Castes of Mind

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The Original Caste

WHEN WE THINK OF INDIA it is hard not to think of caste. In comparative sociology and in common parlance, caste has become a central trope for India, metonymically indexing it as fundamentally different from other places, synecdochically expressing its essence. A long history of writing, from the grand treatise of the Abbé Dubois to the general anthropology of Louis Dumont, or from the desultory observations of Portuguese adventurers in the sixteenth century to the eye-catching headlines of the *New York Times*, has identified caste as the basic form and expression of Indian society. Caste has been seen as always there in Indian history, and as one of the major reasons why India has no history, or at least no sense of history. Caste defines the core of Indian tradition, and caste is today the major threat to Indian modernity, even if we concede that it helped pave the way for the modern or realize that it has been exacerbated by modern institutions. If we are to understand India properly, and by implication if we are to understand India's other principal claim to universal fame—Hinduism—we must understand caste.

The agreement in the West about the centrality of caste has not meant that there has been agreement about what is meant by the term, or about the moral valuation of it. The Abbé Dubois wrote in 1815 that the institution of caste was the only reason accounting for why Hindus did not fall into "the same state of barbarism as their neighbors and as almost all nations inhabiting the torrid zone." As he went on to observe:

> We can picture what would become of the Hindus if they were not kept within the bounds of duty by the rules and penalties of caste, by looking at the position of the Pariahs, or outcastes of India, who, checked by no moral restraint, abandon themselves to their natural propensities. . . . For my own part, being perfectly familiar with this class, and acquainted with its natural predilections and sentiments, I am persuaded that a nation of Pariahs left to themselves would speedily become worse than the hordes of cannibals who wander in the vast waste of Africa, and would soon take to devouring each other.[1]

A rather different view was held by John Wilson, a missionary of the Church of Scotland who had also been onetime president of the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, author of another canonic text on caste published in 1877:

> It is among the Hindus . . . that the imagination of natural and positive distinctions in humanity has been brought to the most fearful and pernicious development ever exhibited

on the face of the globe. The doctrine and practice of what is called CASTE, as held and observed by this people, has been only dimly shadowed by the worst social arrangements which were of old to be witnessed among the proudest nations and among the proudest orders of men in these nations. . . . It is the offspring of extraordinary exaggeration and mystification, and of all the false speculation and religious scrupulosity of a great country undergoing unwonted processes of degeneration and corruption. It is now the soul as well as the body of Hinduism.[2]

In these two quotes we move from Enlightenment mentality to Victorian morality, from early to late colonialism, as also from France to England. But in both these quotes we read that the soul and the body, not to mention the mind, of India reside in caste.

Theories of caste are not only about society but about politics and history as well. Weber, Marx, Henry Maine, and now Louis Dumont have all held that in India, in marked contrast to China, the state was epiphenomenal. Caste, not the state, held society—with its constituent village republics and communities—together. In a more general sense, caste is seen as the foundation and core of Indian civilization; it is responsible for the transmission and reproduction of society in India. And caste, like India itself, has been seen as based on religious rather than political principles.

With the publication of *Homo Hierarchicus* in 1966, Dumont gave canonic formulation to this view of the caste system, setting many of the terms of discourse and debate about Indian society that continue to the present day.[3] Dumont holds that the political and economic domains of social life in India are encompassed by the religious domain, which is articulated in terms of an opposition between purity and pollution. For Dumont, the Brahman represents the religious principle, inasmuch as the Brahman represents the highest form of purity attainable by Hindus. The king, while important and powerful, represents the political domain, and is accordingly inferior to, and encompassed by, the Brahman. The overarching value accorded to the religious domain is the central feature of the ideology of caste, which Dumont characterizes with the single word *hierarchy*. Dumont argues that the sociological significance of hierarchy has been systematically missed by modern writers obsessed with the ideology of equality, and he hopes instead to "distinguish fundamental values and ideas from everything else, the ideological from the non-ideological, or rather the more conscious or more valorized from the less conscious or valorized" with this concept (232).

Dumont thus identifies the politico-economic aspects of caste as relatively secondary and isolated. In assessing recent changes in the caste system, he notes that the British government's policy of "not meddling in the domain of religion and the traditional social order, while introducing the minimum of reforms and novelties on the politico-economic plane" (234), significantly reduced the extent of change and conflict under colonial rule. Only with the introduction of modern democratic politics has caste begun to undergo the major transformation of "sub-

stantialization," which for Dumont constitutes an important breakdown of the structural relations of parts to wholes and an essential challenge to the ideology of hierarchy.

Caste not only subordinates the political; it also reduces the individual to a position of relative unimportance. The individual only has ideological significance when placed outside society, becoming in Dumont's terms "the individual-outside-the-world" (235). This is the individual as the renouncer, the *sunnyasin* who must leave both society and the mundane world to attain transcendental truth. Dumont's position is stated more forcefully by Jan Heesterman, an indologist who has also played an important role in defining the discourse of Indian sociology:

> Here we touch the inner springs of Indian civilization. Its heart is not with society and its integrative pressures. It devalorizes society and disregards power. The ideal is not hierarchical interdependence but the individual break with society. The ultimate value is release from the world. And this cannot be realized in a hierarchical way, but only by the abrupt break of renunciation. . . . Above the Indian world, rejecting and at the same time informing it, the renouncer stands out as the exemplar of ultimate value and authority.[4]

The individual as renouncer thus occupies a critical position in what Heesterman calls "the inner conflict of tradition" in a transcendental critique of the possibility of politics, economics, and history in the Indian world.

The prominence of indologists in the contemporary anthropology on India has served both to secure a specialized discourse on India and to mitigate the charge that anthropology has not taken cognizance of a civilization far more venerable and refined than other objects of anthropological scrutiny. In this anthropology, indology has been substituted for history, and it has been used to dehistoricize both India and anthropological practice in India. Not only has the state been erased as a major force in the constitution and transformation of Indian society; the colonial history of India also has been rendered invisible, as we have just seen in Dumont's peculiar sense of caste's compatibility with empire. I find this sense of compatibility unsettling, and I see similar, and not unrelated, compatibilities existing between the view that the precolonial state was weak, the assertion that traditional society was organized by social and religious rather than political principles, and the sense that caste is the exemplary traditional form which has resisted the development of modern state and social structures. It is thus even more unsettling to read statements such as those in the introduction to Heesterman's recent book: "The modern state . . . wants to bring the ideal of universal order from its ultramundane haven down to earth. The inner conflict then becomes explosively schismatic, as eventually became clear in the drama of the Partition" (8).

