a notable way among the half-educated classes that up to the appearance of the English, the Indians were living in a state of religious simplicity under various kings. The Golden Age has been succeeded by the Iron Age under the British” (Murdoch 1886:40).

The 1891–92 HMSO report noted the moral and material progress of tribes from the Assam Hills of the Northeastern Frontier Agency (NEFA). Agricultural indebtedness and education were seen as key issues. The standard of life of Nagas was compared to those of Khasis and Garos. The report ended with an interesting observation that “the population of Assam is above the Indian average in material prosperity but has not yet awakened to the advantages of its position.” Likewise, the HMSO Statement of 1920–21 emphasized merits of philanthropy during famine in Kathiawar, particularly Servants of India, the Seva Samiti, the Bengal Social Service League, and the Bhagini Samaj of Gujarat. Thus, it was decided that the “uplift of the Indian people, economic, physical, and moral, really revolves itself into the question of education” (p. 162). The last two reviews highlighted the unsatisfactory progress in education, especially among the lower castes, and of female illiteracy.

Ghose (1921), in contrast, brought the voice of “enlightened” Indians while attempting to answer a test question, that “India is not a conquered country.” He noted that India was better equipped than ever before to fight the scourge of famines. There was a redistribution of surplus stock across provinces. A Famine Insurance Fund was maintained by the state, and despite famines, the population of British India had increased by tens of millions in the past 10 years. Moreover, the fact that the Native States in the plains of India had increased by four million spoke volumes for the material benefits “sometimes so unreasonably disputed derived by India from her present administration” (Ghose 1921:83). He justified the colonial order by stating that “India is not a conquered country and that the English came to India as did others to trade and because the country was divided into
innumerable factions and contending elements. Inevitably, in the ensuing quarrels the British traders and mercenaries all got intricately embroiled supporting one or the other contending groups. The inevitable result was that the strength of character of the British and the power of their organisation brought them to the top” (Ghose 1921:117).

He was forthright in his articulations that “It is of great importance to note that when the British nation found itself in power, it did not abuse such power. On the contrary, it eventually rose to the height demanded by the greater part, which Providence thus called upon Great Britain to play” (Ghose 1921:118). As Butterfield (1950:95–97) notes, “Providence itself was progress or rather that progress was the work of providence.” Justification not just for the East India Company but also for Crown rule was ably demonstrated: “When it was found that government by the East India Company originally a profit-making organisation, led to an undesirable situation, the British people did not hesitate to take over the supreme responsibility of sovereign power” (Ghose 1921:118).

By 1921, the notion of a commonwealth was emerging in its very nascent form, as “the very expression of ‘Empire’ is out of date. Germany was an Empire and so was Rome, but Great Britain is ever tending to become a federation, a community of nations, of peoples under one flag. In this type of Empire there is not as in other past Empires of Europe, any idea of assimilation of the weaker to the stronger, of the East to the West. But as in the Hindu ‘Samrajya’ of old, each nation, each race is left free to develop into greater manhood like special culture it has acquired or inherited in conformity with the principles of self-government, freedom, and liberty. In other words, this British Empire does not stand for any enforced unity or standardisation of its various parts, but for a fuller, richer, and multifarious life among each of the peoples that compose it for the glorification of their common humanity. Is it not an ideal worth thinking and working for, living, and dying for?” (Ghose 1921:129–30).

The importance of public health and culture emerged only after 1858. Here, Ghose called for the cooperation of the Indians as being essential: “If the progress of sanitation in rural areas leaves much to be desired, that is due not only to the lack of funds, but the habits of our own people are also to blame. Our compatriots find it difficult to get over their old deep-seated prejudices and the lax ways of life into which they had fallen” (Ghose 1921:99–100). He provided an optimistic report that India continued to benefit from the scientific advancement in medicine. The Lady Dufferin Association, founded in 1888, was reported to be immensely successful in providing medical aid to women and children. The promotion of European literature and science among the native Indian population had progressed well. The College of Science in Calcutta and of Bombay and the Tata Research Institute of Bangalore, “all three owe their existence to the munificence of patriotic Indians of great eminence either in Law or in Industry or Commerce” (Ghose 1921:111). A fact which he lamented, however, was that most of the recently educated and literate Indians always sought to become lawyers (Ghose 1921:112). There was hope that advancement in Indian archaeology would assist the “British to respect our past” (Ghose 1921:113), a throwback to the Victorian sensibility of the late 19th century.

