ORIENTALISM : A CRITIQUE

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A major concern of bourgeois thought has been the attempt of blur the distinctions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, between Marxism and bourgeois thought and between capitalism and socialist society. Edward Said is a brave warrior of the bourgeoisie who entered the fray with his book 'Orientalism' which was published for the first time in 1978. Palestinian in national origin, trained in literary theory in the U.S., untouched by Marxist theories of literature, blissfully nescient of Soviet orientalist scholarship under Lenin and Stalin and deeply enmeshed in the idealist and subjective theories of the French scholar Michel Foucault, Edward Said argues that the works of western orientalism, including the writings of Marx, inferiorise the East in relation to the West. At the root of the Saidian system is the failure to recognise the notion of socio-economic formations in the thought of Marx which embraced Asiatic, ancient, feudal and capitalist social formations. Said is oblivious of the fact that for Marx the Asiatic Mode of production spanned continents including pre-Columban America, parts of Europe and Asia itself. For Said the notions of Asiatic Mode of Production and Oriental Despotism represent merely a common endeavour with the Romantic orientalists of eternally inferiorising the East to the West. In the thought of Karl Marx the brutal introduction of capitalism in India had a two-fold destructive and regenerative mission which was laying the basis for a social revolution. In the fantastic thinking of Edward Said this represents an attempt, together with other orientalism, to 'reconstitute' and 'redeem' the East. For Said there are no laws of motion in society there is only an eternal undifferentiated Orientalism which eternally subordinates the East. Any attempts to revolutionise the East in accordance with the Marxist notions of social change are, for Said, an integral part of the orientalist subordination of eastern societies.

Saidean orientalism' postulates that during the past two centuries Europe has ideologically 'constituted' Asia in relation to itself with the purpose of inferiorizing it. This has been done by Europe, by projecting itself as rational, changing, progressive and superior in contradistinction to Asia, that is, 'the other', being irrational, unchanging, static, inferior and despotic. Although Edward Said himself maintains that these distinctions were 'not changing, nor simply fictional', yet he categorically asserts that the Orient was 'by the mainstream academic thought to be confined to the fixed status of an object frozen once and for all by the gaze of western peripient'. For Said this
ideological construction 'orientalism' exists in 'insulation from intellectual developments everywhere else in the culture'. 1 Saidean 'orientalism' is thus tantamount to a total reduction of European intellectual activity concerning Asian societies stretching over two centuries, to the perceived task of inferiorizing those societies.

Saidean discourse rests on the assumption that it is possible to arbitrarily create an ideology in insulation from material reality. Further, it absolutizes the concept of nationality without its class components defining its character. The notion of social formation is alien to Saidean orientalism which replaces class by the absolutized concept of 'nationality'. It is not a sheer coincidence that Saidean orientalism omits from its ambit the entire range of Soviet literature which certainly was not part of inferiorizing the East, but rather of studying Asian societies in terms of their specific social formations.

It is our contention that orientalism, that is the study of Asian societies by European scholars was not an undifferentiated system of ideas. Like, any other system of ideas, it contained within itself divergencies and contradictions reflecting their class character. Orientalism, like any other system of knowledge, was the product of several currents and crosscurrents and situations acting and interacting upon each other and in the process producing varied, even conflicting explanations of 'historical phenomena regarding the societies of Asia. These views had greater or lesser consonance with objective reality depending upon scholars' conceptual frameworks, tools and techniques of investigation, availability of information and their politics.

To start with, it is a totally indefensible premise for Saidean orientalism that European scholars' views on societies of Asia existed in 'insulation from intellectual developments everywhere else in the culture'. Besides the fact that such a formulation is theoretically not feasible, we would like to refute this with empirical data. Our indepth study of six British scholars of medieval Indian history reveals that the nineteenth century British historical writing of medieval India had a remarkable closeness to British as also to European historical writing, both in its strength and weaknesses. 2 The nature, the scope and historical methods of investigation were deeply rooted in historians' intellectual antecedents. The questions that they raised, and the answer they sought from their evidence were integral to their notions of social development. William Erskine's (1773-1852) extensive learning and wide horizon were deeply embedded in the Scottish Enlightenment and the intellectual milieu of the University of Edinburgh at the close of the eighteenth century. His entire study of medieval India permeates with the idea that society had progressed from, 'rudeness to civilization' through four stages, namely 'hunting, pastoral, farming and commerce'. Erskine, reflecting the influence of Adam Smith, John Millar and Adam Ferguson in his conception of social evolution, did apply these categories to the Asian context, though not uncritically. In the context of India he recognized that these categories may co-exist but the concept itself was equally applicable for Erskine to Asian and European societies. The interest of Edward Thomas (1813-1886), 'a name recognized over Europe as a Prince in oriental numismatics', in the Indo-Muslim numismatics was integral to numismatics emerging as a science in Europe. The Indo-Muslim numismatics acquired the status of a subject through his life long devotion. Henry Miers Elliot's (1808-1853) search for historical sources of medieval India runs parallel to the systematic search for historical sources in Britain and other countries of Europe in the nineteenth century. Henry George Keene's (1825-1915) positivist approach led him to study medieval India for a closer and deeper understanding of the contemporary Indian reality. Under the influence of the ideas of Henry Maine and Herbert Spencer, Keene's concern for the future of India became identified with finding out how and why India had remained in 'an arrested state of development', that is, why it had not grown into an industrial society.

Differences in John Dowson's (1820-1881) and Keene's concepts of history reflect two streams of thought in the nineteenth century British historical writing, represented by Carlyle, Froude and Freeman on the one hand and that of Buckle on the other. The preponderance of the narrow political content in the British historical writing of medieval India also reflects the conceptual limitations of the British historical writing of the nineteenth century. These limitations notwithstanding, it is quite remarkable that medieval India emerged as a specialized unit of study through the work of British scholars of the nineteenth century.