In such views, the essential difference between East and West, between the recent histories of India and Europe, would lie in the "invention" of the modern

nation state in eighteenth-century Europe, which went hand-in-hand with the construction of a new form of civil society. Civil society was to free "individuals" in new and progressive societies from "traditional" modes of social organization and from the myriad constraints of premodern and/or feudal polities. Civil society had been constituted by and institutionalized in a range of bodies—the church, educational institutions, civic organizations—that represented the interests of a private domain, interests construed to be autonomous from the state (even as they were simultaneously protected by it). The modern state, more powerful than ever before, had legitimated itself in part through its claim to free the social from the politics of the past.

In India caste, so colonial sociology had it, always resisted political intrusion; it was already a kind of civil society in that it regulated and represented the private domain, such as it was. But a society based on caste could not be more different from modern Western society, for caste neither permitted the development of voluntarist or politically malleable social institutions, nor did it work to reinforce the modern state. Indeed, caste actively resisted the modern state even more than it did the old, for the modern state opposed rather than supported *dharma*.

Of course, under colonialism the modern state was not a viable option, since the development of modern states in Europe depended in large part on the conquest and exploitation of premodern states that fell to the technological, military, and economic power of the ascendant West. But colonialism was predicated on more than simple economic exploitation, and its effects were as various as they are still difficult to untangle from the presumed weight of tradition on colonized societies. It is increasingly clear that colonialism in India produced new forms of society that have been taken to be traditional, and that caste itself as we now know it is not a residual survival of ancient India but a specifically colonial form of civil society. As such it both justifies and maintains the colonial vision of an India where religion transcends politics, society resists change, and the state awaits its virgin birth in the postcolonial era.

In a previous study I have written on the relationship between Indian state and Indian society in the old regime, and the transformation of this relationship under British colonialism, when the Indian crown became increasingly hollow.[5] But until the emergence of British colonial rule in southern India, the crown was not so hollow as it has generally been made out to be in Indian history, anthropology, and comparative sociology. Kings were not inferior to Brahmans; the political domain was not encompassed by the religious domain. State forms, while not fully assimilable to Western categories of the state, were powerful components in Indian civilization. Indian society, indeed caste itself, was shaped by political struggles and processes. Both the units of social identity and their respective relations were part of a complex, conjunctural, political world. The referents of social identity were multiple and contextually determined; temple communities, territorial groups, lineage segments, family units, royal retinues, warrior subcastes,

occupational reference groups, sectarian networks, even priestly cabals were just some of the significant units of identification, all of them at various times far more significant than any uniform metonymy of endogamous "caste" groupings. Caste was just one category among many others, one way of organizing and representing identity. Moreover, caste was not a single category or even logic of categorization. Regional, village, or residential communities; kinship groups; factional parties; chiefly retinues; and so on could both supersede caste as a rubric for identity and reconstitute the ways caste was organized. Within localities, or kingdoms, groups could rise or fall (in the process becoming more or less castelike), depending on the fortunes of particular warriors or headmen, even as kings could routinely readjust the social order by royal decree.

Social identity was importantly political, as too were the contexts in which different units became formed, represented, and mobilized. And politics took on its shape and meaning in relation to local and regional systems of power in which headmen (of lineages, temples, villages), gurus (leaders of sects and monasteries), warrior leaders, chiefs, and kings were figures of central importance, with authority over constituencies that from certain perspectives could look and act like caste groups. To read and organize social difference and deference—pervasive features of Indian society—solely in terms of caste thus required a striking disregard for ethnographic specificity, as well as a systematic denial of the political mechanisms that selected different kinds of social units as most significant at different times. Brahmanic texts, both vedic origin stories and the much later *dharma* texts of Hinduism's puranic period, provided transregional and metahistorical modes of understanding Indian society that clearly appealed to British colonial interests and attitudes.

In stressing the political logic of Indian society, I am of course conscious of imposing a modern analytic term onto a situation where ritual and political forms were often fundamentally the same. However, I stress the political both to redress the previous emphasis on "religion" and to underscore the social fact that caste structure, ritual form, and political process were all dependent on relations of power. These relations were constituted in and through history, and these relations were culturally constructed. But most recently this cultural construction took place in the context of British colonial rule, when caste was represented as the essential religious basis of Indian society and as the reason why India had no genuine politics.

Colonialism purposefully preserved many of the forms of the old regime, nowhere more conspicuously than in the indirectly ruled Princely States, of which the little kingdom I studied was the only one in the Tamil country of southern India. But these forms were frozen in time, and only the appearances of the old regime—without its vitally connected political and social processes—were saved. Colonialism changed things both more and less than has commonly been thought. While introducing new forms of civil society and separating these forms

from the colonial state, colonialism also arrested some of the immediate disruptions of change by preserving many elements of the old regime. Paradoxically, colonialism seems to have created much of what is now accepted as Indian "tradition," including an autonomous caste structure with the Brahman clearly and unambiguously at the head, village-based systems of exchange, isolated ceremonial residues of the old regime state, and fetishistic competition for ritual goods that no longer played a vital role in the political system.

The transformations of Indian society under British rule, as also the contemporary concerns of comparative sociology, are the products not only of a nineteenth-century orientalism but also of the colonial intervention that actively removed politics from colonial societies. Neither British administrators nor orientalists were able to go to India and invent caste through sheer acts of will and rhetorical fancy, however useful caste was as a social mechanism to assist in the management of an immensely complex society. Ironically, it was the very political permeability of Indian society that allowed caste to become India's modern apparition of its traditional being. Under colonial rule, caste—now disembodied from its former political contexts—lived on. In this dissociated form it was appropriated, and reconstructed, by the British. What orientalism did most successfully in the Indian context was to assert the precolonial authority of a specifically colonial form of power and representation, thereby playing a critical role in disguising the politics of caste.

Early Colonial Knowledge and Indian Society

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a great number of British writers—among them Alexander Dow, Montstuart Elphinstone, Mark Wilks, John Malcolm, and Colin Mackenzie—felt compelled to write Indian history. Although they all saw the eighteenth century as a decadent prelude to and justification for British rule, and although they frequently disparaged Indian historical sensibilities and traditions, they nevertheless felt the need to understand India historically. During this period very little was written about caste, in marked contrast to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What was written about caste reflected the textual work of orientalists, but the paucity of general works and the fact that the only major book of the period on caste was composed by a French Jesuit suggest a very different colonial emphasis than that which developed later.

