

Geographies, Histories, Boundaries:
The Formation of a Regional Cultural Idiom in Colonial
North India

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Abstract

The dominant cultural formation which emerged in several areas of public and political life in north India at the beginning of the twentieth century presented itself as a national culture which was able to articulate and represent the vast and disparate interests of the new cultural-political entity of the nation. In fact the concepts, terms and vocabulary of this national culture were derived from a predominantly Vaishanava cultural and religious order propagated by the largely high caste, merchant communities of north India, which itself had been recast and reformulated to negotiate with and encompass the demands of contemporary needs and aspirations.

The story begins with the entry of the colonial state into the region as a newly transformed political and administrative power seeking to establish an integrated and effective administration through tax on land. Colonial interventions and classifications, both administrative and intellectual, are also the subject of the second chapter which offers an analysis of early Orientalist and missionary interpretations of Hindu textual sources, emphasising the Aryan and Vedic roots of Hindu civilisation. However, while the relevance of colonial constructions is emphasised, the thesis recognises a dialogic relationship between colonial projects and the initiatives of the colonised which often involved resistance and contestation of state practices. The third chapter explores the transmittance and mediation of knowledge within a new public domain being created by colonial education and print. It traces the emergence of a new type of indigenous intellectual and the role of such figures in the mediation of knowledge through the colonial disciplines of geography and history. History as a discourse of legitimacy used by both the colonial state and indigenous intellectuals served as an important tool for constructing new forms of national identity. The national cultural and religious identity being newly fashioned in the historical writings of the publicist and foremost Hindi intellectual of this era, Bharatendu Harischandra, is the subject of the fourth chapter. Chapter five continues with the issue of identity and explores the self-conscious construction of boundaries between self and other, community and non-community, in the context of regional and pan-Indian travel. The final chapter explores how, by the end of the nineteenth century, language had become the dominant symbol through which a shared cultural and political identity was projected.

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Glossary

Acharya	religious philosopher and/or founder of a sect
Amani	system of land taxation
Amil	revenue collector
Asabhya	uncivilised
Ashraf	gentry
Ashtachap	eight main gurus of devotional sects
Asnan	ritual bathing
Atavi	barbarous, uncivilised
Avatara	incarnation of a deity
Ayurveda	Hindu system of medicine
Banjar	wasteland
Basti	settlement
Bhakta	devotee, disciple
Bhakti	devotion
Bhaktimarg	devotional movement
Bhasha	vernacular language
Bhugol	geography
Birtia	class of landholder
Boli	dialect
Chachar	lands left fallow
Char dham	four corners (of Hindu sacred geography)
Chaukis	tolls
Chitravali	biography
Danpatr	deed of gift
Darshanas	philosophical schools
Desh	nation, region, land, country
Deshbhasha	regional language, national language
Dharma	religious duty
Dharmshala	rest house for pilgrims
Dharmashastra	religious law books
Digvijaya	world conquerer (title attributed to religious leader)
Ek Ishvaravad	monotheism
Gopi	cowherd
Grihastas	householders
Huzoor Tahsil	revenue agreement
Imambari	Shia shrine
Itihas	history
Jagat	world
Jama	land revenue demand
Jamabandi	document of revenue demand
Janapada	populated land
Jangala	jungle
Jati	literally caste or sub-caste, also community, people, nation

Jivan charitra	life story, biography
Jyotisha	astronomy
Kachar	low lands
Kahani	stories, tales
Kavya	classical tradition of Sanskrit poetry
Khadir	cultivated land
Khetihars	cultivators
Khudkasht	resident cultivators
Kshetra	religious place
Koti	merchant store/warehouse
Mahal	lineage division
Mahatmya	Sanskrit eulogy
Mahayatra	pilgrimage to one or more of the great Hindu tirthas
Mal	land revenue
Malguzar	revenue official
Malikana	type of tax
Mat	faith, doctrine
Matribhasha	mother tongue
Mela	festival
Mimansa	philosophical system
Mohalla	neighbourhood
Mulk	region
Munshi	literally, accountant
Muqqadam	village official
Murtipuja	image worship
Naga	snake deity
Nankar	type of tax
Naya Vidya	new knowledge
Nibandhakara	Sanskrit digest
Niti	polity
Nyaya	Logic
Paikasht	non-resident cultivator
Pan	betel nut
Pandit	a brahmin learned in the traditional Hindu texts
Pargana	land revenue unit
Pathshalla	school
Patta	deed of lease
Patwari	village accountant
Pavitra	holy, sacred
Polaj	lands in permanent cultivation
Pothi	manuscript, collection of manuscripts
Prachin	ancient
Praja	political subjects, citizens
Prant	region
Pradesh	region, state
Puja	worship
Punya	merit

Purvajom	ancestors
Qabuliyat	revenue agreement
Qanungo	revenue official
Raksa	demon
Rahdari	protection tax
Rais	gentry, notable
Raiyat/ryot	peasant, cultivator
Rajatva	realm
Rajavali	genealogical list of kings
Riti	convention, manner; manneristic style of poetry
Ritu	seasons
Rusoom	rent
Ryotwari	type of tenancy in southern states
Sadhu	Hindu ascetic
Sair	revenue from sources other than land
Samadhi	religious death
Samaj	society
Sampradaya	religious sect, tradition, community
Sanad	Mughal deed/charter granted by a ruler
Sanatana Dharma	the eternal (orthodox) religion
Sanyasin	disciple
Sarkar	district
Sati	death by fire
Shastrartha	doctrinal disputation
Shilalekh	stone inscription
Shishya parampara	tradition of disciples
Sloka	Sanskrit verse
Smriti	Hindu texts dealing with moral and religious duty
Sthan	place
Suba	province
Svadhinta	independence
Svabhav	nature
Svarup	nature
Tahsildar	revenue collector
Takavi	type of government grant
Taluqa	administrative sub-division, unit of land
Taluqdar	land-controller
Tanhadari	protection tax
Tapasya	penance
Terai	flat, marshy land
Tirtha	pilgrimage place
Tirthayatra	act of pilgrimage
Vaishnavata	Vaishnavism
Vamshavali	genealogical text
Vana	forest
Varna	four divisions of the Hindu social order
Vedanta	Hindu philosophical system

Vyakarana	Sanskrit grammar
Vyavahar	interaction
Vyavastha	decree
Yaksa	pre-Hindu nature deity
Yavana	outsider, immigrant, Muslim
Yuga	Hindu time period, age, era
Zilla	Muslim revenue district

Note on Transliteration

Despite the large number of Hindi words in the text I have avoided the more correct system of transliteration with diacritical marks in favour of following the conventional spelling of Hindi words to enable an easy reading of the work. Some familiar spellings of words and place names have been retained without 'modern' transliterations in order to avoid confusion with spellings used in quotations.

Except where indicated, all translations in this work are mine. Some terms used only once have been italicised and explained in the text. Other non-English words are included in the glossary and italicised when they first appear but are otherwise printed in roman.

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Introduction

This work traces the evolution and development of a regional cultural idiom in north India from its roots in the intellectual and material changes in the early colonial period to its fruition at the end of the nineteenth century into a dominant discursive formation within the broad spectrum of Hindu nationalism. It has two main elements: the development of a body of knowledge regarding Indian (Hindu) society and culture in the early colonial period and the subsequent definitions of identity among Hindu elites in the period prior to the emergence of 'high' nationalism.¹ These elements determine the starting and ending points of the thesis as well as its focus.

The notion of a 'cultural formation' in this context is derived from the historical interaction and concurrence of a number of social, political and economic developments that together establish a causative framework within which an hegemonic articulation of culture is defined. The concept of hegemony implies the degree of acceptance which such a formation achieves within society at large and its dominance over other alternative or competing expressions of culture and identity. My use of the term 'idiom' to describe this formation is simply meant to convey the sense of a more fluid and open form than the more rigid 'formation' which implies a more structuralist approach.

Studies on the formation of regional identities in colonial India have commonly examined such factors as the growth and spread of print, the standardisation of regional languages, the emergence of a vernacular elite and the construction of notions of a shared history and culture.² Each of these factors is looked at and considered in this thesis, however they do not constitute the focus of its argument. This work differs from

¹ I am using this term, following Ranajit Guha and others, to refer to the period 1920-1940 when national movements such as the Swadeshi were underway. See Ranajit Guha, 'An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications', in Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony. History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge Mass., 1997, p. 153.

² Recent studies which consider some or all of these processes in the context of regional identity formation include Pragati Mohapatra, 'The Making of a Cultural Identity: Language, Literature and Gender in Orissa in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', Unpublished PhD Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1997; Sanghamitra Misra, 'Spaces, Borders, Histories: Identity Construction in Colonial Goalpara', Unpublished PhD Thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2004; Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1994.

some of its predecessors in that it seeks to understand the emergence of a regional cultural idiom in the context of the growth and spread of the discourse of nationalism. The various chapters are informed by an assumed link and interface between the imagination of the region through language, history and religion and that of the nation which positions the idea of the region and its contingent identities within the framework of the (equally constructed) nation and national identity. At several points in the narrative the region is constructed through recognisable criteria in opposition to the nation, however these moments are also seen as being constitutive of and inherent within the historical evolution of nationalism.³ Thus while it refers in a general way to the region of Gangetic north India, and more precisely the eastern districts of the modern day state of Uttar Pradesh, the study prefers not to define in any precise way the geographical limits or material constituents of this region as it existed always in a conceptually fluid and historically contingent relationship to any fixed geographical reality.

During the nineteenth century the towns and cities of the North Western Provinces, later the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, witnessed a huge expansion in public expressions of Hindu identity. In that it seeks to understand the definition of a modern Hindu identity through a detailed analysis of the discourse and debates which took place within a nascent public realm the thesis draws on and overlaps with the work of other scholars.⁴ However, as an attempt to analyse a local/regional intelligentsia's definitions of self and the wider social world in the period before anti-colonial thinking articulated its hegemonic claims as nationalist discourse the work differs from other similar studies. In particular it situates the late nineteenth century definitions of 'Hindu' identity in the context of the intellectual and institutional changes of early colonial rule,

³ For a similar kind of argument about regional identities see Sudhir Chandra, 'The Nation in the Making: Regional Identities in 19th Century Indian Language Literature', in P.C. Chatterjee, ed., *Self Images, Identity and Nationality*, Simla, 1989.

⁴ Two studies in particular come to mind when considering the construction of an Hindu identity in nineteenth century north India. Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present. Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992 and Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition. Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997. Comparable studies on other north Indian communities pursuing similar goals include Hafeez Malik, 'Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan's Doctrines of Muslim Nationalism and National Progress' in *Modern Asian Studies*, 11, 3, 1968; W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Community*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976 and Faisal Devji, 'Muslim Nationalism: Founding Identity in Colonial India', Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Chicago, 1993.

thereby suggesting a constructive and constitutive influence in these developments. As we shall see it was a 'Hindu' culture, history, politics and language as mediated by western Orientalists and colonial administrators that was evoked, constructed and propagated by Hindu publicists in north India in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The aim to consider both causes and consequences moreover ensures that the research takes into account a number of factors that underlay some of the more strictly ideological formulations, namely the constitution of an archive of colonial knowledge in the official sphere, the emergence of a modern Hindu community in north India, created in part via colonial classifications and categories, the development of an indigenous public culture through print and colonial education and the formation of a limited public sphere through which the newly emerging middle class could articulate itself.

Where many studies of colonial culture and nationalist discourse have focused exclusively on the making of a 'high' (literary) culture, this work, by examining materials as diverse as school textbooks, Orientalist geographies and agrarian records aims to plot the evolution of the concepts and vocabulary which were employed to define such identities as they emerged in several arenas at once. The thesis therefore concentrates on several of the less obvious and more localised arenas for the evolution of such ideas. Thirdly, it aims to situate the relevance of regional specificities that were reflected in the discursive realm so that regional variations are seen as determined by regional historical forces and circumstances. This allows for, among other things, an interesting exploration of the interface between expressions of regional and national identity in the later chapters. Finally, in that the thesis seeks to examine the evolution of one idiom: a conservative, Hindu and largely high-caste idiom of cultural identity, it seeks to uncover elements of the cultural identity which underlay the subsequent political demands of Hindu nationalists in the twentieth century.

The research presented here is largely concerned with the rhetoric and representations of male Hindu publicists rather than with the material conditions and changes which underlay these ideas. The emphasis of the work on the discursive sphere involving an analysis that addresses the discursive space within which interpretations of culture and identity were negotiated, does not mean that the social, economic and material conditions under colonialism that underlay these developments are not

considered important. On the contrary they are understood as crucial. However the long term social and economic changes, the early history of the region, the advent of colonial rule, its administrative units, institutions and policies, all of which contributed substantially to the formation of the modern region, are not discussed in detail in the thesis.⁵ For these I have relied on the work of other scholars who have concentrated more fully on the social and economic bases of cultural change. In particular those works which have dealt with the transitional period which saw the rise and consolidation of colonial power in the region and the shifting social and economic relationships which developed as a result of this have provided important contextual material.⁶

The historic marking of boundaries through which a particular notion of identity was articulated also involved the suppression and marginalisation of a host of subordinate identities. These voices – those of women, low castes, non-Hindu and religious counter-currents – are sadly beyond the scope of this thesis, but in stressing the dominant and at times coercive aspects of the discourse of male Hindu reformers I hope to at least include a sense of their presence in the wider arena of social and cultural interaction and the process of their exclusion in the cultural standardisations which are discussed here.

Materials for this study have been drawn from a wide array of sources that include official, non-official and literary arenas. For the later chapters I have drawn on the large number of vernacular journals, periodicals, pamphlets, tracts and books that were written and published in Hindi during period between 1860 and 1920. These publications were the dominant medium for the construction and propagation of new community identities in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The earlier chapters draw on the voluminous records and reports produced by officials of the colonial government as well as the vast literary output of Orientalist scholars and missionaries that were regularly published in the learned journals of the period. These sources have also provided the material for other studies. A less examined set of sources in this

⁵ These have been explored in detail in C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1820*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983 and more generally in the introduction to Sandra Freitag, ed., *Culture and Power in Banaras. Community, Performance and Environment 1800-1980*, Delhi, 1989.

context are the large number of tract and text book material created for the school book market that sprang up from the 1840s and 50s. The remainder of the introduction will consider the major themes and arguments of the thesis in the context of recent historiography and critical approaches.

I. Critical Contexts: Colonial power/knowledge

Studies of colonialism have in recent years moved away from an economic and administrative focus to the ideological, cultural and political dimensions of the colonial encounter. This shift has proved successful in addressing the complexity of colonial power and its cultural construction and modes of dissemination. Scholars working in this field have shown that colonial power operated at a profound level by altering the structures and categories of discursive production as well as the networks of cultural patronage and the modes and contexts of dissemination.⁷ Questions about the hegemonic nature of colonial power, the connections between colonial power and its forms of knowledge, its technologies of rule and the influence of modern normative categories in shaping the possibilities and hierarchies of production, knowledge, communication and contestation in colonial societies have energised these debates. Such questions also inform the arguments presented in this work.

An important strand of recent thinking has stressed the importance of ideas and institutions introduced under colonial rule in the framing of modern identities pertaining to language, religion, caste and region.⁸ Such arguments have implications for this study because they raise questions about the relative impact of colonial categories and classifications on subsequent definitions of Indian identity. Drawing on the work of such

⁶ Bernard Cohn's essays on structural changes in the Banaras region in the early colonial period have also been a source of information on pre-colonial and early colonial changes. Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁷ There is now a vast literature on this subject which includes Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India*, Delhi, 1997; Sudipta Kaviraj, 'On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony' in Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks, eds., *Contesting Colonial Hegemony, State and Society in Africa and India*, London, 1994; Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind, Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton, 2001.

⁸ An alternative to this argument which suggests that in fact new cohesions developed around the existing, or pre-colonial, foci of loyalty, such as caste, language and religious community, and which tended to broaden or extend the boundaries of such collectivities can be found in C.A. Bayly, *The Origins of Nationality in South Asia. Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

critics the thesis argues that, as in other parts of the empire, the colonial understanding of north India relied on a group of locally-based officials who sought to understand and compartmentalise the complexity of religious, cultural and social life in their localities or districts and who presented their amassed data in gazetteers, census reports, surveys and other encyclopedic compendia.⁹ In the early stages of colonial rule their role was to study, interpret and report on Indian land systems and society; and their understanding of these factors was heavily coloured by their cultural pre-dispositions, administrative functions and political roles. The volumes of statistical and survey information which were produced during this period entered the public domain as official and semi-official knowledge and became authoritative ethnographic, cultural and historical texts for Europeans and Indians alike. A starting point for the thesis is hence with the early stages in the accumulation of this type of knowledge which, though it failed to significantly transform the structure and constituents of indigenous society, created a mind set, or a habit of mind concerning the classification and categorisation of social and religious types.

Alongside the accumulation of 'official' knowledge to be directly employed for administrative purposes the body of knowledge commonly referred to as Orientalism also played a part in the creation of certain tropes and discourses that were later used in the demarcation of an Indian/Hindu identity. Orientalism played an instrumental role in the construction of a canon of Sanskrit texts as forming the original basis of Indian (Hindu) civilisation and culture. Colonial legislature moreover played an important role in the enterprise of endowing specific areas of the religious tradition with particular authority. The colonial belief in the authority of the *dharmashastra* and the Brahmanic tradition as a whole led to the elevation of this (textual) area of religious knowledge above other sources of Indian knowledge. Geographical, historical and philological investigations into early Indian civilisation before the eleventh and twelfth century, or prior to the onset of Muslim invasions, effectively erased the Muslim presence from the Indian past during this early period, and constructed a narrative of civilisation and decline that was later used by Hindu nationalists.

⁹ Cohn, *Anthropologist Among the Historians*, pp. 224-54; Nicholas B. Dirks, 'The Invention of Caste: Civil Society in Colonial India', in H.L. Seneviratne, ed., *Identity, Consciousness and the Past: Forging of*

On the whole it has been historians of the later colonial period who have pointed out how colonial categories resulted in the reification, or thickening, of boundaries between major social and religious groupings.¹⁰ Though the implications of such a colonial sociology were indeed less pronounced in the preceding era their influence at this time was not confined to the level of discursive representation alone; these perceptions acquired institutional significance and were powerfully reproduced through policy measures, especially in the field of education. From the 1830s the British discourse of reform and improvement advocated the role of public instruction to the state. Influenced by reformist thought in Britain Anglicist reformers looked to public instruction as a means of spreading civic and religious knowledge. In the North Western Provinces, James Thomason who became lieutenant governor in 1846 thought that public instruction and useful knowledge were closely tied with agrarian reconstruction. The village and sub-divisional schools which were established in the province between 1846-53 became sites for the diffusion of western scientific rationality along with a whole range of ideas and assumptions about indigenous society. School textbooks became the new media in which the knowledge systems of pre-colonial India, as well as the vernacular language, were redefined and reformed according to the requirements of liberal ideology and education policy.

Nevertheless, accepting the importance of colonial categories in shaping Indian identities, the creation of these categories is not understood as a monolithic process that was exempt from the impact of historical contingency. In fact the changing nature of the state and the shifting ideologies of imperial rule played a part in determining the direction and focus of colonial views on Indian culture and society in different periods. For example, the early phase of colonial military and political expansion into north India was characterised by the nascent state's pressing need for a systematic knowledge of the new territories under its control. The state's preoccupation in particular with land and other sources of revenue led to the reorganisation of local power relationships and indigenous notions of space. The various phases of mapping, surveying and statistical accounts that were undertaken during this period mark new phases in the accumulation

Caste and Community in India and Sri Lanka, Delhi, 1997, pp. 120-35.

¹⁰ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

and ordering of colonial knowledge. Thus the state's preoccupation with the political economy and with political power, as the early chapters suggest, provide the conditions for its use of the cultural technologies of rule and these constituted influences that were taken up by indigenous agents at a later date.

The chapters therefore acknowledge the distinction between earlier and later forms of classification. Whereas the interests of the early state were in establishing and maintaining an effective administrative and revenue system which, at least to some degree, aimed to draw on pre-existing criteria of legal codes and social custom; the more interventionist state of the late nineteenth century, which had developed from a modern notion of the state as being representative of a community of interests stemming from an informed and participating (albeit in a limited sense) people, relied on a large colonial bureaucracy and its classifications of the colonised with censuses, surveys and ethnographies.

From the third quarter of the nineteenth century colonial census operations and linguistic surveys helped to build up a linguistic profile of the population.¹¹ Vernacular languages and dialects could, unlike Sanskrit and Persian, be identified with particular populations which could be physically located and enumerated. Each person, regardless of their linguistic competence came to be defined in terms of their so-called mother tongue. The division between adjacent vernaculars and increasingly also their dialects, came to be represented in mapped spaces. The description of a language in official documents produced by the government – gazetteers, reports and surveys – contained information on its geographical location, political and linguistic boundaries, the number of people who spoke it and a list of its related dialects. The process of collecting information for the linguistic survey became an arena for the playing out of linguistic rivalries between various communities. There was a significant rise and fall in the numbers designated as speaking a particular language between the successive censuses. As community identities crystallised around language, the number of people who spoke

¹¹ Studies on the importance of colonial classificatory systems such as the census include Bernard Cohn, 'Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia' in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians*, Benedict Anderson, 'Census, Map and Museum' in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983; Arjun Appadurai, 'Number in the Colonial Imagination' in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer, eds, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Pennsylvania, 1993.

a particular language and the extent and boundaries of the geographical area over which it was spoken acquired added political meaning.

Thus colonial knowledge, and indeed colonial power for that matter, varied in its institutional and structural functioning at different times in the colonial encounter. The intellectual assumptions of eighteenth century Europe as well as the shifting imperatives of colonial rule and the maintenance of social order had a fundamental influence on the manner of interpretation of Hindu culture as well as the precise questions that were asked, as the second and third chapters take into account. The humanism that we see in early Orientalist ideas about the unity of mankind and the search for ancient analogies differed considerably from the radical utilitarianism of the generation of Bentinck and Macaulay which succeeded it. Moreover, even in the era of reform the diffusion of useful knowledge and liberal universalist categories into the indigenous sphere, as discussed in chapter three, was not a straightforward process. The issues of translation and the conceptual asymmetry that existed meant that there were important limitations to the effective dissemination of colonial ideology into the indigenous sphere.

This brings us to another underlying theme that is central to the thesis and to the historiography of colonialism, that of the dialogic nature of the colonial encounter and the agency of the colonised in shaping colonial power. Drawing on Foucault's delineation of the discourse of dominance inherent in the relationship between power and knowledge, as well as the Gramscian notion of hegemony, Edward Said studied the processes by which a dominant western imperialist culture created an imaginary Orient devoid of subjectivity and history.¹² Within the South Asian context Ronald Inden built upon the arguments of Said to demonstrate that the colonial subjugation of India was facilitated by defining India in terms of a set of unchanging essences which kept India eternally passive and deprived Indian people of agency.¹³ This theorisation of the nexus between colonial power, cultural production and epistemology however provides only a limited framework through which to assess the arguments presented here. Said's presentation of a seemingly homogenous Orientalist discourse is essentially ahistorical

¹² Said, *Orientalism*, [1978], London, Penguin, 2001.

¹³ Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

in its approach, as subsequent critiques have already demonstrated,¹⁴ and it pays little attention to the more radical uses of Orientalism as its messages were encountered and reworked in early nationalist thinking.

This is particularly relevant in the case of history writing which became a conscious agenda for the emerging Hindu literati of north India intent on legitimising claims of community and social status. In the decades following the trauma of 1857 the reinvention of a Hindu cultural past was cultivated amongst early nationalists in the region. The theory of the Aryan race and the Aryan conquest of northern India, as propagated by western Orientalists, became the foundational myth for the beginnings of Indian history. However the fact that history itself became the crucial mechanism of legitimation for conflicting views over Indian identity that arose during the course of the nineteenth century was also to some extent a direct result of the colonial construction of Indian/Hindu culture.

Colonial encounters with the numerous scholarly and ritual traditions of Hindu religion in Banaras, already the focal point for a regionally based Hindu culture, led to a perception that Hinduism, as it was represented in that city, lacked any real historicity and had remained more or less unaltered since its foundation. This perception was in direct contradiction to the actual history of the development of ritual and scholarly traditions in the sacred city in the preceding centuries. Subsequently missionary attempts to discredit the authority of Hindu religious traditions, in particular those relating to the sanctity of Banaras, sought to deny and discredit the antique status of these traditions by evaluating them in terms of the historical-critical scholarship developed in Biblical criticism and on the basis of European historical criteria. Early nationalists in the region responded to this critique by developing an historicist discourse that aimed to, amongst other things, counter act the assertions of Orientalists and missionaries that Hindu culture lacked historicity.

The theme of history and history writing as an instrument of self-definition therefore runs through both earlier and later chapters and leads us into the question of agency and the relative agency of indigenous actors in shaping their own identities

¹⁴ Introduction and essays in Breckenridge and Van der Veer, eds, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*.

within the structures of colonial power. The elimination of the agency of the colonised in certain works have resulted in the reduction of colonial society, particularly the middle class and the traditional elite, as subjects capable of only 'derivative' discourses. Partha Chatterjee in assuming the existence of a monolithic colonial discourse with more or less complete hegemonic possibilities has argued that an (modern) Indian identity was framed on the one hand by a derivative discourse which appropriated the vocabulary and concepts of colonial discourse or on the other by a resistance characterised by a refusal to adopt the positions and language of colonial discourse.¹⁵

The thesis, however, agrees with the recent assertions of post-Saidian scholars that 'colonial subjects were not passively produced by hegemonic projects but were active agents whose choices and discourses were of fundamental importance to the formation of their societies'.¹⁶ In his analysis of colonial power Ranajit Guha argued that colonial rule never achieved complete hegemony because the so-called indigenous Indian idiom that he understood as being derived from the pre-colonial traditions of the colonised, retained more than a measure of autonomy throughout the colonial period. Guha stipulates that the historical articulation of power in colonial India can be conceptualised in its 'institutional', 'modal' and 'discursive' aspects as the interaction of the two principles of dominance and subordination. Guha's theoretical analysis offers an interesting conceptual framework for analysing the contradictions and ambivalences of the discourse of the colonised. Whereas the principle of dominance consists of persuasion as well as coercion, the principle of subordination consists of resistance as well as collaboration. The interaction of these pairs then offers a more nuanced approach to understanding colonial power and the responses to it.¹⁷

Post-Saidian critics have likewise asserted that theoretical analyses of third world nationalisms do not take full account of the autonomous positive cultural contents of Afro-Asian nationalism. In the Indian case autonomy is undermined in that the sanskritic tradition is seen as mediated by western Orientology. Tapan Raychaudhuri has argued

¹⁵ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London, 1986.

¹⁶ Breckenridge and Van der Veer, eds, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Introduction.

¹⁷ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, pp. 20-23. The theoretical framework outlined below owes much to Vasudha Dalmia's exposition in *The Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions. Bharatendu Harisachandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, Introduction.

that in the Bengali case access to the indigenous tradition was not necessarily routed through the western understanding of it.¹⁸ In India there had been an unbroken tradition of Sanskrit scholarship as an autonomous source of knowledge about the past. The issue of autonomy is critical also to the argument of the thesis. It argues that although in north India there was a considerable degree of autonomy in traditions of Sanskrit knowledge, the early nationalist engagement with and representation of Sanskrit knowledge was also mediated through the lens of western historiographical and most importantly Orientalist knowledge of India. Thus despite the persistence of pre-colonial cultural forms in the shaping of modern cultural identities, particularly in relation to the Sanskritic traditions, it is difficult to view these forms as remaining unaltered and intact within the new institutional and discursive spaces introduced by colonialism.

In her study of nationalism and Hindu tradition in north India Vasudha Dalmia thus distinguishes between three separate but interacting strands which together constituted the basis of nationalist thought during this period. The first involves the direct access of early nationalists to pre-colonial traditions, literary as well as socio-religious. The second involves ancient 'Hindu' texts and institutions as mediated by British and western Orientalists while the third strand involves the British colonial administrative, legislative and educational measures and missionary activity.¹⁹ Thus while the emergent Hindu intelligentsia of this period used a 'deliberately Indian terminology' to represent the concepts needed to articulate a nationalist agenda these were developed in response and resistance to both the colonial government and the various forms of knowledge that it generated.

This raises another point about the processes of community construction that takes place in modern societies that is a central concern of the thesis, that such communities when aiming to assert the idea of a shared interest are often forced to express that interest in the language of tradition. The third idiom which Dalmia goes on to postulate as the modern Indian or nationalist is thus constituted or derived from a combination and reformulation of the British colonial and the indigenous Indian. Thus, she asserts, 'the creative act of invention consisted in the rearrangement of older and

¹⁸ Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered. Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Delhi, 1988.

¹⁹ Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions*.

newer concepts and practice and the historical links in time and space that were forged anew'.²⁰

This principle of the combination or incorporation of a variety of different cultural and epistemological reserves in the creation of new forms of identity differs from the 'derivative' essence of recent studies of Indian nationalism. The thesis therefore asserts that colonial knowledge as manifest in the myriad classifications, taxonomies and standardisations of Indian culture and society was not monolithic. Nor does it argue for the complete hegemony of the colonial state in that it sees that the activities of the state were persistently influenced by Indian responses and there was a considerable degree of agency of the colonised in shaping colonial projects.²¹ Likewise, the discourse of Hindu publicists and reformers, as discussed here, never achieved a totality or homogeneity in the task of constructing a unified Hindu identity. As always identities remained multiple, subject to moments of accommodation and disintegration, and characterised by transient, shifting boundaries.

II. Critical Contexts: Publics, publicity and publicists

The agency of the colonised was expressed most forcefully within the public sphere that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The spread of print culture provided the institutional setting for the formation of a discursive sphere through which the articulation of a Hindu cultural identity took place. The regional cultural idiom discussed in this work was pre-eminently a public idiom, expressed within and through public forms of rhetoric and discourse. Print, publishing and the extension of the Hindi print domain all contributed to the evolution of a public sphere as an arena of debate and controversy. Jurgen Habermas's influential analysis of the development of the bourgeois public sphere in Europe has recently been viewed as an instructive model for exploring the emergence of similar institutional and political spaces in the making of non-western modernities.²² In particular, the connections between communicative practices, literary

²⁰ Ibid, p. 6.

²¹ Sumit Sarkar, 'Orientalism Revisited: Saidian Frameworks in the Writing of Modern Indian History', *The Oxford Literary Review*, 16, 1-2, 1994, pp. 205-24.

²² Veena Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere. Western India under Colonialism*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001; Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940. Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

audiences, and the political public as they developed within European modernity provides an historical model against which to compare such developments outside of Europe.

According to Habermas's model the public sphere in Europe developed through several stages each of which bore its own peculiar expression of the public, beginning with the 'representative publicness' of feudal kingship, developing as the 'literary public sphere' of the bourgeois family and the community of letters and finally crystallising into the 'political public sphere' which acted as a intermediary sphere of clubs, associations and voluntary bodies between the state and the people.²³ Thus in the European context the public sphere developed as a sphere that mediated between society and the state, in which the public organised itself as the bearer of public opinion and which was aimed at transforming arbitrary authority into rational authority according to the scrutiny of a citizenry.²⁴ According to this model the public sphere is further identified with the demand for representative government and a liberal constitution, but more broadly also with basic civil freedoms before the law, such as speech, press, assembly and association.

Habermas's model based on the (western) European historical condition has serious limitations in its application to the evolution of non-western modernities where concepts of civil liberty and civil society did not exist in the same way. Even in the context of nineteenth century Europe Habermas has been criticised for the exclusions which his liberal model implied and for his blindness to the variety of competing and conflicting publics that were not contained in his model. However, in its historical evolution the public sphere outlined by Habermas presumed such factors as the prior transformation of social relations, their consolidation into new institutional arrangements and the generation of new social, cultural and political discourse around this changing environment. The impact of the colonial encounter and, as some scholars have recently argued, the long term social and economic transformations taking place in north Indian

²³ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1989.

²⁴ My own exposition owes much to Geoff Eley, 'Nations, Publics and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in Nick Dirks, Sherry Ortner and Geoff Eley, eds., *Culture, Power, History. A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, Princeton, 1994, 297-355.

towns and countryside which pre-dated this encounter, provided a similar set of conditions for the emergence of wider forms of debate and publicity.²⁵

The emerging public sphere of nineteenth century north India which is the subject of this thesis most closely resembled the 'literary public sphere' of Habermas's model which began with the evolution of certain institutional spaces like the press, publishing houses, literary associations and the education system wherein ideas of the public and community were formulated and expressed.²⁶ This sphere, it must be said, was to begin with numerically small. Participation was necessarily limited by education and means and the realm of political participation was circumscribed, either confined to local (municipal) and regional issues, or, in national terms, subordinated to wider models of political consciousness developed in other discursive spheres. Hence in the context of this thesis the public sphere is understood primarily as a community of letters, a community able to inhabit a more or less unified discursive realm; only secondarily a space for the enactment of political life, or more latterly of national life. Further, the public sphere provided a space within which a particular community could be imagined, elaborated and defined without necessarily reflecting participation in a single sphere of public or political life.

This sphere was not, as in the case of Habermas's model, centred on a parliamentary system in which its members had a shared interest; it was not, indeed, based on any entitlement to participation in representative politics. Rather the middle class publicists who emerged at the end of the nineteenth century as a result in part of the transformation of social and economic relations prior to and under colonialism worked entirely within a framework of colonial rule. The development of a public sphere in India was thus also linked to the growth of an urban culture – metropolitan as

²⁵ For long term social and economic change in pre and early colonial north India see C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*. Two recent works (read after the substance of this thesis was completed) which deal more fully with the material (socio-economic), as well as the institutional bases of cultural change in the colonial period are Manu Goswami, *Producing India. From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004, and for a later period, Carey Watt, *Serving the Nation. Cultures of Service, Association, and Citizenship in Colonial India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005.

²⁶ C.A. Bayly has also discussed the phenomenon of the *ecumene* as an early form of public sphere in north India in *Empire and Information. Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 180-211.

well as provincial – as the novel arena of a locally organised public life, to a new infrastructure of social communication and to a new universe of voluntary association.²⁷

The public sphere of nineteenth century north India was dominated by a number of elite groups who between them had access to and knowledge of the new forms of publicity and arenas of debate. Of the several types of elite that were recognised and appealed to at various times by the colonial state we need to take account of the intelligentsia (of various kinds), the landed aristocracy and a proprietary peasantry who achieved considerable economic power and status during the course of the nineteenth century.²⁸ The research presented here focuses on the former of this class, the native intelligentsia, amongst and by whom the construction of a broader regional/national cultural idiom was most forcefully propagated. This was by no means a homogeneous group, although by the end of the nineteenth century, in its public discourse it had achieved what might be called a normative attitude to many aspects of public debate such as language and the various constituents of the Hindu community.

My use of the term ‘Hindu publicist’ to describe this group is meant to denote those men who used the written media of newspapers, magazines and books to promulgate a particular Hindu cultural identity. I do not mean to assert that they always represented a unified and homogeneous whole, rather that there were important differences in their perspectives and points of view. The trajectory of the thesis, which deals with causes as well as consequences, is also meant to ensure that a sense of the evolution and development of this group during the nineteenth century is conveyed. This means that not only are the institutional spaces such as the education system and the press implicated as important but also that the specific characteristics of the intelligentsia who occupied these spaces at different times are taken into account.²⁹ Thus the urban and provincial classes who at the end of the nineteenth century elected Hindi

²⁷ Eley, ‘Nations, Publics and Political Cultures’, p. 305.

²⁸ ‘Aspects of the Public in Colonial South Asia’, in *South Asia*, xiv, I, 1991.

²⁹ Michael Dodson, in his study of the intellectual engagements between pandits and orientalists in Banaras in the nineteenth century, has shown how another so-called ‘traditional’ social group in the same region, were actively involved in the redefinition and negotiation of questions of cultural and national identity. See Michael S. Dodson, ‘Orientalists, Sanskrit Scholarship and Education in Colonial North India, ca. 1775-1875’, unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2003, especially chapter five.

as the primary symbol of a communal cultural and political identity were in some ways the end result of a combination of structural and institutional contexts.

The social and occupational background of this group was also mixed. On the whole they were drawn from the brahman, baniya and khatri caste groups that were positioned at the high and intermediate levels of the caste system. In terms of employment they occupied positions in a broad spectrum of what might be termed as new occupations which gave them access to the new forms of sociability generated by the expanding public sphere. These included positions in the lower and intermediate levels of government bureaucracy, teaching and administrative positions in the colonial education system and occasionally editorial and publishing positions in the expanding market of book, journal and periodical publishing. Some of these men were actively involved in the reform and revivalist movements of the period such as the Arya Samaj and the Sanatana Dharma as well as the various language, literary and caste associations that sprang up towards the end of the century in the region. While the views which they articulated in newspaper articles, journals, petitions and memorials were the views of an educated elite they were only rarely the positions of the most affluent and politically influential sections of north Indian society.³⁰

Foremost amongst the early proponents of a Hindu cultural identity in north India, and an exception to the 'subordinate' status of many subsequent publicists, stands the figure of Bharatendu Harischandra of Banaras (1850-85). The views and opinions of this most erudite of Hindu publicists have been fore-grounded in the thesis simply because Harischandra typified the new spokesman for Hindu tradition and Hindu culture as it was developed in this early period. In his writings, speeches and publications Harischandra was able to employ and articulate his familiarity with new western-derived ideas as well as the older, orthodox strands of tradition to formulate what Dalmia has termed as the new 'traditionalist idiom'.³¹ In this respect he was one of the earliest publicists to employ the new technologies of print and print media to propagate his ideas and opinions to a wider audience.

³⁰ Francesca Orsini refers to this elite as a 'subordinate elite' that 'bears little resemblance to the ascending and self-confident bourgeoisie of Habermas' account, or even to the Bengali *bhadralok* in the 'middle' between the English elite and the subaltern masses'. Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, p. 13-14. See also biographies of writers in this volume.

Harischandra inspired a circle of family and friends in Banaras, known as Bharatendu Mandal, into publicity-generating activities and they continued the development of the Hindi language and literature after his death. Men such as Radhakrishna Das and Shyamsundar Das who appear in the later chapters of this thesis in many ways symbolise the next generation of publicists in the region during whose time a more authoritative and standardised (and sanitised) version of Hindu culture was worked out. Radhakrishna Das was Harishcandra's cousin and along with Shyamsundar Das one of the founding members of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras, an association established for the promotion of Hindi in the region. A generation earlier men such as Bapu Deva Shastri and Raja Shiva Prasad who were involved with and employed by the colonial education system perhaps offered a more composite and less exclusive set of identities than their compatriots at the end of the century. Nearly all of Harischandra's contemporaries in Banaras and beyond were involved in some form or another with vernacular writing, journalism and printing.³² Many of these voices also have been recognised and recorded in this thesis. Thus Harischandra though very much a product of his city and region enjoyed a reputation and influence that was supra-regional because he represented a growing merchant aristocracy and he used the literary medium of Hindi to convey his ideas. Harischandra's journals were the first to create a literary public, which was to grow to occupy a politically functional public sphere in the later decades after his death.

There has been some comparison of the nature of the Hindu intelligentsia in north India as compared with other regions. Sudhir Chandra in his study of social consciousness has argued that the intelligentsia of the North Western Provinces was slightly behind that of the other three presidencies in its associational activities and

³¹ Dalmia, *Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, Introduction.

³² Other relevant figures include Pandit Shitalaprasad Tripathi, English professor at the Banaras College and fellow poet; Ambikadat Vyas, a brahmin from western India who came to Banaras as a child and became a professor of Sanskrit at Patna college. Vyas was a close friend and associate of Harischandra. Raja Lakshman Singh was a contemporary and translator of several Sanskrit works including the first Hindi translation of *Shakuntala*; Pandit Badarinarayan Chaudhuri was a fellow poet and editor of the journal *Anand Kadambini* in Mirzapur; Damodar Shastri, a Maharashtrian Brahmin who came to live in Banaras as a young man, editor of *Biharbandhu* Press and wrote the first travelogue and autobiography in Hindi and Radhacharan Goswami a fellow Vaishnava from Mathura who was involved in many aspects of religious and social reform. Brief biographies of some of these figures are given in Shivnandan Sahay, *Harischandra*, [1905], Lucknow, Hindi Samiti, 1975, pp.359-376.

agitation of nationalist politics.³³ He further asserts that while the intelligentsia of this region, as in other parts of India, concerned themselves with aspects of social and religious reform, they consistently demonstrated an ambivalence towards reformist ideas that was never totally resolved. This ambivalence was further most clearly manifest in the attitude of most sections of the intelligentsia toward colonial rule which fluctuated between expressions of loyalty and a critique of British rule centred around issues of taxation, tariffs, famine, economic drain and political representation. This ambivalence both toward colonial rule and aspects of colonial modernity is present in this account, most notably in chapter five which deals with new definitions of self and community in the context of travel. Chandra understands this ambivalence as being most clearly manifest in a divergence between belief and practice in the expression of a nationalist consciousness. In this account the tension which marks this discourse was between a 'progressive' reformist polemic and the language of orthodox tradition.

This points to another characteristic of the north Indian Hindu intelligentsia was that they retained strong links with orthodox tradition, as well as seeking to define and reconstitute those traditions and cultural practices in the light of new ideas and influences. Through their interaction with Orientalists, missionaries and western ideas these elites shared many of the concerns about social and religious reform of their regional neighbours but they did not always propagate change so explicitly. Unlike the so-called 'revivalist' or the overtly reformist groups such as the Arya and Brahmo Samaj in the Punjab and Bengal, who like them sought to advocate the purity of Vedic religion and the ultimate authority of the Aryan heritage of Hindu culture, north Indian Hindu traditionalists did not reject the subsequent accretions which had developed in numerous traditions and which they understood collectively as constituting the orthodox tradition of *sanatana dharma* (eternal religion). This attachment to and inclusion of certain aspects of 'tradition' whilst rejecting others is examined in chapter four.

The perceived threat of external forces was another important trope in the construction of a modern Hindu identity in the region. From the late nineteenth century a sense of crisis regarding economic and social change was expressed among the educated classes in north India in images of decline and degradation. A sense of decline was built

³³ Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*.

up around the era of *kaliyug*, denoted by the increasing moral poverty and newly assertive lower castes. Images of decline and the contemporary frailty of Hindu culture and society were a recurrent theme in the writings of Hindu publicists from this period.³⁴ The anxieties which provoked such themes in contemporary sketches and dramatic pieces were in part a consequence of the newly felt tensions of caste status, religious values, and traditional social norms perceived to be under threat from missionaries, reformists and the larger forces of social and economic change.³⁵ Ironically such images of decline and degradation had also been present in missionary accounts of the fall of Hindu civilisation which are discussed in an earlier chapter. The causes for the decline of Hindu civilisation moreover were squarely attributed to the long periods of subjection to Muslim rule, first depicted as reigns of tyranny and despotism by British historians of Sultanate and Mughal India. Here we note simply that the marking out of various 'others' both external and internal to the community's collective self became central to the definition of a certain idea of north Indian 'Hinduness' during this period.

III. Regional contexts

Underlying and to a great extent determining the cultural changes which are discussed in the latter part of the thesis were a series of crucial social and economic changes. Foremost among these in the formation of a regional cultural idiom was the rise of the Hindu urban merchant community and other Hindu landholding groups in north India who in the later nineteenth century became the strongest supporters and most enthusiastic patrons of a regional language movement. Several writers have focused on the emergence of such groups in the immediate pre-colonial and early colonial period and on their connections with the institutional structures of early colonial power.³⁶ A brief account of the rise of these groups in their local and regional setting will provide

³⁴ Chandra, *The Oppressive Present*, chapter three.

³⁵ See for example Bharatendu Harischandra, *Bharat Durdasha* (The poor state of Bharat), 1875; idem, *Bharat Janani*, 1877.

³⁶ C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*; Bernard Cohn, 'The Initial British Impact on India: A Case Study of the Benares Region' and 'Structural Change in Indian Rural Society 1596-1885', both in *Anthropologist among the Historians*, pp. 320-421. Laksmi Subramanian and Rajat K. Ray, 'Merchants and Politics: From the Great Mughals to the East India Company', in *Business and Politics in India. A Historical Perspective*, ed. Dwijendra Tripathi, Delhi, Manohar, 1991, pp. 19-85.

some context for the development of the cultural constellations in the second half of the nineteenth century which form the substance of this work.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, as a result of the decline in power of the Mughal heartland of Delhi and Agra, the east of the region and in particular the city of Banaras became 'the subcontinent's inland commercial capital...[receiving] immigrant merchant capital from the whole of north India and [standing] astride the growing trade route from Bengal to the Maratha territories'.³⁷ Bayly notes that, particularly during this period of political flux, the establishment after migration of the great agricultural clans of Bhumihars or Rajputs into the region led to the creation of new commercial centres. Economic development in the region was also linked to the political emergence of a raja from the ranks of the Buniyar clan organisation.³⁸ Working from a relatively small estate between the 1730s and 1750s, this Bhumihar family used its position as tax officials for Awadh to become zamindar for most of the Banaras province, and to gain the title of Raja. What enabled the family to achieve relative independence from Awadh was its ability to profit from the changing economic and legal circumstances affecting the control of land, as well as the interdependent relationship the family developed with the Banaras merchant bankers.³⁹ Between 1750-90 Banaras became one of the fastest growing cities. The important relationship between Raja Balwant Singh (1740-70) and the Banaras merchants who supported him led to the growth and expansion of both the royal family and the merchant community in the region.

The Hindu merchants had already gained in financial and political importance in the late Mughal period by becoming intermediaries between the military and revenue administration and agrarian society. Bayly and others have argued that there were continuities between the pre-colonial formation of business communities and the communities which exercised financial control in the early colonial period. Throughout this period Hindu merchants occupied an intermediary position as financial and diplomatic guarantees to local chiefs and zamindars. In the second half of the eighteenth

³⁷ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 104.

³⁸ The rise of the Banaras Rajas and their gradual succession of political power to the British is also described in chapter two.

³⁹ Cohn, 'Structural Change', pp. 343-412.

century the Banaras merchants began to both ally themselves with the new power holding groups in the region, such as the rajas of Banaras, and to become the bankers for the British. The requirements of these groups for ready money to fund military and other ventures, as well as the increasing monetisation of agriculture strengthened the position of the corporations of merchants. By the 1780s an integrated regional economy had been achieved around the holdings of the Raja of Banaras based on a pattern of commercial development which had arisen in agricultural society and which was linked to the growing urban demand produced by the emergence of new kingdoms. During this time the revenue system was penetrated and controlled by bankers at every level. They made loans against the incoming revenue to the raja. In the years 1776-80 fifteen large Lucknow and Banaras banking houses handled the entire Banaras revenue of 40 lakhs of rupees.⁴⁰ After 1800 the same Banaras banking houses became committed to the patronage and protection of the Company by providing funds for the military campaigns against the Marathas.

There have been several accounts written of the histories of the great merchant banking families of Jagat Seth and Aminchand in Bengal and their rise to positions of power through management of the state revenue. The banking family firms described in H.R. Nevill's gazetteer of Banaras include many whose histories are suggestive of the ways in which ties were also established between Banaras and other trading centres.⁴¹ In particular significant numbers of trading and banking families came to Banaras and settled there from such diverse parts as Nagpur, Pune, Hyderabad and the Deccan, as well as the Punjab. Motichandra gives an account of several of the major banking families in Banaras in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.⁴² The family of Sahu Gvaldas came originally from Gujarat and settled in the city around 1730. Gvaldas supported Mir Rustam Ali, the chief *mustajir* of Jaunpur, Banaras, Chunar and Ghazipur and is known to have initially opposed the new raja of Banaras. Sahu Gopaldas supported Mansaram, the Bhumihar revenue official in Rustam Ali's employ who rose to become the first raja of Banaras. Another well known figure, Kashmirmal, who had

⁴⁰ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 210-11.

⁴¹ H.R. Nevill, *Banaras: A Gazetteer*, vol. xxvi, Lucknow, 1922, pp. 51-55. See also account of commercial families in Cohn, 'Structural Change', pp. 374-379.

formerly been *daroga* of the *tosakhana*, or master of provisions, to the nawab of Avadh became the treasurer of the Company in Banaras for many years. The now infamous *naupatti* mahajans of Banaras who were heavily intertwined in the political and commercial life of the city occupied the area of Chaukhambha, the central residential area of the merchant community.⁴³ The caste backgrounds of merchants and professional traders in north India also consisted of a heterogeneous mix. In the Banaras and Avadh region they consisted of Khattris, Agrawals, Jain, Oswal and Maheshvari families, a few powerful Gujarati families of both Brahman and mercantile caste and a mixed group of local traders consisting of vaishyas and lower castes such as telis (oil pressers) or (kalvar) liquor distillers. The jati panchayats and bazaar panchayats discussed by C.A. Bayly and Nita Kumar suggest that merchant social and commercial organisation during this time may have amounted to a virtual civic self-government.⁴⁴

Merchant bankers were drawn to Banaras for the commercial opportunities it offered. A further impetus to the pattern of trade that emerged and led to the rise of these groups was the rise in pilgrim traffic between the Maratha dominions to the south and the major pilgrimage towns in the north. Bayly notes that in 1815, 5 to 10 percent of the cash transaction of the city with the Marathas was accounted for by the provision of cash for pilgrims.⁴⁵ Pilgrimage and the temple and priestly establishments which it incorporated were an important element of the Hindu urban merchant culture during this period. In all the cities of the region, stone wharves, rest houses and wells for pilgrims and temples were built by traders and urban landlords in the 1810s and 20s. There was considerable patronage of scholars and priests by these groups and in 1829 the completion of the Gopalalji mandir in Chaukhambha built with merchant capital signalled the centre of social and religious life of the community. The rich Gujarati and Agrawal merchants supported the Vaishnava cults and these were increasingly popular among the western Khattris. While in the long run the expansion of the colonial state signalled the decline in merchant power in the region many families profited from the

⁴² Motichandra, *Kashi ka Itihas*, Banaras, Vishvavidyalayan Prakashan, chapter on 'Banaras ke Mahajan', [1962], 1985, pp. 312-30.

⁴³ See list in Motichandra, p. 356.

⁴⁴ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, pp. 369-393; Nita Kumar, *Artisans of Banaras. Popular Culture and Identity, 1880-1986*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, chapters one and two.

⁴⁵ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, p. 128.

changes in the land-owning patterns which followed the Permanent Settlement.⁴⁶ By the middle of the nineteenth century about 40 percent of the land in the Banaras region changed hands, much of it into the hands of merchants and bankers who formed the basis of a new class of landlords.⁴⁷

The point of this section has been to describe the rise and consolidation of new urban elites in the immediate pre-colonial and early colonial period who subscribed to and supported a locally rooted culture based substantially on the activities of the temple and (Brahman) ritual formations. The convergence of this urban merchant culture with the Sanskritic textual tradition of the Brahminic establishments provided the social support and legitimation for colonial power when it began to make serious inroads in the region in the early nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Though the nature and scope of their role changed substantially during the nineteenth century it was this new merchant elite who formed the basis of the new middle classes seeking to assert a (Hindu) cultural identity after 1860.

IV. The Chapters

A brief summary of the chapters here will provide an outline of the journey of the thesis. The first chapter looks at early colonial attempts to form a body of official knowledge about land and society in the region. It argues that such categories and classifications, which became enshrined in colonial law and bureaucratic forms, were motivated by the need to establish an effective revenue system. It further suggests that they set the epistemological framework through which indigenous social categories came to be expressed at a later date. Chapter two looks at the Orientalist unearthing of the geography of the ancient Indian/Hindu past. It concentrates, initially, on the early period of Orientalist scholarship in which a more open spirit of enquiry was applied to the Indian past in order to reveal its synchronicities with other 'nations'. The chapter argues that it was this period of Orientalism that provided the authorisation for the ancient, Hindu, Aryan and Vedic focus of both Orientalist and Nationalist histories as well as

⁴⁶ See chapter one.

⁴⁷ Cohn, 'Structural Change', pp. 360-371.

⁴⁸ The role of the Brahmin intelligentsia and their part in providing cultural authority to colonial rule is discussed by Michael Dodson, 'Orientalism and Sanskrit Scholarship', chapter two.

setting the boundaries for its ancient geography. Chapter three considers the mediation of new forms of knowledge into the indigenous sphere through vernacular education and print. It suggests that textbook writers of the mid-nineteenth century who were in effect government employees patronised and commissioned by the provincial education department effected a complex negotiation of influences and ideas in their texts which drew on earlier Orientalist constructions of 'Hindu' history and geography as well as older indigenous sources and knowledge systems. In this chapter also we see the emergence of indigenous terms and categories used to define spaces and collectivities that reappear in subsequent arenas. Chapter four considers the indigenous project of history writing in the work of Bharatendu Harischandra. The need for an indigenous historiography was seen as paramount by early nationalists seeking to reform and regenerate Hindu society and to forge a national community and culture. The chapter demonstrates that while Harischandra, in contrast to both Orientalists and contemporary colonial histories, looked to his own scriptural and literary traditions for the source materials to construct this history, traditions which, he argued, were legitimate and authoritative for present day Hindus, he also employed aspects of the European interpretation of 'Hindu' culture as discussed in a previous chapter. Chapter five examines the imagination and definition of notions of self and other in the context of travel and travel writing towards the end of the nineteenth century. Chapter six examines the various ways in which the idea of a linguistic community converged at the end of the nineteenth century with the idea of a territorially defined and numerically counted political community who sought greater representation on the basis of, for one thing, a shared language.

Chapter 1

Colonial Intervention and Classification in the North Western Provinces

This thesis traces the emergence of a regional cultural idiom in north India largely as a discourse which was formulated by sections of the Hindi elite in the second half of the nineteenth century. Underlying this discursive formation were a series of momentous social, political and material changes which had a constitutive and constructive influence on the subsequent imagination and definition of a regional culture and identity. This chapter follows a transitional period of north Indian history when the accession of the region into the political and administrative control of the British led to substantial changes in the political economy. The early colonial state, driven largely by economic motivations, sought to understand and to regulate the complex systems of landholding and tenure which it encountered in the region. The representations and classifications of regional land and society which developed during this period were largely the result of the administrative need to assume direct control of the revenue. Both land reforms and the classificatory operations of the state in the early period sought to effect, among other things, a consolidation and reification of social and economic forms.

Recent studies on the history of the region comprising the Gangetic provinces of central north India have argued that the region has for many centuries constituted a 'cultural realm' that has been linguistically, geographically and historically distinct.¹ Schwartzburg refers to an expanding condition of settlement and sedentarisation in the region, with a corresponding rise in the density of the population, during the early medieval and Sultanate periods.² It was further during this period that the region first

¹ Richard Barnett, *North India Between Empires. Awadh, the Mughals and the British 1720-1801*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p. 18.

² Joseph E. Schwartzberg, 'The Evolution of Regional Power Configurations in the Indian Subcontinent', in Richard G. Fox, ed., *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, Duke University Press, 1977, p. 222.

became united politically as such by a regional power structure. During the Mughal period the centralised position of the Gangetic provinces meant that it formed a 'nuclear zone' in relation to its surrounding provinces.³ Situated between the Mughal political heartland of Delhi and Agra in the west and the eastern seaports of Bengal the region provided a major trade and transportation route between these two centres. After the decline of Mughal centralised authority in the early eighteenth century a variety of new political structures sprang up in the region which led to a new constellation of political and economic relations with its surrounding areas. These structures were in turn gradually replaced by the consolidation of colonial power and the transformation of the region, by the middle of the following century, into a colonial economic and administrative region.

The advance of the East India Company as a military and trading power into the various political territories of northern India took place gradually over a period of years. The first parts of the region to come under British administrative control were the Banaras provinces in the far eastern parts of the region, and the areas surrounding the Mughal capital of Delhi in the west. A brief survey of the events leading to full political and administrative control by the Company government in 1857 is worth recounting here. In 1764 the Company defeated the Nawab of Awadh at Buxar and secured an annual tribute and the revenue of the provinces of Benares. The rulers of the province, the Banaras rajas, were effectively reduced to vassals. In 1774 the British fought alongside the Nawab in the conquest of Rohilkhand. The Afghan rulers of this area were expelled or reduced to pensioners of the state and the region came under direct British control.

In 1801 problems in the collection of the Awadh tribute led to the cession to the Company of much of Gangetic Awadh – including the districts of Bareilly, Moradabad, Farruckhabad, Etawah, Kanpur, Allahabad and Gorakhpur. This area became known as the Ceded Provinces attached to the Bengal presidency. The Company took possession of Gorakhpur in 1802. At the same time the British undertook the second Maratha war (1802-6) to drive further west towards Delhi and Agra and these districts were

³ Bernard Cohn, 'Regions Subjective and Objective: Their relation to the Study of Modern Indian History', in *An Anthropologist among the Historian and Other Essays*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 109.

conquered from Daulat Rao Sindia by Lord Lake . In 1805 further conquests led to cession to the Company of the Conquered Provinces in the west of the region and Bundelkhand. The Company war against the Peshwa in 1817 led to the cession of territories in the Narmada valley and in 1834 the whole of these, known as the Saugor and Nerbudda Territories, became part of the North Western Provinces.⁴ The Delhi territory and Ajmer were brought under regular administration in 1832. Between 1840 and 1853 Jhansi and the rest of Jalaun and a part of Hamirpur were acquired by the Company.⁵

This process of military conquest leading to the acquisition of territories and the remittance of an annual revenue, or tribute, continued throughout the first fifty years of the nineteenth century. It was not until 1856 however that the entire province of Awadh, still under the authority of the Nawab of Awadh, was ceded to the Company. When joined to the existing North Western Provinces, this region became known as the North Western Provinces and Oudh. During this period the role of the Company in the region developed from that of an initially hesitant military and trading power to that of a settled political power controlling resources, collecting revenue and carrying out legislative and judicial functions.

The nature of the early state is one of the underlying concerns of this chapter, motivated as it was by economic considerations and a dependence on the extension of the sources of revenue to support its expansion. It was this motivation that informed and determined the nature of the encounter between colonial and indigenous society in the early part of the nineteenth century. In particular colonial assumptions about and understandings of pre-colonial social and economic forms, based on eighteenth century political economy and notions of oriental despotism, led to changes to the existing pattern of agrarian relations and thereby the economic relations between state and society. The introduction of the rule of property to the system of tenure in land in this regard led to wide-scale changes in land distribution and social organisation. Reforms

⁴ Henry Baden-Powell, *The Land Revenue System of British India: being a manual on the land-tenures and the systems of land-revenue administration prevalent in the several provinces*, vol. I, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1892, p. 42-3.

⁵ The Delhi territories became part of the Punjab in 1858 and the administration of Ajmer-Merwar was transferred to the government of India in 1871. See B.B. Misra, *Administrative History of India, 1834-1947: General Administration*, London, 1970, p. 254.

and rationalisations of the land revenue system effected in the early days and enshrined in colonial legal institutions, effectively compressed the 'overlapping and complex gradations of rural society' into the 'crude categories of landlord, tenant and labourer'.⁶ The classifications and categorisations of Indian land and society effected in colonial surveys, censuses and statistical reports led to the reification of lifestyles and social structures that were previously more fluid and ambiguous. In effect, the chapter aims to show how during this period a process developed whereby a large and ill-defined region incorporating fairly flexible socio-economic forms and a fluid politics was replaced by a colonial administrative province incorporating a series of districts with clearly marked boundaries, a settled agriculture and revenue demand.

I. Reform and regulation

The new regional powers that had emerged in the century prior to British military conquest had by and large continued to collect their revenue and administer their territories according to the system set in place by the Mughal rulers. Prior to British political control, territorial sovereignty in India meant, in pragmatic terms, the ability to collect revenue and command the loyalty of local chieftains in times of war. The outer limits of such control would expand or contract, depending upon the abilities and resources of a ruler at a particular time, but in a well-established kingdom there would be blocs of territory integrated into a permanent pattern of administrative control.⁷ By the time the British were establishing themselves in the region however boundaries clearly demarcated on the ground and drawn on maps, along with their corollary, a system of relationships with neighbouring states settled on the basis of formal treaties, were embedded in European political thinking. For this reason the officials of the new Bengal government were told that one of their most urgent tasks, after getting a summary of the history of the provinces, would be to fix 'the ancient boundaries'.⁸ James Rennell who surveyed the area in 1767 argued that the Mughal divisions of

⁶ Eric T. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj*, Cambridge, 1978, Introduction.

⁷ Ainslie T. Embree, 'Frontiers into Boundaries: From the Traditional to the Modern State' in R.G. Fox, ed., *Realm and Region in Traditional India*, Duke, 1977, p. 263.

⁸ Select Committee Proceedings, 1769, Instructions to Residents, 16 August 1769, quoted in Embree, 'Frontiers into Boundaries', p. 269.

sarkars (districts) and *subas* (provinces) were 'the most permanent ones'⁹ since they were still widely recognised among the people despite the constantly fluctuating political boundaries of these territories. Rennell's map and those of several early surveyors adopted the Mughal revenue divisions that had been outlined in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the sixteenth century administrative compendium composed by Abul Fazl during the reign of Akbar.¹⁰ According to the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the Mughal empire was divided into twelve subas, or provinces, and these in turn were divided and subdivided into sarkars and *mohals*. The *farmans* transferring power to the Company however made no mention of the boundaries of the provinces, and the officials soon discovered that the rent-rolls, with their careful statements of revenue districts, were reliable only for the internal settled districts which were bounded by other Mughal areas, with the boundaries of the external districts having little precision. In effect the sarkars and their subdivisions, the *mahals* (lineage division) in the central areas of the subas, were well defined, but on the peripheries there was a great deal of vagueness.¹¹

The revenue system which the British set out to establish first in the newly ceded territories of the Banaras provinces and later, in a somewhat modified form, in the seven districts of the Ceded and Conquered Provinces was initially intended to follow at least loosely the existing pattern of revenue extraction in the area. The Company officials employed in revenue collection however, possessed neither the detailed knowledge, nor the access to indigenous procedures, which they needed to secure an efficient revenue. In the Banaras region, the first to undergo direct British administration from 1788, the Permanent Settlement carried out by the Resident, Jonathon Duncan between 1788-90 was founded, at least initially on the principles of settlement previously introduced in Bengal.¹² Duncan sought to make a temporary settlement with a class of large *zamindars* (land-owners), in whom the proprietary right over the soil would be invested, which would be followed by a permanent settlement based on a perpetual assessment of the land revenue.

⁹ James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan; or the Mogul Empire; with an introduction illustrative of the Geography and Present Divisions of that Country*, London, 1788, p. iv.

¹⁰ William Hamilton, *The East India Gazetteer*, London, John Murray, 1815, p. xiii.

¹¹ 'Frontiers into Boundaries', p. 265-6.

¹² See S.C. Gupta, *Agrarian Relations and Early British Rule in India. A Case Study of Ceded and Conquered Provinces, 1801-1833*, London, Asia Publishing House, 1963, p. 70-77.