Although medieval India emerged as a specialized unit of study, the predilection of the academia for ancient Indian studies still continued to predominate British scholarship. The Bibliotheca Indica publications of the Asiatic Society of Bengal are a significant indicator in this respect; only one-fourth of these publications were texts or translations relating to medieval Indian history, the remaining three-fourths were largely Sanskrit texts or translations relating to earlier centuries of Indian history. 3 The preference of the academic world for ancient over medieval Indian studies also stands out by the absence in the whole range of British scholarship on medieval India of a name comparable to William Jones, Charles Wilkins, Horace Hayman Wilson, Henry Colebrooke or John Muir. The predilection of scholars for ancient over medieval Indian studies, which in Saidean terms would be tantamount to Britain attempting to antiquate India, in fact runs parallel to intellectual trends in Britain.
mid-nineteenth century. Research and teaching was Eurocentric with a heavy tilt towards classical European past itself was negligible in comparison to that of the history of Greece and Rome. That the students were acquainted with the structures of political economy, economic geography and modern literature. It is remarkable that history as an independent subject of study got introduced in the University of London only at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The interest of the intellectual world in Britain in classical and ancient Indian studies was largely an extension of classical biases in education in Britain. This interest owed a great deal to the discovery that Sanskrit was related to certain European languages. The comparative philology ‘discovered’ one link that had never been suspected before. The language of the prevalent race of India is indeed the same family as our own language.

The academic world was fascinated by this unexpected discovery and philological interest in Sanskrit was a corollary of this. Sanskrit was viewed ‘as noble a speech’ as Greek and Latin, ‘exemplifying in itself all those changes which scholars love to trace in the classical languages of Europe. The same principles may be observed working alike in each.’ Moreover, emphasis on the study of Sanskrit was partly due to their belief that Sanskrit belonged to a period earlier than that of Greek and it was thus assumed to be in a purer state of preservation.

For the classical world the ‘discovery of Sanskrit opened an almost inexhaustible region for investigations’. The fact of commonality between Sanskrit and some European languages prompted subsequent work on the common Indo-European heritage. The scholars of the Graeco-Roman history were to realize that during:

Those very centuries which they seem to have monopolised, the sun still witnessed other empires in other parts of the earth. Contemporaneous with these romance-lands of European antiquity, flourished the great empires of Persia and India, and however little their orbits intersected, each was indeed a ‘magic circle’ of awful import and reality. The two worlds of ancient life fulfill their destiny side by side.

Indeed, Sanskrit came to be viewed as a ‘precious key to the due understanding of Greek mythology, and to the solving of many a problem in the history of Aryan races and tongues.’ Interest in Sanskrit and Persian studies was seen as analogous to the ‘peculiar pleasure’ being taken by the Americans in ‘connecting’ their country with their ‘old home’ in Europe. This ‘might not inaptly be paralleled for us Englishmen, by the interest of researches concerning the progenitors of our whole Aryan stock in Persia and India’. While the students of ‘the earlier school are looking for derivation from Saxon, Norman, Roman, Celts, the students of Zend and Sanskrit literature have been occupied in revealing to us an ancestry behind all ancestries of which we had hitherto taken account; a primaeval home whence have come even the names of our closest relationships, and the fables and fairy-tales of our nurseries.’

Paradoxically these studies, through their findings were blurring distinctions between the East and the West. Indeed, the East and the West, Asia and Europe were not being presented as mutually exclusive realities by a variety of scholars. Most writers with Rational and Positivist ideas searched for universal laws of social development in their study of India and other societies of Asia. William Erskine and Henry George Keene approached Indian history equipped with general laws of social development and they discerned several analogies between the Indian and the European pasts. C.L. Tupper in a presentation on Indian history to the Society of Arts in London in 1891 aptly remarked that those who regarded societies as having passed through successive stages of development looked at the history of human race ‘to ascertain the general laws of the progress of mankind from the mere savage horde to tribal stage, thence forward to the agricultural community, to city life, to the formation of states and empires, and the growth of nationalities, united by the bonds of commerce and international law’. C.L. Tupper, the writer of several volumes on the customary law of the Punjab, was keen that the Indian evidence should be collected before it disappeared under the strong impact of another civilization. He perceived similarities between European feudalism and Indian society at the time of the British conquest of India. With his understanding of feudalism as a polity with ‘a complete organization of society through the medium of land tenure, in which from the king down to the lowest land-owner, all were bound together by obligation of service and defence’, Tupper noted similarities and dissimilarities between the European,
and the Mughal, the Maratha and the Sikh systems both with regard to land tenures and the pyramidal political structures. From these he inferred that 'India, as we found it, was for the most part in a praefeudal stage with strong marks of incipient feudalism'. Both in the completed feudalism of the West and the 'the imperfect feudalism of India', Tupper perceived 'double ownership of land'. Writers such as Tupper were explicitly or implicitly commenting on the specificities and generalities of various pre-modern social formations in Asia and Europe with implications for backwardness or forwardness of social formation and not of any people or regions. It is important to note that historical findings were also being concurrently used for universalized notion of systems of exploitation. James Malcolm Ludlow, Ernest Jones and Karl Marx used historical findings on India for their understanding of the laws of social development.

The inferiority of Asian societies was situated in time and content in terms of social formations for several writers of general histories of Europe and Asia -even though they might not have articulated the same through adequate and clear concepts. A close look at some writers of Indian, Ottoman and comparative history of Europe and Asia reveals that these writers approached their subjects of study with contemporary modern Europe as their point of reference. Scientific discoveries, machine-age, emergence of nation states, some representative mode of governance, rational ideology, emergence of the individual and his disentanglement from the community, new forms of art and literature were all essential components of this point of reference for the British writers. That it was so is apparent from the fact that they were preoccupied with the changes that made Europe so distinct from Asia. 