The early period of colonial rule is of course better known for the work of the orientalists than for that of the "historians," though there was not always a strict separation between the two. Alexander Dow studied Persian while an officer in the East India Company's army, and he published a translation of a standard

Persian history in 1768.[6] In his introduction to the translation he wrote about subjects such as the nature of Mughal government and the effects of British rule, but he only wrote seven pages on Hindu customs and manners. Though not a sanskritist, Dow relied on the tutelage of a Brahman pundit in Banaras and adopted a textual and brahmanic view of Indian society. Many years later, the administrator and historian Montstuart Elphinstone wrote his two-volume work on Indian history without any claim to be a proper orientalist.[7] Indeed, when he published his massive tome in 1841 he suggested that his chief qualification for the task, which he feared might seem redundant so soon after the publication of Mill's eight-volume history,[8] was his experience in India. But in his opening sections, titled "State of the Hindus at the Time of Menu's Code" and "Changes since Menu, and State of the Hindus in Later Times," he reproduced a textual view of caste and early Indian life based almost entirely on the work of orientalists, most especially Sir William Jones's 1798 translation of the *Manu dharma shastras*, the classic, brahmanically authored, normative Hindu text on social mores and customs. Elphinstone's historical text goes on for pages about the four *varnas* (Brahmans, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas, Sudras), the complex rules and formulations about the separation and mixing of castes, and the consequent proliferation of the myriad *jatis* that become the recognizable caste groups of contemporary India. So pervasive is the reliance on Manu's text that even 388 pages into his book Elphinstone begins a chapter on the history of the Hindus by noting that "the first information we receive on Hindu history is from a passage in Menu . . ." It is striking that Elphinstone sees no contradiction between an orientalist textualism and an administrative historicism; it is clear that India had not yet been fully anthropologized.

When Elphinstone turned to an inquiry into early Indian history outside the purview of the orientalist canon, in particular in his chapter on the early history of the Deccan, he relied upon the manuscript material collected by Colin Mackenzie, a man who had become, through diligent and prodigious effort, the first Surveyor General of India. Throughout a career in southern India stretching from 1786 to 1821 as cartographer and surveyor, Mackenzie was obsessed with an interest in collecting manuscripts and information to supplement the maps he and his associates made of Hyderabad, Mysore, and other regions of the southern peninsula.[9] On his own initiative and with his own resources he hired and trained a group of Brahman assistants who helped him collect local histories of kingly dynasties, chiefly families, castes, villages, temples, monasteries, as well as other local traditions and religious and philosophical texts in a variety of Indian languages. He also took rubbings of stone and copper-plate inscriptions; collected coins, images, and antiquities; and made extensive plans and drawings wherever he went. By the time of his death in 1821, Mackenzie had amassed a collection that still contains the largest set of sources for the study of the early modern historical anthropology of southern India.

Mackenzie played an important if contradictory role in the rescuing of south India's precolonial historiography. Throughout his career, he consistently advocated the importance of recovering and documenting the precolonial history of southern India, and in this context he stressed the significance of local texts. Unlike most of his contemporaries he did not disparage or dismiss out of hand Indian historical accounts or sensibilities. And he did not assume that his Brahman assistants were mere informers, acknowledging frequently and generously the extremely important role played by his assistants, such as C. V. Boria, in defining as well as transcribing the sociology of knowledge in precolonial peninsular India. Nevertheless, this sociology of knowledge was clearly *early colonial* rather than *precolonial*, as neither Mackenzie nor his assistants were unaware of the strategic and political character of their historiographic project.

In Mackenzie's initial project of collecting representative texts, histories of places, particularly temples, and polities, especially little kingdoms, predominated. The south Indian landscape was dotted with temples that often served as centers for marketing and defense in addition to worship and that, due to the tall *gopuram* towers built over their gateways, were also convenient reference points for trigonometrical surveying and general route maps. Every temple had a history that inscribed the significance of its deity and the ground of the deities' worship with a special past of miracle and power. The south Indian landscape had also been controlled by myriad little kingdoms, ranging immensely in size, each with a family history for the chief or king. Thus the set of local tracts collected by Mackenzie contain literally hundreds of accounts of one lineage headman after another who, through a combination of strategies and successes, managed to become a little king.

Mackenzie's preoccupation with local chiefs and kings was in part the result of his clear recognition of the political landscape of late precolonial peninsular India, and in part his response to the land tenure debates of British rulers at the time. When Mackenzie began his survey of Mysore after the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799, the general assumption among most East India Company officials was that a revenue "settlement" with the local lords or *zamindars*, along the lines of the 1793 "Permanent Settlement" in Bengal, would be the most suitable form of local governance and revenue collection for Madras Presidency. Thus Mackenzie's historiographical concern with the political history of the Deccan made a great deal of sense for early colonial administration because of its emphasis on the pasts and pedigrees of the potential landlords of a *zamindari* revenue settlement.

From my earlier work, I was aware of the prevalence of texts that concerned kings and temples. However, when I first turned to the Mackenzie collection as a repository for early ethnographic knowledge about southern India, I was surprised to find very few caste histories.[10] There were some general texts about castes, as also some curious lists of caste groups that resembled Jorge Luis

Borges's Chinese encyclopedia more than later ethnographic surveys. But there were only a few specific caste histories. Those that did exist, such as the Kallar and Maravar caste histories I had earlier read and copied from the Tamil, seemed of uncertain textual genre; they appeared to have been hastily put together from the chance concerns and remarks of local subcaste headmen. But in all of Mackenzie's obsessive collection, caste as a rubric for textualization was surprisingly uncommon.

Mackenzie seemed far less interested in caste than I would have expected. Although he occasionally mentioned the need to collect texts with information about caste, I only found systematic material about caste in his statistical and cartographic collections, as also in some of his drawings. In the statistical tables called *caneeshamaris*, "the population of the districts by castes, families, and villages" was carefully counted and presented by local Public Officials.[11] Some of these tables were transcribed on his actual maps of Mysore and the Ceded Districts. Here, the compilations of population data under caste headings seemed to have the same indexical function for the map as the delineations of field types and irrigation sources. These lists were highly particularistic and idiosyncratic; though Brahmans were usually at the head, the lists were neither regularized nor easy to compare across districts or regions. At first I felt disappointed that my interest in finding early (and little mediated) texts on caste had turned up so little.

Only when I turned to Mackenzie's drawings did it seem that I had finally struck ethnographic gold.[12] One of Mackenzie's largest portfolios has eighty-two drawings depicting different groups in the northern Deccan drawn during the early years of the nineteenth century. The volume is labeled "Costumes of Balla Ghaut, Carnatick, 1800 & 1801."[13] Costume is thus the key sign and objective focus of ethnographic difference. This emphasis on costume is in part a reflection of the fact that clothes in India (as also in England) were important markers of hierarchy and difference, but it was surely also because of the lack of any clear generic sense of what a pictorial survey of the castes and tribes would be like, as well as perhaps because of the influence of the picturesque cult's preoccupation with the colorful and exotic aspects of the Indian social order.