In order to determine the correct basis of this assessment Duncan, an administrator of the Orientalist school, relied on surviving revenue records and information supplied by *qanungos* (revenue official) and other local revenue 'officials' for his understanding of the existing revenue system.¹³ While on the one hand he recognised that the rights of some groups and individuals to be considered as zamindars had been destroyed during the immediate pre-colonial regime of the local rajas, and that corporate groups as well as individuals had landed rights, still he made the assessment on the basis of those factions who could prove via written documents their status as zamindars since 1775.¹⁴ Proof of holding zamindari rights included possession of tax receipts, a *patta* (deed of lease) from previous tax officials, entry in the *qanungo's* records if they existed, or, in the absence of all of these, the statement of 'leading' men in the area.

Early critics of the colonial intervention into rural society have argued that the Permanent Settlement made in Benares in 1795 had substantial consequences for local society in the following decades.¹⁵ The failure of Duncan's settlement in particular was accredited to a number of crucial mis-assumptions about the nature of existing landholding structures. Firstly, no boundaries were established between fields within a mahal, or between mahals, or between villages. This led to disputes arising between co-sharers and neighbouring zamindars and proprietary groups. Secondly, no record of rights of the subordinate members of proprietary groups was recorded. Thus internal division of the revenue obligation was left to be recorded by members themselves. Thirdly, no record of rights of permanent tenants and other tenants was recorded, so that subordinate cultivators had no legal protection. The outcome of this first settlement (1789-90), famously, was that due to the misunderstanding on the part of the Company of the nature of land-holding systems, and the absence of formal indications of engagements, the British made a number of errors in their assessment leading to the situation where land itself or the rights over it were made transferable either by the state

¹³ A. Shakespeare, *Selections from the Duncan Records*, I, Benares, 1873; K.P. Mishra, *Banaras in Transition (1738-1790)*, Delhi, 1975, ch. 2; Wilton Odham, *Tenant Rights and Auction Sales in Ghazee-poor and the Province of Benares*, Dublin, 1873.

¹⁴ V.A. Narain, *Jonathon Duncan and Varanasi*, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 52-145.

¹⁵ Bernard Cohn, 'Structural Change in Rural Society 1596-1885', in *Anthropologist Among The Historians*, pp. 343-421.

or by the individuals possessing it, thereby creating a new practice of land sales and what some have termed as a market in land.¹⁶

With the accession of the Ceded and Conquered Provinces in 1801 and 1803 a system based on similar principles as those in Banaras was initially introduced with some modifications. Here for the first two years of assessment also the government relied on the officers of the former governments and their assessment of the revenue. In Gorakhpur, for instance, which underwent its first triennial settlement in 1802, the year of its cession, the Company officials were faced with the same absence of written documentation as in the Banaras region. Neither the qanungos, nor the *amils* (revenue collectors) had preserved any records of the previous government's, the Nawab of Awadh's, mode of assessment or the engagements that may have existed between the amils and the zamindars.¹⁷ In some areas of the district under the *amani* system of taxation the amils had received *sanads* (deeds) from the Nawabs for the collection of revenue and had been granted allowances or revenue free grants in return.¹⁸ At the time of cession the amils failed to present the sanads in confirmation of their rights and as a result of this the Company pleaded ignorance of their rights and refused to recognise them.¹⁹ Again in this district the officials were forced to rely on local informants for their knowledge of local custom and law. Based on this imperfect information and a general perception of the greed and extreme exactions of the native amils during the preceding period, the Company devised a new set of engagements with the zamindars and a much reduced assessment. All together, this amounted to a reform of the existing system.²⁰

Similarly, at the time of cession in Gorakhpur the immediate problem for the Company was to define the rights of the body of landholders known as *taluqdars* (land-controller). Here again the Company requested written proof of the control which the taluqdars had over the rights of the zamindars in the form of deeds and sanads. Where these were absent however, the Company, rather than forcibly remove the taluqdars,

¹⁶ 'Structural Change', pp. 356-60.

¹⁷ J. Routledge to G. Mercer, 25 July 1802, in G.N. Saletore, ed., *Selections from English Records. Henry Wellesley's Correspondance, 1801-3*, Allahabad, 1955, p. 30.

¹⁸ *Amani* was the collection of revenue directly from the cultivators by government officials without the intervention of any intermediary.

¹⁹ J. Routledge to Graeme Mercer, 25 July 1802, in *Henry Wellesley's Correspondence*, pp. 31-2.

made settlements with them only if they were in possession of the lands at the time of cession. It also conceded to their claim of proprietorship on the basis of their 'long possession', if their proprietary rights could be confirmed if they had held 'bonafide possession' for at least 12 to 60 years. However, the grants of the amils, whom the Company held to be incompetent and lacking authority, were declared invalid, and any taluqdars who held grants of this type were divested of their rights.²¹

The motivation behind the reforms and regulation of the revenue system based on the rule of property was that such an innovation by creating a class of landholders who would invest in the improvement of land and the extension of agricultural production would lead to economic growth. The economic imperatives of agricultural expansion and the increase in cultivation further meant that a class of rural landholders, or zamindars, could provide stability and continuity of the social order. Realising that the security of property rights would be an incentive for the zamindars to improve the land and increase revenue, the Company consented to recognise them as the actual proprietors of the soil, provided, of course, they could present the sanads of the Mughal emperors or the Nawabs of Awadh, as a verification of their rights.²² This realignment of the revenue system on the part of the Company meant that the zamindars, now recognised as the sole owners of the land, were invested with certain rights and privileges which they had previously not held.

The nature of this transition to a colonial agrarian system was clearly set out in the *Directions for Collectors of the North Western Provinces*: 'In the theory of native government the revenue, derived to the state from the land, is essentially Rent. Unless under circumstances of special grant or contract, it is levied in money or in kind from the actual cultivators, whether proprietors or otherwise and the small consideration allowed to the manager, is more a remuneration for the labour of collection, than an acknowledgement of proprietary right'.²³ Under the British government, it was claimed, the revenue demand was realised on the basis of 'contracts' which had been 'universally formed' for a certain period, or 'in perpetuity' so that landholders or managers could

²⁰ Buchanan Hamilton, 'An Account of the District of Gorakhpur', Book IV, Mss. Eur. D91, p. 95.

²¹ Meena Bhargava, *State, Society and Ecology: Gorakhpur in Transition 1750-1830*, Delhi, 1999, p. 140.

²² F. Balfour to J.E. Colebrooke and other members of the Bd. Of Commrs., 6 May 1808, Procs. Bd. Com. Ceded and Conquered Provinces, vol. 9, July 1808 (UPSA) quoted in Bhargava, p. 130.

extract all the surplus on the land over and above the sum stipulated by the state. Therefore, the government demand had become a tax on rent, rather than a straightforward rent.²⁴ Zamindars, in whom the proprietary right had largely been invested, would, it was assumed, encourage further cultivation in order to receive a larger share of the revenue over and above the fixed sum extracted by the state.

The state's desire to structure the revenue system at least partly on the precedents of traditional law and custom depended on a number of mutually enforcing factors.²⁵ For one thing the Company was initially hesitant either to abandon or to subordinate Mughal economic institutions which they saw as being successful. The Company further feared that any drastic changes to the existing system could alienate local landholders, both zamindars and taluqdars, whose rights and privileges may have been curtailed.²⁶ In much of the official discourse of this period there are references to the need to 'define and fix rather than change existing customs' of tenure and land ownership.²⁷ The problem which emerged in the fulfilment of these commitments was the difficulty in determining exactly what the prior arrangements had been in each area.²⁸ Throughout the early years of the nineteenth century much official space was given over to debates over the various systems of land tenure and the status and rights of the land holders.²⁹ Questions concerning what was the basic peasant tenure and in whose hands lay the primary dominion of the soil were essential to determine at what point in the tenorial scale the modern proprietary title should be accorded – whether it was at the level of the local magnate, the zamindari system, as was assumed in Bengal and Bihar; the joint managing village notables, the *pattidari*, *mahalwari* or village zamindar system; or the individual peasant holder, the ryotwari system, as in the southern presidencies.

²³ *Directions for Collectors of Land Revenue in North Western Provinces*, Agra, 1846, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

²⁵ S.C. Gupta, *Agrarian Relations*, p. 81.

²⁶ See Bhargava, p. 135 for Company's strategy on zamindar's right to receive *nankar* in early settlements in Gorakhpur.

²⁷ Settlement of Bandah, no. 1504, letter to H.M. Elliot, Sec. to Sudder Board of Rev., Agra, 14 April 1845, from James Thornton, Sec. to Gov. NWP, in *Selections from the Records of Government*, Allahabad, 1856, p. 75; Settlement of Pergunnah Sukrawah, zillah Faruckabad with detailed report on proprietary rights in each village' in *Selections from the Records of Government*, Allahabad, 1855, p. 78.

²⁸ John Thomason, *Report of the Collector of Azimgarh on the Settlement of the Ceded Portion of the District commonly called Chuklah Azimgarh*, Agra, 1837, p. 30.

²⁹ Thomas Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979, pp. 60-2.

Ideological stances also played a part in colonial interpretations of agrarian systems.³⁰ In defining zamindari rights, officials such as James Grant combated the prevailing idea that the zamindars were the proprietors of the land, and encouraged the notion that they were 'originally no more than officers of collection, holding property by temptation and connivance'.³¹ Other officials on the other hand, such as John Shore, asserted that the zamindars were in fact the hereditary proprietors of the soil, a fact which he maintained was supported by 'usage and custom'.³²

The basic principles of the land revenue and administration in this region, as they were instituted in the regulations of 1802 and 1803, continued in operation with some modifications until 1822. By 1822, as a result of extensive local research into the actual structure of land tenureship carried out by officials such as Charles Metcalfe, Holt Mackenzie, James Thomason and Robert M. Bird, each of whom worked at various times for the revenue department, it was generally agreed that the most widespread form of tenure in the Ceded and Conquered Provinces was the mahalwari, followed by the taluqdari.³³ In the minutes of his evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Commons Holt Mackenzie set out in detail the system of land tenure in the region as he understood it, elucidated how it differed from the land systems of other regions such as Bengal and set out a comprehensive program for reform of the existing revenue system based on an extensive survey and assessment project of the entire region.³⁴ In Mackenzie's minute the theory of joint village notables as constituting the basic tenurial structure in north India was predicated on the existence of 'village communities' peopled by cultivating and non-cultivating proprietors who shared either ancestral or customary rights in the land. This situation, it was recognised, differed quite

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 63-7.

³¹ Warren Hastings Papers: Political and Literary Essays and Papers, Add. Mss. 29233, quoted in Bhargava, p. 129.

³² Ibid.

³³ The mahalwari tenure was 'where several persons possessed inheritable and transferable properties in the same *mahal* or estate... These properties were either of the same kind or of different kinds. In the former case the profits of the land were divided among several sharers... according to certain fixed laws or customs, while in the latter the profits were divided among several proprietors or classes of proprietors, the one being superior and the other inferior. The properties of the same kind formed part of what were commonly called joint or co-parcenary tenures, while those of different kinds were known as talukdari tenures.', Misra, *Administrative History*, p. 415.

considerably from that in Bengal where, it was argued, the proprietary classes 'have a patriarchal rather than a corporate character'.³⁵ Following Holt Mackenzie's Memorandum an extensive revision of the revenue system was instituted in the region with the village community as the basic form of tenure from 1833.

The recognition of a 'unique agrarian' system in the North Western Provinces eventually led to the introduction of a revenue system that differed from the Bengal landlord system and the *ryotwari* system introduced in Madras and Bombay. Prior to this however, even in the first two decades of assessment and settlement in the Ceded and Conquered Provinces and Bundelkhand, it was determined that some reform of the existing system was needed. In such instances reform was recommended on the basis of the inefficiencies or extortion of the previous governments.³⁶ In Gorakhpur where it was determined that prior to cession the native amils or *ijaradars*, under the *ijaradari* system of taxation, had squeezed the landholders beyond their limits,³⁷ leading to widespread resistance and the failure to pay the full revenue,³⁸ the Company imposed a new system known as *huzoor tahsil*, whereby the landholders paid revenue directly to the government. They further sought to insure the remittance of revenue by imposing a system of securities which the landholders had to agree upon. In Bundelkhand also, which underwent its first settlement in 1806 it was decided that due to 'the reported oppression of the former Government of the Pargannahs... and the impoverished condition of the landholders, as well as the decreased cultivation of the lands' it was necessary to 'subvert immediately, or to control in an efficient manner, the authority of the Raja's [Himmat Bahadur] Amils'.³⁹

Where reforms of the land revenue system were undertaken these were most often institutionalised in new legal frameworks and regulations. Generally, the 'local

³⁴ The major difference was in the right to proprietary title of Bengal zamindars and North Indian *taluqdars*. See Mackenzie Minute of 1 July 1819, *Selections from the Revenue Records, 1818-20*, p. 98; Minute by R.M. Bird, 25 September 1832, para 12, *Selections from Revenue Records, 1822-33*, p. 49.

³⁵ Charles Raikes, *Notes on the North Western Provinces of India*, London, 1852, p. 44; Settlement of Pergunnah Kurnaul, Zillah Paneeput, in *Selections of Government*, 1855, p. 107.

³⁶ For example, the crippling exactions of the amils appointed by the Nawab of Awadh. See M.H. Court, *Statistical Report of the District of Budaon, 1852*, Agra, 1855, p. 3.

³⁷ Buchanan Hamilton, 'An Account', Book IV, p. 88.

³⁸ J. Routledge to Graeme Mercer, 14 December 1802, in *Henry Wellesleys' Correspondence*, p. 42.

³⁹ Edwin T. Atkinson, ed., *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North West Provinces of India*, vol. 1, *Bundelkhand*, Allahabad, 1874, p.41.

rules of procedure were abolished, and were superseded by Regulations formally introduced or spontaneously applied'.⁴⁰ The legal framework thus sought to mould the pre-existing forms of property and tenancy into a new pattern of agrarian relations. In many cases, besides the changes which were actually sought in the relative rights of the various agricultural classes by means of regulation, many changes were also effected by the misapplication of laws and the abuses and mal-practices which occurred at the time of their enforcement.⁴¹ The Board of Commissioners, set up in 1807 to review the process of settlement in each area, discovered that many of the regulations were ill-adapted to the existing conditions in the various provinces. The process of review of these regulations continued until in 1822 when, as mentioned above, a system based on entirely new principles, more in conformity with the status of property and tenancy as it existed before British rule, was instituted. Until 1822 however, all five short term settlements were made on the basis of the earlier regulations, that is engagements were to be made with those assumed to be proprietors. These settlements moreover tended to consolidate the changes which were already happening in the state of landed property and tenancy.

We have already noted how the records of settlement which were taken in the Banaras province in the early years of British administration led initially to changes in the constitution of rural society. This was because the record of the right to engage for the revenue was often mistaken for the right of ownership of the land. Should the government revenue not be fulfilled for some reason the land would automatically be auctioned or sold to another bidder who was then recognised as either a temporary or permanent proprietor under colonial law. In other cases the records of the government collector recorded only the name of the proprietor who had entered into an engagement with the government for the revenue where there were often many proprietors in a single estate. This led to abuses of the system and in some cases the loss of property of the whole estate.⁴² Often the early assessments were made on 'the terms procurable' that is engagements were made with the highest bidder. The government *tahsildar*, who in some areas replaced the former amils, became responsible for the revenue and received a

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 53; H.M. Court, *Report of Budaon*, p. 8.

⁴¹ H.M Court, *Report of Budaon*, p. 5.

⁴² Ibid, p. 16.

percentage of the annual sum.⁴³ Wherever failure to pay the revenue occurred, for whatever reason, the proprietary rights to estates and villages passed either into the hands of the revenue farmers or the government.⁴⁴ This process also occurred in other areas where it was argued the taluqdars or revenue contractors had become, under colonial law, zamindars or land controllers with whom settlement was made on the basis of a perceived hereditary right.⁴⁵

The desire to be both the representatives of 'local tradition' and to establish direct control over land taxation led to the Company attempting numerous interventions and experiments in state agrarian relations. In Gorakhpur the Company's management of the existing systems of *nankar* and *malikana* dues granted to zamindars demonstrates the remaking of custom and tradition in the colonial interest, the reinterpretation of law and the redefinition of the contracts and agreements with the landholders. Colonial restructuring of rural society and agrarian relations is evident in official attempts to transform village officials, *muqqadams* and *patwaris*, into state employees. These officials who enjoyed considerable privileges and status under preceding governments were often reduced during the early colonial period to mere intermediaries between villages and the state. In the case of the patwari who performed the role of a village accountant and assisted in the organisation of the local revenue structure, their functions and responsibilities continued with some constancy in the colonial period. Nevertheless to arrest what was seen to be the abuses of the system and corruption on the part of patwaris, in 1815 the Company made the patwari directly responsible to the Collector, thus making him in effect an employee of the state.

It remains to be said that despite the assumptions of some historians that colonial intervention in the region led to wide-scale changes in the agrarian structure, more recently commentators have argued that the pattern of landholding and tenancy in the region in fact remained largely the same. This was partly because while wishing to simplify and modify the rights of landholders and tenants the government did not wish, initially, to disturb fundamentally the structure of rural social relations. The link between

⁴³ Ibid, p. 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Letter to GG, 31 Jan 1844, from James Thomason, Lieut. Gov. of NWP, in *Selections of the Government*, 1856, art. 8.

dominant castes/clans and landholding castes in the region continued during the colonial period. The dominant landholding castes in Awadh were the Rajputs, Brahmins and Muslims. In Banaras these were Rajputs, Brahmins and Bhumihars,⁴⁶ and in Gorakhpur they were generally Brahmins, Bhumihars, Rajputs, Kshatriyas and Kayasths. These groups continued to dominate the landholding rights in the region into the late nineteenth century.⁴⁷ The shift or transformation which occurred during this period was therefore more an intellectual-cultural one effected by the colonial need to classify the different social and agrarian categories and to define their relationship to the land. The classification of these social types and the definition of their rights in a legal sense led to a thickening of the boundaries between different castes and social groups and a reification of their status.

The perceptions and policies of the Company during this period reflect its concern to consolidate state power through the recognition of its sovereign authority and the legitimation of its claims as the upholders of local tradition. Underlying these objectives was the further aim of enhancing economic growth via effective revenue administration. Intent on increasing the already prevailing process of expansion and cultivation and increase of revenue, the Company sought to restructure or realign the existing property rights and relations in order to further its stated aims.

That there was a considerable degree of resistance to the government reforms of the revenue administration and its attempts to reform or regulate other forms of lifestyle is shown in the official writing of the period. Alongside the revenue which the state received from land taxation there were other forms of revenue accruing from trade, manufacture and various forms of protection. During the Mughal period the *sair*, or revenue from non-agricultural sources had been joined with the *mal* or *jama*, being the land revenue. In addition to this there had also been another revenue source known as *rahdari* or protection. *Rahdari*, or *tanhadari*, was paid by the merchants to the zamindars for the protection provided to them while passing through the latter's zamindari or villages. That these exactions made a substantial difference in the overall revenue of a district was attested to by the large number of *chaukis* (tolls) set up for their collection.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cohn, 'Structural Change', p.372, 383.

⁴⁷ Bhargava, *State, Society, Ecology*, p. 126.

⁴⁸ J. Routledge to G. Mercer, 25 July 1802, in *Henry Wellesley's Correspondence*, p. 33.

Prior to colonial rule both *sair* and *rahdari* were a profitable source of income for the zamindars who retained rights over a percentage of their total amount. In fact in many areas, particularly those on the fringes of the regional polities, neither the Mughal government nor the regional rulers had much control over them and they remained firmly in the control of local rulers and zamindars. During the early years of settlement however the Company sought to separate the agricultural and non-agricultural revenue so as to better control and regulate it. The zamindars were subsequently prohibited from levying either *sair* or *rahdari* and these became the exclusive monopoly of the Company.⁴⁹

During the initial temporary settlements of the Ceded Provinces the zamindars of each area were required to enter into engagements with the government for a fixed period of three years. The revenue demand was stated in the *patta*, a written document setting out the amount or rate of the revenue demand, and the zamindars were required to formalise their agreement to this in the form of a *qabuliyat* or acceptance for the demand. The rights and obligations of the zamindars and the *raiyyat* (agriculturalists) were also defined in this document as well as the new colonial regulation forbidding them to collect *rahdari*, zamindari *chauki* duties or to levy any other taxes on manufactures. The official correspondence from this period reveals a large degree of resistance among local elites and landholders to these new regulations imposed by the colonial state. In Gorakhpur, for instance, local zamindars failed to follow the new regulations on revenue remittance and attempted to continue previous practices of sporadic remittances.⁵⁰

II. Surveying the land and its people

Holt Mackenzie's Minute which set out to reform and rectify the problems of the existing revenue system was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it instituted the formation of a centralised system of revenue administration for the entire region from Allahabad to the Punjab seeking to create uniformity and a rationalisation of the system. Secondly, as part of the reforms necessary to complete such a task, Mackenzie had

⁴⁹ Bhargava, *State, Society and Ecology*, p. 97.

⁵⁰ J. Routledge to G.N. Saletore, 28 October 1802, in *Henry Wellesley's Correspondence*, pp. 38-9.

advocated a detailed local inquiry into the rights, interests, and privileges of all the classes connected to the land. This was meant to include a survey of the land area of each village, and of the individual holdings within, as well as the collection of data on such subjects as soil conditions, cropping patterns, livestock, marketing facilities, and caste customs.⁵¹ The most extensive survey and settlement of the revenue was carried out in the region after 1822.⁵² Prior to this, short-term settlements were fixed on the basis of previous assessments and regularly reviewed. While the actual process of survey and settlement underwent constant revision during the period, nevertheless it fixed the spatial dimensions of the political economy of the region. Mapping fixed the external perimeters of districts and provinces while surveys and censuses fixed the internal dimensions of population types as well as economic factors such as markets, imports and exports and the agricultural and non-agricultural resources of each district. Throughout the period of survey and settlement, and the subsequent attempts to fix and make permanent the assessment, the colonial government embarked on a massive project to record and classify every aspect of north Indian land and society.

For the purpose of land revenue, a detailed knowledge of the types of land in each *pargana* and district had to be collected to ensure a fair and accurate assessment: 'The capabilities of soil; the condition of the estates, whether improvable or otherwise; its local advantages or disadvantages; the condition of the people, etc. are all points affecting equality of assessment'.⁵³ To execute this commitment lands were demarcated either according to local usage or local circumstances or, failing that, according to the type of soil. Although the designations differed between districts the lands were generally divided into three categories – *banjar*, or wastelands, *chachar*, or lands left fallow for three or four years and *polaj* or lands in a perennial state of cultivation.⁵⁴ As the process of survey and settlement became more regulated, and more uniform, the same type of information was reproduced on a *pargana* by *pargana* basis for each district that underwent survey and settlement in the following decades.

⁵¹ Mackenzie's Minute of 1 July 1819, *Selections from the Revenue Records, 1818-19*, p. 73 and passim.

⁵² Regulation 7 of 1822 instituted that the settlement of each district should be made village by village.

⁵³ H.M. Court, *Report on Budaon*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Bhargava, *State, Society and Ecology*, p. 99.

Prior to the more permanent settlement undertaken in the 1820s colonial surveys had followed a more flexible taxonomy of land and of social types. Buchanan's survey of Gorakhpur included descriptive information on soil types, varieties of irrigation and the different kinds of crops that were cultivated in each division of the district at various times of year. He also noted the large number of indigenous classifications for waste land. The basic distinction between *khadir*, cultivated and *bangur*, waste, he suggested, was only a superficial classification since all varieties of forest, woodland, jungle and un-cleared land were considered in indigenous terminology to be waste. The British, in contrast, developed a much narrower definition of what was barren or wasteland since in their reports and surveys they took into consideration land that had the potential for cultivation, or cultivable wasteland as it became known. Thus in the initial settlement that was carried out in Gorakhpur in 1802, in marked contrast to previous settlements, this type of cultivable land was taken into consideration in the assessment and added to the overall revenue demand.

With the growing need for reform of the early settlement process the government sought to develop a more detailed and regulated system of classification of land and the customary rights attached to it that could be implemented in settlements across the entire region. Holt Mackenzie's form for settlements made under the new Regulation VII of 1822 requests details of every type of land and its usage within a single village. Lands were designated as barren, cultivated and culturable; these were measured and explained in terms of their rate of assessment or otherwise.⁵⁵ Within the same form the inhabitants of each village were also to be classified according to their relationship to the land. Thus among the cultivators there were those who had 'a hereditary and transferable property' in the village; those with a 'hereditary right of occupancy' as distinct from those who were hereditary cultivators with no right of occupancy; recent settlers and *paikhast* (non-resident cultivators). Among the proprietors there were those receiving 'rent or *rusoom* as owners of land cultivated by others' and there were several types of rent to be classified. In the miscellaneous section there were further classifications of houses,

⁵⁵ This form is reproduced in H.M. Court, *Report on Budaon*, pp. 10-12.

ploughs etc and censuses of population, with details of the various castes, markets, roads and so on.⁵⁶

Besides the classification of the agricultural land surrounding villages there were other types of non-arable land that were also of interest to the state. In particular forests were seen by early British surveyors either as potential areas for clearance and cultivation or as yielding other resources such as timber and firewood.⁵⁷ Colonial classifications of land into different zones of productivity further led to the increased control of the state over forest resources. Early nineteenth century surveyors noted the wealth of forest resources such as timber and their position within the local economy. The Commissioner of Gorukhpur in his report on the district noted the increase in trade in *sal* timber from Nepal through the district as well as other types of 'hill produce' such as iron and copper.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, attempts to control and manage these resources as the exclusive property of the state often led to conflict with local populations for whom forests and woodlands provided important sources of food and grazing. Describing the forested region around the district of Ballia Donald Butter wrote that although much of it had been cleared at the encouragement of local zamindars 'the remaining portion, consisting of very large and ancient trees, is reserved on account of the pasture, which it affords to their cattle; the ground underneath the trees being thickly covered with grass, from the end of June, till the middle of January, and the cattle subsisting upon the fallen leaves of the trees, during the rest of the year'.⁵⁹

Colonial classifications of and valuations of certain types of land often directly contradicted those of the local population. For instance in the northern and eastern districts of the region there were large areas of mango plantations which surrounded villages and which were considered by colonial observers to be useless and a waste of land. Buchanan described the proliferation of mango groves in the northern parts of Gorakhpur as 'a destructive and superfluous waste of land' where 'the very best wheatfields are daily converting into mango groves'.⁶⁰ British concerns for the

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Buchanan Hamilton, 'An Account', Mss. Eur. D91, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Alan Swinton, *Manual of the Statistics of the Goruckpore District*, Allahabad, n.d, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Donald Butter, *Outlines of the Topography and Statistics of the Southern Districts of Oudh, and of the cantonment of Sultanpur*, [1839], ed., Safi Ahmad, Delhi, 1982, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Buchanan Hamilton, 'An Account', p. 10.

productivity of land, however, whereby the state perceived land as 'a quantifiable measurable object of knowledge, and a resource to be controlled and improved',⁶¹ were often in direct conflict to indigenous perceptions of the customary and hereditary functions of land and its produce. For example, Buchanan noted that in the same district it was not customary to cut certain fruit trees that had been planted, regardless of their utility, because these often had a customary function in the village. Tree rights, in particular, the rights over fruit bearing trees were distinctive in defining the property rights of cultivators in Gorakhpur. Certain types of cultivators were entitled to the free use of the produce of such trees which were planted by their ancestors.⁶² Describing wastelands in the southern districts of Awadh in 1837 Donald Butler wrote: 'Some of them occupy the low lands, *kachar*, adjacent to and annually overflowed by the Ganges and Deoha, which oppose formidable obstacles to the clearing and reclaiming of the wastelands. But others are situated on high ground, being traditionally believed to be remnants of the primeaval forest of Oudh; and are carefully preserved from the axe, by neighbouring Zamindars, to whom they have long afforded a secure asylum, from the tyranny and rapacity of the Chakledars'.⁶³

The classification of land in topographical and revenue surveys further meant that areas where land had recently fallen into waste could be identified. Such cases were often viewed as 'wilful deterioration' or 'neglect of cultivation' on the part of land holders and cultivators and marked as forms of rebelliousness against the state. In Gorakhpur Buchanan observed that many local zamindars whose rights as lessees of the land only lasted for a number of years (generally three) on the whole did not bother to encourage the extension of cultivation into wastelands for the simple reason that they did not want to be taxed on it. In order to rectify this situation a new settlement should be agreed whereby cultivable land was included in the settlement which should be made for a longer period.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Peter Robb, *Ancient Rights and Future Comfort, Bihar, the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 and British Rule in India*, Richmond, 1997, p. xvi.

⁶² Extract from a memorandum by Holt Mackenzie, 19 October 1826, *Selections from the Revenue Records, 1822-33*.

⁶³ Butler, *Topography of Oudh*, p. 5.

⁶⁴ Buchanan Hamilton, Bk I, p. 17.

From the earliest days therefore, of British control of the region areas of forest, woodland, wastelands and cultivable areas were measured and classified into different geographical domains. In addition to this different types of land were accorded value depending on their productive capacity. Representations of waste in official writings were often a signifier of socially and culturally marginalised regions and signified the limited skills of the inhabitants of these areas. Such concepts of 'waste' moreover were based on nineteenth century evolutionist ideas of nature being arranged (like society) into a hierarchy of superior and inferior types with productivity as the sole ordering criterion. This discourse meant that wasteland was viewed as idle land, that is, land not being utilised for commercial purposes. The economic imperatives which motivated agricultural improvement and the increase of cultivated land further led to initiatives to encourage, or sometimes to coerce, proprietors and cultivators to clear wastelands for cultivation or improve existing land. In Gorakhpur in 1815 arrangements were made to locate a colony of Tharus in order to clear and settle the areas of jungle. Grants of land were given to local clan and caste leaders as an incentive to settle the land.⁶⁵ In Ajmer colonial officials noted the large tracts of land that had been brought under cultivation in the years 1843-4 through a system of government grants, known as *takavi*, and the general agricultural improvements which had been carried out in the district leading to greater productivity.⁶⁶ This system of granting credit for the clearance of wastelands which were subsequently lightly assessed occurred in many areas of the region.⁶⁷ The classification of land in surveys therefore enabled a greater control over the production process and the extraction of revenue for the state.

Despite enormous complexity and variation in the system of land tenure between each area the state sought to describe and classify every possible mode of tenure and sub-tenure in each district. Again the basic motivation for this was to recognise the revenue potential and productivity for every area. However, this type of information accumulated over a period of time also enabled a comparative view of the changes effected in the social order by colonial interventions into land tenure and proprietary

⁶⁵ Alan Swinton, *Manual of Goruckpore*, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Extract of Letter from Superintendent at Ajmere to Commissioner of Ajmere Division, no. 20, 27 July 1844, in *Selections from Government Records*, 2nd ed., Agra, 1855, p. 69-72.

⁶⁷ Butter, *Topography of Oudh*, p. 7-8.

rights. This type of classificatory information recognised 'the dissolution of old farms and talookas, the fall of old influential families and rise of new ones; all peculiarities of the agricultural population...'.⁶⁸

While the classification of land on the one hand can be seen as a function of and rationalisation for the colonial revenue administration, the early state also engaged in the enumeration and classification of wider social factors such as population, religion, caste and disease. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century travellers and ethnographers wrote descriptive accounts of local societies in terms of dress, customs, food and rituals. This purely descriptive approach was transformed in the statistical tables of early ethnographers, such as Francis Buchanan, which listed for each district he surveyed tables on population, caste, natural products, imports and exports. Buchanan produced a general categorisation of the rural social order in Gorakhpur at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Under a general classification of *ashraf* (gentry) he included various castes who formed the major agricultural population of the area and owned the major portion of the land. Buchanan also listed a number of terms to describe the cultivating castes, popularly called *grihastas* (householders) and *khetihars* (cultivators).

Once again the essentially revenue driven impetus of the early state meant that types of people and social relations were classified according to their relation to the land or forms of cultivation, as well as in terms of their position within the revenue structure. Zamindar was a generic term, ascribed in Mughal India to describe the rural magnates who were superior to the peasantry.⁶⁹ This was by no means a homogenous group who despite holding hereditary rights were divided amongst themselves on issues of caste, clan and territorial lines. Understanding, regulating and modifying the existing system of zamindars was a central administrative concern of the colonial state in the region. In the official discourse of the period zamindars were defined as being 'a perpetual, hereditary servant of the crown', entrusted with cultivation, population and regulation of lands and with the receipt and payment of the revenue and land tax.⁷⁰ In contrast to zamindars, taluqdars during the Mughal period were rent collectors and receivers rather than

⁶⁸ Atkinson, ed., *Descriptive and Historical Account of NWP*, vol. 1, p. vii.

⁶⁹ S. Nurul Hasan, 'Zamindars under the Mughals' in R.E. Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 17-31

⁷⁰ Warren Hastings Papers: Copies of Essays, Add. Ms. 29234, quoted from Bhargava, p. 130.

cultivators or landholders. This group had risen to prominence and power during the eighteenth century as a result of the revenue functions which they performed under the Mughals and Nawab and continued to do so during the early colonial period. They did not subscribe to any single category, rather some were hereditary proprietors who leased out parts of their own estates to a further category of landholder known as *birtias*, while others were simply farmers of the revenue. The classification of this group however as either hereditary landholders or revenue farmers within the complex structure of the landholding system continued to create confusion and disagreement amongst colonial officials for the first half of the nineteenth century.⁷¹ Birtias also held or leased lands on variable terms depending on the local situation and circumstance, they were rarely however proprietors but rather renters of land leased to them by zamindars or taluqdars who continued to pay the revenue on their behalf to the government. The rights and status of the birtias also posed a dilemma for the Company. They became the subject of enquiries and deliberations at each recurring revision of the assessment.⁷² Recent commentators have suggested that the status of birtias changed after cession, largely as a result of the government abandoning its initial desire to maintain and bolster the status of zamindars as the principle landholders and best entrepreneurs. When the zamindars proved to be unforthcoming, rights of possession in the land were transferred to the birtias.

In contrast to the categories of landholders, the peasants or cultivators were initially categorised on the basis of the rental and occupancy rights and seasonal rent-paying rights. Raiyat were defined by the Company as that 'numerous and inferior class of people, who held and cultivated small parts of the land on their own account'.⁷³ In the Mughal period, *khudkasht* was the title of peasants who cultivated their own lands. Paikasht referred to cultivators who cultivated lands in villages not belonging to the same zamindari, tribal or clan settlements as their own. Khudkashts were occupancy tenants whose names were entered in the patwari's records and in the *jamabandi* of the village. The fields that they cultivated were known and marked on the village map. They

⁷¹ See Bhargava, *State, Society, Ecology*, p. 137-8; Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, pp. 58-63.

⁷² Bhargava, *State, Society, Ecology*, pp.142-9.

held hereditary occupancy rights in the lands that they cultivated and the right to alienate them. In many areas this category of peasants had successfully expanded cultivation and improved agricultural productivity. Also the khudkashts belonged to the class of the ashraf and to the dominant land controlling castes such as the Rajputs, Brahmins or Bhumihar Brahmins. Among the revenue officials of the Company there was no consensus on the role and position of the khudkashts in the rural economy. From one perspective khudkasht was a form of contracted tenancy and the khudkashts engaged annually for revenue on their lands with the zamindars. This meant the zamindars had the right of renewing or rejecting the annual engagements on completion. From another point of view, khudkashts were securely protected by local custom and local society which provided them hereditary occupancy rights which could not be violated by the zamindars. Prior to colonial rule the rights of the khudkasht were not necessarily defined or fixed by law. Only with British rule and the definition of property rights in land, did it become necessary to specify what rights raiyats of all types possessed. In fact the rights of the khudkasht within the revenue administration evolved during the early period of colonial rule but became more or less fixed by 1856.⁷⁴

In order to form clear categories that would prevent any clash of interest between the different landholders and cultivators, the Company defined the paikashis as non-resident cultivators.⁷⁵ Where there was an abundance of unoccupied or cultivable land the paikashis were encouraged to clear the lands and bring them under cultivation. The Company offered these lands on low concessionary terms. Recent commentators have noted that although a distinction was made in the official discourse between resident and non-resident cultivators, or khudkasht and paikashis, in actual practice they were the same individuals. In Gorakhpur district, Bhargava has noted that there were very few cultivators who did not cultivate any land in the villages where they resided, or, alternatively, drew their subsistence exclusively from fields in another village: 'If a

⁷³ Rights of zamindars or hereditary landholders and of the raiyat or cultivator of the soil, HMS 381, p. 41-4.

⁷⁴ Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, p. 71.

⁷⁵ Wilson described the *pahikasht* as 'a migratory or non-resident cultivator, who cultivates lands in a village to which he does not belong by birth or hereditary claim and holds his lands either for a stipulated term or at pleasure of some member or members of the proprietary body' as opposed to the *chhapparband* who was defined as 'resident cultivator'. See H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, London, 1855, pp. 110, 389.

cultivator was recorded as a paikasht in the rent-rolls of one village, it was certain that he would be recorded as a khudkasht in the rent-rolls of some other village. This had developed as a common practice, particularly because the khudkashts worked as paikashts in fields elsewhere to supplement the income from their farms'.⁷⁶ In addition to these two major divisions of cultivators there were also various kinds of servile labourers in the agrarian system of the region. These were described in detail by Francis Buchanan in his survey of the northern part of Gorakhpur at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ They varied between temporary and permanent labourers, some of whom did have their own holdings but worked on others to supplement their income, and others who worked solely on the lands of others.

The classification of the agricultural population was informed by ideas about productiveness which further led to the implicit assumption of a hierarchy in the colonial taxonomy of the modes of agricultural existence. Since settlement and cultivation were at the basis of this valuation, those who led a nomadic lifestyle were at the negative end of this hierarchy whilst those who tended towards sedentarisation and high levels of productivity were considered to be good agriculturalists. Colonial attempts to define and categorise these modes of existence however also indicate that previously such categories were more fluid and less well-defined. For instance, prior to the large-scale sedenterisation of the agricultural population that developed with colonial rule nomadic groups such as herdsmen, pastoralists, carriers, bandits and religious mendicants all incorporated both sedentary and non-sedentary forms of existence. Sedenterisation was understood by the state as the most productive and sustainable mode of existence and those groups who resisted a settled lifestyle were singled out in the official writings for their criminal characteristics or antagonism to a settled lifestyle.

At the very beginning of the nineteenth century Francis Buchanan had described the powerful Banjara taluqdars who moved in large groups across parts of north India trading salt, cattle and other goods as 'mercantile robbers' and 'vagrant tribesmen'.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Bhargava, *State, Society, Ecology*, p. 167.

⁷⁷ Buchanan Hamilton, Bk IV, pp. 75-6; C.A. Bayly also gives a comprehensive account of the various types of bonded labour in northern Awadh in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. See C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars. North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 43-4.

⁷⁸ Buchanan Hamilton, Bk 1, pp. 161, 172.

The Banjaras had enlarged their power in the region by plundering areas which they found to be defenceless and claiming these areas to be their *taluqas*, while usurping titles such as *chakledars*, *nazim*, *naib*, and *taluqdar*. Having achieved considerable status in certain areas, such as parts of Gorakhpur, prior to cession, the Banjaras continued to resist the revenue demands and taxes of the Company in the early period of settlement although increasingly they opted for a more settled lifestyle.

Population estimates were carried out in both rural and urban areas.⁷⁹ In rural areas statements showing the relative population of different areas and the areas where depopulation had occurred provided useful information for revenue as well as police and judicial departments of the government. Dense population or its scarcity was understood by the state as explanations for the relative richness or barrenness of particular areas. Sparse population, such as in northern Gorakhpur and northern parts of Awadh at the beginning of the nineteenth century, meant not only large areas of uncultivated wasteland but also a population of usually low-caste or tribal groups. Statistical information enabled the government to single out these areas in order to introduce measures to bring in groups of cultivators to clear the land. Depopulation in early colonial discourse was understood as being the result of bad government (as in areas of Awadh) or the tyranny of local tax officials. Other reasons for temporary or sporadic depopulation which were often misunderstood by early colonial observers were the emigration of the local population for reasons of employment, such as when low castes were banned from owning or cultivating land, or the rotation of cultivated land when cultivators left an area fallow for two to three years.

In urban areas, population statistics were similarly used for tax and disciplinary purposes. In Banaras the earliest census of the city was recorded by the Resident, Deane, in 1800. Deane's estimate of over 600,000 permanent residents was later found to be exaggerated. While collecting information for a drain cleaning assessment, James Prinsep, chairman of the Committee for the Local Improvement of Banaras, decided to use his information to make a new census of the city.⁸⁰ After an initial estimate based on

⁷⁹ The first census of the North Western Provinces was carried out by G.J. Christian, *Report on the Census of the North West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency taken on the 1st June 1853*, Calcutta, 1854, p. 5.

⁸⁰ James Prinsep, 'Census of the Population of the City of Benares', *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 17, 1832, p. 474.

the information from a small number of *mohallas*, neighbourhoods, in 1829 Prinsep made a complete estimate of 180,000 as the permanent population of the city. He gathered his information through a system of assistants who interviewed the watchmen stationed at the mohulla gates who knew the details of every house under their care. The men then made enquiries from house to house, either from servants or the head of households. All available resources were used including 'the Chamars who remove the dust and rubbish from each house [and who] were valuable auxiliaries in checking the statements of population derived from the above sources, as they have daily admittance to the houses'.⁸¹ Prinsep further divided the population by caste which it appears he saw as being analagous to trade guilds: 'Most of the Hindu castes and such trades and professions as are of a similarly exclusive character, as well as many of the Mossulman trades, form distinct corporations, united among themselves under a Choudree, Kotwal, Muhunt, Juttee, Dulputee, or whatever may the title of their headman'.⁸²

Early ethnographers divided local populations into classes and occupational groups of gentry, merchants, proprietors, cultivators and labourers. This descriptive information was later rationalised and systematised in the settlement reports of each district which contained tables showing the population distribution of each pargana by religion, caste and occupation.⁸³ From a very early period there were distinctions made in official discourse between Hindus and Muslims.

Different areas and regions became associated in official writing with a dominant caste or castes. For instance, in the Banaras region the dominant landholding caste was the Bhumihar Brahmins. In the Doab the major landholding and cultivating caste were the Rajput clans or brotherhoods who had achieved dominance over the agrarian structure through conquest and settlement in the preceding century. This kind of information was considered useful for colonial government since even by the early nineteenth century different castes and occupational types were beginning to be

⁸¹ Committee for the Local Improvement of Benares, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, p. 140.

⁸² Ibid, pp. 143-4.

⁸³ For example, Letter from the Collector of Paneeput to the Commissioner of Delhi, no. 434A, Nov. 1847, in *Selections from the Government*, 1855, p. 116; Court, *Report on Budaon*, p.23.

associated with particular characteristics.⁸⁴ Certain castes, for instance, were considered to be good cultivators while others might be prone to lawlessness or cattle stealing.⁸⁵ This essentialising of caste in colonial discourse became a standard trope in much of the official writing of a later period. Charles Raikes, for example, in his accounts of the land systems of northern India talked of the 'warrior Rajputs' as being the major landholding caste who maintained their 'war-like' nature of previous eras and contrasted their behaviour to that of the 'insipid Bengalis'.⁸⁶ Bhumihar Brahmins and Pathans were also noted for their clan-like and war-like characteristics.

As the state further bureaucratised its agrarian system in the nineteenth century criminal statistics were gathered for those groups and classes who failed to conform to colonial agricultural patterns and modes of taxation. Early settlement reports indicate the resistance of both landholders and cultivators to paying the prescribed government revenue and these acts of resistance continued to threaten the economic status of the government from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.⁸⁷ In order to counter act these areas of resistance it was essential for the government to develop a detailed record of each area and to determine its exact revenue potential.

Both colonial land reforms in the North Western Provinces and the classificatory operations of the early state sought to effect a consolidation and reification of new social groups and economic structures. The fluidity and ambiguity in so many occupations and lifestyles that was noted by late eighteenth and early nineteenth colonial observers was, by the middle of the century, to some extent replaced by a more rigid existence, indicated in some areas by the increase in the density of population dependent on settled agriculture and the expansion of the areas under cultivation.

Colonial attempts at innovating and transforming the land tenure and revenue systems of north India led to the redefinition and rationalisation of space into a taxonomy of land based on notions of productivity and value. However despite this,

⁸⁴ One of the earliest studies on provincial castes was Elliot's *Races of the North Western Provinces of India*, which became a standard against which later surveyors and gazetteer compilers could check their own information. See Atkinson, *Statistical Account of the NWIP*, vol. 1, p. vii.

⁸⁵ For example in his report of criminal activity in Budaon H.M. Court wrote that 'The prevalent crime now is cattle-stealing. A great portion of the population consists of Aheers... The Aheers are notorious cattle-lifters', *Report on Budaon*, p. 27.

⁸⁶ Raikes, *Notes on the North Western Provinces*, p. 51.

⁸⁷ Bhargava, *State, Society and Ecology*, p. 107.

several communities continued to practice several forms of lifestyle and occupation simultaneously, for example, cultivators could also be tenants and landlords. The state's broad intention of creating widespread sedentarisation continued to be vexed by the many groups who continued to subsist on shifting cultivation, sometimes abandoning their lands for other areas for up to three years at a time. Thus despite certain continuities the colonial attempts at classification of indigenous land and society led to widespread changes, particularly in the rights and privileges accorded to various members of the agrarian system. By the mid-nineteenth century, landed property rights had been redefined and restructured. Company officials had spent much of this initial period in deciphering the intricacies of the Mughal and post-Mughal agrarian order and they attempted to graft a new reformed system of agrarian relations onto that basic model. Thus committed to encouraging growth and development, the Company began by emulating Mughal patterns but soon shifted to simplification, modification and the reinterpretation of the local custom and law.

III. Building an archive

The early colonial desire to know India and to understand the fundamental nature of Indian social, economic and political forms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was motivated primarily by the need to take control of the land revenue system and to organise into a more permanent and regulated form the various modes of revenue extraction. With the establishment of the Board of Control in 1784 the East India Company, whose initial concerns had been the expansion of trade in the subcontinent, were charged with the establishment of legitimate procedures for the delineation of revenue and property rights on the basis of which it was meant to support its new found governmental role via the collection of revenue. The land that had been conquered through military conquest or diplomatic treaties had to be measured, surveyed and mapped as did the various populations that inhabited it. The interest which fuelled this new agenda of control and administration was initially historical in the sense that the state needed to assume the claims of previous rulers either to own the land itself or the right to its produce. It also needed to legitimate its assumption of these claims through historical precedent and bureaucratic management.

As we have seen in the first section of this chapter colonial decisions about land and revenue both produced and were produced by a variety of historical materials about pre-colonial social and economic forms. Administrators involved in debates about the nature of pre-colonial land systems assumed that historical arguments were necessary predicates for colonial policies. Nicholas Dirks has argued how the local histories and royal genealogies which were collected by Colin Mackenzie in south India at the beginning of the nineteenth century constituted a first stage in the official attempt to know India that was marked by historicist tendencies. He demonstrates how Mackenzie sought to 'make the land known' through a combination of surveying, description and the collection of local and authentic accounts of royal families, land grants and genealogies.⁸⁸ However, while Mackenzie collected every type of historical, ethnographic and religious text and document in his project to catalogue the nature of existing social and political forms this type of information was fairly soon discarded by the newly regulated state in favour of the more systematic and rationalised information collected by colonial officials seeking to reform the revenue system on the ground, in various localities, and reproduced in the form of tables, statistics and surveys.

The early colonial archive therefore consisted of two contradictory but in fact mutually reinforcing types of information. Firstly, there were collections of indigenous works on revenue, political and administrative systems which were either commissioned or collected during the initial period of settlement in the late eighteenth century. C.A. Bayly has noted how between 1790 and 1830 in north India munshis under British patronage wrote numerous works on the topography and history of the new colonial districts. Despite their recasting in a mode that was accessible to the imperatives of colonial political and revenue demands, these texts still drew on older models of economic and topographical knowledge.⁸⁹ For example, the history of Gorakhpur written by Mufti Ghulam Hazarat recounted the origins of the zamindari right in that area which was understood by early administrators to be essential to sorting out the

⁸⁸ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind. Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 85.

⁸⁹ Bayly refers to J.M. Siddiqui, *Aligarh District, A Historical Survey*, Aligarh, 1981, p. 316; Khairuddin Hussain, *Tarikh i Jaunpur*, tr. anon., Add. Mss. 3866, CUL; Rieu, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the British Library*, I, p. 431, III, p. 958, in C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information. Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 226-7.

legitimacy of certain kinds of claims to local rule, and by extension property, in order to regulate accordingly the position of these claimants within the revenue system. In the first stage of this 'information order' therefore colonial surveyors and settlement officers, as noted above, relied on a series of local indigenous 'experts' for collecting information on land rights, property holding conventions and the principles of taxation employed by former regimes. Wherever possible, they consulted written documents that were held by these experts which related to the various areas of specialist knowledge and if these were lacking they often commissioned reliable indigenous 'experts' to reproduce this information in the form of local histories.

William Bentinck, governor of Madras, in his correspondence to the Board of Revenue regarding Mackenzie's collection made clear his opinions on the value of such information for the project of British rule. Bentinck wrote that 'the valuable collection of manuscripts and other documents of the highest antiquity which that officer has been enabled to procure, may be expected to throw useful light on the dark ages of Oriental history, and to be equally valuable as a guide in the pursuit of literary knowledge, as in the attainment of correct information with regard to the former tenures of property and the laws of the ancient dynasties of the peninsula of India'.⁹⁰ As one of the early constructors of British revenue policy in India Bentinck was clear about the value of any historical information about the nature of landed property.

Historical questions were paramount during this period in discussions about the modes of revenue settlement with peasants or village communities in north India. Historical exploration was linked to the effort to justify the system of land settlements or the formation of government institutions of one form or another and much of this writing and discussion was influenced by British stereotypes concerning Indian village communities or ideas about oriental despotism. In order for the reformed revenue system, based on the idea of joint village communities, to work the Company had to collect large amounts of local information. This meant that local officials were dependent on the involvement of local accountants and revenue officials. In north India this position was generally occupied by the qanungo. In the local revenue system the

⁹⁰ Letter to Board of Control dated March 14, 1807, in BC no. 6426, OIOC, quoted in Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p. 97.

qanungo had generally functioned as the head record keeper of a pargana. Considered to be the knowledge on local custom and usage, the qanungos maintained revenue receipts, area statistics and local revenue rates. The Mughal system of appointing hereditary qanungos is said to have begun from the time of Akbar to preserve the actual surveys, valuations and revaluations of revenue. Counterparts of all accounts, whether they were regarding the establishment of new villages, or transfer, sale and measurement of lands or boundary disputes, were kept in the office of the qanungos as public records. Records of qanungos, therefore, contained a significant history of successive alterations which had taken place in the state of landed property.⁹¹ The strategic value of the qanungos in determining the affairs of revenue were realised by the Company in the early days of administration.

As the Company developed from a trading power into a state, it developed a 'bureaucratic form and rationality' that positioned land revenue at the very centre of its governmental roles. Revenue was thus the *raison d'être* for the new acquisition of knowledge for the colonial archive and the various forms of state governmentality in the region were established through the mechanism of a revenue bureaucracy. Significantly however, this type of locally produced information was later discarded after the initial period of settlement and superseded by another type of data considered to be more reliable: the officially produced statistical information on land systems and social types gathered in the field by British surveyors and revenue officials and firmly rooted in the scientific principles of empirical observation and local experience. Dirks suggests that the history of Mackenzie's Collection and its role in the development of British policy decisions marks the emergence of this 'new epistemic regime' in colonial knowledge, in which the enterprise of historical knowledge became progressively transformed and subordinated by a British 'colonial sociology of India'.⁹²

The form and reason for this shift is evident in much of the official discourse of the period. We have already noted in the previous section how the colonial reliance on written documentation and records led to misappropriations and abuses of the land and property rights in the early days of British administration. Nevertheless, though the

⁹¹ Warren Hastings Papers: Ameen Accounts, vol. 1, Add. Mss. 29086.

⁹² Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p. 105.

motivations of native amils, qanungos and *malguzars*, who had often acted as revenue officers for the previous regime, were viewed with mistrust, in the absence of other evidence their testimonies and accounts formed the basis of the revenue system in this period.⁹³ Once however a certain amount of local knowledge and experience of the revenue system had been gained by British officials by the early decades of the nineteenth century this indigenous knowledge was considered to be disposable or at least subordinate. In particular, the local histories and royal genealogies collected by the likes of Mackenzie in the south and Buchanan were no longer recognised as trustworthy sources of information, lacking as they were in the positivist credentials of rational historiography and authorship. By the time of his survey of Bengal and Bihar Buchanan had been instructed to dispense with the purely descriptive and prolix manner of his survey of Mysore and develop a more systematised and scientific form for the survey which he was commissioned to undertake.

Thus from the point of view of British tax and revenue officials the accumulation and recording of such knowledge was a means of cutting out, or at least subordinating to a lesser position, the role of intermediaries or 'native informants' who had become a source of such mistrust in the initial period of settlement.⁹⁴ In addition to this there was a genuine desire to improve the recording and transmission of information within newly formed government offices.

With the major reforms of the revenue administration in the 1820s the state's desire to systematise the specialist knowledge of taxation and commercial systems became even more pronounced. H.H. Wilson's *Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms* (1855) and Elliot's *Supplement to the Glossary of Indian Terms* (1845) both shared a similar motivation to record and simplify the complex intricacies of the revenue administration for subsequent administrations. While Wilson's *Glossary* was intended strictly as a compilation of indigenous legal and revenue terms that were in current use, Elliot expanded his remit to include detailed information on 'the tribes, the customs, the

⁹³ For example in Bundelkhand see E.T. Atkinson, *Account of Bundelkhand*, p. 42.

⁹⁴ The reduced position of the 'native informant' at this time however must also be matched and balanced against the developing role of the Indian government employee. This merits some further attention.

fiscal and technical terms' of the North Western Provinces.⁹⁵ The local and specialist information that was brought together to compile these general works were the more humble lists of native terms compiled by local officers at the district and pargana level.⁹⁶ In the purely administrative domain 'compendious treatises, embracing not only the rules of revenue process, but also the principles of revenue science' were compiled in order to record and to rationalise the body of disparate information concerning revenue administration and its legal enshrinement.⁹⁷ These compendious treatises became the handbooks for revenue officers working in every district of the region and provided a new level of uniformity and rationality to the revenue system in the region. Charles Raikes, Magistrate and Collector of Mynporie, noted that by 1850 all candidates for government employment in the revenue department had to master the by now fairly large compendium of Revenue Codes.

Colonial officials such as Robert Cust in the Punjab confronted by the total absence of recorded information on the revenue system sought both to rectify this information gap and to create a fixed system for subsequent administrators to follow. With the aid of his munshi he wrote 'A Manual for the guidance of native officials and magistrates in the Cutcherries of the North Western Provinces' in which he set out to codify various aspects of the revenue system according to the terminology of the previous Mughal regime and the rationalised and centralising methods of an incipient colonial bureaucracy.⁹⁸ Shahid Amin has rightly described these glossaries and manuals as 'instruments for establishing control over a regional agrarian economy' as they sought to set the economic and political terms on which the revenue system would operate. In

⁹⁵ Wilson set out the official parameters of his enquiry in the preface to his glossary. H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms and of Useful Words Occurring in Official Documents relating to the Administration of the Government of British India from the Arabic, Persian, Hindustani, Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Uriya, Marathi, Guzarathi, Telugu, Karnata, Tamil, Malayalam and other languages*, London, 1855; H.M. Elliot, *Supplement to the Glossary of Indian Terms, A-J, Agra, 1845*; John Beames, ed., *Memoirs on the History, Folklore and Distribution of the Races of the North Western Provinces of India: being an amplified edition of the original Supplemental Glossary of Indian Terms by the late Sir Henry Miers Elliot*, London, 1869.

⁹⁶ Reference to list by E.A. Reade, the Collector of Gorakhpur compiled in an agricultural glossary in 1839 in Shahid Amin's Introduction to William Crooke, *A Glossary of North Indian Peasant Life*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989, p. xxiv.

⁹⁷ C. Raikes, *Notes on the North Western Provinces*, p. 75.

⁹⁸ This text was also translated into Urdu as *Fihrist dastur amal fajdari*. See R.N. Cust, *Literary and Oriental Essays*, 2nd series, 3, London, 1887, p. 89. See also references to such texts in C. Raikes, *Notes on the North Western Provinces*, p. 76.

this respect they also represent a further aspect of the 'ethnological encounter' which Ranajit Guha sees as marking the setting up and constitution of a colonial state since they involved quite literally the transmission of knowledge from one epistemological domain, infused with empiricism and the discourse of rationality, into a quite different one.⁹⁹

The voluminous records of economic, social and geographical information that were generated in topographical, revenue and statistical surveys of the early nineteenth century might be seen as the second stage in the formation of a colonial archive on north India. Initially, this largely technical information, gathered in a spirit of positivist empiricism served to constitute an official domain of knowledge that was understood to be a necessary accoutrement for the effective administration of government.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to examine the process by which the survey and settlement of the land revenue, as well as the reforms of the revenue administration, carried out by the colonial state in the first half of the nineteenth century led to significant political, social and material changes and set the physical and political boundaries for a colonial administrative region during this period. This transformation, from a vaguely defined, politically diverse geographical region into one with a systematised and uniform economy and well defined administrative boundaries by the middle of the nineteenth century, was simultaneously effected in the domain of colonial knowledge. The colonial archive worked to 'canonize, crystalise, and classify' the knowledge required by the state to carry out its ruling and administrative functions.¹⁰⁰ In the context of north India moreover this body of information enshrined in maps, survey and settlement reports and codes of regulations reproduced and codified a colonial region managed and administered through colonial bureaucratic forms.

⁹⁹ S. Amin, ed., *A Glossary*, p. xxv; Ranajit Guha, 'An Indian Historiography of India: a nineteenth century agenda and its implications' in *Dominance without Hegemony. History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge Mass., 1997, p. 164.

¹⁰⁰ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, p. 107.

Chapter 2

Mapping Hindu Space: Banaras and the Interpretation of Archaic Knowledge

This chapter continues with the concerns of the previous chapter in considering the nature of early colonial classifications and categorisations of Indian society in determining later regional cultural forms. In this chapter however, the intellectual encroachments of Orientalist and missionary scholarship, rather than the pragmatic interventions of administrative policy, are considered as a formative influence on the subsequent constructions of cultural identity which emerged in the later nineteenth century. The chapter focuses on the early Orientalist constructions of Hindu geography and chronology which formed an important phase in constituting an historical and geographical basis for a contemporary regional identity. The early Orientalist emphasis on the textual sources of Hindu religion further led to an exaggerated emphasis on the ancient, Vedic and Aryan sources of Indian tradition, bypassing almost completely the more recent Indo-Persian traditions. Colonial encounters with the numerous scholarly and ritual traditions of Hindu religion in Banaras, already the focal point for a regionally based Hindu culture, led to a perception that Hinduism, as it was represented in that city, lacked any real historicity and had remained more or less unaltered since its foundation. This perception was in direct contradiction to the actual history of the development of ritual and scholarly traditions in the sacred city in the preceding centuries. Subsequently missionary attempts to discredit the authority of Hindu religious traditions, in particular those relating to the sanctity of Banaras, sought to deny and discredit the antique status of these traditions by evaluating them in terms of the historical-critical scholarship developed in Biblical criticism and on the basis of European historical criteria. Despite significant differences therefore, both saw Hinduism as a unitary and mono-linear religion which was epitomised in the centralising force of the city's ritual and learned traditions and in which both the sacred and the archaic were intertwined.

I. Archaic knowledge

In Europe during the eighteenth century geographical knowledge was divided into several new categories which included the mathematical, the geometrical and the astronomical processes of mapmaking. The two major theoretical divisions according to which these categories were distributed were the physical, which referred to the study of the terra-aqueous globe and the historical, the study of all of the spatial aspects of human existence and history.¹ Orientalist-scholars of the late-eighteenth century in India, who were concerned with the discovery and retrieval of ancient Indian knowledge, chose the latter discipline of historical geography as an apposite tool for resolving certain questions about the pattern of ancient Indian civilisation. Historical geography acquired an institutional platform at the Asiatic Society in Calcutta where it was developed as a complementary discipline that would lead to the improved understanding of antique knowledge. At the administrative level moreover historical geography was reckoned to serve as an important supplement to the growing number of surveys and cartographic representations of the subcontinent. In particular, it was thought, it could furnish some historical account of the current geographical distribution of people and places in the newly acquired territories of the Company government.

In 1799 the society confirmed this connection between scholarly pursuit and imperialist ambition by publishing in its journal a list of questions concerning Indian geography which its readers and contributors might endeavour to pursue:

II. Geography

1. A catalogue of the names of Towns, Countries, Provinces, Rivers, and Mountains, from the *shasters* and *puranas*, with their modern names annexed; and a correct list, according to the oriental orthography, of the Towns, etc. mentioned by Major Rennell, and other European geographers. The etymology, as far as practicable, would also be desirable.

2. What were the geographical and political divisions of the country before the Musulman invasion?²

¹ See David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise*, Oxford, 1992.

² Desiderata, *Asiatic Researches*, vol. VI, Calcutta, 1799, pp. iii-v.

At this stage the interests of the members were clearly focused on the ancient, pre-Muslim, era of geography. Despite the continued authority of Mughal imperial power in the region, and despite the adoption of Mughal revenue and police divisions, it was precisely this period of the Indian past that was reckoned by early Orientalists such as Warren Hastings and William Jones to hold the key to the original and authentic divisions of society and religion. Moreover it was these divisions that the newly formed Company government should seek to reproduce in its own legal and social institutions of rule. The sources for this information, as stated in the *Desiderata*, were the Hindu shastras and puranas, the recently discovered principal texts of ancient Hindu law and religion. The first generation of Orientalists, therefore, who set about these texts with the help of pandits and munshis, were seeking amongst other things to inform and to authorise the introduction of new legal and social codes into the realm of governance.

Among the first generation of British Orientalists in India, Francis Wilford, a retired army servant living in Banaras, became known for his work on historical geography.³ Wilford's interest in and knowledge of Indian geography had developed from his work as a civil engineer in the surveying of Bihar while serving as an officer in the Bengal Engineers.⁴ His later geographical theories however developed from a more personal and intellectual interest in the historical sources of Christian revelation. In the late 1790s he had commissioned one of his Indian informants Mughal Beg to make a survey of the southern Punjab and Bhawalpur, areas which remained at this time largely unknown and uncharted by Company surveyors.⁵ Surveying, based on a practical system of measurement and topographical study, thus provided one of the ethnographic-based

³ Wilford became known latterly for the well-publicised scandal surrounding the fraudulent inventions of his chief pandit who was the main source for his extravagant theories concerning ancient Indian geography. There are two existing studies on Wilford which consider his work in the context of early Orientalism in India. Nigel Leask has considered Wilford's work and his disgrace in the light of post-colonial theories of colonial discourse, 'Francis Wilford and the Colonial Construction of Hindu Geography, 1799-1822', in *Romantic Geographies. Discourses of Travel 1775-1844*, Amanda Gilroy, ed., Manchester, 2000, pp. 204-222; C.A. Bayly offers an interpretation of Wilford's work in the context of the project of early Orientalists and the discursive relationship between Orientalists and their informants in 'Orientalists, Informants and Critics in Benares, 1790-1860', in Jamal Malik, ed., *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History 1760-1860*, Leiden, Brill, 2000, p. 97-127. My own approach borrows more from the latter in situating Wilford's work in the context of British Orientalism and Christian revelation.