Railways became the vehicle for communicating colonial ideology of moral and material progress across the Indian space. While the military and the civilian population hailed the emergence of the railways, restrictions were placed on the differentiated travel.
arrangements between the imperialist and native travelers. The segmentation of a race and a class system remained a major issue, thereby reinforcing the subject, second-class status of Indians versus the rest. It reinforced the binarism between the colonized and the colonizer. How far was the colonial state implicit in reinforcing the underdevelopment of regional spaces in India? There is unambiguous evidence of a monopoly in the colonial-sanctioned historiographical and geographical discourses to reinforce the patterns of material and moral progression in India (Kumar 2007). The question is whether improvement was a preserve of the British. It does not seem so, as the material improvements over time spread across the length and breadth of India. This came about largely because the cost of maintaining these enormous material improvements became a financial drag as years progressed and it was deemed pragmatic to allow the use of the key material services beyond the immediate military to include civilians. This was particularly visible when civilians were allowed to use the railways for pilgrimage, thereby helping defray the costs of maintenance. There was also active engagement by prominent Indian entrepreneurs in financing key infrastructural projects in this period. At the same time, there were areas which remained underdeveloped despite increased connectivity, especially the northeastern regions, as well as the remote islands of Andaman and Nicobar (Vaidik 2010). The colonial legacy of focusing on the 16 major states of India has continued to this day, at the expense of communities inhabiting these peripheral regions. This helped perpetuate secessionist tendencies, violence, and disconnectedness to the larger body of the Indian state.

The material progression saw the shift from a curative to an entirely preventative medical policy in the colonies. This can be seen in the Sanitary Commission Reports, which sought to manage the “preventive” policies by the spatial and moral ordering of colonial spaces (Kumar 2002). This was reflected in the regulation of prostitution, of the lunatic asylums, or pilgrim controls, abattoir controls in urban landscapes, and of course the suppression of “criminal tribes,” or “Thughees” and “Pindaris,” of India. The economic import of these regulations cannot be underplayed in this respect. This also helped to reinforce the structuring of the colonial society.

The rise of imperial science and technology and its adaptation across the colonies became well established. This was reflected in the major enterprises associated with botanical gardens, of economic geology. The appointment of a keeper of East India Company was recorded in 1771. This volume follows the time-honored tradition led by Sir George C. M. Birdwood, an Anglo-Indian naturalist who published his report on the old records of the India Office (1879). In true Humboldtian tradition, encyclopedic compilations of plants, both medicinal and economic, were instigated during this period, as was the establishment of the Royal Botanical Garden in Calcutta, Saharanpur, Ootacamund, and Darjeeling, of Nopalry (a cactus garden) in 1789 by Dr. James Anderson in Madras, as well as Hookers’s documentation of a century of Indian orchids. In the case of agriculture, there was development of scientific research led by surgeon-naturalists related to economic botany, such as plant genetics, agricultural chemistry, and mycology. A range of experiments relating to tea, dye-producing plants, coffee, and medicinal plants such as cinchona, and the progressive development of cotton in the region were instigated to support commercial ventures of the company and the empire.
Detailed investigations into recurring famines in India from 1769 onwards in the three Presidencies of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay were commissioned. The importance of trade in timber and its exploitation was a keen concern during this period to fuel the material development of shipping and railway enterprises in India and abroad. The diversity of animals in India was investigated with great scientific pragmatism. At the same time, the sanction for the destruction of 5,673 tigers in the Bengal Presidency between 1822 and 1824 is quite revealing. The 18th-century preoccupation with natural history saw the development of geology in India, from seismology to paleontology, and meteorology to stratigraphy. The exploitation of coal, iron ore, and oil reserves, on the one hand, and the competition for naming of uncharted territories in India, on the other, became quite frequent during this period.

Acclimatization to the Indian subcontinent was a major preoccupation, and this led to the development of the exact science of meteorology. Here, the interrelations between the devastating cyclone of 1864 in Bengal and the consequent famines in Orissa in 1866 were well established and documented. Both the physical effects of climate and of astronomical observations were well organized. The registration of the ozone in Bombay was set up as early as 1863. The obsession with the role of the environment in determining the cause and effect of disease resulted in the documentation of “medical topography” since 1820 across the key provinces of India. This follows the ideas promoted by James Lind ([1768] 2012), A. MacDougall (1825), and James R. Martin’s (1837) classics on Calcutta, thereby extending the debates on human acclimatization by David N. Livingstone (1987, 1999). This has been adeptly demonstrated by entries on health and disease. As Mark Harrison (1999) notes, the ensuing debate between environmental determinism and progress in the empire has never been fully resolved. Medical topography, lock hospitals, sanatoriums, and sanitary measures were key concerns during this period both in civilian and military establishments and in towns. Translating science to the community has been a challenge when confronting superstitions and cultural prejudices. We do find evidence of Dr. Christian being removed from the services for forcing the people of Kullu to submit to vaccination in 1860. Up until the 1830s, vernacular medicine was accepted by the colonial authorities to remain a supplement to Western medicines. This, however, changed after 1857.

