South Asians and Victorian Thought 1870-1900

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This third lecture considers how Indian and (some other Asian) public men between responded to, refuted and re-cast the arguments of the leading intellectuals of late-nineteenth century Britain and other Europeans, writers such as J S Mill, James FitzJames Stephen, Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and Henry Maine. It shows how Indians applied what I have called a benign sociology and statistical liberalism to challenge the theoretical statement of thinkers who were regarded as the intellectual leaders of the nineteenth-century world. In these debates Asians were at a great disadvantage. Only a few, such as B M Malabari, Dadhabhai Naoroji and Keshub Chandra Sen, could actually visit the British and European arenas in which these debates took place. Most received copies of newspapers and journals months after literary exchanges had occurred in London and without direct knowledge of the metropolitan social contexts to which they were addressed. Not many knew French or German, though their British contemporaries were in almost constant debate with writers of these nationalities.

Nevertheless, Indian public men adjusted their exchanges with these British writers to their own indigenous audiences and to their local Anglo-Indian critics. They were stamping their authority on Indian debates, often with an eye to vernacular translation and dissemination, rather than expecting a productive intellectual encounter with the distant and aloof European writers. The refutation and endorsement played an important part in forming the attitudes of the Indian intelligentsia. These attitudes in turn influenced their social policies and political projects. The arguments concerned ranged across political economy, sociology and religion, and there were distinct underlying connections between these domains of knowledge.

It is striking, as I stated yesterday, that many of the early Indian political economists were also expounders of classical Indian religious texts. The reason for this was that Victorian thinkers, both British and Indian, were public moralists, to use Stefan Collini's phrase, as well as social scientists. The doctrines of political economy and social Darwinism were for them moral imperatives as well as social scientific truths, even if God had 'taken a back seat.' Bowring, Bentham's follower, had once argued rather opaquely that 'Jesus is free-trade' and the providential dimension of nineteenth-century British thought about famine and economic cycles is well known. Spencer's concern with the rise and degeneration of organisms was infused with moralising imagery. Even agnostic British Victorians believed that 'by their works, shall ye know them.' Yet, for Indian public men, understanding and celebrating Hindu civilization's great works of the past- moral, social and economic- was a vital guarantee of its present improvement and great future. For Indians, religion, history and society were even more inseparable than they were for contemporary Europeans and Americans.

R. C. Dutt's Bengal river craft filled with British statistical blue books and editions of the Hindu scriptures epitomised the continuing connection between spiritual and worldly well being that could be divined equally from the Bible and the Hindu classics. For the role of what I call statistical liberalism had grown rapidly since the foundation of the Bethune society in1854. Indians had founded the Calcutta Statistical society less than a decade after equivalent bodies had been established in London and Paris. Bombay Presidency, with measuring, counting, commercial city surrounded by a famine-ridden countryside, quickly gave rise to several similar statistical societies, notably the Poonah Sarvajanik Sabha (Pune Peoples' Welfare Society). Much has recently been made of the so-called British

ethnographic state. But because of the emphasis in the literature on colonial 'epistemic violence', the almost immediate Indian riposte to colonial categorising in the form of Indian statistical liberalism has been little noted.

K T Telang, for instance, was a widely read political economist and critic of the application of laissez faire economics to India. He was also a learned commentator on the epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. In both related realms of religion and political economy he insisted on India's cultural specificity. Telang's most memorable contribution to oriental scholarship consisted in his refutation of the idea, propounded by German orientalists, that the *Ramayana* was a late work, essentially copied from Homer's Iliad, with its dynastic disputes and epic siege. Telang asserted that India's literary traditions were authentic and autonomous. Any similarity between themes in the Greek and Sanskrit works arose from the existence of common tropes across world literature. Shakespeare, for instance, was not a mere imitator because his characters sometimes recalled figures in the Greek myths.

Telang's economic arguments similarly insisted on the separate conditions of India in the context of wider principles of political economy. The Subcontinent would not necessarily benefit from the application of laissez faire principles that might be quite appropriate in the case of Britain. Telang's conflicts with doctrinaire free traders worked at several levels. At the widest level, he appealed to the periodic statements of Adam Smith, J. S. Mill and Mill's follower, John Elliot Cairnes, that political economy was simply one guide to political action rather than a rigid an 'unappealable' set of prescriptions. Telang quoted Mill to the effect that economics was 'a branch of Social Philosophy so interlined with all the other branches that its conclusions even in its own peculiar province, are only true conditionally…'[1] At another

level Telang appealed to the particular conditions of India. From the negative perspective, if the Indian Government gave up its revenue from import tariffs on incoming British manufactured cotton goods, this would inevitably mean an increase in local taxation on the land. But recent famines and riots by cultivators in Western India during the 1870s made it clear that the land could bear no more taxation.