Keene's preoccupation with the 'arrested state of development' of the Indian society was tantamount to finding out why India had not developed into an industrial society which characterized modern Europe. Industrial development, rational ideology and the concomitant relegation of religion to background in society and the emergence of the individual were all present in Keene's views on Indian society. Steam, electricity, railways all figured prominently in British scholars views on India. Not only scientific discoveries, but also scientific methods and outlook formed an integral part of British scholars' angle of vision on India. These currents of thought are reflected by the author of The Expansion of the Empire, J.R. Seeley, the popular ideologue of imperialism who represents the dominant viewpoint on the subject of the Indian Empire and whose book was referred to as 'a sort of koran of imperialism' by a speaker at the Baku Congress of the Peoples of The East in September 1920. Seeley writes:

Many travellers have said that the learned Hindu, even when he acknowledges our power

and makes use of our railways yet is so far from regarding us with reverence that he despises us. This is only natural. We are not cleverer than the Hindu; our minds are not richer or larger than his. We cannot astonish him, as we astonish the barbarian, by putting before him the ideas that he never dreamed of. He can match from his poetry our sublimest thoughts; even our science perhaps has few conceptions that are altogether novel to him.

But our boast is not that we have more ideas or more brilliant ideas, but that our ideas are better tested and sounder. The greatness of modern, as compared with medieval or ancient, civilization is that it possesses a larger stock of demonstrated truth, and therefore power.

No wonder Seeley perceived of the dominion of England over India as 'the empire of the modern world over the medieval'. General Mac Lagan made a similar distinction between the machine and premachine age in the context of building arts in India. Townsend also refers to machinery. He writes that the Asiatics have 'practised all necessary arts, and except in machinery, can make and do all that European can do'.

It is significant that there were individuals and groups of people who did not view even their contemporary Asian societies as inferior in comparison to Europe. It is important to note that the idea of inferiority never came to be attached to the Ottomans, who, despite European intervention, retained their political independence. The Ottoman could be presented as a 'destroyer', who could not be a builder, but not as an inferior people. Quite to the contrary, Ottoman superiority was axiomatic for British scholars of the Ottoman empire. Holding parts of Europe with most Biblical and classical cities in dominion, the Ottomans were held in awe by the Europeans. It was maintained by many British writers that even in the hour of their waning power 'The Turks have never been honestly beaten in the present century'. Although reduced in power, the Ottomans had belied the prophecy and hope of Europe about their extinction. 'Bravery', 'superiority' and 'heroism' of the Turk were subjects of comment by many a British writer of the nineteenth century even during the decline of the Ottoman power.

Conversely, Europe was not consistently shown to be superior to Asia. Several British writers applied their concepts of progress to their own past. They found that their own past too revealed 'barbarism'. Meredith Townsend in his book Asia and Europe mentioned that massacres had been common in Europe and that we 'used to persecute for the faith as Asiatics do now, that it is, hardly a century since torture was disused'. The Chartists found tyranny in their contemporaneous political structures in Britain. A lot of such evidence surfaced due to Britain's support to Turkey in the 'Eastern Question'. The political compulsions of supporting the 'Islamic', ' despotic' and 'barbaric' Ottomans created conditions for the British writers of the nineteenth century to marshal evidence to show that the 'Christian Europe' was not free from the
kind of inhumanity and cruelty being highlighted against the Ottomans. Evidence was gathered from history and their own time by several writers to show that the so-called 'human' and 'just' 'Christian Europe' had been and still was in some respects more barbarous than the Ottomans. Through these debates surfaced the duplicity of the idea that contemporary Britain and other European countries were 'civilized nations' governed by notions of freedom, equality, justice and humanism. Thus, for instance, George Larpent asserted that slaves in Turkey were 'enjoying absolute felicity, if we compare their conditions with that of the negroes in Christian countries'. Edward Freeman's tirade against the Ottomans evoked a reply The English in Ireland. The writer of this booklet not only wrote about the 'conceit of being' done to the Turk through Freeman's depiction of him as a 'monster in human form', but also extended Freeman's argument to the English in Ireland. From this he concluded:

Turkey, after all.—bad as she has been—is no worse than the boasted civilized nations of Europe, and that...those who desire to drive her out of Europe are by their own argument fit subjects for similar treatment...No matter who they be—American, French, Russian, Turk, Austrian, Jew, Catholic or Protestant; a tale of horror equal to this, if not worse, can be placed to the credit of them. The Chartists went a step further and pointed out that the British system under 'forms of law' and 'constitutionalism' was far more oppressive and tyrannical for the poor and unrepresented sections of the British society than the Turkish despotism for its subjects. It was categorically asserted that the Turkish Sultan possessed no power whereby he could compel his subjects to work 'as the English slaves work'. The perfunctory nature of the Chartist trials was pointed out to illustrate that there seemed no difference between them and those held in Turkey.22

From a very different angle, the notions of inferiority and superiority were not part of 'constituting' the East, but were the components of the ideology of subjugating and subordinating others. The attempts to inferiorise were not confined to the east; the idea cut across religions, races and continents. The Asians, the Africans, the people of the West Indies, the Red Indians, the aborigines of Australia were all inferior people. The notion equally embraced sections of European society too, both in the past and their own time. It has been aptly pointed out the Germanic 'Crusades' in Slav lands precede by some three centuries the Frankish movement against Islam. Germanization and civilization were 'very naturally equated, and time did not diminish the attraction of the equation'. The theory of German racial superiority and Jewish inferiority is too well known to need elaboration. The Germans were destined to civilize since they were 'civilized people par excellence'.

For England, it was not merely India or the darker races that needed strong paternal intervention on account of their incapacity to rule, the argument extended to Ireland too. Like the Indians, the Irish too were 'incapable of taking care of themselves'. It is significant that this view of the Irish people's inability to rule themselves was common both to their sympathizers and their critics. These ideas underlay their opinion that England had earned no gratitude from Ireland for having done so much for it. Kipling and Fletcher, summed up these views on Ireland in their comment that Ireland was: 'full of beautiful laughter and tender tears, full of poetry and valour, but incapable of ruling herself and impatient of rule of others'.