The castes and groups that found their way into Mackenzie's portfolio reveal a very particular ethnographic sensibility. There are a portrait of the ancient kings of Vijayanagara; a fine picture of a royal Darbar scene; a collection of drawings of "Boya peons," the court servants and soldiers of the local chiefs; as well as drawings of other court officials such as Brahman *amildars*, or revenue agents. There are also a number of drawings of gurus and itinerant holy men. In addition, the collection included occupational categories such as barbers, basket makers, and palmists, as well as Brahmans of various descriptions including court Brahmans, physicians, even groups of Brahman women. Both in the absence of any kind of systematic and autonomous sense of a "caste system," and in the con-

centration of pictorial attention given to characters who reflected the political landscape of the eighteenth-century Deccan—the same characters who figure in most of Mackenzie's local texts—we see major differences between Mackenzie's vision of India's ethnography and the ethnography that became canonized in the late nineteenth century.

One of the first indications of the importance of caste—and of the liabilities of official ignorance about it—came in an official memo of 1816 recommending support for and publication of a revision of Abbé Dubois's *Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies*, the first edition of which was said to contain a large number of errors and omissions. The Board of Control wrote, "There is nothing perhaps of more importance to the Hindoo community than that their distinctions of caste should be well understood by the civil officers of the government in the interior of the country, yet there is no subject at present on which it is so difficult to procure correct information."[14] In later years, of course, the collection of information about caste structure and customs was justified less in terms of the needs of Hindu community. Lord Bentinck also gave contemporary testimony to the importance of the Abbé's work. "I am of opinion that," he wrote, "in a political point of view, the information which the work of the Abbé Dubois has to impart might be of the greatest benefit in aiding the servants of the Government in conducting themselves more in unison with the customs and prejudices of the natives."[15] Here Bentinck suggests that ethnographic knowledge will contribute to administrative sensitivity, a very different use of ethnography indeed from what develops later in the century.

Early colonial ethnography was thus both unsystematic and still in the service of a regime that remembered the struggle of conquest, that could not yet afford to dehistoricize and recast Indian society. This ethnography also reflected in part what the silences of Mackenzie's collection illustrate, the lack of local textual and cultural traditions about civil society (separated from its political and institutional moorings) that could be immediately appropriated and re-presented. The uncertain pedigree and recent genre of colonial ethnography is perhaps nowhere more cogently illustrated than in a book compiled by the youngest brother of the Brahman family that had supplied Mackenzie with his chief informants. In 1847 C. V. Ramaswamy privately published "A Digest of the Different Castes of the Southern Division of Southern India, with Descriptions of Their Habits, Customs, Etc." The work was dedicated to the "British public of India" and was clearly intended for a European audience ("that they may receive that gratification and instruction which it is my anxious desire to impart"). The treatise began with an account of the four *varnas* with their dharmic duties, and it then in catalogue fashion listed the castes of the south of India with brief descriptions for each one. The list begins like this: "Butler, Dubash, Cook, Cooks' mate, Ayea, Lamplighter, waterwoman, grasscutter," and then includes such standard castes as the

dog boy, the *hammaul*, and the agriculturalist. As idiosyncratic as this work clearly is, it reflects the lack of clarity and convention regarding caste as a site for textualization.

A Colonial Sociology of India

As British colonial rule became increasingly secure, we begin to encounter growing traces of a new ethnographic sensibility. In mid- and late-nineteenth-century collections, I found, caste histories had begun to predominate.[16] Part of the reason for this had to do with the demise of the little kings; those who had survived at all had done so as *zamindars* or landlords with little particular claim to histories of their own. Temple histories continued to be important, but they were considered to be relevant by the colonial state only insofar as they could be used to decide disputes over temple control, management, and honors. But for a variety of reasons caste histories were considered to be particularly important, and caste became increasingly the only relevant social site for the textualization of Indian identity.

During the nineteenth century, the collection of material about castes and tribes and their customs, and the specification of what kinds of customs, kinship behaviors, ritual forms, and so on, were appropriate and necessary for ethnographic description, became increasingly formalized and canonic. In the first half of the century, the emphasis on caste was consistent with the change from revenue settlements with landlords to settlements with village headmen and individual cultivators, providing a ready means to evaluate the authoritative claims and social positions of the individuals to be granted revenue titles. But gradually the institutional provenance of caste expanded, affecting the recruitment of soldiers into the army (particularly after the great rebellion of 1857), the implementation of legal codes that made the provisions of the law applicable on caste lines, the criminalization of certain entire caste groups for local policing purposes, the curtailment of the freedom of the land market when excessive amounts of land were thought to be sold by "agricultural" to "merchant" groups, the assessment of the political implications of different colonial policies in the area of local administration in caste terms, to mention only a few examples.[17]

One of the first general compilations of material on caste was assembled by the Rev. M. A. Sherring, who in 1872 published his influential three-volume work, *Hindu Tribes and Castes*.[18] The work aims to be encyclopedic in coverage, starting with Brahmans then moving to Ksatriyas and so on. But unlike earlier colonial works that relied on textual *varna* categories as a general guide about Indian society and then turned to historical modes of investigation, Sherring used these categories to frame an empirical study of Indian society. The footnotes refer to District Manuals, writings such as those by James Tod on Rajasthan, even

Settlement Reports.[19] Gone is the ubiquitous reliance on Manu; orientalism has become empiricist rather than textual. Ironically, at the very point that race becomes invoked as the biological referent of caste in British anthropological conjecture, the pervasive references to the "mixing of castes" based on Manu's text cease as well.

The new empiricism not only replaced earlier orientalist emphases on textuality and history; it also eclipsed earlier enthusiasms for things Indian, even if, as in the case of most early orientalists, these enthusiasms were exclusively for ancient Indian civilization. Sherring shares the same general outlook on caste as John Wilson, and in clearly betraying his missionary affiliations he also reveals that missionary disdain for caste is no longer incompatible with the colonial scientific scrutiny of it. In his concluding essay on the "Prospects of Hindu Caste," he begins his opening series of paragraphs with the following assertions (which went uncontested in myriad subsequent uses of this text): "Caste is sworn enemy to human happiness"; "Caste is opposed to intellectual freedom"; "Caste sets its face sternly against progress"; "Caste makes no compromises"; "The ties of caste are stronger than those of religion"; and "Caste is intensely selfish" (274–96). Nevertheless, he is wary of progress when not accompanied by Christian conversion. After noting that "some of the caste-emancipated Bengalees have a character for adopting European usages," he went on to observe that "in our judgement, it is far better for natives of India to adhere to their own customs than to adopt those of foreigners."