On the positive side, Telang argued that India, which was a natural producer of raw cotton, was in fact a much more appropriate place than Britain for the establishment of a cotton manufacturing industry. He used the fruits of 'statistical liberalism', pointing both to government surveys and also to the reports of the Poonah Society to show that there was a vast pool of under-employed male villagers in districts around Bombay. This could find profitable employment in an expanded manufacturing sector in the city.[2] Perhaps in developed economies the 'diversion' of capital to less profitable areas was unproductive. But where no productive enterprise existed at all, it was better to have something than nothing. Here he appealed to the authority of Adam Smith, the theory of the division of labour and the writings of American protectionists. Indeed, quite apart from broader arguments about productivity, Telang returned ultimately to Smith's fundamental caveat about the application of free trade. If protection was needed for the defence of a country in war or other conditions of danger, Smith argued, then the advantages of free trade must inevitably lapse. India needed protective tariffs, Telang concluded, for reasons of sheer self-defence.[3] Telang here used the real Smith as a weapon against vulgar 'Smithianism.'

Finally, Telang moved back to a wider level of debate in arguing that India was a different and clearly less developed social organism, in Herbert Spencer's sense. It was incorrect to apply to India economic remedies that might be beneficial to a more technically

'advanced' society such as Britain. He quoted Spencer to the effect that 'it is only when a considerable advance has been made in that metamorphosis, which develops the industrial structures at the expense of the predatory structures… that the efficiency of these spontaneous co-operations for the purposes of internal social life, becomes greater than the efficiency of central government agency.'[4] That is to say, that strong government intervention was necessary to stimulate economic growth in a country like India. Here Telang cleverly reversed the polarities of British political thought about the Subcontinent: if it was true that India was backward and in need of tutelage, it was wrong to apply British remedies to Indian conditions. British liberals could not have it both ways.

Dadabhai Naoroji and R C Dutt are regarded as the foremost early Indian economic nationalists. Their arguments have been followed by Indian economists, journalists and politicians up to the present day and have informed popular understandings of the legacy of the colonial period. Bipan Chandra's *Rise of economic nationalism* (1980) remains a good summary of the arguments in their historical context. But they reveal a rich mixture of rhetorical strategies, inversions of British moralising and claims to Indian entitlement that deserve to be studied in their own right. Here I want to assess the rhetorical strategies employed by these writers and their contemporaries, indicating that the terms 'economic' and 'nationalist' need to be qualified, at least before 1907-8. These arguments were moral as much as economic and sought to secure India a colonial status within the British Empire similar to that of Australia or Canada.

Dadabhai Naoroji's writings and speeches are less interesting as historical and cultural statements than those of Dutt and Telang, at least after his early sociological essays on the Parsis. From time to time in his later career, Naoroji voiced the particular historical

sensibilities of Western Indians, who lauded the pre-colonial rulers in response to the calumnies of British writers, such as Grant Duff. In a very modern historical idiom, he asserted that he was writing for those who could no longer 'answer back.' But Naoroji never ventured far into historical analysis. He was a professional politician concerned to win the support of the electors of Finsbury in London and his audiences at the early meetings of the Indian National Congress. Yet we can see a number of interesting developments in his speeches and articles.

First, at a rhetorical level, he sought to destroy the authority of Indian official statistics and to employ the evidence of dissenting Indian officials against the India Office itself. This was statistical liberalism at its most effective. Secondly, he began to develop concepts equivalent to the idea of entitlement and 'capacities' associated today with Amartya Sen. On statistics, Naoroji denounced the official reports on the 'moral and material progress of India' which had become official and Parliamentary fetishes after 1858, calling them 'seriously misleading.'[5] He mounted a systematic critique of the figures produced by the Calcutta Statistical Office.

Most government global statistics, Naoroji alleged, were not only useless but 'mischievous' This was the burden of his evidence before the Parliamentary committee on Indian finance in 1872-3, when he drew on the help of the radical liberal Professor Fawcett to counteract the obstruction of the committee chairman. In 1885, Naoroji estimated the Indian income per head at Rs.20 per annum per year, considerably less than Evelyn Baring's estimate of Rs 27. Besides, the total income per head of the Indian population (£2) was only half what the British population spent on alcohol each year (£4). [6] This was a good example of the way in which he tacked between moral and statistical arguments.

Alongside his own calculations, Naoroji habitually used the statements and analyses of British officials, some but not all of who were liberals, to challenge the official version. This 'turning of the defence witnesses' not only undermined the authority of the Anglo-Indians, but it also neatly deflected the charge of sedition. If the British themselves were saying this, how could it possibly be seditious? He ranged back from Florence Nightingale, Cobden, Bright and the Manchester School to Edmund Burke. But he made particularly made extensive use of the writings of Rammohan's supporter of the 1820s, the statistician Montgomery Martin, who had himself used Hamilton Buchanan's figures from about 1810 to calculate the 'drain of wealth' from India through British agencies. Though Naoroji was no historian like Ranade or Dutt, he did resort to historicising themes in his discussion of the drain. The tribute, he argued, was a form of oppression known to despotisms from ancient Persia to the Roman Empire, but even England had suffered from it in the Middle Ages. During Pope Innocent III's tyranny, the tithes and the remittances of foreign ecclesiastics in England had 'drained' huge sums out of the country: 'England had for a long time been the chief pecuniary tributary of Italy.' Here he used Draper's *Intellectual Development of Europe* to elicit sympathy for India from a profoundly anti-Catholic British ruling class.[78] Answering the charge that railways had done much good to India, Dadabhai noted that, while this was so, interest on railway loans was repatriated to Britain, while in the USA, railway building benefited everyone including local investors.

