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James Mill and the History of the *History of British India*

Colonialism is not about geographical and political control only; it is a systematic and systemic intervention through which the knowledge systems and culture of the colonized are mauled, deformed, twisted, transformed, and destroyed. At the core of the colonial project is epistemological violence, where not only is the knowledge worldview or paradigm of the colonized destroyed, but also an alternative knowledge on the colonized is generated by the colonizer, which is permeated with falsehoods and projections. This knowledge is generated through translations, commentaries, books, journal articles, travelogues, newspaper reports, etc., which acquires the tag of putative or received knowledge over a period. For, the colonizer ensures that not only the knowledge systems of the colonized are obliterated, but also the centers of the dissemination of the indigenous knowledge systems, like schools and colleges, are shut down and laid to waste. In their place, he (the choice of “he” is deliberate) also ensures that new institutions—schools, colleges, and universities—are erected, where the falsehoods generated on the colonized, masquerading as knowledge, are taught and disseminated. Colonialism thus fundamentally alters the discourse of and on the colonized. Colonization writes Ania Loomba, “refracted the production of knowledge and structured the

conditions for its dissemination and reception”¹ and “restructured, often violently, the world of the colonized, and birthed new worlds and practices.”² Over a period, colonization also causes a profound inferiority complex within the colonized, which creates a sort of vortex that sucks into itself the colonial discourse leading to its regurgitation by the colonized themselves. The colonial discourse comes full circle and acquires a life of its own where the colonizer and the colonized become complicit in regurgitating and reproducing the colonial discourse.

Colonial attempts to classify, record, represent, and educate non-European societies where efforts to re-order words that were often incomprehensible to the masters and make them more manageable and available for imperial consumption and exploitation. Legal, medical, military, bureaucratic and economic institutions are readily recognized as part of the repressive apparatus of any society, but in recent years there has been a rich scholarship showing how ethnography, cartography, translation, and education were also crucial to colonial control and governance, as indeed were museums and other collections.³

Postcolonialism, with many objectives about understanding and analyzing the consequences of colonization, investigates and uncovers the falsehoods, deformities, and deformations imposed by the colonizer on the colonized. It is an accepted idiom of postcolonial studies and theory that the consequences of colonialism exist and linger in the erstwhile colonized population and the culture far after the colonized have gained political independence. The most sinister effects are experienced and seen in the regurgitation of the colonial discourse, which, by the time the colonies gain political independence, acquire the label and stamp of objective and true knowledge. The colonial discourse of the colonizer on the colonized at the time of the political independence and later also acquires the facade and veneer of political correctness, where all the earlier coordinates and descriptions explicitly suggesting the savagery, barbarianism, uncivilization, and brutishness of the colonized are suppressed

¹ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 81.

² *Ibid.*, 109.

³ *Ibid.*, 110.

and made invisible. In other words, the colonial discourse becomes politically correct. It becomes the task of postcolonial studies to genealogically expose the veneer of the colonial discourse to show its inherent ugly face.

[Postcolonialism, therefore,] refers to a mode of reading, political analysis, and cultural resistance/intervention that deals with the history of colonialism and present neocolonial structures. It is a mix of rigorous epistemological and theoretical analysis of texts and a political practice of resistance to neocolonial conditions. It is, in short, a critique.... It asserts the formerly colonized subjects' "agency"—defined as the ability to affect her/his present conditions in the face of continuing oppression. Postcolonialism as well as its more "dense" (in more ways than one) companion, postcolonial theory—is a method of reading and discussion.... Postcolonialism refers to any strategy that resists not *colonialism* as such but *colonizing* (or oppressive, exploitative) practices.... Postcolonial theory explores how colonial ideology, strategies of representation, and racial prejudices are coded into the literary texts, and how these informed concrete political military and social "operations" in colonialism.⁴

In *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Leela Gandhi says that colonialism produces a "mystifying amnesia" that can only be remembered by a critical interrogation of the past. Postcolonialism "is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past," and if "postcoloniality is to be reminded of its origins in colonial oppression, it must be theoretically urged to recollect the compelling seductions of colonial power."⁵ Further,

The colonial archive preserves those versions of knowledge and agency produced in response to the particular pressures of the colonial encounter. The colonial past is not simply reservoir of "raw" political experiences and practices to be theorized from the detached and enlightened perspective of the present. It is also the scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity,

⁴ Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (Chennai: Pearson, 2008), 17–18, italics in original.