⁴ Wilford acted as an assistant to the Surveyor General between 1786-90 but retired in 1794 after failing to be promoted to the post itself. He subsequently moved to Benares where he was appointed secretary of the Sanskrit College by Jonathon Duncan. See Leask, 'Francis Wilford', p. 204.

sources for his geographical conjectures. The other and, as it later turned out, less reliable sources were a plethora of ancient Hindu, Greek, Roman and Egyptian texts, all of which contained passages referring to particular locations in and around the subcontinent. With regard to the textual sources, Wilford's method of enquiry proceeded on the basis of extracting with the help of a team of Sanskrit pandits various disparate references to geographical locations which were scattered throughout the various texts of the Puranas and other Sanskrit sources. These references would then be compared, corroborated and amalgamated to finally produce what was presented as a coherent and systematised account of ancient Hindu geography.

When comparing the various textual sources Wilford proceeded by adopting a method of conjectural etymology in order to develop synchronicities between the names of locations mentioned in the Greek, Hebrew and Sanskrit texts. In the first of several essays published in the *Asiatic Researches* he described how he had extracted his information from the 'historical poems' of the Hindus collected for him by his pandit, and that from the evidence of a Sanskrit source called the *Padma Purana* he had discovered the Indian origin of Egyptian civilisation. The *Padma Purana* he claimed, told the story of the post-diluvian dispersal of the family of Noah (named Satyavrayata in his source) initially to India and then to Egypt. After the Biblical flood, Satyavrayata or Noah apparently turned the Ark to the famous peak of 'Chaisa-ghar' which the Puranas denominated as 'Aryavarta, Aryawart or India, an appellation which has no small affinity with the Arrarat of Scripture'.⁶ In a later essay, published in volume VI of the *Asiatic Researches*, Wilford located the 'abode of the progenitors of mankind, both before and after the flood in the mountainous tract which extends from Balkh and Candahar to the Ganges'.⁷ Citing Sanskrit sources and oral legends communicated to him by a Brahmin traveller called 'Areewara' he located the terrestrial paradise inhabited by 'Adima' (Adam) and 'Iva' (Eve) in Kashmir, beneath Mount Meru, the focal point of the Hindu geography. In this way Wilford combined evidence from a wide range of classical sources including Ptolemy's *Geography* and Nonnus's *Dionysiaca*

⁵ Moghal Beg/Francis Wilford (*Majmua Walforti*): Mss. Eur. F. 22.

⁶ 'On Egypt and other Countries adjacent to the Ca'li river, or Nile of Ethiopia. From the ancient books of the Hindus', *Asiatic Researches*, III, Calcutta, 1792.

⁷ 'On Mount Caucasus', *Asiatic Researches*, vol. VI, Calcutta, 1799, pp. 485-523.

with the Puranic and biblical sources. He then made a large number of identifications of biblical place names with places referred to in these texts. The Greek Mount Parnasus was identified with Mount Meru/Kashgar/Ararat, and Dionysus or 'Deva-Nahusha' with Noah the cultivator of vines.⁸

It was this dubious method of combining disparate sources which led to many of Wilfords' most extravagant theories and to his eventual undoing. Nevertheless, as C.A. Bayly has argued, the blatant motivation behind his attempt to substantiate in a far too simplistic and instrumentalist a way the chronological and historical validity of the Biblical story of Genesis through Sanskrit sources must be seen in the light of the current Deist and even Naturalist thinking of the late eighteenth century.⁹ Anglican mythographers like Thomas Maurice in England had also sought to confirm the historicity of revelation and of the ethnology of Genesis from external sources, in particular those of 'pagan' religions.¹⁰ Moreover, as more recently commentators have remarked, the intellectual and religious impulse which led Wilford to make these wild claims and conjectures was entirely covalent with the urge of many eighteenth century Orientalists, including William Jones, to subsume the heterogeneous findings of ancient Indian civilisation within the metanarratives of (European) universal history and geography. Wilford therefore expected to find a number of links between the ancient Indian wisdom of the Vedas and Puranas and the knowledge of the ancient Egyptians, Israelites and Greeks. Firstly, he believed he would discover traces of an ancient Indo-European mother language, thus confirming his mentor Jones. Secondly, the inheritance of a common store of sacred lore, albeit degenerated following the Flood, was expected to attest to underlying unities in human mythology, Biblical and classical. And thirdly,

⁸ Ibid, pp. 500-503.

⁹ Many intellectuals and thinkers of the late 18th century were governed by the notion that human knowledge had been at its most complete during the time of the Ancients. Deists and natural philosophers believed amongst them that humanity's knowledge was implanted by rational Providence at the beginning of time, before the Flood fragmented its pristine unity. See R. Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, London, 1687; David Hume, *Natural History of Religion*, Edinburgh, 1757; Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, passim.

¹⁰ Thomas Maurice, *A Dissertation on the Oriental Trinities: Extracted from the Fourth and Fifth Volumes of Indian Antiquities*, London, 1801; *Indian Antiquities; Or, Dissertations Relative to the Ancient Geographical Divisions, the Pure System of Primeval Theology, the Grand Code of Civil Laws, The Original Form of Government, the Widely-Extended Commerce and the Various and Profound Literature of Hindostan*, 7 vols., London, 1806.

he expected to find evidence that ancient Indians had migrated through trade and pilgrimage over large distances to ancient Egypt and Ethiopia.¹¹

By far the most extravagant of Wilford's theories however, and his intellectual tour de force, appeared in the series of essays covering a total of six hundred pages, published in the *Asiatic Researches*, under the main title the 'Sacred Isles of the West'.¹² In these essays Wilford's penchant for the wild speculations of mythography were carried to their full extent. The essays propounded two main theories. The first was outlined in the fourth and fifth essays on 'Vicramaditya and Salivahana' and 'The Origin and Decline of the Christian Religion in India' according to which Wilford claimed to have discovered a Sanskrit version of the birth, life and crucifixion of Christ, called Sallivahana. The second thesis, equally extravagant, was based on the claim that Wilford had found evidence to suggest that the British Isles, which he identified in the Sanskrit sources as *Svetam Dwipa* was the original home and most sacred location of the Hindu religion. The essays in which these preposterous theories were presented however were preceded by a series of essays on the ancient geography of the Hindus in which the author identified several of the more significant sites of the region's past. In the eighth volume of the *Asiatic Researches* Wilford published a systematic survey of his own construction of ancient Hindu geography drawn from the Hindu cosmographies contained in the Puranas and corroborated by the physical evidence of Major Rennell's survey and cartography of the Indian subcontinent which he used to check and verify his Sanskrit sources.

In the first essay of the 'Sacred Isles' series, 'Of the Geographical System of the Hindus', Wilford elaborated an outline of Hindu geography which involved the division of the continents into seven islands, *dwipas*, of which India itself was said to have formed the principal one. It is worth noting at this point that most of his information relating to the geographical system of the Hindus concerned north India and the regions around the Ganges and Indus rivers:

¹¹ C.A. Bayly, 'Orientalists', pp. 106-7.

¹² It was in the introductory section to these essays that Wilford gave a confessional and detailed account of the forgeries perpetrated by his pandit which had led him to be misled and to mislead his hero William Jones in the process. Despite admitting however that both the essay on Egypt and many of his later claims were coloured by falsity he maintained that many of his theories were still admissible from the evidence

The first [island], or *dvipa* of *Jambu*, commonly called India, was formerly an island, as it appears from the inspection of the country. The British provinces along the Ganges from Hardwar down to the mouth of that river, was formerly an arm of the sea: and in the same manner, toward the west, another arm of the sea extended from the mouth of the Indus to Hardwar, and there met the other from the east. A delineation of the northern shores of India could not be attended with much difficulty, as they are in general sufficiently obvious. The sea coast may be traced from the Neelgur mountains to Rajmahal, where it turns suddenly to the West... From Rajmahal, the shore trends toward the west, forming several headlands; the principal of which are Mongheir and Chunar. From thence it goes all along the banks of the Jumna to Agra and Delhi where it ends, forming two small rocky eminences; and then turns suddenly to the south west; and forming an irregular semi-circle, it trends toward the Indus, which it joins near Backar at the distance of about four kos from that place, and one from Lohuri, or Rohri, where suddenly turning to the south, it goes toward Ranipoor sixteen kos from Rohri, and four from Gunmot on the Indus. This account is from Captain Falvey, who visited that country about the year 1787. 'From Delhi to Backar in a direct line there are no mountains, which remain to the South of this line, forming an immense curve. Thus from the mouth of the Indus, to that of the Ganges, round Delhi, it is an immense flat and level country. The beach of the shores to the North, at the foot of the snowy mountains, and to the south round the island of India in ancient times, is covered with pebbles, some of the most beautiful I ever saw. ... It seems as if the waters, which once filled up the Gangetic provinces, had been suddenly turned into earth: for the shores, the rocks, and islands rise abruptly from the level; and are everywhere well defined, and strongly marked;... This I noticed particularly about Birbhoom, and to the south-east of Chunar. What we call the hills in this country, and which appear such, from the immense plains below, are in reality the Table-land of old India....'¹³

One of the main reasons for this emphasis on the middle Ganges region must have been at least partly due to the scanty knowledge of the region north-west of Delhi at that time. No doubt Wilford used the survey of Mughal Beg for his reconstruction as well as the accounts of travellers mentioned in the text.¹⁴ According to his account this region of Jambu was bordered on the north-east and north-west as far as Hardwar in the north by the rivers of the Ganges and Indus which had previously formed arms of the sea-coast

of the similarities between legends of the west and India. *Asiatic Researches*, vol. VIII, Calcutta, 1805, p. 259.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 291-2.

¹⁴ Moghal Beg/Francis Wilford (*Majnun Walforti*): Mss. Eur. F. 22. There were also some indigenous maps and surveys of some western regions which Wilford may or may not have had access to.

which separated that country into an island. Moreover, by asserting that this ancient island, *dwipa*, was coterminous with what was commonly known as India, Wilford made the mistake of identifying what he understood to be the ancient abode of the Hindus with the modern geographical region of India.

In the next two essays of the 'Sacred Isles' series Wilford produced a list of the mountains, rivers and countries of 'Bharata', a term which he claimed referred to 'India proper'. These had been extracted from the Puranas together with a translation of some geographical extracts from the Brahmanda, Vayu and Devi Puranas. Repeatedly Wilford used these largely cosmographical references to identify a number of physical geographical locations of the subcontinent. The naivety of his method however should not detract from the fact that in consulting these sources he did manage to identify, sometimes for the first time, the ancient names and terms for many contemporary locations of Gangetic India. In volume IX of the *Asiatic Researches* he produced an account of this region which he described as 'Anugangam or the Gangetic Provinces and more particularly of Magadha', in which he identified the ancient kingdom of Magadha with the 'countries lying on the banks of the Ganges'.¹⁵

As many of his critics have subsequently pointed out, Wilford's naivety lay in his insistence on the underlying scientific truth of the Hindu cosmographies which he attempted to utilise as rationally-construed and empirically-derived geographical treatises.¹⁶ Thus according to his account the 'old continent' was divided into seven (lotus-like) *dwipas* or climates centred on Mount Meru, from whence four rivers flowed to the cardinal points of the earth. Moving in a north-westerly direction from *Jambu* (India), the six *dwipas* were as follows: *Cusa* (the country between the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea and the western boundary of India); *Plascha* (Asia Minor, Armenia etc); *Salmali* (Eastern Europe, bounded on the west by the Baltic and Adriatic seas); *Crauncha* (Germany, France and the northern parts of Italy); *Sacam* or *Swetam* (the British Isles, surrounded by the sea of milk) and *Pushcara* (Iceland). Most of these

¹⁵ *Asiatic Researches*, vol. IX, p. 33.

¹⁶ Wilford has been stigmatised, by Schwartzberg in particular, because he was looking for classical, Biblical and Egyptian place names in the Puranas and failed to recognise that these texts were not 'scientific' so much as 'cosmographical'. See J. Schwartzberg, 'Traditional South Asian Cartography', in J.B. Harvey and David Woodward, *A History of Cartography*, ii, I, Chicago, 1992, pp. 299-300; C.A. Bayly, 'Orientalists', 2000, p. 106.

apparent identifications were based on the loose method of transcultural etymology that was used to link Hebrew, Greek and Biblical place names with those of the Sanskrit texts.¹⁷

In spite of his own misappropriation and misuse of this cosmographical material Wilford was himself quick to criticise both the puranic and astronomical bases of Hindu geography. To begin with he made a point of condemning the fantastical nature of the Puranic sources which, he claimed 'whether historical or geographical, are most extravagant compositions, in which little regard indeed is paid to truth... In their treatises on geography, they seem to view the globe through a prism, as if adorned with the liveliest colours.... There are rivers and seas of liquid amber, clarified butter, milk, curds, and intoxicating liquors. Geographical truth is sacrificed to a symmetrical arrangement of countries, mountains, lakes, and rivers with which they are highly delighted'.¹⁸ The other branch of Hindu learning, astronomy, which might have been used as a complement to geography, he saw as equally pernicious:

There are two geographical systems among the Hindus: the first and most ancient is according to the Puranas, in which the Earth is considered as a convex surface gradually sloping toward the borders, and surrounded by the ocean. The second and modern system is that adopted by astronomers, and certainly the worst of the two. The pauranics considering the earth as a flat surface, or nearly so, their knowledge does not extend much beyond the old continent, or the superior hemisphere: but astronomers, being acquainted with the globular shape of the earth, and of course with an inferior hemisphere, were under the necessity of borrowing largely from the superior part in order to fill up the inferior one. Thus their astronomical knowledge instead of being a service to geography, has augmented the confusion, distorted and dislocated every part, every country in the old continent'.¹⁹

It seems that despite such reservations Wilford felt he could overcome the shortcomings of indigenous sources by establishing his method of comparative etymology and comparing the evidence of the Sanskrit texts with the classical Greek, Roman and Hebrew works. After the revelation of the fraudulent inventions of his pandit, Wilford, with his reputation as an Orientalist in tatters, confined his efforts to the study of ancient

¹⁷ *Asiatic Researches*, vol. VIII, pp. 264-86.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 271.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 271-2.

geography wherein he adopted a more stringent approach to his sources than those previously employed.

In an essay published posthumously in volume XX of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* Wilford introduced a topographical description of the western sea-coast of the subcontinent, known as Calinga, which included an account of the ancient boundaries of India extracted, it seems, from the text of the Mahabharata.²⁰ In the Bhishma book of the Mahabharata, Wilford stated, Bharata was described as being of a triangular shape with its base in the Himalaya and its peak at Cape Comorin: 'This equilateral triangle is divided into four other triangles equilateral also, and of equal dimensions. There are three in the north, and the one in the south represents the peninsula'.²¹ These four triangles, representing the ancient divisions of Hindu geography were denominated respectively as the middle country, the north-east and north-west quarters and the southern part. In a later essay, published posthumously, he elaborated his findings on the regional area of north India, referred to as the Gangetic Provinces:

The country of Oita, or Oeta, is that of Oude, with forests in the northern parts, still abounding with elephants. The town is situated on the Gagra, or Sarjew, called after it the river Oedanes, or Oude river by Strabo, who represents it as a large river, abounding with crocodiles, and dolphins, and falling into the Ganges. The town itself is called Athenagara, or the town of Athe, by Ptolemy. The geography of the countries to the north of the Ganges, in that author, is distorted in a most surprising manner, and every geographer since has been equally unfortunate with regard to that country, till Major Rennell's time. All the ancient maps of India, in Thevenot's collection of travels, and in other authors, are equally bad. And Mr Danville's description of this tract is by no means superior to that of Ptolemy, for he places Kannauj below Allahabad. Fortunately, the names of these places in Ptolemy, being very little disfigured, may be easily brought again into their proper order and situation...'²²

The significance of Wilford's researches into ancient Indian geography for the subsequent development of this field have largely been overlooked in contemporary assessments of his work. He was, possibly, the first European scholar to identify the

²⁰ The essay was considered to have been written sometime around 1811 but remained unpublished in the library of the Asiatic Society until 1851.

²¹ 'Of Calinga or the sea coast from Cape Mudan to Chatganh', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XX, 1851, p. 228.

²² 'On the Ancient Geography of India', *Asiatic Researches*, vol XIV, Calcutta, 1822.

classical divisions of the country into four parts, north, south, east and west, as mentioned in the Mahabharata.²³ Like his contemporary William Jones, Wilford based his assertions in the evidence of textual sources, both Hindu and classical Greek, Roman and Hebrew, and asserted both the validity and authority of certain key shastric texts. The scandal of his fraudulent assertions have latterly obscured the genuine contribution which he made to the awareness of the sources of ancient Indian geography at a time when these texts were being translated and analysed by European scholars for the first time.²⁴

The apparent absurdity of many of Wilford's assertions moreover must further be contextualised in the general environment of conjecture and uncertainty concerning ancient Indian civilisation at the end of the eighteenth century, and for much of the early nineteenth century. William Jones had also made claims about the connection between ancient Greece and India in his article on orthography in the first volume of the *Asiatic Researches*. According to his theory the Greeks had made a habit of changing the names of places in India to suit the form of their own language: 'The ancient Greeks... who were too vain perhaps, of their own language to learn any other, have... strangely disguised the proper appellations of countries, cities and rivers in Asia.... They had an unwarrantable habit of moulding foreign names to a Grecian form, and giving them a resemblance to some derivative word in their own tongue: thus, they changed the Gogra into Agoranis, or a river of the assembly, Uchah into Oxydrace, or sharpsighted, and Renas into Aernos, or a rock inaccessible to birds'.²⁵ Nevertheless, Jones had been wary of the potential inaccuracies accrued from the system of comparative etymology used by

²³ These divisions were subsequently cited by historians and geographers such as Alexander Cunningham as forming the principle regional divisions of ancient India. Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India. I. The Buddhist Period, including the campaigns of Alexander the Great, and the travels of Hwen-Thsang*, London, 1871, Introduction and Chapter 1.

²⁴ The enduring nature of much of Wilford's textual research is attested to by the fact that he was so frequently referred to and quoted by subsequent scholars of Indology throughout the 19th century principally in connection with points on ancient geography, history and archaeology. Many of these men such as Henry Elliot and Alexander Cunningham held far more substantial reputations for scholarship than Wilford himself.

²⁵ *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 1, Calcutta, 1788, p. 2.

Wilford and others, and had indicated his doubts to Wilford prior to the publication of his manuscript on the Greeks.²⁶

Jones's interest in the archaic connections and synchronicities of the ancient world was partly fuelled by a desire to construct a comprehensive chronology of India prior to the biblical period and to perhaps eventually link this to the chronologies of other nations, such as Egypt and Greece.²⁷ Jones had developed his chronology on the basis of the Puranas, several works by European scholars,²⁸ a number of Chinese texts and the *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl. These sources were undoubtedly also used by Wilford in several of his essays on Hindu geography. Wilford himself had produced a well-received essay 'On the Chronology of the Hindus' in 1796 in which he had constructed a genealogical table of the various Hindu royal dynasties stretching from the mythological to the biblical era from information given in the *Bhagavat* and the *Vishnu Puranas*.²⁹ Jones had previously found a parallel legend in Indian mythology to the Biblical flood, and felt at the time that 'this episode fixes consequently the time when the genuine Hindu chronology actually begins'.³⁰ Much of this debate regarding chronology concerned the relative antiquity of Hindu civilisation and other ancient civilisations. In England, mythographers such as Thomas Maurice wished to prove the derivative nature of the Hindu myths and legend, and thereby their more recent origin, in order to affirm the originality of the Biblical stories.³¹ In India however this theory was increasingly

²⁶ 'Etymology, has no doubt, some use in historical researches, but it is a medium of proof so very fallacious that, where it elucidates one fact, it obscures a thousand, and more frequently borders on the ridiculous than leads to any solid conclusion...', *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 1, p. 416.

²⁷ Jones's essay 'On the Chronology of the Hindus' was the first attempt to draw up a chronology of ancient India on the basis of the Hindu scriptures available at the time. Jones divided ancient Indian history into four periods, of which the first three were mythological, *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 2, p. 139.

²⁸ These included works by Paterson, Le Gentil and Desguignes.

²⁹ 'On the Chronology of the Hindus', *Asiatic Researches*, Calcutta, 1796.

³⁰ Jones had made his own explorations into Indian astronomy which had led him to assert that 'the Mosaic and Indian chronologies are perfectly consistent, that Manu, son of Brahma, was the Adima, or first, created mortal, and consequently our Adam; that Manu, child of the Sun, was preserved with seven others, in a *bahitra* or capacious ark, from an universal deluge, and must therefore be our Noah, 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India', *Asiatic Researches*, vol. II, Calcutta, 1788, p. 401. See also Alun David, 'Sir William Jones, Biblical Orientalism and Indian Scholarship', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 30, 1, 1996, pp. 173-184.

³¹ This was to counteract the recent claims of French sceptics, drawing on the work of Orientalists, which attacked the historicity of genesis and the authenticity of the biblical stories. Thomas T. Maurice, *Brahminical Fraud Detected: or the attempts of the sacerdotal tribe of India to invest their fabulous deities and heroes with the honours and attributes of the Christian Messiah, examined, exposed and defeated in a series of letters to the Episcopal Bench*, London, 1812.

rejected. In 1779 John Zephaniah Holwell published his *Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal And the Empire of Indostan* which included a section exploring the religious principles of the Hindus.³² Holwell's conclusions, based on 30 years residence in Bengal during which time he had collected substantial textual materials, was that the treatises on which the Brahmans based their knowledge were both original, that is they were not borrowed from any prior or contemporary branches of philosophy, such as the Greek, and that they were indeed of great antiquity.

Nevertheless, Wilford was not alone in seeking to reconcile the passage of early Indian chronology with the events of Biblical history in order to prove, finally, the legitimacy of the latter. In fact his mentor Jones had hinted at just such a relationship before him and he was only one amongst several scholars of what C.A. Bayly has called the 'creative re-interpretation of European master texts' in that he sought to construct a comparative geography and chronology of ancient India that would link it to the ancient past of other nations and that would ultimately confirm the authenticity and the historicity of the biblical story of genesis. And like Jones and other Orientalists this confirmation was made all the more important because it came from external sources, in this case the records of the Hindus, which could lead to the proof of revelation.

The Orientalist quest to ascertain the order of early Indian chronology proved to be an important complement to historical geography. For example, when it came to providing approximate dates for the Magadhan dynasty both Wilford and Jones managed to draw more or less accurate conclusions due to the fact that the contemporary Greek accounts helped to support rather than conflict with the Indian dates. Time and again it was the classical Greek accounts of India, whose dates were considered indisputable, which enabled the placing of Indian royal dynasties of the past in their correct geographical location.³³ Many of the early attempts to establish a definite chronology of ancient India however were little more than stabs in the dark. The real advancement occurred with the discovery and presentation to the Asiatic Society of a number of

³² This was also published separately as *A Review of the Principles, Religious and Moral, of the Brahmans: Comprehending an Account of the Mythology, Cosmogony, Fasts and Festivals of the Gentoos, Followers of the Shastah. With a Dissertation on the Metempsychosis, commonly though erroneously called the Pythagorean Doctrine*, D. Steel, London, 1779 [1765-67].

³³ See emphasis on Greek sources in Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*, Chapter 1; and also in James Rennell's preface to the *Memoir of a Map of Hindostan*, London, 1788.

inscriptions which had been collected by administrator-scholars working in the Company territories of eastern and north India. The first of these was an inscription discovered by Harrington in Bodh Gaya in March 1785, and later deciphered by Charles Wilkins.³⁴ This event heralded the beginning of Indian epigraphy and established, together with the evidence of later discoveries, the existence of the Maukhari dynasty which had risen on the ruins of the Gupta empire in the sixth century.³⁵ Following that another inscription was discovered at Monghyr by Wilkins which led to the discovery of the Pala dynasty of Bengal. Over several years spanning the turn of the century the gradual discovery of groups of inscriptions in various regions enabled the piecing together of a picture of the movement and settlement of various royal dynasties of India in the period leading up to the Muslim invasions of the eleventh century.

Initially, inscriptions were employed as a complement to the evidence of textual sources which had already been translated. In this way, inscriptions would be examined for evidence of the names of locations which appeared in the texts. This method was used to decipher the location of several of the royal capitals of early India. In the tenth anniversary discourse of the Asiatic Society, published in 1793, Jones had claimed that he had identified the 'Patalibothra', which was named in the Greek texts, with Pataliputra, an ancient Hindu capital, and the title of 'Sandracottus' with Chandragupta. Prior to this an attempt had been made to locate the site of Palibothra, capital of the flourishing kingdom of Prasii, to which Megasthenes had come as an ambassador of the Greek general, Seleucos Nicator; but what had continued to vex scholars was the identity of the river Erranoboas, at whose confluence with the river Ganga, said the Greek historian Arrian, Palibothra was situated. James Rennell, the Company geographer and later Surveyor General, was the first to identify Palibothra with the modern city of Patna in 1788.³⁶ He had reached this conclusion on the basis of the geographical location of the city provided by Pliny. Wilford had subsequently disagreed

³⁴ 'Translation of a Sanskrit Inscription copied from a stone at Bodha-Gya by Mr Wilmott, 1785', trans. Charles Wilkins, *Asiatick Researches*, vol. I, Calcutta, 1788.

³⁵ O.P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society and the Discovery of India's Past, 1784-1838*, Oxford, 1988.

³⁶ See James Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindostan*, London, 1788, Introduction, pp. 51-55. Although in the Bengal Atlas the title stated it to be an atlas of Bengal, Rennell in fact surveyed as far west as the city of Agra and in so doing was able to include in his account all the historic cities of that part of north India, including the ancient city of Pataliputra on the modern day site of Patna using a combination of surveying and Greek sources.

with Rennell in his own treatise on Indian chronology by stating that Palibothra was in fact located at Rajmahal in the vicinity of the modern town of Bhagalpur, so named by the local inhabitants as a residence of the sons of Bala Rama, son of Krishna.³⁷ Two decades later in 1817 William Francklin, after extensive travels in the region during his service, identified the river Erranoboas with the river Chandan which he had followed as far as its source near Deoghar, thus fixing the capital near Bhagalpur, in agreement with Wilford.³⁸

Between the end of the eighteenth century and 1830 the most substantial insights that were gained into the location of ancient capitals still depended on the evidence of the Greek authors: Arrian, Curtius, Diodorus and Strabo, as well as Ptolemy, who had written an account of Alexander's progress towards India and named many places along the way. In 1832 James Prinsep, who had previously served as assay master for the Mint in Banaras, was appointed as the new secretary of the Asiatic Society and a new phase in the Orientalist search for ancient knowledge was inaugurated.³⁹ Prinsep's major contribution to the Asiatic Society, and to the discovery and representation of India's past, was to establish a more scientific approach to the accumulation of historical and geographical knowledge. The evidence of texts, which had previously dominated the discipline, was continually made subordinate by him to the more empirical evidence of epigraphic and (most importantly) numismatic material. Between the years 1833 and

³⁷ 'The capital city of Prachi Proper, or the western part of it, is declared to be Rajgriha, or the royal mansion. According to the Puranas, it was built by a son of king Prithu, called Haryacsha. It was taken afterwards by Bala Rama the brother of Krishna, who rebuilt it and assigned it as a residence for one of his sons, who are called Baliputras, or the children of Bala. From this circumstance it was called Balipura, or the town of the son of Bala; but in the spoken dialects it was called Baliputra, because a putra, or son of Bali, resided in it. From Baliputra, the Greeks made Palipatra and Palibothra,' in Wilford, 'On the Chronology of the Hindus', pp. 269-70.

³⁸ Francklin had made a detailed survey of the area which led him to his conclusions concerning the siting, but his textual analysis of the site was based almost entirely on Wilford's own interpretations of the Sanskrit sources. See W. Francklin, *Inquiry concerning the site of ancient Palibothra. Conjectured to lie within the limits of the modern district of Bhagalpur, according to research made on the spot in 1811-12*, London, 1817.

³⁹ Whilst in Banaras Prinsep had founded a literary society and press, erected a drainage system of the city, restored the minarets of Aurangzeb's mosque and the stone bridge on the Karmanasha river. In his capacity as assay master he had undertaken a census of the city and published an illustration of the life, monuments and the riverfront of the city. When he returned to Calcutta in 1830 Prinsep took over the running of the journal *Gleanings in Science* from Major J.D. Herbert in 1831 and in 1832 this journal became the new *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. H.T. Prinsep, 'Memoir of the Author', in J. Prinsep, *Essays on Indian Antiquities, Historic, Numismatic and Paleaographic*, ed. E. Thomas, vol. 1, London, 1858, pp. i-xvi.

1838, as a result of the large number of coins and inscriptions sent to the Society and added to the collection there, the discovery and dating of a large number of the ruling dynasties of ancient India was successfully completed alongside a reconstruction of much of its ancient history and geography.⁴⁰

The first discovery which Prinsep himself made related to the period of Bactrian India after Alexander's death and to the extent of the Bactrian kingdom to the north-west of India. Using the collections of Roman, Greek and Persian coins amassed by Colonel Tod in Mathura, Swiney in Karnal and Burnes in Afghanistan, Prinsep was able to develop insights into the overthrow of the Bactrian kings by a line of Scytho-Parthian princes.⁴¹ A few years later Masson made further in-roads into the history of Alexander in India with his discoveries of Afghan antiquities and coins which helped to identify the route taken by Alexander and the site of Alexandria.⁴² In the following years the first research was carried out on the inscriptions on the Allahabad pillar which were found to be identical to rock inscriptions at Girnar in Gujarat and Dhauli in Orissa. This discovery eventually led to the determination and dating of the Gupta empire of northern India.

In his role as secretary of the society Prinsep was the recipient of a large number of coins and facsimiles of inscriptions which he was able to collate and compare to form groups of data leading to rapid and path-breaking discoveries. In his mind the key to further knowledge lay solely with the careful collation and comparison of scattered sources of information, which when put together might shed some new light on previously obscure and opaque materials. His role was therefore principally that of an overseer who from his base at the Asiatic Society in Calcutta was able to organise a complex level of collaboration between scholars working in diverse fields, and to thus bring together for comparison the scattered materials of coins and inscriptions. This method of comparison and collation was in fact the only way in which important connections could be made to link the obscure patterns of movement and settlement of the various Hindu dynasties.

⁴⁰ See Kejariwal, *Asiatic Society*, pp. 162-220 for this period of the Society's history and an overview of Prinsep's career; J. Prinsep, *Essays*, pp. i-xvi.

⁴¹ James Prinsep, 'On the Roman Coins in the Cabinet of the Asiatic Society', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, hereafter *JASB*, vol. 1, 1832 and 'On the Greek Coins in the Cabinet of the Asiatic Society', *JASB*, vol. 2, 1833, pp. 27-41.

Prinsep's aim was to co-relate the various coin-discoveries so as to produce a systematic history of the period down to the era of Muslim conquest. Once the basic chronology of ancient India had been established then its successive 'periods' could be demarcated with the Buddhist period standing at the earliest limit of Indian chronology and the Gupta period as its 'classical' age. Like the generation of Orientalists before him, Prinsep's interests concerning early Indian chronology were limited to the Hindu dynasties that were believed to have dominated the fabric of the Indian past up to the eleventh century.⁴³ As recent scholars have argued both eighteenth and nineteenth century Indology were suffused at some level with the political imperatives of Orientalist knowledge.⁴⁴ The Orientalists of the early nineteenth century however, were beset by a different set of political pressures than those of their predecessors a decade or so before them. Following the impeachment of Warren Hastings and Wellesley's accession to the governor generalship a new style of government was brought to bear on British rule in India that forced it into greater involvement with its Indian subjects. Reform and the improvement of indigenous society through useful knowledge became the guiding principles of utilitarian inspired administrators like James Thomason in the North Western Provinces. Orientalists of this era were increasingly forced to justify and even defend their prolonged and expensive labours on uncovering the obstrusities of the ancient past according to the new ideological imperatives of utility and good government.

There were, of course, a number of pragmatic concerns which had always fuelled the Orientalist endeavour. Early British administrators such as Warren Hastings believed that Sanskrit social and legal treatises and their purveyors, the 'Brahmans', would provide the nascent government with both the information and the legitimacy it needed to govern such a large mass of people.⁴⁵ At this time a system of rule based on indigenous legal and social principles was believed to be the most effective form of

⁴² Masson 'Second Memoir on the Ancient Coins found at Begram, in the Kohistan of Kabul', *JASB*, 1836.

⁴³ See for example the large number of chronological tables concerning Hindu dynastic genealogies in the appendices to Prinsep's *Essays on Indian Antiquary*.

⁴⁴ Roseane Rocher, 'British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century: The Dialectics of Knowledge and Government', in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament. Perspectives on South Asia*, Philadelphia, 1993, pp. 215-249.

foreign government.⁴⁶ Having made an early distinction between Hindus and Muslims and their attendant customs and belief systems, Persian legal and political treatises were also translated to determine the appropriate system of governance for the Muslim population. Nevertheless, once the era of reform and improvement was underway and this vein of Orientalist knowledge was relegated to a second place behind western scientific knowledge, other justifications had to be found. Firstly, the search for and confirmation of previous imperial regimes in the past, in particular the evidence of Alexander's imperialist ambitions in India and the later imperial dynasties of Maurya and Gupta, served to bestow authority and a sense of precedence on the increasingly expansive agenda of British rule.⁴⁷ The fact that there was already a well-established and authoritative history of the various Hindu dynasties that had ruled over much of northern and other parts of India in the ancient past meant that to some degree the British ambitions to conquer and rule could also be expressed in the same terms of imperial conquest.⁴⁸

Secondly, the emphasis of Orientalism on pre-Muslim India was also justified in similar terms. The Mughal regime had been the immediate predecessors to the British and one that the British sought to replace. While the British relied on the symbolic memory of Mughal imperial authority for effective political and administrative control in several regions there was also the need for a certain amount of distancing from the declining empire. From the early decades of the nineteenth century British histories of India began to appear in print in which both the early Muslim and the Mughal rulers were demonised as despotic and foreign aggressors who had subjugated the Hindu population of India under a set of alien laws and language.⁴⁹ In the light of this disparaging attitude to the more recent past, Orientalism could be recast as the scholarly

⁴⁵ Hastings had himself contributed to the process, involving a gathering of pandits, which led to the compilation of the digest, *Code of Gentoo Laws* by Halhed in 1780.

⁴⁶ Hasting's Letter to the Court of Directors, 1785.

⁴⁷ Rocher, 'British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century', p. 217.

⁴⁸ Another important incentive for the production of Orientalist knowledge for government was based in the search for the original sources of Hindu law in the Sanskrit sastras which would confer authority on those brought into play by the British government. See Rocher, pp. 220-22.

⁴⁹ Two examples of such histories, published slightly later, are Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India: The Hindu and Mahometan Periods*, London, 1839, and Henry Elliot, *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India*, Calcutta, 1849.

instrument with which to uncover the pristine civilisation of ancient India, the ancient wisdom of the Hindus and the history of the rise and fall of Hindu dynasties.

While it is erroneous to overlay the connection between political and intellectual concerns at this time, or for that matter the wider impact of Orientalist scholarly research on state policy and initiatives, it is important to recognise the saliency of the new political and religious pressures affecting Orientalist scholarship in the nineteenth century. The influx of evangelical Christians in to India after 1813 to serve as missionaries and administrators created a new set of governing conditions on the interpretation and employment of ancient Hindu texts and scriptures.⁵⁰ Whereas Orientalists like Wilford and Jones had essentially sought to reconcile the history of Indian civilisation with the Mosaic chronology and Christian revelation; the new breed of Orientalists sought to undermine the authority of Hindu scriptures by questioning both the historicist and antique status of Hindu civilisation. Missionaries in particular and evangelical administrators, in direct opposition to the views of Jones and Wilford, viewed Hindu civilisation as having suffered an episode of decline and decay, similar in fact to the Fall of Biblical history. It was this concept of decay and the decadence of Hindu civilisation that accounted, in their view, for the success of "Muslim" conquests. The following section examines the reconstruction of 'Hindu' tradition in Banaras in the early nineteenth century as it evolved through a process of interaction between the intellectual and institutional interventions of British involvement in the city and the ongoing indigenous ritual and scholarly traditions relating to its sacredness.

II. Banaras in parallel traditions

The Company expansion into the western provinces of Bihar and north India in the eighteenth century led to the assumption of political control over the provinces of Banaras, still under the nominal control of the Nawab Vazir of Awadh.⁵¹ Immediately prior to the accession of British power a local landholding lineage of Bhumihar Brahmins, a dominant caste in the region, headed by Mansa Ram had managed to seize

⁵⁰ Rocher argues that in the eighteenth century there was not the same imperialistic tone to Company rule in India which developed later, and scholars such as Jones did not see themselves in any way as apologists for empire. Rocher, 'British Orientalism', pp. 216-220.

⁵¹ See Chapter 1, p. 2.

considerable political power in the area through their relationship with the Nawab of Awadh and to set themselves up as local rulers.⁵² Mansa Ram's son and successor, Balwant Singh, became gradually more independent of the Nawab by building up his own administrative organisation in the region alongside the Nawab's. The main function of the raja's administration was the levying and collection of taxes and the building of a military force to protect his own interests and occasionally those of the Nawab.⁵³ The rise of the Banaras rajas into a major political force in the region, capable of raising taxes and generating and deploying troops, represents 'the triumph through skill and circumstance of one regional lineage group wielding power in the area over others', such as the various Rajput, Brahman and Muslims lineages that had traditionally also been landholders.⁵⁴ It was in the context of numerous power struggles with these local cum-regional rulers that the British first encountered the city of Banaras.

When the British attained sovereignty over Banaras in 1775 they initially allowed the then raja, Chait Singh, to retain civil, criminal and police powers and control over the mint and established a Resident in the city to safeguard their own interests. After Chait Singh's rebellion in 1781 the British replaced him with a relative, Mahip Narain Singh, and reduced considerably the sovereign powers of the raja. By 1795 when the Resident Jonathon Duncan's revenue settlement had been made permanent and the British had extended their administrative duties to include the collection of revenue, the raising of troops and the meting out of punishment, the political power of the raja was reduced to a nominal one only.⁵⁵

The question of the antiquity of the city of Banaras and its ritual importance thus first became a subject of debate in the late eighteenth century when Orientalist scholars and administrators first encountered the learned traditions of the city and its pandits. The discovery by Orientalists based in Calcutta of several centres of Hindu scholarship in the north had initiated a line of interaction between the scholars of these eastern and northern centres. While Nadia and Tirhut, in Bengal and Bihar respectively, were famed

⁵² Bernard Cohn, 'Structural Change in Rural Society' in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 381.

⁵³ Bernard Cohn, 'The Initial British Impact on India: A Case Study of the Benares Region', in *Anthropologist Among the Historians*, pp. 323-4.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 347.

⁵⁵ Cohn, 'Initial British Impact', p. 332.

for their specialisms in *nyaya* (logic) and *smriti* (law), Banaras was exceptional in that not only was every branch of Sanskrit learning represented there, but its fame as a centre of learning and scholarly traditions was matched by its reputation as a sacred centre.⁵⁶ Unlike other regional centres of this kind, Banaras attracted an India-wide collection of scholars and wealthy patrons, as well as an all-India contingent of pilgrims throughout the year.

In the previous century the French jeweller, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, had passed through the city on his way to Bengal in 1665 and noted the variety of scholarly traditions represented there.⁵⁷ In his account he referred to a 'university' in the city which was dedicated to the science of astrology but where there were also 'doctors who teach the Law'.⁵⁸ He described the temple of Vishveshwar, later destroyed in 1669, as a 'pagoda... which, after that of Jagannath, is the most famous in all India'.⁵⁹ In addition to the 'university', Tavernier visited a college in the city built and supported by Raja Jai Singh for the education of Brahmans and noblemen.⁶⁰ Another seventeenth century European traveller, Francois Bernier, famously described the city as the 'Athens of India, whither resort the Brahmans and other devotees; who are the only persons who apply their minds to study. The town contains no colleges or regular classes, as in our universities, but resembles rather the schools of the ancients'.⁶¹ The accounts of these men received wide circulation in Europe and were almost certainly known to subsequent British Orientalists.

The earliest British accounts of the city however did not materialise until the following century. In 1772 Robert Barker had visited the recently constructed Observatory at Banaras where he had held discussions with the pandits concerning their astronomical observations. Their system of computation he observed, although arcane and inaccessible, was highly developed.⁶² In view of the growing European interest in

⁵⁶ Ruth Gabriel, 'Learned Communities and British Educational Experiments in North India: 1780-1830', PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1973, pp. 30-32.

⁵⁷ Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India*, trans. V. Ball, ed. William Crooke, second edition, 3 vols, Delhi, Low Price Publications, 2000 [1676], vol. i, p. 97.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 143.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 179.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 183.

⁶¹ Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656-1668*, trans. Archibald Constable, 2nd ed., Delhi, Low Price Publications, 1999, p. 334.

⁶² Robert Barker, *An Account of the Brahmans Observatory at Benares*, London, W. Boyer, 1777.

Hindu astronomy at this time, John Playfair, professor of mathematics at Edinburgh University, published a treatise in 1789 examining Indian astronomy based on the accounts of it by Bailly and Le Gentil, both of whom had visited India in the 1760s. His conclusions echoed those of Holwell on Hindu philosophy: 'That observations made in India, when all Europe was barbarous or uninhabited, and investigations into the most subtle effects of gravitations made in Europe, near five thousand years afterwards, is perhaps the most striking example of the progress and vicissitudes of science, which the history of mankind has yet exhibited'.⁶³ He concluded his lecture with a reference to 'the repositories of Benares' as yet untapped and which, it was promised, would reveal 'the most ancient and complete evidence on the subject'.⁶⁴ In 1791 William Robertson wrote that 'Benares has been from time immemorial the Athens of India, the residence of the most learned Brahmins, and the seat both of science and literature... There it is highly probable, whatever remains of the ancient astronomical knowledge and discoveries of the Brahmins is still preserved'.⁶⁵

The city's reputation as the repository of ancient knowledge was also communicated to William Jones by a group of pandits in Calcutta. According to his informants the most respected authorities on Hindu religious and social law were at 'the universities of Hindustan, particularly from Banaras and Tyrhoot...'.⁶⁶ In 1784 he was invited by fellow Orientalist, Charles Wilkins, to visit the city on his tour of upper India. Wilkins, who was stationed for some time in Banaras, had been able to procure many manuscripts from his local sources which shed light on several of the branches of Sanskrit knowledge.⁶⁷ During this brief visit to Banaras Jones had also met with Samuel Davies, a former officer in the Bengal Engineers and the then District Judge and

⁶³ John Playfair, *Remarks on the Astronomy of the Brahmins*, Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1789, p. 28.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 60.

⁶⁵ William Robertson, *An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India; and the Progress of Trade with that Country prior to the Discovery of the Passage to it by the Cape of Good Hope. With an Appendix containing observations on the Civil Policy, the Laws and Judicial Proceedings, the Arts, the Sciences and the Religious Institutions of the Indians*, [1791], 4th ed., London, T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1804, pp. 256-7.

⁶⁶ William Jones, *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, ed. Garland Cannon, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, vol ii, p. 667.

⁶⁷ Ibid, pp. 649-53; 665-66; 669-71; 678.

Governor General's Agent in the city.⁶⁸ At the time Davies had already begun to try and identify astronomical and mathematical references in Sanskrit works and he later published his findings in a paper to the Asiatic Society in 1789 'On the Astronomical Computations of the Hindus'. Most of his assertions were based on the evidence of a single Sanskrit text, the *Surya Siddhanta*, one of the five *Siddhantas* on Indian astronomy, which had been procured for him by the then Resident of Banaras, Jonathon Duncan.⁶⁹

The discovery and translation of numerous manuscripts and Sanskrit texts procured in and around Banaras was an important incentive both to the colonial interest in early Indian sciences and the constitution of Banaras in the colonial imagination as the major repository and source of ancient Hindu knowledge. In part the emphasis on the textual roots of Sanskrit knowledge was based on the Judaeo-Christian assumption that any highly developed socio-religious system must be founded on and derived from a single textual, or scriptural tradition. Moreover the need to preserve and perpetuate this knowledge was recognised by Orientalist administrators such as Duncan who in a letter to the Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, suggested that the surplus revenue for the year 1789 should be used to establish a Hindu College in the city, that would assist in 'the preservation and cultivation of the laws, literature, and religion of that nation at this centre of their faith and the common resort of all their tribes'.⁷⁰ Duncan's assessment of the advantages of this project once again reveal the political objectives behind the British courting of what was perceived to be Hindu tradition. One advantage, he claimed, would be 'to the British name and nation, in its tendency toward endearing our Government to the native Hindoos'.⁷¹ The second advantage, and one that points to a growing preoccupation amongst Orientalists in Calcutta regarding the difficulty of collecting manuscripts, was that a public institution such as this would provide the right conditions for the collection, preservation and dissemination of precious manuscripts on

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 657.

⁶⁹ Brahmagupta (588-660) described Brahma's system of astronomy in the versified *Brahma-sphuta-siddhanta* (628). Based on the five *Siddhantas*, it systematised Hindu knowledge of astronomy. Bhaskaracharya based his work *Siddhanta Shiromani* on these five also. It contained two original mathematical parts and two astronomical ones. The former included *Lilavati*, trans. John Taylor, Bombay, 1816, and *Bijaganita*. The latter were translated by John Wilkinson in 1861-2.

⁷⁰ Extract of Bengal Revenue Consultations, 13 January, 1792, Resident at Benares to Lord Cornwallis, Governor General, H/487, pp. 29-30.

Hindu law, religion and literature. As Duncan himself admitted, 'the great difficulty of now collecting complete treatises (although such as are well known to have existed on the Hindoo religion, laws, arts or sciences...) a college at Benares... well adapted to correct and recover by a gradual collection and correction of the books still to be met (though in a very dispersed and imperfect state)... and by the assistance and exertions of professors and students to accumulate... a precious library of the most ancient and valuable general learning and tradition...'.⁷²

Following the ideas of Orientalist administrators such as Warren Hastings who had wished to maintain the institutions of customary law in the colonial legislative system, the college was also set up to preserve the principles of Hindu law as they appeared in textual sources, such as the *Manusmriti*, and to produce men knowledgeable in these laws to assist the European judges in the courts. The college was founded on October 28, 1791 with nine students and as many professors who were considered to be experts in 'the principle Hindoo sciences'.⁷³ The college almost immediately ran into difficulties which were largely a result of the cultural misunderstandings between its patrons, the British, and its management, the pandits.⁷⁴ Nevertheless the British had taken an important step in the cultivation of their relationship with the city based on a calculation of its centrality to what they understood to be Hindu tradition.⁷⁵

The British perception of Banaras as the seat of Hinduism, in the first place, stemmed from their conception of religion as a single, unitary tradition that originated in one place at one time and subsequently branched out into various schools from that central point. This was in line with the development of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. According to this thinking, which was supported by the evidence of ritual practice and the apparently derivative nature of indigenous scholarly traditions, the essence and

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 30.

⁷² Ibid, p. 31.

⁷³ The money used to fund the college was to be drawn from the surplus revenue collected after the introduction by Duncan of the Permanent Settlement in the Benares province. Extract from the proceedings of the Resident at Benares, December 1, 1791, H/487, p. 38.

⁷⁴ These difficulties are most clearly outlined in George Nicholls, *Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Benares Pathshalla or Sanskrit College, Now Forming the Sanskrit Department of the Sanskrit College*, [1848], Allahabad, Government Press, 1907, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁵ Dalmia posits three social formations – the rajas, the Hindu merchants and the Brahmins – as being essential to the British conception of the city and its traditions. Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition. Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Oxford, 1997, pp.64-107.

original form of this tradition was preserved in the religious and scholarly institutions and men that could be found in the city. Hence the Orientalist conception of an ancient knowledge that was preserved in its pristine form in texts and in social and religious institutions was founded on the premise that both Hinduism and the branches of scholarship attached to it lacked any real historicity and had somehow remained unchanged and without innovation.

The Orientalist tendency to confound indigenous beliefs relating to the sacredness of the city with their own temporal definitions of its ancient and archaic status meant that in late eighteenth century Orientalist discourse the idea of Banaras as a sacred space was largely articulated in terms of its temporal dimensions, or rather the lack of them. It was this very discourse of temporality, of the ancient and original status of the city and its traditions of learning, that characterised the colonial encounter with the sacred element of the city throughout the early nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century Orientalist imagination it was the city itself and its religious traditions which, lacking any historical development, were understood to be the living model of ancient Hinduism. In the nineteenth century this absence of historicity was expanded to include the living representatives of tradition, the Hindus and all their social and political institutions, and it was on this basis that the sacredness of the city would be challenged.

Pre-dating and no doubt contributing to this perception of Banaras were the multiple indigenous traditions relating to its sanctity and ritual status. The city's fame as the holiest of cities had been preserved in the popular imagination over centuries through the puranic textual accounts which were read aloud and sung by priests at the numerous shrines and temples. The earliest textual sources on Banaras are the *Vayu* and *Brahmanda* Puranas. These, it is believed, were composed sometime between the fourth and sixth centuries AD and establish the city's connection with the worship of Shiva (*shivpuja*) from this time.⁷⁶ Besides these, there is mention of the famous five *tirthas* (pilgrimage stations) along the banks of the Ganges in the *Matsya Purana*, composed between the eighth and eleventh centuries. The *Kurma Purana*, composed about the same time, contains a separate part known as the *Varanasi Mahatmya* which mentions all the great lingas of Kashi. By far the most well-known and the most quoted source on

⁷⁶ Motichandra, *Kashi Ka Itihas*, Hindi Granth-Ratnakar, Bombay, 1962, p. 22.

ancient Kashi was the *Kashikhanda*, one of the seven khandas of the *Skanda Purana* composed between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This book contains a huge number of myths associated with the city, as well as eulogies (*mahatmyas*), ritual prescriptions and geographical information concerning the sacred geography of Kashi. It was through this work that the idea of Banaras as sacred space was consolidated. The two latest puranic sources on Banaras are the *Kashi Rahasya*, an appendix to the *Brahmavaivarta Purana* which contains a mahatmya of the Panchkroshi pilgrimage and its stations, and the *Kashi Kedara Mahatmya* which contains a praise of the Kedara linga. Both of these were composed between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁷⁷ The puranic tradition concerning Kashi continued to evolve up until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was then perpetuated in the work of the digest compilers (*nibandhakaras*). Of the Hindu digests and compilations relating to Banaras as sacred space the most significant was the extensive treatment of the city's sacred sites in the pilgrimage section of the *Krtyakalptaru*, the famous digest composed by Laksmidhara in the early thirteenth century. From these textual sources it is evident that the mythological and ritual importance of the city stemmed from a very early period and that it increased and waned in form and flavour through several different periods.

The development of Banaras as a sacred centre began in the fourth to sixth centuries when north India was first united in the empire of the Guptas.⁷⁸ Prior to that there is no textual evidence of the city being an important religious centre either in terms of pilgrimage or ritual status.⁷⁹ Long before the spread of Shiva worship in the region, however, there were local cults worshiping *nagas* and *yaksas*, deities who inhabited trees and ponds, and some of the names and ritual forms of these yaksas were later incorporated into those of Shiva worship.⁸⁰ Eventually, the older forms of yaksa worship were destroyed or incorporated into the Shaivite tradition and this process appears to

⁷⁷ Diana Eck, *Banaras City of Light*, [1983], Penguin, New Delhi, 1993, Appendix, p. 347-8. Eck herself seems to adopt a relatively ahistorical approach in her anthropology of the city's religious traditions. In her introduction she states that it is not the events of the city's history that make it significant but its *sacredness*. She remarks that in terms of the city's 'ethos' it remains unchanged from ancient times and that Banaras itself is 'symbolic of the whole of Hindu culture', pp. 5-6.

⁷⁸ Hans Bakker, 'Construction and Reconstruction of Sacred Space in Varanasi', *Numen*, 43, 1, January 1996, pp. 32-55.

⁷⁹ Motichandra, pp. 31-42.

⁸⁰ Motichandra, p. 32.

have been complete by the fourth century.⁸¹ There is little evidence of the pre-Buddhist history of Banaras except to confirm that it must have been a centre of some importance for the Buddha to have visited there. Alongside the rise of new spiritual disciplines, such as Buddhism and Jainism in the centuries before the Christian era the city also witnessed the emergence of the new philosophical schools, *darshanas*, associated with the Upanishadic doctrines. It became known as 'Brahmavardhana', the increase of Brahman.⁸² With the emergence of theistic Hinduism in north India Banaras again came under the jurisdiction of kings who patronized the Hindu rather than Buddhist traditions: first the Bhara Shaivas, then the Vakatakas, followed by the Gupta dynasty, who led a Hindu revival after centuries of Buddhist domination in the region.

It was during the Gupta period that Banaras became a city pre-eminently associated with Shiva. A sectarian movement called the Pashupatas had emerged at this time combining asceticism with new forms of devotion.⁸³ Alongside these there was a flourishing of other types of sectarian devotional movements: Buddhist, Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta and Saura (associated with sun worship). During this time there was a significant amount of sponsorship and installation of images of the various deities in temples and shrines, suggesting that image-worship developed in popularity at this time. In the period from the end of the Gupta dynasty in the sixth century to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth, Banaras became a stronghold of brahmanical Hinduism. This was the period in which many of the puranic traditions about the city were elaborated. Banaras was made the political capital of the Gahadvala dynasty in the late eleventh to twelfth century. This was perhaps the first time in its history that the city became a political as well as a religious centre. At this point it was probably also one of the richest towns of north India with a mixture of commercial activity, pilgrimage trade and the 'industry of the dying'.⁸⁴ Due to Gahadvala royal patronage led by the great king Govindachandra many new shrines, temples and ghats were constructed in the city. Govindachandra, (1104-1154), was also a patron of learning and the compiler of the *Krityakalptaru*, Laksmidhara, was his chief ministrer. Laksmidhara inaugurated a new

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 34.

⁸² Eck, p. 59; Kuber Nath Sukul, *Varanasi Down the Ages*, Bhargava Bhushan Press, Patna, 1974, pp. 19-20.

⁸³ Eck, p. 71.

era in Hindu religious literature with his digest on Hindu *dharma* (religious law) drawn from a multitude of sources. It is perhaps because of this work that Banaras, already at the time known as a pilgrimage centre, became famous as one of the most important centres of pilgrimage. The Gahadavala dynasty ended with defeat by the advancing armies of Muhammad Ghuri in the twelfth century.

In spite of what have subsequently been described as long centuries of Muslim domination, it seems the mythological and ritual importance of Banaras was to grow during this period. Many of the puranic traditions concerning the city and its ritual significance developed during this time and there were several periods of reconstruction and temple building in between the outbreaks of destruction. During the reign of Akbar in the fifteenth century many Rajput nobles and ministers, who were allies of Akbar, sponsored temple building and the construction of ghats in the city. Both Raja Todarmal and Raja Mansimh, ministers of Akbar, supported the religious observances of the city. The rajas of Bundi also proved to be generous patrons and owned a palace on the river front. The rise of devotional movements (*bhaktimarg*) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to a new emphasis on the *avatars* (incarnations) of Vishnu, namely Rama and Krishna in north India. Despite its reputation as a stronghold of Hindu orthodoxy, Banaras was included in the devotional resurgence of this era. In the fifteenth century, Ramananda, the exiled disciple of the south Indian Vaishnava tradition started by Ramanuja, settled at Banaras at Panchaganga Ghat. Following him the Muslim poet, Kabir, also lived in Banaras, and despite his disdain for the orthodox traditions relating to the city's sacredness, inspired a sectarian movement, the Kabir Panth, that was initiated by his followers after his death, with its centre in Banaras. In the same century Vallabha founded a Vaishnava institution (*sampradaya*) in the city, from whence it spread out towards western India. During the sixteenth century the famous Vaishnava poet of north India, Tulsi Das, lived in the city and, amongst other works, composed his vernacular version of the Sanskrit Ramayana, the *Ramcharitmanas*, whilst living there. At the beginning of one section of this work the poet, though strictly speaking a Vaishnava, praises Kashi and its Lord Shiva. The almost complete destruction of the city's temples in the seventeenth century under the emperor Aurangzeb meant that the

⁸⁴ Bakker, p. 34.

sacred geography of the city changed considerably. The Banaras of the Puranic Mahatmyas had once and for all been destroyed. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the city underwent a huge influx of Marathas migrating from the south. During this time, as a result of commercial activity and greater circulation of people and goods throughout the region, Banaras underwent a period of renewed religious revival, sponsored largely by the Marathas.

The city's reputation as a centre of learning and religious scholarship developed simultaneously to its ritual and mythological traditions. There is evidence of schools of Vedic learning in the Gupta period (c. 500 AD) although little is known of these.⁸⁵ In the eighth and ninth centuries, the philosopher Shankara is said to have visited the city and each of the great monastic orders founded by him after his great tour had a centre in Banaras. The schools of Nyaya and *Advaita* (Non-Dualism) were particularly strong in Banaras, as was the science of Sanskrit grammar (*vyakarana*). Further digests, in the tradition of that of Lakshmidhara, were compiled on matters of dharma. Narayana Bhatta, one of a number of Maharashtrian brahmans who dominated the intellectual life of the city during the sixteenth century, composed the *Tristhalisetu*, a digest of scriptural verse on the three great pilgrimage cities of North India – Kashi, Prayag and Gaya. He also composed a number of other works dealing with several different branches of Sanskrit philosophical thought such as *Mimansa* and *Vedanta*. According to a Sanskrit family history written by the scholar's son the tradition of southern brahmans in the city began during the time of Narayana's father Rameshvara, a famous teacher who developed a large following of students from all over India while he lived and taught in the city.⁸⁶ During this time of intense scholarly revival there were often large doctrinal disputations (*shastrartha*) which took place between the pandits of Banaras and those of eastern India, Mitthila and Bengal, on points of religious interest. Injunctions from the scriptures would be selected for debate and then interpreted by each of the protagonists in a well-known process of disputation. Such debates and discussions over the meaning and practice of scriptural injunctions inevitably led to a certain amount of innovation.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Kubernath Sukul reproduces seals from this period in *Varanasi Down the Ages*, Patna, 1974, pp. 89-90.

⁸⁶ Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Shastri, 'Dakshini Pandits at Benares', *Indian Antiquary*, 41, January 1912, p. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

During Akbar's reign there were royal patrons of Sanskrit learning in the Mughal emperor's court. Raja Todar Mal, as well as supporting projects of temple construction was also a patron of Sanskrit literature and sponsored compilations in the branches of Smriti, *Jyotisha*, *Vaidyaka*, amongst others. In the seventeenth century Vidyanithi Kavindra, a wealthy *sanyasin* and scholar wielded great influence in the city in intellectual and political matters.⁸⁸ Following him Gaga Bhatta, great grandson of Narayana Bhatta, wrote a series of commentaries on Sanskrit works and was a master of mimamsa and his successor, Nagoji Bhatta, also composed works in all the branches of Sanskrit literature. Aside from their dominance of the literary and intellectual life of the city for at least two centuries the southern brahman families of scholars were also responsible for starting and presiding over many schools and educational establishments. In his seventeenth century account of the city Tavernier described the school (*pathshalla*) built by Raja Jaisimh which was attached to the main Bindu Madhava temple.⁸⁹ And Francois Bernier, who visited the city at the same time, mentioned several educational establishments which he encountered, supported by the local merchant community. By the end of the eighteenth century all the branches of Sanskrit learning – Vedas, Shashtra, Vyakarana, *Kavya*, Vedanta, Mimamsa, Nyaya, *Dharmashastra* and *Jyotisha* – were well represented in the city's schools and seminaries.

There is considerable evidence from the immediately pre-British period to suggest that the Banaras rajas, mentioned in the beginning of this section, had begun to patronise local Hindu religious traditions as well as the more established Indo-Persian cultural traditions as a means of legitimising their rule. In spite of, and perhaps because of, the recent origin of these local rulers, there was a perpetual need to establish legitimacy through emphasising the ancient pedigree of the lineage and by patronising local religious traditions.⁹⁰ Balwant Singh, who had in effect consolidated the position of Banaras raja, built the Ramnagar Fort in 1756 and began to patronise a number of courtly literary traditions. Among them Raghunath Kavi, his court poet, composed a

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

⁸⁹ Tavernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 97

⁹⁰ The anonymous author of *History of the Province of Benares*, part 1, Inverness, R. Carruthers & Sons, 1873, goes to some lengths to establish the 'ancient rank' and status of the Banaras rajas and to assert that prior to Muslim rule the province had always been ruled by Hindu sovereigns, pp. 117-120.

number of original works in Brajbhasha and a commentary on the *Satsai* of Biharilal.⁹¹ Chait Singh, Balwant Singh's successor, is said to have sponsored the construction of the Gopallalji Mandir in the city of Banaras, which was later to become the headquarters of the Vallabha sampraday, and to have instigated a number of lavish festival celebrations, in particular the celebrated Burvha Mangal. Both George Grierson and Shivsimh Semgar, writing in the nineteenth century, list a number of Sanskrit and *Bhasha* poets who resided in his court and were patronised by him.⁹² Balbhadra composed a history of the lineage in Sanskrit verse entitled *Chetasimhivilasa*. Lal Kavi wrote a commentary on Biharilal's *Satsai*, entitled *Lalchandrika*. The most well known poet was Gokulnath Bandijan, who composed the *Chetchandrika*, narrating the raja's family history.⁹³

After losing to the British the political and administrative control of his territories the only role left to the then raja, Udit Narayan Singh, was a largely symbolic one of patron to the numerous local and regional religious and cultural traditions. Hence the raja, relieved of all administrative responsibilities, became the major representative and patron of local festivals, the building of temples and dharmashalas and the patronage of scholarly and literary traditions in the city. It was in the reign of Udit Narayan Singh that the festival of Ramlila was first sponsored and enacted at Ramnagar in the surroundings of the raja's fort. It was in his reign also that the massive project of the translation of the *Mahabharata* into *Bhasha* was completed by Gokulnath Bandijan and his son Gopinath Bandijan. In the nineteenth century the rajas of Banaras, alongside other Hindu notables and people of rank, would continue and develop this tradition of patronage. They also became the benefactors of British-led institutions such as the Banaras Sanskrit College.⁹⁴ The reputation and status of Banaras as an ancient and holy city was a major factor in its ability to attract elite patronage from all over India. Wealthy Indians who had often accumulated their wealth in other regions chose to spend it on conducting benevolent works in the city.⁹⁵ This tradition of patronage for the holy

⁹¹ Shivsimh Semgar, *Shivsimh Saroj*, Lucknow, 1868; George Grierson, 'The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan', *JASB*, Part 1, Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1888, p. 117.