Naoroji made two further important contributions to a more flexible and humane political economy at a time when economists in Britain were either engaging in a last ditch defence of Mill and Cobden, or beginning to venture into the arid technical realms of the 'marginalist revolution.' He firmly dismissed both the climatic and the Malthusian

interpretations of famine and scarcity. Instead, he anticipated Amartya Sen's theory of entitlement. There was no correlation between high population density and famine mortality, he argued. The problem was lack of money and access to food rather than absolute scarcity. 'The drought', he wrote in 1901, was not really the cause of famines, 'for if the people had not food in one place, and they had money, they could buy what they wanted from elsewhere.' The real problem was the impoverishment of the country, which was not in Britain's interest either. Australia with a tiny population of four million bought annually £20 million of British goods, while India with 150 million bought a mere £25 million.

Naoroji had also begun to develop the notion of social capital. The monetary drain, he argued was accompanied by a 'moral drain' because British Indian officials retired to Britain: 'all experience and knowledge of statesmanship, of legislation, of high scientific or learned professions are drained a way to England.[9] Here he drew on the evidence of two early colonial officials, John Malcolm and Thomas Munro but inserted it into political economy in a way that Mill had not conceived of. India's 'capacities' could only be improved by a rapid movement towards self-government within the Empire and a full adult franchise. Here again, Naoroji resorted to the arts of analogy. Why, despite British claims to empower the people, he wrote in 1911, was democracy so limited in Britain itself? Only middle class men had the vote: 'women have no vote. Adult franchise is yet in struggle.' India had weak and compromised representative bodies while even 'the peasants of Russia had got the Duma from the greatest autocrat in the world.'

Naoroji's analysis moved on with the political situation. In 1906 he seems to have been the first major public man to use the term *swaraj* (self-rule) for dominion status in India. He meant by this an ethical form of Home Rule, taking control of our destiny and building

social capital in India. Though he remained a moderate in regard to boycott, he also inaugurated the India of *swadeshi* (the protection of home industry), at least in Britain. As early as the 1880s, in a passage of benign sociology, he noted that people in Western India were already circulating songs and ballads that deplored the destruction of Indian industries by British manufactures. Swadeshi was inevitable and the government itself must intervene unless there was to be a full-scale reaction against all things Western in India.

Dadabhai's Naoroji's status in India was mainly the consequence of his standing as an MP and periodic president of the Indian National Congress. He developed further mid-nineteenth century statistical liberalism, a product in particular of Bombay and Pune's social analysis of its own Western Indian hinterland which was periodically scarified by famine. Yet his statistical weapons were always given added explosive force by being encased in moral homilies. This was designed to appeal to the world of Gladstone's public moralists. By contrast, R C Dutt's eminence derived from his personal transition from being an ICS officer to a Congressman and ultimately to the position of Dewan or treasurer of a major and covertly anti-colonial Indian state, Baroda. Dutt's personal experience both of British life and of the world of the Bengali peasant allowed him to develop another version of benign sociology, challenging many of the assumptions of official ethnography. Here I briefly examine how Dutt built his experience into a more formal set of critiques of British political economy in India and of European international relations and made his own novel contribution to a global debate about economic justice.

Dutt broadened out the moral attack on the Bengal landlord system inaugurated by Grish Chunder Ghose and the missionary, James Long, into statistics and social analysis. He earned official disapproval and was denounced as a revolutionary by spokesmen of the

landholding interest. He confronted the landlords directly as an official in the district of Nadia in the 1870s and mounted detailed investigations of illegal cesses and labour levies. This data was much later supplemented after the famines of 1899 by material gleaned on bullock-cart trips across western India. At the end of his life he made numerous further field trips into rural as treasurer of Baroda, collecting material on the relationship between revenue demand and peasant expenditure. Calling for a 'permanent settlement of revenue and rent' for the peasant, Dutt contradicted both Mill and Ricardo, who had argued that direct taxes were superior to indirect because indirect taxation encouraged finance ministers to fiscal laxity.[10] Dutt countered that this was of no significance in an impoverished peasant society where direct taxation fell as a 'vexatious impost' on the family budgets of the poor. Here, indirect taxation was preferable because it could be targeted on the expenditures of the better off. Dutt's critique of Indian revenue policy and the political economists who supported it theoretically extended to the rarefied realms of currency matters which were central to many mid-Victorian economic debates. He opposed the official policy of the 1870s and '80s of raising the value of the rupee against silver and gold. The policy was designed, once again, to impose fiscal rectitude. But Dutt argued that this would effectively 'confiscate' one third of the value of peasant savings that were invested in jewellery, bangles and 'trinkets.' It was effectively a tax on the poor.[11]

While insisting that Indian conditions were particular, Dutt argued that the same 'economic laws' applied in India as elsewhere. In other words he also totally reversed the polarities of much British liberal political economy. The peasants were not children (a dig at the liberal paternalism of J. S. Mill). Indian farmers were as well aware of their own economic interests as any other group of subjects. They merely needed guaranteed rights, moderate revenue assessments and rents. The Bengal and Indian economies, though caught at

a specific historical conjuncture, did not work on some archaic, culturally specific principles that required a stultification of the agrarian commercial activity. He admitted that the peasant often appeared 'spendthrift.' But this was because people in the countryside were attempting to build up social capital and systems of protection through the gift exchange relations of the village.