The view of the inferior 'other' embraced large sections of their own society too. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates for the years when extension of franchise was under consideration in Britain provide a telling commentary on the attitudes of the British ruling class towards lower sections of their own society and towards women of their own class as well. This is so despite the fact that debates in Parliament were conducted under restraint and in the discussion on women's enfranchisement members were especially advised not to transgress the limits of decorum and decency of the Parliament as had happened at an earlier occasion on the subject. In both instances class and gender biases dominated the debates. Extension of franchise by lowering property qualifications, it was stated by a member, who purported to be referring to a letter received by him, 'would be hazardous on account of the character and tendencies of too many of the persons whom such an extension would place upon the register'. An extended franchise, it was argued, would bring on registers, many 'whose improvidence, drunkenness and venality were at present, and would...long continue to be a standing reproach to the class to which they belonged'. The member maintained that the working man should 'rise to it, and not have it lowered to him'; the 'character' of the working man was to be raised. Several members mentioned the 'haughty ignorance' of the working men and questioned their competence for matters of state which required intellectual capacity for serious deliberations.

The 'moral depravity' of the class which would get enfranchised by the bill was also a subject of comment by many members. It is quite ironical that the bill was under consideration because of the enormity of prevalent corrupt electoral practices of those who were sitting in the House as its members, and yet the greater susceptibility of the lower sections of society to corruption was adduced as an argument against extending the franchise. The entire tenor of the debate was that the working men were ignorant, incompetent and in several other ways unfit to be given a share in power which needed serious deliberating capacity possessed by those who were then sitting in the House.
or their alike outside the House. The opinion cut across party lines. Robert Lowe, a member of the Liberal Party, after mentioning that the educated and the enlightened opinion in the country was opposed to any extension of franchise, added:

The matter is of incalculable importance: any error is absolutely irreparable...To our hands at this moment is intrusted (sic) the noble and sacred future of free and self-determined Government all over the world. We are about to surrender certain good for more than doubtful change...To precipitate a decision in the case of a single human life would be cruel. It is more cruel— it is parricide in the case of the constitution, which is the life and soul of this nation.

The very subject of women’s enfranchisement was described as ‘grotesque’ and ‘preposterous’ by a member during one of the earliest debates on the subject in 1883 A.D. Like the working men, women too were considered devoid of intelligence which was a prerequisite for any political power. It was asserted that ‘the narrowness of woman’s range of ideas is absolutely deleterious in its effects’. It was further held by some that women could not be enfranchised since they were inherently incapable of acquiring intellectual development. It was stated:

how constantly does it happen that the man’s freedom of intellect is a thing unto himself, that he is incapable of imparting to the woman, with whom so much of his life is spent, any conception of the range of his thought?

Again,

If you are going to put these unlit women into the light of citizenship, are we to sacrifice the interests of this country in the hope that they improve?

Women were considered incapable of appropriate responses and they were portrayed as erratic in their behaviour. It was maintained that dealing with the questions of peace and war ‘We should find them timid in time of panic and violent in time of outbreak.’ Added to all this was the fact that women had no expertise and experience to contribute in matters of commerce, trade and military affairs. Her historical position was thus being adduced as an argument for keeping her perpetually out of political rights. One member was opposed to ‘giving of a franchise to a woman because she is a woman’. Another strengthened the argument by adding that her being a woman is ‘a condition she never changes’. Class and gender biases in conjunction get revealed very suggestively by the comments of one member named Inderwick. He was of the opinion that he would much rather see one of the intelligent women connected with this movement (suffragette) sitting in the House and taking part in the debates than I would consent to give the franchise to the whole of the sisterhood.

He went on to add:

If you admit the question of political franchise for women, you must treat them on the same footing as men [since property right had then just been established for women], and as you lower the franchise to men [by lowering property qualification], so must you lower it to women; how, then, are you going to control or oppose the bad passions of a low class of men by adding to them, as you must, by the bad passions of a low class of women.

The inferiority of the Asian was thus matched, from the perspective of a large section of the British ruling class, by the inferiority of the British working men and by the inherent inferiority of the British women of all classes.

The Parliamentary debates make it abundantly evident that the members were apprehensive about losing their power by extending the franchise. The Liberal member Robert Lowe did not quibble about the question and ‘laid bare the implications of the Act hidden under the medley of principles’. The extension of the franchise, he believed, was aimed at annihilating the power of the opposition, but:

I do say that it is a short-sighted and foolish idea, because if we could succeed in utterly obliterating and annihilating the power of Hon. Gentlemen opposite, all we would reap as reward of our success would be the annihilation of ourselves. The history of this country—the glorious and happy history of this country—has been a conflict between two aristocratic parties, and if ever one should be destroyed, the other would be left face to face with a party not aristocratic, but purely democratic... (and) if the purely aristocratic and purely democratic elements should come into conflict, the victory would in all probability, be on the side of democracy.

One reason for excluding women from becoming members of Parliament was that the male members themselves might be affected by the change. The hierarchy of races established by the Nazis in Germany with the Jews, the Poles and the Ukrainians formed an integral part of the liquidation of the Jews and enslavement of the Poles and the Ukrainians by playing off minorities and nationalities against each other. The Indian upper castes to-day raise the question of ‘merit’ to retain their stranglehold over the Indian bureaucracy.

The ‘other’ too like the European ‘self’ was not an undifferentiated whole. Ernest Jones in the mid-nineteenth century wrote that the untouchables and the other oppressed castes in India have for ages been ‘inferior’ not only for this world, but for the next world too. Jones wrote about the tyranny of the caste system which condemned the sudras to perpetual slavery and treated the outcastes as beyond the pale of humanity and denied them human status. Here is a parallel for Said to find the inferiorization of the ‘other’ within his ‘other’. We in India have recently seen doubts being raised about the ability of the untouchables and other backward castes to undertake tasks involving deliberating capacity, and thereby requiring ‘merit’, which, of course is presented as an abstract concept devoid of social context and conditioning. The parallel is very similar to the nineteenth century views of the British ruling classes about their working men and of all classes in Britain.