This also brought into focus the key issues relating to the indigenous hakim/unani system of medicine versus Western medicines. We see the emergence of private/public partnerships through charities in dealing with major relief operations after an epidemic. The idea of an idiot hospital, of providing surveillance metal tags, was also widely debated and used in the empire after 1856. Medical education therefore formed a major part of educating and of translating science across the community most vulnerable to key health issues. Controlling the large water resource was critical for maintaining the imperatives of trade and revenue for the empire. The large-scale program of engineering works undertaken by the Public Works Department is a case in point. The emergence of hydroelectric projects, of sustained intervention of irrigation and hydraulic projects, thereby transforming the landscape in modern-day India and Pakistan, is well documented. Scientific analysis of diverse race tribes and caste groups was organized and documented at a regional level. Here, the use of photographs and ethnographic documentation helped in coming to grips with the
vast and complex population of India. We find documentation of “rude” tribes (Axelby and Nair 2010:233, 235) of the northeastern frontier of India, along with the diverse dialects, languages, customs, and manners of these tribes and castes. Finally, topography and landscape surveys were confined to magnetic surveys, mapping the physical geography and meteorology of the Himalayan region. Geographical and statistical reports became the standard bearer of critical information for policy and planning (Axelby and Nair 2010).

Indeed, the liberal project receded into the background after 1857, with the establishment of direct rule as a Crown colony. The question remained as to what happened to the moral justification by the Liberals after 1857, especially when the emphasis was shifted back to the traditional despotic landed elites (Metcalf 1964). The perceived status quo was not an option, given that Europe was already embroiled in a major democratization of the polity, with the rise of nascent nationalism, and the extension of the franchise. Indeed, moral justifications were never accidental or whimsical in the colonial era. They were deliberate, despite the subtlety of liberal endeavors.

In this age of imperialism, Henry S. Maine (1822–1888) challenged the currency of forceful introduction of ideas of progress and enlightenment in India. He wanted the traditional, idyllic village society to be left alone and vehemently opposed the encroachment of modern enlightened institutions across indigenous territories. While the liberal pedagogical project was roundly criticized in the wake of the rise of nationalist and anti-imperial historiography in India, what is evident in the postcolonial period is that institutions set in place by the liberal projects, such as a free press, an impartial judiciary, and a continuation of rule of law and democracy, have strengthened participation of citizens in asserting their claims on the future of India’s development. This was advocated through the assertion of new jurisprudence in place of customary laws initiated through the colonial period, which was amply documented over time in the material and moral progress of the empire; thus, capitalism enshrined in the imperial endeavors of European powers came to facilitate the gradual transformation and emergence of criminal justice and of private property rights from ancient usufruct entitlements. Maine, as an ardent critic of the material and moral progress as advocated by the liberal and utilitarian members of the empire, endeavored to highlight the profound consequences this would have on the traditional societies of India. Colonial modernity created serious ruptures in these societies which changed forever.

Here again, we see ideas of Orientalists such as Sir William Jones being advanced by Maine, bringing him into confrontation with the utilitarians and the evangelicals about what was right for the natives in India, eventually culminating in direct rule by the Crown after 1857 (Mantena 2010). “The liberal and anti-liberal views gave rise to the different ideologies of empire” (Chatterjee 2011:691). In all, both the anti-liberal and liberal views normalized traditional Indian society in need of change, thereby discounting the specific aspects of their spatiality or location. This also reinforced the superiority of Western society and, by extension, the imperial rule. The exceptionalism of colonial rule was reinforced in these material and moral projects. Indeed, liberalism never faded from memory and policy (Chatterjee 2011:691). Imperial governance was tailored for different regions depending on the level of progress, so what was true of the Bombay Presidency
did not necessarily extend to the Bhils of Central Provinces or the Nagas of NEFA (Zou and Kumar 2010).

CONCLUSION

We can state that the colonial project of modernization remained incomplete and fractured, especially in the marginal areas of the empire. These areas came under the policy of “Paternalism,” which remained in place even in the postcolonial period (Nag and Kumar 2002). This brings me to the question of whether postcolonial interpretation can be nonideological. Postcolonial theorists have over time become apologetic of the past and have reached an impasse towards future agenda. Indeed, claiming change can only be addressed by reclaiming continuity across colonial and postcolonial episteme. This presents agonies of the real (Gordon 2012) in an unequal world. Optimism about the ideas of progress received a rude jolt with the World Wars (1914–1918 and 1932–1945). Today in the age of the Anthropocene, the idea of progress has degenerated to reiterate the catastrophic consequences of human greed to place themselves at the middle and center of all activities. Progress, indeed, has never been constant or automatic, nor inevitable as the laws of cosmology (Kumar 2024).

NOTE

1. See also Mr. Grant’s “State of the Society” excerpts from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company. General Appendix to Report from Select Committee, 1831–32, VIII, 20–111.

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