Dutt argued, more coherently than Dadabhai that it was India's economic history and not its innate civilisational and moral failings that explained why it had fallen far behind Europe. By the same token, it had the capabilities to rise again and become a great economic power and even greater civilisation. It was this attempt to refute the charges of James Mill and others that India was a 'toxic culture' (to use David Landes' recent phrase) that caused him to put so much emphasis on economic history. Indeed, he was one of the first people worldwide to use the term 'economic history.' To Dutt the 'South Asian mind' (to use Ronald Inden's phrase, in this case) was as rational and comprehensible as any human mind. The problem was that nineteenth-century European political economists had never properly understood the Indian social and revenue systems. Even sympathetic observers had misunderstood the Mughal system of farming and subcontracting and assimilated it into the categories of post-feudal European system of landholding. The result was a 'fetishisation' of a certain idea of property and this had impoverished the Bengal peasant.

Acutely aware as all Indian thinkers had become of global conjunctures, Dutt also took note of the 'new imperialism' after 1890 and the partition of Africa and the Far East. Colonialism could only save itself from 're-barbarisation', in Spencer's term, through the benign action of the imperial parliament to limit the Indian bureaucracy. The British needed to concede dominion status and inaugurate urgent state action in the realms of education and

economic management. Here Indian liberals needed to appropriate and transform the huge body of though associated with the younger Mill. J S Mill attracted none of the opprobrium in India that his father received as a result of his derogatory views on Indian civilisation. Still, for the emerging intelligentsia, the younger Mill was an ambivalent figure. As the greatest international exponent of liberalism they knew, he offered distinct intellectual benefits to them. But his views were suspect in the realms of racial capacity and religion, as well as the economy. They applauded his late stand against imperial expansion in the case of the seizure of the princely state of Mysore and governor Eyre's massacres of blacks in the West Indies. Seeking a more constructive role for the state, many Indian liberals also approved the emerging English version of 'socialism' that Mill seemed to endorse in the 1860s.

In fact, it was Mill's general scepticism and his occasional attacks on deism that attracted most hostility in India. Raja Rama Varma, for instance, noted that Mill, following Hume, had reasoned himself to the conclusion that God could not be wholly divine on account of natural disasters. Yet, said the Raja, reason was not the only or even the best way to comprehend the spirit that animated the universe. There was much that was 'without the pale of human knowledge' and could only be achieved by spiritual communion with the life force.[12] Generally, though, Mill was given the benefit of the doubt. In an act of selective amnesia, most Indian commentators ignored his condescending views of the Indian capacity for self-government that Mill promulgated and have been so widely commented on by today's political theorists, such as Uday Singh Mehta. The reason for this was that by the later 1860s, Indian liberals were confronted by a much more dangerous ideological enemy in the form of a new and harsher liberal imperialism, and especially the figure of James FitzJames Stephen. Mill may have basked in his distant knowledge of India, but Stephen had been on the spot in the office of Law Member of the Government of India. He had intruded

himself not only into Indian debates on representative government, but had also framed legislation on Indian family law, sometimes cutting across the policies advocated by Indian social reformers. An edited version of Mill proved a useful ideological weapon against Stephen and his acolytes in London.

Perhaps the most coherent Indian response to FitzJames Stephen was made by a young Ashutosh Mukherjee, who went on to become Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University in the 1900s. In 1873, Mukherjee reviewed Stephen's newly published *Liberty, Equality Fraternity* that contained a systematic refutation of the constitutional thought of Mill and other leading liberals.[13] Mukherjee was particularly incensed by Stephen's attack on Mill's view that freedom of discussion and association were unalloyed goods. Mill had argued that the sole justifiable reason for the intervention of the majority in the discussions or combinations of the minority 'is to prevent harm to others.' Stephen insisted that combination and discussion should be prohibited when it tended to lead to the subversion of religion and morality. Religion, for him, was a system based on fear of hell and is 'intolerant of evil.' Mukherjee attacked Stephen for confounding Mill's civil theory of religion with religious prescriptions that bore on man's relationship to his maker. It was supremely dangerous, he thought, to merge the general will and God. In light of the history of Indian liberalism's sedulous attempt to create separate, but inter-acting spheres for civil society and religion, his alarm was understandable. Stephen seemed to be saying that it was acceptable for the majority- even the state- to intervene against the thought and actions of 'wicked people', or maybe 'wicked religions', especially since the majority were ignorant of the principles of jurisprudence and political economy. Mukherjee refuted both these claims on factual grounds. Too often, the majority had misidentified evil and intervened in the wrong way. European history was one long proof of this. Secondly, philosophers such as Buckle, de

Quincy, Bailey and Cairnes had disproved the assumption that the people were ignorant and in darkness. Knowledge and enlightenment was continuing to expand, and was doing so across the world.