⁹² Grierson, 'The Modern Vernacular Literature', pp. 117-8.

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 117-8.

⁹⁴ Extract from *Friend of India*, Serampore, August 25, 1853, Reade Papers, Mss. Eur. F.45.

⁹⁵ 'Anathalaya Kashi', *Kavi Vachan Sudha*, 17 November 1884, pp. 6-7.

city, which reached as far back as the Rajputs and Marathas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and even to the Guptas, was continued and elaborated in the nineteenth century after the emergence of the British as self-styled patrons.

Thus when the British first discovered the wealth of Sanskrit literature in the late eighteenth century it was the Puranic tradition and the digests attached to it which they first encountered. These textual traditions were, by their very nature, ahistorical in that they purposefully distorted the historical dimensions of Banaras, to project its status as a city of ritual and mythical importance far back into the mists of time. The intellectual and scholarly traditions of Sanskrit literature were largely commentarial and by this feature tended to hide the great degree of innovation and change which had arisen in almost every branch of Sanskrit literature. The apparently derivative nature of these texts was mistaken by colonial interpreters for lack of imagination where often the creativity lay in the manner of interpretation. Thus when the British first encountered Banaras and its textual traditions it was its status as the living embodiment of ancient tradition, an antique relic that had escaped the passage of history, that first attracted them to the city. This reputation and the traditions of patronage which they observed to exist there were precisely the factors which led them to establish themselves as patrons of the city's learned traditions and thereby to contribute further to its status as a sacred city. The following section examines the gradual undermining and reversal of this process from the mid-nineteenth century onwards when a new breed of civil servants and missionaries resident in the city sought to discredit the authority of the Hindu traditions represented there by undermining their claims to ancient status and special sanctity.

III. Historicising the sacred

In the first of a series of essays published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* on archaeological remains found in Banaras, the Rev M. A. Sherring of the London Missionary Society and Charles Horne, acting Judge of Banaras, made a number of statements regarding the history of the city and its links with the history of Buddhism: 'The fact that Benares is the birth-place of Buddhism, and that in it Sakya Muni first "turned the wheel of the Law" or in other words promulgated the peculiar dogmas of the Buddhist creed, is generally believed to rest on good historic grounds. This circumstance

alone, independent of the concurrent testimony of Hindu writers, gives a high antiquity to the city'.⁹⁶ The reason for their certainty concerning this fact therefore lay specifically in the idea that the remains that were found were Buddhist rather than Hindu. Unlike the Buddhists, the ancient Hindus had not sought to preserve a record of their presence in buildings and monuments and had therefore 'left their most sacred city, and one of their most ancient, without some irrefragable proofs in column or cornice, of their residence there prior to the Buddhist reformation'.⁹⁷ In Sherring's mind the Hindus not only lacked a history but they lacked any sense of history that would have prompted them to leave a record. This belief was further compounded by the increasing number of Buddhist remains that were being discovered all over north India during the mid-nineteenth century. Such discoveries led Sherring to conclude that 'Buddhism has preserved the footprints of itself in all places wheresoever it eminently flourished'.⁹⁸ In spite of his obvious admiration for the Buddhist sense of history however Sherring was forced to concede that at the time of the Buddha's enlightenment and arrival in Banaras in the sixth century BC the city must have already been a place 'of much influence, if not also of great sanctity, among the Hindus, especially the Brahmins'.⁹⁹ The evidence of Buddhist remains in the locality of Bakariya Kund in the north-west of the city, of which the paper was a discussion, also meant that 'the true epoch of ancient Benares must date from an earlier period still' than that of the birth of Buddhism.¹⁰⁰

The true weight of the city's antiquity had first been unearthed by Jonathon Duncan some three decades earlier when he published an essay in the *Asiatic Researches*, entitled 'An Account of a Discovery of Two Urns in the vicinity of Benares'.¹⁰¹ The urns had been discovered in 1794 at Sarnath by people digging for stone for a local landholder and minister of the Raja of Banaras, Babu Jagat Singh, to be used in the construction of a new part of the city. The local people believed that the urns and jewels discovered in the digging had belonged to a local king and his household and

⁹⁶ Rev. M.A. Sherring, 'Description of the Buddhist ruins at Bakariya Kund, Benares', *JASB*, Calcutta, Asiatic Press, 1865, p. 1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁰¹ Jonathon Duncan, 'An Account of a Discovery of Two Urns in the Vicinity of Benares', *Asiatic Researches*, vol. v, Calcutta, 1798, pp. 131-2.

had been buried alongside them in the ritualistic fashion awaiting immersion in the Ganges. Duncan, however, was more inclined to imagine that the urns were in fact evidence of Buddhist remains in the area; a fact which was corroborated by the further discovery of a statue of the Buddha and an inscription on the urns. This was the first time that the area of Sarnath, just outside the city of Banaras, had been connected with the history of Buddhism in the area. It led to a series of other discoveries of material remains in and around the province of Banaras which linked the area to a remote and ancient past. In the first volume of the *Asiatic Researches*, published in 1788, the Orientalist stationed in Banaras, Charles Wilkins had published a translation of a Sanskrit inscription copied from a stone at Bodh Gaya.¹⁰² In the same volume there were other translations of inscriptions by Wilkins gathered from sites in and around the province of Banaras. Following this, during the early decades of the nineteenth century in subsequent volumes of the *Researches* and its successor the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, there was a steady accumulation of inscriptions, stamps and royal grants found on coins and stones situated in and around the eastern region of the Gangetic provinces.¹⁰³ These materials contributed to the development of a chronology regarding the early history of the region from its Buddhist origins in the sixth century through the successive eras of Hindu dynasties and the Muslim rulers up to the present time. Situated at the centre of the region concerned and at the forefront of any claims to great antiquity was the city of Banaras.

Unlike his Orientalist compatriots however, Sherring's perception of the Hindu religion and culture which he encountered in the city was based on the premise that it had been subject to several hundred years of decay and corruption which had left it in a decayed and degraded condition. Perhaps more in his role as antiquarian than missionary, Sherring was prepared to exclaim over the delicacy of ancient tastes in architecture: 'Taking it altogether, this little remnant of antiquity is a charming piece of art, and is in itself a proof of the delicacy in taste and expertness in chiselling of the architects of those times, and is also a proof of the sad degeneracy of their posterity'.¹⁰⁴ However, while he was prepared to accept that the Hindu civilisation of ancient times, or

¹⁰² Charles Wilkins, 'Translation of a Sanskrit Inscription', *Asiatic Researches*, vol I, Calcutta, 1788.

¹⁰³ Examples of these can be found in *Asiatic Researches*, vols i-x.

¹⁰⁴ Sherring, 'Description of Buddhist ruins', p. 8.

rather Orientalist interpretations of it, was indeed superior; his own eminently Christian and evangelical beliefs would not allow him to concede that the idolatrous and debased religion of present times had any intrinsic value.¹⁰⁵

The later colonial imagination of a decaying and corrupted civilisation that needed reform at its deepest level had originated in the early nineteenth century Anglicist approach to Hindu culture espoused by utilitarian administrators such as James Mill. Nineteenth century travellers to Upper India, and particularly to Banaras, encouraged by European Romantic aesthetic sensibilities of age and decay, believed that they encountered in the monuments of north India the ruins of an ancient and dying civilisation.¹⁰⁶ These romantic sensibilities were no doubt compounded by a number of artistic representations of the city made by William Hodges in the eighteenth century and by James Prinsep in the early nineteenth, in which ruined forts and crumbling battlements appeared as the nostalgic subjects of their drawings.¹⁰⁷ The notion of decay and the degeneracy of a pristine culture, moreover, was one of the common factors which informed both the later Orientalist and the indigenous reformist approach to Hindu culture whose influence was spreading towards the north from Calcutta in the early nineteenth century.

In the series of articles which were published in the *Journal* and in his major work on the city, *Benares. The Sacred City of the Hindus in Ancient and Modern Times* (1868), Sherring sought to elaborate a history of the holy city based on what he conceded to be concrete historical evidence. His aim in this undertaking was to historicise the city, to describe its condition and development through the different eras of its past, and to determine at what point the myth concerning the sacredness of the city had originated. From a missionary point of view, his project regarding the history of Banaras was somewhat subversive in that he sought to undermine the sacred status of the holy city, which the puranic texts claimed to have existed from time immemorial, by illuminating its historical origins. He accomplished this in a number of ways: by

¹⁰⁵ Rev. M.A. Sherring, *Benares. The Sacred City of the Hindus*, [1868], Delhi, Rupa & Co., 2001, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰⁶ Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India*, London, John Murray, 1861; Fanny Parks, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim: In Search of the Picturesque*, vol 2, London, Pelham Richardson, 1850.

discovering certain new 'facts' about the city's past and by seeking to prove that certain parts of the city deemed to be very sacred and of great antiquity were in fact of recent origin.

In a second article on Banaras published in the *Journal* Sherring was able to assert from the evidence of ancient archaeological debris discovered in the north of the city that the situation of Banaras had shifted considerably from its position in ancient times: 'Moreover, there is no manner of doubt that the site of Benares has considerably shifted, and that at one time it came quite up to the banks of the river Burna, which flows into the Ganges on its northern boundary, and from which it is now distant nearly half a mile, and stretched beyond the opposite bank, until perhaps it coalesced with the ancient city which, if we may believe the Ceylon historians, encompassed Sarnath in the age when Sakya Muni arrived there to "turn the wheel of Law" or previous to it'.¹⁰⁸ The realisation of this discovery allowed Sherring to exclaim with some satisfaction that 'the Hindu pilgrim who performs his wearisome journey of perhaps many hundreds of miles, with the object of reaching holy Kashi, and dying in the city of his fathers, is labouring under a prodigious delusion, for the city which he visits, has been chiefly erected under Mohammedan rule, and on a spot for the most part different from that which his fathers trod'.¹⁰⁹

Thus the poorly hidden purpose behind Sherring's arguments regarding the city's more ancient past was to collapse the popular myths associated with particular sections of the city's sacred geography. In his 1866 article he concluded that the Panchkoshi Road, a famous pilgrimage route which circumvented the modern city and represented the outer limit of its sacred geography, was, contrary to popular belief, in fact of very recent origin. This in itself was enough for him to claim that 'Many pleasant and perhaps hallowed associations connected with Benares, as it now stands, will in the minds of multitudes be in danger of being snapped asunder, when they discover that the Benares of to-day was not the Benares which their forefathers knew'.¹¹⁰ In fact it was not the

¹⁰⁷ William Hodges, *Travels in India, During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1783*, London, 1794; James Prinsep, *Benares Illustrated in a Series of Drawings*, Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1831.

¹⁰⁸ Rev. M.A. Sherring, 'Description of Ancient Remains of Buddhist Monasteries and Temples, and of other buildings, recently discovered in Benares and its Vicinity', *JASB*, 1866, p. 63.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

city's antiquity which he disputed: 'It is, indisputably a place of great antiquity, and may even date from the time when the Aryan race first spread itself over Northern India.

Although such a supposition is incapable of direct proof, the sacred city must undoubtedly, be reckoned amongst the primitive cities founded by this people... But of its great antiquity, stretching back through the dim ages of early Indian history, far into the clouds and mists of the Vedic and pre-historical periods, there is no question'.¹¹¹

That the city was indeed of a very ancient origin was, by the mid-nineteenth century generally accepted even by the most sceptical of antiquarians. But Sherring's assumption that there was a connection in the popular imagination between the ancient status of the city and its claims to sanctity led him to examine the former in order to undermine the latter, based on his rational use of proper historical evidence.

Like other missionaries who lived and worked in the city, Sherring's major preoccupation was to undermine the popular beliefs concerning the holiness of the city. Many missionaries also saw Hinduism as a unitary tradition, with separate sectarian strands that had all shared at some point a common historical origin. According to this perception Banaras stood at the centre of that tradition and represented in its vast array of sectarian and ritual traditions the whole of Hinduism. In the preface to his major work on the city Sherring had claimed 'The city of Benares represents India religiously and intellectually, just as Paris represents the political sentiments of France'.¹¹² It was precisely this symbolic status, as a microcosm of Hinduism in India, that from the missionary perspective made Banaras so important. Banaras was no less than the key to the proselytisation of the rest of India; should they achieve success there, it was believed, the rest of the country might well follow.¹¹³ The Rev. James Kennedy, also of the London Missionary Society, was stationed in Banaras between 1839 and 1868. Like Sherring, he soon realised the significance of the city in its representative function as a symbol of Hinduism: 'What Jerusalem is to the Jews; what Mecca is to the Muhammedans; what Rome is to the Roman Catholics – that, and more than that,

¹¹¹ Sherring, *Benares*, pp. 3-4.

¹¹² *Ibid*, preface, p. xiii

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

Benares is to the Hindus'.¹¹⁴ Kennedy also was aware of the formidable task of trying to spread Christianity in a city so deeply rooted in religious tradition as Banaras: 'When the peculiarities of Benares are in any degree realised, the work of making known the gospel to its inhabitants may appear formidable to the extent of hopelessness'.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless from both a missionary and a scholarly perspective, the most effective way to undermine the special sanctity accrued to the city was to critique it on historical grounds, to demonstrate that Banaras, like other cities, had been subject to historical change and had no more existed beyond the boundaries of conventional time and space, on the point of Lord Shiva's trident, as was claimed in the puranas, than any other place subject to decay and deterioration.

One of the major obstacles to this process of historicisation however was the apparent absence of proper history and chronology in the Hindu records. In his introduction to Sherring's work on Banaras, Fitzedward Hall, a Sanskrit scholar associated with the Government College in the city asserted that 'the attribution to it [Banaras] of peculiar sanctity seems to date from the period of the Puranas'.¹¹⁶ This assertion, based on an accurate dating of the puranic texts, set the date for the emergence of the city as a sacred space to a much later period than the age of the city itself. Drawing on the body of archaeological evidence which he had unearthed near Sarnath Sherring was able to dispute the popularly held belief that the ancient name of the city, Varanasi, had emerged as a result of the city's situation between the rivers Varan in the north and Asi in the south. At the time when this appellation was in use, he argued, the city had not occupied this position at all but had been situated much further to the north beyond the boundary of the river Varan.¹¹⁷ Several decades later in a vernacular account of the city published by the Christian Literature Society, the anonymous writer employed the same tactics of historicisation on the city's learned traditions. The tract, which was in essence an attack on the Hindu practice of idol worship (*murtipuja*), emphasised in the section on Sanskrit learning in the city the successive religious teachers and philosophers who have preached their doctrines in the holy city from the

¹¹⁴ James Kennedy, *Life and Work in Benares and Kumaon, 1839-77*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1884, p. 56.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 78.

¹¹⁶ Fitzedward Hall, Introduction, in Sherring, *Benares*, p. xxx

time of the Buddha.¹¹⁷ Whilst he fails to recognise the inherent potential for innovation that existed within the Sanskrit system of learning, the author maintains according to accepted evidence that most of the current traditions of learning emerged only after the decline of Buddhism in the region.

While it was argued that much of the historical past of the city had been obscured by myths and legends of all descriptions, it was however possible to glean a more accurate reading of the city's past via concrete historical sources. Once a degree of rational historical enquiry had been brought to bear on these sources, both material and textual, it was argued that substantial parts of the city's sacred geography were in fact of a fairly recent date. What these historical investigations revealed moreover were the multiple layers of history that had informed the city's past. Banaras, like other north Indian cities, had been subject to momentous periods of change and revolution, both in its physical appearance and in the religious and scholarly traditions which had taken root and developed within its environs. Instead of immobility and stagnation, the missionary project to historicise Banaras, its religious and scholarly traditions, and thereby debunk the myth of its sanctity, led to its reconstitution as a city of substantial change and innovation.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how both Orientalist and missionary constructions of the early Hindu past and archaic knowledge, often for quite different purposes, served to constitute historically and geographically the image of an antique religion and culture in north India. This region was linked in the colonial imagination not only geographically with the early histories of other antique nations but also historically with the contemporary region through its ongoing social, religious and political institutions. The early history of the Aryans in particular had caught the attention of Orientalists and administrators who served in northern India, as this region clearly evoked the idea of Aryavarta, the primal abode of the Aryans. Though initially Orientalists in the late eighteenth century understood ancient centres such as Banaras as the living embodiment

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 31-32

¹¹⁸ *Kashidarshan*, Allahabad, Christian Literature Society, 1894, p. 19.

of an antique civilisation and religion and therefore devoid of history, this ahistorical perspective was later debunked by missionaries in the nineteenth century who sought to historicise and critique both the ancient status of the sacred city and its learned traditions. Such historical and geographical representations of the city and the region were crucial to the indigenous response to its ancient past and its cultural and intellectual traditions from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The next chapter examines the transmission of colonial historical and geographical knowledge into an indigenous public domain being created via colonial education and vernacular print.

Chapter 3

Diffusing Knowledge: Contest and Mediation in Hindi Textbooks

With the introduction of vernacular lithographic and printing presses in several towns of north India in the 1830s and the simultaneous establishment of a number of government schools in the region the colonial archive of official and semi-official knowledge concerning Indian land and society was soon being translated into the vernacular languages and disseminated amongst sections of the indigenous population. The idea of diffusing 'useful' and improving knowledge to sections of agrarian and urban society through education and vernacular print was encouraged and supported by a new generation of provincial administrators in the North Western Provinces. In particular James Thomason, lieutenant governor of the province between 1843-53, advocated an ambitious program to spread improvement via education among the rural population who had hitherto remained beyond the reach of government administrative and educational reforms.

At the level of higher education the drive to diffuse western knowledge based on liberal, 'universal' principles through education coincided with the ascendancy of Anglicist administrators in the region who, in contrast to the Orientalist emphasis on classical knowledge and Sanskrit learning, advocated the diffusion of scientific rationality through the vernaculars and English. For Thomason also it was the vernacular languages, in particular Urdu, which was considered to be the appropriate 'vehicle for conveying practical and useful knowledge to all classes of people'.¹ In 1843 Thomason proposed that the recently established English College in Banaras and the Sanskrit College be amalgamated. John Muir became the new principal of the College and

¹ Thomason to Wilson, 16 Nov. 1847, Mss. Eur. E301/10, OIOC, quoted in Bayly, *Empire and Information. Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 219.

immediately introduced reforms regarding the study of traditional Sanskrit learning.² In particular, Muir argued for the introduction of works of 'practical utility' into the curriculum rather than concentrating solely on the 'abstruse systems of Hindu philosophy'.³ In addition to this he also urged the use of the vernaculars as the most effective means of instruction as it was the vernacular language and literature which would ultimately lead to the 'enlightenment of the people'.⁴ From henceforth at least one of the vernaculars should be studied alongside the branches of traditional scholarship as well as English.

In the relatively newer sphere of primary and secondary education the focus was on the vernacular and the spread of useful and improving knowledge to a general population. Wood's Educational Dispatch of 1854, which ironically signalled the beginning of the end of the era of government sponsored primary education, summarised the new governmental attitude to educational policy and the role of the vernaculars within it: 'We look, therefore, to the English language and to the vernacular languages of India together as the media for the diffusion of European knowledge, and it is our desire to see them cultivated together in all schools in India of a sufficiently high class to maintain a school-master possessing the requisite qualifications'.⁵ English was to replace the classical languages as the model and standard against which the various vernacular languages should proceed and develop.

This chapter explores the transmission and mediation of new forms of colonial knowledge into the new public domain created by colonial education and print. While the process of knowledge transmission and mediation that took place at the higher level of education, in institutions such as the Benares College, has been explored more fully in the historiographical literature;⁶ there has been less attention given to the ways in which

² An outline of these developments at the College is contained in George Nicholls, *Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Benares Pathshalla or Sanskrit College, Now Forming the Sanskrit Department of the Sanskrit College*, [1848], Allahabad, Government Press, 1907, pp.68-105.

³ Ibid, p. 91.

⁴ John Muir, 'An Address to the Students of the Benares College', in *General Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1844-5*, Allahabad, 1846, pp. xcvi-xciv.

⁵ *Selections from the Educational Records*, part 2, 1840-1859, edited by J.A. Richey, Calcutta, 1922. p. 368.

⁶ For example Nita Kumar, 'Sanskrit Pandits and Modernisation of Sanskrit Education in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in William Radice, ed., *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, Delhi, 1998; Vasudha Dalmia, 'Sanskrit Scholars and Pandits of the Old School: The Benares Sanskrit College and the Constitution of Authority in the Late nineteenth Century', in *Journal of Indian*

modern political, economic and social categories were transmitted into the vernacular sphere at the lower institutional level, in primary and secondary schools in the region and in particular through textbooks.⁷ The chapter therefore seeks to focus on this process taking into account the institutional and linguistic context of the exchange in order to question how new concepts of self and society introduced into the emerging vernacular sphere by colonial education and print created the conditions for new expressions of identity and community in the region in the following decades.

I. Remaking language

The vernacular languages of Hindi and Urdu which became the chosen medium, after English, for the dissemination of useful knowledge in the North Western Provinces themselves underwent a considerable degree of transformation during the first half of the nineteenth century. As has been recently argued for western India,⁸ the modern vernaculars to a great extent attained their modern, standardised form as a result of the ambitious programs of colonial education.⁹ The very idea of a general education meant that a regional standard that would be widely understood had to be developed to replace and ultimately to supersede the large variety of dialects and linguistic idioms that were in existence and which continued to be used in different social and institutional contexts. This involved a restructuring of the vernacular not only vis a vis the classical languages of Sanskrit and Persian but also, more importantly in the case of education, vis a vis

Philosophy, vol. 24, 1996, pp. 321-337; C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, pp. 224-7; Rakesh Pandey, 'Archaic Knowledge, Tradition and Authenticity in Colonial North India, c. 1780-1930', PhD. University of London, 2004, chapter 3.

⁷ The importance of textbooks and education in the transmission of knowledge has been noted by Krishna Kumar, *The Political Agenda of Education*, New Delhi, Sage, 1991 and Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940. Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 89-104.

⁸ Veena Naregal argues for this case in western India in *Language Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere. Western India under Colonialism*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001, chapter 2.

⁹ This is particularly true in the case of Hindi in the first half of the nineteenth century. While there were a small number of Hindi/Nagari newspapers published in this period, for instance *Sudhakar* and the *Benares Akhbar*, the language of these was nearer to Urdu than Hindi. In general, Urdu journalism was much more prevalent than Hindi right up until the twentieth century. Shardadevi Vedalkar, *The Development of Hindi Literature in the Early 19th century (1800-1856)*, Allahabad, Lokbharati Publications, 1969, pp. 166-87.

English.¹⁰ The role of print in this process, where one standard language comes to replace a variety of forms, was of course paramount.

Having chosen to adopt Persian as the language of administration in the wake of its Mughal predecessors, East India Company officials in the late-eighteenth century soon realised the political imperatives of knowing the various vernaculars of the territories under their control.¹¹ To this end Fort William College in Calcutta was founded and a number of pandits and munshis employed to teach incoming servants the basics of classical and regional languages.¹² Pro-vernacular Orientalists such as John Gilchrist (1759-1842), according to their own understanding of the linguistic situation in the region, encouraged the munshis to produce texts that made a clear distinction between two forms of the vernacular, one that utilised the Persian script with a predominance of Perso-Arabic vocabulary and another in the Devanagari script with mainly Sanskrit-derived vocabulary. The vernacular textbooks and anthologies that were produced according to this system, mostly translations of classical works, set an early standard for the re-definitions of Hindi and Urdu in the years to come.¹³ Due to a rising demand amongst Company servants early grammars and dictionaries of the vernacular were produced at this time and these too generally made a distinction between two principle forms of the spoken language, increasingly now known as Hindi and Urdu, or Hindustani.¹⁴ Shortly after this early institutionalisation of two distinct idioms missionary efforts at proselytisation in north India led to a further dichotomisation. In their efforts to engage with the vast community of north Indian Hindus, missionaries produced translations of the Bible and gospels in a form of the vernacular which they

¹⁰ The role of English as the new high language in restructuring the vernaculars in north India in the early nineteenth century has still not received a close study.

¹¹ Bernard Cohn's seminal essay on the British cultivation of Indian languages discusses the relationship of power inherent in this process. B.A. Cohn, 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command', in *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994.

¹² For a full account of the activities of pandits and munshis at Fort William see Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis. An Account of the College of Fort William*, Orion Publications, Calcutta, 1978.

¹³ Examples of such texts in Urdu and Hindi were *Baghi Urdu*, 1802, a translation of the *Gulistan* by Mir Ali Afsos, *Hidayat-ul-Islam*, 1804, a translation from the Arabic and *Hitopadesh*, 1806, a translation from the Sanskrit. Also in Hindi were collections from folk literature, *Baital Pachisi*, *Ukhlaqi Hindi*. See S.K. Das, chapter 5.

¹⁴ The most commercially successful of these were written by Gilchrist himself and sold in Britain and India. See for example *A Grammar of the Hindoostanee language*, Calcutta, 1806; *The Oriental Linguist*,

understood, for practical reasons, as being the popular, spoken language of the Hindus.¹⁵ The missionary understanding of the division between Hindustani, or Urdu, and Hindi was from an early stage based on the preconception of religious difference. Missionaries pioneered the founding of printing presses and fonts in north India¹⁶ and their translation enterprises were later institutionalised in the form of Tract and Book societies which were established to distribute pedagogical literature to missionary schools throughout the region, as well as to provide proselytising materials.¹⁷ Vedralankar states that while the early Hindi tracts were nearly all translations from English, Sanskrit, Bengali and Urdu and thus bore the impress of the original language in their style, the later tracts, composed after 1823, were approaching the modern standard.¹⁸ The School Book Societies which followed on from these organisations were responsible for producing a wide range of textbook material for the burgeoning school book market.¹⁹ The Ram Saran Das series of Hindi texts in particular were extensively circulated in the North Western Provinces in the 1850s. This series included books on subjects with a positivist emphasis such as elementary primers, arithmetical tables, geometry, history, geography, mathematics, natural philosophy, hygiene, letter-writing, painting, drawing and moral

Calcutta, 1798; *A Dictionary, English and Hindoostanee*, 2 vols, Calcutta, 1798 *The Strangers East Indian Guide to the Hindoostanee; or Grand Popular Language of India*, Calcutta, 1802;

¹⁵ Vedralankar gives a full account of the early missionary understanding of Hindi in chapter 3 of her monograph.

¹⁶ See Vedralankar chapter 3 on the proselytising activities of John Chamberlain in north India. Also W. Yates, *Memoirs of Mr. John Chamberlain and Rev. F.A. Fox, History of the Baptist Missionary Society (from 1792-1842)*, 2 vols, Calcutta, 1825.

¹⁷ The following information on tract and school book societies is taken from Vedralankar. In 1823 the Calcutta Tract and Book Society was instituted. The total number of tracts published up to 1835 was 41 including biographical sketches, sermons, one memoir and one on travels. Most of the tracts published by the Society were by William Bowley, an Anglo-Indian Christian convert. A few Hindi tracts were composed by M.T. Adam. Later he compiled a Hindi Dictionary (1829) and Hindi Grammar (1827) and a few text books. His compositions were mainly for schools. The Banaras Tract Society was established in 1827; but owing to the death of some of its active members, it ceased to exist in 1829. It was re-established for the Districts of Benares and Chunar, as a branch of the Calcutta Tract Society in 1834. The first report published in 1836, stated that during the 18 months the Society had been in operation, 25,000 copies of vernacular tracts had been circulated. In 1840 the Banaras Tract Society was merged into the Christian Tract Society. It was re-established as a separate organisation in 1844 and was for some time styled 'The Central North India Tract Society.' It was amalgamated with the Agra Tract Society which was instituted in 1848. Most of the Hindi tracts published by the Society were chiefly reprints. Some of these were revised by Rev. W. Smith of the Benares Tract Society. The total number of the tracts published in Hindi was thirty. During the Mutiny in 1857, the whole of the Society's stock was destroyed. The transfer of the seat of Government of NWP from Agra to Allahabad rendered the latter more central and the Society's headquarters were removed from there early in 1858. A new title was also assumed 'The North Indian Tract and Book Society'. Vedralankar, *Development of Hindi Literature*, chapter 3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

instruction.²⁰ These books, mostly translations from English originals, covered all the subjects taught at primary and some secondary education. The two principal Indian translators were Pandit Srilal, Superintendent of the Central School in Kanpur and Pandit Vamsidhar in Agra. The texts they wrote in a simple and often colloquial style of Hindi served as linguistic models for the style of Hindi that was employed in government schools in the region over the following decades. The Vernacular Literature Society was established in 1851. It patronised translations but also supported original compositions in Hindi and other regional languages. The Agra School Book Society and the Calcutta School Book Society published texts and tracts associated with education which had an improving and civilising influence. Many of the early (pre-1840) texts were later revised and improved by native scholars working under the patronage of the government.²¹

Simultaneous to the institutionalisation of vernacular languages in provincial education, a series of philological enterprises sponsored and patronised by the colonial government established the roots and grammatical structure of the Hindi language and its various 'dialects'. Beginning with short collections of words and word groups published in the early volumes of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*,²² during the second half of the century these rather simplistic taxonomic manoeuvres were developed into sophisticated philological analyses in the form of comparative grammars of the modern Indo-Aryan languages of northern India.²³ The colonial interest in the classification and history of Indian vernaculars did much both to constitute and to legitimise standard forms of these languages which were then developed and energetically deployed in the expanding indigenous public spheres. In his grammar of 1876 Rev. S.A. Kellogg used the term 'modern standard Hindi' to designate the 'Hindi which agrees in grammatical

¹⁹ See Vedalkar, chapter 4 for fuller information on early school textbooks.

²⁰ Examples of books published before 1846 include: *Balkhon ke liye Pratham Siksa Pustak* (First Primer for children); *Mul Sutra* (Spelling Book); *Nitikatha*, 2 vols, (Moral tales); *Manoranjan Itihas*, (Entertaining Histories); *Upadesa Katha* (Cautionary Tales). See J.F. Blumhardt, *Catalogue of the Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushtu Printed Books in the Library of the British Museum*, London, 1893.

²¹ See below for information on native scholars.

²² For example Major R. Leech, 'Notes on, and a short vocabulary of the Hinduwee Dialect of Bundelkhand from the political secretary of the government', *JASB*, Calcutta, 1843, pp. 1086-2002.

²³ The first and most influential of these were two grammars published in 1872 by John Beames, *A Comparative Grammar of the Modern Aryan Languages of India*, vol. 1, On Sounds, London, 1872 and Rudolph Hoernle, 'Essays in aid of a Comparative Grammar of the Gaurian Languages', *JASB*, Calcutta, 1872, pp. 120-173.

form with the Urdu' and which is used as the '*lingua franca*' and has been adopted by 'the educational authorities as the medium of vernacular instruction in all Hindi schools'.²⁴ Even by the middle of the century, however, the use of Khari Boli Hindi in school textbooks had already established a hegemonic standard which proved to be an enduring one.

Beyond the immediate impact of colonial educational and intellectual enterprises in the construction of a standardised Hindi, it was the administrative and policy decisions made by the state concerning the use of vernacular languages in the official sphere that contributed substantially to the controversy which developed in the indigenous sphere over Hindi and Urdu in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁵ The resolution of 1837 which had stated that vernacular languages were to be substituted in place of Persian for use in the judicial and revenue departments had two major consequences for the formation of polarised linguistic identities in the region.²⁶ Firstly, since it was Urdu in the Persian script which was recognised as the official language in the North Western Provinces and Oudh, there was a restriction on access to government jobs to those professional groups and communities who spoke and were literate in Urdu. Irrespective of the broad multi-lingualism of most sections of the educated and elite north Indian society,²⁷ the preference for Urdu over Hindi in official circles was taken to be symptomatic of the government supporting a class of people, namely the traditional Muslim landowning families and service gentry of north India, as well as a number of Hindu service castes, who had traditionally always had access to administrative

²⁴ Rev S.A. Kellogg, *Grammar of the Hindi Language*, Allahabad, 1876, p. vii.

²⁵ There is an extensive and exhaustive literature on the development of Hindi and Urdu during the nineteenth century and the history of their split. For example see C. Shackle and R. Snell, *Hindi and Urdu since 1800: A Common Reader*, SOAS, London, 1990; David Lelyveld, 'The Fate of Hindustani: Colonial Knowledge and the Project of National Language', in Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Pennsylvania, 1993, pp. 189-214; Christopher King, *One Language Two Scripts. The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1994; Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions. Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benares*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997; Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, Delhi, Orient Longman, 2001. A more contentious approach because it situates the split much earlier than the nineteenth century is that of A. Rai in *A House Divided: The Origin and Development of Hindi-Urdu*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991.

²⁶ Act no. XXIX of the Governor General in Council,

²⁷ See the testimony of Bharatendu Harischandra of Banaras before the Hunter Commission in 1882 in which he stated that he spoke Hindi, Sanskrit, Urdu and Persian, *Education Commission, Report by the NWP and Oudh Provincial Committee; with evidence taken before the Committee and Memorials addressed to the Education Commission*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 200.

positions.²⁸ Secondly, the official policy of preference for Urdu in administration was in conflict with the educational policy of the government which recognised both Hindi and Urdu at the primary and secondary levels of education at least until the 1850s when it ceased to subsidise primary education in the province.²⁹ This contradiction became the principal platform on which the agitation in support of Hindi developed after 1870.³⁰ The statistics on education showed poor standards of literacy and attendance in the schools of the North Western Provinces and this lack of progress was presented by Hindi supporters to be the result of giving Urdu official status when the majority of the population was educated in Hindi and Hindi-speaking.³¹

The rhetorical arguments which crystallised around the opposing idioms of Hindi and Urdu were constructed on the basis of these two elements, the official language and the language of education. Thus Hindi supporters claimed that Urdu was essentially a foreign language, that the Persian script was at best ambiguous and at worst illegible, that its potential for distortion encouraged clerical mischief, and that the use of Urdu for official purposes had led to an artificially Persianised idiom which no one could understand.³² Hindi was denigrated likewise as the language of uneducated rustic villagers that was inherently unfit for official use due to its lack of refinement. In fact it was the political nature of the contention with Urdu which determined the intellectual and cultural terms on which Hindi was constructed at the end of the nineteenth century. Again, much of the linguistic stereotyping that was employed in the indigenous sphere was based on polarities that had first been developed in colonial discursive practices.³³ Urdu was represented as the language of the largely urban and educated Muslim elite while Hindi was the rustic mother-tongue of the vast rural population. Ironically it was

²⁸ See reference to this point in the petition supporting Hindi of Madan Mohan Malaviya, *Court Characters and Primary Education in the NWP and Oudh*, Allahabad, 1897.

²⁹ The government education policy which was developed in the 40s and 50s of the century failed to offer a clear direction on the vernacular of the province, 'Order of Government', *Report on Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces and Oudh*, 1873-4, Allahabad, 1875. See also King, *One Language*, p. 102.

³⁰ See *Sampadak*, editorial, *Harischandra's Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 1, 15 October 1873.

³¹ Evidence of Aubinash Chander Bannerjee and Pandit Din Dayal Tiwari before the Hunter Commission, *Education Commission*, pp. 160-175.

³² Evidence of Babu Tota Ram, Faja Uday Pratap Singh and Babu Birshwar Mittra before Hunter Commission, *Education Commission*, pp. 318, 347, 400. See also memorial from inhabitants and residents of Allahabad, *ibid*, pp. 423-6.

the elite status of Urdu and the perception of it as the language of a privileged minority which sealed its fate in the new representative politics adopted in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The creation of a standard for Hindi had inevitable repercussions in terms of generating a linguistic hierarchy between the various idioms and registers of the language and their respective scripts.³⁴ Both in the colonial and the indigenous spheres there was some debate as to what this standard should be. In his testimony to the Hunter Commission on education in 1882 Harischandra stated that though there were four main categories of dialect in the region, Purbi, Kannaui, Brajbhasha and Khari Boli only two of these, Brajbhasha and Khari Boli, merited attention. The vernacular language was according to him 'the dialect spoken by all classes of people in public places and on public occasions...or the dialect in which books were written'.³⁵ Like other educated north Indians Harischandra admitted to speaking a variety of languages and linguistic registers which he employed in different social contexts. His definition of Hindi as the public language, what he termed *nij bhasha*, at this point in time suggests the onset of a process whereby language becomes increasingly multipurpose and people increasingly mono-lingual. Thus the impact of print, the requirements of colonial education to transmit useful and improving knowledge to a large number of people with varying linguistic habits and the recognised need for a public language to be used in the public domain meant that a standard was required to replace the broad variation of forms.

II. Institutional and social contexts

After 1843, largely due to the initiatives of James Thomason, there was considerable government support for primary schools in the localities of the region and for public instruction through the vernacular.³⁶ New initiatives were undertaken to write and translate elementary textbooks in the vernacular that could be used in schools across the

³³ For example in the Appendices attached to the memorial of the inhabitants of Allahabad were a number of testimonies by colonial officials such as F.S. Growse and Rev. S.H. Kellogg which presented a series of stereotypical representations of Hindi and Urdu, *Education Commission*, pp. 433-6.

³⁴ A typical such contest developed between the Nagari and Kaithi scripts after its official adoption in Bihar in 1880, see King, *One Language*, pp. 65-9.

³⁵ *Education Commission*, p. 200.

³⁶ Thomason introduced his 'Complete Scheme of Vernacular Education' in 1846 which was finally put into practise in selected districts in 1850.

region. The School Book Societies, mentioned above and the Vernacular Literature Society were responsible for commissioning and publishing textbooks and had management committees which were composed of both European and 'native' members. These Societies were later amalgamated into government structures, firstly the General Committee of Public Instruction and latterly the Department of Public Instruction and served as a mediating channel between colonial and native interests in education. Their procedures and those of the Textbook Committees which superseded them functioned on the basis of voluntary association and became models for similar forums that the new intelligentsia would establish to represent native interests.³⁷

Despite the provincial government's stated objective of general education to a mass population the School Book Societies and Educational Societies on the whole represented an elite level of native interest. From the 1830s much of the school text book writing was carried out by Indians employed in the provincial education department as translators, as teachers and more latterly as school inspectors at the district and divisional levels. The textbooks were mostly commissioned by education officials but also occasionally written speculatively. In some cases, in particular where a textbook became popular and went through several editions, there was a degree of collaboration between the native textbook writers and education officials.³⁸ These men embodied a small class of intellectuals who through their linguistic skill and bilingualism were able to perform the task of translation and the creation and mediation of new forms of knowledge in the vernacular. In many ways they constituted a new breed of native official, replacing an earlier generation of colonial employees,³⁹ who through their contact with western liberal education appeared to straddle simultaneously both the older indigenous systems of knowledge and the new rational-critical techniques espoused by western scientific knowledge.

³⁷ Up until 1894 there were separate Textbook Committees for each of the educational divisions in NWP. After that date a new UP Textbook Committee was set up with a separate sub-committee for Hindi. For a similar process in western India see Naregal, *Language Politics*, chapter 2.

³⁸ See Avril Powell's discussion of the collaboration between Kempson and Shiva Prasad on *Itihas Timirnasik*, also discussed below. Avril Powell, 'History Textbooks and the Transmission of the Pre-colonial Past in North Western India in the 1860s and 1870s' in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, ed. Daud Ali, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 91-133.

³⁹ The first generation of native officials to be involved in colonial education were the pandits and munshis employed at Fort William College. See Sisir Kumar Das, *Pandits and Munshis*.

Many of the pandits and munshis working at the intermediate and collegiate levels of instruction had themselves received some formal education in western subjects such as geography and history as well as learning English and taking western style exams. All of them however, had received a traditional education in some or all of the branches of Sanskrit or Persian learning.⁴⁰ Bal Shastri, the foremost pandit in Banaras, taught *Samkhya* philosophy at the Banaras College but was known to be well versed in the Vedas, the Dharmashastras and the classical schools of philosophy, as well as being a grammarian. Rajaram Shastri also taught Samkhya as well as Dharmashastra at the College but he also functioned as a judge in the District Court of Azamgarh. Bapu Deva Shastri was a professor of mathematics and astrology at the Benares Sanskrit College. He had been exposed for some years to the 'rational pragmatism' of western empiricist thought through his association with British scholars at the college and in particular its principal from 1847, James Ballantyne.⁴¹ He had also become well known amongst the British scholarly establishment for his translation of the twelfth century Sanskrit work on Hindu astronomy, the *Surya Siddhanta*, by the astronomer Bhaskaracharya in which he had sought to prove, in contention to the claims of several British scholars, the advanced state of Indian astronomy at the time as compared with western astronomy.⁴² He was moreover one of the very few north Indian scholars to have penetrated the elite circle of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta.

While these men symbolised the vanguard of indigenous classical scholarship and occupied the highest levels of the indigenous and colonial scholarly establishment in places such as Banaras, they were often simultaneously involved in the translation and composition of more lowly textbooks for the elementary and middle school book market.⁴³ Lower down the scale of the colonial education system there was another type of indigenous intellectual, many of whom were also traditional scholars but were employed in the more mundane tasks of translating, revising and composing textbooks

⁴⁰ For example, Babu, later Raja Shiva Prasad who became Joint Inspector of Schools in the Benares Circle was educated in both Persian and Sanskrit traditions of knowledge. See Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 234.

⁴¹ C. A. Bayly, 'Orientalists, Informants and Critics in Benares, 1790-1860', in Jamal Malik, ed., *Perspectives of Mutual Encounters in South Asian History 1760-1860*, Leiden, 2000, pp. 115-126.

⁴² Bapu Deva Shastri, *The Surya Siddhanta, an ancient system of Hindu astronomy; with Ranganatha's exposition, the Gudhartha Prakasaka*, ed., F. Hall, *Biblioteca Indica*, 25, Calcutta, 1854.

⁴³ For example the work on geography by Bapu Deva Shastri discussed below.

as well as missionary tracts for school book societies. Men such as Pandit Srilal who was Superintendent of the government Central School in Kanpur and a translator for the Ram Saran Das series. Pandit Ratneshvar was a teacher at the government college in Sehore and wrote textbooks for the Agra School Book Society in the 1840s.⁴⁴ Unlike the higher level/English educated intelligentsia discussed above, these men on the whole had received a vernacular education at the school level. Lala Sitaram (1858-1937) was a teacher and translator who worked for the education department in several districts for most of his life. He was also a member of the Textbook Committee and a composer of Hindi textbooks. A final example of this type of 'native' intellectual was Babu, later Raja, Shiva Prasad (1823-95) who served as Joint Inspector of Schools for the Banaras Division, later to be made a full Inspector, for much of his career. Shiva Prasad, who was born into a rich mercantile family of Banaras, had received a classical Persian as well as a Sanskrit and English education and attended the Benares Sanskrit College for some of his education.⁴⁵ Though he retired in 1878 Shiva Prasad was a prominent public figure who worked in government service most of his life. He was awarded the prestigious Star of India in 1874 and the hereditary title of Raja in 1887 by the British.⁴⁶ Thus while there was little uniformity in social background or economic status between the various types of indigenous intellectual it is important to recognise their role collectively both as the mediators of new forms of knowledge and as intermediaries who to a greater or lesser extent straddled the gap between the knowledge systems of pre-colonial India and the western scientific rationalism that was to dominate both Orientalist and nationalist discourse on India in the decades to come.

In addition to occupying subordinate positions within government offices and the colonial educational bureaucracy many of the native intelligentsia were simultaneously involved in the new institutional fora, such as the Benares Institute, formerly the Debating Club, which were being established in several towns of the province.⁴⁷ The Benares Institute was set up around 1860, initially by a small group of English educated

⁴⁴ See his guide to letter-writing *Patramalika*, Agra, 1841 discussed in chapter five.

⁴⁵ Shiva Prasad authored about forty different works, mainly school textbooks, written in Hindi and Urdu. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 234.

⁴⁶ See biography in G.A. Grierson, 'The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Part 1, Calcutta, 1888, p. 148ff.

⁴⁷ See list of members in *Transactions of the Benares Institute for the Session 1864-65*, Benares, 1865.

natives of the city to provide a forum for discussion on various branches of knowledge. The membership however soon extended to other sections of native society and eventually to missionaries and Orientalists based in the city. The hierarchical ordering which developed among the members of this association reflects a similar order in the authority attributed to the various sources of knowledge by the indigenous intelligentsia in the region. After the Maharajas of Benares and Vizianagaram who were its patrons the administrative structure of the institute was composed of Europeans and only three high level natives – Raja Dev Narayan Singh, who was president and Babus Fateh Narayan Singh and Aiswarya Narayan Singh who were vice-president and secretary respectively. Below these were the English educated native gentlemen who had first formed the Debating Club. The essays delivered to the members at each meeting were later printed in the *Transactions* for a wider audience.⁴⁸ From the second half of the nineteenth century organisations such as this one provided an institutional basis for the exchange and transmission of ideas between colonial intellectuals - Orientalists, missionaries and administrators - and the newly forming indigenous intelligentsia.⁴⁹

III. Disciplining the land

School Book Societies and latterly the Department of Public Instruction in the North Western Provinces commissioned the composition and translation of books in the vernacular languages of Hindi and Urdu. Alongside school books teaching basic grammar and arithmetic, texts on agriculture were also produced at the behest of the Lieutenant Governor of the province. These texts teaching basic measurement, land surveying techniques and arithmetic to a largely rural population were aimed directly at village cultivators and proprietors to aid in the management of their land and to offer advice on how to improve on existing methods of cultivation. Land revenue settlement which, as we have seen in a previous chapter, was undertaken extensively from the 1820s, had required the execution of rough field maps by native revenue officials or qanungos. These represented village and mahal boundaries, crops, soil types and areas of cultivation and wasteland. The surveying and measurement manuals which were

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ There was a further Institute in Ballia, a town to the north east of Banaras.

published and disseminated on these subjects in elementary schools were meant to rationalise the techniques of land measurement and surveying and to extend agrarian literacy.

Texts like *Khet Karm* (A Field Manual) which went through its third edition in 1853 was a compendium of land types, agricultural practices, modes of assessment and types of revenue payment aimed at village cultivators. In the preface to this work the author, or rather the translator since it first appeared in Urdu, claimed to have used a simple village dialect (*gav ki bolchal*) that could be easily understood by rural people.⁵⁰ *Gramya Kalpadrum* by Pandit Vamsidhar was another text aimed at agriculturalists which set out the land and revenue regulations in the province. In this work the meaning of revenue-related terms and social categories like zamindar are explained in the form of a glossary.⁵¹ Other types of manuals demonstrating basic accounting techniques for village patwaris and urban and rural merchants also became popular.⁵² Such 'popular' texts aimed at a large and poorly educated audience were meant to ensure that colonial cartographic, agricultural and economic knowledge, as discussed in the first chapter, was gradually communicated to the indigenous sphere.

The various typologies regarding land and environment adopted in these texts tended to follow a western positivist approach to agricultural knowledge. Inevitably they employed a scheme of classification regarding land and soil types which reflected colonial concerns about productivity and value. In *Khet Karm* areas designated as being wasteland (*banjar dharti*) or left in an uncultivated condition are represented as evidence of the absence of improvement.⁵³ Elsewhere the classification of agricultural and natural resources in the countryside is presented as being evidence of the wealth of natural resources but the absence of technology and science to reap the benefits.

Much of the information which went into these agricultural manuals and village handbooks was drawn from the official records of revenue, trade and legal departments.

⁵⁰ Kale Ray, *Khet Karm*, Agra, 3rd ed., 1853. Kale Ray was the Deputy Collector of Farukhabad. The original text was in Urdu and in the preface it is explained that a Hindi translation was needed to make it more comprehensible to village people. Other similar texts from the same period include *Map Prabandha* (Map Composition), trans. by Pt Vamsidhar from the Hindustani *Risaleh Paimaish*, Agra, 1853; *Kshetra Chandrika* (Manual on Land Surveying), trans. Pt Sri Lal, Agra, 4th ed., 1855.

⁵¹ Pt Vamsidhar, *Gramya Kalpadrum*, Agra, 1863.

⁵² *Patwariyon ki Pustaka* (Manual for Patwaris), Agra, 1849; *Mahajanom ki Pustaka* (Manual for Merchants), Agra, 1849.

As we have seen in the first chapter such official records were themselves often attempts to understand and represent local conditions and specialist forms of knowledge, and accordingly they often sought to derive their taxonomies and systems of classification from the existing conditions and institutions of rural life. In this respect they represent significant sites of encounter between the 'embodied' knowledge of local specialists and the rationalised knowledge of colonial science.⁵⁴ Colonial classifications of social and religious types which had first appeared in the form of revenue, trade and statistical records were thence transported into the vernacular realm through their translation into vernacular print. Textbooks such as *Khet Karma*, printed in Urdu and Hindi, were thus perhaps the first stage in which the colonial classifications and categories of social and religious groups were internalised by local populations.⁵⁵ Language also for the first time became a marker of difference in such texts which demonstrate incipient devices for defining communities. In *Khet Karma* all non-Hindi Persian and Arabic derived words and terms were underlined in the text. Even the term zamindar was underlined and designated as being a Persian word. Although after 1850 a decline in government support for primary school education meant a simultaneous decline in the production of the more elementary of the school textbooks, particularly those aimed at the rural population, the wider support among the native intelligentsia for vernacular education in the province after this period ensured the continued production of texts dealing with the more established disciplines, such as geography and history.

The new science of colonial geography which was introduced from the 1830s into a similar arena of village and provincial schools became an important site for the mediation of this new type of economic and political information. Geography textbooks had been produced in abundance from the 1830s for the school book market. The discipline of geography which had been developing rapidly in Europe since the eighteenth century was seen as a particularly appropriate medium through which to represent both the new political and territorial conquests of British power in India and to

⁵³ *Khet Karma*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Reference to the *Kitab i Halat i Dihee*, (Book of Village Affairs), Agra, 1850, and its author, Jumaloodeen Hussun (sic), who was the deputy collector of Mynpoorie and represented just this type of embodied local knowledge, by Charles Raikes, *Notes on Notes on the North Western Provinces of India*, London, 1852, p. 80.

⁵⁵ See chapter one, pp. 55-60.

communicate the principles of western positivist empiricism. In the introductions to their works, writers and translators often referred to the laws of Newton and Copernicus as forming the basis of their investigations. According to these principles, texts began with a description of the globe, its shape and various terra-aqueous divisions followed by a description of the world divided into continents and nations.⁵⁶ The *Bhugol Darpana*, for instance, sets forth a straightforward list of political divisions followed by another of cities, rivers, mountains and so on. In this case conceptual/political categories were listed alongside physical categories thus naturalising the former to appear consistent with the latter. 'National' territories were also defined in terms of their 'other' spaces, or the nations that lay externally to their borders. Hindustan, which was described as the territory which the British had inherited from the Mughals was represented as an historical nation whose various parts had been united during the time of the Mughal empire.⁵⁷

Despite an unequivocal projection of political space as being both exclusive and unambiguous in its form of sovereignty, several aspects of these early texts indicate that the mediation of western scientific knowledge into the indigenous sphere was not enacted without some slippage, both in the information transmitted and in the process of translation. In the case of Hindustan and, more specifically the Gangetic Provinces, many of the texts displayed an inconsistency and vagueness regarding the representation of political and administrative divisions. The *Bhugol Darpana* described the Gangetic Provinces as consisting of Bengal, Bihar, Ilahabad, Avadh, Agra and Delhi. Within this division moreover each region had several major cities. Those of Bengal were Calcutta, Dhaka and Murshidabad; those of Bihar were Azimabad, Ilahabad, Banaras, Azimgarh, Jivanpur and Ghazipur.⁵⁸ While the author does not refer to the source from which he has drawn this division it is clear that he is not following any colonial division of the region since at the time of publication the cities of Ilahabad, Banaras, Azimgarh and Ghazipur were all part of the colonial province of the North Western Provinces of the Bengal Presidency. Furthermore, while Bengal, Bihar and Awadh were all substantial

⁵⁶ This is the order of most of the early texts such as *Bhugol Darpana* (Mirror of Geography), Calcutta, 1835; *Jyotish aur Goladhyaya* (Astronomy and Geography), Serampore, 1822; Pt Ratnalal, *Bhugol Darpana*, Calcutta, 1838.

⁵⁷ *Bhugol Darpana*, 1835, p. 40.

regions in their own right, Ilahabad, Agra and Delhi were merely individual districts of the new North Western Provinces.

A second text also called *Bhugol Darpana* demonstrates a similar tone of confusion and inconsistency regarding the correct provincial and regional divisions. In this text the author claims that at the time of the emperor Akbar Upper Hindustan had been divided into eleven regions, or *pradesh*, and while the boundaries of these divisions had since changed the names had remained the same.⁵⁹ The author then goes on to claim that the British territories of Hindustan included the Bengal, Madras and Bombay presidencies. Within the Bengal presidency were Bihar, Avadh, Orissa as well as Agra, Delhi and Allahabad. Bengal itself was divided into six administrative districts, or *zila*, which included Calcutta, Murshidabad, Dhaka, Patna, Banaras and Bareilly! It is clear from these examples that the relatively recent changes to colonial administrative and provincial divisions had not been thoroughly absorbed by the composers of geography textbooks. In many of the early texts in fact the adoption of the Mughal term *suba* to indicate province indicates their archaic influences, since this term had been abandoned some years before as an administrative division. The early period in which these texts were produced suggests that a degree of vagueness as to administrative divisions still persisted both in colonial and, more understandably, in indigenous circles. The level of collaboration moreover between colonial administrators involved in education and native textbook writers is unclear in this period. Nevertheless, we see that whereas on the one hand new concepts of political space are represented, incorporating modern notions of political boundaries as an indication of absolute and exclusive sovereignty, on the other the representation of the internal divisions of Hindustan often turned out to be closer to the inherited Mughal divisions than the new provinces of British India.

Bearing in mind that most vernacular texts from this early period were translations of English originals a further disruption to the smooth transmission of western geographical knowledge into the sphere of colonial education is apparent in the inadequacy and inconsistency of the vernacular terminology used to convey western geographical and political concepts. The word *bhugol* was a combination of the Sanskrit

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.30.

⁵⁹ *Bhugol Darpana*, 1838, p. 21.

term *bhu*, meaning land, earth or ground and the term *gol*, meaning round or globe. There were no terms to convey the idea of 'geography' as an independent science, distinct from astronomy and astrology. Words like *desh*, *jagat*, *pradesh*, *mulk*, *prant* and so on which had a broad and variable meaning in their indigenous usage which was determined by context and even by the social position of the audience being addressed,⁶⁰ were henceforth employed in these texts to refer to modern political categories such as nation, region, state and globe. This collision of old and new meanings emerged in the use of a single term to denote several different concepts. For example, the word *desh* was used to mean country or nation as well as a small locality or village. The general direction of this translation process however was more often from a multiple and contingent meaning to a singular and exclusive one. Thus the mediation of western science into the public realm depended on the taxonomies and vocabularies of vernacular languages and their regional idioms.

That the remnants of older, pre-modern categories of space and environment appeared, albeit inconsistently, in textual representations of new forms of knowledge is not altogether surprising when one considers both the early period in which the texts were written and the social and educational background of their authors. Despite the patronage of their British employers and their role as mediators of the new knowledge these men had all received a traditional education and remained more or less rooted in their own cultural environment. Bapu Deva Shastri's text, *Bhugol Varnan*, published in Mirzapur in 1853 encompasses an interesting example of the mediation of traditional Sanskrit based knowledge in the new political and cultural context of western education and learning. In his introduction Bapu Deva claimed that he was moved to write such a text by the general ignorance he encountered amongst the people, both of their own region and of their country.⁶¹ Certainly the conventional list of topics to be covered in the introduction – the physical co-ordinates of countries, their languages, customs, raw materials and manufactured goods and their arts – does not indicate the content to be anything different to the empirically driven compendia of British geographies.

⁶⁰ For an argument about the social context of pre-colonial language use see David Washbrook, 'To Each a Language of his Own': Language, Culture and Society in Colonial India', in P.J. Corfield, ed., *Language, History and Class*, Oxford, 1991.

⁶¹ *Bhugol Varnan*, Mirzapur, 1853, p. 1.

Nevertheless, from the outset Bapu Deva's text suggests a more complex negotiation of older, specifically classical and shastric-based, notions of space and environment alongside the newer designations of western scientific geography. For example, in the first and largest section of the work, on India, Bapu Deva employs the Sanskrit term Bharatvarsha to denote the country in addition to the more popular term Hindustan. His explanation of the meaning of the term, furthermore, was based on the Puranic notion that Bharatvarsh was so called because it referred to the land that once belonged to Raja Bharat.⁶² This reference was then elaborated in his description of Bharatvarsh as being in the shape of a triangle with its base in the north, across the Himalayas, and its apex in the south; a description which mirrored that in the Mahabharata of Bharatvarsh as being in the shape of an equilateral triangle that was divided internally into four smaller triangles representing different regions of the subcontinent. The second term he uses, Hindustan, also involved the grafting of an older definition of cultural and religious space onto a modern conception of national territory. Hindustan, he claimed, was the term used more recently to refer to the land occupied by the Hindus. In Bapu Deva's usage both terms have been applied to the concept of a political territorial unit, but the former which he used in his title, denotes a more explicitly Hindu religious and cultural context.

After this introduction to the terms used to refer to India Bapu Deva gave a region by region description of the subcontinent. Each one is noted for its climate, topography, agriculture, trade, customs and languages. Throughout this section the author continued to import older categories of space and cultural notions of land and people into the new territorial divisions. Regions are divided internally by the different types of land that characterise them. Distinctions are made between hilly areas and plains, riverine and dry territories. The author demonstrates a detailed knowledge of places, the various types of agriculture that are practised, the raw and manufactured materials of each province and the customs and habits of the people that inhabit them. In contrast to the format of other geography texts however little mention is made of the political condition of each region, its government and system of rule; instead places are noted for their local produce, their markets, trade, religious significance, their pilgrimage

⁶² Ibid, p. 2; Schwartzberg, ed., *South Asian Cartography*, p. 311.

places and historical importance. In the north, the city of Allahabad is noted for its significance in the Hindu shastra. Its name prior to the Muslim empire was Prayag and along with Varanasi or Kashi, now known as Banaras, it is considered to be a holy (*param pavitra sthan*) and merit-giving (*punya kshetra*) place for those pilgrims who visit it. There are eight thousand Brahmin households in Kashi and the city has been famous for its excellence in all the branches of Hindu learning since ancient times. Also in the north, the colonial district of Agra which is divided into five smaller divisions is noted for its historical significance. Nearby is the ancient Hindu city of Kannauj, once a centre of Hindu political power and the pilgrimage centres of Mathura and Vrindavan, sacred to the gods Krishna and Radha. The region of Bihar is noted for its links to the ancient past: the southern part was once the powerful Hindu kingdom of Magadha, while the northern portion was Mitthila, birthplace of the Buddha. Tirhut is a famous place in this district as it is renowned for the learning of its Brahmins who are versed in Nyaya and Jyotish. Avadh, still an independent kingdom, is called by its Sanskrit name, Uttarakosala, and is famous for the city of Ayodhya.

To what precise degree Bapu Deva employed modern classifications of political and economic space, or not, is difficult to ascertain. The point is that his text reveals a complex array of influences which included those of European interpretations of Indian/Hindu culture as well as European ideas about climate and race, and he attached to these indigenous social and moral meanings. In the account of the Gangetic Provinces the author distinguished between certain types of environment and the concomitant nature and disposition of the inhabitants. In the flat, marshy lands in the north of Bihar, known as the *terai*, wild animals are in abundance and regularly destroy the neighbouring crops. The people here are also described as being physically strong and resilient in contrast to the people of other less demanding environments.⁶³ This connection between climate, topography and human disposition which the author makes draws on older conceptions of the influence of the environment and ecology.⁶⁴ In the

⁶³ In other areas also the author notes how the disposition of the inhabitants has adapted to their environment so that the cultivators in the eastern part of Agra district have become tough and skillful due to the aridity of the land, *Bhugol Varnan*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Francis Zimmerman has demonstrated how classical distinctions between wet and dry zones, cultivated and waste lands and the perceived effect of the environment on human behaviour and temperament

classical Sanskrit texts, which dealt largely in a prescriptive capacity with certain types of space, the designation of land as jungle (*jangala*) or forest (*vana*) carried a certain moral and social meaning. The attitudes to specific categories of space no doubt shifted with time as a result of migration, new technologies and conquest. Thus in later medieval and early modern texts the designation of *jangala* to wild and uncultivated land differed from that of its earlier more positive connotation. This term also carried the sense of being uncivilised.⁶⁵ Equally, the description of land as forested, at different points in time, carried a particular socio-political meaning. It referred, alternatively, to the habitation of the barbarous (*atavi*) and the civilised (*vana*). When understood as barbarous, or uncivilised, it was often used in opposition to the notion of country as being land which was populated (*janapada*).⁶⁶ In the classical texts the opposition between populated and unpopulated land carried political significance since the former designated the type of land that was appropriate for kings.⁶⁷

Once again it is impossible to say exactly how far Bapu Deva carried these classical distinctions of land, climate zones and environment into the western designation of geographical domains. What is more many of the designations and associations made here were already current in European thinking about environment and human disposition. Orientalists had already several decades earlier unearthed many of the sites of ancient capitals in the region and their historical and cultural significance and it is difficult to know how far Bapu Deva would have been influenced by these 'discoveries'. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that a Sanskrit scholar such as he would not have been aware of the classical Sanskrit allusions to them and this is apparent in his own divisions of land and territory. Perhaps what we have here is a level of conjuncture, where ideas and moral evaluations come together from a wide variety of sources, both 'indigenous' and 'colonial', and often serve to support and reinforce one another.⁶⁸ Thus

informed the medical principles of *ayurveda*. *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats. An Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, Chapters 1-3.

⁶⁵ David Ludden has pointed out the changing attitudes to different types of land and space from classical to medieval and modern times in Indian history. See 'Archaic Formations of Agricultural Knowledge in South India', in *Meanings of Agriculture. Essays in South Asian History and Economics*, ed. Peter Robb, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 35-70.

⁶⁶ Zimmermen, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats*, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁷ Kautilya, *Arthashastra*, ed. L.N. Rangarajan, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1992, pp. 178-194.

⁶⁸ For instance, the long held connotations of forests and uninhabited lands as wild and uncivilised in European folklore and culture.

throughout the regional descriptions distinctions are made between cultivated and uncultivated areas, their respective levels of population and, less overtly, the level of civilisation of their inhabitants. In Bhagalpur, for instance, which the author describes as a wild and uncultivated area of Bihar, there is only a sparse population and little civilisation.

