



JNANAPRAVAHA MUMBAI QUARTERLY

APRIL - JUNE 2020

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Director's Note

The high bar of excellence that we have set for ourselves does become daunting at times – however, it is the unfailing support and largesse of our wide body of scholars that make our task simpler. This was in ample evidence in the Islamic Aesthetics iteration of 2020, when three scholars took us through the intricate and challenging realms of Safavid Art & Architecture. The historic contextualisation of a region from the 16th-18th centuries CE, with its ongoing power dynamics, whether political, religious or economic, set the tone and situated the visual forms that emerged, be it within architecture or the art of book-making. The triadic structure of the seminar series –three emperors (Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasp and Shah Abbas) and their three capitals (Tabriz, Qazvin and Isfahan) – was an ingenuous way to successfully navigate a very complex and layered history, and its visual forms, and to understand the underpinnings of Shiism, which became the official state religion. The Islamic Aesthetics rubric will continue to be addressed through a lecture on an Abbasid-period 'scientific' manuscript, as well as a seminar series on the architecture of the Maghrib later this year.

Our tryst with the world of numismatics continued with a spirited and enlivening lecture of 'minor' caves in the Western Deccan, leaving the audience surprised with the knowledge of neighbourhood treasures.

Though several lecture series on South Asian painting have been presented in the past, this rubric was to be officially launched with Prof. Daniel Ehnbohm's week-long seminar series titled 'Rajput Painting: Concepts and Realities'. This would have been the first time that a para-academic institute like Jnanapravaha Mumbai has successfully initiated this rarely discussed subject in a systematic and discursive manner. Unfortunately due to the Corona virus travel advisory, it has been postponed to a future date.

Thanks to an out of the box solution found by two of our course director's Dr. Jaya Kanoria and Ms. Alisha Sett we have been continuing our courses through online lectures. We have not had to cancel a single session as our Resource Scholars have put their best foot forward and the students have been great troopers. JPM is indeed grateful to all as we salute their spirit.

This quarter also saw a gratifying student response to the newly minted certificate course, 'Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory', a detailed report of which will be carried in our next *Quarterly*. As part of this programme, a special seminar, 'Theory & Practice of Imperialism: Locating the British Raj', was held, examining the early models of ancient Greece and Rome, through to 18th-century enlightenment and the imperial ornamentalism of 20th-century viceroys in India. We are also deeply indebted to Dr. Zareer Masani, whose entire presentation is carried in The *Slant/Stance* section at the end of this *Quarterly*.

As always, we look forward to contributing to pedagogy, rigorous public discourse and having you amidst us.

With my warmest wishes,



Rashmi Poddar PhD.
Director

AESTHETICS



A Folio from the Manuscript of Kalpasutra and Kalakacarya Katha: Jaina Tirthankara Enshrined (upper panel), Celestial Dancers (lower panel). c.1475

JPM's Aesthetics offerings include:

(1) an academic year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Yoga and Tantra, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (3) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Southeast Asian Art and Architecture, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (4) a fortnight of public seminars and lectures in Islamic Aesthetics; (5) an ongoing series of public seminars in Buddhist Aesthetics; (6) an ongoing series of public seminars in South Asian Painting; and (7) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.

Indian Aesthetics



Dr. Roda Ahluwalia speaks during 'The Sultans of the Deccan and their Artists: Scanning the Heights of Fantasy with a Direct Gaze and Rare Sensitivity'

The Islamic Aesthetics course conducted in early January at Jnanapravaha covers a new area each year and enriches the Islamic module of the Indian Aesthetics course. This year, the Islamic Aesthetics course focussed on the art and architecture of Safavid Iran in the 16th and 17th centuries, and drew interconnections with Indian painting within the period. In mid-January, students of the Indian Aesthetics course immersed themselves in the poetics of Indian painting through Roda Ahluwalia's lectures on Mughal, Pahari and Deccani painting. Mughal painting, with its Persianate fineness, sensitive delicacy, indigenous colours and vibrancy, achieved its zenith under the patronage of Akbar and Jahangir, reaching a point of stasis during the reign of Shah Jahan. Pahari and Rajput painting styles emerged from the earlier Mughal style, and show evidence of artists trained in Mughal ateliers whose styles evolved and changed to suit the requirements

of different patrons. The scholar combined history, biography, attentive analysis, and categories such as portraiture and naturalism to analyse these genres of painting. The lyrical beauty of Pahari paintings both conceals and reveals its concern with political reality and identity.

Dr. Leela Wood explained that the *Chitrastuta* of the *Vishnu Dharmottara Purana*, a treatise which elaborates on the rules of painting, was probably written after the painting tradition gained some maturity. Texts of this kind seem to have taken on a generally descriptive and only loosely prescriptive role in the evolution of painting such as the incredible murals at Ajanta. Dr. Wood's exceptional photographs of the superb paintings at the Ajanta caves complemented her research and imaginative yet logical analysis of pictorial conventions, as well as the styles and modes of expression in the murals. The scholar's reading of the spatially complex visual narratives of *Jataka* stories at Ajanta, especially in Cave 17, are extraordinary and enlightening. Examples of rapid execution and slow, careful rendering in various sections of the murals became apparent due to Dr. Wood's insight. She also explained the continuing tradition of Indian painting as is visible in loose-leafed Jain manuscripts, Deccani manuscripts such as the *Kitab-i-Nauras*, and painted folios such as those of the *Chandayana*, a Sufi romance inspired by folklore and codified by Mulla Da'ud in the 14th century.



Dr. Harsha Dehejia speaks during 'Krishna Shringara: The Many Manifestations and Meanings of Krishna's Love'

Dr. Harsha Dehejia dwelt on *Krishna shringara*, which leans on the *advaita* philosophy found in the *Bhagavata Purana*, a text that conflated and combined several devotional strands prevalent in the Indian subcontinent prior to it. He also analysed the *Bhakti* tradition which turned towards *dvaita* philosophy and complementary aesthetics and faith as is apparent in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. *Krishna shringara* thrived in poetry, paintings, as well as practices. The scholar distinguished between the *bhakta* who submits wholly to the deity due to faith, and the *rasika* who enjoys *Krishna shringara* aesthetically. He also

elaborated on the *Pushti marga* sect founded by Vallabhacharya which still continues at Nathdwara, practices conducted at Pandharpur in the worship of *Vitthala*, and the veneration of *Krishna, Balarama Subhadra* at Jagganatha Puri. His lectures engaged with the *Bhakti* tradition through philosophy and its ambiguities and art such as miniature paintings, *pichhwais* and popular forms.



Dr. Pheroza Godrej speaks during 'Introduction to Print Making: Early Archaeology in India - Ferguson & Curzon'

The final section of the Indian Aesthetics course concentrates on aesthetics in the national and colonial period. Dr. Pheroza Godrej presented a lecture on printmaking and early archaeology in the colonial period, in which Ferguson and Curzon played a pivotal role. They were responsible for the rediscovery, classification and preservation of some of India's most precious archaeological and sculptural heritage through the Archaeological Survey of India, their work and policies. Dr. Pushkar Sohoni analysed the architecture and function of the colonial market hall, while Dr. Kurush Dalal's discussion of *gadhegals* or ass-curse stones, which bear inscriptions of land grants, was preceded by a discussion of the grotesque in European art. There are many links between European and Indian art, which are increasingly coming to light as scholars uncover the history of travel and transport through objects, revealing a surprisingly connected world. Dr. Jaya Kanoria introduced students to Edward Said's *Orientalism* and the aesthetics of Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh in the context of nationalism and *swaraj*. - J.K.

Islamic Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Narrating the Safavid Past: Religion and Society in Three Iranian Cities

January 6th, 7th & 8th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Sholeh A. Quinn (Associate Professor of History at the University of California, Merced)



Detail from the scene of Shah Abbas and the Uzbek ruler, from the Chehel Sotun Palace, Isfahan, mid 17th c

This three-day lecture series surveyed the history of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1736) from a religious and social slant. Scholar, author and editor Dr. Sholeh Quinn tackled the vastness of the period by dividing into sections based on its three capitals Tabriz, Qazvin and Isfahan, and their respective rulers Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasp and Shah Abbas. A variety of rich, written documentation was used to render details of the state of society and religion during each ruler's reign, providing a mesmerising narrative of life during the Safavid period.

The presentations began with a contextualisation of the Safavids within a wider historical landscape. Texts on the Islamic civilisation by the American historian Marshall Hodgson (1922-1968) were used for this purpose. A brief synopsis of these texts' three volumes provided a structured background of Islamic history, tracing the origination of the Safavid dynasty to the eponymous Sheikh Safi-ad-din, a Sunni Muslim who founded the Safaviyya Sufi order in Ardabil.

Since the Safavids began as a Sufi group and not as a ruling dynasty, the focus first turned to Sufism. It is generally accepted that Sufis are those who believe it possible to have direct experience of god and are

prepared to do what it takes to have that experience. Hodgson's volumes outlined the history of Sufism and its gradual transformation – from its early phase, when Sufi masters stressed on the religion as a communal experience, to the 11th and 12th centuries when Sufism became institutionalised. That is, it came to be believed that every person had dormant potential for union with the divine, which could be released by the guidance of a teacher. The final phase saw Sufi schools being organised, with each group of Sufi followers looking to a particular

teacher. These followers also began to develop genealogies, which then made it possible to trace the spiritual background of leaders.

An important narrative source for this study of the Safaviyya Sufi order was the hagiographic text known as *Safvat al-safa* (the essence of purity). This was a collection of stories based on the life of Sheikh Safi-ad-din, spread across more than a thousand pages. Amongst other things, the text highlighted the notion of world conquest in relation to the Sufi founder. His narration of a dream was followed by its interpretation by his teacher, who stated that Sheikh Safi-ad-din was not only the light of sainthood but also the mandate of sovereignty.

After Sheikh Safi-ad-din's death, the Safaviyya Sufi order fell to his descendants, making leadership hereditary. Sheikh Junayd and his son Hayder became the subsequent leaders of the Sufi order. This period of Sufism saw interesting changes, such as sympathy towards Shiism and growing engagement in border warfare. Written accounts from the 15th century critiqued Sheikh Hayder's interest in military activities as he followed the path of his father. However, he continued his conquests, as did his eldest son Ismail,

who took it a step further, conflating religion and kingship by crowning himself Shah (king) Ismail in 1501 at the age of 14, while moving the capital from Ardabil to the northern Iranian city of Tabriz. It was at this point that he also proclaimed Twelver Shiism the state religion.

Twelver Shiism is a strain of Islam that was birthed at Prophet Muhammad's death, essentially as a family squabble regarding his legitimate descendant. Factions of followers eventually turned from his four successors to the twelve imams for leadership, and Twelver Shiism was formed.

To understand Shah Ismail's religiosity, several poems from the period were studied, which spoke of his claims to divinity, and his genealogical claims linking himself to imams, the Prophet, and a number of pre-Islamic kings. Some poems even spoke of his followers equating him with god. These accounts detailed his followers' lack of fear at going into battle for their ruler, stating their belief in their godlike king's protection. However, contrasting accounts stating Shah Ismail did not take kindly to being equated with god also exist. At his death in 1524 at the age of 36, he was succeeded by his son Tahmasp who was 10 years old at the time.

To understand the society of this period, the large faction of Qizilbash (nomadic tribes) must be considered. The term 'Qizilbash' was initially pejorative and translates to 'redhead', referring to the red turbans worn by these nomadic tribes. The Qizilbash first began as followers of Sheikh Junayd and grew in number through the leaderships of Sheikh Haydar and Shah Ismail. By the time young Shah Tahmasp came to be sovereign, the Qizilbash had grown into powerful military leaders. Another social group of the period consisted of Persian speakers, who mainly occupied professions in administration and bureaucracy. An uncomplicated rivalry existed between these two social groups, which Shah Tahmasp leveraged in his favour, to control the powerful Qizilbash who had begun to take advantage of the young ruler.

Travellers' written correspondences were referred to next, as these tend to offer insides that court chroniclers would overlook. (Here, one must consider that travellers to foreign lands may not always understand what they see, and may only see what their hosts wish them to. Equal weightage must also be given to the fact that history is a collection of human perspectives, therefore making every account inherently biased!)

An interesting observation found in the correspondence of Venetian diplomat Michel

Membre, who visited Tabriz in 1540-41, details how elite Qizilbash women controlled domestic finances rather than men. This led him to the conclusion that Qizilbash wives must be much loved by their husbands. Another interesting recording by Membre described how the memory of Shah Ismail was being kept alive by Persian entertainers, both, through storytelling in city squares, as well as through reading aloud from history books. These storytellers would also, interestingly, curse the Ottomans and create fantasies of Safavid victories against them.



Dr. Sholeh Quinn speaks during 'Narrating the Safavid Past: Religion and Society in Three Iranian Cities'

Alongside these social developments, Shah Tasmasp continued with Iran's religious conversion, further solidifying Shiism within the dynasty. He also engaged in surveillance activity to detect and abolish Sunni activity, making Iran more Shia in his 52-year reign. He commissioned the rewriting of the Safavid past, manipulating history to suit his vision for the state. Rewritten histories include the hagiography *Safvat al-safa*, whose updated version consisted fabricated genealogies.

After Shah Tahmasp's death, two of his successors ruled poorly, until a faction of the Qizilbash, who had regained power during this period of weak leadership, placed Tahmasp's grandson Abbas on the throne. Shah Abbas was 16 at the time, and went on to rule for 41 years (1588-1629). He built an architecturally stunning capital at Isfahan, with a design plan that reflected the notions of kingship and authority, and the relationship between nation and state. (These architectural concepts are studied in detail in the subsequent lecture series presented by Dr. Sussan Babaie.)

As his grandfather did before him, Shah Abbas continued to strengthen the state religion. According to British historian Charles Melville, the Safavid king's public religiosity not only served a religious motive, but also political and economic goals. For instance, he

planned a pilgrimage to Mashhad, in 1601, to visit the shrine of Imam Reza as a publicity act that would allow an extended 66 days for his people to witness their pious king and his entourage walking 700 miles from Isfahan to Mashhad. Choosing Mashhad over Mecca or Medina also not only sent a message about Shah Abbas's relationship with Shiism but also deflected from the fact that the Ottomans had captured these cities, serving his political motive. On the economic level, Melville believed Shah Abbas had calculated his pilgrimage to Mashhad to trigger economic rejuvenation within the city, and to also keep much needed revenue within Iranian borders.

Due to growing rebellion of the Qizilbash, Shah Abbas raised a new army of soldiers, the Ghulams, from Georgia, Armenia and Circassia, as the loyal core of his military power. Executing the Qizilbash governor of Shiraz, Jacob Khan, and supplanting him with the Georgian Ghulam Allahverdi Khan, marked the end of Qizilbash supremacy. The Ghulams remained loyal to

their king for the rest of the Safavid period.