Stephen had attacked Mill's theory about individuality and the growth of liberty. He argued that the growth of democracy stunted individuality, that Mill gave 'an exaggerated estimate of the power of education' and that the lack of coercion in social life would promote immorality. Mukherjee replied that Stephen had caricatured Mill and that coercion had been no more effective in promoting a good society in the area of morality. Here again, Mukherjee used a historical example of the puritan revolution in England. He quoted Milton: 'God sure esteems the growth and completion of one virtuous person more than the restraint of ten vicious.' Finally, Mukherjee refuted Stephen's claim that Mill had conceded the case by arguing that 'the power of the people in the minority is and ought to be absolute' because it was unclear what was the minority and what the majority. Instead, we should look at the vast difference between the period of barbarous despotism and the modern age of popular representation and enlightenment. Mukherjee hardly adverted to Stephen's writings on India in this article, but he clearly had them in mind. The argument that benign coercion would produce a better society than one in which liberty and education were steadily progressing struck at the heart of the Indian liberal agenda. It signalled the arrival of a new version of imperialist thought which would find its practical application in the policies of Tory viceroys, notably Lords Lytton and Curzon. Mukherjee used both European historical examples and abstract reasoning to refute this position.

My lecture today has dealt with 'high' economic and political ideas, which, I argue, was still linked through analogy and historicism to evolving concepts of religion in Europe

and Asia. But the essence of liberalism was a universalist sensibility and set of programmes which were appropriated and used with widely different inflexions in different contexts. I will therefore make a sharp, but deliberate, digression to Southeast Asia during a later period of time. In many ways, Lim Boon Keng, a Chinese resident of British Malaya, was to R C Dutt and Dadhbai Naoroji what Munshi Abdullah had been to Rammohan, an analogous, but subtly different thinker.

Lim Boon Keng was typical of a style of late-nineteenth century liberalism in the Asian world, which emphasised selective economic and cultural protectionism. For instance, Lim, like Ranade or Malabari before him, believed in cultural protectionism and rejected some forms of cosmopolitanism. He deplored the fact that Christianity had become 'fashionable' in late nineteenth century coastal China and Southeast Asia, urging a return to proper Chinese culture and religion. He observed that 'a tree severed from its roots must wither away and degenerate.'[14] A proper Chinese education, even conjoined with an English one, would 'ennoble man's mind' and purify his character. The Chinese, he argued in 1897, should neither be swallowed up in a miscellaneous Malay crowd or reduced to speaking an English patois.[15] His campaign to 'save China' from imperialism and the influx of corrupt western values had something in common with the contemporary home industry movement in India, mildly advocated by Dadabhai, or the 'turn to the east' advocated by the Indochinese nationalist, Phan Boi Chau. Yet Lim did not query the liberal rationalist programme to the extent that the so-called Indian 'extremists' of 1905-10 did. Instead, he attempted to recreate liberalism in a Chinese guise along the lines proposed by a number of earlier reformers.

To a degree, Lim's philosophical hybrid was comparable with those of Rammohan or Keshub Chander Sen. Lim believed in binding liberal political principles with a striving this-

worldly Confucianism. Far from being atheistic as missionaries asserted, Confucianism, in Lim's formulation, helped to create harmony in society, rather than simply contemplating it as an inner spiritual condition: '[t]o put it very tersely, Confucianism is the religion of humanity with the acknowledgement of God.'[16] Social harmony was quite compatible with personal freedom. This was in line with the views of a number of Confucian reformers across coastal China who reinterpreted Confucianism to accord with notions of personal liberty. One such was Yan Fu (1854-1921), translator of Rousseau and J. S. Mill who 'argued that freedom is the essential principle of which democracy is the application.'[17] Confucianism did indeed admit the need for personal spiritual freedom if the ruler deviated from the path of righteousness. There was a similar strain in Confucianism's, rival and complement, Daoism.[18] But both these traditions urged severance from the world in the case of oppression or bad conduct by the rulers. By contrast, Lim and his peers argued for a reform of society. If government promoted the consumption of opium and people dulled their senses with drugs, then the proper response was political agitation and the establishment of societies to work against social evil.

This activist Confucianism bore a family resemblance to Rammohan's interpretation of Hindu vedantism. But it was much more hostile to Christianity, and in this respect closer to India's revivalist Arya Samaj. Indeed, Lim thought the Christian doctrine of atonement was based on a 'Jewish legend' and would not survive.[19] It had a 'pernicious effect on legislation and education.' Christianity would soon go through a reformation that would make it more like Buddhism and Confucianism. Human nature would 'grow as it has done in the past. Selfishness will decrease.'[20] Conversely, Lim was very hostile to Chinese social practice, especially on the mainland, which had not been forged in the vigorous modernity of the Straits Settlements. Lim deplored 'apathy', having absorbed aspects of the stereotype of

Chinese civilisation's stagnation found in Mill, or closer to home in the writings of the missionary analysts of Confucius's thought. He championed the Chinese movement against the wearing of the pigtail as a symbolic refutation of the idea that the Chinese were characterised by feebleness of originality of mind.'[21] Straits Chinese should always bear in mind their lines of descent from China. China had a long history of independent statehood as well as nationality. This sensibility set Lim and his contemporaries apart from their Indian coevals, who constantly bemoaned the loss of their historic statehood first to Muslim and the to British invaders. But Straits Chinese shared in two forms of incomplete statehood. China was stagnant and Britain was racially exclusive. Yet after the Naturalisation Act of 1867, Chinese in the Straits Settlements had become British subjects, ruled by the common law. They should have access to all the rights and privileges of that nationality.