Educated within the Sanskritic tradition, and no doubt, familiar with many of the Sanskrit works on polity (*niti*) and medicine (*ayurveda*) it is most likely that Bapu Deva would have been familiar with the classical designations of ecological frontiers, the distinctions made in all areas of moral and social life between wet and dry zones, and that these concepts would have appeared in his own representations of Indian space and environment. The tenacity of these concepts is further maintained by their appearance, albeit in a highly repressed form, in other geographical texts which adhered to a more overtly 'colonial' taxonomy. Raja Shiva Prasad's *Bhugola Hastamalik* published in 1859 began with an outright refutation and derision of the puranic notions of geography and an exaltation of Newtonian science.⁶⁹ Drawing attention in his introduction to the British sources on which he had based his work he proceeded to divide the world into hemispheres, continents and nations, each with their distinct boundaries, populations and languages.⁷⁰ His section on the North Western Provinces described the province in terms of the thirty one districts and their separate administrative divisions.⁷¹ Even so, despite this overtly 'scientific' and rational approach to his subject matter it appears that Shiva Prasad still imported some of the older classifications of land and people into his work. Like the eighteenth century topographical works which went into elaborate detail on the climate, fruit, grains, cloths and so on specific to each region,⁷² Prasad's work contained a large spectrum of information on plants, animals, minerals, dress, manners, customs, religion and literature of each area. Moreover there were subtle allusions to the distinctive character and behaviour of people from different regions. In the hill districts

⁶⁹ *Bhugola Hastamalik*, Benares, 1859, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 2-5.

⁷¹ Ibid, pp. 22-3.

⁷² Indigenous topographical works from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century also linked climates, places, products, the essences of the people and the prevalence of learning and virtue. In his account of Gorakhpur Mufti Ghulam Hazrat stated that the hills and waters of the Terai in the northern part of Gorakhpur gave the area its particular human and moral configuration. In one division water and

of Uttarakhand, the author stated, 'situated between the Ganga and the Sindhu rivers [the people] are fair and attractive and straight and true'.⁷³

In his study of agricultural knowledge in south India in the nineteenth century David Ludden has argued that most of the indigenous traditions concerning particular attitudes towards or concepts of space were not textualised until the nineteenth century when they were collected and incorporated into colonial texts relating to discrete disciplines of agriculture and geography. In this way many of the terms used to refer to particular kinds of space lost their original meaning in the de-contextualising process that occurred with textualisation. Irrespective however of the very real confusion over terms and terminology in their texts and the equally unavoidable problems of translation from one epistemic system into another quite different context, the agents of colonial geography, both British and Indian, served to mediate a complex amalgam of ideas concerning notions of space and environment into their texts. While on the one hand Orientalist interpretations of Hindu geography and history appear in conjunction with the more 'scientific' expressions of political geography, it is possible and indeed highly likely that these authors also incorporated in their texts the older indigenous conceptions of space which had persisted as valuable repositories of archaic knowledge well into the nineteenth century.

III. Disciplining the past

As with geographies, the first vernacular histories to appear in print in north India were published in the 1840s and 50s as part of the expanding market for primary and secondary school textbooks.⁷⁴ These texts in Urdu and Hindi tended to follow closely, if not exactly, a colonial model of historiography that had been initiated in the eighteenth century by imperialist historians and further consolidated in the early nineteenth century by utilitarian administrators seeking to demonstrate the inherent inutility of Indian

jungle vegetation 'spoil the atmosphere which in that state gives rise to the phlegmatic and cold diseases'. Mufti Gulam Hazrat, 'Kifayat-i-Zillah Gorakhpur' quoted in Bayly, *Empire of Information*, p. 304.

⁷³ Bhugola Hastamalik, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Most of the early Hindi language histories were in fact translations from Urdu texts which were often themselves translations of British histories of India. See below.

classical knowledge for British administration.⁷⁵ This model of historiography, which followed the contemporary European fashion for writing broad general surveys, was quickly supplanted into the vernacular sphere in the form of textbooks and other pedagogical literature intended for future generations of colonial schoolchildren.⁷⁶ The ideological aspirations of these texts was clear: to historicise and thereby to rationalise and to justify the progression of British dominion in India.

In general the format and style of these texts conformed to a formula dictated, one assumes, by the English language histories from which they were originally derived.⁷⁷ Each began with a brief introduction to the geography and topography of the subcontinent, variously named as Bharatkhand or Hindustan. Both of these terms, which denoted respectively the Sanskrit and Persian names for India, indicated the intended scope of the narratives as 'national' history. In fact the colonial bias towards the north and the recently acquired empire of the Mughals was faithfully reproduced in these early vernacular histories.⁷⁸ Following a brief introduction to or overview of Indian history, the rest of the text was divided into two or three sections, depending on whether the end point was with the 'Mohammedan' or the 'British' empires, but the emphasis given to each section varied enormously. The so-called 'Ancient' period of history, also known as the 'Hindu' period, formed only a relatively brief introductory chapter of around ten or eleven pages. Throughout this section there are frequent allusions to the unreliability of sources on early India, and the absence of any conclusive knowledge of its earliest inhabitants. When however the authors do refer to the sources from which they have gleaned their knowledge of ancient India, we find, as was the case with Marshman's text, that this information was derived exclusively from a few early Orientalist

⁷⁵ For example Alexander Dow, *History of Hindostan*, 2 vols, London, 1768; Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India: the Hindu and Mahometan Periods*, London, 1839; Edward Thornton, *Chapters of the Modern History of British India*, London, 1840 and John Kaye, *The Administration of the East India Company. A History of the Indian Progress*, London, 1853 were both employed as Company historians. The quintessential utilitarian approach to Indian history was of course James Mill's six volume, *A History of British India*, London, 1817.

⁷⁶ See Avril Powell, 'History Textbooks', pp. 91-133, for a study of early history textbooks and their fluctuating careers in the education service in NWP and Punjab.

⁷⁷ The inspiration behind many of the earliest vernacular histories was J.C. Marshman's *History of India from Remote Antiquity to the Accession of the Mogul Dynasty* published in Hindi by the Agra Schoolbook Society in 1846. See Powell, *History Textbooks*, pp. 96-8 for the popularity of this text in north India.

⁷⁸ The subsequent narratives refer predominantly to the land to the north of the Narmada river and scarcely mention the southern regions.

translations and interpretations of 'Hindu' sources, in particular those by William Jones.⁷⁹ It was thus the Orientalist interpretation of 'Hindu' history and civilisation, based on a few key texts such as the *Manusmriti*, that set the foundation for all subsequent re-constructions of the early Indian past. Thus in the chapter on 'Ancient History' the translator of *Bharatvarshiya Itihasa* refers to the land, described by Manu as Aryavarta, which was situated between the Himalaya and the Vindhya mountains. This was the land also where the four original Hindu *varnas* first settled, between the Sindhu river and Prayag, and from where the Solar and Lunar races began.⁸⁰

The so-called 'Mohammedan' period, in contrast, forms in many cases the remainder of the narrative and was in all of the school texts by far the largest section.⁸¹ This shift away from the early Orientalist focus on classical Hindu knowledge and ancient India in the vernacular texts had also previously been effected in the British histories of India. Most prominently that of H.M. Elliot, Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, who wrote the *Biographical Index to the Historians of Mahomedan India* in 1849. Elliot took as the basis of his text the large number of Persian histories which had been written by the ministers and scholars attached to the Muslim regimes in the preceding centuries. Although he had conceded some factual content to these histories he was also deeply disparaging of the general form and tenor of historical writing in India which he saw as a 'mere narration of events without speculation on causes and effects'.⁸²

In the vernacular histories the narrative selection of events and personalities in roughly chronological order and the neatly rounded explanation for the causes of historical change demonstrate an adherence to the European model of rational historiography. The need for neat narrative closure is clearly summarised at the end of each chapter. Thus a rough trajectory of the first or ancient period of Indian history

⁷⁹ Thus in *Bharatvarshiya Itihasa* the author recounts the foundation of the Solar and Lunar dynasties in north India and the names of their immediate descendants. Later in the chapter the Mahabharata becomes the major source for the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas and the Ramayana is cited as a source for the life of the hero king Ramchandra. *Bharatvarshiya Itihasa*, trans. by Pt Vamsidhar from the Urdu, *Tarikh-i Hind*, 3rd edition, Benares, Medical Hall Press, 1858, pp. 2-10.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

⁸¹ For example Pandit Magan Lal's, *Bharatvarshiya Vrittant Prakash*, translated from the Urdu, *Tawarikh Wakeat Hind*, Lucknow, 1869, devotes 257 pages to the 'Mohamedan' period compared with 15 to the 'Hindu'.

⁸² Quoted in Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 227.

according to Marshman's text and its various Hindi translations begins with the entry of the Vedic Aryans into India from somewhere to the west, followed by the establishment of the Solar and Lunar dynasties in the north, the reign of Ramchandra in Ayodhya, Vyas's arrangement of the Vedas, the rise of the Pandavas at Indraprastha and the battle of Kurukshetra, the story of Krishna and Jarasandh, the rise of Buddhism in Magadha, the subsequent rise of Chandragupta and his minister Chanakya, the advance of Alexander the Great as far as the Sutlej, the reign of king Vikramaditya at Ujjain and the history of the kings of Mewar (Udaipur). The final episode in this period is marked by the arrival of Mahmud of Ghazni in western India which draws to a close the 'Hindu' period of Indian history. The causal explanations for the end of this period moreover are neatly summarised as being the result of internal disputes and rivalry amongst Hindu kings leading to their weakening and the breaking up of kingdoms in the wake of Muslim invasions. Again, this explanation reflects a similar attitude of evangelical reformers in the early nineteenth century about the 'Muslim' invasions of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as being the result of 'Hindu' decadence and the decline of civilisation.⁸³ The conclusion moreover is that all forms of Indian sovereignty prior to British rule, including those of the Muslim polities, were inherently wanting and therefore their collapse was inevitable: 'It appears from this history that neither were the ancient kings of Bharatkhand particularly powerful nor were their kingdoms very great, because of this foreign kings of Persia made continuous attacks on them plundering their lands and they were not able to repel them'.⁸⁴

These stereotypes regarding the periodisation, the significant events and the prevalence of causal factors determining the successive stages of Indian history were apparently translated without contest into the vernacular realm. The archetypal example of this 'vernacularisation' of the colonial historiography of India was Shiva Prasad's three volume *Itihas Timirnasak* (History as the Dispeller of Darkness) published between 1864 and 1873 as a general history for schools.⁸⁵ Although in the preface to the

⁸³ See chapter two, pp. 101-2.

⁸⁴ *Bharatvarshiya Itihas*, p. 16.

⁸⁵ *Itihasa Timirnasak*. A History of India in Three Parts, part I, Allahabad, Government Press, 1864; *Itihasa Timirnasak*, part II, Allahabad, 1871; *Itihasa Timirnasak*, part III, Benares, 1873. Babu, later Raja Shiva Prasad was Inspector of Schools for the Benares Division at the time when he wrote this text. For family background and career information see Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p.346. For information on

first volume Prasad referred disparagingly to the inaccuracies of the imperial histories of Dow, Elliot and Elphinstone he subsequently went on to reproduce in his own text many of the stereotypes regarding Muslim rulers and their politics instigated by these writers.⁸⁶ Like colonial authors before him Prasad also criticised the fallaciousness of Hindu mythological and epic texts: 'No sober man is expected to go through these pages and again believe in the mythology of the Puranas or long for one of the old regimes'.⁸⁷ While 'Hindu' sources are summarily rejected, Persian histories, and in particular the seventeenth century text of the historian Ferishta used by several British historians, are notably incorporated as bearing the hallmarks of rational historiography. Consequently in Prasad's History the 'Hindu' period up to the arrival of the Ghaznavids is dismissed in only five pages while the 'Mohamedan' period takes up the remainder of the first volume. In the third volume of his work Prasad departed from the normal historiographical model in order to make a comparison of the customs, manners, laws, religion and forms of government between ancient and modern times. While on the one hand his approach suggests a modicum of innovation in fact his concluding remarks in the preface to this part demonstrate his thorough internalisation of colonial stereotypes on Indian history and the superiority of British rule:

My endeavour is in this part to prove to my countrymen that, notwithstanding... the many heroic actions ascribed to our ancient Hindu Rajas, there was no such thing as an empire in existence; that the country was divided between numerous chiefs always fighting with each other for temporary superiority; that, notwithstanding the splendour attributed to Muhammedan dynasties, the country was sadly misgoverned, even during the reigns of the most powerful Emperors; and that, although the diamonds and pearls were weighed by 'maunds' in the royal treasuries the people in general were very poor and utterly miserable.⁸⁸

Several years earlier Prasad had written a history of the Sikhs, *Sikhon ka Udaya aur Asta*, which demonstrated a similar predilection for the British style of writing Indian history. Based largely on Cunningham's recently published *History of the Sikhs*, Shiva

the publishing controversies of this text in the provincial education department see Powell, 'History Textbooks', passim.

⁸⁶ Although he cites both Persian and British sources Prasad relied heavily on Elphinstone's history, in particular for the narrative structure of his text, and Elliot's for his assessment of the Muslim rulers. See Powell, 'History Textbooks', p. 111.

⁸⁷ *Itihas Timirnasak*, part I, p.i.

Prasad's text resembled to an even greater extent than the *Itihas* an apology for British government in India in that it sought to naturalise the idea of British conquest as being the inevitable result of internal weakness and disputes within Indian regimes. The writing of these early vernacular histories was thus on the whole an exercise in the writing of general histories of India, that is national histories from the imperial standpoint, that would convey a broad survey of events from the ancient to the present and would offer an implicit explanation and justification of the events leading up to the period of British rule. The teleological trajectory of these accounts, and their pedagogical role as an instrument of power, meant that they inevitably embodied many of the ideological presuppositions of colonial historiography regarding the Indian past.

Given the early period in which many textbooks were written, well before the age of nationalism proper, it appears less surprising that, to a greater or lesser extent, they demonstrate a sense of thrall to the intellectual glamour of the conquering west. Shiva Prasad, in particular, represents a particular brand of 'colonial' intellectual who in a sense epitomised this transitional period by consistently demonstrating his admiration for the scientific rationality and liberalism of his colonial patrons as well as seeking to emulate it. Nevertheless, the reproduction of such 'colonial' historiographic model in the vernacular did not go uncontested in the newly forming sphere of indigenous print and publishing after 1860. A highly critical review of Shiva Prasad's history which was published in one of the early issues of the Hindi journal *Harischandra's Magazine* demonstrates an awareness of the power of such representations of Indian history as well as bearing testimony to the wide level of circulation that such 'textbooks' achieved outside of the sphere of colonial education. While the reviewer recognised the significance of the *Itihasa Timinasak* in that he credits it with being the first of its kind written in Hindi, and that by virtue of its government patronage would receive wide circulation in the province; nevertheless Shiva Prasad's text is criticised on several counts. Firstly the author was criticised for his 'sneering and abusive' manner towards his countrymen.⁸⁹ In particular the reviewer disliked the author's portrayal of ancient

⁸⁸ *Itihas Timirnasak*, p. ii.

⁸⁹ It is now widely accepted that the review was written by Harischandra himself at the time of the publication of the third part of *Itihas Timinasak* in 1873. See *Harischandra's Magazine*, 1.5, February 15 1874, pp. 151-2.

Hindu institutions such as the ritual feasting of Brahmans which he saw as 'offensive to orthodox Hindus'.⁹⁰ Secondly the author is attacked for his attitude to the Puranas, which he discredited as containing no historical truth. Thirdly, the author is criticised for relying too heavily on Elliot's *History of India* for his chapter on the Muslim period which is attacked as being biased and exaggerated. 'It is a dreadful catalogue of the violence and oppression practised by the Delhi kings on their subjects' which fails to take into account the acts of benevolence and enlightened rule which the Muslim rulers practised.⁹¹ This last criticism, it appears, was a particular consequence of the perceived role of the *Itihas Timirnasak* as a school book which would influence the minds of school children.

The review merits attention in particular because within it were the seeds of a discourse on which a new historiography would be constructed in the decades to come, a nationalist historiography that would argue for the historicity of 'indigenous' sources, such as the Puranas, as well as for the continuing relevance and authority of orthodox tradition. After citing various Orientalist praises of Hindu literature, the reviewer states that without belief in his own scriptures a man becomes 'an ungodly creature' who opens himself up to depravity and dissolution.⁹² He ends the review by stating that an historiography that takes count of ancient Hindu sources as well as the Orientalist and British histories must be worked out for the future.⁹³

From the early 1870s this type of response to and critique of colonial historiography began to appear more regularly in the pages of the vernacular press and Hindi periodicals. It signalled the emergence of a new indigenous historiography in north India that was derived from and in consultation with, but also sought to counteract and to resist, many of the claims of colonial historiography, as well as the in-depth critique of 'Hindu' culture and civilisation propagated by Orientalists and missionaries.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 151.

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 152.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Shiva Prasad's *Itihas* was also strongly contested by the Muslim scholar most responsible for trying to forge an Indian Muslim identity vis a vis Hindus, Saiyyid Ahmed Khan.

Conclusion

New notions of political space and economic principles were communicated into the indigenous sphere via vernacular print and colonial education. Though the transmission of agricultural, geographical and ethnographic knowledge, incorporating new epistemic principles of western scientific rationality, remained at best fragmentary and incomplete during this time, the process of mediation whereby indigenous intellectuals were employed in the construction and transmission of the new knowledge created the social and institutional conditions for the emergence of a new style of western educated intelligentsia in the region. These men straddled simultaneously both the older indigenous systems of knowledge and the new disciplines of geography, history, astronomy and so on. As the mediators of a new knowledge, those who were able to adapt to the new forms became leaders and moulders of public opinion. Moreover they were able to incorporate into the texts they wrote and translated their own reconstructions of Indian society and environment, many of which had admittedly already been shaped by western Orientalist and missionary interpretations of the Indian/Hindu past. The terms they employed to articulate such new categories and concepts moreover provided an early glimpse of the emerging vocabulary of a vernacular nationalist consciousness. The next chapter explores the emergence of an indigenous historiography that was developed and coined in dialogue with the interpretations of 'Hindu' geography and history that have been discussed in the previous chapters, but which also drew on the pre-colonial bases of orthodox tradition.

Chapter 4

A North Indian Historiography: Bharatendu Harischandra and the Construction of a National Past

The previous chapters have considered how colonial administrative and intellectual practices in the first half of the nineteenth century contributed, in different ways, to an emerging sense of a regional culture in north India. The following chapters depart from considerations of colonial interventions in order to examine the ways in which ideas about Hindu history, religion, language and culture were formulated and expressed amongst the north Indian Hindu intelligentsia against and within the context of an emerging nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Recently, studies of Indian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have argued for the role of narratives, and in particular historical narratives, in forging a collective consciousness capable of producing nationalist sentiment.¹ Undoubtedly nationalist writers of the later period sought to project in their historical writings an image of a continuous and unbroken history stretching back to an ancient period which, anachronistically, was intended to provide the source and mirror image of the modern nation. This 'Indian historiography' however, as Ranajit Guha has pointed out, despite differences of emphasis and idiom, itself turned out to be a monolithic discourse that, according to its own ideological imperatives, excluded or subsumed within it any alternative or counter-narratives that did not conform to a singular strand of nationalist history.² The large-scale historicisation of various aspects of 'Hindu tradition'

¹ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986; Ranajit Guha, 'An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications', in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Dominance Without Hegemony. History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge Mass., 1997; Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and David Arnold, eds, *Subaltern Studies VII*, Delhi, 1993.

² Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, pp. 152-3. The attempt to recover some of these 'alternative histories' was, of course, one of the initial motivations for the project of the Subaltern Studies group of historians. See in particular Gyanendra Pandey, 'Encounters and Calamities: The History of a

which took place in the second half of the nineteenth century among the north Indian Hindu intelligentsia developed, in a similar way to the later nationalist historiography, into a dominant discourse that effectively marginalised many of the competing versions of community and identity that had remained intact up to that point. The historical reconstructions of caste, lineage, sect and region which began to appear in profusion in vernacular periodicals, pamphlets and books during this period were presented, either implicitly or explicitly, as part of a larger, unified, national history despite the fact that a nationalist historiography was still very much under construction and it was by no means decided as to what precisely should constitute it.

This chapter then examines the development of an indigenous historiography as a discourse which emerged in dialogue with but also in resistance to the colonial historiography that preceded it. It considers the materials on which this new historiography was constructed in order to claim its legitimacy and authority as a history of the incipient nation. It argues that it was this strand of early nationalist historiography, which sought to identify, constitute and consolidate various aspects of Hindu tradition into a central core that achieved hegemony over other versions of Indian history by the end of the century, so that subsequently, whenever this 'national' past was imagined in the writings of north Indian Hindus, it was a north Indian Aryan-based Sanskritic civilisation that was presented as forming the historical foundation and the essential core of the national religion and culture.

The chapter focuses almost exclusively on the historical writing of Bharatendu Harischandra as one of the foremost intellectuals of the period, in touch with both the pre-colonial sources of religion and tradition and the new thinking of western Orientalists and missionaries, and a pioneer in Hindi writing and publishing.³ Harischandra was a unique and highly significant figure in the growing network of Hindu intelligentsia in the region in the second half of the nineteenth century. Though he was in many ways a singular product of his Vaishnava merchant family, his city, Banaras, and his region, his influence and status was supra-regional and he retained links

North Indian *Qasba* in the Nineteenth Century', in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies III. Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi, 1984.

with intellectuals and publicists from other parts of the country. Foremost amongst these was the Bengali scholar and antiquarian Babu Rajendralal Mitra (1822-91) who worked for the Asiatic Society in Calcutta for thirty five years and became its President in 1885. In his own work Mitra straddled comfortably the authority of British Orientalist scholarship as well as taking part in and contributing to the formation of an indigenous public sphere in Bengal. In this latter capacity he edited two influential Bengali journals the *Bibidarth Samgraha* and the *Rahasya Sandarbha* which both in their content and format provided models for Harischandra's own journals in Hindi.⁴ Like Harischandra, Mitra was an ardent and devoted Vaishnava who wrote extensively on the history and traditions of the Vaishnavas in both north and eastern India.⁵

Like Rajendralal Mitra, Harischandra established himself as a publicist and authoritative figure through his writing and publishing of journals. He edited the journal *Kavivachansudha* from 1868 to 1876 and started the journal *Harischandra's Magazine*, later to be renamed *Harischandrachandrika*, in 1873. He continued as editor of this journal up to 1880 when it passed into other hands but resumed the editorship in 1884 shortly before his death. He also edited the first women's literary journal in Hindi, *Balabodhini*, which came out from 1874 to 1878. Through these journals Harischandra has been widely credited with the creation of modern Hindi literature in that he experimented with and developed new forms of writing in Hindi that had previously been unknown. Aside from creating a public forum through the journals through which to voice opinion and ideas Harischandra was also involved in the numerous clubs and associations which sprang up in Banaras during the 1860s and 70s. The Benares Institute, discussed in the last chapter, which brought together Orientalist, missionary and indigenous scholars of the city was an important forum for the exchange of new ideas. The Kasi Dharma Sabha established in 1870 was another institution set up by the Raja of Banaras to form consensus on matters of religion and ritual and preserve the orthodox traditions of *sanatana dharma* (the eternal religion). Alongside his involvement in these institutions, Harischandra also founded several associations

³ Vasudha Dalmia has produced the most comprehensive account of Harischandra's family background and role as a public intellectual in *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition. Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 117-143.

⁴ Ibid, p. 133ff.

himself, including the Kavitavardhini Sabha, a poetry society which attracted all the major poets of the city to its meetings and the Tadiya Samaj, a Vaishnava association which sought to propagate his own brand of reformed vaishnavism. Among the north Indian Hindu intelligentsia who were involved in any aspect of public life or Hindi publishing during this period, most were known to him or counted themselves as his friends.⁶

I. A novel historicism

The scattered sources of historical writing that were published independently in Hindi journals and periodicals from the 1870s and 1880s, and in particular the body of writing by Harischandra, demonstrate a sustained, if incipient, attempt to construct an indigenous history and chronology that would contest the hegemonic status of colonial historiography. Harischandra's widely recognised role as a litterateur, patron of arts and culture, and substantial figure in the public life of the city meant that his pioneering work in historical writing was also widely reviewed and responded to by a growing circle of Hindi writers in the region, as well as a small group of British Orientalist and missionary authorities. Viewed in its summation Harischandra's historiographical work functions as a highly selective and somewhat fragmentary history of the nation, still as yet an ill-defined category, but imagined largely in the context of the north Indian region known variously in his writing as Hindustan, Bharatvarsh, Aryavarta. Though he never attempted to write a complete history of the nation, or a national history, as such, the breadth and scope of his subject matter, which included dynastic chronologies, regional histories of Maharashtra, Udaipur and Kashmir, local, sectarian and caste histories, and which stretched in time from the ancient right up to the present period, infers his intention to construct a suitable and usable past for the contemporary national

⁵ See below this chapter.

⁶ The most prominent of these figures were Pratapnarayan Mishra from Kanpur (1856-95), Balkrishna Bhatt of Allahabad (1844-1914), Lala Srinivas Das of Delhi, Badrinarayan Chaudhari 'Premghan' of Mirzapur, Babu Ramdin Singh of Patna (1856-1903) and Babu Radhakrishnadas of Banaras (1865-99), all of whom were involved in writing, editing and publishing Hindi journals and books. Lesser known figures were Radhacharan Goswami of Vrindavan (1859-1923), Damodar Shastri of Banaras and a group of writers and editors from Muradabad. Some of these figures appear in this and later chapters of the thesis. For a more extended list of his contemporaries see Babu Shivnandan Sahay, *Harischandra*, [1904], Lucknow, Hindi Samiti, 1974, p. 359-375.

community which he was seeking to posit, a concept which he termed variously as *Arya jati*, *Hindu jati*, and *Hindu samaj*.

Harischandra's approach to his historiographical material however differed in several respects not only from the colonial-derived vernacular histories found in school textbooks but also from the incipient nationalist historiography under construction in other regions such as Bengal. Despite the novelty of the genre in which he chose to write Harischandra represented the perspective of an orthodox and conservative Hindu elite for whom the authority and legitimacy of tradition was still an essential component of any creative endeavour. Unlike the so-called neo-Hindu and reformist intellectuals of other regions, he continued to value the Sanskrit-Puranic tradition as an authoritative and reliable source of information on the past, at the same time as embracing the modern and rationalist techniques of the Orientalist historiography of India.⁷ If in Bengal the influence of Orientalist and rationalist modes of historiography had by this time entirely discredited the 'puranic mode' of history,⁸ Harischandra, as an orthodox Hindu and a devout Vaishnava, was not prepared to abandon indigenous representations of the past in favour of the staunchly empiricist materials of colonial historiography. Instead he adopted a broadly inclusive and catholic approach to history writing in which he regularly included the puranic and epic material, as well as other types of Sanskrit literature, as being authoritative.

It was indeed, as he sought to prove, the often 'wondrous' nature of the Hindu sources that, rather than discrediting their historicity, confirmed their great age and antiquity: 'Just as the beginnings of the chronicles of most kings of the world are filled with many miraculous tales, so there are many wondrous tales set at the beginning of this one. No one need harbour suspicion on the historicity of this account, since ancient chronicles are often filled with miraculous episodes and historians apply their

⁷ In this regard, as Vasudha Dalmia has argued, the north Indian intelligentsia differed from their Bengali counterparts who at this time had undergone a far longer exposure to European rationalism. See Dalmia, 'Vernacular histories in late nineteenth century Banaras: Folklore, Puranas and the New Antiquarianism' in *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 2001, 38, 1, p. 60. Also Partha Chatterjee's assesment of the growth of nationalist historiography in Bengal, 'History and the Nationalisation of Hinduism' in V. Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron, *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Tradition and National Identity*, Delhi, Sage Publications, 1995, pp. 102-127.

⁸ Chatterjee, 'History and Hinduism', p. 106.

intelligence to deduce from them the essentials of their history'.⁹ According to this view the more ancient a piece of writing, the more one should expect such a mixing of historical fact and poetical embellishment. The simple presence of poetic exaggeration did not however diminish the historical value of ancient works but was on the contrary authoritative evidence of their antiquity.

In an historical essay on the Ramayana, *Ramayan ka Samay* (The Age of the Ramayana), Harischandra subjected the work to a critical examination in order to show that the epic could in fact reveal much historical information about the time in which it was composed: 'The Ramayan was composed a long time ago, everyone accepts this. It is therefore certain that whatever things appear in [this text] used to be current in Hindustan in that time'.¹⁰ The historicity of such works was then considered in the context of a critique of the narrow empiricism of European historiography:

Once you set about thinking and reflecting upon matters connected with the ancient age, [you will find that] there is no way to form an immediate estimate of things. The number of new works you consult will demonstrate the range of ideas revealed about them. Present day intellectuals (*budhiman*) have two views about this branch of knowledge (*vidya*). The one follow, without due reflection, the path laid down by the older European scholars (*vidvan*) while the other take nothing for granted and accept new evidence as it emerges. The latter view is the more proper and correct but the former makes it more simple to lay claim to being 'antiquarian'.¹¹

Rather than discount 'Hindu' sources on the grounds of their being unhistorical, as was the case in much of the colonial historiography of India, Harischandra was prepared not only to accept the authority of literary sources, once they had been subjected to rational enquiry, but he was also ready to consider new evidence as and when it emerged, thereby adopting what he considered to be a more relative approach. According to this method Valmiki's Ramayan, as the author proceeded to show, was a source of great social and technological information on the ancient past. Furthermore, once the boundaries of what constituted 'history' had been enlarged to include the epic-puranic

⁹ 'Udaipurodaya', *Bharatendu Samagra*, Hemant Sharma, ed., Varanasi, Pracharak Granthavali Pariojan, 4th ed., 2000, p.681.

¹⁰ 'Ramayan ka Samay', *Samagra*, p. 784.

¹¹ Ibid.

and other 'Hindu' material Harischandra was free to plunder all areas of indigenous literature to construct his own historiography. He did this, however, with a constant view to the final authority of Orientalist and antiquarian studies of the past, with which he was familiar through his contact with the Asiatic Society in Bengal, his friendship with a number of prominent Orientalists and his familiarity with articles published in the antiquarian journals of the Asiatic Society and the *Indian Antiquary*.

II. History and Innovation

The earliest and most directly personal subject which Harischandra sought to address was the history of his own city and its numerous scholarly and religious traditions. In chapter two we saw how the history of Banaras and in particular the history of Kashi's sacred geography had been subjected to a critical examination in the work of the missionary-cum-Orientalist Rev. M.A. Sherring. As a prominent figure in the city Harischandra was well acquainted with Sherring's scholarly work on the city which he had first encountered in the context of the Benares Institute.¹² Undoubtedly then his own views on the history of the city were shaped and influenced by those of the missionary. Moreover the British understanding of Banaras both as the centre of Hinduism and as an ancient capital of scholarship and learning made it an obvious choice for the poet as a starting point with which to begin his project of constructing a national history.

In a series of essays published between 1872 and 1874 Harischandra undertook to write a number of histories of the more famous tirthas in the city's sacred geography. The first of these essays was an account of the famous burning ghat known as Manikarnika on the banks of the Ganges. Before embarking on a description of the ghat, Harischandra prefaced his account with an unusual statement on the passing of time and the novelty of the contemporary landscape of the city: 'Ah! How strange is the world when one thing is constantly born of another, but people, not realising this truth remain absorbed in it. Where great and substantial temples were built costing lakhs of rupees now there is nothing at all and those who spent the lakhs of rupees, earned with their own hands, now their descendents go around begging; daily more new places are

¹² Sherring in fact delivered a lecture on 'Benares and its Antiquities' at one of the meetings of the Benares Institute. *Transactions of the Benares Institute for the Session 1864-65*, Benares, Medical Hall Press, 1865.

appearing and everything is new'.¹³ Following this the writer emphasised the fame of Manikarnika as a tirtha so that 'all followers of the Hindu Dharma always feel great enthusiasm for it'.¹⁴ And just as it retains its popularity with pilgrims in the present it was in the past a place where great kings sought to establish their name by having them inscribed on stones laid at the ghat. Beneath the present ghat however, incorporating the tirthas of Gangaji and Chakrapushkarini, there are signs of several former ghats that predated the present one. Little is known of the patrons who sponsored the construction of these early ghats, but on one of the stones of the present ghat there is an inscription which refers to two kshatriya brothers of the then raja who had constructed the ghat as well as a large temple known as Manikarnikeshvar in the year 1302 AD. According to the author both the temple and a number of other places mentioned in the inscription are in different places now from their situation at that time. The temple of Manikarnikeshvar, he claims, is 'in a narrow and constricted place lower down and Vishveshvar and Viroshvar are also in new places'.¹⁵ The present ghat after being destroyed several times was rebuilt again by Ahalya Bhai in the eighteenth century. The writer concludes his account by stating that the existing steps of Manikarnika Kund, the water tank attached to the temple, were made in the year 249 AD by a vaishya named Narayana Das, which was another name of Raja Vasudeva of the Soma lineage. He follows this assertion with the four lines of Sanskrit verse (*slokas*) inscribed on the steps of the Manikarnika Kund.

In a second article entitled 'Kashi' the writer combines archaeological and puranic sources on the city to construct a history of several important tirthas and temples. Again, he begins this essay with a reference to the transformative power of time: 'I don't want to describe the Panchkroshi so that people should read it and then set off on a pilgrimage..., but rather I want to show the supreme transformative power of Time...'.¹⁶ His intentions therefore are not purely descriptive, or even in the manner of much pilgrimage literature of the day, proscriptive, but historical. Here the poet uses one of the many local epithets of the god Shiva, *Bhairava Kal*, to describe the phenomenon

¹³ Manikarnika, *Samagra*, pp. 648-49.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 648.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 649.

¹⁶ 'Kashi', *Samagra*, p. 649.

of time, which he claims is at the essence of all things and therefore merely another name for god himself. Undoubtedly, the use of this epithet was intended as a play on words which served to locate the notion of time, or history, at the centre of the city where *Bhairava Kal*, Time, was a guardian deity:

‘Ah! What is the glory of him and how unimaginable is his power? Therefore I am able to say without inhibition that even God is just another name of Time. Because the origin and destruction of this world is based only on this. The victorious and conquering Alexander who conquered the world, where are his remains buried now? The poems of Kalidasa which are read the world over, where did he live and when? His influence is such now that there’s not even a sign of him. If we call God, endowed with qualities like most ancient, most new, strongest of all, creator, preserver, destroyer, and controller of all principles, another name of Time itself, then what can be the error?’¹⁷

Here the writer is clear to demonstrate his recognition of the forces of time and history in the city.

The overall intention of this essay seems to be to demonstrate that most, if not all of the major monuments of Kashi’s sacred geography were, contrary to popular understanding, of very recent date: ‘There is no sign that the tank and temple and route of the Panchkroshi are even two or three hundred years old, and there is no certainty that this is the way of Panchkroshi, only the temple of Kardmeshvar is very old and could be rightly said to be of the Buddhist period or before that.’¹⁸ Throughout the essay he employs an empiricist approach, citing the material evidence of Buddhist and Jain remains in the area as an indication of its age. His point however is not to undermine the sanctity of Kashi’s sacred geography by exposing its recent origins but to stress the great impact of change on these sacred sites and to question the absence of Hindu remains. In the middle of the piece he exclaims:

‘Why brother Hindus! Is Kashi not your tirtha, and are your Vedas not the most ancient? Then why does no sign appear by which it can be certain that the main gods of Kashi, Vishveshvar and Bindhumadhav, were here, and that a sign of them is left here, and that since the area of Kashi is so large, that this is the limit

¹⁷ Ibid, *Samagra*, p. 649.

¹⁸ Ibid.

of it, and that these are the gods of the Panchkroshi and that this is the route. Well this much I can say, "Salutation to Time"¹⁹.

The absence of any Hindu remains which predate the Buddhist and Jain suggest that Kashi can not be claimed for certain as an original city of the Hindus. But in apparent defiance of the authority of such narrow empiricism the author finally claims, 'Is there no possibility that in an ancient time there were temples and statues of Hindus and that on them the Jains have built their own statues in their own period? Why not?'²⁰ Thus in the end the historicist approach is discarded or made irrelevant and in its place is offered an exclamation of faith and belief in the city's status as a city of the Hindus.

In other accounts of the city Harischandra again subsumed the findings of empirical research within the wider authority of tradition and orthodox belief. His willingness to employ puranic sources and oral accounts as evidence to be used alongside material sources suggests his intention to construct an historiography that would conform with and confirm the claims of orthodox tradition regarding the city's sanctity. In reference to some sites along the Panchkroshi road he adds, 'It's a possibility that there were some small kingdoms here, because all around Kashi there were several such small kingdoms such as Ashapur. In the *Kashikhand* it is written that Ashapur is a big city but now only a village has survived'.²¹ Popular memory and local beliefs regarding the previous incarnations of the various sites he mentions also serve as an acceptable basis for constructing their histories. According to several brahmans of Kashi, Delhi Vinayak, a small town in the west of the city which constitutes one of the present boundaries of Kashi, is several miles away from where it once stood. This explains, the writer asserts, why there are no ancient remains in the current location of Delhi Vinayak. And all along the Panchkroshi route, the writer concludes, the majority of the remaining Hindu temples and rest houses (*dharmshalas*) have all been rebuilt by Hindu merchants and Maharashtrians in the last two or three centuries.

Alongside the puranic and oral-epic material Harischandra also utilised the recently translated tirtha literature to construct his history of the city. From the middle of the nineteenth century, as part of the growing traffic in pilgrims from other regions to

¹⁹ *Samagra*, p. 650

²⁰ *Samagra*, p. 651

Banaras, some of the Sanskrit eulogies and ritual proscriptions for the city's holy sites had been translated into Hindi and published in tract and pamphlet form.²² Hence these popular myths and eulogies regarding Kashi's sacred geography and merits as a tirtha were now available to a much wider reading public. Harischandra's intention was to elaborate on this tradition by including the new evidence of historical investigation which had shed much light on the city's more recent past.²³ Both of the above accounts draw heavily on the archaeological discoveries made in the city and its environs by British scholars, in particular those of Sherring.²⁴ And in both accounts the author is ready to admit that each temple and ruin stands as a testament to the numerous changes and revolutions in the city's religious history. Even the Panchkroshi road, he admits, which marks the boundary of the city's sacred geography is more than likely to be on a different route to the one it traversed in ancient times. Thus while they both agree that there is no clear continuous history of the city's sacred geography and 'Hindu' traditions, they differ as to the meaning and consequences of that absence.

In constructing a history of the city's sacred geography Harischandra's project was one of recovery and regeneration of the past for its present day uses. His histories were therefore written as a celebration of the city's sacred sites and their ongoing ritual and sacred traditions and unlike his antiquarian counterparts, he wrote from the position of an orthodox believer who was ensconced in the religious life of the city. The use of puranic and oral-epic materials in this context was crucial since these texts constituted the backbone of religious tradition and provided the foundation for the traditions concerning the city's sanctity on which the historical material could be grafted. And when the methods of rational historiography fell short of recovering the 'Hindu' past then these materials could be used to confirm it. This project to revitalise the 'Hindu' past of the city was continued in his weekly journals *Harischandra's Magazine* (later *Harischandrachandrika*) and *Kavivachansudha* in which he included in each issue a

²¹ *Samagra*, p. 152

²² *Ath Kashi Mahatam*, rev. and ed. Pandit Durga Prasad, Benares, Benares Light Press, 1867; *Kashi Tattva Bhaskar*, comp. Munshi Harabhajan Lal, Banaras, Hitachintak Press, 1917; *Kashi Yatra Prakash*, comp. Dwarakanath Dube, Benares, Chandraparbha Press, 1913; Harshankar Prasad Upadhyaya, *Kashi Darshan Natak*, Kashi, Shri Kashi Natakmal Daryalaya, 1920.

²³ Another account of the hamlet of Shivpur on the Panchkroshi route was later published in which the writer mentioned an inscription on a stone in the Draupadi Kund there extolling Raja Todarmal and proving the places antiquity, 'Shivpur ka Draupadi Kund', *Samagra*, p. 653.

small section covering the city's religious life and the lives of its patrons under the subtitle 'Kashi'.²⁵ In these articles Harishchandra sought to build upon and elaborate the ancient puranic traditions concerning the sacred life of the city in the light of the new knowledge (*naya vidya*) of colonial historicism.

III. Ancient Chronologies

Besides several essays on the history of sacred sites in and around Banaras, Harishchandra collected together over the same two year period (1872-74) a large number of inscriptions and royal grants recounting the deeds and legacies of kings and royal dynasties from various parts of the country, which he published in his journals *Kavivachansudha* and *Harischandrachandrika*. The absence of interpretation in these essays and the fact that many of them were simply reproductions of the Sanskrit, Brahmi or Apabhramsha originals, either with or without a Hindi translation, reflects both the inherently positivist nature of antiquarian research during this period and the writer's intention to emulate it as far as possible in his own historiography. Facts are collected, documented, recorded and only later compared and cross examined to suggest an interpretative framework.

The focus of this research was the ancient (*prachin*) or Hindu period of Indian history and in particular the chronological rise and fall of successive Hindu dynasties. Viewed in total it appears from these fragments that he was deliberately collecting together a series of significant names and dates that would provide in summation a positivist chronology of the region through its pre-Muslim past. Thus in *Kannauj ke Raja ka Danpatr* he reproduces in Sanskrit a copy of a deed of gift (*danpatr*) of Raja Govindachand of the kingdom of Kannauj who, he states, was said to be a great benefactor.²⁶ Despite an overall north Indian bias in these essays, the inclusion of inscriptions collected from the south suggest the author's intention to construct a chronology of ruling dynasties on an India-wide basis. Thus the outline of a series of temple and stone inscriptions found by archaeologists at Bodh Gaya are followed by the reproduction of a deed of gift from the southern region of Mysore belonging to Raja

²⁴ See Chapter 2.

²⁵ For example, *Kavivachansudha*, hereafter KVS, 14 July 1884, p. 8; KVS, 17 November 1884, p. 7.

²⁶ *Samagra*, pp. 641-2.

Janmejaya and another from Mangaleshvar.²⁷ The series of inscriptions collected at sacred sites in and around Banaras, confirming the ancient and ongoing tradition of Hindu patronage of that area,²⁸ are followed by a translation into Hindi of a deed of gift found by an agriculturalist on the banks of the Godavari concerning two rajas from the Chandravamshi dynasty and this is followed by the reproduction of another grant of the Kannauj raja Govindachand.²⁹

Frequent attempts at cross referencing and cross-examination of sources from different locations further demonstrate the writer's desire to link together the various dynastic elements of this chronology in to some larger order. The final entry in this series is a reproduction of a genealogical list of kings (*rajavali*) taken from an astrological text composed in Samvat 1816 (1759) with calculations on the various eras of Hindu time along with a list of the kings of Kaliyug (and the other three Hindu *yugas*) beginning with Yudhisthir.³⁰ The juxtaposition of hard empiricist facts from the inscriptional evidence of the previous entries with the reproduction here of an archaic representation of the mythic past expressed in cyclical time and treated, in this case, with equal sincerity, further substantiates the writer's intention to graft the ancient, mythical and cyclical versions of the past onto the more recent, historical elements of the past in order to create one continuous and unbroken chronology.

This painstaking attempt to reconstruct a continuous and unbroken Hindu chronology was part of a larger project adopted by Harischandra and several of his contemporaries to historicise and thereby to galvanise the current Hindu jati into a recognition of its unified past. The perceived absence of history for this, as yet, rhetorically imagined community was a source of great concern for the writer not least because it threatened the sense of cohesion and unity needed to counteract the indignity

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 643-48.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 643

²⁹ See Raja Janmejaya ka Danpatr; Mangalishvar ka Danpatr; Manikarnika; Kashi; Shivpur ka Draupadi Kund; Kannauj ka Danpatr; Nagmangala ka Danpatr; Chitrakut (Chittaur) stha Rama Kund Prashast; Govind Devji ke Mandir ki Prashast; Ibid, pp. 643-61.

³⁰ The interjection in the middle of this series of ancient epigraphica of the names of the nineteenth century benefactors inscribed on a door at the Queens College in Banaras suggests the writers attempt to connect the ancient practise of patronage with its modern counterpart. *Samagra*, pp. 661-2.

of colonialism.³¹ The manner in which he, and other writers of his generation, dealt with this absence was to imply that history, like other ancient knowledges, had been lost or destroyed in the mists of time. In the introduction to one of his regional histories, *Kashmir Kusum*, the writer lamented,

‘The moon of history cannot be sighted in the clear sky of Bharatvarsha, since along with other ancient branches of knowledge, history has also disappeared. Partly there was no tradition of writing chronological history in older times, and what was left has disappeared in the jaws of grim time. The Jain destroyed the works of the Vaidics, and the Vaidics those of the Jains, ... as if this was not enough, the Muslims came and burnt whatever was left. Thus were we relieved of our burden. Such black clouds gathered that the valiant glow of the moon of Bharatvarsha was cast over’.³²

The intention then is clearly stated here: history, as one of the branches of ancient knowledge, has been lost, or destroyed, and must now be recovered in order to restore the ancient glory and valour of Bharatvarsha. The idea of the decline and decay of a pristine Hindu civilisation which missionaries and early nineteenth century travellers to north India had detected in the ruins of palaces and debased social practices are here embraced by the writer who in turn attached to them the idea of conquest, or rather Muslim conquest, as a rationale for that loss.³³ Moreover in Harischandra’s writing all history, even the histories of Muslim kings, became Hindu history in the sense that it accounted for that loss and the events of Hindu subjection. In a history of the Mughal kings of Delhi, *Badshahdarpan*, he wrote ‘In this work there are only biographies of those people who first made slaves of us. There are small character sketches of those lusty elephants who uprooted and then trampled upon the lush lotus groves of Bharatvarsha and tore these apart’.³⁴

³¹ For an argument about the essentially anti-colonial stance of early nationalists, in that early nationalists could not yet imagine the possibility of political independence from colonial rule see Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘The Imaginary Institution of India’, pp. 12-13.

³² This essay was first published in pamphlet form by the Medical Hall Press in Banaras, 1884. *Samagra*, p. 708.

³³ See chapter 2, p. 102.

³⁴ First published in pamphlet form by the Medical Hall Press, Banaras, 1884. *Samagra*, p. 731. For a more positive appraisal of Akbar, in line with later nationalist historiography, and an equally negative depiction of Aurangzeb, see ‘Akbar aur Aurangzeb’, *Samagra*, pp. 638-41.

The ancient glory of the Aryas and pre-Muslim independence, both relatively modern concepts that had been derived to some degree from Orientalist interpretations of early Sanskrit sources, appear as the primary elements on which to galvanise a present day recovery:

The very Bharatvarsha which was once the crown of the entire earth, whose glory was recognised the world over, which was the mainstay of knowledge, valour and wealth, it is also one aspect of time that this very Bharatvarsha is lean and inferior today.

There is no chronological history of the period before the sun of independence (*svadhinta*) set here. The histories that Muslim writers have written have caused the glory of the Aryas to disappear. It is to be hoped that there will be some mother's son who will undertake the labour of writing the history of his ancestors to make everlasting their glory.³⁵

The purpose in writing such a history of these Muslim kings was to chart the destruction of the Hindu jati which, the writer claims, occurred during their reign. The future project, one that Harischandra implores future generations to accept, is to write the history of that jati and to restore its ancient glory.

IV. The nation within the region

In a series of regional histories also written during the 1870s Harischandra sought to address the question of contemporary Hindu decline and frailty directly. In doing so he looked to the histories of several regions in the north and west of the country in which he saw a model of Hindu sovereignty, either in the glory of their past empires or in an uninterrupted line of Hindu kings, which would provide an example and inspiration for the current Hindu jati. In *Maharashtra Desh ka Itihas* the writer begins with a comment on the absence of a continuous history of the region but positions the beginning of his narrative anyway in the ancient past, thereby identifying the ancient kingdom of Shalivahan with the modern territory of Maharashtra: 'There is no chronological history of Maharashtra. Shalivahan is counted as among the ancient kings of there. He inaugurated the Shaka [era] and it is well-known that he killed a certain [Raja] Vikram.

³⁵ *Samagra*, p. 731.

His capital was Pratisthan, which is nowadays called Paithan. The kingdom of Devgiri was independent up to the arrival of the Muslims and Ramdev was the last independent king there'.³⁶ From here the Muslim rulers of the area are briefly passed over until the arrival of Shivaji in 1627. The first part offers an account of the military prowess and cunning diplomacy of Shivaji who re-captured vast territories and wealth from the Mughal emperor and the subsequent mismanagement and weakening of these territories through the misdemeanours of his descendents. The implication is that, disregarding the brief period of Muslim rule, Shivaji re-established the Hindu kingdom that was inaugurated in the ancient period by Shalivahan. The modern idea of territorial sovereignty has been projected back into the early modern and semi-mythical past to obscure the boundaries between ancient polities and modern communities. The section ends abruptly with the transferral of these territories to the British government 1818.

This idea of an exclusive territorial sovereignty in the pre-modern past was elaborated further in an essay on the Rajput kings of Udaipur, a royal dynasty who had preserved their independence through much of the period of Muslim rule. Harischandra began his account with an invocation of the antiquity of this dynasty:

This is the lineage which is the most ancient and the most respected in all of Bharat. It is in this lineage that there have been such gigantic kings as Mandhata, Sagar, Dilip, Bhagirath, Harischandra, Raghu and others and it is in this lineage that Bhagvan Ramchandra took incarnation. It is of this lineage that Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, as also Vyasa and Valmiki have written charitras, or biographies, which still bejewel Indian literature. This is the only lineage remaining in Hindustan which has remained on the throne in eternal sovereignty since the satyayuga.³⁷

Turning to the more recent past the author stressed the unbroken sovereignty of the rulers of this kingdom, 'The rule of foreigners began eight hundred years ago in Bharatvarsh, since then several kingdoms have risen and fallen in their entirety. The invading army of Ghazni crossed over the deep waters of the Sindhu and entered Hindustan. The kingdom of Mewar is still now as it was at that time. Many kings all

³⁶ This essay was first published in *Harischandra Chandrika*, vol. 3-4, 1875-6. It was also published in pamphlet form in 1880. *Samagra*, p. 663.

³⁷ Udaypurodaya, *Samagra*, p. 681. This essay was first published in *Kavivachansudha* in 1877 and as a pamphlet in 1878.

around that kingdom, many have left and gone elsewhere, but their palace still stands now where it stood before. From the Satyayug to now all the men of this lineage died on the throne'.³⁸ This identification of the pre-Muslim kingdom with the contemporary region of Mewar effectively manages to erase the historical contradictions between the two types of sovereignty, the one, pre-modern, based on notions of conquest and divine kingship and the other, modern, on exclusive territorial sovereignty. The realm, *rajatva*, is here linked to a specific territory and to a concept of statehood in a manner that was not characteristic of the pre-modern era.³⁹

The boundaries between past and present communities were further elided in Harischandra's writings by incorporating myth and legend as part of the historical narrative. In *Udaypurodaya* the legendary origins of the founder of the present dynasty of Udaipur, Bapa Raval, are portrayed in great detail. While the writer acknowledges the contentious nature of his sources, shrouded as they are in the mists of time, he also argues for their historicity: 'Like other royal men from the ancient era the stories of Bapa are a mixture of truth and falsehood. But ignoring this aspect, the royal clan of the sun dynasty who held sovereignty over the throne of Chittaur for such a vast period of time, that sovereignty began with Bapa and for this reason in order to calculate the length of time of the rule of the clan of Gihalot it is important to know the birth date of Bapa'.⁴⁰ In this case both legend and history are reckoned to be important since together they demonstrate both the illustrious origins of the ruler and his proper status as an ancestor of the modern Hindu jati.

In *Kashmir Kusum*, an historical account of the Hindu kings of Kashmir, based primarily on the *Rajatarangini*, Harischandra summarised the essential legacy of the mythical past on the historical consciousness of the present community, 'Harischandra, Ram, Yudhisthir, the brightness of the deeds of such great souls was so vast that it pierced the dark clouds and delivered light on to our present state of darkness'.⁴¹ In each case the chronology of kings begins in the mythical time of Satyayug and ends, after an

³⁸ Ibid, p. 681.

³⁹ For example, as Partha Chatterjee notes to be the case in contemporary Bengali histories, 'The *rajatva* [realm] in other words, constitutes the generic sovereignty of the country, whereas the throne represents the centre of sovereign statehood.' In 'History and the Nationalisation of Hinduism', p. 115.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 691.

⁴¹ *Samagra*, p. 708.

unbroken chain, at the point at which Muslim rule was established in the region. Thus the Marathas are portrayed as the last Hindu rulers of Maharashtra,⁴² the Udaipur rajas as rulers of a Hindu kingdom which preserved independence (*svadhintā*) throughout the period of Muslim subjection and the present king of Kashmir, Ranvir Singh, as the contemporary descendent of the first king, Gonard, who established the dynasty at some point in the epic past and was killed in the epic war of Jarasandh.⁴³

Thus it can be argued that the particular brand of nationalist historiography which emerged at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century shared much in common with the representations of the past contained in these early histories. In particular the narrative of Muslim oppression and the destruction of the Hindu jati came to be a standard trope of nationalist historical discourse. These themes of loss, decay and destruction also shared common ground with those of the later Orientalist and missionary interpretations of the Indian past and Muslim rule. Harischandra's contribution to the formation of an indigenous historiography was to begin the process of recovery and representation of the ancient Hindu past that had been dismissed so summarily by colonial historians and later Orientalists and to position it at the beginning of a direct sequential line leading to the present day Hindu jati. In his writing the representations of the ancient past embodied in myth, epic, purana and genealogy were attached to and combined with the new forms of historicism instigated through European historical discourse to become the new histories of territories and communities and, quite literally, of the Hindu nation.

V. Biography of the nation

While the histories of regions and dynasties defined as 'Hindu' provided the territorial basis and sovereign image for the ancient Hindu nation Harischandra also wished to construct a legacy based on the recovery of ancient lives for the contemporary Hindu jati. In a series of biographies (*charitravali*) written over a ten year period and published in his journals Harischandra plotted the biography of the nation from the perspective of

⁴² Ibid, pp. 666-67.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 701.

ancient figures of political, artistic and religious excellence.⁴⁴ Though accounts of the lives of eminent men and women of the past had already been written and published in Hindi for the school book market, their pedagogical intention meant that they generally took the form of moral and didactic tales for the use of women and children,⁴⁵ Harischandra's scope and purpose in the historicisation of these lives was altogether more wide-ranging and ambitious. To write the histories of these men and women was to give them authority and legitimacy as ancestral figures. In summation the collection of biographies of ancient rulers, poets, philosophers and religious founders which he depicted provided a relatively complete, if selective, political, cultural and religious biography of the nation during its ancient past. For this reason he chose figures who enjoyed wide-spread fame and honour on a country-wide or national basis but whose historicity was shrouded in some obscurity.

In an account of the semi-historical ruler Vikramaditya the writer depicted the portrait of a national hero who had quite literally united the vast territories of Bharatvarsha from north to south and east to west during his glorious reign.⁴⁶ The Vikram of this account is the ruler who lived between 1076 and 1127 AD rather than any other ruler of that name and whose capital was Kalyana in the south. Having established the historicity of this figure through an extended cross examination of various sources the writer projects an image of national unity back into the ancient past by describing the unity which existed between the individual Hindu kingdoms of that time. These kingdoms whose rulers were 'in contrast to the present... in very good circumstances' included such well-known dynasties as those of 'Ayodhya, Chanderi, Kanyakubj (the raja of Arjun's lineage), the region on the bank of the Chambal, Kalinjar, Gopachal, Malva, Gujarat, the Pandya region opposite Mandarachala and the Chola

⁴⁴ In total Harischandra published sixteen biographies which were published individually in his journals between 1871 and 1880 amongst which were biographies of *Vikram*, *Kalidasa*, *Ramanuja*, *Shankaracharya*, *Jayadeva*, *Pushpadant aur Mahimna*, *Sri Vallabhacharya*, *Surdas*, *Napoleon*, *Socrates*, *Jangbahadur*, *Judge Dwarkanath Misra*, *Rajaram Shastri*, *Maharajadhiraj Jar*. See *Samagra*, pp. 588-632. They were also published posthumously in a single volume as *Prasiddha Mahatmaon ka Jivancharit* (The Biographies of Famous Figures), Bankipore, Khadgavilas Press, 1885.

⁴⁵ Shiva Prasad, *Varnamanoranjan* (Tales for Women), Banaras, 1849; Sadasukh Lal, *Prasiddha Charchavali* (Biographies of Famous Personages), trans. Pt. Vamsidhar, Agra, 1859.

⁴⁶ *Samagra*, p. 588

[region]'.⁴⁷ The kings of these individual regions however had all been united at one point in time under the common sovereignty of the great king Vikramaditya.

In *Kalidasa* and *Jayadevaji* Harischandra depicted two poets of unequalled skill and talent whose fame had spread throughout the world and whose poetry had been celebrated by successive generations up to the present.⁴⁸ Here also the writer was concerned with presenting them as historical figures. Referring to Kalidasa he notes that though there are few historical sources on this poet it is well-known and generally established that he was a court poet, one of the nine jewels (*navaratna*), at the court of Vikram. The mention of Vikram in this context however provokes a further series of deliberations on the historical figure of Raja Bhoja, a contemporary of Kalidasa, whom some believe to have been the same person as Vikram. Various sources, including the works of several Orientalist scholars, are cited and disputed on this point. Within this discussion is a secondary account of Raja Bhoja according to the well-known and widely translated Sanskrit text, the *Bhoja Prabandha*,⁴⁹ which the writer cites as a major source on Kalidasa. While the historicity of each of the sources is considered individually the author retells the famous legends associated with the births, deaths and lives of these semi-legendary figures which have been passed down through the ages, textually and orally, as part of the received tradition. The superiority of history over legend in this instance is asserted when the author appeals, 'It is important for readers to see how much confusion there is concerning the history of just one Vikramaditya. If only one Vikramaditya is famous among the people, [then] the names of several Vikramadityas are found in the Indian histories of this period. But it is necessary to know the *history* (*itihasa*) of that Vikramaditya so that our doubts might be dispelled and knowledge established whether there is any connection between Vikramaditya and the incomparable poet Kalidasa of the *navaratna*, or not'.⁵⁰

In retelling the lives of such figures, men renowned for their skill in literature, philosophy and state polity, Harischandra sought to assert their status as ancestral heroes and to emphasise their glorious legacy for the current Hindu jati: 'Who does not wish to

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 590.

⁴⁸ See also Surdasji, *Samagra*, p. 615.

⁴⁹ This text was translated into Hindi and presented as a history (*itihasa*) of one of the great Hindu kings. See *Bhoja Prabandha*, trans. Pt Vamsidhar, 2nd ed., Allahabad, 1859.

hear or to read the life stories of those men who are very famous and in whose [honour] the heads of thousands of men continue to bow'.⁵¹ The inspirational potential of such lives for an emergent national/Hindu consciousness was set out more explicitly by Hindu nationalists of the late nineteenth century.⁵² Radhakrishna Das, Harischandra's cousin and contemporary and editor of the famous Bharat Mitra Press in Banaras issued a series of such biographical studies entitled *Aryacharitamrit* (Biographies of Aryans) through which he hoped that 'the people of this region/nation (prant) can know the accounts of their ancestors (*purvajom*)' so that 'common people might realise their own [true] nature (*svarup*) and again strive to be that way'.⁵³ Das's use of the term prant to indicate the wider region or nation is significant here. It suggests that the term has undergone considerable conceptual transformation from its earlier meaning in the geographies discussed in the last chapter. In its older usage, prant would have referred to a smaller, regional unit, something like a realm. Here the term is specifically used to refer to a much larger unit, one that would encompass the people (*sarva sadharan*) whose ancestors were the models for the incipient nation. According to Das moreover the historicity of these figures became a crucial factor of their ability to provide authentic role models. In his account of the life of Jayadeva Harischandra cited a wealth of contemporary evidence including archaeological discoveries, local histories and the opinions of indigenous Orientalists to support his dates for the poet's life.⁵⁴ Legends are duly recorded but generally stated as such with the prefatory sentence of 'it is said that...'. Historicity as the basis of authenticity was equally important to Radhakrishna Das, as he argued in a tract on the history of Hindi journalism, 'Everyone knows how useful history has become. Because we have no history from ancient [times] our country suffers a great deal, whatever histories remain from the Muslim period these sing the praises of Muslims and the stupidity of the Hindus...'.⁵⁵ The necessity then was to

⁵⁰ *Samagra*, p. 593.

⁵¹ Sri Vallabhacharya, *Samagra*, p. 612.

⁵² This was in opposition to their role as didactic, reformist tales as in the case of Shivaprasad's *Varnamanoranjan*.

⁵³ The first in this series was a biography of the Maratha leader Bapa Rawal. *Aryacharitamrit: Arthat Arya Mahatmaon ke Jiwan Charitra. No. 1, Birbar Bappa Rawal*, Benares, Bharat Jiwan, 1884. A later volume was published on Nagaridas, *Shri Nagaridasji ka Jiwan Charitra*, Banaras, 1897.

⁵⁴ *Samagra*, p. 605.

⁵⁵ *Hindi Bhasha ke Samayik Patron ka Itihasa*, Banaras, 1894, pp. 1-2.

reconstruct the historical lives of these ancient men so as to begin the process of constructing an authentic past for the Hindu nation.

The 'national' agenda of Harischandras' biographies was further attested to by the fact that no obvious preference was shown either for the civilisational past of the north of the country or the writer's own sectarian allegiances. Thus Shankaracharya, despite his well known status as a Shaivite and avatara of Shiva, is praised for his rescuing of the Vedic religion from Buddhism which had spread all over the nation, Bharatvarsha, at the time of his birth in the tenth century.⁵⁶ As a great religious reformer Shankaracharya had united the country through the dissemination of his monistic philosophy and his mastery of the art of shastrartha.⁵⁷ This concept of transmission and unification effected in the country-wide travels of religious reformers (*digvijaya*) is further presented as evidence of their national status. Jayadeva, like Shankaracharya, travelled all over India in the twelfth century visiting sacred sites and the courts of great rulers. His great legacy is still remembered so that '... several hundred years have passed since Jayadevji left this earth. But he still remains resplendent in our society (*hamare samaj*) today from the power of his poetry. There is a great festival (*mela*) at the time of Makar Sankranti in the village of Kenduli to remember him, at which seventy seven thousand Vaishnavas gather to celebrate his *samadhi* in every direction'.⁵⁸ Ramanuja, the great Vaishnava reformer, is also presented as a unifying figure who travelled all over the subcontinent spreading his faith, converting people to the way of bhakti and, most significantly, through the tradition of his disciples (*shishya parampara*) became the founder of north Indian Vaishnavism: 'After composing these texts Swami set out along with many disciples to spread his fame. He travelled to the country of the Cholas, Pandyas and the Kurukas and conquered the pandits of those places in shastrartha. From there he travelled to the tirthas of Dwarika, Mathura, Shaligram, Kashi, Ayodhya, Badrikashram, Naimisharandha and Srivindavan and then finally he returned to Sharadpitha'.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 601.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 604.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 609.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 599.