⁵ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 4.

characterized by a profusion of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of the colonized subjects. Thus, in its therapeutic retrieval of the colonial past, postcolonialism needs to define itself as an area of study which is willing not only to make, but also to gain, theoretical sense out of that past.⁶

The interrogation and analysis of literature produced by the colonizer on the colonized, particularly when it involves the latter's representation, becomes crucial if the patterns of oppression and the subjection to racism of the erstwhile colonized and their progenies must cease in the postcolonial world. The critical examination of the colonial past becomes important, most specifically because of their continued operation in the postcolonial present. Postcolonialism "names a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within such oppressive circumstances. It combines the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with the political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality."⁷

Consequently, our work involves a deep, systematic, and critical examination of the discourse on Ancient India and Hinduism produced in the nineteenth century. We bring under critical interrogation and microscopic scrutiny James Mill's *History of British India*: more specifically, the seven chapters he wrote on the Hindu people and Hinduism in volume one of this three-volume work.⁸ These chapters describe the manners and customs of Hindus to their social structure, modes of governance and taxation, legal ordinances surrounding governance and society, and religion. This textual interrogation of the past is highly crucial because it is hurting the present of the Indian American children who are being subjected to a sanitized and politically correct version of the same discourse in school textbooks, which our work exposes elaborately, extensively, and conclusively. The sanitized discourse negatively impacts them psychologically and socially, which is the teleological point of our

⁶Ibid., 5.

⁷Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 57.

⁸James Mill, *The History of British India: Volume 1*, ed. Hayman Horace Wilson (London: James Madden and Co., 1840).

discourse analysis. In other words, the textual representation of Hinduism and Hindus in the colonial past continues in the postcolonial present that profoundly impacts the Indian American children. Within the canopy of postcolonialism, this work, therefore, involves textual analysis that critically interrogates the colonial past to show how the colonial representation is still alive and kicking and how it is negatively impacting the Indian American children in the present.

The teleology above has also determined the choice of Francophone postcolonial thinkers whose theories have formed the container for our discourse analysis. Though the intellectual resistance to colonialism is almost as old as colonialism itself, postcolonial theory owes its origins to the writings of Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, and Albert Memmi that began in the mid-twentieth century.⁹ Since these thinkers came from regions colonized by France, their writings originally appeared in French; hence Francophone. Postcolonial theory got a significant boost with the publication of *Orientalism* by Edward Said¹⁰ in 1978. Said's work has been critiqued and refined by two other thinkers, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, who, like Said, write in English, and therefore, their work falls in the category of Anglophone postcolonial theory. Robert J. C. Young, in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, makes a significant observation that buttresses our choice of Francophone postcolonial thinkers. He says:

Whereas Anglophone activists tend to focus their interventions on the objective realm, the realm of history, economic history, sociality and materiality, Francophone activists...were distinguished by balancing attention to those aspects of the history of oppression and exploitation with a concern for the human attitudes towards them, in other words, with the subjective realm. This comprised a desire to articulate the cultural and psychological effects of colonialism as they were experienced by those subjected to them.... How does it feel today to be a "postcolonial subject," whether in the three continents or as a part of an immigrant minority in a dominant western culture? What in short has been the human experience

⁹ Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature*.

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

of colonialism and decolonization? What are the psychological effects of colonialism?¹¹

Since one of the chief objectives of our work is to discuss the damaging psychological consequences on the Indian American children—as reported by themselves, as we will see in the closing pages of the book—it made absolute sense to use the framework provided by Francophone postcolonial thinkers for discourse analysis. Discourse analysis of the writings of James Mill, its continued regurgitation, and circulation in school textbook contents on Hindus, Hinduism, and Ancient India, leading to a commentary on its negative impact on the psychological health of the Indian American children, are the focal points of the work.