For this reason, Lim actively championed Britain's participation in the Great War. Germany, he wrote in *The First World War from a Confucian Point of View*, had overthrown 'the harmony' of the European balance of power by its invasion of Belgium in 1914.[22] We can see two intellectual manoeuvres here. First, the Confucian notion of celestial harmony has been removed from the spiritual realm to the world. Confucianism has become a 'religion.' Indeed for some on the Straits or the China coast. Confucius had become a Christ-like 'Prince of Peace.' Conversely, the international balance of power had become more than a legal convention of government. It had, in Lim's writing been transformed into a moral principle which should control the actions of statesmen. A similar moral approach to international relations was to guide President Wilson's 'Principles' a year after Lim's book was published. This provides a good illustration of Erez Manela's recent argument that the 'Wilsonian moment' formed an international conjuncture with varying political and philosophical roots in different parts of the world.[23]

In other respects, Lim clearly represented the concerns of the 1900 cohort of liberals, both British ones such as James Bryce and colonial intellectuals such as the Indian liberal leader, G D Gokhale. Race was by then the dominant issue. Lim argued that racial exclusionism, or more explicitly 'the colour line' would, if unchecked lead to the demise, of the British Empire as it had done the Roman and the Spanish empires.[24] He had long deplored 'the indignities of the Chinese abroad' in South Africa and the United States.[25] On this basis, he unequivocally demanded Chinese representation in imperial local governance. This alone could avoid the destruction of social harmony by arrogant settlers and deracinated Eurasians. If racial discrimination could be outlawed, the Empire might prepare the way for a 'federation of mankind.' Liberal projects and arguments, though increasingly embattled and disjointed from within, remained vibrant even at the beginning of the First World War. I will chart their decomposition next week.

At the end of this talk, I want to return to some of the more abstract arguments in intellectual history that drew colonized people to attack or defend the major liberal theorists of the nineteenth century. John Gray's *Mill on liberty. A defence*, first published in 1983 noted that Mill's critics from FitzJames Stephen onward argued that his stress on the inviolability of individual liberty up to the point that it harmed others was impossible to square with his utilitarianism, that is the need to do the greatest good to the greatest number.[26] As we have seen, paternal oversight, Stephen argued, whether by a religious hierarchy or an enlightened bureaucracy or even an aristocracy, may be necessary to achieve humanity's collective flourishing. Elsewhere, Stephen made it clear that this was especially the case when dealing with the European lower classes or backward non-European societies. Gray defended Mill in his 1983 edition by making a distinction between what he called 'act- and

rule-utility' and Mill's 'indirect utilitarianism.' He meant that the principle of utility acted for Mill as a kind of foundational discriminator to adjudicate conflicts between different moral imperatives or legislative codes. Utility was not necessarily an unambiguous guide to action in any particular case.

A writer such as Ashutosh Mukherjee seems to have accepted the utilitarian principle, more in the way that Richard Tuck has recently understood it, as a democratic programme, than as a philosophical imperative. For its adherents, Mukherjee had stated, *On Liberty* was not so much a body of reasoned truths, but a 'mass of sentiment' giving priority to liberty of thought and feeling, freedom of discussion and association.[27] It is understandable how important this was for Indians in 1873, at a time when the Tory backlash against the Indian press was beginning to gather momentum. If Indians were enfranchised under a proper constitution a high degree of personal liberty could indeed be combined with the imperative of the greatest good to the greatest number. Liberalism was a guide to good practice, not a watertight and irrefutable logical system, he implied.

Mill's was also essentially a theory of historical progress, as Gray insisted in 1986. Mukherjee, too, had seen this in 1873. He understood more clearly than many of his contemporaries, and Mill's later commentators, such as John Rawls and Richard Rorty, that *On Liberty* is in one sense, what he called 'a protest against European history.'[28] It was education not coercion along the lines advocated Stephen that would produce a better society across the world. Knowledge was increasing. This need not lead to 'over-democratisation' and the 'tyranny of opinion,' as it had done in the United States. Mukherjee implied two things here. Firstly, he gave tacit support to Mill's emphasis on the need for a guiding elite to take charge of a cautious movement towards popular representation. This was an approach of

which Indian liberals, suspicious of the mob-especially the Muslim mob- wholly approved. Secondly, by drawing attention to the universal expansion of knowledge, Mukherjee was silently refuting the developmental aspect of Mill's argument, which proclaimed the need for 'barbarians' to be held in tutelage and the one that brought him quite close to Stephen. European history was far from an unalloyed story of progress; nor, Mukherjee implied, were Asia and Africa lacking in progressive developments. Mukherjee, along with Ranade and Naoroji, was advocating a multi-stranded, rather than a Eurocentric teleology of progress.