The life stories of Vaishnava saints and devotional poets, in particular the founders (*acarya*) of the two major Vaishnava sectarian divisions, Vallabha and Ramanuja were an important component of Harischandra's biographical work. On these occasions the writer employed the inherited traditions of Vaishnava hagiography as the basis of his material and then attached to them the rules of chronology and biography. The reason for this shift of emphasis away from historical accuracy must have been the involved nature of Harischandra's own position. Himself a devout Vaishnava of the Vallabha or Pustimarg sampradaya, he was here writing from within his own devotional tradition as one of the many hagiographists. For this reason the opinions of others outside of this tradition, in particular those of European Orientalists, were viewed as peripheral and often refuted. In his essay on the life of Ramanuja the author cites at length the various legends and traditions concerning the saint's life and religious activities from the devotional and hagiographical literature and only in the penultimate paragraph does he acknowledge the role of history by citing a charitable grant establishing the dates for the saint's lifetime (1010).⁶⁰

Similarly in his biography of Vallabha, the founder of the writer's own sampradaya, the author draws on hagiographical and devotional literary traditions written in Brajbhasha, rather than historical material, for the details of the saint's life and religious activities. Like Ramanuja, Vallabha is credited with spreading his own brand of the Vaishnava faith (*mat*) 'all over Bharatkhand' and with establishing a tradition of discipleship which continues in the present.⁶¹ The use of the term Bharatkhand to refer to the contemporary political unit of the nation reflects its similar usage in geography textbooks discussed earlier. This shift from a rational, objective perspective to a subjective one of attempting to historicise one's own religious tradition was the starting point from which he set out to reform and reconstitute through history and chronology the religious traditions of Hindus and in particular his own version of Vaishnava bhakti as the universal religion of the Hindus.

VI. Nationalising religious tradition

⁶⁰ *Samagra*, p. 600.

⁶¹ *Samagra*, p. 614.

Harischandra's project to historicise and ultimately to reform the whole range of north Indian Vaishnava traditions was developed gradually in the two decades leading up to his death in 1885.⁶² In his biographies of Vaishnava saints and later, more closely, in his sampradaya histories the author set out to reconstruct the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century hagiographical traditions concerning the lives of Vaishnava saints in the light of new modes of history and chronology. *Vaishnava Sarvasva* ((1875-1879), *Vallabhiya Sarvasva* (1875) and *Yugul Sarvasva* (1876) together constitute a detailed exposition on the foundation and spread of the four major Vaishnava sampradayas and their principal gurus up to the present.⁶³ Building on the inherited traditions of hagiography Harischandra contested and reconstructed these traditions, at least partially, in an historical format. In *Vaishnava Sarvasva* the author alternates between the cosmic time of the Puranas and historic time, or rather he sets the latter time-pieces within the cyclical time of the former.⁶⁴ In this way the writer accounts for the origins and spread of various other strands of Hindu dharma: the Buddhist, Jains, Shaivas and the Vedantins, but asserts the Vaishnava as being the most authentic. *Vallabhiya Sarvasva* and *Yugul Sarvasva* both contain biographical, hagiographical and historical information on Vallabhya, the founder of the writer's own sampradaya, and on the companions of Krishna, gleaned from various canonical texts. The second part, *Uttarardha*, of the *Vaishnava Sarvasva*, published in 1879, contained lists of the disciples, the shishya parampara, from the four major sampradayas.

Although in the above-mentioned pieces Harischandra adopted the conventional hagiographical information on the lives of saints and *bhaktas*, in other cases he was not afraid to question and contest this hagiography where the evidence suggests alternatives. For example, in a biography of the poet and bhakta Surdas, one of the eight *ashtachap* of

⁶² Harischandra's long term project to reformulate and thereby to reform various aspects of Hindu tradition took place on a much wider scale than simply the writing of history. Vasudha Dalmia has charted his involvement in religious organisations and reformist societies, such as the Tadiya Samaj in Banaras, as constituting a part of this agenda. This chapter, however, is specifically concerned with the historical construction of national traditions and therefore limits itself to a reading of his work in this area. See Vasudha Dalmia, 'The Only Real Religion of the Hindus: Vaisnava Self-representaion in the Late Nineteenth Century' in V. Dalmia and H. von Stietencron, *Representing Hinduism*, pp. 176-209.

⁶³ *Vaishnava Sarvasva* was published in two parts in *Harischandra Chandrika* in 1875 and 1879; *Sri Vallabha Sarvasva* was published separately in 1888 by Khadgavilas Press, Bankipore and *Yugul Sarvasva* was published in 1876. See *Samagra*, pp. 863, 871, 905.

⁶⁴ See Romila Thapar, *Time as a Metaphor of History: Early India*, Delhi, 1996, p. 37.

the sampraday, Harischandra contests the received information on the poet's caste status and lineage with reference to a verse from one of his own poems. By comparing the information from this verse with historical information from other contemporary sources Harischandra is able to assert that Surdas, rather than coming from humble origins, was in fact descended from a great lineage associated with the likes of Prithviraj Chauhan and Raja Harischandra.⁶⁵ Previously, in a work entitled *Uttarardhabhaktamala* (The Second Bhaktamala) Harischandra had located himself, his family lineage and other regional contemporary poets within the same hagiographical tradition of these Vaishnava bhaktas.⁶⁶ The piece was composed in the same style as the seventeenth century hagiographical compendium the *Bhaktamala* and served to identify the poetical and devotional traditions of that period with those of the present day bhakta poets. Nevertheless, despite some infrequent and minor contestations with received tradition, both in *Surdasji* and in other such essays, Harischandra was writing strictly from a position within the sampraday, as a bhakta, who was addressing a readership of fellow Vaishnavas, 'In the world people who are familiar with bhasha kavya will know [the importance of] Surdas and those who are Vaishnava will know a certain amount about his life story'.⁶⁷

Viewed in their total the biographies of Vaishnava bhaktas and the sectarian histories which Harischandra composed at this time provide a sustained attempt at constructing a historiography of Vaishnava Hinduism. His intention, and those of his near contemporaries,⁶⁸ was to posit and confirm a continuous and unbroken chain of tradition, described according to context as Hindu dharma, sanatana dharma, bhakti and Arya dharma, originating in the ancient Aryan past and surviving, despite several minor reformations, up to the present. His essay *Vaishnavarta aur Bharatvarsha* (Vaishnavism and India) published shortly before his death in 1884 was both the synthesis and culmination of all his previous writings on Vaishnavism in which the Vaishnava doctrine, with its emphasis on personal devotion, bhakti, is presented as the ancient and

⁶⁵ *Samagra*, p. 617.

⁶⁶ Published in *Harischandra Chandrika*, 1876-7.

⁶⁷ *Samagra*, p. 616.

⁶⁸ In 1886 Harischandra's contemporary and fellow Vaishnava Radhacharan Goswami also included Harischandra in his list of *bhakta* poets published under the title *Navabhaktamala*, or New Bhaktamala.

universal religion of Bharatvarsha. Here his intention was to account for and to situate each separate and individual strand of Hinduism within the great historical tradition of Vaishnava bhakti and to constitute this tradition as being both the source and essence of all other strands of tradition, including those that were considered by some to be outside of the Aryan fold. In the beginning the writer asserts that 'If we consider carefully then it is clear that Vaishnavism is the oldest doctrine of Bharatvarsha. Our Aryan ancestors created the first civilisation in ancient times and that's why they are the leaders of the world in the fields of religion, ethics and other things'.⁶⁹ According to this argument the writer connects the Vedic practise of sun worship with Vishnu as the manifest creation, 'That is why among the Aryans the most ancient [belief] was in one god and hence the Aryans of that time were also Vaishnavas'.⁷⁰ This monotheism was later forgotten as the single focus of worship became divided between first two and then many other deities. Nevertheless, the essential elements of a monotheistic Vaishnavism, as he saw it, continued uninterrupted encompassing all later developments such as Shaivism which, the author argues, came after the worship of Vishnu. All the various stages of this process are united into one long historical continuum: 'From the beginning period of the Vedas to the time of the Puranas Aryan books are full of writings on the greatness of Vishnu. And it is the same in Tantra and in the modern works [written in] the vernacular'.⁷¹

Harischandra's historical reformulation of Vaishnava Hinduism, or rather his constitution of Vaishnava bhakti as an ancient, unitary and universal religion, comparable and co-eval to other world religions such as Christianity or Islam, must be viewed in the context of his interaction with British Orientalist and missionary thinkers as well as with other Hindu reformist organisations of the period. In her study of the poet Vasudha Dalmia has lucidly set out the various stages of this process, beginning with his involvement with the Kasi Dharma Sabha and the Tadiya Samaj in Banaras in the 1870s,⁷² and culminating in the historical consolidation of Vaishnavism as the original

This work was published separately as a book in 1886. See Karmendu Shishir, ed., *Radhacharan Goswami ki Chuni Huyi Rachnaen*, Allahabad, 1990, pp. 216-20.

⁶⁹ *Samagra*, p. 971.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 973.

⁷² Vasudha Dalmia, 'The Only Real Religion of the Hindus', pp. 182-194.

religion of the Hindus in his writings and speeches. The initial motivation to redefine and to consolidate the different sectarian strands of Vaishnavism into one all-encompassing and unified tradition emerged, according to her analysis, in the context of the religious associations mentioned above.⁷³ The Kasi Dharma Sabha was a religious organisation set up to deal in part it seems with the threat to orthodoxy posed by Hindu reformers such as Dayanand Saraswati. It dealt with matters pertaining to Hindu dharma and was made up of both religious specialists, pandits, and lay figures. It encouraged Sanskrit learning and organised examinations for scholars but was mostly involved in deciding on matters relating to ritual and ritual status. Individual decisions were made through consultation with the relevant Sanskrit textual authorities, in particular the Srutis, Smritis and the Dharmashastras, and decrees (*vyavasthas*) were issued.⁷⁴ Despite the fact that at this stage the full dimensions of Harischandra's historical project had not yet been developed, his involvement with the Kasi Dharma Sabha and subsequent founding of the Tadiya Samaj in 1873, a Vaishnava religious reform association in Banaras, suggest his awareness of the need for a more defined and proscribed form of religion or sanatana dharma and for greater cohesion between the various sects of Vaishnava Hinduism.

In an article published in the *Kavivachansudha* in 1872 entitled, *Public Opinion in India*, this agenda of religious reform and doctrinal consolidation was posited as essential to the project of national improvement:

Hence it is desirable that religion, which has gone to such a degree of corruption now, should be looked after with much care and concern by the Indians. Unless there be a general desire to shake off the trammels of superstition, the regeneration of India cannot be aimed at. Let the religion of India be *the* religion that can govern the millions of her subjects without any let or hindrance. Let the dark shadows of sectarianism be vanished by the rays of Western civilisation and let one and all of us combine together to look over national customs and habits from the Catholic point of view and let the unity be the basis of the grand superstructure of national improvement which every civilised nation has in its possession'.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 188-94.

⁷⁴ KVS, 3, 5, 28 October 1871; KVS, 3, 7, 25 November 1871.

The question of national regeneration through religious reform therefore was widespread even amongst orthodox and conservative Hindus in north India,⁷⁶ but it was a brand of reformism that was consciously distinct from the radical departures from orthodox practice of the Hindu reform groups such as the Brahmo and Arya Samaj.⁷⁷ From the outset Harischandra's reformulation of Vaishnava tradition, its reconstruction of the Vedic past, and its maintenance of ritual practice, including image worship, were in radical divergence with the doctrinal reformations implemented by these groups which aimed to strip away what they deemed to be all later sectarian appendages from the original Vedic religion. Both the Brahmo and Arya Samaj, as a consequence of their reforms of social practices such as widow remarriage and their complete rejection of all ritual practice, most markedly image worship (*murtipuja*), and the Hindu marriage ceremony, were thus relegated to the very peripheries of the religious collective defined and understood as sanatana dharma by Harischandra and his contemporaries.⁷⁸

In fact it was the challenge issued both by the missionaries and the Hindu reformists such as the Arya Samaj which led to the consolidation of the 'conviction that the devotion to a single, personally accessible and iconically represented god, was a central feature of the sanatana dharma'.⁷⁹ Harischandra's reformulation of Vaishnava bhakti into a national religion was further formulated in its early stages through his translations and commentaries of key bhakti texts, such as the bhakti sutras. The first issue of *Harischandra's Magazine* carried a translation and commentary of the *Sandilyabhaktisutra* in which the poet extended the doctrines of his own sampradaya, the Pustimarg, to a Pan-Indian or national dimension.⁸⁰ Following this a more elaborate exposition was developed in the translation and commentary of the *Naradabhaktisutra*

⁷⁵ KVS, 3, 14, 9 March 1872. It is not clear whether this piece was written by Harischandra himself or one of his contemporaries.

⁷⁶ For example Harischandra's famous Ballia lecture, 'How can India progress?' (1878), published in *Samagra*, pp. 1009-1014; Radhacharan Goswami's piece in his own journal *Bharatendu*, November 1883 and Balkrishna Bhatt's 'Method for the Improvement of the Hindus', published in *Hindi Pradip*, May 1878.

⁷⁷ The inherent tension between reformist and conservative tendencies among traditionalist Hindus is discussed in detail in Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present. Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992, chapter two.

⁷⁸ Harischandra did make some concessionary moves to include these groups in his vision of the sanatana dharma towards the end of his life. See Dalmia, *The Only Real Religion*, p. 188.

⁷⁹ Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, p. 388.

⁸⁰ *HM*, August 1873.

where the poet discussed his notion of an original dharma, *muladharmā*, encompassed in a monotheistic bhakti, personal devotion to one god, which had been subject to a process of decay and disintegration into several paths but which maintained its link and continuity to the original even now.⁸¹

Thus monotheism (*ek ishvaravad*) was from a very early stage posited as an essential component of Vaishnava bhakti and when it came to the historical reconstruction of this faith or doctrinal continuum it was described as being from the beginning a monotheistic religion. The authoritative identification of Vishnu as the primary and central deity of an originary Vedic ur-monotheism, as was posited by Harischandra in *Vaishnavata aur Bharatvarsha*, had been developed in the field of European Indology as early as 1808 when the German Indologist Friedrich Schlegel identified Vishnu with the sun which was worshipped monotheistically by the Vedic tribes.⁸² This idea was later taken up by Max Mueller, whose work Harischandra refers to in his own text, as the basis of the religion of the Aryans. Mueller had asserted that 'the idea of one God is expressed with such power and decision, that it will make us hesitate before we deny to the Aryan nations an instinctive monotheism'.⁸³ In the Indian context it was Rajendralal Mitra Harischandra's friend and contemporary, who engaged with and incorporated these views, albeit with some modifications, into his own substantial work on the Vedic Aryans and Harischandra bases his own history of Vaishnavism on that of Mitra in the *Antiquities of Orissa*.

From the mid-nineteenth century an important connection had been posited by Albrecht Weber, between the figure of the pastoral child god Krishna and Christ.⁸⁴ This connection was later elaborated on in the specific context of the doctrine and practises of the Vallabhacharyas in Mathura by Francis Growse, in his work *Mathura, A District Memoir*.⁸⁵ Growse was one of a new breed of Orientalist-administrators based in north India whose work on the popular religious traditions as practised in the towns and villages of the Braj region did much to extend the knowledge of the contemporary forms

⁸¹ Dalmia has discussed these texts in detail in *Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, pp. 370-75.

⁸² Ibid, p. 195.

⁸³ Max Muller, *A History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, so far as it illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmans*, London, 1859.

⁸⁴ Weber's thesis was translated into English and published in an issue of the *Indian Antiquary* in 1874.

of Vaishnavism as practised in the north Indian countryside.⁸⁶ His contemporary, George Grierson, whose knowledge of the sixteenth and seventeenth century bhakti literature and the Brajbhasha hagiographical texts outshone even that of Growse, later extended these hypotheses regarding both Vaishnava bhakti and Christian monotheism and his ideas, as he documented, were partially influenced by the writings of Harischandra of Banaras.⁸⁷ While Indian Orientalists, in particular R.G. Bhandarkar, had disputed the direction of the influence of Christianity on Krishna worship by furnishing proof of the existence of the figure of Krishna prior to Christianity, it remained to more popular writers, such as Harischandra, to turn these theories on their head by asserting the original status of the Krishna myth over the figure of Christ both in the rituals surrounding the nativity and the propagation of monotheistic worship.⁸⁸

In an essay published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1881 Monier Williams, a British Sanskritist following the path set out by Max Muller, asserted his belief that monotheism had been known in India since the Vedas and that despite the subsequent development of forms of pantheistic belief these had always been underpinned by the fundamental doctrine of god's unity.⁸⁹ The following year in an essay on the Vaishnava religion, Monier Williams had separated the development of what he termed *arya dharma* into four phases: Vedism, Brahmanism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism. According to this thesis Vaishnavism was both the culmination and the perfection of all the three previous doctrinal phases and stood as the central religious tradition of the Hindus: 'The worship of Vishnu, in one phase or another, is the religion of the bulk of the middle classes: with its roots deep down in beautiful forms of non-

⁸⁵ F.S. Growse, *Mathura A District Memoir*, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1993 [1878], pp. 286-7.

⁸⁶ In his work on Mathura he had observed the special connection between the area and its religious traditions and wrote, 'all its [the area's] special interest is derived from its religious associations with the Vaishnava sects...of whom some took birth here, all regard it as their holy land'. This observation extended to the necessity of recording and relating the various legends associated with the figure of Krishna and his companions 'because, however puerile and comparatively modern many of them may be, they have materially affected the whole course of local history...' Ibid, preface.

⁸⁷ Here I diverge from Dalmia's argument who appears to see Grierson as an influence on Harischandra's thinking, even though most of his writings on the subject of bhakti monotheism were published after Harischandra's death.

⁸⁸ This argument was developed in *Isu khrista aur Isa Krishna*, HC, 6,7, January 1879.

⁸⁹ 'Indian Theistic Reformers', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s. 13, 1881, pp. 1-41.

Aryan nature worship, and its top sending forth branches among the most refined Brahmans and literary coteries'.⁹⁰

Once again it was Rajendralal Mitra who was responsible for communicating many of these ideas, originating as they had in Orientalist textual research, into the domain of Hindu nationalist thinking. In 1884 Mitra had published an essay, the same year as Harischandra's historical essay on Vaishnavism, in which he proclaimed monotheism as forming the core of the Vaishnava religion and of Vaishnava bhakti which linked together the four chief Vaishnava sampradayas.⁹¹ In Mitra's work however the connection with Christianity, as proclaimed by all of the Orientalists, was discarded. Previously in a work on the ancient remains discovered in Orissa Mitra had plotted the history of Vaishnavism in five stages stemming from the Vedas up to the present.⁹² In this work, the Vedic origins of Vaishnavism were emphasised and asserted through a multiplicity of textual references. Following Mitra's initiative Harischandra posited the Vedic origin of Vaishnavism as being central to its constitution as a monotheistic religion. Moreover all the numerous and diverse strands of Hinduism, including Shaivism, Shaktism and Tantraism as well as the subsequent sectarian divisions of Vaishnavism were described and presented as having developed out of this original Vedic source which originated with the worship of Vishnu and were thus to be understood as encompassed within this one original natural religion (*prakrit mat*) which was Vaishnavism. Again following Mitra Harischandra had divided the evolution of Vaishnavism into five stages: The age of the Vedas; the age of the Brahmanas; the age of Panini; the age of the Puranas and the present age.

There were however crucial differences between the two theories. In particular Mitra had considered that primitive polytheism had preceded Vedic monotheism and that the primitive religious sentiment amongst the Aryans had been expressed in various forms of polytheism, pantheism and ideas of an all-pervading essence.⁹³ Harischandra reversed the process and placed polytheistic practice as a successor to the monotheism of

⁹⁰ 'The Vaishnava Religion, with special reference to the Sikshapati of the modern sect called Svami-Narayana', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, n.s. 14, p. 296.

⁹¹ 'On the Psychological Tenets of the Vaishnavas', in *JASB*, 53, 1884, pp. 103-17.

⁹² *The Antiquities of Orissa*, 2 vols., Calcutta, 1875, vol. 1, p. 136.

⁹³ Rajendralal Mitra, 'The Primitive Aryans' in *Indo-Aryans: Contributions Towards the Elucidation of their Ancient and Medieval History*, vol. II, London, Edward Stanford, 1881, pp. 445-449, 460.

the Vedas. Unlike Mitra, he disregarded all contrary evidence and used the textual references selectively to suit his thesis. Thus in Harischandra's work, the culmination of the historical process which began with the worship of Vishnu at the time of the Aryans was the development of bhakti as the essential constitutive principle of Vaishnava monotheism. Bhakti, in Harischandra's later work, is presented not only as the synthesis of all Indian traditions of worship including Buddhism but also as being present in all world religions such as Christianity and Islam.⁹⁴ Vaishnavism is thus historically presented as an essentially monotheistic doctrine which has developed from the worship of one god in Vedic times to the worship of many and then again to the worship of one through the practise of bhakti. For the historical proof of this claim Harischandra cited the work of Orientalists who had already provided the necessary historicisation of Vaishnava traditions in their philological and textual analyses of classical Sanskrit sources.⁹⁵

Clearly then by this point the concept of Vaishnavism which Harischandra sought to articulate and project had been expanded to cover a vast range of religious and philosophical dimensions. In particular the notion of bhakti, or rather the newly historicised and enlarged notion of bhakti as envisaged by him, was presented as being the essential constitutive element and unifying principle of a national religion. A national religion was necessary in this discourse because Harischandra saw religion as the essential force in the regeneration and unification of the nation.⁹⁶ The historicisation of Vaishnava bhakti was thus part of a larger collective project to represent Vaishnavism (*vaishnavata*), be it termed as vedadharma, aryadharma, sanatana dharma or Hindu mat as the internally coherent and historically continuous religion of Bharatvarsha which was capable of providing both historical inspiration and regeneration for the present Hindu community on a national scale.

According to this process Vaishnava Hinduism, the religion of the merchant communities of northern and western India, had attached to itself the heritage of the Aryas. Aryan culture, as understood by western Orientalists was seen as largely confined

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 974.

⁹⁵ In this essay Harischandra cites the work of H.H. Wilson and Max Muller but in fact goes on to dispute their claims that Rudra, an early form of Shiva was a non-Aryan deity. *Samagra*, p. 971.

to the north,⁹⁷ and it was the predominantly high-caste Hindu communities of the north, conscious as they were of the authoritative status of western Indology, who presented themselves as the descendants of the original Aryans. The terms employed to denote those people who were deemed to be the present day inheritors of this ancient tradition were interchangeable: Arya jati, Hindu samaj, Vaishnava, bhakta, all were employed to refer to the descendents of the original Vedic Aryans. Likewise Bharatvarsha, used exclusively in this context rather than the more general Hindustan, referred to the territory held together historically, culturally and religiously by the concept of Vaishnava bhakti. Thus despite its more universalist claims *Vaishnavata aur Bharatvarsha* was in fact the history of Vaishnavism, as the essential and unifying strand of Hindu dharma, in the specific context of a north Indian, Aryan, past.⁹⁸

Early Hindu nationalist thought which was constituted during this period was constructed and formulated in dialogue and interaction with the theories and formulations of Hindu history and religion developed by western Indology. In its first phase Orientalist knowledge had been concerned with the equivalences between the figures of Greek and Roman mythology and those of the Indian.⁹⁹ From the mid-nineteenth century however this equivalence had been located in the worship of the pastoral god Krishna and Christian theology. Indian Orientalists and later Hindu publicists such as Harischandra engaged with and selected various aspects of this Orientalist discourse in order to substantiate and authorise their own arguments on Hindu history. Where they found support for their ideas they referred to the authority of the Orientalists,¹⁰⁰ and where the theories of western Indology contradicted or devalued the relevance of their own findings, they either refuted or simply ignored them.

⁹⁶ This idea is clearly set out in some of his speeches which have been discussed elsewhere. See 'Bharatvarsha ki Unnati Kaise Ho Sakti Hai', *Samagra*, pp. 1009-1013.

⁹⁷ See section on Archic Knowledge in chapter two which demonstrates this association.

⁹⁸ The Aryan ancestry of the present day Hindu dharma was highlighted in the writings of many of Harischandra's contemporaries and successors in north India. For example Balkrishna Bhatt, *Bharatvarsha ka Prachin Rajdharma* in *Hindi Pradeep*, May 1880, pp. 21-3; Balmukund Gupta, *Rajbhakti*, in *Bharatmitra*, 1907; Pratpnarayan Misra, *Bharatadharma Mahamandal*, in *Brahman*, 15 November 1890, 7, 4, pp. 3-8.

⁹⁹ See chapter 2.

¹⁰⁰ For example Harischandra's reference to 'Mahatma Moksmular' in *Vaishnavata aur Bharatvarsha*.

VII. Unity in diversity

The progressive shift which this process of historicisation effected, whereby local and regional cultural and religious forms were constantly projected as embodying the national culture, was similarly effected in the writing of histories of the various social classes and sub-groups. Early Hindu nationalists who set out to define and elaborate on their own local and regional traditions of caste, clan and religious sect and to publicise their findings to the wider community sought to incorporate them into the broader framework of a pan-Hindu and increasingly a pan-Indian, national notion of history and culture.

In Harischandra's case the impulse to consolidate the social and ritual history of one's own caste and clan led him to publish essays on the origins and historical development of north Indian sub-castes. *Agravalon ki Utpatti* (Origins of the Agrawals), published in 1871, was a genealogical history on the origins of his Agrawal sub-caste. In the introduction he describes it as being written in the style of a *vamshavali*, a genealogical history, which he had gathered from oral narratives, ancient texts and puranic sources.¹⁰¹ The Agrawals, he states, are the most important sub-caste of the Vaishya class, they are and have been predominantly situated in the north west region (prant) and they speak Khari Boli or Urdu. In the main text the writer outlines the position of Vaishyas in the *varna* system, effuses over the glory and wealth of the Agrawals in the past and lists a number of famous personages of the distant past who have belonged to this caste.¹⁰²

In *Khatttri ki Utpatti* (Origins of the Khattris), published in two parts in 1873 and 1878, Harischandra again focused on the origins of a particular clan or sub-caste but in this case their status in the *varna* system was unclear and even disputed. In the beginning the writer refers to the now widespread practice of writing caste histories: 'At this time the people of many castes are actively engaged in portraying the history of their development. For example, the Dhusara (whose Vaishya status is itself doubtful since they permit widow remarriage) have declared that they are Brahmans, the Kayasthas (who are a hybrid Shudra community...) claim to be Kshatriyas... In this situation, it is

¹⁰¹ Published first by the Medical Hall Press in Banaras and again in 1882 by the Khadgadvilas Press, Bankipur. See *Samagra*, p. 583.

¹⁰² *Samagra*, pp. 585-87.

necessary that this Arya community too should find its chronicler'.¹⁰³ The Khatris, he argues, are undoubtedly of the Kshatriya varna, since, amongst other burdens of proof, they originated from the ancient Aryans who inhabited the land between the Punjab and Allahabad: '[the Khatris] who were spread over the Punjab and the North Western Provinces the main place of habitation of the Arya jati and who have always been good people'.¹⁰⁴ In this case Harischandra's sources again show a degree of eclecticism and he cites as authorities on the subject both his friend Pandit Sri Radhakrishnadasji from Lahore, the book *Mihirprakash* by Munshi Budhsimh and Sherring's *Hindu Tribes and Castes*.¹⁰⁵

In both of these essays, oral narratives, alongside and in complement to textual sources, form the basis of many of the assertions. When it came to the varna status of the Khatris Harischandra refers to local stories, rumours and oral legends, prefixed with the words, 'It is the belief of many people...', 'Some say that...', and so on, followed by some references to a number of Puranic texts. Harischandra calls these oral narratives *kahani*, stories, and he grants to them an authority as the carriers of tradition that colonial ethnographers were similarly granting to folk tales and stories in the pages of the *Indian Antiquary*. Thus the boundaries of what constituted authoritative sources had again been broadened to include the local and the popular and writers seeking to assert the status of their own social groups took full advantage of this new development.

While Harischandra did not refer to these narratives as popular they were drawn from precisely the kind of ethnological context that was becoming popular amongst colonial anthropologists and sociologists.¹⁰⁶ From the mid-nineteenth century colonial administrators, ethnographers, folklorists and antiquarians began to examine popular beliefs and customs as they appeared in the towns and villages of the north Indian countryside, as well as language, for evidence of the survival of primitive forms of religion and culture. In particular the institutions of caste and of popular religious

¹⁰³ The first part of this essay was published in *Harischandra's Magazine* and the second in *Harischandra Chandrika*. A pamphlet was later published by the Khadgavilas Press, Bankipore in 1883. *Samagra*, p. 615.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Rev. M.A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes as represented in Benares*, 3 vols, London, 1872.

¹⁰⁶ In the late nineteenth century the significance of the 'folk' and popular traditions of rural society became apparent to a new generation of north Indian nationalists who saw in them the essence of a north Indian culture that had remained unchanged since ancient times.

practise were understood as features of a primitive religion. William Crooke in the preface to his *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* wrote: 'I believe that the more we explore these popular superstitions and usages, the nearer are we likely to attain to the discovery of the basis on which Hinduism has been founded. The official creed has always been characterised by extreme catholicism and receptivity, and many of its principles and legends have undoubtedly been derived from that stratum of the people, which it is convenient to call non-Aryan or Dravidian. The necessity then of investigating these beliefs before they become absorbed in Brahmanism, one of the most active missionary religions of the world, is obvious'.¹⁰⁷

Crooke emphasised the distinctive nature of the popular and local traditions of the common people which he saw as being gradually absorbed into the religion of the 'Brahmanas'. The worship of local godlings in many places demonstrated evidence of an animistic religion which through the 'combination of the local with the orthodox cults' led to the animistic gods entering into the 'orthodox pantheon'.¹⁰⁸ Harischandra represented just the threat of absorption which Crooke had recognised since his aim was to incorporate the local, the popular and the oral into the wider authoritative Sanskrit tradition. Just as in his historicisation of Vaishnavism all sects and sub-sects were presented as parts of one great *ur*-tradition descending from the time of the Vedic Aryans, so in the presentation of castes and sub-castes all are described as part of and contained within the Sanskrit varna system as described by Manu in the *Manusmriti*.

The project to define the constituent parts of the national religion and culture as understood by early nationalists was thus in part an effort to answer to the criticisms of Orientalists regarding the diversity in Hindu tradition and culture as it had developed subsequent to the Vedas and in particular from the Puranic age to the present. In the early nineteenth century Orientalists had regarded the multiplicity of religious and social institutions within contemporary Hinduism as evidence of the historical *divergence* from the Aryan and Sanskrit model of religion as represented in textual sources and as an aberration of the purity of Vedic religion. On the other hand it was also part of an effort to link the present day customs and practices of Hindus with an Aryan ancestry and to

¹⁰⁷ William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, [1894], vol. I, London, 1896, p. ii.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 6.

forge a continuous link with that past through the representation of living traditions as being the embodiment of primitive and ancient practices. The efforts of upper caste, urban Hindi intelligentsia to record, examine and to historicise the numerous social institutions and popular customs in the region was therefore an attempt to link these to an original Aryan ancestry and to include them within the larger Sanskritic scheme of orthodox religion and culture.

Indian nationalists of the late nineteenth century, who sought to historicise and consolidate their own regional, caste and religious traditions understood them in this way as being part of a larger, unified and unitary framework of religion and culture. This 'national' religion and culture, however, as it was constituted and consolidated in various kinds of historical narratives was founded on the Sanskritic model of a north Indian Aryan-derived civilisation originating in the ancient past.

Conclusion

The various chronological and historical reconstructions of royal lineages, caste groups, religious sects and even regional histories that appeared in vernacular pamphlets and periodicals from the second half of the nineteenth century were understood as being part of a 'national' history. Despite the apparent diversity of social groups and cultural traditions the general trend in writing their histories was to position them all within the four-fold, Sanskritic varna system as constituted by western Orientalists through their engagement with orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism. In the case of the north Indian Hindi intelligentsia this reconstituted 'national' tradition was imagined largely in the context of a north Indian, Sanskritic, Aryan-based civilisation. The common reference point which could be employed to unite all the various aspects of this tradition were the terms Arya, Arya jati, Aryavarta. These terms were used to encompass a diverse range of social and religious dimensions, they offered a sense of cohesion and claimed historical, territorial and cultural hegemony within the subcontinent.

While this chapter has focused largely on the terms of inclusion such as Hindu, Arya, Vaishnava, used by history writers to define and consolidate the national community, the following chapter examines the equally necessary demarcation of difference that was plotted in the same arena of Hindi print. New forms of social

mobility, coupled with new technologies of communication, travel and print in the late nineteenth century led to a widening of the social and cultural experience of a section of the north Indian Hindu intelligentsia. Travel, which for the first time became a recreational as well as an educational and religious practice, provided an important medium for exploring the tensions of caste, class, region and religion which were highlighted in the context of rapid social change.

Chapter 5

Anxieties of Travel: Constituting the Nation in Hindi Travel Accounts

This chapter explores the novel ways in which the Hindu intelligentsia of north Indian society sought to identify and affirm newly tested notions of self and community in the context of regional and pan-Indian travel. While travel itself provided the framework for this new exploration of sameness and difference, what was equally instrumental in its rise was the development of vernacular prose in Hindi and the prospect of a geographically wide, if socially narrow, arena of dissemination, provided by the burgeoning Hindi press from the late 1860s.¹ The material context, moreover, of this new experience of travel (and space) was the growing network of railway lines that began to appear in north India from the early 1860s, after the commencement of the East Indian Railway from Calcutta in 1854. The convergence around the same time, therefore, of the rail road, the rise of print capitalism and the emergence of modern forms of travel writing in Hindi was no mere coincidence, but the result of an expanding network of communication and contact amongst a newly educated and mobile Hindu elite.

From the mid-1860s those who could afford it could leave the towns and cities by train and enter into regions which had previously been impenetrable.² They could travel through wild and uncultivated areas which they observed through the windows of the train compartment and return home again in a matter of days or even hours. In the beginning, travel of this kind, whether it be for recreational or for educational purposes,

¹ I have dealt with the development of the Hindi print domain more fully in Chapter 3.

² The first railway line to cross north India was the East Indian Railway which started from Calcutta in 1854 and reached as far as Delhi in 1862. After that the network of railway lines in north India grew rapidly through the 1870s and 80s. By 1915 the United Provinces possessed 5000 miles of railway track and a network density 'among the highest in the periphery', Ian Derbyshire, 'Economic Change and the Railways in North India, 1860-1914', *Modern Asian Studies*, 21, 3, 1987, pp. 521-45. For the pattern of

was mainly limited to the wealthy and elite sections of north Indian society. Hindi writers and publicists who undertook such journeys were drawn almost exclusively from the upper or intermediate castes located in the urban and provincial centres of north India. The railways' potential to provide long-distance travel at a relatively inexpensive price was realised more slowly by other sections of north Indian society.³ This was partly because the cheapest way to travel long-distance was on foot and this long remained an important mode of circulation for the less well off.⁴ Nevertheless for those who did use them railways facilitated travel in a previously unimaginable way and they transformed the imagination of space and time by drastically reducing the time (and therefore the perception of distance) it took to travel between places. Towns and cities which had once been separated by journeys of several weeks were suddenly connected by a journey of days, or even hours.

The impact of this novel opportunity to travel for pleasure, amusement and, most significantly, for knowledge was well documented within the pages of the vernacular press. As early as the 1860s, and well before the arrival of the railway line in many places, timetables of trains as well as the projected costs and routes of new lines were regularly commented upon in the editorial pages of periodicals. And from the early 1870s writers began to publish short, often fragmentary, essay-like accounts of their journeys to other towns and regions.⁵ At the very least travel enabled publicists to employ their newly-found knowledge of places and their inhabitants to generate discussion on a range of social, cultural and political issues which they felt to be of significance.⁶ But in addition to this it seems a largely neglected feature of nineteenth century Hindi literary history that the writing of these travel reports, albeit insubstantial,

railway development throughout India see Daniel Thorner, 'The Pattern of Railway Development in India', in Ian J. Kerr, ed., *Railways in Modern India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 80-96.

³ The exception to this was the use of the railways by pilgrims travelling long-distance which began soon after its construction. See Ian J. Kerr, 'Reworking a Popular Religious Practice: The Effects of Railways on Pilgrimage in 19th and 20th Century South Asia', in Kerr, ed., *Railways*, pp. 304-327; Anand Yang, *Bazaar India. Markets, Society and the Colonial State in Bihar*, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 136, 179, 53.

⁴ G.A. Grierson, *Notes on the District of Gaya*, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1893, p. 7; A. Yang, 'Peasants on the Move: A Study of Internal Migration in Colonial India', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 10, 1979, pp. 37-58.

⁵ These narrative fragments appeared in a variety of printed media including periodicals, magazines, pamphlets and occasionally, though rarely, as individual monographs.

⁶ See for example the more politically motivated tour narrative of the 1880s such as 'Paschimottar Desh ki Yatra' written by a publicist from Kumaon, Jay Datt, *KVS*, 23 February 1885, pp. 8-10.

provided an increasingly self-conscious Hindi literati with an appropriately new and experimental literary form in which to explore the newly-felt tensions of language, caste, region, religion and a fast encroaching colonial modernity. Thus while travel brought into focus and highlighted a number of social and, significantly in this context, regional differences, it also, by uniting in distance and time previously isolated parts of the country, facilitated the experience of a wider sense of community and nationhood based on common factors of social or religious identity. The assertions of community and not-community moreover that were continually negotiated in these travel narratives must be recognised as being, at times, different from the more abstract and rhetorical imaginings of community and identity expressed in historical writings, such as those of Bharatendu Harischandra discussed in the previous chapter. In particular the immediate and spontaneous experience of people and places occasioned by travel often led to a more ambivalent and limited expression of community than that expressed via a purely historicist discourse.

This chapter concentrates largely on these short, report-like accounts of travel, although it also includes a number of travelogues published separately as pamphlets or books in the late nineteenth century. It further aims to take into account an important dimension of travel in the late nineteenth century, namely the new relationship between rail travel, pilgrimage and print. Long before the introduction of modern roads and transport pilgrims had travelled in huge numbers for great distances across India to various sacred centres.⁷ After the introduction of railways information concerning the conditions for travelling to distant tirthas such as Badrinath and Kedarnath in Garwhal, which required a considerable amount of forward planning, were printed alongside travel news in the Hindi press. Guide books for pilgrims instructed pilgrims how to reach the various sacred places and what to do there. These were organised into a number of different forms. There were those that provided a guide to the tirtha and the

⁷ Bayly argues that long distance travel generally increased during the Mughal period due to greater security and a network of roads linking parts of the empire. This is confirmed by contemporary accounts such as the *Ardhakathanaka*, the autobiographical account of a Jain merchant who travelled extensively for reasons of trade between several towns of north India at the beginning of the 17th century. See Bayly 'From Ritual to Ceremony: Death Ritual and Society in Hindu North India since 1600', in *Mirrors of Mortality. Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley, London, 1981. He further suggests that there is ample evidence to suggest that the pilgrim traffic had grown considerably between Benares, Allahabad and Gaya in the period 1780-1830 as a result of political stability.

various ritual activities which should be performed at them. These prescriptive genres were often extracted from well-known mahatmyas and other 'religious' texts associated with the Puranas. By publishing such information in Hindi they made available in an accessible form information about the tirthas from all the existing puranic and shastric texts which had previously been scattered. For example the *Avadh Yatra*, published in Lucknow in 1869, listed all the tirthas of Avadh with special emphasis on Ayodhya. It's author Ray Gurusaran Lal a lawyer at the Gorakhpur court declared in his preface that even those people who didn't know Sanskrit, and were therefore unable to read the original texts, should not be deprived of taking *darsan* and bathing in these tirthas.⁸ Pilgrimage guides thus offered a kind of encyclopaedic knowledge of the tirtha and its surroundings;⁹ often produced in towns far away from the actual tirtha, they greatly augmented both the status of the tirthas to which they referred in the popular imagination,¹⁰ and the overall stimulus to print provided by travel. This is confirmed by the proliferation of printed guide books and ritual guides to sacred centres after 1870.

I. Transitional Journeys: From Road to Rail

Prior to the introduction of rail transportation, the modes of circulation and transport used by travellers and traders throughout the subcontinent had barely changed for centuries.¹¹ In the north and east the Ganges, and its various tributaries, had served as important arteries of inland and maritime trade.¹² Although metalled roads had preceded railways by several decades as the major basis of land transportation, some of the primary and most of the secondary roads in northern and eastern India remained in a poor condition during the first half of the nineteenth century as a result of the seasonal weather conditions and the lack of investment by the colonial state and local

⁸ *Avadh Yatra*, Lucknow, 1869, pp. 1-2.

⁹ See also in the same genre *Badri Yatra*, Lucknow, 1892; *Ujjain Kshetra Yatra Sankshep*, Allahabad, 1893; *Balark Tirtha Rahasya*, Ayodhya, 1919.

¹⁰ Bayly argues that the constant reiteration of the merits of holy places in Puranas had kept them in the popular mind of the localities and it was still possible to slip in new names and attributes as late as the 18th century, see Bayly, 'Death ritual' in *Mirrors of Mortality*, pp. 163-6.

¹¹ Hence the comment that the mid-nineteenth century traveller was said to be moving 'as slowly and as tediously as in the days of Asoka', quoted in Yang, *Bazaar India*, p. 26.

¹² Two important tributaries for northern India were the Gogra and the Burhi Gandak, both in Bihar, Yang, *Bazaar India*, pp. 27-32.

landholders.¹³ After the onset of the railway era there was a renewed effort by the state to construct new roads and improve existing ones in the regional hinterland, primarily to serve as feeder links to the new mainline railway stations.¹⁴

The period immediately preceding the full onset of the railway era, when the landscape of travel was undergoing considerable transformation, constitutes a period of transition in the experience of travel and the literature that was formulated to represent it; one that stands in some contrast to the travel accounts of a subsequent era. Pandit Ratneshvar's account of a journey through central India from Sehore to Bombay, published in 1841, evokes precisely this sense of transition both in content and form. The author, a pandit at the government high school in Sehore,¹⁵ accompanied a number of colonial officials on their journey to Bombay where several of them had made plans to set sail for England in 1839.¹⁶ The text was written and published in the form of a series of letters which Ratneshvar wrote to his friends and colleagues at the Sehore school recounting the various stages of the journey, and it is via these personal letters that one gets a sense both of the novelty of the author's undertaking and the ongoing presence of a religious and cultural landscape with which the author is familiar.¹⁷

In the first instance, the author is well aware of his own position as a government teacher and the changes which the country through which they pass is undergoing as a result of colonial rule. The journey was undertaken under the auspices of the East India Company and evidence of the Company's expansive agenda was apparent in the large number of military garrisons which the travellers encountered stationed in the territories through which they passed. Ratneshvar was eager not to present too negative an image of the British presence in India. Accordingly, in view of his position as a teacher, he focused largely on matters of education in the letters to his fellow teachers and reported

¹³ The early colonial state attempted to make it the responsibility of local landholders and administrators to maintain secondary roads in the various districts of the region. Francis Buchanan, *An Account of the District of Bihar and Patna in 1811-1812*, Patna, Bihar and Orissa Research Society, 1928, pp. 442-43; C.E.A.W. Oldham, 'Routes, Old and New, from Lower Bengal 'Up the Country'', *Bengal Past and Present*, 28, 1924.

¹⁴ Yang, *Bazaar India*, pp. 26, 31.

¹⁵ Pandit Ratneshvar is mentioned in chapter 3 as being one of the transitional intelligentsia discussed in that chapter.

¹⁶ *Patramalika. A Journey from Sehore to Bombay*, Agra, Agra School Book Society, 1841.

¹⁷ As the title of the volume suggests, it was published as a textbook in letter-writing for students of the school.

back on the various types of schools and teachers which he had visited in order to observe the progress of the new knowledge, meaning western scientific knowledge, with which he was familiar. On the whole it appears that he was largely disappointed with what he saw; many of the schools he visited knew nothing of the new knowledge epitomised by maps and geography and taught only indigenous systems of accounting to their students. On one or two occasions, however, where there were government-patronised schools, at Nasik and at Poona, he was impressed by the displays of both western scientific and indigenous knowledge that were demonstrated in these places.¹⁸ Thus on the whole the general tone of the account is one of admiration for the new order generated by the colonial regime and in particular its program of disseminating 'useful knowledge' amongst the general population.

Secondly, there is a genuine sense of the novelty of Ratneshvar's undertaking which involved a journey embarked upon solely for reasons of knowledge and education. In addition to his professional interest in the progress of education Ratneshvar shows interest in all things new and unknown on his journey. Thus the letters are peppered with observations of the remarkable things (*achche padarth*) which he saw along the way – beautiful gardens, rich merchants stores and bountiful markets – many of which, it is inferred, were a consequence of the institution of the British presence in the region. In Hoshangabad he marvelled at the beauty and abundance of the merchants shops in the bazaar. Nearby, he was dazzled by the amazing display of wealth in the garden of a rich man of the locality which was filled with foreign flowers and trees, 'To the east of that city about a mile away the *kotis* (houses/stores) of important men (*bare sahib*) have been built in charming gardens filled with flowers; nearby a battalion has been established.... Just by looking at the beauty of that garden I knew that it must cost several thousand rupees to maintain it'.¹⁹ Later on, when they pass through the territory of the Maharaja Scindia, this sense of abundance and order is contrasted with the bad condition of roads in this area where bandits were known to regularly attack travellers and rob them of their possessions. In this territory, Ratneshvar commented, the people endure great suffering because there is no established order.²⁰

¹⁸ *Patramalika*, pp. 9, 13.

¹⁹ *Patramalika*, pp. 1, 2, 3.

²⁰ *Patramalika*, p. 4.

In contrast, however, to the general sense of novelty which pervades the text there is also ample evidence of an older, more familiar and no less valued cultural order in the account. For one thing the religious and cultural *landscape* which the author describes appears to be largely consistent with that of a previous era. At several of the stopping points along the way Ratneshvar mentions the familiar activities of Hindu pilgrimage. In Hoshangabad, on the banks of the (holy) river Narmada he observed the daily ritual of bathing (*asnan*), offering betel nut (*pan*) and performing ritual worship (*puja*).²¹ The countryside through which they travelled was populated with temples, shrines and other sites of religious significance which in the author's mind derived their importance not only from their association with deities but also from the political and cultural authority of their founders and patrons. In the village of Harsud, the travellers came across a temple to Mahadev in which a Sanskrit *bijak* dating from Samvat 1275 (1218 CE.) indicated that the temple had been established at that time by a merchant named Keshav. Ratneshvar demonstrates a sensitivity to local legend by noting that the local zamindars here claimed that this locality had once been the abode of Raja Harischandra. And in Singaji, in the region of Mandaleshvar, Ratneshvar mentions the annual festival of *sadhus* (religious mendicants) that had been taking place there since 1816.²² Besides the numerous tirthas and temples which they encountered on their journey, the author also mentioned the important towns and more specifically the marketplaces through which they passed. In Burhanpur there were thousands of people who made their living spinning gold thread, the market was filled with fountains and due to the irrigation system around the town there was a sweet smell from all the different kinds of fruit on display in the market. Here, the author wondered, there were as many as 36 markets in one city.²³

While the novelty of the journey was manifest in the new networks and resources of travel which the retinue relied upon,²⁴ the author also demonstrates his familiarity with the older, indigenous networks of travel on which they also partially relied. At several points he refers to the names of local 'big men' (*bare admi*) and important

²¹ *Patramalika*, p. 2.

²² *Patramalika*, pp. 3, 4.

²³ *Patramalika*, p. 6.

personages whom they met and from whom they received hospitality.²⁵ For instance, outside Burhanpur they met Krishna Rao Madhav, an important zamindar of that locality, who showed them great hospitality. His reference to such figures suggests an awareness of older modes of circulation, based on alternative networks, which existed prior to the new order. Local elites, landowners, merchant networks and administrative families involved in the patronage and support of religious activities such as the building and maintenance of temples would have constituted the backbone of these networks. In view of his appreciation of this older culture of circulation Ratneshvar makes passing reference in his letters to the names of the sponsors of religious fairs and pilgrimage places as well as the local landholders and zamindars who had contributed to the upkeep of temples and dharamsalas. Assuming that Ratneshvar shared a common religious and cultural background to the recipients of his letters his decision to mention these points concerning the indigenous political and cultural authorities prevalent in particular localities demonstrates the continuing relevance of such authorities in the minds of indigenous travellers.²⁶

While Ratneshvar's account was published in a period when the institutions and structures of colonial authority were still in their infancy in central India, a travel account from a later period articulates a similar sense of transition regarding both the modes and resources of circulation and the different registers of cultural and political authority which persist in different territories. In the first part of his autobiography published in 1886, Damodar Shastri, a Maharashtrian Brahman and Sanskrit scholar living in Banaras, recounted the story of the *mahayatra* (pilgrimage to one or more of the great pan-Indian Hindu tirthas) which he had undertaken as a young man with his family from his natal village in Maharashtra to the sacred centres of Prayag, Kashi and Gaya in the north.²⁷ In the pre-modern period pilgrimage was probably one of the main

²⁴ Ratneshvar recounts the hospitality which they received along the way from various Company officials and makes a point of emphasising their exploitation of such official connections.

²⁵ *Patramalika*, p. 7.

²⁶ Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam describe this common cultural framework shared between the author and readers of a text as a 'community of departure', 'Circulation, Piety and Innovation. Recounting Travels in Early Nineteenth Century South India', Claude Markovitz et al, eds, *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750-1950*, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2003.

²⁷ *Mai Vahi Hum*, Bankipore, Khadgavilas Press, 1886, pp. 3-32; Damodar Shastri wrote two additional travel accounts: *Meri Janmabhumi Yatra*, Bankipore, Khadgavilas Press, 1888, an account of a journey from Banaras to his native village in Maharashtra and a pilgrimage to Dvaraka; *Meri Purvadig Yatra*,

reasons for long-distance, cross-regional travel inside the subcontinent and, in spite of the much later date of its publication, this account of a journey, which was in fact undertaken in 1864, reflects many of the same religious and cultural preoccupations as those of a pilgrimage undertaken in an earlier era.

In this case it is the motivation for and context of the journey which determines what the author chooses to expand on and what to omit from his account. Pilgrimage defines both the spiritual and the material context of their journey and though the route which they followed was partially covered by the new railway network, due to his father's adherence to traditional practice, they did not travel by rail and instead went by cart and on foot.²⁸ After setting out from their village of Usthal they journeyed to Satara, Poona, Paitav, Nagpur, Kamthi, Ramtek, Jabalpur and finally reached their first destination of Prayag. Along this itinerary the major points of interest and those which are singled out by the author for special attention are the various tirthas and religious places which they visit. Thus at Paitav, on the banks of the Godavari, they stop to carry out the long-established custom of adding their names to the genealogical records kept by the ritual specialists at the river side.²⁹ The various rituals associated with individual tirthas are elaborately retold and explained in this account thus at Ramghat, on the banks of the Narmada near Jabalpur Shastri mentions his father's preoccupation with the rituals established by the tirtha brahmans and which differed from the southern versions. Having consulted two specialists of that place who advised them on the correct forms of the rituals, they carried out their religious obligations according to the proper order and conventions.³⁰

In the journey from their village in Maharashtra to Prayag in the north the retinue passed through a series of different territories which are noted by the author as each bearing their own distinctive cultural forms and manners. As they journey towards Nagpur in the area to the north of Hyderabad Shastri describes the territory they have entered as 'Mughlai' and under the authority of the Nizam.³¹ Following a brief history of

Bankipore, Khadgavilas Press, 1888, an account of five years spent in Bihar and a pilgrimage to Jagannath Puri in Orissa.

²⁸ *Mai Vahi Hum*, p. 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 20.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

the region up to the time of British conquest Shastri gives a description of the language, dress, customs and specialist commodities produced in the area. Many people still speak Marathi here, he notes, because the region had once been a kingdom of the Marathas. The awareness of the differentiated nature of political and religious authority in various territories is further reflected in the networks and resources that the retinue draw on as they enter different regions. In the immediate vicinity of their village they were able to utilise family and extended family connections. As they move further away from home, however, they were forced to rely on less familiar networks of travel. In the religious centres, such as Paitav and Ramtek, they were able to stay at dharmashalas provided for pilgrims by religious organisations with which they may well have had some connection. For some of the journey they were accompanied by a *Prayagval*, a ritual specialist employed for the rites to be performed in Prayag. These men travelled all over India in search of clients and had their own networks and resources to utilise in each place. In some areas however, it appears that these resources were not available. In the Mughlai territory Shastri commented that having tried to find a village to camp in, being afraid of robbers, they had been forced to camp outside a town and were later robbed by the villagers of that place.³² Hence wherever possible they avoided unfamiliar locations and continued travelling until they were able to find some secure place to stay.

Such episodes indicate a persistent awareness of the multiple claims to authority which had traditionally coexisted in any given location. Prior to the colonial era the rise and fall of regional and local claims to resources from trade and commerce meant that there were no examples of states with mutually exclusive territorial jurisdiction. Territorial authority in pre-colonial India was based neither on the rationally conceived and objective cartographic representations of political space employed by the modern state, nor on the notion of an exclusive right or sovereignty over territory. Rather, territorial conceptions flowed from a '*differentiated* understanding of terrain' and the right to extracting dues and levies from those residing in or passing through it.³³ According to such pre-modern conceptions the marketplace, the trading centre and the pilgrimage site existed as heterotopic spaces, incorporating multiple domains of meaning

³²Mai Vahi Hum, p. 11.

³³ Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace*, Pennsylvania, 1998, pp. 32-33.

in terms of exchange and claims to authority over them.³⁴ Pilgrimage sites, in particular, embodied this notion of the multiple claims to authority, both religious and political. Like marketplaces they functioned as nodes in a complex pattern of economic, social and religious exchanges organised hierarchically as well as by such factors as economy, geography, transportation, politics, and administration. Travel accounts, such as Shastri's, which articulate the contingent and uncertain nature of such locations in terms of politics, culture and economy demonstrate the currency of an older conception of territorial authority which was sensitive to these different registers. Hence even where the new resources such as the railways, the telegraph and the postal service are mentioned they are recognised alongside the older networks of communication and patronage based on family and regional connections, sectarian affiliations and localised forms of transportation.

The context of pilgrimage and the decision to employ a mode of travel that was in keeping with the traditional requirements of religious orthodoxy meant that Shastri's journey reflects an older mode of circulation, one that provides glimpses of the nature of such travel in the pre-colonial era. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that the markers of economic and political change which had so altered the conditions of travel at this period should have been mentioned by the author. At various points he refers to the improved condition of roads and security for travellers as a result of British rule. On the road from Nagpur to Jabalpur the author comments, 'Previously on this road there was a lot of jungle and lots of animals, but since the British have made a straight road as far as Jabalpur many new villages have appeared alongside the road and much land has begun to be cultivated, and the toll duty has also increased'.³⁵ In Nagpur Shastri remarked that the city had generally flourished under the British and that trade had expanded there since the introduction of the railway.³⁶ Moreover writing his account towards the end of the nineteenth century Shastri has had enough exposure to the new historical awareness

³⁴ In his study of markets at the beginning of the nineteenth century Sen has written that 'Sites of transaction (fairs, pilgrimages, marketplaces) and routes of exchange (rivers, reffies, ports and roads) were part of an everyday material culture closely entwined with religious obligations. Groups contending for political clout in the regional sphere of Mughal north India sought to appropriate and keep up such passages, not merely to harness material resources but to secure their authority over the multiple domains of everyday life.', *Empire of Free Trade*, p. 22.

³⁵ *Mai Vahi Hum*, p. 18.

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 12-15.

and its part in the reconstruction of a national past to depict the war between the Mahrattas and the Mughals as a war between Hindus and Muslims and the final cause of Mahratta defeat to have been the lack of cohesion between the various Hindu powers.³⁷ At such points the author articulates an awareness of the broad context of social and cultural change effected in the colonial period that is unlikely to have been felt by him at the time of travel.

Travel accounts from the pre-rail era appear to retain vestiges of what might be called an indigenous or pre-modern culture of travel. In such narratives it appears that the cultural sphere of travel was still to some extent determined by the vocabulary and concepts of the Mughal regime and its regional polities.³⁸ In particular, travel narratives of this period, spanning the first century of British colonial rule, demonstrate an awareness of the culturally differentiated nature of different territories that is less marked in later accounts. Whilst in these accounts each region and even locality is represented as differentiated in terms of language, culture and economy, in the later accounts such differences are often deliberately effaced or subsumed within the homogenising categories of a regional and/or national culture and religion. The transitional character of these early accounts, moreover, was apparent not only in the individual itineraries which the travellers undertook, which were often not new at all, but also in the context in which the journey took place, the modes of transportation, the places and people encountered and equally, in the texts which they produced to account for the experience of travel which employed a range of formal and stylistic innovations.

II. Constructing boundaries: self and other

Until recently most studies of indigenous responses to railways have focused on the economic dimensions of the transition. Undoubtedly it was indeed the largely negative economic consequences which fuelled much of the initial opposition to railways within the region. The introduction by the British of rail transportation to certain areas designed to transport goods into and out of north India heralded the onset of a new, colonial,

³⁷ *Mai Vahi Hum*, pp. 12-15.

³⁸ An example of this was Enugulu Veeraswamy, *Enugula Veeraswamy's Journal (Kasiyatra Charitra)*, ed. and trans. by P. Sitapati and V. Purushottam, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh Governmental Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Institute, 1973.

economic order that differed substantially from what had hitherto existed.³⁹ Railways altered traditional trading routes and patterns of commercial activity to such an extent that the territories which they traversed were soon transformed into a systematised economic grid in which individual localities lost their distinctive meaning, both in terms of produce and consumption and in their varying claims to political and cultural authority.⁴⁰ Despite, however, the largely negative response of the north Indian intelligentsia to the economic changes brought about by railways, there were also a range of social and indeed moral issues connected with these new structures of colonial industrial and technological transformation that were a major preoccupation amongst the elite and more traditional sections of north Indian society. Travel writing in Hindi became a convenient platform both for the expression of these new anxieties and aspirations and for the construction and organisation of social difference which such tensions inevitably provoked. Through the act of writing, travellers could constitute or redefine the boundaries between self and other whilst simultaneously establishing their authority as narrators seeking to address a readership of common cultural origins. Intra-regional travel accounts in particular, though they stressed the complex variety of 'others' which might be encountered in such proximity to home, also provided a strong sense of community by identification with their readership and with a larger geographical grouping created by the rail network. If those travelling to Europe wrote accounts which were intended to be educational and informative for those at home, publicists travelling within India generally addressed their own countrymen, *deshvale*, or townsmen and occasionally their fellow travellers.⁴¹

³⁹ Derbyshire, 'Economic Change', p. 528. Derbyshire's work demonstrates the important influence of railways in transforming the economic balance between different regions of north India. In particular the eastern districts of the North Western Provinces, from where many Hindi publicists and writers were drawn, suffered a decline in commercial traffic while the west of the province experienced a boost to its trade.

⁴⁰ For example, places which had previously been marginalised and isolated from mainstream trade routes were soon amalgamated into the larger networks of trade by their proximity to the railroad, just as those markets and towns which had been previously well-connected to road or river traffic suffered a decline in their commercial activities as a result of not being situated near the railway. Derbyshire, 'Economic Change', pp. 528-9.

⁴¹ Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan in his account of his trip to Europe published serially in the *Aligarh Institute Gazette* between 1869-70, addressed his countrymen and his Muslim brothers about their squalor and ignorance compared with what he had seen on his travels to Europe. *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 6 May 1870, North Western Provinces Native Newspaper Reports, hereafter NWPNNR, 1869-70, p. 215 and *Aligarh Institute Gazette*, 25 February, 1870, NWPNNR, p. 92.

The expression of the new anxieties occasioned by rapid social and economic transformation took a number of different forms in the accounts of journeys published in periodical literature. In these accounts it was the trains, compartments, railway stations, railway bridges and tunnels which often occupied prominent positions as the physical representatives of colonial modernity.⁴² Railway stations in particular were portrayed as novel spaces which had to be negotiated by passengers as an integral part of the contemporary experience of travel. The reality of this fact however, was as much a source of trepidation as it was of excitement for many contemporary travellers. Har Devi, a Punjabi Kayasth from Lahore, leaving her native home for the first time in 1883 was awestruck by the size and noise of the railway station when she and her husband boarded the train for Amritsar.⁴³ Depictions of stations in much of the literature of the period were characterised by images of chaos and disorder: the ferocious noise of the steam engines, the repeated blowing of whistles by the railway guards and the tremendous push and shove of people trying to reach the platforms and board their trains. The general chaos which passengers regularly encountered at railway stations was perceived to be such a customary part of rail travel that it was used as the subject of a Christian Tract, *Yatri Vigyapan*, published in Hindi, which likened the great hardships endured by passengers undertaking travel by rail to those of treading the path to Christ.⁴⁴ Hence trains, stations and compartments, which began to appear as motifs in contemporary travel accounts, were deployed by writers as appropriate settings from which to examine a range of social and religious tensions which were being experienced in an intense fashion during rail travel but also, perhaps less acutely, in the wider arena of contemporary life.

Modern developments such as railways made it difficult to maintain caste separations and the strictness of food taboos. Social and religious hierarchies which were a part of everyday life were inevitably accentuated in the confined space of the railway

⁴² Purna Chandra Basu, a Bengali from Calcutta described the sensation of speed which he experienced as the train on which he was travelling passed over a railway bridge: 'We had to pass over the Sone Bridge, and I shall never forget the sensation I felt at the time: the rattling noise with which the train thundered along the bridge dinned my ears, while the chasm below and the velocity with which we were moving on almost made my brain dizzy', Purna Chandra Basu, *A Journey Through Upper India*, Calcutta, 1887, p. 17.