Dr. Quinn concluded with contrasting primary accounts from an Armenian and a chief historian of Shah Abbas, both reporting the deportation of Armenian merchants from the city of Julfa to the suburb created for them in Isfahan, called New Julfa, to strengthen the Safavid economy. While the former chronicler spoke of the Armenians being unhappy at being forced to leave their home in Armenia, the latter spoke of their purported happiness at moving to their beautiful new home, exemplifying the critical analysis required to interpret history.

With these and the illustration of several other aspects of Safavid society, a panoramic view of the period's religious and social orders was created, enlightening the fascinated audience on the evolution of the dynasty. – **S.P.M.**

Architecture of Persuasion: Safavid cities in the 16th and 17th centuries

January 9th, 10th & 11th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Sussan Babaie (Reader in Islamic and Persian arts at The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London)

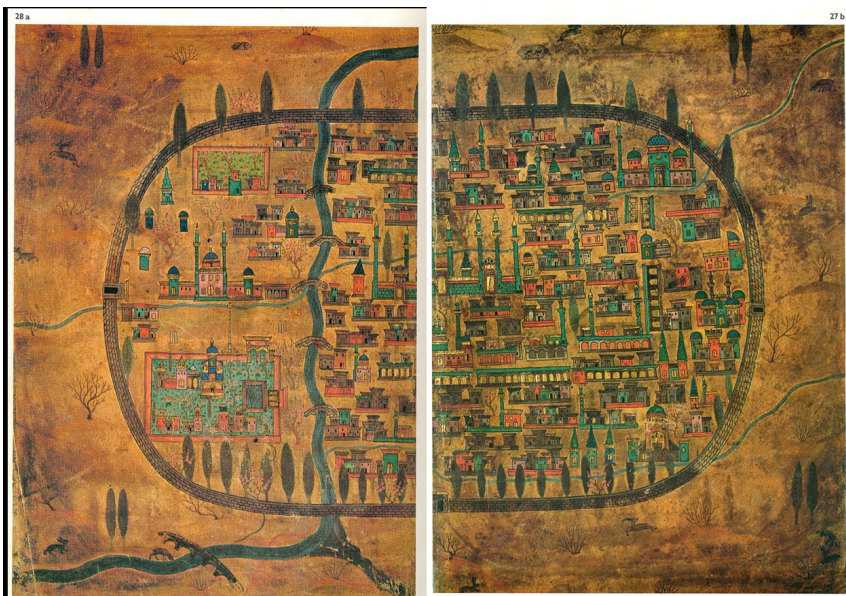
Professor, author and curator Dr. Sussan Babaie took us on a journey through the awe-inspiring urbanscape of three major Safavid cities – Ardabil, Qazvin and Isfahan. The three-day lecture series illuminated Safavid architecture and its ability to persuade the observer to view buildings to have specific sensorial experiences.

Safavid architecture features urban and spatial conditions that are particular to the dynasty but are

not unique inventions, as other dynasties such as the Ottomans, Mughals and Timurids also feature similar architectural styles. A viewer of Safavid architecture is not just led to view 'a building' but also 'that building within the city' – an architectural paradigm that was unpacked to understand how Safavid buildings are laid out to activate these sensorial experiences. The underlying stratagem involved thinking of architecture and urbanism in terms of 'sites' (buildings) and 'sights' (viewing), a perspective that was elaborated on with a presentation of sites over the course of the series.

Day 1: Tabriz and Ardabil: Inherited Traditions and Invented Empires

The detailed study began with a historical overview of Tabriz (located in northwestern Iran and eastern Anatolia), the zone of operation for Shah Ismail as he came to power. Being a dynastic member of the Aq Qoyunlu royal family, Shah Ismail simply inherited their capital Tabriz, and made it the new Safavid capital. However, due to Tabriz's vulnerability to Ottoman invasions by Sultans Suleyman and Selim, Shah Ismail did not commission major architectural



Tabriz as depicted in the Ottoman travel book by Matrakçı Nasuh in 16th century
Shows the garden palace known as Hasht Behesht in Tabriz built by the Aq Qoyunlu Uzun Hassan

campaigns within its boundaries.

To the east of Tabriz lay the city of Ardabil, which emerged as the spiritual core of the Safavid clan – Sheikh Safi-ad-din, the head of the Safaviyya order, originated from and was buried in the city in the 14th century. Subsequently, Shah Ismail chose to be buried at this site as well, in an effort to gain legitimacy through proximity to the spiritual leader. This dynastic shrine complex in Ardabil was built over a long period of time, from the 14th to 17th centuries, and involved a series of architectural campaigns by at least three Shahs. They were also buried there, thus serving the political and religious aspirations of the Safavids. The complex was maintained through *waqf* foundations (which are charitable endowments to protect an investment) involving a number of people, including royalty, nobility and locals.



Dr. Sussan Babaie speaks during 'Architecture of Persuasion: Safavid Cities In The 16th And 17th Centuries'

Dr. Babaie asserted that early Safavid building campaigns were scarce and scattered, having architectural expressions largely related to their Timurid, Aq Qoyunlu and Qara Qoyunlu past. She referred to Bibi Khanym's tomb and the Gur-e-Amir dynastic tomb complex at Samarkand, whose building forms and spatial decisions were incorporated in Safavid funerary architecture. What became the hallmark of Safavid architecture was the relation of the *pishtaq* (rectangular frame) to the drum, and the softness of the dome. However, these Timurid complexes did not have the spiritual core that the complex at Ardabil did, which was the site of Sheikh Safi-ad-din's burial.

The Safavid obsession with spiritual shrine complexes can also be seen at the pilgrim site in Mashhad, where a Timurid shrine was dedicated to the martyrdom of Imam Reza. The golden-domed congregational mosque was a major commission by the Timurid queen Gawhar Shad (Shah Rukh's wife) to indicate proximity to the holy personage and to strengthen their

Twelver lineage. Although the Safavids themselves did not build congregational mosques until the reign of Shah Abbas – unlike other Muslim dynasties such as the Ottomans and Mughals – this Timurid mosque did become the inspiration for later Safavid mosque decorations at Isfahan. Another Timurid influence was to have an epigraphic panel signed by the architect and displayed at the entrance of the building's *pishtaq*, just as Qavam al-Din of Shirazi's signature is visible on Gawhar Shad's mosque. Although this trend of signing buildings proliferated during the Safavid period, architects such as Brunelleschi, Alberti and even the Ottoman master-architect Sinan did not follow it.

The session concluded with the pronouncement that as Shah Ismail's attention towards architectural campaigns was minimal – his focus was primarily on structuring the ideologies and religious philosophy of the newly founded dynasty – he could not be considered a notable patron of architecture.

Day 2: Qazvin: A New Beginning under Shah Tahmasp

Following the death of Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasp moved the capital to Qazvin, bringing it into the heartland of the empire, away from Ottoman threats. Ardabil continued to be the spiritual centre, while Tabriz continued to serve as the political pivot. Shah Tahmasp's long reign (r. 1524-76 CE) was crucial to both, consolidating the imperial structure, and introducing the Ghulam system (to negate any Qizilbash threats), as he refashioned the notion of a central government in the capital.

The architectural campaigns of Shah Tahmasp's reign were an expression of his desire to bring greater structure to the practice of Sufism. For instance, Shah Tahmasp added a courtyard to the shrine complex of Ardabil, creating a formal entrance to the space. The construction of Dar al-Huffaz (a hall meant for the reading of the *Quran*) and Dar al-Hadith formalised the entire complex, transforming its three tombs into a space for ritual practices. These architectural alterations demonstrated clear sympathy to the legalistic and formalised normative practices of Islam within its newly formulated Twelver Shia structure, as it emerged from its earlier esoteric Sufi context. Another move to normalise these practices was the construction of Jannat Sara, a domed octagonal room towards the end of the courtyard, with a large *pishtaq*. Meant to house the ecstatic dance rituals of Qizilbash warriors, its construction indicated Shah Tahmasp's support of these practices, rather than their banishment.

At Qazvin, Tahmasp planned architectural campaigns

by taking over Maidan-e-asp – the hippodrome (now a major thoroughfare) – and using it for equestrian activities and to muster armies in preparation for war. To its north, he built a royal precinct, a major site in Qazvin. Of these constructions, only the palace gate – the Ali Qapu – and the gates of the multiple garden pavilions survive. The greatest surviving garden pavilion within the royal precinct is the octagonal two-storeyed building called Chehel Sotoun (forty columns). Based on the *hasht-bihisht* concept (a floor plan consisting of a central hall surrounded by eight rooms), it was used for the formal reception of ambassadors. Although not much survives in Qazvin today, its town planning was a precursor to that of Safavid Isfahan.

Interestingly, the Maidan at Isfahan is connected to Chahar Bagh, a tree-lined pedestrian street on the south end, with water channels across and cafes alongside it. Chahar Bagh was built for quiet strolls and sensorial pleasures, and was open to the public for picnics. On crossing River Zayandeh Rud, to the west of Chahar Bagh, was the town New Julfa, which housed upper-class merchant families brought from Armenia. Shah Abbas had strong commercial and economic motivations to house these Armenian silk farmers here. Their residential buildings were constructed not by Shah Abbas but by the Armenians themselves, to their own specifications. Shah Abbas also sanctioned – but did not fund – the plan for an Armenian church. New Julfa had many churches dotted across it, one of which still survives today – the Holy Saviour Cathedral. It was constructed with local material and methods, using the vocabulary of typical Iranian-Islamic architecture, with wall paintings of biblical scenes.

scaled project of renewal. Hence the Persian saying, '*Esfahan nesf-e Jahan*' meaning 'Isfahan is half (of) the world', i.e., it is incredibly beautiful.

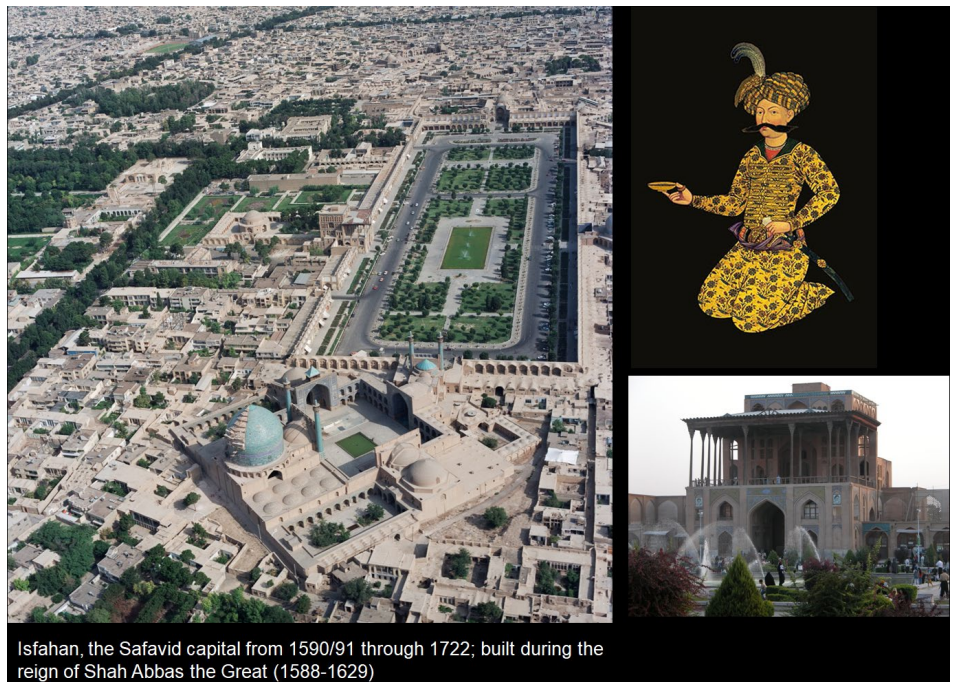
European travellers' accounts present the Maidan as an element of vanity for the city, but its purpose was to serve as a threshold between public spaces, the royal administrative spaces, ceremonial spaces and the living quarters of the royal household. This was expressed subtly through its architecture, unlike the Ottomans who bluntly fortified Topkapi Palace for royalty. This clearly shows that the intention of the Shahs who ruled on behalf of the Imams was to remain accessible to people, keeping the ruler and the ruled in proximity to each other.

The Maidan was used for various activities like polo, military exercises, equestrian exercises, shows, for public executions, as a site for commerce where sets of goods would be displayed in tents, and for festivities sponsored by the court.

One could enter the Maidan from the north – from Qayseriyeh, the old medieval *bazaar* – into the theatrically calculated massive expanse of the Maidan. It had an elaborate entranceway, the *nagar-e-khane* or the cattle-drum house, which produced music or rhythms at the opening and closing of the market, and to announce seasons and festivals. The north, east and south sides of the Maidan had a continuous, arcaded walkway such that one would not realise they were being routed away from the palace precinct where Ali Qapu, a two-storeyed gateway to the palace, was located in the west. To the south of Ali Qapu was the Harem gateway, which led to the palace living quarters.

Day 3: Isfahan: A Jewel in the Safavid Crown

There is a sequential history of Safavid capitals from Tabriz to Qazvin and to the heartland of Isfahan due to invasions by the Ottomans. The capital moved to Isfahan in 1598, during Shah Abbas's reign. Isfahan too, like Qazvin, was attached to a medieval city. Its construction began in the last decade of the 16th century, in 1590-91. This is a significant calendrical marker, as the construction year of Isfahan is 999/1000 of the Hijra calendar. Having millenarian aspirations, Isfahan is a representation of a massively



Isfahan, the Safavid capital from 1590/91 through 1722; built during the reign of Shah Abbas the Great (1588-1629)

During the reign of Shah Abbas II, Ali Qapu rose up to five storeys, with the addition of a private music room on the top floor. A *Talar-i Tavila* (hall of royal stables) was also added to highlight the significance of royal horses as they were dressed up and led out through the alleyway for ceremonial events.

Ali Qapu is situated on a liminal space between the public square, the Maidan, and the private royal-palace precinct. It is the most unusual building in Islamic architecture as it serves not only as a gateway to the palace precinct – which was both, a seat of judiciary and a ceremonial palace where ambassadors were formally received – but was also the venue for the Shah to be seated while looking out at the Maidan, and be seen by his subjects. This reciprocity is particular to Safavid architecture, and is not found in Ottoman or Mughal architecture.

Across from the Ali Qapu was the jewel-like Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque. Sheikh Lotfollah was the father-in-law of Shah Abbas, and was brought from Lebanon to solve issues of legitimacy, legalities, and the theology of Twelver Shiism. His mosque was an expression of Shah Abbas's personal piety and dedication, and was only meant for use by the royal household.

The south facade had a new congregational mosque, the Masjed-e Jadid-e Abbasi, a significant contribution by Shah Abbas who had it built to

proclaim Twelver Shiism. It had an elaborate formal entrance with a skewed axis that, in totality with the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque and the Ali Qapu, created theatrical architectural dialogue.

Isfahan's gigantic square juxtaposed its commercial, political and religious ends, and were carefully measured to keep the commercial end separate from the private and religious. Its skewed entrance served as spatial cleansing – a spiritual transition from the outer world to an inner sacred world where one encountered an explosion of tiles in the large courtyard. Shah Abbas made a *waqf* for the whole complex in order to maintain it and to provide loans to shopkeepers, in an effort to attract them to buy the arcaded shops within it.