This vast range of diverse views reflecting different sectional and class
interests, clearly and emphatically question the validity of Said’s homogenized single category of European superiority versus Asian inferiority. In fact, there were sharp divergences of opinion in Britain on almost everything pertaining to India including the nature of their empire in India. If there was a Henry Miers Elliot, there was also a James Malcolm Ludlow. While Elliot was an arch reactionary, a nationalist and imperialist to his core, who painted Indo-Muslim rule in extremely dark colours, Ludlow, a Christian socialist could bring out the ugly face of British imperialism in India. Coming from a regicide family of Wiltshire with Scottish links, born in India and educated in France, where he imbibed Buchez’s idealist notions of socialism, Ludlow presents a remarkable analysis of the British empire and its implications for India and its people, belying all the basic assumptions of ‘orientalism’. He held the British parliament and the British people responsible for all actions and policies of the company which were responsible for misgovernment and oppression in India. The British Parliament, Ludlow emphasized ‘contemptuously set aside’ petitions needing ‘urgent enquiry’; it always renewed the company’s charter without ever deeming it ‘worthwhile to go into evidence regarding the condition of the country’. He categorically asserted: ‘England cannot shake off her responsibilities for India. She cannot make the East India Company the whipping-boy for her sin. Her Parliament is responsible for it’.

Considering the subject ‘with reference to the Mutinies of 1857’, Ludlow dispassionately analysed the nature of British rule in India notwithstanding the highly charged atmosphere of 1858 in which ‘revenge’ was the dominant cry against those who dared revolt against the British government. Counting protection of persons and property, honest and efficient justice, an inoperative fiscal system, encouragement to agriculture, industry and trade and as a necessary consequence of these a thriving and contented people as ‘necessary outward marks of a good government’, ‘I do not even say a Christian government’, Ludlow found the British rule in India deficient in all these respects. Drawing his information from diverse sources, he asserts that in a large part of the company’s territories, ‘it proved that neither life nor property are secure’. Giving information from different regions of the subcontinent, he delineates on legalised torture quite apart from illegal malpractices. He states that even in areas such as North-East India where the British seems to bring at first law and order in place of more savagery, the gradual effect of that rule is to produce in the long run a result far worse that mere savagery in which both person and property number among their worst enemies among those whose office it is to protect them. Illustrating his point, he gives evidence from another region and cites a petition from the Indian inhabitants of Madras stating how life and property were being taken on the pretext of non-payment of revenue. The cultivators were being imprisoned and tortured with neither life nor property being safe. There was notoriously corrupt and oppressive police, while the judicial system was ‘supremely cumbersome and inefficient in Madras’, ‘a mere lottery in Bengal’ and ‘in the hands of the native officials venal everywhere’ marked by perjury and dishonesty. But then the ‘native dishonesty’ was produced by the system itself.

The fiscal system came in for sharpest comment from Ludlow. He underlined the oppressive nature of all the three systems of revenue introduced by the British government in India. Ludlow pointed out that high revenue rates combined with relentless and efficient collection were leading to pauperization of the peasantry. He emphasized that the revenue system under Indo-Muslim rule was far less oppressive in comparison to the British revenue system. He noted that though the principle of exacting half of the produce in revenue was in vogue under Muslim rule, for several reasons it was neither universally applicable nor universally practised or enforced in India.

There were other aspects of the oppressive fiscal system which had serious repercussions for impoverishment of the peasantry. With the salt becoming government monopoly, its price was enhanced from 50 to 200%. Either the poor must go without salt or substitute for it ‘an unwholesome article impregnated with saline particles’. Ludlow points out that the government monopoly price of salt at Madras was 1300% above the cost price. He calculated that the salt requirements for a family’s consumption ‘actually represents to the cultivator in the interior the amount of three months wages’. Added to this was the fact of taxes on grass, cow dung, jungle wood etc. levied on ‘the poorest of the poor’, Ludlow stated that ‘I have no time to linger over the incredible list, which proves at least unsurpassable amount of fiscal ingenuity’.

Heavy and vexatious taxation was leading to impoverishment of the peasantry and, in Ludlow’s view, it was very difficult for agriculture to...
flourish under these circumstances. Furthermore, the state, 'assuming to be
universal landlord' was not discharging its responsibilities of improving
facilities for agriculture. Ludlow points out that very scant attention was paid
to irrigation both with regard to constructing new works as well as main-
taining of the old ones. He refers to the 'lamentable position' of public works, with
the exception of the Punjab.

Not only did the state not discharge its duties as the 'landlord', practically
'absentee' landlord was responsible for the 'frightful yearly drain of capital'
out of the country. Ludlow writes that 'he carries away yearly with him more
than one-seventh of his rental to foreign country'. Moreover, the manufactur-
ers of India were deliberately ruined by a general lowering or total
abolition of import duties on articles, the produce of the manufacture of Great
Britain, without any reciprocal advantages being given to Indian produce, or
manufacture when brought home. Ludlow also notes that under the system
of annual licences, 'which mullet the commonest workman for the use of his
commonest tools, sometimes to the amount of six times their value' it was
very difficult for industry to flourish.

Besides all this, Ludlow points out that the population was 'sinking
alike...in moral character' as a result of British rule. While the salt is kept at
'famine price, the sale price of spirits is extremely low'. The system for
the sale of spirits and drugs was so designed as to encourage their consumption.
He was also of the opinion that 'Indian robbery is in a great measure
artificially made and kept up, and is a fruit of our revenue'. Moreover
with total violation by the British of the existing rights in India, notions of the
rule of law had been seriously undermined. The 'dilatory, costly, and
efficient' judicial system encouraged dishonesty; corruption at lower levels
was the result of extremely low wages. Social aloofness due to unjust
prejudices was also demoralizing the Indians.