⁴³ *Landan ki Yatra*, Lahore, 1886, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁴ Anon., *Yatri Vigyapan*, Advice to Travellers, Allahabad, Mission Press, 1876.

carriage. First, second and third class carriages organised the spatial division of the train compartments according to caste, class and economic means. Some trains, like the one which Harischandra took from Jabalpur to Itarsi in 1872, had only one class available to Indians which meant that all passengers were seated together, regardless of their social or economic status.⁴⁵ Harischandra's experience of Jabalpur, like other similar accounts, was more negative than positive. He highlighted the difficulties of finding accommodation in a strange place and the annoyance of being swindled by the local cheats. He complained that people were often rude and unhelpful and the food, when it was available, was of poor quality compared to the food in Banaras.⁴⁶ Besides the discomfort there was also the very real lack of facilities which meant that often travellers had to go without water and food for long periods of time. Other varieties of complaint included problems of overcrowding in third class carriages, the long delays leading to discomfort and fatigue and the difficulties of buying tickets, boarding the train and having to cope with the intrusions of drunk soldiers.⁴⁷

Social anxieties moreover were directed as much at British passengers as at other Indians. In particular complaints about having to share compartments with Europeans reflected the anxiety which was felt regarding their personal habits and public behaviour. British soldiers were often described as drunk and offended the Hindu gentry with the smoke of their pipes.⁴⁸ These were largely new anxieties produced by the new and unfamiliar experience of proximity of people to one another in the carriages of a train. In the travel account 'Janakpur ki Yatra' Harischandra stresses the urgent need for separate toilets on the train for British and Indians travelling in first and second class: 'Just as they are disgusted by the habit of chewing and spitting out paan, so we are by the smoke from their pipes. These habits contravene nature if only because they cause harm. One more thing is obligatory. At stations where the train waits for a long time there should be separate toilets for Indians in first and second class because they are not used to

⁴⁵ This article entitled 'Jabalpur' was first published in *Kavivachansudha*, hereafter *KVS*, 20 July 1872. See also Hemant Sharma, ed., *Bharatendu Samagra*, Banaras, 2004, p. 1036.

⁴⁶ *KVS*, 20 July 1872, also *Samagra*, p. 1036.

⁴⁷ Each of these inconveniences was listed by Pandit Ramshankar Vyas, *Paribhraman*, Bankipore, 1909.

⁴⁸ *Paribhraman*, p. 7.

commodes, nor are they suitable without individual water'.⁴⁹ The article is written with a certain degree of humour and the writer seeks to ridicule British notions of civility. 'Some' he claims 'are civilised, some are very civilised and some are even humorous... but some of them are really excruciating and they feel so much hatred for Hindustanis that one's mind becomes filled with sorrow'.⁵⁰ The conflicting needs of British and Indian travellers were emphasised and repeatedly represented as incompatible.

For many of the Hindu *rais* (gentry), the ignominious treatment which they underwent while travelling on such modern forms of transportation was considered to be well below their dignity and status. In the Janakpur account Harischandra bemoaned the sorry state of the steamer which the travellers had to board to cross over the river: 'At five o'clock the train set off again. We arrived at the ghat. There, there was a steamer. A really wretched [looking] steamer, the second class of which had no redeeming feature other than its name. It is indeed a matter of great shame that important men should have to sit in such [a place]'.⁵¹ In response to such grievances, demands for separate carriages and refreshment rooms in stations for high-caste Hindus were raised repeatedly in the pages of the Hindi press from the 1870s.⁵² While the focus of the complaints was on the discomfort and bad condition of the compartments reserved for Indians and the lack of facilities provided at stations, the trains themselves were portrayed as symbolising the era of kaliyug and all the negative effects of rapid social and economic change. In an account of a journey made in 1879 along the banks of the Sarayu river in Awadh Harischandra wrote, 'It seems that the railway company is a great enemy of Nature (*svabhav*) because anything that is connected to it, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, going to the loo and so on is a great inconvenience on the train. Perhaps it is for this

⁴⁹ This article, 'Janakpur ki Yatra', was first published in *Harischandra Chandrika*, hereafter *HC*, 7, 4, 1880. See also *Samagra*, p. 1046.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1046.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 1046.

⁵² 'Rel ki Savari', *Hindi Pradeep*, March 1879; *Agra Akhbar*, 20 December 1876, NWPNNR, 23 December 1876, p. 747; *Bharat Jiwan*, 2 June 1902, NWPNNR, 7 June 1902, p. 378. See for example a petition to the Government from the British India Association published in English and Urdu in 1869, 'A Petition to the British Government praying for certain reforms in the Railway arrangements for the convenience of Native Passengers, with the Government's Circular received in reply thereto', Oriental and India Office Collection, Tract no. 37184, 1869.

reason that there is now so much disease in Hindustan'.⁵³ Criticisms of the individual railway companies, of the management of the lines and stations and of the colonial government's use of rail transportation to extract wealth from India and import foreign goods began to appear frequently from the 1880s.⁵⁴ Poetic and dramatic compositions of the time also reflected these popular concerns.⁵⁵

The social anxieties experienced during travel however were also frequently a feature in the accounts of travellers. Shortly after a trip to Roorki in 1872, Harischandra wrote an humorous account of a visit to Lucknow from Banaras by train. On this occasion an earlier appreciation of new technology was supplanted with a critical reflection on the new organisation of the colonial city which had been substantially rebuilt by the British after the rebellion of 1857. As the travellers approached the city by train the writer was initially struck by the large number of minarets on the skyline denoting its large Muslim population. At the entrance to the city, the travellers were troubled by fraudulent tax-collectors, described as *raksas* (demons), who tried to extract money from them. This, it seems, was an implicit way of commenting on the excessive demands and injustices of the government taxation policy. The city itself, at least the old part of it, was described as dirty and foul-smelling and the writer claimed: 'The old city has been ruined, whatever remains of it has been buried so far below the new streets that it exists like some kind of hell'.⁵⁶ Whatever the faults were of the old city, these have now been almost completely effaced by the construction of the new colonial city: 'Where before there was the jewellery bazaar and the street market now donkeys graze. Of all the *imambaris* (Shia shrines) some have become post offices, some hospitals and some are printing presses. The Rumi Darvaza, the Masjid of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula and the Machibhavan have all been turned into a government fort'.⁵⁷

In spite of the overall humorous tone of the piece which depicts Lucknow disparagingly as a city of effeminate men, cunning prostitutes and debauched Hindu rais,

⁵³ First published as 'Sarayu Par ki Yatra' in *HC*, 6, 8, February 1879. Also in *Samagra*, p. 1039.

⁵⁴ See below in this chapter for further details on this point. Jay Datt, 'Pashchimottar Desh ki Yatra', *KVS*, 23 February, 1885, pp. 8-10.

⁵⁵ See for example Kartikprasad Khatri's 1873 drama *Rel ki Vikat Khel*, The Trials of Train Travel, which described with some humour the vicissitudes of travelling by train. The drama was initially written to be performed at Harischandra's house and was later printed in *Harischandra Magazine*, 1, 7, 1873.

⁵⁶ The article first appeared as 'Lucknow' in *KVS*, 2, 22, 1871. See also *Samagra*, p. 1031.

⁵⁷ *Samagra*, p. 1031.

Harischandra appears to be conscious of the transformation which the city has undergone in recent years. The general decay and poor condition of the old city was symbolic of the collapse of Mughal aristocratic culture and an elite Indo-persian cultural world of which Lucknow had once been at the centre. All of this had now been supplanted by a British bureaucratic culture characterised by arrogance and an ignorance of local cultural values. The new government offices and institutions were the symbols of the colonial 'civilising' mission on this urban space. In the whole city there were apparently only two things left worth seeing in the writer's opinion: Husainabad and Kaiser Bag, both remnants of an older cultural order prior to the colonial. After a brief description of the architectural features of these two places the writer mused: 'Where once pearls were scattered in abundance now only dust blows around'.⁵⁸ The tone of this sentence in particular reflects a style of lament found in a genre of Urdu poetry, *shahr-i-ashub*, which emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in north India.⁵⁹ The genre had originally developed as a response to the sense of dislocation experienced amongst an aristocratic class at the hands of new rulers with altered ties of patronage and prestation during the dissolution of the Mughal empire. In these poems the themes which reappear are of external invasion, the devastation of cities and the loss of friendship and intimacy among men. In this remark the poet appears at least implicitly to have been drawing on such sensibilities and the theme of nostalgia to define the greater sense of dislocation effected by the arrival of British rule.

Despite the sense of loss however, the writer is keen to brand the people of Lucknow as backward and lacking in modern ways. At this point his focus shifts from the urban landscape/topography to the inhabitants of Lucknow and their behaviour. Harischandra criticises the Hindu rais of the city who are backward in both their attitudes and behaviour. The inference is perhaps that they have been corrupted by the long-term influence of an overly-decadent Muslim culture. Here the writer produces stereotypical images of Muslim decadence which echoed those of official British attitudes to the Lucknow nawabi culture. After detailing a barrage of criticisms on the city and its various inhabitants alongside a grudging nod to the few sights that he claims

⁵⁸ *Samagra*, p. 1031.

⁵⁹ Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam, *Three Mughal Poets*, Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1968.

are worth seeing, the writer asks that God will enlighten these people and release them from their backward ways.

Thus faced with the intractable reality of colonial rule and a range of novel anxieties about social and cultural transformation, writers sought to constitute aspects of sameness and difference in their writings by tracing a variety of social and topographical landscapes. On the whole these writers saw themselves as Aryan, Hindu, upper caste and educated at least superficially in the new knowledge, *naya vidya*; lacking any element of this criteria could result in being classed as 'other'. Differences of class, caste, race and religion were often represented in terms of concepts of civilisation and nature or via evolutionary-historical concepts, while regional differences were generally expressed in terms of language, dress and social customs.

The classification and labelling of certain types of people or people from other regions as uncivilised (*asabhya*) forms a motif in many contemporary travel narratives. Indeed, the act of travel for reasons other than trade seems to have situated the traveller in the immediate present whilst those being represented are thrust into a descriptive past. Srimati Har Devi travelling by train from Lahore to Bombay in 1886 recounted with genuine dismay the backward ways of those women who, unlike her, were still trapped in the prism of purdah and ignorance.⁶⁰ Whilst regional differences were often seen as subordinate to differences of social status, caste and religion in the accounts of many writers, such distinctions were nevertheless often represented in the form of cultural stereotypes which reflected British ethnographic modes. Damodar Shastri, on a pilgrimage to the temple of Jagannath in Puri in 1885 described the people of Bengal as timid and cowardly in contrast to the Oriyans who were, surprisingly, of purer stock.⁶¹ In this account the villagers of Bengal are also represented as backward because they wash and drink from the same water and have little access to good water even in the rainy season.⁶²

Images of poverty and of social and cultural backwardness are further conjured by Harischandra in a travel account, 'Sarayu Par ki Yatra' (Journey on the banks of the Sarayu), published in *Harischandra Chandrika* in February 1879. The author recounts

⁶⁰ Srimati Har Devi, *Landan ki Yatra*, Lahore, 1886, p. 17.

⁶¹ *Meri Purvadi Yatra*, Bankipore, 1885, p. 24.

⁶² *Ibid.*

the details of a journey by train and bullock cart along the Sarayu river in Awadh. The first stop on the rail line was at Ayodhya where they spent the night of Ram Navmi. The writer is struck by the extreme poverty of the people there. As they continue their journey they enter an increasingly rural landscape containing small villages and settlements to which the writer responds with a mixture of disgust and disinterest, 'Basti, Basti is totally useless, if this is called *basti* (settlement) then what do they call a ruin'.⁶³ Further on he mocks the local people for their coarseness and village manners: 'A lot was learnt about the nature of the people of Avadh at the Ramlila from meeting them here on the road and on the rail in Ayodhya. The people of Baiswara (another name of Avadh) are proud, rude and romantic, not only romantic they are virile. The men really are men, each one considers himself a Bhima, or an Arjuna, and all are the composers of the Puranas and all are Wajid Ali Shah. They speak of coarse matters with great enthusiasm. The new civilisation (*naya sabhya*) has not reached here.... The refinement of the men is hidden under large moustaches and a coarse style and the refinement of the women beneath dirty clothes and ugly nose-rings'.⁶⁴ There is clearly little or no sympathy for rural life in this description. The villagers are measured against the standard of 'naya sabhya', which apparently only exists amongst the educated classes in the cities.

Continuing with his account the writer lays greater emphasis on the rurality and backwardness of the local inhabitants and their descent from inferior stock. The description of the zillah of Basti culminates in a list of the types of people to be found there: 'Basti is only a settlement of four or five thousand people but the zillah is large because the revenue is 14 lakh. There are altogether ten or twelve sahabas here and the same amount of Bengalis. I didn't find a single Agarwal except one and he was Gorakhpuri'.⁶⁵ This gazetteer-like information is then followed by a description of the lowly status even of the landowners in this area: 'The palace of the Raja is no better than any house in the Orderly Bazaar in Banaras. Opposite the palace is a field, behind it jungle and terai on all sides. The houses of five hundred of the Rajas henchmen are near the palace who at some time in the past were the principle supporters of the looting of

⁶³ *Samagra*, p. 1039.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

the Raja. Now the Raja has a manager of the estate called Cook... You can't compare the bazaars here with any bazaar in Banaras. They are completely without resources. There is one moneylender here who sits in a broken down grassy hut... The main gate of the Thakur is two or three hands wide and the same in length and height. Nor is there any stone erected. This is the state of Basti'.⁶⁶

Ethnographic details, like those to be found in the contemporaneous colonial gazetteers, were another means of asserting differences of caste, status and sect in areas internal to the writer's own region. In Mehadaval, near Basti, Harischandra noted how the people spoke with a strong dialect and emphasised its difference from the speech of his native Banaras. On discovering that the local people are Vaishnava, like himself, and followers of Vallabhacharya, the author is at pains to point out the strangeness of their sect and its difference from his own religious practices 'This branch of the sect is the same as ours its true, but it is a strange reformed sect. This is the only case I have heard of Vaishnavas who criticise image worship (murtipuja)'.⁶⁷ The final part of this account, which precedes a description of Gorakhpur written in Avadhi verse, describes the customs and religious practices of these rural folk. Overall, the style of this account is ethnographic. The area is described topographically and a brief history of the local zamindari families is offered: 'The Pindaras who have got the land in this zillah now have become nawabs and their vigour has been transformed with comfort'.⁶⁸ Similarly Damodar Shastri relied on the representation of ethnographic details in his accounts to reproduce varying degrees of sameness and difference when describing the people of his own region. At the tirtha of Brahmavarta near Kanpur in the North Western Provinces the people are very different because their speech, customs and distinguishing features are from the south.⁶⁹ In the village of Kukuradev nearby the Kanyakubj Brahmans, in contrast, are described as pure and without vice. These are both Shaivites and practitioners of Tulsi's Manas. They share many customs as well as marriage relations with the Kulin Brahmans of Bengal.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 1041

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Meri Purvadig Yatra*, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Thus difference, no matter how minutely constructed, was a relative thing according to location and circumstance. That being so there were always those classes of people who were consistently singled out as different. Muslims in particular received a rough treatment in the contemporary texts of the Hindi-writing region. Returning from a long sojourn in western India, Shastri noted down all the towns which contained a large population of Muslims and the general poverty of their inhabitants.⁷¹ Muslims were generally referred to as *yavanas*, a pejorative term meaning outsider or immigrant.⁷² The notion of difference, however, as we have seen could be extended to such mutually exclusive social groups as the rural villagers of Avadh and the Hindu gentry in the neighbouring town of Lucknow. Thus to be high caste was not, of itself, always enough to evoke identity since many high caste people of north India lived in rural areas and performed unskilled manual labour.

Difference could also be constructed by the use of evolutionary-historical concepts in which the writer, inscribed with history depicted others as being literally without history. On a pilgrimage to Vaidyanath in Bihar in 1881 Harischandra and his retinue passed through a low-lying jungle region inhabited by the indigenous Santals. The writer describes the Santals as a 'jungli jati' who were 'very black, ignorant, poor and dejected'.⁷³ Both the inhabitants as well as the low-lying marshy area in which they lived are located temporally as being backward on the evolutionary scale since 'up until now they have remained completely savage' (*ye log ab tak mire vahmshi hain*).⁷⁴ In addition to certain types of people being depicted as temporally, or evolutionarily, backward, certain locations and landscapes were also depicted as representing different eras of the historical or evolutionary past. When leaving behind the modern, urban space of their native towns and cities our travellers often represented their journeys across space to other regions as a movement backwards in time. Srimati Har Devi described the arid, desert-like landscape she had seen through the carriage window on her journey by rail through Rajputana: 'Though the landscape here was completely devoid of water a number of trees stood in places. There were endless dunes of sand and mud. A hot wind

⁷¹ *Meri Purvadi Yatra*, pp. 4, 8.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 8; *Paribhraman*, p. 31.

⁷³ The account was published in *Harischandra Chandrika* and in *Mohan Chandrika*, 7, 4, 1880; See also *Samagra*, p. 1042.

blew sand into the compartment and it seemed as if we were passing through some desolate jungle'.⁷⁵ Even the stations through which they passed at sporadic intervals, instead of providing potential pockets of civilisation, seemed equally desolate and wild. In an account of a journey through the Central Provinces from Banaras to Bombay Harischandra described the wild landscape outside Jabalpur: 'On both sides of the rail track you see nothing but jungle and hills. For miles not even a single village appears. You can imagine from this description what kind of region this is... Coming out of the station at Itarsi I knew straightaway from the view around me what kind of place I had come to because all around was jungle and open fields'.⁷⁶

III. Recasting Hindu Space

Just as travel functioned to bring in to focus and to highlight numerous aspects of social and cultural difference, it also enabled Hindi writers travelling within and beyond the region to draw together and to integrate diverse places and peoples into a larger, unified imagination of community and identity. The form in which this unifying function was most often undertaken was the pilgrimage or journey to a sacred centre in which the writer, drawing on a store of common religious and mythological references, could establish markers of identity with his readers and with a wider Hindu community.

Tirthayatra, or journeys undertaken to pilgrimage centres, has been an integral feature of Hindu devotion for centuries and reaches at least as far back as the Mahabharata.⁷⁷

According to this tradition the tirtha, or pilgrimage site, represents the location of an event, or series of events, in the life of a deity, who, it is believed, was literally present in that place at some time, or indeed continues to be so.⁷⁸ Journeys to such places

⁷⁴ *Samagra*, p. 1043.

⁷⁵ *Landan ki Yatra*, Lahore, 1886, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Kavi Vachan Sudha*, 20 July 1872, or *Samagra*, p. 1036.

⁷⁷ Though not apparently prevalent in the Vedic era the popularity of pilgrimage as a religious practice emerged during the Puranic period (300 BC – 1100 CE) and developed in the second millennium after the growth of Bhakti devotionalism. In north India the focus of devotionalism on the figure of Rama, the avatar of Vishnu, dates back to the end of the first millennium. Hans Bakker and Alan Entwhistle, *Vaisnavism: The History of the Krishna and Rama Cults and Their Contribution to Indian Pilgrimage*, Groningen, Institute of Indian Studies, 1981, p. 78; H.T. Bakker, 'The Rise of Ayodhya as a Place of Pilgrimage', *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 24, 1982, p. 108; Surinder M. Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India: A Study in Cultural Geography*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1973.

⁷⁸ For a literal definition and further explanations of the meaning of the term tirtha see Diana L. Eck, 'India's Tirthas: "Crossings" in Sacred Geography', *History of Religions*, 20, 1981, pp. 323-44; A.

whether of local or regional repute, or of pan-Indian status, have been conducted by pilgrims in the subcontinent seeking religious merit for centuries.⁷⁹ While the Sanskrit literature regarding the qualities and benefits of such sites is voluminous there is little representation in traditional literature of the journeys made to them. In the context of late nineteenth century travel accounts, however, the representation of the tirtha itself and the journeys made to them underwent a process of cultural reconstruction based on the desire of early nationalists for an Hindu cultural identity. Within these accounts the tirtha was presented as an idealised and uncontested space that was both exclusive in its appeal to a Hindu religious identity and inclusive enough to incorporate a pan-Indian or national framework.

In a travel account describing a trip to Hardwar published in 1871 in *Kavivachansudha* Harischandra alerted his readers to the special sanctity of the place and to the great joy he felt in being able to describe it for them, 'In sending news of Hardwar I feel great joy that I can give an account of that sacred place'.⁸⁰ Hardwar, the author noted, is such a sacred place that simply by entering it the mind is said to become pure.⁸¹ Following this introduction, he launched into a description of the natural scenery in the hills surrounding the town. The richness of his description and the radiance of the landscape eloquently conveyed the sacred qualities of the place, one of the best known pan-Indian sites of Hindu pilgrimage:

This place is surrounded on three sides with beautiful green mountains, on which verdant green creepers have spread out and flutter in the wind like the auspicious wishes of virtuous men and huge trees stand forth as if they are sages performing penance while poised on one leg, like good men who endure the heat of the sun, the dew and the rain.... Fruit, flowers, fragrance, shadow, leaves, bark, seeds, wood and roots, even after they are burnt to charcoal and ashes they are able to fulfil the desires of men.⁸²

Bharati, 'Pilgrimage Sites and Indian Civilisation', J.W. Elder, ed., *Chapters in Indian Civilization*, vol. 1, *Classical and Medieval India*, Dubuque, Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1970, p. 95.

⁷⁹ 'Whereas the best known tirthas drew "pilgrims across linguistic, sectarian and regional boundaries," the overwhelming majority comprised the "countless local and regional tirthas visited regularly by pilgrims from their immediate areas", Eck, 'India's Tirthas', p. 127.

⁸⁰ *KVS*, 14 October 1871. See also *Samagra*, p. 1033.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

Following this description the eyes of the reader are led in a panoramic sweep of the surrounding vista in which various points of reference are mentioned, many of which are related to the mythology of the Ganges fall to earth. There on one hill is the source of the Ganges and the place of Raja Bhagirath's *tapasya* (penances) which brought the Ganges down from heaven and, further on, at a place called Kankhal, is the site of the goddess Parvati's *sati* (ritual death by fire) performed as a result of the disgrace of her husband, the god Shiva. Throughout this passage the language used to describe the tirthas and the landscape surrounding it is rich and rhetorical. In the final section the writer sets aside this description of landscape and the myths attached to it and recounts his own personal devotional practises at the tirtha which included bathing in the Ganges at the auspicious time of an equinox and hearing the recitation of the *Bhagavata Purana*.

The focus on nature and naturalistic description in this account contrast sharply with an earlier account of a journey to the British town of Roorkee in which the author gave little attention to the natural surroundings. There is also a clear contrast between the tone and substance of the two accounts which implies that the writer was making a deliberate and conscious distinction between the two places: Roorkee and Hardwar. Roorkee at this time represented the pinnacle of British technological achievement, a symbol of colonial industrial modernity, whilst Hardwar, one of the seven major pan-Indian Hindu tirthas, was reconceptualised for the reader as a symbol of sacred space, the location of mythological events which were the common cultural and religious heritage of all Hindus. The reconstruction of this latter symbol is effected via a number of literary strategies. In particular there is a connection between Harischandra's description of the landscape surrounding the town of Hardwar quoted above and another depiction of a sacred landscape in the famous and hugely popular *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas, the sixteenth century rendition in Avadhi of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. In the Tulsi passage, the hero Ram addresses his brother Laksman using a naturalistic description as the metaphorical basis for a lecture on human behaviour: 'Bending over the earth the clouds pour rain, as wise men bow down on gaining learning. How do the mountains bear the assault of raindrops? As a saint bears the words of man!'.⁸³ In utilising such

⁸³ There are a number of editions and translations of this text the earliest of which was *The Ramayana of Tulasidasa*, trans. F.S. Growse, [1891], Delhi, 1978; see also *Sriramcaritmanas*, ed. and trans. R.C. Prasad, Delhi, 1989. The translation which I have used here is taken from an unpublished version of

imagery in his own account Harischandra must have deliberately made the connection in his readers' minds between the two passages and, furthermore, intended to insert his own novel account into a long genealogy of literary forms dealing with nature. Lastly, in visiting and writing about a pilgrimage to Hardwar, a place traditionally connected to the god Shiva, Harischandra, a devout and committed Vaishnava, made a conscious and deliberate attempt to iron over any regional and sectarian differences and to forge a sense of an Hindu identity based on the careful selection of textual allusions and mythological references.

The connection between contemporary descriptions of the natural landscape and the treatments of nature in older literary forms reappears in other travel accounts by Harischandra. In a much later piece describing a trip to Janakpur, the birthplace of the goddess Sita in northern Bihar the poet elaborated on a well-known treatment of the landscape which was characteristic of the literary tradition of the Braj region as the imagined home of the god Krishna. Delighted by the sight of mustard fields growing near Janakpur the poet claimed in a typically pastoral conceit that he wished sometimes to leave the city and to enjoy the natural life of the village. The region here, he claimed, is alive with birds and animals and fish, and the people are as simple as the cow herds that pass by :

Mustard also flourishes here. As far as the eye can see, there is field after field yellow with it. It has a strange effect on those whose hearts are easily moved. 'The mustard fields are flowering, look, look, my beloved Mohan. The pain of parting which is winter has turned into the yellow of spring'.⁸⁴

In the verse line of this passage the author, by addressing the god Mohan, linked this landscape of northern Bihar with another idealised vision of pastoral life which took place in the imaginary groves and fields of Vrindavan where Krishna, here called Mohan, was believed to have sported with the *gopis* (cowherds). The imagery of this passage appears to have been deliberately stylised in that it followed certain

Kishkindhakand, the fourth book of the *Ramcharitmanas*, edited and translated by Rupert Snell. I am grateful to him also for pointing out to me the similarity between these two passages.

⁸⁴ This account appeared in *Harischandra Chandrika*, vol. 6, no. 12, June 1879. The translation comes from Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition. Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, p. 327.

conventional modes of describing nature. Deploying such stock images and refrains the writer deliberately alerted the reader to the derivative nature of his own passage which was undoubtedly modelled on older literary forms such as the Sanskrit *kavya* or the late-medieval *riti* poetry composed in Brajbhasha, both of which provided well-known formulations for describing nature.⁸⁵ Older traditions of nature poetry had remained popular in the Hindi print culture of the nineteenth century. Magazines and periodicals regularly included poetical compositions by both old and new Brajbhasha poets and the more folk-oriented treatments of the various seasons, *ritu*.⁸⁶ Such literary allusions linking the two places textually were further elaborating on the traditional Hindu perception of an embodied landscape, a sacred topography which was connected and repeated in the network of pilgrimage sites and holy places throughout north India and which were linked textually and orally in the ongoing traditions of mythic and legendary stories associated with those sites.

The motif of the natural landscape combined with the activity of pilgrimage assumed a pre-eminent position in a third account by Harischandra of a pilgrimage to the temple at Vaidyanath on the border of Bihar and Bengal with the Maharaja of Banaras. In 'Vaidyanath ki Yatra' the writer began with a vivid description of the lush green scenery viewed passing by from the window of the train: 'All around was a carpet of the greenest grass, above were clouds of many colours, below the craters were filled with water, everything was beautiful'.⁸⁷ The journey took place during the rainy season in 1881 and Harischandra evocatively depicted the onslaught of rain during the night as the train travelled through the flooded stations and the drenched scenery of northern Bihar: 'It was after we arrived at Jhapki that the shower began to pelt down, on arriving at

⁸⁵ See A.W. Entwhistle, 'The Cult of Krishna Gopal as a Version of the Pastoral' in Diana Eck and Francoise Mallison, eds, *Devotion Divine. Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India. Studies in Honour of Charlotte Vaudeville*, Groningen, 1991, for a discussion of the pastoral qualities of the Braj poet Nagaridas: 'The Indian version of pastoral... has closest affinities with the type that flourished in Europe up to the late Renaissance, when the pastoral was at its most artificial... While European pastoral found expression through the classical eclogue and the vernacular *pastourelle*, in India the learned tradition also had its folksier counterparts, which we find Sanskritised in the *Harivamsa*, *Bhagavatapurana*, *Gitagovinda*, and the verses of Vilvamangala'.

⁸⁶ See magazines published by Harischandra as well as the *Kshetriya Patrika*, published in Bankipore, Bihar and the *Saran Saroj* published in Banaras. For an account of nineteenth century Hindi literature see R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature of the 19th and early 20th Centuries*, vol. 8, Fasc. 2 of *A History of Indian Literature*, ed. Jan Gonda, Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1974.

Patna the rain began to pour down on all sides. The earth, the sky, everything became liquid. In this uproar even the train had disappeared in its own spray like Krishnabhisarika'.⁸⁸ The imagery of this passage, describing the force of the rain as it pounded against the earth at this time of year was again, as in the previous narrative, deliberately and knowingly reminiscent of a similar one in the famous *Prem Sagar*, the 10th book of the *Bhagavata Purana*. This text had been translated into Brajbhasha prose between 1803-10 by the Fort William munshi Lalluji Lal from the Sanskrit version of Chaturbhuj Misra. Due to the enormous popularity of the text amongst Vaishnava Hindus it had been reprinted in at least 30 new editions during the nineteenth century and would have been well known to the majority of Harischandra's readers.⁸⁹

Throughout the early part of the narrative there is a powerful evocation of the sense of time passing as the landscape changes and the clouds turn from light to dark and the day into night. After an uncomfortable and sleepless night on the train the writer is inspired by the sight of the dawn breaking on the horizon:

Having broken up the curtain of clouds Usha Devi began her investigation. Like the deeds of heavenly beings the light of Surya Narayan began to appear encircled with the inflated speech of the treacherous clouds. The name of Nature changed from Kali to Saraswati, a cool breeze began to blow feeding the buds of the mind. Far off a golden hue appeared on the hills of shades of light and dark green. In some places half the hill was encircled with cloud, in other places the peaks of the mountains were hidden by a large mist and in other places still they appeared charming playing holi with spurts of coloured water all over them. Nearby the hills appeared very large... the outlines of rivers appeared in the distance and all around in many places there was dense green vegetation. At various intervals misshapen rocks appeared on high and low crags and all around the green plains gave off a wonderful beauty. As the light became stronger we arrived at Vaidyanath station.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ The account was published in *Harischandra Chandrika* and in *Mohan Chandrika*, 7, 4, 1880. See also *Samagra*, p. 1042.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Lalluji Lal, *Prem Sagar*, [1810], rev. and ed. by Ramsahat pandit, Calcutta, Sudhanidhi Yantram, 1870. For a list of the multiple editions of this text, including the original, see J.F. Blumhardt, *Catalogues of the Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushtu Printed Books in the Library of the British Museum*, London, Asher, Kegan and Longmans, 1893.

⁹⁰ *Samagra*, p. 1042.

Arriving at their destination the passengers disembarked at Vaidyanath station and proceeded on the final leg of their journey by foot to reach the temple at Vaidyanath.

In each of the above accounts the tirtha was represented as the metaphorical embodiment of an authentic Hindu space. Both the literary/textual allusions and the mythological references were exclusively Hindu, and predominantly brahmanical, and were calculated to confer the sense of a common Hindu identity located territorially in the network of sacred centres and perpetuated in the ongoing practice of pilgrimage. The representation of certain types of landscape as the immediate physical embodiment of a shared religious and literary tradition serves as an important marker of cultural identity in many of these narratives of travel.

Sectarian differences are deliberately downplayed in these accounts as are the regional and caste differences which occupy so prominent a place in the accounts of more secular journeys and landscapes. The presentation of an idealised Hindu space, free from the newly-felt tensions of caste, region and sect, reveals the constructed nature of this vision and the writer's preoccupation with generating an image of an homogenous and historically legitimate religious community that was struggling to emerge at this time.

IV. Travel and the Nation

From the late nineteenth century Hindi writers sought to elaborate and extend on the image of an homogeneous Hindu community and to widen its parameters to promote the concept of a pan-Indian or national community. In the context of travel this task was effected by determining and representing various aspects of sameness and identity which the north Indian Hindi literati experienced with others whilst on their travels. By the mid-1880s with the emergence of popular reformist associations, the extension of the Hindi print domain and the arrival of 'railway tours' as a means of travelling the country, a different kind of travel narrative was emerging in the pages of the Hindi press, one which sought to generate a wider sense of community based not only on religious identity but also on factors of common interest such as social and political reform, education and history. Travel became a way of experiencing the 'nationhood' of India as

well as striving toward the expression of a 'national culture' through the experience of India's history.

Rail travel in particular was an important means of transport for those seeking to propound a reformist agenda of any kind. Jay Datt, a publicist from Kumaon published an article in *Kavi Vachan Sudha* in 1885 in which he remarked on the transformation which the railways had brought to the experience of travel, 'To begin with I shall describe the railways which have become such a convenient means of travel for us, that in just a short space of time we can go from one place to another'.⁹¹ Datt's article, however, which was inspired by a tour of the towns and cities of the North Western Provinces by rail, raised several points of criticism concerning the management and efficacy of the railway companies and questioned the real value of the railways for the citizens (*praja*) of Hindustan.⁹² The author's reference to the people of Hindustan as *praja*, citizens, evoked the sense of a national community with a single state at its head. Moreover it was this imagined (political) community which, in this context, needed widespread reform to realise its potential.

According to Datt the railways have become a symbol of all that is wrong with colonial rule: despite the modern technology they do not prevent the deaths of animals and people who wander on to the tracks; they have not helped the spread of mass education and ultimately have contributed to the ruin of Indian trade and commerce as a direct result of foreign imports and British misrule. The present age, symbolised by the railway, is compared to the past glories of Bharatvarsh. Neither the great temples of Kashi nor Vrindavan were built by foreign hands and it is this fact which makes the present situation so intolerable. The article culminates with an appeal to the educated men of the North Western Provinces to recognise the need for educational and social reform of the lower classes. And in a final attempt to generate an inclusive and collective agenda he recommends that all castes and classes of India, including Muslims and Christians, must join together to work for the improved condition of the country.

⁹¹ Jay Dutt, 'NWP ki Bhraman' in *KVS*, July 1884, pp.7-9.

⁹² Gradually then, the railways themselves became a focus for dissatisfaction and dissent in the region, partly due to the fact that they were largely built by labour transported from other parts of the country and that the higher level jobs were given to British men. Criticising the superintendent of the Rohilkhand and Kumaon Railway the author claimed that, 'The partners were all English men from England and even the employees were brought here through his own separate connections', *Ibid*, p. 8.

The call for unity, however, is qualified somewhat by the author's reference to the ancient honour of Bharatvarsh. The term Bharatvarsh in this context, unlike the more neutral Hindustan, as well as the reference to Hindu temples as the common cultural heritage, evokes the vision of a national community which, simply by their historical associations, was exclusive to Hindus.

The shared interests of education and social reform were also an important element in Damodar Shastri's travel accounts. Over a ten year period of travel throughout north India and various parts of the subcontinent, Shastri paints a picture of an active and expanding print domain which is in part fuelled and propagated by issues of social, cultural and religious reform. In north and western India he visited towns and cities meeting with the owners and editors of Hindi presses and periodicals. These meetings were in part an effort to gather and garnish support for his various literary projects and to foster patronage from such members of the Hindi intelligentsia as Bharatendu Harischandra in Banaras, Pratapnarayan Mitra in Kanpur, Ramdin Singh, editor of *Kshetriya Patrika* and Prasad Singh, editor of the Khadgavilas Press in Bankipore.⁹³ All of these fellow literati were educated, cultured gentlemen like the writer and saw themselves as such. Invariably these meetings involved discussions on various aspects of reform such as widow marriage, the Arya Samaj and the fate of Sanskrit education. On the whole the views of these men, in contrast to the more radical reformist ideas expressed in Bengali travel accounts, were conservative and traditionalist.⁹⁴ Shastri was himself a Sanskrit scholar and a Brahman and frequently bemoaned the lack of scriptural knowledge in the writings and ideas of reformers.

The contrast between these accounts and the narrative of his original journey from south India to Banaras is marked. Whereas in the earlier journey places assumed significance primarily because of their status as sacred sites, in these later pilgrimages, sacred sites appear as just one aspect, albeit a significant one, of the many historically and culturally significant features of the social and geographical landscape. Shastri's pilgrimages to the four corners (*char dham*) of the Hindu sacred geography include a

⁹³ Shastri, *Mai Vahi Hum*, Bankipore, 1886; *Meri Purvadi Yatra*, Bankipore, 1885.

⁹⁴ See Kumkum Chatterjee, 'Discovering India: Travel, History and Identity in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century India', in Daud Ali, ed., *Invoking the Past. The Uses of History in South Asia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 192-227.

plethora of other activities that have less to do with the traditional forms of pilgrimage and more connection with a modern notion of travel for national education. In this way India as a national-historical entity, comprising not just sacred sites, but also ancient cities, monuments, palaces and fortresses became the new object of pilgrimage.

An excellent example of this travel as a form of national-historical experience is effected in the travelogue of Ramshankar Vyas who in 1902 set out with his employer, a wealthy woman from Banaras, and a large retinue of servants on a pilgrimage to the town of Pushkar in Rajasthan. Along the way, however, the company stopped at most of the major towns along the railway route as well as making a prolonged stopover in Ghazipur, outside Delhi, during the time of the Darbar to observe and participate in the celebrations there. In Vyas's account monuments of every description – religious, historical, political, colonial – were given a place as an important part of the modern pilgrimage experience. They visited almost every site of religious, architectural and historical interest in Jaipur, Ajmer, Pushkar and Delhi. The emphasis was on sites denoted as significant to Hindus, and more specifically to Vaishnavas. Describing the temple of Sri Govindaji near Jaipur, Ramshankar Vyas claimed that the unsurpassed murti (image of the God) which the temple housed had once been the grace of Vrindavan but had been taken from there and re-established at this site by the governor of the province during the time of the Muslim invasions. There is no evidence or authority offered to corroborate this story but it is presented as historical fact.⁹⁵

Alongside the larger mythic themes the inclusion in these texts of incidents of local legend were meant to familiarise the readers with non-familiar localities and to situate the location in its larger historico-cultural context. In a similar way Harischandra made a conscious effort to reproduce in his travel accounts the Sanskrit inscriptions which he had encountered at temples and monuments during his travels. Often these inscriptions were taken from isolated and little known sites off the beaten track. They would then be organised in the context of others which the author had collected from various sites in and around Banaras. The reproduction of inscriptions and grants in printed form further served to appropriate the places from which they had been taken into the larger temporal-geographical framework of the nation.

⁹⁵ *Paribhraman*, Bankipore, 1909, p. 57.

In each of these accounts historical and mythological references are employed to appeal to a community of readers who share a common religious and cultural heritage, beyond the merely regional. Drawing on colonial archaeological and epigraphic disciplines Hindi writers sought to incorporate places into the framework of Hindu history by writing their histories as well as recounting their place in Hindu mythology. At Vaidyanath Harischandra states how the temple was built by Raja Puranamall in 1595 and gives an account of the place in the story of the Ramayana.⁹⁶ This historical information is in fact a mixture of historical facts taken from the inscription at the temple, accounts of the temple which appear in the Vaidyanath Mahatmya and local hearsay about the place. The writer by including such information in so much detail emphasises the history of the place which stretches back through several important eras of Hindu history. There is even an inscription beneath a statue in the 'most ancient Pali' which the writer intends to send to the Orientalist Babu Rajendralal Mitra to be deciphered.⁹⁷

The situating of diverse places and locations within the wider context of an 'Hindu' historico-cultural framework became an increasingly prominent feature of the 'national' themes of such journeys. In Brahmavarta, near Kanpur, Damodar Shastri describes the tirtha of Parihar where Sita underwent her ordeal by fire and which Valmiki described in the Ramayana. This was also the area where Bajji Rao Peshwa resided after leaving his kingdom and was later followed by other Peshwa rulers.⁹⁸ Similarly, Har Devi on her journey through Rajputana sought to evoke for her readers the wild and inhospitable aspect of the terrain which prompted her to exclaim: 'Dear readers, this is the birthplace of those heroic Rajputs whom you will have read about in Chand's history of Prithviraj, through fear of whom the whole of Bharatvarsh used to quake, but today the passing of time has suppressed that mighty force like an orphan'.⁹⁹ In this case just as wild regions were sometimes depicted as being situated further back in the evolutionary past, they were also sometimes represented as being the contemporary embodiment of specific periods of Hindu 'history'.

⁹⁶ *Samagra*, p. 1043.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Meri Purvadi Yatra*, p. 10.

⁹⁹ *London ke Yatra*, p. 8.

In a similar fusion of mythic themes with rational positivist history Harischandra evoked the presence of ancient Hindu kings in a journey along the banks of the Sarayu river in Avadh, made in 1879. Confronted by the general lack of cultivation amongst the present people of Ayodhya, Harischandra was thrown into a reverie of the past glory of the place:

Then we remembered Ayodhya. This is the self-same Ayodhya which was made into the first capital of Bharatvarsh. It was here that the great souls Ikshvaku, Mandhata, Harischandra, Dilip, Aj, Raghu, Sriramchandra reigned and it is in the portrayal of this royal clan that the greatest of poets applied their aptitude. It was the glory of this Ayodhya which pervaded the world and kings the world over feared the dagger of Ayodhya. It is the self-same Ayodhya which one cannot bear to look at now. Wherever one looks it is Muslim graves which meet the eye.¹⁰⁰

Despite its present feeble condition, therefore, Ayodhya is firmly located within the temporal and spatial fold of a more glorious Hindu tradition. Hindu kings and Hindu poets once occupied these grounds and made them great. In this way specific landscapes were deployed as backdrops for the playing out of mythic themes and historical events or personages. Places, through their association with these events and people were evoked and appropriated into the temporal and spatial world of the traveller. The juxtaposition and even fusion of myth and history in these accounts was effected on the basis of a common Hindu religious and historical past. History alone, in the positivist sense, was not sufficient to create this sense of common cultural heritage linked to specific regional locations. Myth was a far more powerful and necessary method of co-optation than the limited shreds of historical fact. Thus it appears the two coexist side by side in the same texts without any apparent sense of contradiction.¹⁰¹

In this way travel narratives aimed to constitute travel as an historical act. Travel became a means of exploring time via the exploration of space. Moreover the new imperatives for educated Indians to write their own history naturally led to the need for

¹⁰⁰ *Samagra*, p. 1039.

¹⁰¹ This is true also of many of the deliberately 'historical' texts produced by Hindi writers at the time, including Harischandra. Many of these texts contain an unproblematised mixture of what Partha Chatterjee has called 'puranic history' and positivist history. See Partha Chatterjee, 'Claims on the Past: The Genealogy of Modern Historiography in Bengal' in David Arnold and David Hardiman, eds, *Subaltern Studies VIII. Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, Delhi, 1994, pp. 5-10.

the histories of places, as the physical embodiments of the past, to be written. The practice of travel and the writing of local histories together enacted an appropriation of 'space' on the part of Hindi writers even as the historiographical 'mode' employed to write those histories was that of official colonial discourse.¹⁰² Thus the appropriation of the landscape through the act of describing it and historicising it, as well as the incorporation of specific sites within a Hindu religious-historical idiom became an increasingly common practice in the writing of travel accounts. The pan-Indian or national idiom which these writings sought to generate and evoke however was consistently imagined in the context of an Aryan, Hindu, educated and generally high caste cultural framework which despite its claims to wider notions of community remained exclusive and exclusionary in the terms and references of its depiction.

Conclusion

Narratives of travel that were produced towards the end of the nineteenth century, in whatever form, provide an interesting and largely untapped source for exploring the sense of social and cultural transformation experienced amongst an educated and elite section of north Indian society in the face of the massive technological, industrial and economic change brought about by colonial modernisation. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, before the process of colonial spatial restructuring was complete, it was still possible to foster and convey notions of territory and the complex and contingent nature of the claims to authority over it that stood in contrast to the idea of an exclusive right or sovereignty advanced by the modern state. In other words there was no such thing as a national territory, either economically, politically or culturally, although it was on the ascendant even at this time. In contrast, many late nineteenth century travel accounts, in both their itineraries and mode of selection, articulate an awareness of the historical production of a national space or territory that was based precisely on the effacement of such differences as region, sect and caste. In these texts differences of caste, class, language, custom and religion were either highlighted or smoothed over in the context of generating broader regional and national cultural

¹⁰² See also *Bundi Ka Rajvamsh*, Benares, 1881; *Hardwar Ka Itihas*, Benares, 1904; *Itihas Durgapore State*, Meerut, n.d.

identities. The apparently novel and experimental form of these accounts, which at first appeared in all kinds of different literary formats, in fact conceals the complex negotiation which their authors realised between establishing legitimising links with older literary forms and engaging with new modes of self-expression that could better express the sense of social and cultural transformation.

Chapter 6

Imagining a Hindi Pradesh: Language and the Formation of Tradition

By the end of the nineteenth century the impact of colonial education and new technologies of print had created the conditions for a new kind of public sphere in north India. Newsprint, publishing and the new arenas of association contributed greatly to an extension of the existing public space and new forms of writing and literature provided a vehicle for the expression of new kinds of subjective and collective identity. Within this new public arena sections of the north Indian Hindu elite sought to determine questions of social and cultural identity which had emerged within and alongside the categories and classifications of Indian society generated by the colonial state.

The rhetorical formulation which designated Hindi as the 'natural' language of the region at the beginning of the twentieth century with its own standard form and discreet linguistic and literary history was itself the culmination point in a long process of contest and differentiation between Hindi and its various regional linguistic rivals.¹ By the end of the nineteenth century however, the aim of Hindi elites in north India seeking greater public and political representation was to assert the identity of the Hindi language (and its literature) with a particular territorial region and its people. This was accomplished simultaneously via two separate but largely complementary processes, though neither one in the end brought either the political recognition or the greater public representation for Hindi that had been hoped for. The first involved the agitation and movement that took place in the political sphere in response to state interventions and initiatives regarding language and linguistic representation while the second occurred in the literary and cultural sphere

One concern of this chapter is therefore to examine how at the end of the nineteenth century language came to be the primary symbol through which a regional

cultural identity was constructed by sections of the north Indian indigenous elite. While language, as we have seen in previous chapters, was only one of the several ways in which such an identity could be imagined, in this chapter I argue that by the end of the nineteenth century, as a result of the particular constellation of social, political and economic forces generated by the colonial state, it took precedence over other expressions of regional identity as the legitimising marker of an homogeneous political community.² The inherent tension and conflict, moreover, which exists between assertions of regional and national identity, and which has been a central theme of this work, was nowhere more obvious and apparent than in the debates over language and linguistic identity which arose in the region at this time.

Expressions of a distinct linguistic identity moreover inevitably raise broader questions about the more complex historical processes that were involved in the marking of linguistic boundaries as exclusive and complete.³ The centrality of the notion of unambiguous political boundaries within colonial governance meant that the existence of trans-regional and trans-cultural identities that did not conform to these boundaries were often ignored or bypassed in the classificatory practices of the state. In other words, British efforts at social engineering, in particular through the census, led to the development of particular kinds of homogeneous and non-contingent social and political categories that had a defining influence on the development of Indian identities. The efforts of the colonial state to construct unambiguous social and linguistic categories were however accompanied by the efforts of particular groups to appropriate, modify and resist the social categories of the colonisers. Thus Hindi elites sought to appropriate and modify the categories and classifications of the colonial state in their representations of bounded linguistic communities so that, in the same way as colonial law, the census

¹ See chapter 3 for an outline of this process in the mid to late nineteenth century.

² This does not deter however from the principle that all identities, even modern ones, are always 'multiple and contingent and continuously constructed' and therefore have to be considered in the context of older, pre-existing and competing religious and cultural inheritances. Peter Robb, 'The Colonial State and Constructions of Indian Identity: An Example on the Northeast Frontier in the 1880s', in *Modern Asian Studies*, 31, 2, 1997, pp. 245-283 and 'Introduction' in P. Robb, ed., *Society and Ideology. Essays in South Asian History*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 2-21.

³ Sudipta Kaviraj has described the transition which took place during the colonial period when vernacular languages became viewed as bounded entities with distinct and enumerated communities attached to them. Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Writing, Speaking, Being: language and the historical formation of identities in India' in *Identity in History: South and South East Asia*, German Historical Congress, University of Heidelberg, 1990.

was not simply a colonial imposition that eradicated all indigenous agency, in fact it was modified and structured extensively by responses from the emerging vernacular elites in north India.

I. The majority language

The expanding activities of the Indian Census in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and the *Linguistic Survey of India* contributed in important ways to the reification of the notion of a series of distinct languages and dialects attached to particular territorial realities. The definitions of language and linguistic territories which the census produced had a determining influence on the categories and typologies of language employed by the colonised. In this section we shall see how indigenous Hindi elites were able to appropriate, modify and contest the colonial categories relating to language and linguistic communities in order to further their own political interests and create seemingly homogenous cultural identities.

In the Census of 1881 an increasingly interventionist state had used its analysis of language for the first time in the larger scheme of classifications of Indian society.⁴ When it came to the North Western Provinces and Oudh however administrative inconsistency and linguistic prejudice led to an unusual side-stepping of the issue. In order to avoid the difficult situation of census enumerators having to distinguish themselves between the different vernaculars and the widespread confusion over the indigenous classifications of language, the enumerators of both the 1881 and 1891 censuses were instructed to list the term Hindustani in place of any of the so-called dialects or languages which were nominated to them.⁵ Nevertheless, while the colonial government refused to recognise either Hindi or Urdu as distinct languages in the tables of the census, petitioners for Hindi set about utilising the statistics from these two censuses to try to establish Hindi as the language of the majority in the province. During the Hunter Commission of 1882, a commission ordered by the government to review the progress of education in each province, statistics from the census were listed repeatedly

⁴ *Report on the Census of the NWP and Oudh, and of the Native States of Rampur and Native Garwhal, taken on 17th February 1881*, Allahabad, NWP and Oudh Government Press, 1882.

by the various organisations and advocates of Hindi and Urdu.⁶ Neither party however could directly employ the census returns on language to further their cause. In a memorial from the inhabitants of the city of Allahabad to the Education Commission in 1882 the memorialists referred to the population statistics on religious categories rather than the more ambiguous returns on language as the basis for their claim: 'The population of the United Provinces has been enumerated to be 44,107,118 in the last census; 59,22,886 of which are Mahomedans. Of the total population about 13% only are Mussulmans. The bulk of the people being Hindus, they speak, with few inconsiderable exceptions, Hindi, which is, in some form or other their mother tongue. Even the rural Mahomedan population talk, as is open to general observation, in Hindi and not Urdu'.⁷

Based on the enumeration of religious denomination in the census the memorialists claimed that the majority community of Hindus were all Hindi speakers, since Hindi, it was implied, was the mother tongue of Hindus, as well as of some rural Muslims. Despite the absence of figures for Hindi speakers in the census, Hindi activists opted to employ the returns for other categories, in this case significantly for religion, to support their claims for linguistic representation. Already a discourse of numerical majority had begun to colour the language of political representation in the region, even if this was not yet recognised by the colonial government.

In a pamphlet published in 1897 and later submitted to the provincial government in support of Hindi, Madan Mohan Malaviya, founder of the Prayag Hindu Samaj and subsequently one of the leading members of the Indian National Congress,⁸ similarly employed the census returns on religion and literacy to support his claims for the use of Hindi in education and government employment. In reference to the tabulated figures for literacy in the 1891 Census he compared the number of Hindi literates (80,118, since he included the Kaithi script used in Bihar and north India as a 'form of

⁵ Enumerators were instructed that 'the language ordinarily spoken in these provinces except in the Himalayan districts will be entered as Hindustani', *Census of India, 1881, vol. XVI, NWP and Oudh, Part I, Provincial Report and Tables*, Allahabad, 1894. The same policy was adopted for the 1891 census.

⁶ Appendix C of the *Education Commission, Report by the NWP and Oudh Provincial Committee; with evidence taken before the Committee and Memorials addressed to the Education Commission*, Calcutta, 1884.

⁷ *Education Commission Report*, p. 423.

⁸ The Hindu Samaj was founded by Malaviya in Allahabad in 1880.

Hindi') as against Persian literates (40,197) in the North West Provinces and Oudh.⁹ In another instance he referred to the census returns on religious communities, further substantiating the already established connection between Hindu/Hindi and Muslim/Urdu: 'According to the 1891 census the population of this region (prant) is 46, 905, 085. Out of this 40, 380, 169 that is 81.1 percent are Hindu and 6, 346, 651 that is 13.5 percent are Muslim. From the report of the census it is evident that out of every four Muslims three live in villages and one in the town. Everyone will agree that the Muslims who live in villages speak the same language as the Hindus, which is Hindi'.¹⁰

In the same petition, referring explicitly to the language policy adopted in the two censuses of 1881 and 1891 he drew attention to a contradiction that existed vis a vis the language of the North West Provinces, 'At the time of the 1881 and 1891 censuses the census enumerators were instructed to write Hindustani in place of the common language and Mr Baillie wrote in his report of the 1891 census that "Hindustani includes the Urdu of the towns and the Hindi of the villages". According to this rule out of 46,905,085 people, 45,882,262 speak Hindustani. Mr Baines however refused to use the term Hindustani in his report and instead called the language of the North West Provinces Hindi'.¹¹ On this occasion Malaviya was able to capitalise on the contradiction between the General Report of the census commissioner J.A. Baines and the Provincial Report for the North West Provinces and Oudh of D.C. Baillie. Whereas Baillie had referred to Hindustani as the 'language of Hindustan', Baines had described Hindi according to a broad definition as 'the language spoken between Rajmahal and the Jamuna' which included Bihar and its dialects along with the whole of 'Hindustan... Punjab and the Central Provinces'.¹²

Despite increasing efforts on the part of the state toward establishing accuracy in the enumeration of languages and dialects in each successive census from 1881 to 1911, the commissioners were consistently beset by problems of classification and definition. In the 1881 and 1891 census there were contradictions between the representation of

⁹ Madan Mohan Malaviya, *Court Characters and Primary Education in the North West Provinces and Oudh*, Allahabad, 1897. Here quoted from a Hindi translation of the text printed in the *Nagari Pracharini Patrika*, hereafter *NPP*, 2, 4, 1898, p. 141.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp.165-6.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 166.

language in the reports of the commissioners and the tables. In his report of 1881 Edmund White, the commissioner for NWP and Oudh stated that the languages of the province were Western and Eastern Hindi and Kumaon and Garhwali.¹³ Western Hindi, he wrote, included the dialects of Marwari, Eastern Rajputani, Brajbhasha and Kannauji, while Eastern Hindi included Baiswari (also known as Avadhi), Bhojpuri, Maithili and Magadhi dialects. The vernacular of the North West Provinces however only included the dialects of Brajbhasha, Kannauji, Baiswari and Bhojpuri. Each of these four dialects were then demarcated territorially with their linguistic boundaries corresponding to the district divisions of the province and their speakers enumerated:

Braj Bhasha	Agra, Meerut	9,954,750
Kannauji	Rohilkhand, Allahabad	9,857,051
Total Western Hindi		19,811,801
Baiswari	Oudh	11,377,121
Bhojpuri	Benares, Jaunpur	11,004,082
Total Eastern Hindi		22,381,203

White's classification of Western and Eastern Hindi and their respective dialects was based on the model of languages outlined in Rudolf Hoernle's grammar of 1880. Like other eminent colonial philologists however Hoernle himself had warned against the difficulty of establishing clear cut boundaries between the dialects: 'The adjoining languages and dialects pass into one another so imperceptibly that the determination of the limits of each will always remain more or less a matter of doubt'.¹⁴ In spite of this warning, the idea of broad linguistic frontiers and dialectic convergence was not translated into the report of the census, and even less so into the tabulated figures,¹⁵

¹² *Census of India, 1891, vol. I, General Report*, London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1893, p. 138; *Census of India, 1891, vol. XVI, NWP and Oudh, Part I, Provincial Report and Tables*, Allahabad, 1894, p.264.

¹³ *Report on the Census of NWP and Oudh, 1881*, p. 88.

¹⁴ Rudolph Hoernle, *Introduction to the Grammar of Eastern Hindi*, London, Trubner and Co., 1880, p. iv.

¹⁵ As mentioned above the tabulated figures for language in this census did not recognise any of the dialects but enumerated the speakers of Hindustani at 43,221,705. *Census of India, 1881, Part II, Form IX*.

where the abiding concern was with neatly bounded and exclusive linguistic categories that corresponded with particular territorial-administrative realities.

The provincial report of the 1891 census followed a similar format to that of 1881 with the crucial difference that Khari Boli was named as a further dialect of Hindi and Bihari, with its dialects of Baiswari, Bhojpuri, Bundeli and Bhageli, was separated from Hindi and listed as a separate language. The source for this new division came from a preliminary list of languages and dialects drawn up by George Grierson, a Bengal civil servant and later author of the *Linguistic Survey of India*, for the Government of Bengal in 1887.¹⁶ By this time, Grierson, following the findings of earlier philologists, had made an important analysis of the entire Indo-Aryan branch of languages and the historical development of the modern vernacular languages from the intermediary Prakrit and Apabrahmsa languages.¹⁷ According to him it was clear that since Bihari was descended from a different branch of the Prakrit than either Western or Eastern Hindi it should be classed as a separate language and be recognised as belonging to a different linguistic group. Following Grierson's division of Hindi and Bihari, Baillie, the provincial commissioner, went on to give a list of all the dialects which the census respondents had submitted as their spoken language, a rough estimate of the geographical areas in which they were spoken and an enumeration of their speakers.¹⁸

Grierson's analysis of language had a pivotal influence on the 1901 census, the General Report of which contained an extensive dissertation on the historical development and classification of Indian languages written by him.¹⁹ The 1901 census was further published simultaneously with the first volumes of the Linguistic Survey which provided the most detailed analysis to date of dialects, their geographical territories and an enumeration of their speakers. According to the census survey Hindi was divided between the Western and Eastern forms. Western Hindi was part of the Inner Aryan Family which included Rajasthani, Gujarati and Punjabi and its speakers numbered 40,714,925. Eastern Hindi was an 'intermediate form of speech' or part of the Mediate Aryan Family whose speakers numbered 22,136,358. In the report Grierson

¹⁶ *Census of India, 1891, Part I*, p. 265.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 266.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 267.

also gave an historical survey of the development of Hindi and Urdu recognising them, for the first time in the census, as separate languages.²⁰

The idea of Hindi as a distinct language whose territoriality was coterminous with the geography of the North Western Provinces and Awadh was thus in some sense an extension of the representation of language in the census and the linguistic survey, both of which presented languages as being territorially bounded entities. This correlation between linguistic boundaries and administrative boundaries was then taken up by Hindi activists in the claims for public and political representation. In the very first issue of the journal *Nagari Pracharini Patrika* published in 1897, Shyamsundar Das, secretary to the Nagari Pracharini Sabha (Society for the Promotion of Nagari) of Banaras and one of its founding members,²¹ alluded to the Aryan languages of northern India and the enumeration of their speakers in the census of 1891. Das claimed that it was this census which had finally dispelled the confusion that had persisted between census enumerators and local informants over the meaning of terms and nomenclature for dialects and languages. This clarity had further enabled the precise determination of the geographical boundaries of each language (*deshbhasha*) and dialect (*boli*).²² Having enumerated the population of Hindi speakers at over 35 million based on the linguistic divisions adopted by Grierson, Kellogg, Temple and Pargiter, Das went on to give a detailed definition of Hindi as one of the 14 Aryan languages.

There are three different meanings for this word Hindi. One is to the written language which is found in the Gangetic lands (*terai*) as far as Bhagalpur in the east, but it is not the language or dialect of any region (*pradesh*) of Bharatvarsh. For this reason pandits and writers call it *shudh* Hindi. In the second meaning Hindi is the name of all speeches of the two middle groups of Indian languages apart from Gujerati and Punjabi. According to this sense all the dialects of Rajputana including Marwari etc... the Baiswari language of Avadh and Bundelkhand and the dialects of Bihar are included in Hindi. This is the

¹⁹ *Census of India, 1901, vol. I, General Report*, H.H. Risley and E.A. Gait, Calcutta, Gov. of India Press, 1903.

²⁰ This recognition was mirrored for the first time in the tables which enumerated speakers of Western and Eastern Hindi in the province. *Census of India, 1901, vol. XVI, NWP and Oudh, Part I*, R. Burns, Allahabad, 1902.

²¹ See below for more on the society.

²² Shyamsundar Das, 'Bharatvarshiya Arya Deshbhashaon ka Pradeshik Vibhag Aur Paraspar Sambandh' (The Regional Divisions of the Indian Aryan Vernaculars and their mutual Relations), *NPP*, vol. 1, 1, Banaras, 1897, pp.1-30.

meaning most British people give to Hindi but it is not correct. The reason for this is that indigenous writers never take this enlarged meaning of Hindi. The third meaning is the one which is understood in this essay which is that Hindi is the language of the North West Provinces....²³

Das's separation of Baiswari (Avadhi) from Hindi was however unusual since it did not follow any of the earlier divisions proposed by colonial linguists. That his essay was heavily influenced by Grierson is confirmed by the linguistic chart at the beginning of the article in which the table shows Bihari to be a descendent of the Magadhi Prakrit and Baiswari (listed here as an independent language) of the Ardhamagadhi Prakrit. From this diagram it is clear that Das has renamed Grierson's Eastern Hindi as Baiswari and that Grierson's Western Hindi has become Hindi (descended from the Sauraseni). The reason for this division was simply that at the time Das wished the linguistic boundaries of Hindi to coincide with the geographical boundaries of the North West Provinces.²⁴ At a time when the political agitation for the use of Hindi in public offices was again on the ascendant the division of languages into neat geographical entities, corresponding with the boundaries of administrative regions, was all important. The geographical divisions of the various Aryan languages were also represented in a map of the subcontinent with each major language group demarcated territorially.

After the census of 1901 language became an increasingly important category of the census. The findings of the *Linguistic Survey of India* moreover relating to languages and groups of dialects came to inform the linguistic categories of the census and vice versa. In order to compile an initial list of languages for the survey Grierson requested that each District Officer compile a list of the dialects spoken in their area and an enumeration of the speakers. Local lists were then collated to form provincial lists in which the total number of speakers had to match the population statistics of the 1891 census for that province.²⁵ In other words a mutually influential relationship emerged between the various censuses and the Survey in terms of the new classifications of

²³ Ibid, p. 13.

²⁴ In another article published when the *Linguistic Survey* was already underway Das again referred to this idea of linguistic boundaries as exclusive and impermeable. See 'Bharatvarshiya Bhashaon ki Janch' (The Branches of Indian Languages), *NPP*, 3, 1, Banaras, 1899, p. 17.

²⁵ *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. 1, Part 1, *Introductory*, Calcutta, 1928, p. 25.

languages and their respective communities.²⁶ Despite the fact that Grierson had acknowledged the existence of broad linguistic frontiers which evaded clear cut division, in the *Survey* languages were sketched in terms of their 'habitat' and number of speakers, and dialects were described as corresponding to the district divisions of provinces.²⁷ Grierson's survey in fact contributed to the idea of a Hindi region since the three languages of Bihari, Western Hindi and Eastern Hindi, which he included under the popular name of Hindi, were not, he argued, independent languages but rather groups of dialects with common grammars.²⁸ In fact, he argued, 'over the whole of this vast area – including even Rajputana, Central India and Gujarat – the great mass of the vocabulary, including nearly all the words in common use, is, allowing for variations of pronunciation, the same. It is thus commonly said, and believed, that throughout the Gangetic Valley, between Bengal and the Punjab there is one language, and only one, Hindi, with numerous local dialects'.²⁹

By 1911 the colonial preoccupation with the inaccuracy of the statistics concerning language dominates both the general and provincial reports of the census.³⁰ In each case the census returns for the North West Provinces and Oudh were said to be partially invalid because of the aggressive agitation among supporters of Hindi and Urdu respectively to try and influence the outcome of the returns.³¹ Disputes arose at the time of each census concerning the method of gathering data for the returns with accusations of bias and foul-play directed at the census enumerators regarding, amongst other things,

²⁶ For instance in the provincial report of the 1911 census E.A.H. Blunt referred to the four vernaculars listed for the province in the Linguistic Survey. *Census of India, 1911, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, vol. XV, Part I*, E.A.H. Blunt, Allahabad, 1912, p. 280.