The seminar series concluded with this last phase, ending a visual journey which began at the shrine complex in Ardabil, travelled to Qazvin and Isfahan, and ended with a study of the Maidan, at the peak of Safavid architecture. Each of these cities illustrated the particularity of Safavid architecture and the animated visual play of 'sites' built and 'sights' viewers were persuaded to see. This building principle remained constant in both the private as well as public architecture of the Safavids, and kept alive a dialogue between the interior and exterior worlds. – **N.M & S.P.M.**

Between Word and Image: Safavid Visual Culture in the 16th and 17th century

January 13th, 14th & 15th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Massumeh Farhad (Associate Curator of Islamic Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery)



Dr. Massumeh Farhad speaks during 'Between Word and Image: Safavid Visual Culture in the 16th and 17th Century'

In this lecture series, Massumeh Farhad, Chief Curator and Curator of Islamic Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery drew on her extensive experience in the arts of the book to recreate the

world of classical Persian painting, focussing on the development of unique Safavid aesthetics. The series began with a close study of bookbinding and decoded the structure of a typically illustrated manuscript. It delved into the relationship between Word and Image and threw light on the many specialists employed at a *kitabkhana*, who worked together to create a single manuscript.

The earliest patron of Safavid paintings was Shah Ismail, the first Safavid ruler of Iran (r. 1501-1524). By the time Shah Ismail captured Tabriz, the city had already become a thriving capital (over the 14th and 15th centuries) and boasted of an incredible library of Persian manuscripts, largely produced by its erstwhile Aq Qoyunlu-Turkmen rulers. Shah Ismail adapted and appropriated many of these manuscripts by adding illustrations and Shia touches, such as adding Qizilbash turbans to male figures. He laid the foundation for a new Safavid visual culture, amalgamating the wild exuberance of the Aq Qoyunlu-Turkmen artists

with the more-structured style of Herati artists such as Behzad, who joined his court. The production of manuscripts in this early Safavid period was dominated by the need to establish Safavid identity and legitimise the new state religion, Twelver Shiism.



Kamal al-din Bihzad, a Persian painter and head of the royal ateliers in Herat and Tabriz during the late Timurid and early Safavid Persian periods.

Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-1576), Shah Ismail's son and successor, built on this legacy by embarking on a grand project – the monumental *Tahmasp Shahnama* (written in ca. 1520-40), which is now scattered across museums around the world. Firdausi's *Shahnama*, as a masterpiece in the "Mirror for Princes" genre, had long marked a rite of passage for Persian rulers, placing them in the illustrious lineage of mythical figures such as the ideal king *Gayumars* and the hero *Rustam* and historical figures like the Sassanian rulers and Alexander the Great. The *Tahmasp Shahnama* expanded this literary world to embrace Shia symbolism through carefully placed inscriptions and imagery. The strongest reminder of the new religious ideology is in the act of illustrating the hitherto unillustrated *Parable of Ships*, replacing a generic Islam with Shia Islam as the superior religion, while simultaneously projecting Shah Tahmasp as the metaphorical Noah who steers and protects the

religion and its followers.

The *Tahmasp Shahnama* was arguably modelled on the celebrated Mongol *Shahnama* (written in ca. 1330s). The initial section of the *Tahmasp Shahnama* heavily draws upon Turkmen artistic sensibilities with respect to colour palette and lines, but the latter sections, especially the historical folios, encompass structured architectural spaces and idealised figures reminiscent of the Herati-Timurid style. The masterpiece folio in the *Tahmasp Shahnama* is *The Court of Gayumars*, now at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto. With its wild abstraction of nature, intense colours, animated rocks and highly stylised figures, the folio represents the best that Persian painting has to offer.

Coupled with frequent wars with the Ottomans, the *Tahmasp Shahnama's* monumentality depleted significant resources from Shah Tahmasp's treasury, and consequently, many artists from the royal atelier had to move to other patrons, including to those from India, and provincial courts such as Mashhad.

The later period of artistic production during Shah Tahmasp's reign was influenced by several factors: political and religious developments such as the shift of the capital to Qazvin; Shah Tahmasp's edicts of religious renunciation; and the growing popularity of millenarianism. Many scholars argue that Tahmasp's *Edicts of Sincere Repentance* led him to stop patronising painting after the *Shahnama*. But Farhad instead points at the *Tahmasp* album and the *Bahram Mirza* album (now at Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul) to argue in favour of the trend of albums or *murraqas* replacing narrative compositions in popularity. Far from being considered taboo, painting as an art attained equality with calligraphy in this period, as attested by the chapters on the history of Persian painting in album prefaces ascribing the origin of painting to Imam Ali.

The Qazvin period was also marked by an agenda of formalising Shiism and consolidating Safavid authority. Alongside Shia revisions of historical books like Shaikh Safi-al-din's *Safvat al-Safa* and Khvandamir's *Habib al-Siyar*, several religious books were also commissioned during this period. The *Falnama* or the *Book of Omens* (1550-60s, now in the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington D.C.) is one such manuscript that Farhad examined closely. The *Falnama* is interesting in its scale (attributed to Tahmasp's failing eyesight), its original compositions (as against the standard tropes employed in *Shahnamas*) and its function as a divination object that sits on the periphery of orthodox Islam. Yet, the *Falnama* is no exception, and shares thematic and functional similarities with many material objects and books such as *The Stories of Prophets* series and *Tadhkira-ye-Shah Tahmasp*, produced in the 50-year

period preceding the Islamic Millennium (1591).

Continuing the focus on religious books, the next topic to be discussed was the production of large numbers of illuminated *Qurans*, especially at the commercial workshops of Shiraz. Using folios from stunning *Qurans* such as the 1580 *Shirazi Quran* (now at the Istanbul Museum for Turkish and Islamic Art), the presentation provided a window into the *Quran*, explaining the role of calligraphy in different scales, the use of illuminated sectional guides and comments, the hierarchy of different scripts, etc. With strategic access to the Persian-speaking elite in Mughal India and Ottoman Turkey, Shiraz became a thriving centre for manuscript production. Contemporary historical records refer to households in Shiraz with the ability to produce a thousand identical books in a year. Most of the *Qurans* from Shiraz were produced between 1550-1600, after which Isfahan, Shah Abbas's new capital, became the centre of artistic activity.

Imagined and planned as *Nesf-e Jahan* or 'half the world', Isfahan was truly cosmopolitan in its inhabitants. The Isfahani elite – who lounged around at new coffeeshops alongside the Khwaju Bridge, and owned pleasure pavilions on the Chahar Bagh promenade – included a diverse set of people such as Georgian *ghulams*, Armenian silk merchants and Indian traders. From the 17th century onwards, this

new elite commissioned their own works of art, showing a distinct preference for *murraqas*, which cost less than narrative manuscripts, and also allowed their patrons more flexibility in indulging their taste with respect to image and text selection. Reflecting a Sufi patchwork cloak in its construction, a *murraqa* folio allowed the reader to ponder over a couplet, then titillate his senses with a nude drawing, and finally rest his eyes on a botanical painting, thus providing a vastly different experience from a formal narrative manuscript.

The distinctive features of this period were: an extensive use of pen/ink drawings, idealised figures, and a repetition of popular images such as a kneeling woman and a youth in Portuguese costume. Interest in portraiture grew stronger as well. However, Safavid royal albums (until the 18th century) were not an imperial enterprise glorifying the emperor and his court, unlike the extensive royal portraiture commissioned by Jehangir and Shah Jahan. Without abandoning the traditional abstraction of Persian art, the artists also experimented with naturalism, drawing inspiration from the Armenian church murals in New Julfa, as well as through the study of European prints and paintings from Mughal India. Having assimilated external influences with respect to volume, light and perspective, the Persian art of the book now had a distinct cultural vocabulary.



Church of Bethlehem, New Julfa, Isfahan, 1628-50

The *kitabkhana* in the late 17th century was dynamic in its structure, and artists were constantly in circulation across courts in Iran, India and Turkey. The *murraqa* format also made the process of painting less of a joint effort, while making it imperative for leading artists to sign their works. Both, the biographical information provided in the album prefaces and the artist signatures made it easy to identify the most prolific artists and calligraphers. Farhad provided a detailed introduction to the most celebrated artist, Reza Abbasi (d. 1635), discussing his early works as a court artist for Shah Abbas, and the evolution of his brushwork and artistic style after he left the court workshop to independently take commissions from the elite. Reza Abbasi's student, Muin Musavvir, proved to be a worthy successor even though his repertoire of idealised figures, portraits and composite animals was quite distinct from his master's. The personal annotation made by Muin Musavvir in his painting *Tiger Attacking the Youth* (1672, now at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) is highly unusual and provides a rare glimpse of an artist's preoccupations with his daily life.

The lecture series rounded off with a short detour to Mashhad to illustrate the role of *ghulams* or 'slaves' as art patrons. By Shah Abbas's time, *ghulams* had risen to positions of power and wealth, and replaced the Qizilbash as the main base of Safavid power. Many of these *ghulams* were major patrons of art and architecture. The governor of Mashhad, who was an Armenian *ghulam*, Qarachaqa Khan (d. 1625), is a case in point. Khan's Chinese porcelain collection rivalled that of Shah Abbas's in its beauty. His son, Manuchihr Khan, (d. 1636) commissioned many manuscripts, including an illustrated and updated version of *Suwar al-Kawakib al-Thabitah*, reflecting his interest in astronomy. Qarachaqa Khan's grandson was also a great art patron, commissioning the *Windsor Shahnama* (1648).

By the end of the lecture series, Farhad had effectively contextualised Safavid painting in its political, cultural and religious milieu, bringing it within reach of the audience. – **U.R.**

Shaykh Abbasi and His Circle: Artistic Exchange Between Iran and India in the 17th century

January 16th, 2020, 6:30 - 7:30 pm | Massumeh Farhad (Associate Curator of Islamic Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery)



Dr. Massumeh Farhad speaks during 'Shaykh Abbasi and his Circle: Artistic exchange between Iran and India in the 17th Century'

In the 16th century, Iranian artists began migrating to India in search of new patrons. These artists were not only welcomed but highly respected by the Mughal emperors and the Shiite Shahs of the Deccan.

The establishment of a new capital at Isfahan in the 17th century turned Isfahan into an international hub

of culture and trade. Many Indian merchants started settling in Isfahan during this period. This epoch ushered in a new idiosyncratic style of painting in Iran that absorbed Indian style and subject matter along with certain elements of European art.

It is significant to note that during this period, the

three great empires of the world – the Safavids, the Mughals and the Ottomans – were constantly sending emissaries with precious gifts to each other's courts as symbols of their respective powers. These gifts, which included one of the most exquisite objects of art of the time, must have led to great artistic dialogue between the three powers.

The first known 'Indianised' style of painting in Safavid Iran can be dated back to 1640 and ascribed to an artist named Behram Sofrekesh. The garland-like floral collars that he painted to depict women's attire could be perceived as a misrepresentation of Indian robes. His painting of the kissing couple, a theme new to Safavid Iran, could be attributed to the Deccan.

The use of hallucinatory blossoming branches by the Safavid artist Rahim Deccani could also be attributed to the Deccan. Due to a dearth of inscriptions, it is difficult to ascertain whether the Safavids were emulating the Deccan or vice-versa. However, what can be said is that the Safavids did look at India for inspiration.

Another artist who seems to have been inspired by Indian art was Shaykh Abbasi. One of his works, dated 1647, shows a woman holding flowers. The painting of the woman sporting a garland-like collar, similar to the attire painted by Sofrekesh, also looks Deccani in appearance.

An interesting artistic figure of this epoch was Ali Quli

Jabedar. Jabedar was interested in Western ideas of naturalism distilled through the Indian artistic idiom. The painting of *Majnun* by Jabedar is very similar to a painting by the Mughal artist Payag. The use of rich background settings and saturated tones, generally identified with the Deccan, suggest that Jabedar may have trained under Shaykh Abbasi.

The Safavids were also enamoured by Indian themes. One of the greatest examples is that of the Hindu *masnawi* *Suz u Gaudaz* (burning and melting) which depicts the tale of a young Hindu woman committing *sati* on her husband's funeral pyre. The mural of the last scene of this *masnawi* at the Chehel Sotoun Palace bears testimony to its popularity in Safavid Iran.

The battle of Kandahar in the first half of the 17th century amplified relations between the Safavids and the Mughals. As the city kept changing hands between the two empires, the game of one-upmanship also began between the two. A painting of Babur kissing the hand of Shah Ismail, executed during Abbas II's reign, depicts Ismail as tall and erect while Babur appears to be meek in comparison. A mural of Humayun taking refuge in the court of Shah Tahmasp at the Chehel Sotoun Palace is another example of the depiction of Safavid superiority. On the Mughal end, a painting of Jahangir embracing Shah Abbas amplifies the unease developing between the two monarchies. In this painting, Jahangir, standing on a lion, appears to be dominant while Shah Abbas, standing on a lamb, looks docile in appearance. - **S.H.**



Youth, Shaykh Abbasi, WAM, Baltimore, Walters Art Museum



Indian nobleman, Muhammad Taqi (?), 1652-53, Baltimore, Walters Art Museum



Woman Offering a Flower, Ali Naqi, Baltimore, Walters Art Museum

Buddhist Aesthetics

PAST PROGRAMMES

Great Buddhist *Stupas* from the Indian Subcontinent

December 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th & 13th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Pia Brancaccio (Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Drexel University, Philadelphia)



Relief Depicting Worship at the Saidu Sharif Stupa, from Butkara III, Swat
Credit: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan

The *stupa* is the most enduring image of Buddhism. They have been erected at sites associated with the *Buddha*, both directly and indirectly, and are often thought of as architectural representations of his presence. Pia Brancaccio (henceforth referred to as PB), over the course of five days, discussed the concept of the *stupa* in Buddhism, its association with funerary monuments, the growth of the idea of the *stupa*, and its development as a Buddhist monument. In this context, PB considered some of the great early *stupas*, such as the ones in Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Kanaganahalli in India; Taxila and the Swat Valley in Pakistan; and Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka.

The word '*stupa*' is not used exclusively in the Buddhist context, but also in Hindu tradition. In the *Rig Veda*, for instance, the word is used to denote a top knot of hair. In other contexts, the term translates to a 'heap', 'pile' or 'mound'. In the Buddhist context, the *stupa* is associated with relics of the *Buddha* and the mound

that is built over them. It is, however, a funerary monument. PB gave examples of various Buddhist sites to illustrate that the *stupa* is always located in close proximity to a necropolis or cemetery. The most impressive among these is the necropolis found near the site of the *stupa* at Butkara in the Swat Valley, in present-day Pakistan.