It was to this latter point that John Gray returned in 1996 when he re-published his defence of Mill with a long postscript. Gray attacked modern liberal theorists, particularly John Rawls and Richard Rorty on the grounds that by divorcing Mill's concept of personal liberty from his wider civilisational historicism, they were in effect reducing liberalism to a parochial reflection of American values, in particular the values of its *bien pensant* academy. [29] At least Mill had the honesty, Gray argues, to reveal his Euro-centrism. Gray went on to claim that the whole historic liberal project foundered on its cultural myopia. He quotes the philosopher Bhikhu Parekh to the effect that societies such as Singapore, Japan and south Korea have had no difficulty in facilitating 'human flourishing' 'without personal autonomy' or an 'individualistic moral culture.'[30] Gray states that 'the centrality of choice in the good life and its associated image of man as a choice-making species are…patently culture bound conceptions. They find no place in the 'Iliad or the Bhagavad Gita'[31], or he states, elsewhere in Confucianism.

Gray is unusual among European and American political theorists in even considering intellectual history outside Europe. Yet both he and Parekh seem in danger of essentialising or even re-orientalising Asian and Islamic societies by denying that they are capable of

conceiving of personal liberty or individual moral choice-making. Asian liberals, from Rammohan Roy and Munshi Abdullah through to Naoroji and Mukherjee to Lim Boon Keng, had all considered how reformed eastern religions could sustain the life of free individuals. Whether in the notion of *mukti* or neo-Confucian conceptions of the individual's active struggle for harmony within society, they had insisted on the universality of man's choice-making character, while arguing that these choices were taken within different, and often incommensurable cultural contexts. In some ways they anticipated Isaiah Berlin's, rather than John Rawls's version of liberalism. These Asian intellectuals had also understood as well as John Gray the need to generalise the idea of human progress beyond its Euro-centric bias, arguing that all major civilisations were and had been historically part of the wider moral project of human betterment. Even anti-liberal thinkers such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mohandas Gandhi took as granted the role of the person as a moral choice-maker in this world. Their disagreement with liberalism, whether in its metropolitan or colonial context, was not about the imperative for the autonomy of the self, but about the relationship between the spiritual self and its material wants, as Shruti Kapila argues.[32] Finally, Gray's observation, based on Parekh's Third World 'culturalism,' that Asian societies, such as Japan or Singapore, have achieved economic success, 'without adopting personal autonomy as a core value', seems questionable.[33] Political controversies in these and other Asian societies suggest its is authoritarian governments and conservative social elites who have chosen to emphasise collective 'Asian values.' There is nothing essential in the ideological inheritance of Asians which prohibits the acceptance of personal autonomy as a core value. To this extent even, even if the liberal project derived from Mill is unable entirely to function as a coherent philosophy without conflicts and contradictions, as a programme of political reform it is clearly still badly needed, as Mukherjee presciently saw in 1873.

While it is important to deny the false and dangerous argument that individual moral choice making was never a facet of non-European values, Gray's broader argument expressed in a further publication of 2002 may still hold. This is that understandings of human flourishing differ in practice to the extent that they are often incommensurable. Rather than seeking a universalist paradigm, practical liberalism has been successful historically when it has helped to secure a *modus vivendi* between such differing ideals. Once again, nineteenth century Asian liberals were in a unique position to understand this distinction. Indeed, some of them anticipated and worked within it. Western historians, philosophers and political scientists are still catching up. Complex religious difference made nineteenth-century Asia a battleground of competing liberalisms, notably in the manoeuvrings of modernist Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Figures such as Dayananda Saraswati founder of the Arya Samaj, and Sayyid Ahmed Khan, the Muslim leader, approximated to liberal positions on matters such as education and political representation. Yet their understanding of human flourishing was grounded in a historical their of the age of prophecy and its 'seal' in the teaching of the Prophet himself. The Muslim understanding of *ilm* (knowledge) was indeed incommensurable with Hindu notions of spiritual progression without revelation, and even the compromise between Christianity and the Enlightenment view of progress. As Faisal Devji has pointed out, the ideology of the Aligarh movement was contiguous with, but did not overlap with Hindu and colonial liberalism.