The entire system, Ludlow maintains, seems to have been devised, 'to
promote the largest possible amount of oppression, extortion and immoral-
ity'. The justification of the British system on the ground that it was based on
the system of their predecessors evt no ice with Ludlow. He writes:

Now if it be alleged in defence of such a system, that it is borrowed from our Mahomedan
predecessors, the first answer is, that they are confessedly the worst of models to imitate;
and that we deserve little credit, if, during a century of rule, we have devised nothing better than what
they practised. But even this plea, bad as it is, would be in measure a false one. It is our particular
credit to have erected the edifices of the conquerors into a fixed system; to have universalized
mischief which were but local, and whilst taking away a few burdens on trade here and there,
to have intensified most of the evils which we have retained. Thus in Bengal, we, and not the
Mussulman (sic), raised the lawless oppressions of the revenue farmer into the claims of the
recognised landowner. We, and not the Mussulman extinguished the principle of village

Commenting on the lamentable position of public works, Ludlow then
goes on to discuss the 'disadvantageous contrast' exhibited by the company's
administration in India, 'not only to the civilized governments of Europe and
America but also to its less enlightened predecessors, the Mohomedans'. He
writes that in Bihar and Bengal:

which have been the longest in our possession and which have yielded the largest amount of
revenue—for one good road which we have constructed, we have allowed twenty others to
disappear. We have erected one magnificent city, and every other city of note has been allowed
go to ruin... when these things are duly considered, I am afraid, we shall feel that even such
great works as canals of the North-West, not to speak of the electric telegraphy, or of the few
miles of dear Railways—are scarcely to be boasted of, comparatively with what has been left
undone, with what has actually been undone by us.

Ludlow presents a sharp contrast to Elliot whose tirade against the Indo-
Muslim rule has as one of its essential components the disregard exhibited by
them towards works of public utility. In contradistinction to their predeces-
sors' neglect, the British, Elliot takes great pains to emphasize, paid far greater
attention to works of public utility. While, Ludlow emphasizes the oppressive
nature of British rule in India, Elliot delineates on the blessings bestowed on
India and its people by the just and beneficent nature of British rule in India.
Ludlow believes in having 'a prosperous happy and loyal India' by a less
oppressive and more just system, Elliot believes in changing the indolent
habits of the Indian population for material prosperity.

The diametrically opposed views of Elliot and Ludlow were rooted in
their politics. While Elliot was an arch conservative, Ludlow was radical in
his outlook. Founder of Christian socialism in Britain, Ludlow consistently
worked for improving the conditions of working men and women in Britain
whereas Elliot was opposed to all reform. Ludlow had a horror of slavery
following his visits to Martinique. Elliot was opposed to the abolition of
slavery since it 'added to the misery of the proprietors'. Thus, while Elliot was
anxious about the impact of the abolition of slavery on the owners, Ludlow's
chief concern in life was with the oppressed. While Ludlow advocated wide
ranging reforms in Britain, Elliot was opposed even to municipal reforms in
Britain. It is not surprising that Elliot opposed liberal criticism of the empire,
while Ludlow found liberal critique highly inadequate. The two had an almost
mutually exclusive audience. While Elliot addressed himself to the critics of
the empire, Ludlow's audience was the working men of Britain. In fact, his
major work on India, British India, its Races and its History, was initially delivered as a series of lectures to Working Men's College in London, the precursor of Birkbeck College, an institution of which he himself was a founder-member. Even in the highly surcharged atmosphere of 1857-58, Ludlow clearly enunciated his ideas on the empire and the revolt before the working men of the college.

Ludlow’s perception of the revolt followed as a logical corollary of his views on the empire. He ascribed it to the oppression of the Indian people by their British rulers; religious and military causes took a secondary place in Ludlow’s views of the revolt. He writes:

it is idle to look for proofs of contumacy and loyalty on the part of the people. Who would have the effrontery to ask a Dinapore riot, who has ‘often’ salt to his rice, or an Orissa riot, obliged to eat his rice boiled and the second day to be ‘contented’ as well as ‘loyal’? who would ask if a Gujarat riot, who had money once, and has none now? Who would ask if a Madras riot, ‘very low indeed’, in the level of his poverty? But who is likely to know anything of the feelings of the people? 44

Ludlow maintained that the British parliament and the nation had been ‘wilfully deaf, wilfully blind’ to the company’s misgovernment and growing impoverishment and oppression in India. In the light of the events of 1857-58 he posed the question:

will the blood of murdered countrymen unseal our eyes, unstop our ears at last?—or will it only clot them into a more deathlike insensibility?

This question was directed to the cry for Indian blood, a stand being advocated at that time, for instance, by Charles Dickens, who succumbed to the ambivalences of his petty-bourgeois radicalism on the question of the empire. With his second son having left for India in July 1857, Dickens wished to extirpate the entire population of Hindustan. 42

Such sentiments were being widely echoed in Britain at that time. There was a cry for vengeance on the Indian sepoys. ‘From the serious Times down to the comic Punch—on public platforms and in the parsons’ pulpit—no matter, in fact, which way we turn (with save few exceptions) the cry is indiscriminate slaughter of the rebel sepoys, and the positive extermination of the whole race’. 40 The Times runs thus ‘The effect of a Summary Execution would have been equal to another Victory. Every tree and gable-end in the place should have its burden in the shape of a Mutineer’s Carcass’. No wonder Ludlow was extremely worried about the ‘deathlike insensibility’ of his compatriots.

Swift came the reply to the demand of The Times for native blood:

did we not believe they [the atrocities committed by the Indians] were the result of a long-continued system of practices on the part of the British, equally barbarous and repulsive, we should have no hesitation in joining even The Times in its wild, wanton and wicked demand for native blood... but who taught them the lesson?...
order of things—political and social—in this country’, the poem imagines the decline and final extinction of British supremacy in India. When the revolt actually came, ‘Jones hails ALL INDIANS as KOSSUTHS and applauds the INDIAN PATRIOTS’ 17 In the year of the actual revolt he gave his poem, ‘The New World, A Democratic Poem’, which he had written with his own blood in 1848-50, the title ‘The Revolt of Hindostan or a New World Order’ In his vision ‘The volcanic fires of insurrection, at length burst forth, and the British, overwhelmed, are driven step by step from Lahore to the Ocean’. The ‘grand struggle is briefly but forcibly’ pictured:

Upon a plain by mountains belted round,
Immortal guardians of the fated ground,
That hail, as though with kindred rage possessed,
Each clangour with an echo from their breast,
The powers engage;—but far from me to tell,
Ambition’s madness, and aggression’s hell!
Or revel o’er the scenes of bloody joy,
Where brute-force learns from science to destroy:
Suffice it that they fought, as best became
A people’s freedom and an army’s fame;
Here rushed the glittering charge through volumed smoke;
There, like thin glass, the brittle bayonet broke;
Here crashed the shot—there swept the Indian spear,
And death won grandeur from an English cheer:
Devotion vain! vain science deadliest pride!
God, hope, and history take the Hindu side!
Here, but a host in misused courage strong:
A nation there with centuries of wrong.