The lexicon associated with *stupas* comes from both, inscriptions as well as later Buddhist texts. The *stupa* is the dome in essence, the *anda*. Its other important components are the *vedikas*, *toranas* and *harmikas*. All these terms are referred to in inscriptions. The *pradakshina patha* is also an important part of the *stupa*. PB briefly touched on the idea of the *stupa* as a cosmogram, as propounded by John Irwin. However, she reiterated that the central idea of the *stupa* is its association with the memory of the *Buddha*.

Buddhist texts highlight the benefits of *stupa* worship,

and consider the offering of votive *stupas* a great source of merit. This encouragement to raise *stupas* over relics and to donate votive *stupas* ensures continuity of tradition, and longevity of the memory of the *Buddha*. This is emphasised through mentions of *stupas* erected in earlier times, in memory of previous *Buddhas*.



Dr. Pia Brancaccio speaks during 'Great Buddhist Stupas from the Indian Subcontinent'

PB highlighted an important distinction – that while we often speak of *stupas* linked to important sites associated with the *Buddha*, both in art as well as texts, the reference is linked more often to *cetiya*s, or *Chaitya*s, rather than the *stupas* themselves. In this context, PB suggested that while a *stupa* might have been built over the relics of the *Buddha*, all these sites would have also had shrines built for worship. While the *stupa* is erected to commemorate the memory of the *Buddha*, the *cetiya* commemorates his presence. The *stupa* is simply one category of shrine or *cetiya* associated with mortal remains.

This is seen in art as well, where the *stupa* is always depicted in worship, decked with garlands of flowers and pearls. More commonly seen are shrines which, PB speculates, might refer to specific shrines at sites associated with the life of the *Buddha*. Thus, the pillars with a lion capital topped by a wheel seen at Bharhut and Sanchi may refer to the shrine at Sarnath, where the *Buddha* delivered his first sermon, a site marked by Ashoka with the lion capital. Similarly, the shrine around the tree may not simply be an aniconic representation of the *Buddha*, but may instead depict the actual shrine at Bodh Gaya, built around the tree where the *Buddha* attained enlightenment.

At Sankassa, where the *Buddha* is said to have descended to earth after preaching to his mother in heaven, the *vihara* is believed to have been built over the ladder from which the *Buddha* descended. PB drew attention to the Bimaran reliquary which depicts three ladders and the *Buddha* flanked by *Indra* and *Brahma*, as well as to the shrine over a ladder represented at Bharhut, suggesting that both

depictions may represent this particular shrine, and not just the episode of the *Buddha*'s descent.

PB also brought up the fact that while Ashoka is often associated with *stupa* building, and most of the early *stupas* are associated with him, material remains only point to him having built pillars with capitals to mark the sites associated with the life of the *Buddha*, and not actual *stupas*. Though the word '*dharmarajika*' is specifically used in the context of *stupas* having been built by Ashoka, there is no archaeological evidence of the same, and indeed, all the sites only have pillars with capitals and/or Ashokan inscriptions.

Discussing the relic casket and its assemblages, PB spoke of the objects placed inside – crystals, pearls, semi-precious stones, ivory, gold, gold flowers, coins, and bodily remains. In this context, she drew attention to the southern *torana* at Sanchi, which has three panels – the bottom panel depicting the war of the relics, the middle, the *Chaddanta Jataka*, and the top displaying seven *stupas* which are believed to represent the *stupas* of the seven *Buddhas* of the past, present and future. PB suggested that these are, instead, the seven original *stupas* built by the seven kings over the divided relics of the *Buddha*, and that the *Chaddanta Jataka*, framed within the context of the war of the relics and the *stupas*, reiterates the story of the *bodhisattva* elephant who sacrificed his own life to give up his seven tusks, and reminds us of the *Buddha*, whose relics were divided into eight portions, seven distributed to the kings, and the eighth given to *Drona*, the *brahmin* who divided them. She also linked this story to the importance of ivory, and the presence of ivory in relic caskets.

Discussing the early *stupas* in detail, PB drew attention to the differences in *stupas* built at different sites. While *stupas* at Sanchi and Bharhut have *vedikas*, *toranas* and *pradakshina pathas*, *dharmarajika stupas* in Taxila and the Swat Valley do not have *vedikas* or *toranas*, but do have a *pradakshina patha* paved with glazed tiles. The central *stupa* is surrounded by votive *stupas*, offered by individuals. Later *stupas* in Gandhara, not associated with Ashoka, such as the one at Saidu Sharif, have a square plinth with steps, and four columns. It has been speculated that the podium symbolises a throne. Consequently, the *stupa* and relics are visualised as set on a throne. This is supported by a large number of images in Gandharan art depicting reliquaries, usually in the shape of a *stupa* set on a throne. The *stupas* at Amaravati and Kanaganahalli in Southern India have *vedikas*, but not *toranas*. In addition, they have pillars at the entrance, and an *ayaka* platform. The *stupas* at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, called *dagobas*, have colossal domes, and bear some similarity to the *stupas* in Southern India.

They don't have *vedikas*, but some do have pillars. The *stupas* in Sri Lanka are classified into different types based on the shape of their domes, a concept unique to the island. However, one striking aspect among them is the Ashokan pillar and capital, which makes it a recognisable Buddhist monument, and is present across sites, in carvings or as architectural elements of the *stupas*.

Carvings on *stupas* usually fall into different categories – decorative, showing flora and fauna; local deities, such as *yakshas/yakshis* and *laukika devatas*; stories from the *Jatakas*; and scenes from the *Buddha's* life.

Early *stupas* such as the one at Bharhut have simple carvings on roundels, with detailed depictions of nature. The *Jataka* stories usually highlight moral values such as self-sacrifice, and are labelled. These are dynamic panels, depicting entire stories within a small space. Scenes from the life of the *Buddha* are also depicted, though in no particular order. They are static in nature, showing a particular moment, a manifestation of the *Buddha*, though he isn't seen yet in anthropomorphic form, and is surrounded by people witnessing the event.

By the time of the great *stupa* at Sanchi, the carvings become more elaborate and detailed. There are no labels, only inscriptions mentioning donations. The focus of narrative shifts from the *Jatakas* to the life of the *Buddha*. The manner of framing the life of the *Buddha* is now diachronic, and though the *Buddha* is not yet depicted in anthropomorphic form, an aniconic depiction has been developed, and emblems of kingship appear. Stories are now clearly an established narrative backed by texts. The *Buddha* is now an object of worship, and the witnesses/audience are now worshippers and devotees.

In Gandhara, the narrative panels are seen at the bases of votive *stupas*. These scenes are all set in order, and unfold as the devotee circumambulates the *stupa*. Among the stories from the *Jatakas*, the *Dipankara Jataka* emerges as the most popular since it marks the connection between the stories and the life of the *Buddha*.

In Sri Lanka, the role of narratives is minor. There are paintings depicting scenes from the lives of the *Buddha* and *Jatakas* at some *stupas*, but the focus is on the worship of relics and the footprints of the *Buddha*, or *buddhapadas*, which are most often seen in all *stupas*.

At Bharhut, the detailed depiction of nature and absence of structures suggest a rural landscape, while at Sanchi, the presence of multistoried buildings and

lack of detail in depictions of nature suggest an urban centre.

Both these sites, however, are not individual sites, but part of a larger Buddhist landscape, located in close proximity to sources of water. This is also true of other sites in Gandhara, Southern India as well as Sri Lanka. PB suggests that this was a factor of trade and patronage. The connection of Buddhism to trade guided the choice of site, so as to exert control over natural resources such as land and water, and draw increased patronage.

Stupas at Bharhut and Sanchi were built and maintained by collective patronage, with multitudes of people offering donations, as seen in inscriptions. The donations weren't for specific parts of the structure, but were offered to the *stupa*. At Amaravati and Kanaganahalli, patronage by local rulers was very strong, but inscriptions also refer to donations by locals. In Gandhara, donations were no longer collectively for the *stupa* as a whole, but individual, meant for the building of votive *stupas* and donation of relics. The *stupas* were maintained and enlarged by local kings. In Sri Lanka, patronage was exclusively royal, with *stupas* being built and maintained by royals. Their monumentality was a result of the royals' desire to exert power by building *stupas*.

In conclusion, the development of *stupas* from a burial mound to hubs of Buddhist practice and symbols of royal power across the Indian subcontinent is the story of the journey of Buddhism, from sites directly associated with the *Buddha*, to the spreading of Buddhism across the region, and the desire to associate a site with the *Buddha* through his bodily remains or objects associated with him. - A.S.

The In-Betweeners: Trade and Patronage in 1st Century CE - The Case of Kuda-Mandad

January 23rd, 2020, 6:30 pm | Shailendra Bhandare (Assistant Keeper, South Asian and Far-Eastern Numismatics and Paper Money Collections, Ashmolean Museum)

The Kuda cave complex near Mandad, Raigad, is one of many caves along the Konkan belt. These caves were named 'Mandagora' by erstwhile Roman traders, while the local ruling dynasty of the period, the Mahabhojas, called them the 'Mandava' caves. In fact, Ptolemy's *Geographia* (2nd century CE) mentions the port of Mandagora, as does the Greek trade manual *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (mid-1st century BCE). The Mahabhojas were a local dynasty ruling as feudatories of the Satavahanas on the Konkan coast

in 1st century CE. Their dynastic history would have been lost without their patronage of Buddhism and rock-cut caves. The Mahabhoja dynasty is known primarily through inscriptions on the rock-cut caves of Kuda, which mention individual names of two of their families – the Mandavas and the Sadakaras.

Bhandare refers to the clan of Mahabhojas as the 'in-betweeners', since they were a small feudal dynasty between the two major ruling dynasties of the time – the Satavahanas and the Kshatrapas. This clan moved its allegiance from one to the other to continue in power and to further foreign trade and economic activity, a fact that has been proven through evidence of counterstruck coins displaying the shifting allegiance. Many of these feudatory coins bear the initial Satavahana four-orbed symbol, which later changes to the Kshaharata thunderbolt-arrow symbol.

The coinage of the Mahabhojas, valued for its political and economic history, was systematically introduced for the first time by Bhandare in 2006. These coins usually bear a turtle design, a pair of snakes, Brahmi legend and an inverted triangle.

While Dr. Dehejia claims wars were the reason for a hiatus in cave-building during this period, Bhandare shows through his study of coins that there was no cessation in building activity. However, their architectural style and development were impacted. The Mahabhojas were lesser patrons with smaller funds, to remedy which they began saving money by cleverly introducing a new architectural style: the flat-roofed *chaitya*. While major sites like the Karla and Ajanta caves were huge in size, vaulted, and profusely carved, the Kuda caves were shorter in height, with a

chaitya attached to the roof, and *chhatris* schematised and carved suggestively into the ceiling. On the basis of these features, and overall style and aesthetics, the Kuda caves were considered a minor site by art historians. However, despite the caves lacking great artistic feats and a grand plan, they remain significant in other ways, such as through their coastal location and the epigraphic evidence they present.

The inscriptions in the Kuda caves mention a variety of patrons. Donations were mainly made by people belonging to four groups – royalty, merchants, craftspeople, and members of the monastic community. However, it is interesting to note that a significant number of these donors were female, as no other sites have shown this feature. A second unusual feature at Kuda is the use of 'hippocampus', an Eastern-Mediterranean design feature, which involves mixed-animal figures. The inscriptions begin with a hippocampus, such as a lion head and a fish tail, followed by a message in Brahmi. Interestingly, the same hippocampus and use of Brahmi is found on the coins of the Mahabhojas as well, thus aiding in the dating of the caves and helping resolve the debate on the chronology of the rulers. It also reveals a Greco-Roman influence due to trade at the seaports on the western coast of India.

Thus, Bhandare concludes that the Kuda cave complex cannot be referred to as a minor site. The scholar believes that an inter-disciplinary study using four main methods – the content of inscriptions, the palaeography of inscriptions, coins, and the architectural style of the caves – unveils the importance of the Kuda site. - **M.M.**



Dr. Shailendra Bhandare speaks during 'The In-Betweeners: Trade and Patronage in 1st Century CE - The Case of Kuda-Mandad'

South Asian Painting



Portrait of a Bird, Bikaner, dated VS 1842 / CE 1785, 20 x 16.5 cm. The work of Sahibadin, son of Abu. Opaque watercolour on paper

“Even when works are of a very small size, they convey a sense of monumentality.”—Daniel Ehn bom, video interview, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies.

The South Asian Painting course makes its way through a constellation of exquisite works on paper produced in northern India from the 16th century onwards. Ranging in size from a few inches to a few feet, the paintings are often mistakenly referred to as ‘miniatures’. Intimate yet monumental, quiet yet pulsating with life, worldly yet spiritual, these paintings have delighted viewers for centuries by allowing them a glimpse into a magical world. With their prices sky-rocketing, such works are the darlings of the art market, boosting the reputation of both, renowned and anonymous artists.

The course will introduce the key terms and concepts that are essential to an understanding of South Asian painting. It will provide an overview of the methods employed in the examination of such works, and discuss scholarship that has defined the field. The value attached to these paintings in previous centuries—they helped their patrons realise spiritual goals, visualise and sustain royal identity, and so on—and by the unpredictable demands of modern-day collectors, will be compared.

This will be accomplished while analysing iconic examples of manuscripts, series, and stand-alone works on paper. The aim of the course is to help students learn how to look at South Asian painting, and to familiarise them with the approaches that may be employed in their study.

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Rajput Painting: Concepts and Realities

New Dates To Be Confirmed Soon | Daniel Ehn bom (Associate Professor of Art, University of Virginia)



Leaf number 13 from a dispersed series of the Bhagavata Purana. Krishna slaying the wind demon. Opaque color and gold on paper. Sub-Imperial Mughal style at Bikaner (?), Rajasthan, India, c. 1600 CE. Private Collection, USA.

The serious study of Rajput painting began in the early 20th century with the path-breaking work of A K Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) but except for his scholarship it languished until the period after Independence. Then discovery followed discovery and scholars scrambled to establish order in this new visual world. Theories were proposed, promoted, and sometimes abandoned. Questions of the relationship of Rajput painting with Mughal painting were central to its understanding—was it part of a continuum with the Mughal style or was it oppositional? The course surveys the history of the study of Rajput painting and its implications for our understanding today of its many styles.

Day 1:

Session I: Coomaraswamy's 'Main Stream' of Indian Painting and a Ground-Level View of the 16th Century
Session II: 'True Miniatures', 'Old Fangled Notions', and The Search for Order in the Post-Independence Study of Indian Painting

Day 2:

Session I: A History of Costume or a History of Painting?
How to look at the Pre-Rajput and Rajput Schools of the 16th and 17th Centuries

Session II: An Embarrassment of Riches: The Post-Independence Discoveries of Rajput Paintings and the Growth of Knowledge

Day 3:

Session I: Simplicity of Narrative(s) in the 16th Century: 'Rajput' (And Other) Painting and Embodiments of Stories

Session II: Complexity of Narrative(s) in the 16th Century: 'Rajput' (And Other) Painting and Illustrations of Texts

Day 4:

Session I: The 'Main Stream' Continues: Overt and Covert Manifestations of Compositional Forms

Session II: The Paradox of the 18th Century: Things Fall Apart and Things Come Together – Political Multiplicity and Aesthetic Convergence

Day 5:

Session I: A Final Flowering and a New Aesthetic Order: Patrons Old and New, Transformed Technologies and Another Way of Seeing

Session II: The Market, the Collector, and the Museum: How the Marketplace Inflects 'Knowledge'

CRITICISM & THEORY



Apnavi Makanji | Untitled - Significant Other | 2018 | Courtesy Vadehra Art Gallery

JPM's Criticism and Theory offerings include (1) a Certificate course in Aesthetics, Criticism, and Theory as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) an ongoing series of public seminars and lectures in Indian Intellectual Traditions; and (3) occasional academic conferences and workshop in these fields.