²⁷ *Linguistic Survey of India, vol. VI, Indo-Aryan Family, Mediate Group, Specimens of the Eastern Hindi*, Calcutta, 1904, p. 1.

²⁸ Despite this favourable attitude, the response to the *Linguistic Survey* amongst Hindi writers and intellectuals was not always favourable. Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, foremost promoter of Khari Boli Hindi and editor of the journal *Sarasvati* was outraged by Grierson's classification of Hindi which he saw as being the artificial division of one language: 'The clerks of the government have now diminished the sense of vastness of our language by cutting it into several pieces. They have divided it into Western Hindi, Eastern Hindi and Bihari Hindi. They have gone even further: they have divided Hindi and Hindustani in two more parts...Hindi, Hindustani and Urdu have been made into three different languages. God only knows how these two languages – Hindi and Hindustani – differ!'. M.P. Dwivedi, 'Apni bhasha ki bat' (The matter of our language), *Sarasvati*, July 1914, quoted in Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, pp. 128-9fn.

²⁹ *Linguistic Survey of India, vol. I*, p. 23.

³⁰ *Census of India, 1901, vol. XVI, part I, Report*, pp. 179-80.

³¹ *Census of India, 1911, vol. I, Part I*, E.A. Gait, Calcutta, 1913, p. 320; *Census of India, 1911, vol. XVI, United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, p. 279.

their religious affiliation.³² The vernacular and English press in the province regularly carried reports of such instances of corruption concerning the census and other language surveys.³³ An article in the Indian Daily Telegraph of May 1900 following Macdonall's investigation into language use in the Judicial and Revenue Departments summarises the official attitude to the unreliability of figures:

On the one hand the preparation of the returns will, in the majority of cases, devolve upon men who are in hearty sympathy with the political objects underlying the agitation in favour of Nagri, and on the other hand Mahomedan employees in public offices will be extremely reluctant to write themselves ignorant of a character, the knowledge of which is in future to be made a *sine qua non* of ministerial appointments, and may for all they know also be made a pre-requisite for promotion of members of the existing staffs of Government offices. Reliable information that reaches us shows that both these aspects of the question are having their effect upon the preparation of their returns.³⁴

In addition to the powerful assertion of linguistic identity that such disputes involved they also demonstrate the extent to which the linguistic policies of the state during this period were shaped by their encounters with the colonised. In the report of the provincial census of 1911 there were references to agitations which had taken place in 1903 and again just prior to the census enumeration in 1910 over the language of school textbooks in the province.³⁵ These disputes were not always confined to the conflict between Hindi and Urdu but also developed internally to the Hindi sphere regarding precisely what should be recognised as the proper form of the public language.³⁶ When it came to the language of education, the courts or government service the census schedule, irrespective of its pro or anti Hindi tendency, was used by indigenous parties to argue for and support their case. The perception among indigenous elites of the censuses

³² Ibid, p. 285.

³³ *Report on the Administration of North West Provinces and Oudh, 1901*, V/10/170, p. 132; *Report on the Administration of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1902*, V/10/171, p. 65.

³⁴ Figures compiled from *NWP&O General Administration Proceedings*, October 1900, pp. 111, 119, 122-4; quoted in King, p. 411.

³⁵ See also *General Report on Public Instruction in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1911-1912*, p. 106 for agitation over the language of textbooks.

³⁶ *Proceedings of the Government of the United Provinces in the Educational Department*, May 1903, pp. 30, 39, 41. See also the controversy over the language of school textbooks in *UP Education Proceedings*, 2 August 1902, p. 37.

ability to enumerate and, thereby, to create self-evident communities marked it out as an important site of contention.

Increasingly the aim among Hindi elites was to use the census figures to demonstrate the majoritarian basis of the demands for political recognition for Hindi. A memorial addressed to the Governor General regarding the use of Devanagari characters on coins to show their value exemplifies this emerging discourse of majority interests and rights among the Hindi intelligentsia:

The Devanagari script is used and read by the largest number of his Majesty's Indian subjects. It is the most widely known character in India... The Hindi speaking population of India which generally uses this character numbers 85.68 million. To the Gujarati and Marathi speaking populations which number 10.62 and 18.89 millions respectively, and the Bengalis generally, who number 41.34 millions, the Devanagari character is well known.... So far as the United Provinces are concerned the extent to which this character is used can be gathered by reference to the Census Report (p. 157), Part 1 of 1901, vol. XVI in which it is stated that there were ten lakhs, sixteen thousand and sixty nine persons (10,016,069) who declared themselves literate in Nagari or Kaithi (a character allied to the Nagari) only and that the number of those literate in Nagari only as compared to the number of those literate in Persian characters only was 4:1.³⁷

Despite the efforts of various censuses to construct communities with determinate boundaries the political-administrative territory known as the North West Provinces, and subsequently the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, continued to defy any unambiguous categorisation of its language. In addition to the critique of colonial language policy from the indigenous intelligentsia there were also periodic attacks from within the government itself regarding the lack of consistency and clarity for the language policy in the province.³⁸ Colonial efforts at linguistic categorisation however provide an insight into the way in which the colonised, who inhabited the categories and classifications of colonial knowledge, were able to some extent to circumvent and undermine them. Indigenous practices regarding census and other survey operations

³⁷ Memorial to Gilbert John Elliot (Earl of Minto), Government of India, regarding the Nagari characters on coinage, from Sudhakar Dwiwedi and Gauri Shankar Dwiwedi, contained in Grierson's correspondance, *Linguistic Survey of India*, A, S/1/5/5, OIOC.

³⁸ For example in the debate over the proper language of school textbooks. See *UP Education Proceedings*, May 1903, pp. 30, 41; *UP Education Report, 1906-7*, p. 69.

demonstrate the extent to which colonial enumerative and classificatory forms were determining of the new expressions of regional and communal identities. The idea of a majority community confirmed by enumeration and defined by determinate geographical boundaries as being entitled to legitimate political representation in particular continued to be an important aspect of the discourse of rights, interests and obligations in the shift to a more representative form of government in the twentieth century.

II. The making of tradition

In the literary and cultural sphere too there were ongoing campaigns to assert the identity of the Hindi language and literature with a particular regional territory and community. The boundaries of this imagined Hindi pradesh, however, had to be constantly redrawn according to the particular form and context in which a Hindi identity was constructed. The establishment of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras in 1893 signalled a new era for the development and promotion of the Hindi language in the region. In contrast to the numerous language societies which had preceded it the sabha's approach, particularly through its quarterly journal the *Nagari Pracharini Patrika* was predominantly scholarly. The activities of the Sabha centred around several key areas which were identified as being essential to the progress of the language: developing Hindi prose in all areas; consolidating rules for prose writing and publishing scholarly work on the history and literature of Hindi.³⁹ Alongside its publishing and translation enterprises, the Sabha also marked off a portion of its annual budget for conducting research into and recovering early Hindi manuscripts to trace the earliest beginnings of the Hindi language in the region.⁴⁰

The manuscripts, letters and inscriptions which were collected from private collections and libraries all over north India, Rajasthan, Calcutta and parts of central India during the first two decades of the sabha's existence became the primary material

³⁹ See 'Prastavna' (Statement), *Nagari Pracharini Patrika*, hereafter *NPP*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1897, p. 1. For a detailed study of the society and its activities in promoting Hindi see C. King, 'The Nagari Pracharini Sabha of Benares 1893-1914: A Study in the Social and Political History of the Hindi Language', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1974, pp. 247-479.

⁴⁰ The sabha began to receive a government grant of 400 rs. per annum for this endeavour in 1899, *Kasi Nagari Pracharini Sabha ka Vinit Nivedan*, Kasi, 1923. See also King, pp. 327-37.

through which Hindi was furnished with an antique heritage.⁴¹ Central to this process was the rhetorical adoption of a rationalist, empiricist historiography which could provide the somewhat fragile linguistic community posited in the present with an historically constituted ancestral community in the ancient past. In order to accomplish this feat a significant redrawing of the territorial boundaries of Hindi had to take place as it was projected back into the past. According to this process the literary languages of Avadhi, Brajbhasha as well as early forms of Punjabi, Rajasthani and Gujarati, languages which had all been more or less excluded from the recently Sanskritised version of standard Khari Boli Hindi, were all re-appropriated into the newly expansive fold of Hindi's classical heritage.⁴²

The classicisation of Hindi however had first developed some decades earlier in the discursive construction of the relationship between Sanskrit and Hindi both in the colonial and indigenous literary spheres. After 1854 government patronage for Sanskrit and the classical languages had declined and been transferred to the support for English in higher education. The elite status of these languages however persisted and was fuelled by revivalist efforts which sought to reclaim and rejuvenate particular aspects of Hindu tradition. At the meetings of religious associations and literary institutes in Banaras, Allahabad and Lucknow there was a conscious revival of the Sanskrit language in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The editor of the *Kavivachansudha* reported in 1883 that 'In Lucknow, on 2 October, an extremely altruistic meeting took place at the home of the newspaper editor Munshi Nawal Kishore. The special purpose of this meeting was to bring about the emancipation of the Sanskrit body of learning and to establish a Sanskrit school. Many rich and prestigious people of the city assembled in this meeting... [which] was named *Sanskrit Hitaishini Sabha* (Sanskrit Welfare Society)'.⁴³ Pandit Prannath claimed that since British support for Sanskrit had declined Sanskrit education and classical knowledge had suffered, people had lost faith in their

⁴¹ 'Prachin Lekh Mani Mala' (Garland of Ancient Writings), Shyam Sundar Das, comp., *Nagari Pracharini Patrika*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1903; G.H. Ojha, *Bharatiya Prachin Lipimala*, [1893], second edition, revised and enlarged, 1918.

⁴² In the last decades of the nineteenth century a public debate had developed internal to the Hindi literary sphere over the relative merits of Khari Boli or Braj Bhasha for use in Hindi poetry. Most of the more committed Hindi activists sought to replace all literary forms of Hindi with one standardised Khari Boli. See King, pp.232-39.

⁴³ *KVS*, 26 November 1883, pp. 2-3.

own history and knowledge of their religious duties and status. Because of this a new initiative was needed to revive Sanskrit education.⁴⁴ The Sanskrit revival which was henceforth pursued in this sphere was undertaken by the same professional men, involved in education, journalism, publishing and lower level administration, who also worked for the progress of Hindi as the 'natural' successor to Sanskrit. While Sanskrit retained its historical and religious authority over Hindi it was also widely maintained that Hindi, being directly derived from the Sanskrit, embodied much of its cultural (and religious) authority.

The historical development of modern languages from their Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramsa predecessors had first been discussed and elaborated in colonial comparative grammars. The quest for origins had thus originated in this sphere with pro-Hindi orientalist such as Beames and Kellogg emphasising the antiquity of Hindi and its Aryan roots.⁴⁵ Once again it was Rajendralal Mitra who through his connections with colonial scholars was responsible for communicating their ideas into the indigenous sphere. In 1864 Mitra, at the time acting as secretary of the Asiatic Society in Bengal, had claimed that 'The Hindavi is by far the most important of all the vernacular dialects of India. It is the language of the most civilised portion of the Hindu race, from the eastern boundary of Behar to the feet of the Solimani Range, and from the Bihdhya (sic) to the Terai... Its history is traceable for a thousand years, and its literary treasures are richer and more extensive than of any other modern Indian dialect'.⁴⁶ Beames had fixed the origin of modern Hindi in the eleventh century thus making it, in his opinion, the oldest of the modern Aryan languages.⁴⁷ Mitra had further made a direct link between modern Hindi and the Vedic languages via the successive intermediary stages of Sanskrit and the Apabhramsa and Prakrit languages.⁴⁸ According to him the process was one of degeneration in that Hindi, like other vernaculars, was the result of the gradual corruption of the Sanskrit language into its modern spoken forms. Corruption had

⁴⁴ *KVS*, 3 December 1883, pp. 4-7. See also *Harischandra's Magazine*, March 1874, p. 176.

⁴⁵ Beames, *A Comparative Grammar of the Modern Aryan Languages of India*, vol. 1, On Sounds, London, 1872, p. 31; Rev. S.A. Kellogg, *Grammar of Hindi Language*, Allahabad, 1876, p. iii.

⁴⁶ Rajendralal Mitra, 'On the Origin of the Hindavi Language and its Relation to the Urdu Dialect', *JASB*, Calcutta, 1864, p. 490.

⁴⁷ 'We may therefore fix upon the eleventh century, or about one hundred years before Chand, as the epoch of the rise of Hindi, or the principal modern language of the group', Beames, *Comparative Grammar*, p. 117.

occurred in part via natural processes and in part through the historical contact with foreign languages at the time of the Muslim invasion and conquest of north India. Hence the theme of the decline and degeneration of Hindu culture, first elaborated by Orientalists and missionaries in the early nineteenth century, was here attached to the historical development of Hindi which was a degenerate form of the Sanskrit.

An alternative representation of this historical link between Hindi and Sanskrit was of Hindi as a pristine ancient language that had been preserved untainted by foreign influence in the homes of Hindus because of its exclusion from the public sphere. In the introduction to his trilingual dictionary in 1865 Mathura Prasad Mitra, professor of English at Queens College in Banaras, claimed that though Hindi 'like a modest maid, has withdrawn from the public gaze in towns and cities, yet it has ever been present around our hearths, and amid our family circles. Our mothers and sisters, wives and daughters, exchange ideas only in genuine forms of Hindi'.⁴⁹ This image of Hindi as a language which had been preserved in the domestic sphere corresponded well with other metaphors used to describe its relationship to Sanskrit as that of a daughter or younger sister. Misra himself wrote of the relationship between the two languages as being one of dependence so that Hindi, 'Like a child in the hour of need... must naturally resort to its parent – the Sanskrit – for help'.⁵⁰ This metaphorical and discursive construction of Sanskrit as the parent language lent further legitimacy to the claims of Hindi supporters to its great antiquity.

Thus building on the previously established and authorised connection of Hindi with Sanskrit, the newly posited Hindi community set out to construct a history of the language and its literature that emphasised its own ancient pedigree.⁵¹ History, in this case literary history, along with the related disciplines of archaeology and philology, became the primary narrative form through which a newly formed linguistic community

⁴⁸ 'On the Origin of the Hindavi', p. 491.

⁴⁹ Mathura Prasad Misra, *A Trilingual Dictionary*, Benares, 1865, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 4.

⁵¹ For example, Thakur Surya Kumar Varma, 'Bhasha', in Shyam Sundar Das, ed., *Nagari Pracharini Lekhmala*, vol. 1, Banaras, 1909; Shyam Sundar Das, 'Nagar Jati aur Nagari Lipi ki Utpatti' (Origin of the Nagar caste and the Nagari script), *Nagari Pracharini Patrika*, vol. 1, 1897.

could endow itself with a respectable past.⁵² In the introduction to his article 'Garland of Ancient Writings' Babu Shyamsundar Das had written that the true materials of Indian history were the inscriptions and grants of ancient rulers. Whereas other historical materials had been proved to be unreliable according to the principles of rational historical method these materials promised an authentic recovery of the nation's past:

No other manuscripts (*pothi*) are more important or necessary for the support and progress of the nation (*desh*) than historical ones. Through them people are able to know precisely how the progress of certain peoples (*jati*) has been achieved and through the onslaught of which evils the deterioration of the nation has occurred. Knowing these things well-wishers of the country and those wishing to work for its progress should they spot the growth of some seed of evil and considering the harm and destruction it might cause they can find some means to destroy it and transform it into some other way of benefiting the country. For this reason the manuscripts of history are very important.⁵³

The question remained however as to how far back into the past the linguistic and literary roots of Hindi could be stretched without losing their historicist legitimacy. Various claims were made as to the genuine antiquity of the Hindi language from several quarters. Radhakrishna Das, another founding member of the Sabha and editor of the Hindi newspaper *Bharat Jiwan*, claimed that though modern Hindi, as distinct from its Prakrit predecessor, had originated in the time of Raja Bhoja in the eleventh century,⁵⁴ the difficulty in establishing its true origins was based on the fact that 'Hindi is the ancient language of India but through the great misfortune of not possessing a history its early period (*adi kal*) is unknown. The absence of history has caused great harm to our country...[while] poetry is known about from a thousand years ago nothing is known of prose although it was current for hundreds of years in [works of] astrology, medicine and religious literature'.⁵⁵ In the absence of the literary evidence that could authenticate these claims for early origins it was necessary to construct with painstaking

⁵² As Sudipta Kaviraj has recently argued, 'To give itself a history is the most fundamental act of self-identification of a community'. Kaviraj, 'Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and David Arnold, eds, *Subaltern Studies VII*, Delhi, 1993, p. 16.

⁵³ Shyamsundar Das, 'Prachin Lekh Mani Mala' (Garland of Ancient Writings), *NPP*, 7, 1, 1908, p. 1.

⁵⁴ See King, 'The Nagari Pracharini Sabha', p. 316.

⁵⁵ Radhakrishna Das, *Hindi Bhasha ke Samayik Patron ka Itihas* (History of Hindi Newspapers), Banaras, Chand Prabha Yantralaya, 1894.

detail the exact development of Hindi from its earliest examples in other literary languages.

Thus the reclaiming of an ancient literary past and, thereby, the forging of a new literary heritage, was initially developed along the lines of appropriating the early Brajbhasha and Avadhi poets of northern and central India into the fold of Hindi literature. These poets had first flourished during and after the time of the great Vaishnava reformers Ramanand and Vallabhacharya in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and were associated with the bhakti sectarian movements of this period.⁵⁶ Braj poetry was connected with the area called Vrindavan around Mathura associated with the god Krishna while Avadhi was connected with the region of that name and the area up to and bordering Banaras. While the legacy of the poets who had excelled in these regional literary dialects was generally agreed upon as forming the great classical age of Hindi literature there were initially various disputes among the Hindi literati as to which particular phases of Braj and Avadhi poetry should be recognised as the earliest. In particular issues of chronology and the biographical authenticity of poets constituted a key area of debate in the construction of a literary heritage.

In 1897 a critical discussion began in the pages of the *Nagari Pracharini Patrika*, the scholarly journal produced by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras,⁵⁷ concerning the dates and life histories of bhasha poets from this early period. In an article entitled *Kuch Prachin Kavyon ka Varnan* (An Account of some Ancient Poets) Radhakrishna Das drew attention to information on the lives (jivan charitra) of a number of poets contained in two anthologies, the *Shivsimh Saroj* (1868) and *Bhasha Kavya Samgrah* (1873).⁵⁸ His interest was essentially in a comparison of the dates given for the lives of various poets in the two texts, several of which appeared to be contradictory.⁵⁹ In the next issue of the journal, Munshi Deviprasad, a Munsif from

⁵⁶ In his treatise on Hindi published in 1883 Harischandra had asserted that '...since the most ancient times people have written poetry in this language, though one can maintain, that this was not the rule before the time of Akbar, since the poetry of Malik Muhammad Jayasi and Chand is after all different...', *Hindi Bhasha*, Bankipore, Khadgadvilas Press, 1883, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷ This journal in fact described itself as 'prachin shodh-sambandhi patrika' (journal related to ancient research).

⁵⁸ Shivsimh Semgar was an inspector of police in the district of Unao, Awadh, *Shivsimh Saroj*, Lucknow, Nawal Kishore Press, 1868; Pandit Maheshdatta Shukla was the second teacher at the school in Ramnagar, Barabhangi, *Bhasha Kavya Samgrah*, Lucknow, 1873.

⁵⁹ Radhakrishna Das, 'Kuch Prachin Kavyaon Ka Varnan', *NPP*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1900, pp. 1-6.

Jodhpur, responded to the assertions of Das's article criticising the information given on several of the poets. In particular, he claimed, the assertion of the *Bhasha Kavya Samgrah* that the poet Ananyadas was a contemporary of Raja Prithviraj and was alive in Samvat 1275 (1218 CE) was wholly incorrect. Instead, he claimed, the poet had been a Kayasth who was a contemporary of Raja Raysimh of Bikaner, his brother was called Prithviraj who, according to the practise of certain parts of Rajasthan, was called Maharaj by his brother Ananyadas.⁶⁰ To support this information Deviprasad cited his own archival research conducted in Bikaner and Jodhpur although he admitted, he was unable to locate the principal work of Ananyadas the *Ananya Prakash*. Two other poets, Harinath and Charandas, whose biographical details had appeared in the anthologies (and in Das's article) were also dealt with by Deviprasad in this article. Each of the disputes involved the identity of the poets in question, their place of origin and their dates.⁶¹ The aim was thus to situate each poet and their works squarely in the chronological record of Hindi literature. What is more there was a territorial aspect to this identity in that each poet was described as coming from a particular place and being an occupant of somewhere. Deviprasad's sources, which included the poems of the poets themselves, colonial sources such as Tod's *Rajasthan*⁶² and a number of Persian histories and contemporary writings illustrate the rationalised and scholarly approach which had been adopted to construct a more authoritative chronology of Hindi poets than had hitherto existed.

Poetry anthologies had first appeared as part of the educational literature produced for schools in the sphere of government education,⁶³ but in the latter half of the nineteenth century their role in the canonisation of Hindi poets was increasingly realised by Hindi elites. In the introduction to his *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections* (1827) William Price had named Chand as being the oldest poet of Hindi and included excerpts of Kabir, Bihari, Kesavdas, Gangkavi and Surdas as well as including selections from

⁶⁰ Munshi Deviprasad, 'Prachin Kavi', *NPP*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1900, pp. 129-34.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp. 131-4.

⁶² James Tod, *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajput States of India*, 3 vols, [1829], ed. William Crooke, London, 1920.

⁶³ See chapter three in which I argue that the terms and concepts for the later constructions of identity were often introduced in school textbooks.

the seventeenth century hagiography of Bhasha poets, the *Bhaktamala*.⁶⁴ In 1867 Sivaprasad's *Hindi Selections* contained examples all of these poets as well as including several modern additions in prose and verse.⁶⁵ Harischandra himself had published the *Sundari Tilak* in 1869 which included specimens of the poetry of several poets both older and contemporary,⁶⁶ but the *Bhasha Kavya Samgrah* and the *Shivsimh Saroj* were the first anthologies to attempt an historical approach to their selections, situating each poet in their time and place.⁶⁷ The focus in these texts moreover had shifted from an illustration of the various types of poetical metres to the poets themselves and their biographies. In the preface to the *Sivsimh Saroj* Sivsimh Sengar outlined a history of *bhasha* poetry from its origins up to the present day. In doing so he drew a continuous line through the intervening centuries connecting the contemporary linguistic community with a pre-Muslim Sanskrit past. The authority of the Sanskrit poetical tradition was invoked by situating the history of *bhasha* poetry as emerging from it at the time of King Vikramaditya. In this example then the origin of Hindi poetry was fixed at a time prior to Chand and Sengar refers to a poet named Pushya of whom there is no surviving record. Sengar was consciously writing the history of *bhasha* *kavya* and he sought to produce an image of a unitary and continuous poetical tradition which was rooted in the territorial domain of north India.⁶⁸

The reappraisal of Sengar's work several decades after its publication in the pages of the scholarly *Patrika* indicates a new undertaking amongst members of the Sabha to incorporate into the Hindi linguistic canon texts and linguistic fragments from a much earlier period than those of the previously established literary languages. In fact the quest for an antique literary heritage meant going beyond the literatures of Brajbhasha and Avadhi to the pre-Muslim past, precisely so that the relationship to Urdu and its literary traditions might effectively be bypassed. In its first annual report, the

⁶⁴ The anthology was designed as a textbook for students at Fort William College, Capt. W. Price, *Hindee and Hindoostanee Selections*, 2 vols., 2nd edition, Calcutta, Asiatic Lithography, 1830, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Raja Shivaprasad, *Hindi Selections*, Benares, Medical Hall Press, 1867.

⁶⁶ The *Sundari Tilak* was in fact compiled by Manna Lal and Hanuman Kavi on behalf of Harischandra but it was subsequently published in his name.

⁶⁷ Other anthologies of the period included Munshi Hanuman Prasad, *Padyasngraha*, Lucknow, Nawal Kishore Press, 1878; Sivaprasad, *Nava Rama*, 1870; Krishna Rao, *Hindu Kaviyon*, Benares, Medical Hall Press, 1875; Pandit Matadin Misra, *Kavittaratnakara*, Lucknow, 1876 and Kunjavihari Lal, *Chittavinoda*, Agra, 1876.

⁶⁸ *Shivsimh Saroj*, pp. 1-8.

Sabha presented an outline of the rise and development of Hindi literature. Although, it claimed, to trace the exact time of the beginnings of Indian civilisation would be difficult, no one could doubt that at that time Sanskrit had been the language of civilisation. This language had gradually degenerated into Prakrit, which in turn gave rise to Hindi. Hindi, the report claimed, had existed as long ago as the reign of Raja Bhoja, but since there were no works extant from that time the *Prithviraj Rasau*, might serve to mark the origins of Hindi.⁶⁹ The Muslim invasion of India which occurred about the time of the composition of this work had prevented the further progress of Hindi and the Muslims, in need of a language of communication with their subjects, created the Persian-mixed Urdu.

The recourse to texts which, it was claimed, embodied these early forms of Hindi, however, led to a serious critical debate internal to the Hindi literary sphere over the authenticity and historical validity of the sources and texts used to construct its historiography. At the centre of this debate was the text of the *Prithviraj Rasau* and its author, Chand Bardai, about which a series of contentious claims emerged. The *Prithviraj Rasau*, the epic tale of the heroic exploits of Raja Prithviraj Chauhan composed, it was said, by his court poet Chand Bardai, had first attracted critical attention in James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829). Tod in fact had exalted the text as both an epic tale and a 'universal history' of the period.⁷⁰ During the nineteenth century the text had gathered a good deal of cultural capital having been referred to variously as the oldest work of Hindi literature and the heroic tale of the last Hindu king of Hindustan.⁷¹ These epithets and the critical attention which it received in colonial scholarly circles,⁷² secured it an important place in the new project of Hindi

⁶⁹ *Nagari Pracharini Sabha Kashi: Varshik Vivaran*, Kashi, Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1894, pp. 1-3.

⁷⁰ Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Introduction.

⁷¹ See references by Rajendralal Mitra, 'But there is sufficient similitude between the language of Prithviraj-Raso, the most ancient Hindvi work extant, and the Hindvi of our day, and between the several dialects of Hindvi, Hindustani, Braza Bhasa, and the Rangri into which the modern Hindvi is divided to show that they are all essentially one...', in 'On the Origin of the Hindavi Language', p. 27 and Harischandra, *Hindi Kavita* (Hindi Poetry), *KVS*, 3, 10, 10 January 1872.

⁷² In particular a row had erupted between 1868-72 over the authenticity of both the text and its author between the well known advocate of Hindi in north India, F.S. Growse and the philologist John Beames. See F.S. Growse, 'The Poems of Chand Barday', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 37, 1868, p. 119; Idem, 'Further Notes on the Prithiraj Rayasa', *JASB*, 38, 1869, pp. 4-12; J. Beames, 'The Nineteenth Book of the Gestes of Prithiraj by Chand Bardai, entitled the "Marriage with Padmavati", literally translated from the old Hindi', *JASB*, vol. 38, no. 3, 1869; F.S. Growse, 'Translations from Chand', *JASB*,

literary history at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1885 however a furious debate over the genuine antiquity and authenticity of the text was initiated by an article published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* by Kaviraj Shyamal Das, the court poet of Mewar. According to him the *Prithviraj Rasau* was neither the composition of Chand Bardai nor had it been composed during the bard's lifetime. The bases on which he made this claim were twofold: firstly, he argued that the language used in the epic was based on a dialect of Mewar and contained nothing of the Braj Bhasha or Eastern Hindi; secondly, he pointed out that none of the events and characters which appeared in the text were in agreement with those mentioned in the Persian histories.⁷³ On the evidence of Persian words in the manuscript, which only began with the interaction of the poets of Mewar from the time of Akbar, he argued that it was probable that the text was composed between 1563 and 1613, some four centuries after its earlier ascription.⁷⁴ The historicist and linguistic criteria of Shyamal Das's critique of the text illustrate the new epistemological premise on which the historiography of Hindi literature and language was to progress.

The first response to Shyamal Das came from Mohan Lal Vishnu Lal Pandia, a prominent member of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha and a historian and literary scholar, who published a pamphlet in passionate defence of the *Prithviraj Rasau*. Pandia argued that not only was there ample evidence of the text's authenticity in the *Raso* literature itself, but that the linguistic influences from outside Rajputana were natural as its language was part of the larger linguistic world of Sanskrit, Hindi and Prakrit.⁷⁵ Pandia further attributed Shyamal Das's criticism of the epic to his hostility towards Bhats and Chauhans of whom the text was a history. Inaccuracies of dates and language were easily attributed to the vagaries of copyists and in no way tarnished the authenticity of the text or its author. For some time the debate over the status of the epic appeared to die down in Hindi scholarly circles until, nearly fifteen years later, Munshi Deviprasad

vol. 38, no. 4, 1869; J. Beames, 'Reply to Mr Growse', *JASB*, 38, 1869, pp. 171-76; F.S. Growse, 'Rejoinder to Mr Beames', *JASB*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1870; J. Beames, 'Translations of selected portions of Book I of Chand Bardai's Epic', *JASB*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1872.

⁷³ Kavi Raj Shyamal Das, 'On the Antiquity, Authenticity and Genuineness of Chand Bardai's Epic, the "Prithviraj Rasau"', *JASB*, November 1885.

⁷⁴ Idem, 'The Antiquity, Authenticity and Genuineness of the Epic called the Prithi Raj Rasa, and commonly ascribed to Chand Bardai', *JASB*, 55, 1886, pp. 5-27.

published an essay in the *Nagari Pracharini Patrika* again taking up the initiative of Shyamal Das and again stating that the text was to all intents and purposes a fake.⁷⁶ On this occasion, it seems, Deviprasad was aware of the import of his claim since he suggested that the status of the *Rasau* in Hindi literature had become equal to that of the *Mahabharata* in Sanskrit. Despite several attempts, however, no complete edition of the poem had ever been successfully produced by any party.⁷⁷ The reasons for this were due to the enormous difficulties of interpreting the text – there were multiple interpolations throughout, each recension was different and none of these matched any of the others. The major reason however was that the *Prithviraj Rasau* had long been proved to be historically inaccurate and due to the contemporary fascination with history and lack of interest in poetry the text was no longer considered valuable. Describing previous attempts at publishing the text he claimed, '[none] has quenched the thirst of eager folk for drinking in the poetry of Mahakavi Chand Bardai, indeed the gratification of this hunger for history becomes [in this case] desperate because the history which is in it is chiefly imaginary, inconsistent and false'.⁷⁸ Marshalling together a range of sources including the Persian histories mentioned before as well as various rock inscriptions excavated in Udaipur and Jaipur the author attacked the text on the grounds of its false claim to historicity claiming that neither the dates in the text, nor the names of rulers, nor the narratives of various events in the text were in any sense reliable. Rather than a work of history, he claimed, the great epic of the *Prithviraj Rasau* was merely an interesting work of poetry.

The response to this attack came from the pen of Babu Syamsundar Das, secretary of the sabha and editor of the journal. According to him the *Prithviraj Rasau* was not only an historically authentic text but it was also linguistically important as the very first example of writing in Hindi. In order to stress this fact he outlined the descent of Hindi from the western branch of Sauraseni Prakrit: 'It is now generally agreed that 250 years before the Christian era in northern Bharatvarsh a language was spoken which

⁷⁵ Mohan Lal Vishnu Lal Pandia, *The Defence of the Prithviraj Rasa of Chand Bardai*, Benares, Medical Hall Press, 1887, pp. i-ii, 5-19, 42-44.

⁷⁶ Munshi Deviprasad, 'Prithviraj Rasau', *NPP*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1901, p. 170.

⁷⁷ He referred in particular to the edition by Mohanlal Vishnulal Pandya of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, *Mahakavi Chand Bardai Krit Prithviraj Raso ki Pratham Samraksha*, Banaras: Medical Hall Press, 1887.

⁷⁸ 'Prithviraj Rasau', p. 170.

originated from the Vedic Sanskrit of ancient times and which gradually became the common language of day to day interaction (*vyavahar*). The name of this language was Prakrit. ...Prakrit was divided into two main groups – one western and one eastern. The other name for the western group was Sauraseni. From this Gujari, Avanti, Sauraseni and Maharashtra originated. From this Sauraseni our Hindi language was born but we do not know exactly when this happened'.⁷⁹ Despite the fact that the *Shivsimh Saroj* had named Pushya as the first Hindi poet, there was no evidence of his writing or his language; thus the first poet of whom there was some genuine account was Chand Bardai. In fact, he claimed, the *Rasau* formed the linguistic juncture at which the Prakrit languages came to an end in north India and Hindi proper began; this was evident in the Prakrit-like words scattered throughout the text which correlated with the Prakrit grammar composed by Hemachandra around 1140 AD. The historical evidence on Chand Bardai was that he came from Lahore, he was the royal poet of Prithviraj Chauhan, the last Hindu king, and, it is said, he was born and died on the same day as Raja Prithviraj.⁸⁰

A summary of the 26 books of the *Rasau* were then presented in the form of an historical account. 'The name of Prithviraj will always be remembered in the history of Bharatvarsh. The Hindu empire came to an end with him. Internal quarrelling and mutual antagonism took the name of Bharatvarsh. The father of Prithviraj was Someshvar Raj – he married the daughter of Raja Anangpal of Delhi...'.⁸¹ Following that Das set out to refute the claims of Kaviraj Shyamal Das and Deviprasad. Using the empirically authoritative sources of royal deeds (*danpatr*) and stone inscriptions (*shilaleckhon*) Das established the historicity of figures from the *Rasau* namely Jayachand, Prithviraj, Parmardidev and Shahabuddin. For Shahabuddin he referred to the Persian histories composed during the time of Mahmud Ghori which had been translated recently by colonial scholars.⁸² These sources, he claims, establish the reign of Prithviraj to have been in the twelfth century AD and his last war, when he was conquered by the Muslim king Shahabuddin, to have taken place in 1191 AD. A

⁷⁹ 'Hindi ka Adi Kavi', *NPP*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1901, pp. 175-6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 176.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, pp. 176-7.

⁸² Namely the *Tavaqate Nasri*, translated by Major Raverty, *Ibid*, pp. 179-80.

comparison of the dates of four major events which occur in the *Rasau* with the dates appearing in other contemporary sources however reveals a discrepancy of ninety years indicating some mistake in Chand's text. This discrepancy, Das argues, can be explained by consulting and comparing a series of nine Hindi royal deeds and grants composed between AD 1135 and 1157 all of which refer to events which occur in the *Rasau*. The explanation which these sources offer was that the date of events in the text of the *Rasau* followed a system of dating used by the court of the period which was 90-91 years less than the Vikram Samvat dates used in other Hindu sources. Therefore, Das concluded, the dates of the *Rasau* were correct and its historicity confirmed.

Debates over the authenticity and historical validity of early Hindi texts thus developed into a major project to establish an authoritative literary ancestry for Hindi. This ancestry, it was proposed, had originated in a pre-Muslim Hindu past and embodied the ancient terrain of Aryavarta. The pre-Muslim origins of Hindi were critical to the imagination of an ancient Hindu community/nation which provided an historical antecedent to the current Hindi nation. In his introduction to a discussion of the text of *Bisaldev Rasa* Shyamsundar Das wrote, 'The name of Bisaldev Raja is therefore famous in history because several times he waged war against the Muslims and once he succeeded in expelling them from the whole of Bharatvarsh. This is the same war that the kings of Rajputana waged against Mahmud of Ghazni and in which they were successful...'.⁸³ The historicity of texts, their individual place in a larger chronology of events and people, which had been established through rational historiographical method was crucial to this imagination. The empiricist nature of the sources employed to establish the historicity of texts entailed a large scale rejection of the puranic-mythical sources of Indian history. Thus Shyamsundar Das lists the sources for his *Prachin Leekh Mani Mala* (Garland of Ancient Writings) to be the collections of inscriptions, archaeological remains and translations of royal deeds and grants which together formed

⁸³ This text enjoyed a similar level of critical discussion as the *Prithviraj Rasau*. See Shyamsundar Das, 'Bisaldev Rasa', *NPP*, 5, 3, March 1901, pp. 135-44; Pandit Ramnarayan Dugarh, 'Bisaldev aur Vighraharaj', *NPP*, 8, 2, 1903, pp. 1-7.

the achievements of the ambitious colonial projects in archaeology, philology and antiquarianism.⁸⁴

The foundational status of the *Prithviraj Rasau*, a text which single-handedly was considered to embody the historical and territorial origins of the contemporary linguistic community was finally confirmed in a six volume critical edition of the text which was published by the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in 1904.⁸⁵ Critical editions of 'ancient' (prachin) Hindi texts became an important aspect of the project to construct a literary heritage.⁸⁶ The numerous texts which were revived in this capacity, often based on the findings of recent searches for Hindi manuscripts, were enshrined in the *Nagari Pracharini Granthamala* (the Nagari Promotion Series) which served as a parallel branch of publishing to the discoveries of the search for Hindi manuscripts and early forms of the language published in the journal. While these activities were initially confined to the few scholarly research journals which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century these journals became the principal platform for the reinvention of literature and language in the twentieth century and as the basis for a later construction of 'national history'.⁸⁷

Late nineteenth century explorations into the origins of the Hindi language and literature were the results of attempts to forge a continuous linguistic and literary history for Hindi. In order to do this a certain amount of redrawing of the historical and territorial frontiers had to be carried out. Since the beginning of this history coincided, ironically, with the beginning of Muslim rule in the region it was necessary to discover some original form of the language that predated this era and thus bypassed the development of Urdu. The foundational status of the *Prithviraj Rasau* as an historical account of the last Hindu ruler of north India was thus linked to its linguistic status as

⁸⁴ The list includes Epigraphica India, Archaeological Survey of India, Asiatic Researches, and Indian Antiquary. See 'Prachin Lekh Mani Mala', pp. 3-4.

⁸⁵ Mohanlal Vishnulal Pandya, Radhakrishna Das and Shyamsundar Das, eds., *Prithviraj Raso*, vols. 1-6, 2nd edition, Benares, Medical Hall Press, 1904.

⁸⁶ Another important publication of this period was the Sabha's critical edition of the *Ram Charit Manas* by Tulsidas, published in Allahabad in 1903. See also Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha's critical edition amongst many others of *Prithviraj Vijay*. Even today the status of the *Prithviraj Rasau* remains important, see *Sanskshipt Prithviraj Raso*, rev. and ed. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi and Namvar Singh, Allahabad, Sahitya Bhavan, 1963.

⁸⁷ See Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-1940. Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

the first text of modern Hindi. Together they provided a continuous literary and historical tradition connecting the contemporary Hindi region with the last Hindu empire of north India. While the inescapable historical fact of the Mughal empire and centuries of Muslim rule made it impossible to construct an historical narrative of uninterrupted Hindu sovereignty in north India, the exposition of a continuous linguistic and literary tradition beginning in the twelfth century furnished the fragile linguistic community being posited in the present with an historical authority and legitimacy. Thus in the first annual report of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha there was a discussion on the origins of Hindi in which the history and fate of the language was portrayed as synonymous with the history of the Hindu nation.⁸⁸

In contrast to the limited territorial extent of standard Khari Boli Hindi which, in the contemporary Hindi public sphere, was propagated as the true form of Hindi; the historical imaginings of its literary terrain were broad and inclusive, extending into Rajasthan and parts of central and western India that had long since been excluded as the homeland of Hindi proper.⁸⁹ Equally, once the search for literary roots had begun the linguistic criteria determining what could be classified as early Hindi soon spanned a broad linguistic spectrum including early forms of Brajbhasha, Punjabi, Rajasthani and so on, forms that were excluded from the new standardised Khari Boli Hindi that assumed pre-eminence as the public language in the twentieth century. Rudolf Hoernle, a latter day member of the Sabha and eminent philologist, recognised this contradiction when he wrote 'The term Hindi, as employed in the name of the search for Hindi manuscripts, is used in its old sense, in which it embraces the languages of the whole of the central portion of Northern India. The search, therefore, includes manuscripts written in Bihari, Rajputana, and Marwari, and it is apparently intended to include even Punjabi. From the point of view of practical utility, seeing that it secures a wide sweep of the search, one cannot help condoning the abuse of the term'.⁹⁰ Hence when it came to the territorial basis of the Hindi literary past there was an expansion of the language domain

⁸⁸ *Nagari Pracharini Sabha Kashi: Varshik Vivaran*, pp. 1-5.

⁸⁹ Vasudha Dalmia has described a similar process in a slightly earlier context 'as if the territorial domain of Hindui as the cluster of languages spoken by the indigenous population of northern India as against the Persian was being transferred to Hindi', *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, p. 217.

⁹⁰ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, March 1906, quoted in King, p. 331.

to encompass a broad terrain roughly comparable to the Mughal 'Hindustan', as all of northern (and parts of central, western and eastern) India.

III. Hindi in the national arena

The partial and limited victory which the supporters of Hindi achieved in the resolution of 1900 allowing its use, alongside Urdu, in public and official documentation did manage to weaken the massive mobilisation of numbers and figures which had previously been used to establish Hindi unconditionally as the regional language.⁹¹ In the early decades of the twentieth century however, Hindi and the Devanagari script began to assume a more assertive role on the national platform. At this time the institutional bases and discursive formations that had previously emerged in the struggle to establish Hindi as the language of the region began to expand their activities and objectives towards the neighbouring regions of northern, western and eastern India. This more ambitious attempt at the inclusion and homogenisation of diverse linguistic forms under one umbrella term, Hindi, mirrored the process which had taken place at the regional level. Hindi was constructed as the successor to Sanskrit which had once been the standard language of the entire country in the ancient past. Hindi as the most ancient of the regional vernaculars was mother tongue of all Hindus and so on. The factual basis for most of these arguments was irrelevant in so far as they were presented as widely acknowledged facts that needed no explanation. The idea of a national language, itself a central tenet of the western European formulation of nationalism,⁹² which would unite politically, geographically and culturally diverse peoples, became a central concern of the nationalist campaign in India for several decades of the early twentieth century occupying at various times such diverse thinkers as Gandhi and Premchand.⁹³

The idea of a national language (*deshbhasha*) that would become the common vehicle of public expression for all Hindus had, as we have seen, already been propagated by several scholars and intellectuals in the nineteenth century. Dayananda

⁹¹ *NWP&O General Administration Proceedings*, October 1900, pp. 93-120.

⁹² See Anderson, *Imagined Communities* for a general discussion of this point and David Washbrook, 'To Each a Language of his Own': Language, Culture and Society in Colonial India', in P.J. Corfield, ed., *Language, History and Class*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991 for a discussion of a national language in the Indian context.

Saraswati, the founder and president of the religious reform association the Arya Samaj had established Hindi, called *aryabhasa*, as the public language of the Samaj which was then used in proselytising and publishing activities by members of the association all over the country.⁹⁴ Establishing Hindi as a public language to unite the common people (*Hindustan ki sadharan praja*) had also been the concern of Bharatendu Harischandra whose term *nij bhasa* was used to denote what he saw as being the common language able to unite the larger national (Hindu) community.⁹⁵ The relationship between a single language and a particular community was further reinforced in the writings of these thinkers since they both made an explicit connection between Hindi and Hindu. The slogan 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan' first coined by the publicist from Kanpur, Pratapnarayan Misra, in the final editorial of his journal *Brahman* in 1890 pointed towards the larger identification of language, religion and territory. While Misra had not intended it to be a communal statement in any way, its subsequent use in communal agitations and disturbances between Hindus and Muslims in the province and beyond demonstrates the power of such identifications in the cultural and political context of north India at the turn of the century.⁹⁶

The first step to enlarging the domain of Hindi from the regional to the national sphere was to establish its religious identification as the language of all Hindus. In this vein Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, a leading Hindi litterateur, attempted to expand on the idea of Hindi as the language of the North West Provinces and Avadh to a conception of it as the mother tongue (*matribhasha*) of all Hindus in a large geographical territory comprising the United and Central Provinces, Bihar, Rajputana, Punjab and the princely states in central India: 'Hindi is the language of the people of Hindustan. It is easy to speak, to write and to understand. It covers a wide area from Punjab to Brahmadesh. Punjabi and Bengali are very similar to Hindi. Even in Marwar, Central India, Madhya Pradesh, Berar and Gujarat there are very many Hindi speakers. Maharashtrians are not

⁹³ Other nationalist leaders who were associated at one time or another with the Hindi movement were P.D. Tandon in Allahabad, Rajendra Pasad and Jawaharlal Nehru.

⁹⁴ Dayanand Saraswati, *The Light of Truth*, Lahore, Imperial Printing Works, 1927.

⁹⁵ This term was first used in Bharatendu's famous Ballia speech in November 1884 under the auspices of the Arya Deshopakarini Sabha. *Bharatvarsha ki Unnati Kaise Ho Sakati Hai?*, in *Bharatendu Samagra*, pp. 1009-1013.

⁹⁶ Gyanendra Pandey deals with these issues in chapters five and six of his *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

unfamiliar with it'.⁹⁷ The idea of a single mother tongue uniting all Hindus was employed to subsume all the heterogeneous varieties of Hindi and other regional languages into a single homogeneous linguistic community: 'The existence of a common language has a peculiar influence and very strong effects. It creates in the hearts of people a longing to be one. They long for their whole country to be one, they strive for its improvement and look upon the country's welfare as their own... Without a common language there can never be national unity. Only Hindi can attain the status of countrywide language'.⁹⁸ According to such rhetoric it was the duty of all Hindus to further the cause of the nation by promoting Hindi at all levels of public discourse: 'The progress of dharma and of the country rests on propagating the mother tongue and on the growth and enrichment of national literature. To strive and work for the progress of Hindi therefore is presently the first and foremost duty of every patriot and rightful man'.⁹⁹

The question of a national language was preceded by the search for a common script in which all the various regional languages could be written. In 1905 a public meeting took place at the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras at which a number of eminent intellectuals and political thinkers from all over India made speeches on the utility and necessity of adopting Devanagari as the common script for the whole of northern India and parts of western India, including all the vernaculars associated with the Sanskrit language.¹⁰⁰ In his address to the public gathering of over several thousand people Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the Maharashtrian Congress politician, made a direct link between the movement to establish a common script in northern India and the national movement. The 'historic difficulties' which he understood to be facing the project for a common language had to be tackled in a series of stages which would gradually unite the whole country. The first step to be taken was that a common character and language should be established for all Hindus which would unite the north and south, and the initial stage of this step was to unite the 'Aryan languages or those derived from

⁹⁷ M.P. Dvivedi, 'Deshvyapak Bhasa', (National language), *Saraswati*, November 1903, p.27.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The meeting included such important political thinkers of the day as R.C. Dutt from Calcutta, who presided over the gathering and Professor N.B. Ranade from Bombay. *A Common Character for Indian Vernaculars*, Benares, Nagari Pracharini Sabha, 1906.

Sanskrit'.¹⁰¹ It was thus on the basis of its status as an Aryan language and, so the argument went, as the most widely understood of these languages that Hindi first staked its claim for being the national language.

The notion of a national language which would create a sense of national unity was also anachronistically projected back into the ancient past when, it was argued, India had been linguistically unified. At the same meeting in Banaras Balchandra Krishna from Bombay emphasised the ancientness of the Nagari script which, he argued, was the oldest character of the Sanskrit language. In his view Hindi in the Nagari script should become the common language of India just as Sanskrit had been in the ancient past '[when] at that time India was a nation'.¹⁰² In the same vein Kshirod Prasad Vidyavinod from Calcutta argued that India had been linguistically unified in the Vedic period.¹⁰³ The idea of an 'ancient nation' that had been posited in the literary sphere as the historical blueprint for the contemporary linguistic community was thus similarly suggested in the realm of nationalist politics as the rationale for contemporary linguistic unification.

The extension of the discourse of Hindi from a regional language struggling for political recognition within the North Western Provinces to a potential national language developed, at least to begin with, almost solely in the confines of scholarly journals and literary associations. That these were not necessarily representative of wider opinion was evident when the debate emerged from this narrow sphere into the wider public arena. The institutional basis of Hindi's transition from a provincial to a national language was introduced by the establishment of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan in 1910 which,¹⁰⁴ following on from its sister organisation the Nagari Pracharini Sabha in Banaras, was founded specifically to promote Hindi at the national level. While the Sabha had sought to achieve recognition for Hindi within the institutional structures of the colonial state and predominantly within its own or neighbouring provinces, the Sammelan focused

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 5.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁰³ This meeting in Banaras took place in the same year as the Ek-lipi Vistar Parishad (Organisation for the propagation of one script) which took place in Calcutta and included a similar gathering of scholars and Hindi intellectuals and government officials. See Orsini, *Hindi Public Sphere*, p. 136.

¹⁰⁴ The first Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (Society for Hindi Literature) met in Banaras in October 1910. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya served as its first President. See King, pp. 461-2.

almost exclusively on establishing Hindi as a national language (*rashtrabhasa*) which could replace English as the language of politics.¹⁰⁵

In December 1916 a conference took place in Lucknow on 'The National Language and National Script' in which the issue of *rashtrabhasa* was explicitly discussed by Congress leaders and where it was decided that only Hindi and Devanagari were appropriate to perform this role of cementing the country together via a common language.¹⁰⁶ In the following decades the Sammelan focused on trying to promote Hindi as the language of the Indian National Congress and in implementing the Resolution of 1900 that government orders and official papers should be written in Hindi as well as Urdu at the provincial level. Debates and queries which arose in the Legislative Council meetings attest to the concern amongst the Hindi literati of the use of Hindi in wider public and official circles.¹⁰⁷ It was however precisely in the objective to pursue Hindi as the language of national politics and in the more communal attitudes of the Sammelan that the greatest opposition to it developed.¹⁰⁸ In the literary sabhas and political associations of north India there was wide support for Hindi as a national language but this support dissipated somewhat in the broader arena of national politics. As a result, Congress support for Hindi weakened when it was realised that Muslim opposition to the Hindu associations of Hindi, and regional opposition to what was perceived as Hindi imperialism from the north opposed its popular foundations.¹⁰⁹ Thus in the political sphere of Hindi activism the nationalist basis of the claims for Hindi proved not only to be highly divisive but they were (in their full form) ultimately insurmountable.

Conclusion

To conclude, in order to project the notion of an homogeneous and unified linguistic community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Hindi elites drew on

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 462.

¹⁰⁶ *Sammelan Patrika*, IV, 5, 1917, p. 180.

¹⁰⁷ See queries of Babu Brijnandan Prasad, Thakur Kushalpal Singh in *Proceedings of the Government of United Provinces, Legislative Department*, December 1910, File no. 5/1910, serial nos. 223, 218; Lala Sukhbir Singh, Ibid., March 1911, file no. 1/1911, serial no. 27.

¹⁰⁸ *United Provinces Native Newspaper Reports*, 1911, p. 902; 1914, p. 1364; 1914, pp. 1364-5.

¹⁰⁹ For example, the opposition to Hindi in the Tamil speaking areas of the south. See Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Battling the Demoness Hindi: The Culture of Language Protest in Tamilnadu, 1937-67', in S. Freitag, ed., *Culture as a Contested Site: Popular Participation and the State in the Indian Subcontinent*,

colonial linguistic and enumerative practices, as well as indigenous cultural reserves, to construct a regional political community that subsumed within its imagining a wide array of older, less exclusive sets of identities. In such a process language was transformed into the primary symbol of community identity during this period which was also able to incorporate other expressions of collective belonging, such as religion and caste, into its broad circumference. Throughout this process the colonial imagination of languages and linguistic categories played an important part in the definition of identities. Colonial education and print set the stage for the creation of a new kind of public space and the standardisation of language in the region. The colonial project, however, was also moulded in important ways by the responses from the colonised and the two parallel but interacting spheres enacted a relationship of mutual influence upon one another. Hindi, which had consistently been projected as a national language by its supporters also in this period was the basis on which a regional political community sought recognition for their interests. Thus language at this time embodied the tension and interface which existed between markers of regional and national identity which we have encountered in this thesis.

Conclusion

In 1986 Ramvilas Sharma, the foremost Marxist literary critic of Hindi, published a work entitled *Hindi Jati ka Sahitya*, (Literature of the Hindi People) in which he asserted that, 'Hindi literature is the literature of the Hindi jati ... The identity (*pahchan*) of the Hindi jati and its region (*pradesh*) is evident in the Hindi speaking area (*bhubhag*)'.¹ The idea of a Hindi jati and a concomitant Hindi *pradesh* which Sharma evokes in this work in many ways encapsulates the central problematic of this thesis. While Sharma undoubtedly was referring to the territorial region in the subcontinent where the Hindi language was spoken, by using the term *jati* he was simultaneously evoking the idea of a national community with a common cultural basis which was partly defined by language. Equally, the national community which was evoked by sections of the Hindu intelligentsia in late nineteenth century north India displayed a similar tension in its imagination of 'national' forms. As we have seen in several chapters of the thesis 'jati' was used to refer to the nation as well as describing a smaller, more limited form of community.

Whilst bearing in mind the tension that characterised articulations of regional and national cultural forms the thesis also sought to identify and elaborate on the various themes and tropes on which a certain notion of 'Hinduness' came to be defined during this period: the idea of a pristine civilisation on which to construct the narrative of a glorious, ancient past; the narrative of decline and moral corruption which brought an end to that past; the idea of an eternal tradition and religion that could provide a basis and a source of renewal to the contemporary nation and the idea of a single language with an ancient pedigree that gave territorial and cultural homogeneity to the current nation. The story began with an examination of the concepts and institutions which were introduced by the British into the region as they set about creating a politically unified region and a bounded administrative unit capable of producing revenue and other forms of tax. It argued that the categories, classifications and statistics on land and society

which the state produced to control and regulate the agrarian economy had a formative impact on the ways in which identity was defined and expressed in the region at a later date. During this period political boundaries were fixed, communities were classified and enumerated and concepts of colonial law were extended into many aspects of state-society relations. The chapter therefore aimed to set the tone for the later chapters wherein indigenous definitions of the various collectivities and sub-groups, such as caste, which were included as being constituents of the incipient nation developed from the same habit of mind as these earlier 'colonial' classifications. Colonial stereotypes moreover also reinforced the ideas of difference that were reiterated in the evoking of a collective 'we' by the various stands within Hindu nationalism at a later date.

The early stages of British rule further witnessed the instigation of an in-depth critique of Indian-Hindu culture and civilisation and the epistemological bases for indigenous knowledge. The second chapter considered how the Orientalist endeavour to uncover the materials of the early Indian past in order to reveal its synchronicities with Biblical history and the ancient history of other nations provided the sources and the interpretative framework for the construction of an historical region with antique origins. The interpretation of 'Hindu' history and geography that was formulated during this time focused on the ancient, Aryan and Vedic roots of Indian civilisation more or less to the exclusion of other influences. These cultural formations then re-appear at various points throughout the thesis as the dominant cultural models on which much of the subsequent 'Hindu' identity was to be constructed. The discussion of the Orientalist encounter with Hindu sacred space in Banaras was meant to demonstrate that the significant aspect of this encounter was the Orientalist denial of historicity to indigenous society and culture.

The absence of history, in this case, was elaborated through the example of the contemporary landscape of the city as representing the living embodiment of an ancient culture and religion. The final section of this chapter focused on the missionary attempts to discredit the popular notions of sacred space which led to the re-insertion of historicity into the trajectory of the Hindu past. The themes which emerged in the different sections of this chapter: the Aryan/Vedic and north Indian focus of Orientalist

¹ Ramvilas Sharma, *Hindi Jati Ka Sahitya*, Delhi, Rajpal and Sanj, 1986, p. 11.

research; the perceived absence of historicity in 'Hindu' culture; and the idea of decay and moral degradation leading to the destruction of a pristine civilisation, are all themes which reappeared in later chapters of the thesis in the form of indigenous responses to colonial interventions as well as in the early nationalist constructions of 'Hindu' history and culture. History, both its absence and its presence, has appeared as fundamental to the imagination of modern collectivities, including both the region and the nation. In engaging with the recent characterisations of colonial knowledge as a dialogic encounter or one based on an assumption of radical difference the thesis has argued to locate colonial knowledge and culture through a notion of hegemony.

The terms and vocabulary of much of this critique became accessible to the new urban classes through the medium of law courts, schools, colleges and the printed media. Chapter three examined the process of knowledge transmission wherein new forms of knowledge based on western scientific and positivist principles were transmitted into the indigenous sphere via education and print. The major obstacle to this process as it was seen in the early part of the century was the absence of a standardised and simple form of the language that could be used for textbooks and in schools across the region. Once this language had been developed, it was argued, large scale educational improvement might be effectively undertaken. However the chapter also showed how the straightforward transmission of colonial political concepts and western positivist principles into the indigenous sphere was rarely accomplished without some level of rupture and contestation. This was because the process of transmission was effected by a new class of indigenous intellectual who despite their education, professional experience and exposure to new ideas were still to some extent a product of and in touch with the traditional indigenous knowledge systems during the middle of the century.

The importance of textbooks as a site of encounter and knowledge transmission was asserted in this chapter, wherein the concepts and criteria of the subsequent discourse of identity were first appropriated and diffused in the context of colonial translation. In this respect Hindi textbooks remain a rich and largely untapped source for tracing the emergence of modern concepts of selfhood and community in the indigenous public sphere of north India and the 'vernacularisation' of liberal ideology.

The new middle classes that emerged from the ranks of the merchant castes of north India in the second half of the nineteenth century had been exposed to new ideas through their interaction with colonial educationalists and reformers and were able to express themselves by way of the new literary and cultural spheres activated by colonial print. Chapters four, five and six dealt with the responses of this class of regional elites to the changes that had occurred under colonial rule. Partly in response to the terms of the critique of Hindu culture offered by Orientalists and missionaries, and partly in an independent bid to unify and homogenise the multiple traditions of 'classical' Indian (Hindu) culture and religion, proto-nationalists of the later nineteenth century tried to create a singular and all-encompassing classical tradition, based on a re-working of the Aryan-Sanskritic foundations of Hindu culture in the light of new ideas. Chapter four looked at the project to unify and to reconstitute Hindu tradition as it appeared in the work of Bharatendu Harischandra of Banaras. The large number of histories which Harischandra wrote covering various aspects of religion and culture were meant to constitute, it was argued, a form of national history and biography that would fulfil this cohesive and unifying function. This chapter also picked up on and developed issues and themes that had appeared previously in the thesis such as issues of historicity, tradition and the authenticity of cultural knowledge.

The joint Orientalist-nationalist reconstruction of religion and culture that was forged at this time therefore was both clearly 'Hindu' and predominantly high caste. It was thus exclusive both of the lower orders of varna-based Hindu society and of non-Hindus. The terms of exclusion of these non-Aryan others were further propagated and worked out in the context of the new social, economic and religious tensions being experienced in north Indian society in the late nineteenth century as a result of rapid changes in communication and transport technologies, amongst other factors. Chapter five focused on the extension of the concept of difference as a marker of identity where chapter four had concentrated on the processes of inclusion involved in constructing histories. The development of the rail network in north India and the new opportunities to travel gave an increasingly mobile gentry the material context through which to explore newly felt tensions of caste, region and religion as well as to experience in an immediate and spontaneous way the idea of a national religion, culture and history. The

various expressions of collective identity and, crucially, those pertaining to aspects of difference which were expressed in these narratives, it argued, often conflicted with the more abstract and homogenising constructions of community that were expressed in historical narratives. Such contradictions moreover tend to affirm the well-recognised idea that identities are complex and contingent to circumstance and context. Like any other form of collective belonging, regional identities are subject to historical processes. The chapter on travel explored the detailed demarcation of others including lower castes, Muslims, rural and regional others. The terms and narratives of inclusion and exclusion in the creation of a modern Hindu identity have thus been an important aspect of the thesis.

This chapter also raised into prominence an issue which has appeared throughout the thesis and which is central to its argument. That Hindu publicists of the late nineteenth century who sought to construct and codify aspects of national belonging in their writings consistently imagined and discussed the nation in terms of their own regional historical and cultural background. The tension between the concept of the region and the nation in the historical construction of identities in India is therefore paramount. The idea of Hinduness that became embedded in this form of nationalist discourse became a primary source of identity as did the notion of a national language and literature as the cultural basis for a 'national' political community. Chapter six explored how at the end of the nineteenth century the discourse of a national community and culture crystallised in north India around the Hindi language. Hindi elites, at first seeking to extend and consolidate their position in the arena of provincial politics, later managed to project what was previously a regional cultural form on to the national stage, thus effecting a similar process to that which had happened with other regional cultural forms.

The regional cultural idiom that developed as a result of these new experiences and encounters thus sought to restructure the entire gambit of social, cultural and political discourse into a nationalist framework that had its roots in the Aryan-sanskritic model of Hindu culture and society as set out, initially, by Orientalists. This discursive idiom was both conservative in that it looked to the traditional and the orthodox for its

model of society and culture and progressive in that ultimately it sought to affirm greater political representation and participation.

The apparent contradiction in this cultural formation between its conservative and progressive tendencies and between an apparently localised basis alongside the wider national aspirations explains my initial research interest in this topic which was motivated by the sense that it differed from the early forms of nationalism found in other regions during this period. While the comparative aspect of this question has not been answered in the thesis and perhaps indicates an avenue for future research the idea that the high-caste merchant community of north India expressed their version of nationalism within the categories and concepts of a regional culture and religion has been demonstrated here.

Beyond this, it is important to add that this idiom or formation was historically contingent and, even within the time scale of the thesis, it developed somewhat and changed in its defining features. The early nationalism expressed by late nineteenth century nationalists had already altered somewhat by the end of the nineteenth century. In particular the Sanskritising elements that we saw emerging in this period had become far more dominant and worked to exclude other non-Sanskritic elements from the (normative) model of a national religion and culture. Thus its constituent parts began to change, a process which was accompanied by the growth of other large-scale collectivities forged around notions of ethnicity and class that were also located beyond the region and the wider region. What began as a heterogeneous culture became far more homogenous by the end of the period in discussion here, although the process of homogenisation became even stronger in the middle of the twentieth century.

The relevance and significance of understanding such cultural formations has been increasingly recognised by scholars working on the history of nationalism in the sub-continent where studies of colonialism and nationalism have moved gradually away from an economic to a cultural, ideological and psychological focus. The hegemonic character of this cultural formation, moreover, continued and as stated above, developed in the region well into the twentieth century, although the proponents of Hindi failed to achieve any significant standing within the nationalist movement to establish Hindi as the national language. This Sanskritising element, wherein a high-caste, varna-based

Hindu cultural order is propagated as the normative version of culture remains an important element in the political culture of present-day north India.

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