Before we proceed further, however, it would be good to provide a brief background of British colonialism in India in which James Mill's *History* was written and published. We will then proceed to give his short biography surrounding its publication.

The East India Company began trading in India in 1600 and gradually became the ruler of a substantial part of its territory till 1858, when an Act of the British Parliament ended its rule, allowing the British Crown to take over. The first significant inroad into India's administrative and political control by the East India Company occurred in 1757 when it won the Battle of Plassey, which gave it the right to collect taxes directly in the provinces of Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa. In 1817, after a decisive battle with the Marathas, which the latter lost, the East India Company became the ruler of most parts of India. In the same year, James Mill's *History of British India* in three volumes was published,¹² which radically changed the representation of India and Hinduism. These three volumes became textbooks for training the Company civil servants at Haileybury College who were to serve in India.¹³ The contents became a part of the

¹¹ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 274.

¹² Alexander Bain, *James Mill: A Biography* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1882); Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians: Volume 2: James Mill* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1900); George D. Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India: 1784–1858* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995); John Marriott, *The Other Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

¹³ Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992).

curriculum of Oxford and Cambridge universities.¹⁴ Thus, the *History* set in motion an alliance where administrators and subsequent academics could converge in the misgovernance of India. Ronald Inden calls it a hegemonic text.¹⁵ With this said, however, it would be good to know who James Mill was and how his writings exemplify the perverted relationship between the colonizers and the colonized: writings, the nefarious, hideous, and sinister impact of which is being felt by the Indian American children even today.

James Mill and the Making of His *Magnum Opus*

James Mill was born on April 6, 1773, to James Milne and Isabel Fenton at Northwater Bridge in the parish of Logie Pert in Scotland. His father was a shoemaker, and his mother was a farmer's daughter. It is said that Isabel had an aristocratic background, but her paternal financial situation fell to bad times because of her father participating in the Stuart rising of 1745.¹⁶ It is surmised that Isabel never forgot her ancestral leanings and therefore engaged in the following: (1) Changed the last name of her husband from Milne, which was quite common in the surroundings, to Mill, and (2) was determined to raise her eldest son, James, as a "gentleman." It is due to the latter that she put an enormous effort into seeing that James Mill not only got a good education but was also kept away from the family shoemaking business. Mill was good in studies, and after completing his education at the local Grammar School, he was sent to Montrose Academy, one of the best-known burgh schools in Scotland.¹⁷ Mill was a precocious child and was brought to the notice of the local Fettercairn aristocrats, the Stuarts: Sir John Stuart (on whose name James

¹⁴ Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁶ Bain, *James Mill*.

¹⁷ Bain, *James Mill*; Terence Ball, ed., *James Mill: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); W. H. Burston, *James Mill on Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Bruce Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the 19th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Mill was to name later his first child, the famous John Stuart Mill) and Lady Jane Stuart (on whose name also Mill named his one of the nine children that he eventually had). It is conjectured that Jane Stuart wanted to raise James Mill to become a preacher at the ministry, because of which he was not sent to the nearer University of Aberdeen but to the University of Edinburgh. Mill became the tutor to the daughter of the Stuarts, Wilhelmina, and spent a lot of time with them, both in Edinburgh and Fettercairn, which was only five miles from the Northwater Bridge. Wilhelmina Stuart was three years younger than Mill, and the legend has it that romance bloomed between the two, but Mill was not allowed to marry Wilhelmina because of his humble background.¹⁸ Wilhelmina was married off to Sir William Forbes and died young in 1810 after the birth of their second son, with the name of Mill on her lips. Mill's relentless tirade against the aristocracy, as we will see in the later chapters, was undoubtedly related to this incident, in addition to the many insults that he had to bear as a tutor to the children of the aristocrats.¹⁹

Mill joined the University of Edinburgh in 1790 and, after completing his studies in the Arts, enrolled for the Divinity studies, which he finished in 1797.²⁰ He became licensed as a preacher as per the Presbytery of Brechin's records but needed help finding a permanent job with any of the parishes. He made a livelihood teaching the aristocrats' children when, in 1802, he decided to move to London. Mill chose to earn a living through pen in London, a city of opportunities. He began by writing for the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Along with writing, he was interested in politics and would follow closely the speeches made in the House of Commons. By the end of 1802, Mill came in close contact with the publisher Baldwin and became the editor of and contributor to the *Literary Journal*, an association that lasted for the next four years. The materials of the *Literary Journal* were divided into four sections: physics, literature, manners, and politics. The "literature" section included the subjects: history, theology, mental philosophy, geography, biography, chronology, travels, poetry, criticism, etc. This editorial experience contributed significantly to the

¹⁸ Bain, *James Mill*; Ball, ed., *James Mill*.