Aesthetics, Criticism & Theory

FORTHCOMING PROGRAMMES

Module I - Foucault and Aesthetics

September 15th - October 14th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Dr. Arun Iyer (Assistant Professor - Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay)



Michals, Duane. *Magritte*, 1965. Gelatin silver print with hand-applied text. Courtesy: DC Moore Gallery, New York

The course is an introduction to the conceptual relationship between painting and photography and the questions it raises for the role of art in our time through the works of a 20th century thinker most attuned to it. Comprising of eight to ten lectures over one month, it will juxtapose Foucault's discussions of the artists Manet, Kandinsky, Klee and Magritte and photographers Duane Michals and Gerard Fromanger with the discussion of their work by major art

historians.

The course will deal exclusively with original texts, looking at the major essays by Foucault on these painters and photographers that have already been translated into English in addition to untranslated interviews and short essays from his collected works *Dits et Ecrits* (Speeches and Writings).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



JPM's Community Engagement offerings include occasional public lectures and performances in Creative Processes, Curatorial Processes, and Iconic Images as well as book launches, concerts, film screenings, and panel discussions on topics of interest to Mumbai's and India's general public.

PAST PROGRAMMES

Dancing Women: Choreographing Corporeal Histories of Popular Hindi Cinema

December 20th, 2019, 6:30 pm | Usha Iyer (Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies program, Department of Art & Art History, Stanford University)



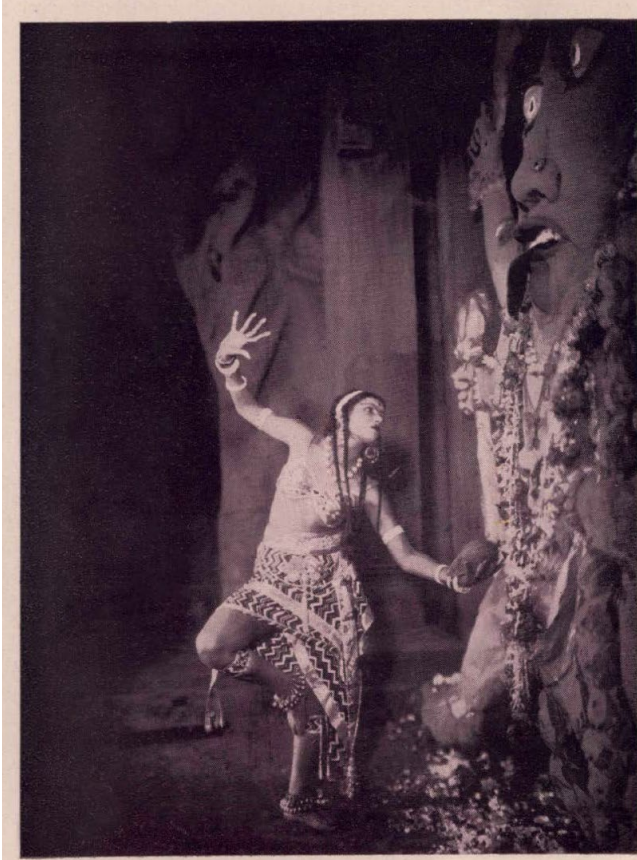
Prof. Usha Iyer speaks during 'Dancing Women: Choreographing Corporeal Histories of Popular Hindi Cinema'

Indian cinema, or 'Bollywood' as it is popularly referred to, saw a vast variety of themes being highlighted in the 1940s. It was during this period that characters like the dancing girl became pivotal to the plots of several films.

On an evening at Jnanapravaha, Usha Iyer, Assistant Professor of Film and Media studies, Department of Art and Art History, at Stanford University, examined the corporeal history of these dancing women, facilitating a better understanding not only of what Indian cinema has to offer but also of what modernity looked like in a new, dynamic nation where cinema was still developing.

Now the biggest film industry in the world, Indian cinema is as diverse as its tradition of stories is plentiful. And although it was initially a predominantly male fraternity, feminist criticism within the field has though progressed as well. It was women like Sadhona Bose and Azurie, who were the first female dancer-actors of Indian cinema, who not only moulded the

definition of '*Bhadra Mahila*' or 'gentleman lady' into its more modern form, but also inculcated the trend of dancing in movies at a time when the activity was considered to be of the 'uncultured class' (a phrase used by The Indian Cinematograph Committee).



Azurie in *Bal Hatiya* (Ram Daryani, 1935)

Prof. Iyer spoke about Sadhona Bose, a dancer who played prominent characters in the films of the '30s, and who paved the path for upper-middleclass women to venture into the professions of dance and theatre. Bose represented women at a time when the country was in the throes of anti-imperial reforms. She pushed the boundaries of creativity with her enchanting dance, self-composed music, costume designing and various other skills. She succeeded in making her mark in the history of talkies, but also suffered the fear of backlash from a society that was conservative in its approach towards female performance artists.

Although Bose was able to draw the audience's attention to herself directly, highlighting her name proudly in the opening credits of a film, not all received the privilege of this acknowledgement.

Besides the lead dancer-actor, there was another character from the dance fold who emerged in the movies of the '30s and '40s: the vamp. This dance character played a small but significant role in film plots. Most vamps either remained uncredited or were generically credited as the 'dancing girl'. Azurie, who was from a mixed-race family, was one such

dancer unlike her contrary Sadhona Bose she was not privileged with the elite race but dexterity. Although she didn't play a '*Bhadra Mahila*', the characters she portrayed provided the crucial turning point in film plots.

These female performers not only changed the populist way of moviemaking in mainstream Indian cinema but also exerted their influence on the production of films, determining the choice of music composers and music artists hired. Their dance moves dictated cinematic techniques, camera movement, music, and its expression, especially during song-and-dance sequences.

In her study of dance-centric films, Iyer paid particular attention to dancers and how they used their bodies. She speculated on the specific movements of their eyes, head, limbs and torso. This framework of body zones contributed to a corporeal understanding of women's presence in films. Given the political and social changes of these periods, the films also provided a window into globalisation and other societal shifts that occurred before the more-commonly researched period of the 1990s.

Usha Iyer's talk took us on a journey across the newly emerged Indian talkies, using a feminist lens which highlighted how women defied the societal confinement of the time to embrace the art of cinema, which few had realised would become the potent instrument of modern performance art it is today.

-D.J.

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Announcements

POSTGRADUATE COURSE IN INDIAN AESTHETICS

July 2020 – April 2021

Typically Saturdays, 1:30 – 5:30 pm



Portrait of Raja Budh Singh of Bundi on Horseback. Jodhpur, c.1820. Opaque watercolour on paper. Jnanapravaha, Varanasi.

Introduced in 1999, Jnanapravaha Mumbai's academic year-long Postgraduate Diploma/ Certificate Course in Indian Aesthetics (IA) examines the development of visual forms in historical and discursive context. Crossing the disciplines of art history, archaeology, architecture, anthropology, literature and philosophy, the course treats roughly 5,000 years of Indian visual art and aesthetics, encompassing premodern, modern and contemporary forms, as well as popular traditions. IA scholars comprise internationally renowned academics who ensure that the visual material presented is broad-based geographically, historically, culturally, and materially. Over the years, in keeping with JPM's mission, the programme has evolved to include subjects of current research.

For admission, you are required to submit:

A copy of your last degree certificate and two passport-sized photographs.

Fee structure:

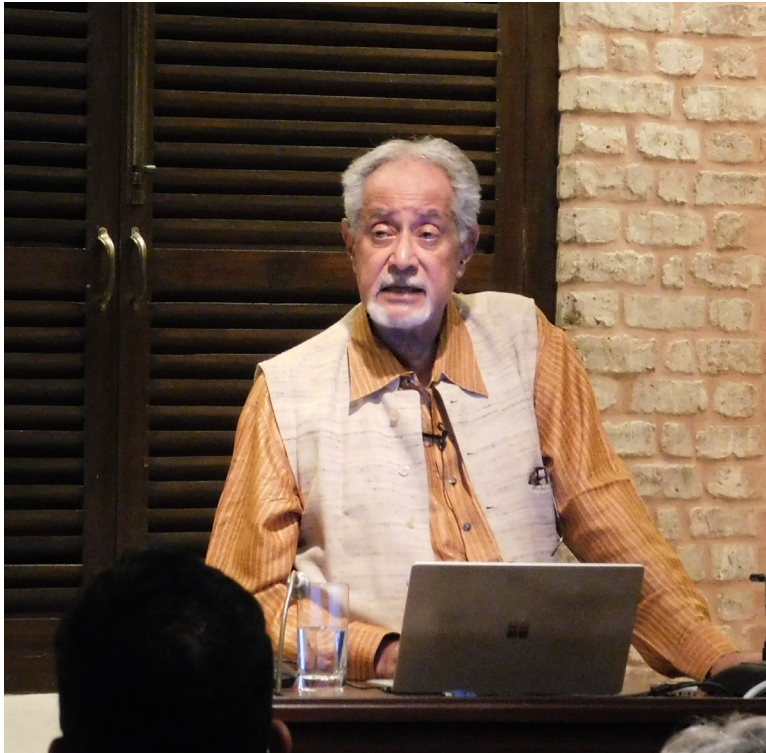
Diploma (writing and attendance) – Rs. 40,000

Certificate (attendance) – Rs. 30,000

SLANT/STANCE

Theory & Practice of Imperialism: Locating The British Raj

February 20th, 2020, 6:30 - 8:30 pm | Zareer Masani (Freelance historian, journalist and broadcaster)



Dr. Zareer Masani speaks during 'Theory & Practice of Imperialism: Locating The British Raj'

One way to measure the resurgence of imperialism has been to conduct a Google Ngram metadata search of the words “empire” and “imperial.” If we track their usage over the past fifty years, what we see is: starting in the 1960s, when decolonization reached its climax, “empire” and “imperial” appeared with far greater frequency than they would do over the next couple of decades. The 1970s and ‘80s show a steep decline. But the trend lines began to turn upward again in the 1990s, and from 2004 there has been postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, the new imperial history, settler colonial studies, the British World, etc . According to one historian, all this transformed a once tranquil, even stagnant, backwater into a stormy, turbulent sea.

The historian John Darwin recently observed, “There has never been a better time to study the history of empire—or write about it.” That’s because the study of imperialism has become multi-disciplinary, bringing together

specialists in history, anthropology, area studies, feminist studies, and, above all, literary studies.

This brings me to postcolonial studies, which I’d like to focus on at the start because it’s sometimes seen as the antithesis of imperial history. There have been objections by historians to the teleological implications of the tag post-colonial, but its evocation of an anti-imperialist political stance and a poststructuralist theoretical one has ensured its usage. The use of “postcolonial” derives from the conviction that colonialism didn’t end with the winding up of colonial empires but continued in areas like race, gender, class, language, literature and art. According to the postcolonialists, the dismantlement of Western modes of domination requires the deconstruction of Western structures of knowledge.

The founding father of postcolonial studies was the late Palestinian American Edward Said, with his critique of Orientalism, or the study of the East by the West. In addition, postcolonial theorists have drawn on the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, French structuralists Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Raymond Barthes, Francois Derrida and Franz Fanon, the psychologist Jacques Lacan and more recent authorities like our very own Homi Bhabha at Harvard and Gayatri Spivak at Colombia. Conspicuously absent from this postcolonial canon is Karl Marx himself, because his work is considered far too Eurocentric. This might seem ironic given that most of the names just cited have never exhibited much intellectual curiosity about non-European peoples.

A major hallmark of postcolonial studies has been its exaltation of critical theory, as against the empirical, factual, chronological concerns of traditional history. And this in turn has involved the use of a distinctive theoretical use of language that deters not just the lay reader but many academics too. It has been argued in Bhabha’s defence that his prose is a deliberate strategy to disorient the reader, to prevent “closure” and thereby subvert the “authoritative mode” of Western discourse. That’s a claim also made by Gayatri Spivak, whose prose is even more difficult than Bhabha’s. Bhabha, Spivak and most postcolonial theorists make use of words, expressions, concepts and doctrines from many different, sometimes incompatible, sources.

Criticism of such language has not been confined to historians. For example, the feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter complains that the “difficult languages of high theory . . . have become a new orthodoxy as muffling as scholastic Latin, expressive straitjackets which confine all thought to a prescribed vocabulary.”

Often postcolonial studies has been creating a language all its own. So the word “metaphor” has metastasized into metaphoricity, narrative into narrativity, origin into originary, fact into facticity. One critic tongue-in-cheek recommended a Devil’s Dictionary of Cultural Studies to make its terminology accessible to the uninitiated.

The strategy adopted by the postcolonial theorists is to subject the language of the colonizers to critical scrutiny, deconstructing representative texts, and exposing the discursive designs that underlie their surface narratives. This is seen as undermining the hegemonic influence of Western knowledge and bringing about the “cultural decentering of the [European] centered world system.” Bhabha, for example, presents his work as an effort to turn “the pathos of cultural confusion into a strategy of political subversion.” Its intent is to escape from the totalizing claims of the West.

For postcolonial purists, history is nothing more than a text, a grand narrative that operates according to the same rules of rhetoric and logic as other genres of Western writing. As such, its significance is limited to the part it plays in the discursive field that the postcolonial critic seeks to dismantle, rather than in the contribution it makes to our knowledge of colonialism.

Suspicion of history as an accomplice to the West’s drive to dominate the Other is a constant motif within postcolonial theory. Edward Said’s position is an ambiguous one, professing on the one hand the importance of the history of Orientalism, while suggesting on the other hand that the discipline of history is itself implicated in Orientalism. Gayatri Spivak praises the subaltern studies group for engaging in what she regards as the deconstruction of a “hegemonic historiography” and then urges them to break from the premises of historical analysis altogether.

The cultural critic Ashish Nandi denounces historical consciousness as a “cultural and political liability” for non-Western peoples. In *The Intimate Enemy*, his best-known work, Nandi proclaims his aim to present “an alternative mythography which denies and defies the values of history.”