Collection of the kind of empirical information assembled by Sherring, and sharing the increasing formalization of his information, soon became the centerpiece of an official colonial sociology of knowledge. As stated in the announcement of the ethnographic survey of India published in the first issue of *Man* in 1901:

> It is unnecessary to dwell at length upon the obvious advantages to many branches of the administration in this country of an accurate and well-arranged record of the customs and the domestic and social relations of the various castes and tribes. The entire framework of native life in India is made up of groups of this kind, and the status and conduct of individuals are largely determined by the rules of the group to which they belong. For the purposes of legislation, of judicial procedure, of famine relief, of sanitation and dealings with epidemic disease, and of almost every form of executive action, an ethnographic survey of India, and a record of the customs of the people is as necessary an incident of good administration as a cadastral survey of the land and a record of the rights of its tenants. The census provides the necessary statistics; it remains to bring out and interpret the facts which lie behind the statistics.[20]

And so the political relevance of caste was announced. Caste was the site for detailing a record of the customs of the people, the locus of all important information about Indian society. This information, which the colonial state felt increasingly compelled to collect, organize, and disseminate, would thus become

available for a wide variety of governmental initiatives and activities—relating to "almost every form of executive action."

If the ethnographic survey announced the preeminence of caste for colonial sociology, it was the decennial census that played the most important institutional role not only in providing the "facts" but in installing caste as the fundamental unit of India's social structure. There was general agreement among most of the administrators of the census, which began on an all-India basis in 1871, that caste should be the basic category used to organize the population counts. But there was far less agreement about what caste really was. For example, various commissioners debated whether a caste with fewer than 100,000 persons should be included, or how to organize the "vague and indefinite" entries that in 1891 exceeded 2.3 million names. There were also debates about whether, and if so how, to list the castes on the basis of "social precedence." When H. H. Risley adopted a procedure to establish precedence in the 1901 Census, caste became politicized all over again. Caste associations sprang up to contest their assigned position in the official hierarchy, holding meetings, writing petitions, and organizing protests. By 1931 some caste groups were distributing handbills to their fellow caste members to tell them how to answer questions about their religious and sectarian affiliations, as also their race, language, and caste status. After 1931 the British could no longer ignore the political effects of the census, and they abandoned the use of caste for census counting altogether.[21]

The rise of caste as the single most important trope for colonial Indian society, and the complicity of Indian anthropology in the project of colonial state formation, is documented in a great many texts, perhaps nowhere more fully, though complexly, than in Risley's classic work *The People of India*.[22] Risley, who was the Census Commissioner of India for the 1901 Census (the regulations of which greatly influenced the 1911 Census as well), had earlier produced the multivolume work *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, published in 1891. *The People of India* resulted directly from Risley's work as Census Commissioner, and it is an expanded version of the commissioner's report on the 1901 Census (written with the assistance of E. A. Gait) that, among other things, summarized his views on the origin and classification of the Indian races based on his historical speculations and anthropometric research.

Risley has been much criticized by contemporary as well as subsequent writers for overemphasizing the racial basis of caste and stressing anthropometry. William Crooke argued against Risley with particular vehemence, suggesting that occupational criteria provided much more comprehensive and accurate indices for understanding caste as a system than race.[23] And the anthropometric researches of subsequent scholars steadily eroded the confidence of the anthropological establishment that racial types in India were anywhere near as pure or clear as Risley had assumed. But Risley's general views of caste as a social system and force in India were little challenged. Risley seemed to speak for many in both

colonial and academic establishments when he wrote that caste "forms the cement that holds together the myriad units of Indian society. . . . Were its cohesive power withdrawn or its essential ties relaxed, it is difficult to form any idea of the probable consequences. Such a change would be more than a revolution; it would resemble the withdrawal of some elemental force like gravitation or molecular attraction. Order would vanish and chaos would supervene" (278). At the dawn of the twentieth century, it would be difficult to put the case much more strongly than that.

When in 1901 the government of India resolved its support for a scheme to carry out an ethnographical survey of India, one of Risley's first acts, as the new Director of Ethnography for India, was to appoint Edgar Thurston, Director of the Madras Museum between 1885 and 1908, as the Superintendent of Ethnography for Madras Presidency. Risley was particularly delighted with Thurston's availability because of their common enthusiasm about anthropometry as the principal means for the collection of physical data about the castes and tribes of India. Thurston's obsession with anthropometry was so marked that before he delivered a lecture to the Royal Society of the Arts in London in 1909, Lord Ampthill introduced him with the following story: "A visit to the Government Museum at Madras was always a very pleasant experience, although at first alarming. Such was the author's zeal for anthropometry, that he seized every man, woman, or child in order to measure them."[24]

In the proposal for the ethnographical survey of India, the Secretary to the Government of India wrote that

> it has often been observed that anthropometry yields peculiarly good results in India by reason of the caste system which prevails among Hindus, and of the divisions, often closely resembling castes, which are recognized by Muhammadans. Marriage takes place only within a limited circle; the disturbing element of crossing is to a great extent excluded; and the differences of physical type, which measurement is intended to establish, are more marked and more persistent than anywhere else in the world.[25]

Thus the government justified its project, and its choice of Risley and Thurston, for a survey that was specifically directed "to collect the physical measurements of selected castes and tribes." Risley's advocacy of anthropometry, and his theories about the relation of race and caste, were clearly fundamental to the definition of the ethnographic project in turn-of-the-century colonial India. The scientific claim about caste reflects Risley's assumption that he could actually test in India the various theories about race and the human species that had been merely proposed on speculative grounds in Europe. At the same time, these claims concealed the continuity between the assumption that castes were biologically discrete and the belief that in cultural as well as biological terms castes in India were like individuals in the West.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Thurston worked system-

atically on his ethnographic survey along the lines set down by Risley, collecting myriad ethnographic details and extensive archives of measurements, all arranged according to the different castes and tribes in the presidency. Indian subjects were not only organized by but contained in their castes or tribes, which determined the cultural, economic, social, moral, and biological characteristics of their constituent members. Individuals only existed as representative types or, rather, as bodies.