¹⁹ Bain, *James Mill*; Ball, ed., *James Mill*; Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill*.

²⁰ Bain, *James Mill*; Ball, ed., *James Mill*.

production of the *History of British India*. In 1805, another engagement was added to Mill's career: the editorship of the *St. James's Chronicle* newspaper, which continued till 1808. The paper was owned by the Baldwin publishing company, the publisher of the *History* when it first appeared in early 1818.²¹

Mill began writing the *History* in 1806. He had earlier thought the project would take a maximum of three to four years, but little did he know that it would keep him engaged for the next twelve years. By then, his involvement with the *Literary Journal* had stopped; There is no evidence of his contributions to the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. Mill, however, was writing articles for the *British Review*, the *Monthly Review*, the *Eclectic Review*, and the *Edinburgh Review*. For *Edinburgh Review*, he wrote on jurisprudence, politics, political economy, and tolerance. In 1811, he began contributing to the *Philanthropist*, though it seems that he wrote more for the *Philanthropist* than for the *Edinburgh Review* because there is no evidence of Mill's hand in the *Edinburgh Review* writings after 1813. The *Philanthropist* was stopped in 1817; however, by then, Mill had contributed significantly to it. In 1814, Macvey Napier invited Mill to contribute to the *Supplement of Encyclopedia Britannica*, which appeared between 1815 and 1823.²² These articles in the *Supplement* will benefit our analysis in the following chapters.

The *History* was a roaring success, which endeared Mill to the Board of Directors of the East India Company, who had him appointed to the India House, its headquarters in London.²³ Almost everyone of any influence or consequence in the Company favored Mill's appointment, which took place in May 1819. By 1821, he was fourth in the hierarchy of the topmost home positions in the East India Company. By 1823, he rose to the post of Assistant to the Examiner of India Correspondence.²⁴ His meteoric and quick rise made possible the employment of John Stuart Mill as a Junior Clerk at the young age of 17 years in the East India

²¹ Bain, *James Mill*.

²² Bain, *James Mill*; Stephen, *The English Utilitarians: Vol. 2*.

²³ Antis Loizides, *James Mill's Utilitarian Logic and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

²⁴ Bain, *James Mill*; Stephen, *The English Utilitarians: Vol. 2*; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*; Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill*.

Company.²⁵ By December 1830, he was the chief of the office—the Examiner of India Correspondence—and remained one till his death in 1836.²⁶ There were four departments at the India House, and till he became the Examiner, when he superintended all the departments, he was heading the Revenue Department almost all along. Bearce says Mill was a “virtual Under Secretary of State for India.”²⁷ Mazlish sees it differently but agrees in spirit with Bearce, for he states:

To put his position in perspective, we must realize that his post during all these years was equivalent to a Secretary, or Assistant Secretary, of State for the East India Company, in a sort of private version of a foreign office administering a huge empire. In short, Mill in the East India Company had become a very high-ranking civil servant with a very respectable salary, able now to afford his own house, summer vacations, and a most comfortable style of living.²⁸

The *History of British India* is indeed a hegemonic text as described by Inden²⁹ because Mill wrote it to assist the British governance of India. He felt that the knowledge of the British on India was defective and that he needed to correct the error. We can safely say that the *History* was a governance manual, intended to be used by the British East India Company officials operating in India. To wit, the *History* is a colonial text. His own words in the preface of the work make it more than amply clear:

There will be but one opinion, I suppose, with regard to the importance of the service, which I have aspired to the honour of rendering to my country; for the public are inclined to exaggerate, rather than extenuate, the magnitude of the interests which are involved in the management of their Indian affairs. And it may be affirmed, as a principle not susceptible of dispute that good management of any portion of the affairs of any community is almost always proportional to the degree of knowledge respecting it

²⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

²⁶ Bain, James Mill; Stephen, *The English Utilitarians: Vol. 2*; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*; Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill*.