This view of history as a mythography, concocted by the West to further its hegemonic ambitions, is at the core of the postcolonial critique. For historians who have come under the influence of postcolonialism, this attack on history has occasioned considerable hand-wringing. Some younger members of the subaltern studies school of Indian historiography have agonized about whether it is possible to write history when “Europe works as a silent referent to historical knowledge itself.” This is a real epistemological problem, and one can sympathise with the struggle to reconstruct history from a non-Eurocentric perspective. But the efforts of the postcolonial purists are directed against a historical mode of understanding altogether.

What happens when history is set aside? Some examples of postcolonial scholarship suggest that it usually leads to a neglect of causation, context and chronology. One of the worst examples is David Spurr’s *The Rhetoric of Empire*. Subtitled “Colonial discourse in journalism, travel writing and imperial administration,” this book insists that the same discursive forms recurred over more than a century in the diverse genres of writing that Western travellers, officials and other observers produced about profoundly varied peoples across the globe with whom they came in contact. In this “global system of representation,” it seems to make no difference whether the rhetoric is British, French or American, whether the author is Lord Lugard, Andre Gide or Joan Didion. Following in the footsteps of Derrida, Spurr tracks this all the way back to writing itself. “The writer,” he says, “is the original and ultimate colonizer, conquering the space of consciousness with the exclusionary and divisive structures of representation.”

We might ask Spurr whether he too is complicit as a writer in this colonization of the mind and whether these imperial implications of writing also apply to the literatures of non-Western societies. Spurr’s analysis seeks to convict historically specific parties of historically specific crimes while exonerating itself of any accountability to historical specificity. Having your cake and eating it? A less polite judgement has been disappearing up one’s own rear end.

Most dismaying of all is a tendency to essentialize the West, a practice no less distorting than the West’s

alleged tendency to essentialize the Orient. In Said's *Orientalism* and much of the scholarship it has inspired, the West is seen as an undifferentiated, omnipotent entity, imposing its totalizing designs on the rest of the world without check or interruption. This vision of the monolithic power of the West neglects how that power was actually exercised in the colonial context, ignoring the variety of its many expressions. It fails to appreciate the uncertainties, inconsistencies, modifications and contradictions that accompanied the West's efforts to impose its will on others. Marxist-inspired critics in particular have taken postcolonial theory to task for ignoring what they call "the microphysics" of colonial power.

Some postcolonial scholarship is, of course, capable of more subtle treatments of the West and its widely varied imperial agents and aims. Javed Majeed's *Ungoverned Imaginings*, for example, shows that Sir William Jones, James Mill, Edmund Burke and other British interpreters of India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries constructed profoundly different versions of the Orient to serve profoundly different purposes, often directed as much towards Britain as they were to India. Monolithic conceptions of the West and its intentions have also been found unsatisfactory by many feminist scholars, finding that the facade of a homogeneous ruling elite obscures and stereotypes the role of white women, of the familiar, much maligned Mem Sahib.

As Professor Jenny Sharpe, literary theorist at UCLA, observes: "The notion of a discourse that is traversed by an omni-functional, free-floating power breaks down any distinction between relations of domination and subordination"—by which she has in mind in particular the conflict that confronted white women as members of both a dominant race and a subordinate gender. Sharpe argues that such distinctions are essential for making sense of the ambivalent positions of memsahibs, poor whites and other subordinate or marginalized groups within white colonial society. Parallel studies of the social and political construction of masculinity in the service of empire also show how it was used as a complex marker of racial and ethnic difference.

What of the subject peoples on whom empire most impacted? Gayatri Spivak insists that the voice of the colonized subject, and especially the colonized female subject, can never be recovered—it has been drowned out by the oppressive collusion of colonial and patriarchal discourses. Others are appalled by this abandonment of the effort to recover the "subaltern" or colonial subject's experiences. They complain that postcolonial theory denies agency and autonomy to the colonized, whose struggles against colonial rule and strategies to turn it in their favour are dismissed as mere echoes in the chambers of Western discourse. One critic, Professor Sara Goodyear at Yale, complains in *The Rhetoric of English India* that postcolonial theory "names the other in order that it need not be further known," and that its practitioners "wrest the rhetoric of otherness into a postmodern substitute for the very Orientalism that they seek to dismantle."

There are signs, nevertheless, that some practitioners of postcolonial studies have begun to back away from such theoretical purism. Even Edward Said himself later warned against viewing the West and the rest as essentialized dichotomies. He retreated from his earlier position regarding the pervasiveness of Western power by examining the work of Yeats, Fanon and other voices of cultural resistance to that power. What Said's choice of them signifies is postcolonial theory's continued obeisance to its literary roots, with its privileging of canonical authors.

What, then, does postcolonial theory still offer to British imperial history? With its mind-numbing jargon, its often crude essentializations of the West and the Other as binary opposites, and, above all, its deeply ingrained suspicion of historical thinking, one might well wonder if it has anything to offer. For all its faults, this body of scholarship has inspired some valuable insights into the colonial experience. It has reoriented and reinvigorated imperial studies, taking it in directions that the conventional historiography of the British Empire had hardly begun to consider.

For example, although the struggle to "tame" the tropics was regarded as a struggle against its physical maladies, we now accept that colonial doctors and others who took up the task tended to associate their endeavours with the agenda of the colonial state. The influence of British scientific institutions and the systems of knowledge they promulgated cannot be understood without reference to their relationship with imperial power. The connection now seems unequivocal in the case of nineteenth-century disciplines like geography and anthropology, which established their claims to scientific legitimacy in the service of empire.

All this has raised provocative, often fundamental questions about the epistemological structures of power and the cultural foundations of resistance, about the porous relationship between metropolitan and colonial

societies, about the construction of group identities, even about the nature and uses of historical evidence itself. The result has often been to reassess Europe's impact on the rest of the world—and the reciprocal effects on Europe itself—by shifting the focus from the material to the cultural realm. The contribution of postcolonial theory to this effort lies first and foremost in its appreciation of the relationship between knowledge and power. Said's central premise, derived from Foucault and embraced by other postcolonial theorists, holds that the imperial power of the West was bound to and sustained by the epistemological order the West imposed on its subject domains. Of course, imperial historians have attended to the issue of power from the very beginning and produced a sophisticated body of work that traces the exercise of power from coercion to collaboration. The fact remains that the circumstances that allowed relatively small contingents of Europeans to acquire and maintain authority over vastly larger numbers of Asians, Africans and others present one of the most persistent conundrums in the study of Western imperialism. The postcolonial theorists have opened up a new and intriguing avenue of inquiry into this problem. They have argued that discursive practices of domination were every bit as expressive of power relations as the more conventional manifestations of those relations in politics and the economy.

Our understanding of the nature and impact of colonialism has been profoundly reconfigured as a result, and at the heart of this reconfiguration lies the postcolonial premise that the categories of identity that gave meaning to colonizers and colonized alike can never be taken for granted: they must constantly be problematized and presented in the context of power.

By presenting a case for understanding the construction of cultural difference as a reciprocal process—we define ourselves in the context of how we define others—postcolonial theory has insisted that the metropole has no meaning apart from the periphery, the West apart from the Orient, the colonizer apart from the colonized. The dominant party in these pairings has its own character shaped by the shape it gives the character of the other. This is certainly the most significant contribution that postcolonial theory has made to the study of colonial practice. , Postcolonial theory, then, has contributed to the task of recovering the connection between the history of Britain, for instance, and the history of its imperial dependencies—in effect, of putting Humpty-Dumpty back together again.

Let me now turn to imperial history itself and its important revision from the 1960s onwards by another strand that sometimes complements the postcolonial approach, sometimes not. I'm thinking of the work of British historians Jack Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, expressed through their contribution to the hugely influential and monumental *Oxford History of the British Empire*, published in 1998.

The term that Robinson and Gallagher have stamped into the imperial historian's vocabulary is that of "informal empire." They were concerned far less with official policy and political ideology than with the material interests that motivated both administrators and local elites. Reacting against a kind of reverse Whiggism that regarded the British imperial experience in the twentieth century as a story of inexorable decline, Gallagher proposed in his posthumously published Ford lectures that the retreat from empire was actually reversed during the Second World War and for some time thereafter until the Suez Crisis. The insistence that the imperial will did not fail with Indian independence, that the determination to cling to global power continued well into the 1950s, is traceable in large measure to the challenge that Gallagher and Robinson posed to the conventional chronology of the imperial retreat.

For Robinson and Gallagher, the history of British imperialism would be the history of the empirically observed interactions between the British and indigenous peoples. *The Oxford History of the British Empire* reflects this reorientation, much of it devoted to the imperial encounter in particular regions and colonies, acknowledging the important role that local elites played in determining the specific shape and trajectory of colonialism in their territories. This approach coincided with the rise in the 1960s of a new interdisciplinary initiative, namely area studies, which were unequivocally interested in the indigenous side of the story and provided the linguistic training and other skills needed to understand the new states and their inhabitants.

The concepts, themes and concerns raised by Robinson and Gallagher, along with the methodological contributions of area studies, give new polish to the old silver and have done much to advance our understanding of the empire over the past forty years. It is hardly surprising that *The Oxford History of the British Empire* does not share the subversive views of postcolonial critics about its own intellectual premises and practices. The single issue most obviously dividing them is the importance *The Oxford History* gives to the state as an

autonomous agent of historical change. For *The Oxford History*, the modern nation-state is both the product of the empire and its repudiation, with a dialectical relationship between the two.

More recent imperial history has focussed on the transformation of imperialism into what we now refer to as globalization: it stresses the erosion of national autonomy, the proliferation of hybrid identities and the intensification of racial, ethnic and religious divisions. All of these developments are seen as the result of the fevered movement of peoples, goods and ideas across the globe by routes and mechanisms that had their origins in the world system established by the British Empire and its counterparts. Perhaps the most compelling criticism of these new studies of imperialism is that they focus mainly on the cultural dimensions of empire. Critics have objected to their neglect of the material manifestations of imperial power, the economic, political, and military might the British wielded and their enemies envied.

All this raises the question: WHY EMPIRE? Until the 20th century, empire was the default mode of governance for peoples as diverse as the Comanche Indians in America to the Mikado in Japan. Arguably, the driving forces behind empires were pressures towards economic globalisation and specialisation, free trade and law enforcement across large spaces and military defence against barbarian invasions. Empires could be seen as the international equivalent of Hobbes's Leviathan, the sovereign power that protects us from living in a state of war by exercising a monopoly of violence. That, of course, did not prevent imperialist wars when empires were expanding and colliding with each other.

Empires tended to be based on some form of technological and military superiority. So the ancient Assyrian empire was based on a multi-ethnic charioteer army, which could move at unequalled speed. Ancient Egypt also adopted chariot technology. In India, the discovery of elephants as war machines far superior to chariots led to the rise of empires big enough to afford them. The result was the Mauryan empire.

The imperial power of Ancient Rome was based largely on superior military organisation, with its multinational army of centurions, with the world's first officer corps and highly disciplined legions. Arguably, it collapsed due to barbarians being allowed to enter the gates as mercenaries with their own regiments under their own leaders.

The arrival of gunpowder weaponry was important in the rise of both the Chinese & Russian empires. The role of European rifle training with speedy re-loading was also crucial in creating human machine guns and winning Indian wars against far larger armies. Introduced first by the French under the Marquis Dupleix, this was perfected by Robert Clive.

The Assyrian empire was based on three essential elements: a bureaucracy, law and market prices. The Romans, Chinese & British followed suit. In India, the East India Company's predatory band of harpies in the 1760s were eventually converted into incorruptible public servants, based on the Company's decision to train its servants and later to introduce open competitive exams.

Empires also required excellent communications, but this could prove a double-edged sword, as it did with Rome's famed roads making it easier for barbarians to invade Rome. Empires also needed a lingua franca like Latin, English or Mandarin Chinese.

The main positive results of empires were peace, longevity, secure property rights, greater prosperity and a common economic space. Indeed, Roman law remains the basis for property rights in much of the world.

The British empire was not only for long the largest in the world, but also the most recent, so its reputation is the most contentious. But Britain was more liberal, culturally, economically, socially and politically, than other major European powers.

In practice, imperialism varies widely. It did not necessarily entail territorial rule, and we see concepts such as "informal empire" and "soft power" dating back to Machiavelli and still applied today to the United States. There are also clear differences between land empires and those with overseas colonies. It is unhelpful if critiques are transferred from one empire to another, as if there were few contrasts between them.

For India, the emphasis tends to be on the 170 years under British rule and not on earlier periods when we

were the base for other imperial powers such as the Mughals. This chronological focus is at the expense of what could be gained from a longer time span and the comparative consideration it would allow. Imperial history is far too complex for such “end-loaded” analysis.

Comparative consideration would allow us to look at the important distinction between Western empires, notably that of Britain, and those in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries of the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals and Manchu. With all its faults, the British empire arose in the context of modernity and the Enlightenment, coming with promises of the rule of law, participatory governance and individual freedom to at least some of its members. These ideas subsequently spread in their area of power with the abolition of slavery and the spread of parliamentary democracy.

Imperial Britain competed in both Europe and overseas with rivals whose rule was often far harsher than Britain's. This was particularly true of Britain's leading role in opposing the genocidal imperialism of Nazi Germany. The enemy in World War I, the Kaiser's Germany, also followed policies in East and South West Africa far harsher than those of Britain, so did the Belgians in the Congo. The brutality used by the Italians in the 1920s and '30s to suppress resistance in Libya and conquer Ethiopia, or by the Japanese in Korea and even more so in China, were far worse than any British equivalent.

Did imperialism end with Western colonialism? Not really. Our own Kashmir insurgency, for example, can be seen as classic opposition to Indian imperialism. Indian policy towards Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal can also be treated as imperialist at different times since independence. In Nepal, where India symbolically took over from Britain its former embassy, we Indians are regularly criticized for intervening in the imperious manner of the Raj. Pakistani commentators have long regarded Indian influence in Afghanistan as imperialist, a process encouraged during the Cold War by Soviet alignment with India. Echoes can still be heard of expansionist Mughal policies in Afghanistan and the Himalayas in the seventeenth century.

So we Indians denounce British imperialism and then defend our own conduct in Kashmir; and the Chinese do the same over Tibet and Xinjiang, both earlier conquests by the Xing dynasty, and threaten Taiwan too. What such examples demonstrate is that the choice for most of the world, both historically and to some extent even today, has not been between empire and non-empire. Instead, the choice, generally, has been between rival empires. Thus, areas such as Khorasan in Persia and western Afghanistan were repeatedly contested between the Safavids, the Uzbeks and the Mughals in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The question for them was “which empire?” and not “whether empire?”

Take the Spanish success between 1519 and 1521 in winning large-scale local support in Mexico against the harshness of the Aztec empire. Britain similarly expanded in South Asia into areas previously ruled by empires or, in some cases, such as Tipu Sultan's Mysore and the Maratha Confederation, by proto-empires. Even in our remote north-east, the choice in areas such as Manipur in the early nineteenth century was between British or Burmese expansionism. In northern Malaya, the choice was British, Burmese or Thai expansionism, and the threat from the latter two led to the British presence being welcomed into Penang in 1786.