Thurston wrote two major ethnographic works. The first was published in 1906 while he was in the middle of his labors for the ethnographic survey. Titled *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India*, it consisted of a series of essays on a variety of subjects that Thurston thought held intrinsic interest.[26] Perhaps also he realized that these essays could not be readily contained by the format of the ethnographic survey. I read this work as an example of how ethnographic subjects were constituted when caste was not the organizing conceit for anthropological inquiry. The book begins with three conventional essays on marriage customs, death ceremonies, and omens. But in the subsequent chapters the organizing principle is no longer the conventional frame of caste, and the subjects seem no longer to be standard anthropological fare. The fourth chapter is titled "Deformity and Mutilation," the next "Torture in Bygone Days," followed by such other chapters as "Slavery," "Firewalking," "Hookswinging," "Infanticide," and "Meriah Sacrifice." If the caste-by-caste entries of Thurston's ethnographic survey volumes focus on the social (which in India was for the British caste), these essays instead focus on the body, and in particular on the subjection of Indian bodies by traditional practices. The individual for colonial anthropology thus became the body—the body that had been in precolonial times subjected by tradition, now the body as caste that could be measured by science, significantly always a body that could be described without any reference to mind, will, or agency.

The ethnographic survey ended in Madras with the completion of Thurston's seven-volume work, *The Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (1907), which had entries on more than three hundred caste groups listed in alphabetical order. The entries on each caste range in length from one sentence to seventy-five pages, and they include such salient ethnographic facts as origin stories, occupational profiles, descriptions of kinship structure, marriage and funerary rituals, manner of dress and decoration, as well as assorted stories, observations, and accounts about each group. Naturally, Thurston also included the results of his anthropometric researches. The text was obviously designed as an easy reference work for colonial administrators, for the police as well as revenue agents, district magistrates, and army recruiters. It was clear that you could know a man by his caste.

The ethnographic survey resulted in a series of similar volumes for the different regions of India, and while not all the surveyors shared Risley's anthropological views to Thurston's extent, all of the volumes nevertheless reflect Risley's general sense of what the survey should entail. Risley's characterization

of caste deploys with particular clarity what I have characterized as the standard late-colonial conception of Indian society, in which caste is the source of all order and the fundamental basis of the social. It is perhaps not ironic that the surveys were conducted during the early years of Indian nationalism, for the new ethnographic knowledge was to be used to curtail popular agitation as well as to justify the colonial assumption that Indian nationalist aspirations were essentially futile.

Although colonial ethnographers rarely addressed directly the political implications of their scientific projects, Risley did precisely that in his *The People of India*, where he confronts the question of nationalism. In one of the two new chapters written for the 1909 publication of the book, Risley assesses the role caste might play in the future of India's political development. And he quotes with approval the words of Sir Henry Cotton, who surmised that "the problem of the future is not to destroy caste, but to modify it, to preserve its distinctive conceptions, and to gradually place them upon a social instead of a supernatural basis" (282). Here Cotton, and Risley, advocate precisely what I have suggested colonialism in India encouraged: the constitution of caste as a necessary complement to social order and governmental authority, a new kind of civil society for the colonial state.

In Risley's view, caste has an ambivalent status. It is both a religious institution and a social or civil one. It is anarchic, yet it encourages the development of monarchy. It is particularistic, even though it is the necessary and inevitable basis for any unity in the Indian context. On the one hand Risley noted, basing his conclusions largely on the lectures of Sir John Seeley, that "the facts are beyond dispute, and they point to the inevitable conclusion that national sentiment in India can derive no encouragement from the study of Indian history" (291). On the other hand, Risley also wrote that "the caste system itself, with its singularly perfect communal organization, is a machinery admirably fitted for the diffusion of new ideas; that castes may in course of time group themselves into classes representing the different strata of society; and that India may thus attain, by the agency of these indigenous corporations, the results which have been arrived at elsewhere through the fusion of individual types" (293). These contradictions are interestingly resolved in (and by) the colonial situation. And here we confront the colonial mind in its most liberal guise. For Risley writes that "the factors of nationality in India are two—the common use of the English language for certain purposes and the common employment of Indians in English administration" (300).

Risley thus holds out a kind of limited but realistic hope for national development in India, measured by his sense that caste ideas and institutions will stand in the way, though he is optimistic that a steady (and English) pragmatism on the part of Indian leaders can sow the seeds of a new mentality. But Risley's liberalism is complicit in the general project of British colonialism as it supports the notion that caste is simultaneously a barrier to national development and an inevitable reality for Indian society in the foreseeable future. Risley suggests that caste, as

he has interpreted it, can be made into a virtue out of its necessity. It can accommodate and shape a gradually developing class society, perhaps even softening its potential conflicts and antagonisms, and it can provide a model (in its idealized *varna* version) for the articulation of an all-embracing ideology that might work at a general level to confound and even counteract the fissiparous tendencies of caste as a specific social institution. Caste in this sense is the key to the great transition from feudalism to capitalism/democracy—except that in the colonial situation that transition can never be fully made. The teleology of self-rule is here, as always, couched in a future that has absolutely no temporal reality.

Toward a Nationalist Sociology of India

It is usual in analyses such as this to attend only to the British side of colonial discourse and to assume that there were no resistant readings of Risley's anthropological politics. In fact, a number of Indian scholars joined in the growing chorus of critical commentary on Risley's emphasis on the racial basis of caste, extending their criticisms as well to some of the fundamental premises of colonial anthropology.

S. V. Ketkar, a Maharashtrian who came to Cornell in the early years of the twentieth century to study for a Ph.D. in political science, published his influential *History of Caste in India* in 1909.[27] He began his work by noting that "it is quite natural that no other feeling than that of amusement should occur to the English mind. He can afford to laugh at the absurdities and contradictions in such an antiquated and complicated institution." Writing from America, he did not restrict his concerns to the English: "An American missionary finds the subject very useful to induce his countrymen to subscribe money to save the souls of two hundred millions of people from heathenism"(1). Ketkar does not go on to apologize for caste but rather to suggest that, as a Hindu who cannot remain unmoved and uninvolved in the face of such a momentous topic, he is well placed to propose the methodological guidelines for its scientific study.

One of Ketkar's major complaints was the suspicion about Brahmans held by his contemporary colonial commentators on caste. Indeed, whereas early colonial writers had relied on Brahmans and on their texts, later writers had not only replaced a textual with an empirical approach; they often accused Brahmans of writing texts—and organizing the caste system—in order to maintain their superior position. Ketkar writes, "The thankless task of guiding the people and of preventing them from doing wrong fell, to a large extent, on spiritual authority, as the political authority was unfit for their share of the burden. . . . But with such a huge task before the Brahmanas what power did they have? All that they had to rely on was their knowledge of the sacred literature, for which all people

had high respect" (53–54). In countering the disregard for India's sacred traditions, Ketkar bought directly into colonial disregard for India's political past.