Jones was certain that Hindostan shall be free.

Even amongst those who identified themselves with the oppressed and wished and struggled for change, there existed a wide range of opinions on India and its social reality. Ludlow, exasperating on the oppressive nature of the British rule in India, advocated a ‘happy, prosperous and loyal India’, while Ernest Jones hoped for a free India. With idealist notions of socialism, Ludlow obviously believed in the compatibility of oppression-free India and British rule in India. Restoration of the village community in India, Ludlow held would alleviate a large degree of oppression. Quite different from that of Ludlow was the vision of freedom Ernest Jones had for ‘Hindostan’, which symbolized the emancipation of the oppressed people of the entire world. For Jones it was but the beginning of successive revolutions whereby the labouring classes would come to acquire political power for a better and more just society. The ‘emancipated Hindostan’ in Jones’s vision becomes a rich, powerful and grand empire. But the condition of the masses, however, continues to deteriorate. Successive struggles, betrayals and changes are part of Jones’s poem. A boy king, in Jones’s poem, frees the peasantry:

Throughout the realm bids servile tenure cease,
In hope bestowing happiness and peace,
And as a rocket on a mine is hurled,
Gives Liberty’s great watchword to the world:
‘But freedom feeds not’, and ‘discontent advances and the nobles seeing that either they themselves or the king must perish, propagate’:

“If burdens crush ye and if bread is high,
It is the King— the King’s to blame!” they cry—
“If famine threatens, work lacks, and wages fall,
The King, the King alone, is accuse of all!”

So comes the war against monarchy; the people struggle and the king ‘dies on the scaffold, sacrificed less by the people than by the aristocrats making a trade of revolution’. The people believe themselves free. But:

Time passes, and their wrongs are unrepressed:
Still crushed by burdens—still by taxes pressed;
Still labour lacks—and still are wages scant—
Still the rich may waste, the poor may want.
No more for the royal lust their blood is shed,
But the petty lords demand the drain instead:

Wondering they wake to find in trust betrayed.
’Tis but a change of tyrants they have made.

Popular dissatisfaction bursting forth, ‘the middle class direct the fury of the multitude against the nobles. Hear the precious shopocrats’:

“If burdens crush ye, and if bread is high,
The landlords—landlords—are to blame’, they cry.
Their vile monopolies, that feudal wreck!
Restrict our trade, and thus your labour check”

Again the struggle comes and the middle class acquires power and addressing the people they cry—

“Disarm!—go home—and wait, while we reform!”
But time passes—and the wrongs are unrepressed.
True, ‘tis no more the nobles’ lazy pride—
But heavier still the bloated burghers ride.
The name is altered—lives the substance still,—
And what escaped the mansion meets the mill.
Wondering they wake to find once more betrayed,
’Tis but a change of tyrants they have made!.

Things go from bad to worse; The lucre too fails, murmurings and petitions and struggles continue; persecution and emigration follow and the people continue to suffer. ‘The people depressed and quiescent for a time, the tyrant exults that—

‘The cowards are tame!’
Men are machines, and Freedom's but a name!

But the day of reckoning comes:

At last, when least expected friends and foes,
Gravely and silently the people rose.

None gave the word—they came, together brought
By full maturity of ripened thought.

Truth sought expression:—there the masses stood,
In living characters of flesh and blood!

Ernest Jones finally presents a Shelley-like picture of new earth, free from disease, violence, and every kind of evil, and basking in the sunshine of universal and perpetual happiness.

And Royalty, that dull, and outworn tool—
Bedizened doll upon a gilded stool—
The seal that Party used to stamp an Act,
Vanished in form, as it had long in fact.

All wondered 'twas so easy, when 'twas o'er,—
And marvelled it had not been done before.

Thus concludes Jones's imagined 'Revolt of Hindostan' with ultimate victory for the long-suffering millions of all lands. Jones's vision thus has for its essential component post-capitalist project too.

Jones's vision encompasses freedom from social oppression. He understood profoundly the caste oppression and believed in the freedom not only from the class oppression in India, but also from the caste oppression too. In the 'Revolt of Hindostan' there are oblique references to the subject of social oppression. Thus, for instance, in his description of the first great empire there is 'And Vishnu yields in part what knowledge claims' and further 'superstition crowned her kings with gold'. These references find amplification in his article on the caste system, in which he writes about the unsurpassable wealth accumulated by the temples and the priestly class through rapacity. He further notes that the oppression of the caste system is perpetuated by its professedly divine origin whereby it is claimed that the four castes were created from different parts of god's body'. In this creation 'the fourth, the Sooder, or labouring tribe' was created 'from his foot' which 'raised an impassable barrier between class and class, by the ordinance of supposed divine authority'. While the Brahmins enjoy immunities and privileges, through 'super-natural terror'. 'the Hindu' was prevented from 'flying' from the reach of this tyranny. The Sudra must be condemned to 'everlasting servitude... by the laws of destiny... The soodra must serve; this is his unalterable doom'. However, the fate of the Chandelas or the outcastes was worst of all. They were treated as animals and their touch and shadow were supposed to defile the caste people. They were deprived of human status both in life and in death. Jones, thus describes the 'unpitiéd and unmerited wretchedness' of the outcastes:

An Indian, in his bigoted attachment to the metempsychosis, would fly to save the life of a notions reptile; but, were a Chandelas falling down a precipice, he would not extend a hand to save him from destruction; such abominations are the Chandelas held on the Molabar side of India, that if one chance to touch one of a superior tribe, he draws his sabre, and cuts him down on the spot. Death, itself, that last refuge to the unfortunate, offers no comfort to him, affords no view of felicity or reward. The gates of Jaggernath itself are shut against him; and he is driven, with equal disgrace from the society of men and the temples of the Gods.