There is a belief today in the right to national self-determination of all peoples and in the sovereignty of nation states. There is also a misleading tendency to apply this belief historically. Take Italy, for example, where the national myth entails the idea of “lost centuries” of foreign rule before Italian unification was achieved in the nineteenth century Risorgimento. These lost centuries are often approached as if there was a clear Italian national alternative. There was not and may not be even today. The alternative to imperial rule in Italy by Spain was frequently that of France or Austria. Even the Risorgimento could be seen as the conquest of southern by northern Italy, resented and resisted in the 1860s and still a fault-line in Italian politics.

The fact is that, across much of the world, there has been little sense of national identity for most of history. Moreover, in many areas, particularly cities, there was no ethnic homogeneity, but a variety of ethnic groups. This variety can be seen as contributing greatly to multi-national empires, rather than them simply incorporating areas each of which had coherent national populations.

The Ottomans, for example, were the ruling dynasty of an empire it would be highly misleading to describe as Turkish. The Ottoman empire was one in which ethnic groups were mixed, especially in cities like Alexandria, Smyrna (Izmir), Salonica, and Constantinople. Such cities contained large minorities of Armenians, Greeks,

Jews and Kurds.

For minorities like the Copts in the Middle East and the Jews of Mitteleuropa, empires ruled by the Ottomans and the Habsburgs were far more benign than the ethnically based nation-states that succeeded them, with often violent ethnic cleansing. An equally harsh example might be the plight of East African Indians under Idi Amin once British rule ended.

One reason why empires arouse so much scholarly interest at present is because they are seen to embody a wealth of experience in the management of multi-ethnic difference and diversity, particularly relevant to our own era of globalisation and migration.

Nation-states are no more necessarily “good” or “bad” than empires, and their treatment of dissent can be even harsher. Take for example the history of Cambodia over the last century. French rule versus that by Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge? The latter does not excuse the former, but it provides a context for judgments.

Imperialism operates as a catchall phrase for the external imposition of power, although external, imposition and power are all subject to varied understandings and usage.

With all these caveats, let's now focus on the British Empire in India, the jewel in Britain's crown. Adam Smith saw the British empire as a waste of money. But his admirer, the historian Niall Ferguson, thinks otherwise. “No organisation in history”, he says, “has done more to promote the free movement of goods, capital and labour than the British Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And no organisation has done more to impose Western norms of law, order and governance around the world.” Ferguson argues that 19th century economic globalisation required empire to enforce the rule of law, efficient monetary and fiscal systems and un-corrupt bureaucracies across the world and to encourage cross-border capital flows and trade.

Why was this process led by Britain? Possibly because the English tradition of constitutional monarchy was the first of its kind and a major economic guarantor. English trade originated in C16th Tudor piracy, which translated into naval supremacy and exploration. England became the world's first mass consumer market fuelled by trade in sugar, tea & tobacco. After 1689, England also incorporated modern finance from the Dutch.

Britain, according to Ferguson, came closest to providing an ideal growth & development model, with private property as the basis for saving & investment, legal rights of contract, personal liberty for the individual, stable, rule-based government, responsive, honest bureaucracy and low taxes.

let's see how many of these virtues were practised by the Raj in India in its different incarnations. We all know the stories of Clive's conquests and plunder, but less about the administrative reforms of his second term, when the poacher turned gamekeeper and tried to stamp out corruption.

His successor, Warren Hastings, plundered far less and instead patronised Oriental Studies and encouraged scholars like the great Sanskritist Sir William Jones, Sir Charles Wilkins, who first translated the Gita into English and invented Bengali typeface, and Sir Henry Colebrooke, the expert on everything from Maths to Hinduism. Jones founded the Calcutta Asiatic Society in 1784, and it went from strength to strength, with its Bombay sister, rediscovering our Mauryan heritage and deciphering its forgotten language. Hence our ability to date Ashoka and read his edicts.

A familiar myth is the idea that the East India Company was a rapacious private multinational. Under the 1773 Regulating Act passed by the British Parliament, the East India Company became a public-private partnership, with its half-yearly reports and Bengal revenue accounts having to be laid before Parliament. Both Clive and Warren Hastings were subjected to highly detailed parliamentary enquiries, Hastings to a 7-year impeachment trial, at the end of which he was acquitted. Led by Edmund Burke, the Hastings trial is unique as an act of self-criticism in the annals of any empire I can think of.

Pitt's India Act of 1784 set up a Government Board of Control, superseding the Company's own directors and including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, another Secretary of State & four Privy Councillors. It was agreed that future Governors-General should be independent of the Company and appointed by the Crown.

Henceforth with one or two exceptions they would be peers of the realm.

Under Clive and Warren Hastings, the Mughal administration had continued much as before, but their successor, Lord Cornwallis Europeanised the higher administration. Contrary to public perception, it was a myth that all Company servants became rich nabobs. Of a sample of 645 civil servants who went to Bengal in the late C18th, more than half died in India, an incredibly high casualty rate. Of the 178 who returned to Britain, around a quarter were far from wealthy. (Ferguson)

The Act of 1784 forbade the Governor-General in Council to make war or conclude a treaty likely to lead to it, the idea being to avoid territorial expansion. But the Marquess of Wellesley openly ignored this policy. Many of you will be familiar with his Mysore Wars against Tipu Sultan, which vastly expanded the Company's territorial power. Wellesley claimed to have been encouraged by humanitarian concerns. He said: "I can declare my conscientious conviction that no greater blessing can be conferred on the native inhabitants of India than their extension of British authority, influence and power."

Clearly a mission to civilise, expressed here. In practice, he had been motivated at least as much by fear of the French, Britain's main rival for global super-power status. Napoleon had been closely allied with Tipu, who had cheerfully offered him half of India if they evicted the English. Even after Tipu's defeat and death, there was a threat of Franco-Persian invasion in 1808.

So referring back to my suggestion about one empire or another being the real choice for many regions of the world, with no real national alternative, there's a real possibility India might have ended up French instead of British.

Lord Grenville's speech for the 1813 Bill renewing the East India Company's Charter clearly set out the goal that British Crown sovereignty should be exercised in both Indian and British interests. The Act simultaneously ended the Company's trading monopoly & the ban on Christian missionaries. It set aside an education budget of **£10,000** (half a million today), small by today's standards. But British education was even further behind India's, with no public grant till 1834.

The first three decades of the C19th have been characterised as a period of enlightened despotism in British India. Wellesley, his successor, the Marquess of Hastings, Sir John Malcolm, Governor of Bombay, Sir Hector Munro of Madras, Sir Charles Metcalfe, Mountstuart Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, & Governor-General Lord William Bentinck all sincerely believed in what Wellesley described as a "sacred trust".

Munro constantly stressed the importance of training Indians for the highest jobs, and Malcolm did so too. Their views were recorded less in public declarations and more often in private correspondence and diaries, so far less likely to be dishonest. For example, on 17 May 1818, Lord Hastings wrote in his diary: "A time not very remote will arrive when England will, on sound principles of policy, wish to relinquish the domination which she has gradually and unintentionally assumed..." Elphinstone, who did much to encourage vernacular education, pointed to a pile of Marathi books in his tent as being "to educate the natives, but it is our high road back to Europe." It was a theme he constantly reiterated. And our own Elphinstone College is of course named after him.

The next phase of the Raj turned into an era of utilitarian reforms. It was led by Bentinck, first as Governor of Madras and later as Governor-General. He was aided by Thomas Macaulay as Law Member of his Council. From the 1830s on, the Bentinck administration famously legislated against female infanticide, then widespread in Rajasthan & UP. It also acted against thuggee, with about 3,500 thugs arrested and half hanged. And most important of all, it legislated against suttee. Between 1813 to 1825, about 8,000 suttees had been recorded in Bengal alone. Some Brahmins appealed unsuccessfully to the British Privy Council against Bentinck's law making suttee culpable homicide.

You will all be familiar with Macaulay's westernising impulse. In 1838, despite Macaulay's famous Minute, there had been only 40 English-medium seminaries under the Bengal Government. By the 1870s, Macaulay's vision was being rapidly realised with 6,000 Indians in higher education and 200,000 in Anglophone secondary schools.

As the corollary to this education policy, Bentinck had resolved to reverse Cornwallis's ban on Indians in senior administration, and this was reflected in the 1833 Charter Act. In practice, it took another 30 years, because exams were initially only held in the UK. In 1863, Satyendranath Tagore, from the elite, Anglophone Calcutta family, became the first Indian to qualify for the ICS.

Bentinck's successor, Lord Hardinge, continued the campaign against female infanticide and persuaded many native princes to follow his example. His advice to his officers was: "Settle the country, make the people happy, and take care there are no rows." The motto of his successor, Sir John Lawrence, was: "Thou shalt not burn thy widows, kill thy daughters, bury thy lepers alive."

Finally, on the eve of the Mutiny, for which he is often blamed, came the economic and social reforms of the dynamic Lord Dalhousie. To tackle famine, he extended the Grand Trunk Road from Lahore to Peshawar, with much trade increased thereby. He had already been active in railway building at home in Britain and now launched India's first rail line. The first branch of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway was built from Bombay to Thana in 1853. A telegraph system was established between Calcutta, Madras, Agra & Peshawar, and a half anna post was established across British India, giving a great boost to newspaper circulation.

Dalhousie was enthusiastic about building new canals, for both irrigation and commerce. He aimed at unifying India, hence his controversial annexation of princely states where possible. His Act of 1856 legalised the remarriage of widows. Under him, caste distinctions were removed in trains, jails and courts of law.

Dalhousie went home before the backlash against some of his reforms. The Mutiny of 1857 has been much misunderstood by both sides as being a racially motivated war of independence, but it was essentially a feudal and religious backlash against the modernisation policies of evangelical Governor-Generals. It was led by Brahmin Sepoys of the Bengal Army, with the Bombay and Madras armies hardly affected, while the Sikhs and most princes supported the Raj.

Clemency Canning's policy of reconciliation after the revolt had been suppressed was supported by the Queen herself. India's three first universities were founded at the height of the Mutiny in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. The Charter Act of 1833, as we heard, had already opened all offices to Indians in theory. These measures combined to produce a new class of Western-educated, middle class Indians, who would increasingly demand a larger share of real power, first at the local and eventually at the Pan-Indian level. The future Congress leader, Dadabhai Naoroji, was representative of this new class, dubbed Macaulay Children. Their demands were met, at least initially, with resistance from the colonial bureaucracy.

India was also rapidly industrialising. This was a process which saw a provincial, UP cantonment town like Kanpur emerging as an industrial centre described as the Manchester of the East. Victorian India saw huge British investments in cotton and jute, coal mining and steel. Of 168,000 Brits in India in 1931, 60,000 served in the army and police, 4,000 in civil govt and as many as 60,000 in the private sector, patronisingly dubbed Boxwallahs by the bureaucracy.

What of the old drain theory first championed by Naoroji and still echoed today? The actual economic drain measured by trade surplus amounted to little more than 1% per annum of net domestic product between 1868 and 1930, compared with the Dutch draining 7 to 10% from Indonesia during the same period. There were also major flows in the opposite direction. By the 1880s, British private firms had invested £270 million in India (**£18 billion today**), and by 1914 this had increased to **£400 million (£24 billion today)**.

Irrigated land increased 8 times over. By the end of the Raj, a quarter of all land had been irrigated, compared with just 5% under the Mughals. On the industrial side, the coal industry had risen from scratch to producing nearly 16 million tons a year by 1914. During the same period, jute spindles increased 10 times. Life expectancy increased by 11 years, with consequent population increases. On the debit side, the Raj conspicuously failed to bring about an agrarian revolution, with its commitment to laissez-faire economics. But there was some very modest improvement in agricultural productivity, with the village economy's share of total after-tax national income rising from 45% to 54%.

The Mutiny marked a watershed in the policies of the Raj, with a growing emphasis on status trumping race, with the Raj turning away from the educated, rising middle class elites on whom Macaulay had pinned his

hopes and seeking to appease the feudal elites after the Mutiny. Under the Utilitarians, India had been seen as requiring reforms. Under the so-called Ornamentalists or Tory-entalists, it was seen as a model of hierarchy to be maintained and reinforced.

It involved a division of labour summed up by this report from the new Private Secretary to the Maharaja of Mysore in 1903: "His Highness on young shoulders carried a head of extraordinary maturity, which was however no bar to a boyish and wholehearted enjoyment of manly sports.... He also had the taste and knowledge to appreciate Western music as well as his own... We meanwhile got to work, cleared out the slums, straightened and widened the roads, put in a surface drainage system leading into the main sewers that discharged into septic tanks, provided new quarters for the displaced population, and tidied up generally."

Tory-entalism reached its climax under Viceroy Lord Curzon, but his predecessor, Lord Lytton, was the first to pin his hopes on India's feudal nobility. His administration placed huge emphasis on social precedence. The Warrants of Precedence issued in 1881 consisted of no fewer than 77 separate ranks.

The Ornamentalists often overemphasised caste distinctions, misunderstanding caste as being similar to British social hierarchy. They tried to make English-style country squires out of Indian zamindars. This was reflected in the world of literature too, especially with Kipling & his cult of the village.

Lytton was responsible for the Great Durbar of 1877 soon after Disraeli's proclamation of the Queen as Empress of India. But Curzon far surpassed Lytton in his 1903 Coronation Durbar for Edward VII, which some wits termed "Curzonisation".

Ornamentalism was also reflected in grandiose Indo-Saracenic architecture. It reached its climax at the Coronation Durbar of 1911, attended in person by George V and Queen Mary.

Curzon found Simla too British suburban for his grand tastes and thought the Viceroy's Lodge odiously vulgar. He shunned Bengali Babus, as he termed them, and the Indianisation of the ICS declined under him. His dislike of the so-called Babus was partly responsible for his unsuccessful Bengal partition. His aim was to reduce the power of the troublesome Hindu Bhadrak, with their never-ending political demands, by giving the Muslim masses a majority in a province of their own. This resulted in terrorism from disaffected educated elites and ended in re-unification, until we divided it again for ourselves in 1947.

Curzon's decision to move the viceregal capital to Delhi was a corollary to his Tory-entalism. Its grand style was reflected in Edwin Lutyens's New Delhi. Coincidentally, Lutyens had married Lord Lytton's daughter and declared that he felt very feudal in India. New Delhi became the architectural symbol of Tory-entalism. One inscription on its walls admonished Indians: "Liberty does not descend to a people. A people must raise themselves to liberty. It is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed."

It has been argued that a major factor fuelling India's embryonic nationalist movement was Curzon spurning Macaulay's Children in favour of the Maharajas. But it all began much earlier with a row over who should judge whom in the law courts.

The appointment of a liberal, new viceroy, Lord Ripon, in 1880 had been controversial because of his progressive views. Even the Queen had warned her ministers about his "weakness", as she termed it. Ripon and his Law Member Ilbert drafted a Bill giving Indian magistrates the right to try Europeans in criminal cases. This was no longer an academic issue, now that more Indians were reaching senior judicial positions. A racist "White Mutiny" forced Ripon to compromise by including the option of white defendants facing an Indian judge to be tried by a jury which would be at least half Anglo-American.