Although Ketkar raised a number of critical questions about Risley's anthropology, disputing his seven-fold classification and blaming the British for introducing an obsession with race to India (78–82), the eminent sociologist G. S. Ghurye moved the critique of Risley, and colonial anthropology, to another level altogether. In his *Caste and Race in India*, Ghurye took up Risley's theory of race as well as his use of anthropometric methods and data.[28] Ghurye was very critical of both the data and its uses, and he ultimately determined that only in the Punjab and parts of the United Provinces was there a correlation between race and caste, in which Brahmans betrayed physiognomic indications of their hereditary connection to the Aryan invaders of the subcontinent. Everywhere else, and for all other groups, general miscegenation had eroded any racial distinctness to caste. Ghurye emphasized the mixing of castes particularly in Maharashtra and Madras, where he also felt caste, in the form of anti-Brahman movements, had become dangerously (and erroneously justified by racial criteria) politicized.

Ghurye was also directly critical of Risley's role in politicizing caste, particularly in relation to the census. Although Risley was not the first to use the decennial census for collecting and presenting material about caste, Ghurye noted that "this procedure reached its culmination in the Census of 1901 under the guidance of Sir Herbert Risley of ethnographic fame" (157). Risley had assumed that the only intelligible picture of social groupings in India could be gained by using a classification of "social precedence as recognized by the native public opinion." Ghurye complained that Risley adopted this procedure despite "his own clear admission that even in this caste-ridden society a person, when questioned about his caste, may offer a bewildering variety of replies" according to whether he chooses to emphasize his sect, subcaste, exogamous section, titular designation, occupation, or region. Ghurye lamented the growth of caste *sabhas* organized expressly around the attempt to press forward claims of higher status in the census. Ghurye quoted with approval the remarks of a Mr. Middleton, one of the two Census Superintendents in 1921, to the effect that the so-called occupational castes "have been largely manufactured and almost entirely preserved as separate castes by the British Government" and that "Government's passion for labels and pigeon-holes has led to a crystallization of the caste system, which, except amongst the aristocratic castes, was really very fluid under indigenous rule" (160).

Ghurye also felt that various decisions of government had encouraged the anti-Brahman movement, and he criticized in particular the use of quotas to restrict government employment for Brahmans in Maharashtra and Madras. Ghurye saw this as part of a general strategy on the part of the British to use caste for the purposes of "divide and rule." Indeed, he quoted as evidence of this the 1865 statement of James Kerr, the principal of the Hindu College at Calcutta, that "it may be doubted if the existence of caste is on the whole unfavourable to

the permanence of our rule. It may even be considered favourable to it, provided we act with prudence and forbearance. Its spirit is opposed to national union" (164). Not that Ghurye apologized for all aspects of the caste system, and even though he lamented the decline of the "priesthood," and was particularly worried about the rise of prejudice against Brahmans, he clearly supported Gandhi's attempts to ameliorate the conditions of the untouchables (even as he disapproved of Ambedkar's attempt to politicize caste around an untouchable movement). However, Ghurye's sense was that the British were largely responsible for caste's alleged antipathy to nationalist ideals.

While Ketkar and Ghurye accepted many more colonial assumptions in their anthropology than they rejected, and while as active exponents of the brahmanical cause they were clearly situated in a sociology of knowledge of their own, their readings both anticipate some of my own criticisms and demonstrate the possibility of nationalist resistance within professional discourses. If this resistance does not seem as successful or complete as perhaps it should in retrospect, it is because, as Partha Chatterjee has noted in a slightly different context, colonized discourses were necessarily predicated on colonial ones.[29]

Recasting India

The assumption that the colonial state could manipulate and invent Indian tradition at will, creating a new form of caste and reconstituting the social, and that a study of its own writings and discourse is sufficient to argue such a case, is clearly inadequate and largely wrong. Long after I began to study the complex dynamics of colonial intervention in India, the study of what is now called colonial discourse has become the site for a compelling range of theoretical projects in literary and cultural studies.[30] This is in large part because of the impact of Edward Said's work and the ease with which colonialism falls subject to a poststructuralist critique.[31] But in spite of Said's insistence on a reading of Michel Foucault that situates discursive formations in historical processes of institutional domination and hegemony, much recent critical theory has merely gestured toward history—no sooner completing the gesture than appropriating history to support ahistorical—and even antihistorical—readings of texts. The ease with which critical readings of colonial texts and "third world" referents are made in certain literary circles today may indicate the ironic birth of a new orientalism.[32]

One of Said's most insistent points is that orientalism has consistently worked to deny history, both for itself and for its objects of knowledge. Said argues that orientalism deploys a kind of "mythic discourse" that "conceals its own origins as well as those of what it describes." In this discourse, "Arabs [as the most salient example of Said's book] are presented in the imagery of static, almost ideal types,

and neither as creatures with a potential in the process of being realized nor as history being made" (321). In the denial of history to the oriental, history becomes lost altogether. Said insists on reading the history back in, seeing the origins of orientalist discourse in colonial histories predicated on a past of conquest and rule. The pasts of the colonized, he argues, were erased as soon as conquest made possible the production of new forms of knowledge that endowed colonialism with natural legitimacy.

Nevertheless, Said no sooner makes this point than he proceeds to concentrate on texts of high imperialism written well after the histories of conquest. These texts assume the absence of history for the colonized subject, displaying few signs of struggle. But Said also fails to focus on the struggles that were part of the consolidation of hegemonic discourses about the Orient, becoming uncannily complicit in the orientalist elision of brute oriental realities by concentrating so exclusively on the metropolitan production and reproduction of orientalist knowledge. Early in his study, Said writes, "There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West. About that fact this study of Orientalism has very little to contribute" (5). However, Said's later point that the Orient was orientalized by the West because of a historical relationship of domination both contradicts his earlier statement and leaves us asking for more. Said often writes about orientalism as if it transcends the exigencies of history, exempting it of its necessarily contingent relations to histories of nationalism and colonialism, rendering it a totalizing monolith.[33]

Any study of colonial discourse that fails to examine the historical character and contradictory nature of colonial intervention and the institutional bases of colonial impact must be rejected even if we accept, as I do, Foucault's emphasis on the fields of power created by discursive practices. The power of colonial discourse was not that it created whole new fields of meaning instantaneously but that it shifted old meanings slowly, sometimes imperceptibly, through the colonial control of a range of new institutions, including those for which the study of caste was judged necessary in the earlier note from the ethnographic survey. Although an emphasis on ideas and discourses reveals that institutional hegemony is not based solely, or even principally, on brute force, discourse does not do it alone. Institutions activate ideological changes most often, and most effectively, when they do so subtly, masking seduction as mutuality, resistance as complicity, and change as continuity. Transformations occurred because of the ways colonial discourse inscribed its peculiar, often masterful, combination of old and new meanings in institutional theaters with major consequences for the colonial subjects. As I have argued elsewhere, this process often involved the paradoxical preservation of old regime forms, creating a shadow theater in which continuities and changes seemed always to mimic each other.[34]