²⁷ Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India*, 66.

²⁸ Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill*, 140–41.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

diffused in that community. Hitherto the knowledge of India, enjoyed by the British community, has been singularly defective. Not only among the uneducated, and those who are regardless of knowledge, but among those who are solicitous to obtain a competent share of information with respect to every other great branch of the national interests, nothing is so rare as to meet with a man who can with propriety be said to know anything of India and its affairs. A man who has any considerable acquaintance with them, without having been forced to acquire it by the offices he has filled, is scarcely to be found.³⁰

Mill's colonial arrogance is also evident in the preface of the work in that he did not feel the need to visit India even once to write the piece. He defends his choice quite vehemently:

It will not, I presume, admit of much dispute, that the habits which are subservient to the successful exploration of evidence are more likely to be acquired in Europe than in India.... A man who is duly qualified may attain more knowledge of India in one year in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and ears in India.³¹

James Mill's influence on restructuring India during the colonial times has been momentous, and the *History* served as the resource book for inducing those changes.³² As early as 1810, Mill had already begun advocating an authoritarian form of governance for India.³³ The British civil servants, trained at Haileybury College with the *History* as their required reading,³⁴ ensured that such a form of governance came into existence in India. Given, however, that this work is not about the transformation of the Indian governance, culture, and social structure in the light of the Millian imagination, we will restrict our discussion purely to the realm of representation and misrepresentation of the Indian and Hindu scenario

³⁰ Mill, *History of British India*, xvii.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xxi–xxii.

³² Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India*; Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill*. For details, see Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

³³ Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India*, 68.

³⁴ Inden, *Imagining India*.

by James Mill. The *History* became the paradigmatic text that found reproductions in all the books on the history of India that the universities of Oxford and Cambridge subsequently published: it became the paradigm determiner of studies on Ancient India and Hinduism. Once Mill set the ball rolling on the misrepresentation of Hinduism and Ancient India and it found traction in academia, its effect continues and finds reflections in the school-textbook discourse that we analyze. Nicholas Dirks describes the text as canonical.³⁵

The *History* undeniably is an imagination,³⁶ given that Mill did not visit India even once as he wrote his *magnum opus*: imagination that affected India significantly after it got published³⁷ and an imagination that continues to affect the Indian American children even today. Our work unequivocally shows that Mill's characterization of Hinduism and Hindus is nothing but a sleight of hand rooted in projections and fantasies. How the *History of British India* changed, transformed, and restructured India is a work we will save for later. For the moment, the task undertaken is to expose thoroughly the projections that undercut his discourse on Hinduism and Hindus—their customs and manners, social structure, governance, jurisprudence, taxation, etc. Once we establish that Mill's enunciations and contentions are fabrications, falsehoods, untruths, lies, fantasies, concocted inventions, fictions, fairytales, and myths, we show conclusively how Mill's narrative is reproduced and regurgitated in sanitized and politically correct forms in sixth-grade school textbooks in the United States. Though this problem is all-pervasive and involves all publishers in greater or smaller measure, for brevity, we have chosen the writings of just one publisher: McGraw-Hill. The final section of the book discusses the negative psychological and sociological consequences that Indian American children experience due

³⁵Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³⁶Inden, *Imagining India*.

³⁷Jennifer Pitts, "Jeremy Bentham: Legislator of the World?" in *Utilitarianism and Empire*, eds. Bart Schultz and Georgios Varouxakis (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 81, writes: "[James Mill] both foreshadowed and influenced political developments that were to become prominent in the East India Company and intellectual developments among the colonialist vanguard."

to the toxic nature of this discourse, which, on the surface, is touted as veritable and putative knowledge of Hinduism and Ancient India.

We begin the next chapter with a short biography of each of the three Francophone postcolonial thinkers and then discuss their contentions as we shape a container to discuss James Mill's colonial narrative on the Hindu people and Ancient India in the subsequent two chapters.

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