Emancipation from caste oppression formed an integral part of Ernest Jones views of free India. It was universally believed that the caste system was deep-rooted in Indian society that 'it will last to the end of time'. Jones maintains this to be 'wrong'. He asserts that 'Truth will must prevail through the whole earth'. So the caste—tyranny, too, must end.

Jonathan Lefevre's poem 'The Enslaved' brings out in sharp relief social distinctions within the European self. It goes like this:

Up, Britons, up! ye trampled slaves, be free!
Your banner, hope—your watchword, Liberty...

To crouch in servile fear is infamy,
Britannia's slaves!

Up, Britons, up!—what? fettered are ye now?

Britannia's slaves!
Oh Liberty abused, deformed, disgraced,
By tyrants mocked, by knives and fools misplaced

I heard a sigh beneath the banian tree,
I looked and lo! the heir of misery!
His fettered hands he clasped, in anguish groaned,
Then looked to heaven! The weeping forest moaned;
The pale moon gazed. Just like some giant oak
By lightnings seared, he lay, and thus he spoke—
'Oh England, hear!
I groan in bondage, while in Freedom's land,
Beneath the caress of her guardian hand,
'Ye know not slavery—wear no galling yoke,
Nor toil for others' wealth'. As thus he spoke,
Another voice cried—'Hold! your eyelids steep
With bitter tears, and bear the tearing whip
Both undisguised

With you 'tis open, avowed slavery;
With us, 'tis masked—a dammed treachery.
Toil not for others' wealth! what meaneth then
That thousand aquisid checks—those sighs of pain?
One in his chariot drives amid the throng,
The thousands round him scarce can creep along,
By famine crushed'.

20 Revolutionary Democracy April, 1996

21 Revolutionary Democracy April, 1996
This poem was published in 1840.

The year 1840 is important; it is significant that eight years before the Communist Manifesto, a Chartist poet from Bristol understood the sharply divided self. He as well understood that wage slavery had commonality with naked national oppression and yet he recognised that the two assumed distinct forms. Edward Said is to-day trying to obliterate social distinctions in the metropolis which were so clearly grasped by Lefebvre and other Chartists.

The range of British opinion on India is, thus, as varied as the social reality itself both in Britain and in India and it blurs even ‘dominant’ opinion. To reduce this wide range to ‘dominant’ and ‘minority’ categories is to miss the historical significance of the relationship between the social reality and the knowledge of India in Britain. Each one of these opinions ranging from Elliot to Ernest Jones, reflecting in varying degrees aspects of the objective reality, had its social roots as also its distinctive audience. Elliot addressed himself to liberal criticism of the empire. Ludlow’s opinion too came within the had tts soc1al roots as also 1ts dtstmcttve audience. Elliot addressed himself to historical himself both metropolis which were so clearly naked divided Communist

This poem was published in J .R .Secley,

15. His book is said to have reached 80,000 copies within two years of its publication. It was reviewed in almost all important periodicals. It was part of the prescribed reading for undergraduate courses in the universities of London and Cambridge. By 1893 it was a household book.

C.A. Bodeleson, Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism, Copenhagen 1924, p. 175.
17. The Expansion of the Empire, p. 244.
20. Ibid., p. 15.
27. Ibid., CCLXXXII (2nd to 19th July 1883), pp. 691, 692, 704, 719, 720, 721.
32. Ibid., pp. 289-90.
33. Ibid., p.216.
34. Ibid., pp.305-6.
35. Ibid., p.314, fn.
36. Ibid., p.288.
37. Ibid., II, p.289.
38. Ibid., pp.310-11.
39. Ibid., pp.319-20.
THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TWENTIETH CONGRESS

On the 40th anniversary of the Twentieth Congress we publish an analysis which argues that it was an historical event which was called to establish the correspondence between the new relations of production ensuing from the destruction of the socialist mode of production between 1953 and 1956 and the still 'unreformed' superstructure. In this light the congress appears as an integral part of an objective process not dependent on the will of the actors on the historical stage, on the subjective role played by the Members of the Politburo or the 'Secret Report' of Nikita Khrushchev. The Twentieth Congress prepared the ground for the removal of Molotov, Kaganovich and Shepilov from the leadership of the CPSU in 1957, thereby eliminating the last political resistance to the conversion of the means of production in Soviet industry into commodities and the introduction of the principle of profitability in the enterprises in 1957-58. In the years after the Twentieth Congress the CPSU and the CPC shrouded the real significance of the event. By doing so they with great care jointly obscured the principled necessity of the transition to communism in the USSR as had been outlined by Stalin, the transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat and the construction of socialism in the People's Republic of China; for the retention of the dictatorship of the proletariat until the victory of communism on a world scale and the necessity of the abolition classes under socialism. The following analysis was presented on behalf of the International Committee for the Restoration of the Soviet Union at a meeting held in Rome in July, 1995 by the group 'Initiativa Comunisti' on the occasion of the publication of the Italian edition of the book 'Conversations in Jail' by the leader of the Russian Communist Workers' Party, Victor Anpilov.

The historical analysis and treatment of the events in the Soviet Union of the 1950s have occupied and continue to occupy many Marxist theoreticians throughout the world. This is a problem of high interest to all those who call themselves Communists. From being a simple question of debate such analysis has been converted into a battlefield between Marxism-Leninism and the survivals of 40 years of revisionism in the consciousness of many communists which are an impediment to current ideological development.

The analysis of the significance of the Twentieth Congress shows the ideological development of the communist movement. It reveals the reigning ignorance of the laws of historical materialism and dialectical materialism which are the fundamental pillars of Marxism-Leninism, the teachings of