To some extent, however, we see in the views of men such as G D Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta, at the end of Asia's liberal century, a philosophical move away from an earlier universalist ideology of improvement, associated with modernised Hinduism, to one which indeed sought such a *modus vivendi* with Muslims and other minority philosophies and social practices. The first generation of Indian liberals had often been highly censorious of

beliefs and practices which seemed to vitiate the improvement of the individual and society: boisterous festivals, especially Muslim ones, the over-active role of women in the public arena, for instance. These men were closer to the postcolonial theorists' picture of constraining, self-disciplining and politically tainted liberalism, a picture that they adapt from Foucault. The *fin de siecle* generation of Indian liberals were somewhat more broad-minded. Their ethical positions cannot simply be reduced to bourgeois self-interest. It is worth stressing again that the tendency of historians to reduce the arguments of colonial intellectuals- or indeed, any intellectuals- to their social position produces a self-limiting and unimaginative representation of the past. [34]

The Congress's acceptance of separate electorates for Muslims has been interpreted as a political tactic of nationalism. Yet reading the debates around the forming of the Muslim League, it becomes clear that there was a growing acceptance of historical difference and moral incommensurability by at least some of the leading figures involved within the Hindu broad church. In other words, there was a transition between Gray's two types of liberalism as a consequence of the lived experience of ideas. After 1906, Gokhale for instance inveighed against the institutionalisation of caste and religious division in British constitution making. Rather than separate Hindu and Muslim electorates, he proposed schemes that guaranteed a fixed proportion of Muslim representatives in legislative bodies, but which forced both Hindus and Muslims to choose each other's representatives, so preserving common rational judgement. Liberalism had begun to adapt-and to buckle from within. In the last lecture I will consider the demise and tenuous afterlife of liberal South Asia.

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[1] Mill, *Autobiography*, (3rd edn, London, 1863), p. 236 cited K. T. Telang 'Free trade and protection', *Selected writings and speeches of K. T Telang*, I, (Gaud Saraswat Brahmin Mitra Mandal, Bombay c. 1916), p. 99.

[2] Ibid. pp. 162-3; R. S. Chandavarkar, *The origins of industrial capital in India* (Camridge, 1993).

[3] Telang, *Writings*, pp. 168.

[4] Telang, *Writings*, 143.

[5] Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and un-British rule in India* (London, 1901, Delhi, 1962), p. 2.

[6] A. M. Zaidi (ed.), *The grand little old man of India. Dadabhai Naoroji. Speeches and writings* (Delhi, 1984), I, p. 160.

[7] Naoroji, *Poverty*, pp. 96-8.

[8] Zaidi, (ed.), *Speeches and writings*, 1, p. 235.

[9] Naoroji, *Poverty*, p. 50.

[10] J. N. Gupta (ed.), *The life and work of Romesh Chunder Dutt CIE* (London, 1911), p. 57.

[11] Ibid., p. 236.

[12] Correspondence between Raja Rama Varma and Pattibhirama Pillai, *Hindu Patriot*, 15 January 1877.

[13] Ashutosh Mookerjea [sic], Liberty, Equality, Fraternity by James FitzJames Stephen (London, 1873), *Mookerjee's Magazine*, 2, 1873, 372-92.

[14] Quoted in Mary C Turnbull, *A history of Singapore 1869-1967* (Kuala Lumpur, 1977), p. 106.

[15] Lim Boon Keng, 'Our enemies', *Straits Chinese Magazine*, 1, 1997, p. 55.

[16] Lim Boom Keng, 'Our enemies', p. 57.

[17] David Kelly, 'The Chinese search for freedom as a universal value' in David Kelly and Anthony Reid (eds.), *The idea of freedom in east and southeast Asia* (Cambridge, 1998), p.99.

[18] ibid., p. 96.

[19] Lim Boon Keng, 'Confucian cosmogony and theism', *Straits Chinese Magazine*, 8, 2, June, 1904, p. 85.

[20] Lim Boon Keng, 'Confucian view of human nature', ibid., p. 1449.

[21] Lim Boon Keng, 'Straits Chinese reform', *Straits Chinese Magazine*, 3, 1899, p. 23.

[22] Lim Boon Keng, 'The first world war from a Confucian point of view.' *War time essays* (Singapore, 1916).

[23] Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment* (HUP, Cambridge Mass. Forthcoming 2007).

[24] Lim, 'Race and Empire', *Wartime essays*. p. 103.

[25] Lim Boom Keng, 'Our enemies', p. 53.

[26] John Gray, *Mill on Liberty: a defence* (Routledge, London and New York, 2nd ed. 1996), pp. 10-15 et seq.

[27] Ashutosh Mookerjea [Mukherjee], 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity by James FitzJames Stephen (London, 1873), *Mookerjee's Magazine*, 2, 1873, p. 372.

[28] Ibid. , p. 376.

[29] Gray, *Mill*, postscript, p. 132.

[30] Citing, B Parekh, 'Superior people: the narrowness of liberalism from Mill to Rawls' in *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 February, 1994, p. 12, ibid. p. 154.

[31] Ibid. p. 150.

[32] See Sruti Kapila, 'Self, Spencer and swaraj', *Modern Intellectual History*, 4, 1, April, 2007.

[33] John Gray, Two faces of liberalism (London, 2000), p. 97.

[34] A point noted by Colin Bird in his assessment of the points at issue between Foucault and Rawls or Chomsky. The desire for improvement and utopian moral projects can in fact expose hypocrisy 'when institutions and agents acts in ways that are demonstrably contrary to their own professed commitments.' For instance, whatever their failings and self-interested discourse in other respects, nineteenth century liberals did in fact abolish the worst forms of slavery, pour social scorn on child marriage and castigate Indian governments into establishing famine codes. See Colin Bird, *An introduction to political philosophy* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 290ff.