One of the leaders of the anti-Ilbert agitation was a British, Calcutta-based business magnate who declared: "The education which the Govt has given them {meaning Indians} they use chiefly to taunt it in a discontented spirit. And these men now cry out for power to sit in judgement on and condemn the lion-hearted race whose bravery and whose blood have made their country what it is and raised them to what they are."

The Indian National Congress, founded by these educated ingrates with the support of English radicals in the UK, aimed partly to appeal to Westminster over the heads of the Government of India. It was an aim

symbolised by Dadabhai Naoroji's election to Parliament as a Liberal candidate facing tough Tory opposition.

Looking behind the nationalist rhetoric, Jack Gallagher, adopted a similar approach as the eminent historian of C18th England, Sir Lewis Namier. Gallagher has analysed the Congress platform as embodying a pork-barrel approach to local politics, more about the distribution of loaves and fishes than about ideology.

Lord Ripon himself saw the introduction of local self-govt, with elected Indian corporators, as the 1st step towards wider democratisation. The Congress was accordingly welcomed as a loyal opposition by him and his successor, Lord Dufferin, and by various provincial governors. In a development ominous for the future, growing majoritarianism by Congress alarmed many Muslims, whose numbers fell to as few as 17 out of a total of 750 delegates.

Hence the origin of the Muslim League, founded in 1906 as a voice alongside Congress, rather than in opposition to it. Its demand for Muslims to have separate electorates for reserved seats in elected bodies was incorporated into the Morley-Minto reforms of 1908, which allowed for a large proportion of Indians in provincial legislatures. Under the Lucknow Pact of 1916, adopted by a joint session of Congress and the League, the former accepted separate electorates, while the Muslims gave up their right to vote in general constituencies as well. It's often forgotten that the League then backed the Congress demand for Dominion Status for a united subcontinent, & the League's up and coming leader, the young Jinnah, actively campaigned for the Congress-led Home Rule League.

In an attempt to placate Macaulay's Children, a liberal education grant was announced at the Coronation Durbar. Morley had closely consulted the then moderate Congress President, G K Gokhale, about his reforms. Gokhale had impeccable Edwardian credentials & even stayed at the exclusive Reform Club when in London. When in 1905 George V asked Gokhale if the Indian people wanted the Raj to continue, Gokhale replied: "If a plebiscite had been taken 20 years ago...they would have answered almost to a man: 'Yes, certainly!' Today however large numbers would say they were indifferent."

One reason for this disaffection, as Jack Gallagher has pointed out, is that growing financial stringency for the Imperial Government led to more state intervention in local franchises, causing local factions to resist by banding together in larger, more nationalistic groupings. Gallagher regarded this as the greatest long-term threat to the Raj's future.

Initially at least, the outbreak of World War 1 appeared to have launched a new era of collaboration between the Raj and its critics. Here's our very own M K Gandhi, then still one of several aspiring Congress leaders, commenting on the outbreak of war in 1914:

"We are above all British citizens of the Great British Empire. Fighting as the British are at present in a righteous cause for the good and glory of human dignity and civilisation...our duty is clear: to do our best to support the British, to fight with our life and property." In 1915, the Government responded by awarding Gandhi the Kaiser-i-Hind medal for his services in the war effort.

But Indian cooperation was accompanied by Congress demands for provincial power and dominion status. The August 1917 Declaration by the Home Government for the first time agreed on the goal of responsible government for India within the Empire. The Liberal Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu was warmly received in India during his tours in 1917-18.

The outcome was the so-called Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, which Gallagher characterises as a shrewd plan to divert Indian politicians from the national to the provincial level. The 1919 Act introduced the interesting constitutional experiment of dyarchy as a first step to Dominion Status. At the provincial level, dyarchy transferred safe portfolios like education and local government to elected ministers, while reserving law and order to the Governor's appointees. The majority of legislators in both the provinces and the Imperial legislature at Delhi were to be elected. A Chamber of Princes would be set up as a step towards unifying the 540-odd princely states. But there was still no timetable for that elusive goal of responsible government at the Centre.

The World War had, meanwhile, been both a unifying and radicalising experience for Indian nationalism. By its

end, more than a million Indian volunteers had served abroad, making up as many as a third of British forces in France. This had exposed them to new, liberal and even socialist political ideas.

About 2.5 million Indian troops in all were mobilised in the war, with the Indian taxpayer paying for most of their use abroad. Military expenditure accounted for more than 40% of the overall Government of India budget in 1920. But the success of the 1919 Reforms needed more financial resources transferred to the provinces to keep the politicians happy. Not surprisingly, Indian constitutionalists were opposed to the use of Indian resources abroad, and a resolution to that effect was passed by the Central Legislature in 1921.

By this time, Irish nationalism and the Dublin Easter Rising of 1916 had had a considerable impact on Indian public opinion. The Irish theosophist Annie Besant headed the Indian Home Rule League, which united leaders as disparate as Naoroji, Tilak & Lajpat Rai, and was considered extremist, going further than Congress, which thought the Home Rule demand premature.

Gandhi had initially welcomed the 1919 reforms with some qualifications. But his response changed dramatically after the Amritsar Massacre, which ironically catapulted him to unrivalled Congress leadership and led to his Non-Cooperation campaigns of 1920-22.

Despite their limitations, the 1919 constitutional reforms gave more powers to Indian political elites, especially by more closely linking up the provincial and local government arenas. The result was that, even during the 1920 Non-Cooperation movement, Congress allowed participation in local government.

The Calcutta Corporation had especially huge patronage, with an annual revenue of 2 crores (about Rs 92 crores today). Such financial patronage often took priority over national civil disobedience, and the Bengal Congress only reluctantly complied with civil disobedience in 1920. Much of the later ideological rivalry between its Subhash Bose faction and the Gandhians derived from more material considerations.

Despite Gandhi's boycott, the Indian Liberals led by Sir C Y Chintamani cooperated with the 1919 reforms, entered its legislatures and took office as ministers, on the grounds that boycott would harm Indian interests. Dyarchy undoubtedly produced some positive results. The Central legislature repealed repressive legislation such as the Press Act and the Rowlatt Act, India joined the League of Nations, the first Indian governor, Lord Sinha, was appointed in Bihar, and political organisations generally became more broadbased to fight elections.

When Gandhi withdrew non-cooperation in 1922, moderate Congressmen like Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das formed the Swarajya Party and returned to the legislatures. The Swarajists formed a powerful bloc demanding a Round Table Conference to decide on the long-desired Dominion Status, which in effect meant sovereign status under the British Crown.

The British government responded with the Simon Commission, to enquire into further constitutional advance. Though boycotted by Congress, it recommended full provincial autonomy with a federal centre including the princes. Another very Liberal Viceroy, Lord Irwin, told the Calcutta Association: "We would...make a profound mistake if we underestimate the genuine and powerful meaning of nationalism that is today animating much of Indian thought, and for this no complete or permanent cure has ever been or ever will be found in strong action by the Government."

In 1930, Irwin delegated the Indian Liberals, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru & M R Jayakar, to negotiate peace with Gandhi and the two Nehrus, then in jail, but the talks fell through. Nevertheless, thanks to Irwin, a Round Table Conference to be held in London was announced, and the UK Labour Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald stated its goal to be Dominion Status. It was an offer which caused as great division in the UK as in India.

Although the Tory leader Stanley Baldwin supported it, the veteran Liberal Lloyd George was opposed, as were Churchill and other Tory diehards. While the Congress boycotted the 1st Round Table Conference of December 1930, the Liberals and Muslim League participated. Representing the princes, the Maharaja of Bikaner announced: "The passion for an equal status in the eyes of the world is the dominant force among all thinking Indians today". The Nawab of Bhopal announced the willingness of the princes to join a federation if responsible government were introduced at its Centre. Muslim delegates were encouraged to think princely influence would curb Hindu majoritarianism.

In the event, opposition, mainly from Churchill, delayed the prospect of a new Act granting responsible federal government in 1933. Churchill had switched from supporting Dominion Status in 1917 as a Liberal to opposing it as a Tory by 1930. He was particularly incensed by Gandhi being given a major role by both Irwin & Macdonald. In an echo of Curzon's Ornamentalism, Churchill argued that the Government was alienating its own natural supporters in India, and he dubbed the Gandhi/Nehru Congress a Brahmin oligarchy, for whom other castes and communities were being deserted.

Much Tory opposition led by Churchill was fuelled by rising economic tensions through the 1930s between the Lancashire lobby at Westminster and the Delhi Government, who were imposing new tariffs on British textiles to keep Bombay millowners happy. The Indian textile industry was booming, thanks to the Government's new protectionism and the Swadeshi campaigns.

Irwin had finally arranged a truce with Congress in the spring of 1931, to enable Gandhi to call off civil disobedience and attend a second Round Table Conference. When Gandhi confided in Irwin that Nehru was berating him for selling out, Irwin said he was under similar pressure from Churchill. Summing up British aims, Irwin later said:

"They realised that the choice lay between power...and influence, which, if we could use it aright in the changed conditions of the C20th, would serve us better. And they knew that, of the two, influence was the more securely founded and the more enduring."

India's business community was now very hopeful of a settlement. The Welfare of India League founded in July 1931, under president Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas, and with the business community's backing, aimed to act as a bridge in promoting Dominion Status. The Gandhi-Irwin Pact, as it came to be known, was opposed more by the Congress left than by the official class. Gandhi insisted on going to London as the sole representative of Congress. The Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Hoare ruminated: "How am I to obtain his (G's) invaluable help in the making of the Constitution without turning against me not only the Moslems and the untouchables, who regarded him with unconcealed suspicion, but the many Conservatives who still viewed with doubt and dislike the changes that I believed to be necessary for India?"

It was nevertheless the beginning of a close friendship between the two men, "shown by many letters, all of them written in a beautiful flowing hand, that continued until his tragic death." They were truthful with each other, to the point of bluntness. Hoare offered Gandhi responsible government, but not immediate Dominion Status. Gandhi insisted on full control of defence and foreign affairs, but not formal independence.

The communal question dominated the conference, with Gandhi and Ambedkar implacably opposed over separate electorates for Dalits. This emerged as the main obstacle to federation. Churchill, still in opposition, proposed keeping provincial autonomy, while indefinitely postponing a decision on the Centre, which is pretty much what happened. The Government tried to break the deadlock by announcing it would issue its own communal award if Indian representatives wouldn't agree. The result was the Macdonald Award of August 1932.

The Round Table Conferences were an opportunity for a united India, lost thanks to diehards on both sides. Gandhi returned to India still willing to talk to the new Viceroy Lord Willingdon, but the latter insisted on him first disowning Congress protests, so he was re-arrested and civil disobedience resumed, eventually petering out in 1934.

The proposals of the three Round Table Conferences were embodied in a Bill, which had to be watered down thanks to parliamentary opposition from Tories like Churchill and Lord Salisbury. Even so, the 1935 Constitution embodied full responsible government in the provinces, enfranchised 30 million voters, held out the promise of federation if 50% of the princely states agreed, and met the Muslim aim of a United States of India with strong provinces.

It's often suggested that better handling on both sides might have resulted in federation, before it became impossible during World War 2 and before any serious Pakistan demand. Even so, the Congress fought elections, won majorities and accepted office in 7 provinces under the new Act in 1937, and its nationalist ministers got on remarkably well with their colonial governors for the next two years.

In 1939, after the Viceroy's declaration of war, his prerogative, his negotiations with the Congress proved unsuccessful, the Congress ministries resigned and autocracy returned, except in Muslim-majority Punjab, Bengal and Sind. Matters were not helped when Gandhi backed the Vichy regime, then collaborating with Hitler in France, and advocated surrender by the British after Dunkirk.

Lewis Amery, Secretary of State for India in the British War Cabinet, was still committed to the goal of Dominion Status. In 1940 came the August Offer from Viceroy Linlithgow to expand his Executive Council if the Congress agreed to join. It was turned down, although V P Menon later wrote that acceptance and a return of Congress provincial ministries would have tilted events towards Congress. Rajaji offered to bring Congress round if the Government agreed to a national government with a Muslim League Prime Minister. The offer was declined as impractical.

In the course of the war, Churchill's opposition to Dominion Status was overcome partly by American pressure and partly by his own growing respect for the Indian Army, now numbering a colossal 5 million. Pressure from Chiang Kai-Shek, Roosevelt and Sapru was offset by growing communal tensions. While Hindus were seen as pro-Japanese after Bose's defection, conciliating Congress was seen as antagonising loyal Muslim troops.

Nevertheless, the Cripps Mission of 1941 offered to create a dominion with the right to secede, which would also be granted to individual provinces and princely states. The Labour politician Stafford Cripps's Congress links made him unpopular with Muslims, but his open manner and frequent broadcasts made him and the negotiations widely popular. Rajaji backed his plan, Nehru vacillated and Gandhi rejected it, repeatedly calling the Nazis the nemesis for Britain's colonial exploitation.

World War 2 has been described as a Pyrrhic victory for Britain, which sacrificed its own empire to stop Germany, Italy and Japan from keeping theirs. The war required huge new spending on the Indian Army, but under the London-Delhi agreement of 1940, the Government of India would only pay for Indian defence. There was political pressure not to divert resources from the provinces & provoke opposition. By 1942 British expenditure on Indian Defence had quadrupled to £150 million (**£5 billion today**), but Delhi was paying less than half that. By 1942, India was estimated to be spending less than 3% of British war expenditure. Given the very immediate Japanese threat to Calcutta, India seemed to be getting imperial defence at bargain prices. As a result, by 1945 India's sterling balances had reached the colossal sum of almost £1.5 billion (**£54 billion today**).

Because Viceroy Linlithgow had been on very friendly terms with Gandhi, he felt personally let down by the Congress's Quit India resolution, hence his precipitate arrests of the entire Congress leadership. The Quit India movement was effectively suppressed in one month. In 1943 the new viceroy, Lord Wavell, agreed to let bygones be bygones, and Amery reiterated the Cripps offer, made during adversity in the war, but reiterated after the tide had turned. But Gandhi stuck to his majoritarian demands. And so matters staggered on till 1945, when Britain made its final effort to broker a Congress-Muslim League compromise with the Cabinet Mission.

Far from wanting Partition, all the evidence is that Britain saw its long-term strategic interests as requiring a friendly, united India with the world's largest standing army. Its generals and military planners were particularly horrified by the prospect of Partition splitting the Indian Army. All except the last viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, who arrived with a lifelong fondness for acceleration. And the rest is history.

A final word. We've travelled an enormous distance at great speed, from Clive to Mountbatten. But returning to where we began, my purpose has been to encapsulate the importance and complexity of historical context and chronology, as opposed to critical theory alone, in analysing empire in its many changing facets.



Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Isfahan, Iran

We know we have made a difference. Our endeavour to encourage and facilitate pedagogy meaningfully continues with the firm belief that the humanities are indispensable to the well-being of the community and the individual.

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