In the case of caste, we have only begun to examine the complex and contradictory character of colonial change. I do not have the space here to detail the mechanisms by which radically new forms and meanings became inscribed around the trope of caste in the late colonial project of British state formation in India. Suffice it for the moment to say that they included, as anticipated in my discussion of Ghurye, the politicization of invented forms of caste in the census as well as in the communally based franchises of early electoral reform, in the development and implementation of legal codes, in the introduction and elaboration of revenue systems and policies predicated on a colonial sociology of India, and in the textualization and professional appropriation and reinterpretation of Indian traditions and social forms. And all of these historical processes themselves rest on a thick historical base, for caste achieved its critical colonial position only because the British state was successful in separating caste as a social form from its dependence on precolonial political processes.

The history of discourses on caste cannot be separated from the full institutional history of British colonialism. But if colonial discourse and the documentation apparatus that provided the evidence and the ground for the colonial caste of mind was not totally and autonomously constitutive, neither was it epiphenomenal. Orientalist versions of India's essence and anthropological representations of the centrality of caste have conspired to deny Indians their history and their historicity simultaneously; their failure to have history was all their own fault. History belonged to the colonizers, not the colonized. The potential subjectivity of Indian subjects was not suppressed outright but shifted into the cultural logic of reproduction implied by terms such as *custom* and *tradition*, which in India meant "caste."[35] At the same time, under colonialism caste became a specifically Indian form of civil society, the most critical site for the textualization of social identity but also for the specification of public and private domains, the rights and responsibilities of the colonial state, the legitimating conceits of social freedom and societal control, and the development of the documentation and certification regimes of the bureaucratic state.

It seems clear in the Indian case that the forms of casteism and communalism that continue to work against the imagined community of the nascent nation state have been imagined as well.[36] However, they have been imagined precisely through and within the same historical mechanisms that in the colonizing nations of Europe and America were far more securely harnessed to the project of state formation. And they have been imagined with such success that when we think of India, we must now insistently be reminded that India's postcolonial condition is not its precolonial fault.

Notes

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1. Abbé J. A. Dubois, *Description of the Character, Manners, and Customs of the People of India; and of Their Institutions, Religious and Civil*, trans. Henry K. Beauchamp (London, 1817), 29.
2. John Wilson, *Indian Caste* (1877; New Delhi, 1976).
3. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, trans. Mark Sainsbury et al. (1966; Chicago, 1980).
4. Jan Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago, 1985), 193.
5. Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987).
6. Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindustan* (London, 1768–71).
7. Monstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, 2 vols. (London, 1842).
8. James Mill, *The History of British India* (London, 1820).
9. H. H. Wilson, *Catalogue of Oriental MSS. of Col. Mackenzie* (Calcutta, 1828); W. C. Mackenzie, *Colonel Colin Mackenzie: First Surveyor-General of India* (Edinburgh, n.d.).
10. The Mackenzie collection is housed in the India Office Library, London, and the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras.
11. The Mysore Survey Documents, National Archives of India, New Delhi.
12. Mackenzie's drawings are in the Map Library of the India Office Library and catalogued in Mildred Archer, *British Drawings in the India Office Library*, 2 vols. (London, 1969).
13. Ibid., 534–38.
14. Board of Control collections, India Office Library, no. 541 (1816).
15. Quoted in Dubois, *Description*, vii.
16. See, for example, the extensive manuscript collections of Walter Elliott (India Office Library, London), which drew heavily on the Mackenzie collection.
17. See Anand Yang, ed., *Crime and Criminality in British India* (Tucson, Ariz., 1985); David Washbrook, "Law, State, and Agrarian Society in Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 649–721; A. H. Bingley and A. Nicholls, *Brahmans: Caste Handbook for the Indian Army* (Simla, India, 1897).
18. M. A. Sherring, *Hindu Tribes and Castes* (1872; New Delhi, 1974).
19. James Tod, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan; or, the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, 2 vols. (1829–32; London, 1950).
20. Such interpretation often rested in a peculiar set of notions about origins, which themselves had less to do with history than with a set of functional correlates assumed to be demonstrated by the particular origins of any given group and its derivative occupational and social status. These preoccupations were reflected in the kinds of information (texts, traditions, statistics) the colonial state collected, stored, and published.
21. This paragraph summarizes the pathbreaking work of Bernard S. Cohn, in Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (New Delhi, 1987).

22. H. H. Risley, *The People of India* (London, 1908).
23. W. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1896).
24. *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 52 (9 April 1909).
25. Government order no. 647, Madras Public Department, 26 June 1901.
26. Edgar Thurston, *Ethnographic Notes in Southern India* (Madras, 1906).
27. S. V. Ketkar, *History of Caste in India: Evidence of the Laws of Manu on the Social Condition in India During the Third Century A.D., Interpreted and Examined, With an Appendix on Radical Defects of Ethnology* (1909; Jaipur, 1979).
28. G. S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (London, 1932).
29. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (London, 1986).
30. For an excellent example, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Race, Writing, and Difference* (Chicago, 1986); for a recent sympathetic assessment of this field of study, see Robert Young, *Writing Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London, 1990).
31. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979).
32. See Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," *Social Text* 15 (Fall 1986): 65–88; and the response by Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987): 3–25. For more recent criticisms of postorientalism writing, see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Critical Fanonism," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 8 (Spring 1991): 457–70; and Aijaz Ahmad, "Between Orientalism and Historicism: Anthropological Knowledge of India," *Studies in History* 7, no. 1 (January–June 1991): 135–63.
33. This is meant neither to dismiss the extraordinary importance of Said's suggestions, nor to imply that Said is necessarily unaware of the peculiar distortions of his polemic. For what is still the best critical consideration of Said's book, see James Clifford, "On Orientalism," in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988). For a more complete statement of my own position, which concentrates on competing historicities in early colonial India, see my "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive," in Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament* (forthcoming).
34. See my *The Hollow Crown*.
35. This is neither to argue against anthropology itself nor to suggest that the simple reallocation of history either to India or to anthropology will solve all the problems I have identified. I have elsewhere suggested that one of the principal tasks of a postcolonial anthropology is to challenge current certainties about the universal character of history and the meaning of historicism. History too can be reified and essentialized. See Nicholas B. Dirks, "Is Vice Versa?: Historical Anthropologies and Anthropological Histories," in Terrence McDonald, ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (forthcoming).
36. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).