

namely that history should not be written backwards" (p. 13), that the fact that the princely states met their extinction in 1947 did not mean that they were doomed right from the beginning of the century, Copland sets about to save, if not the rulers, then at least their place in history: "The *maharajas* have been maligned and marginalised by the historical profession to an absurd degree. It is time the record was put straight." (p.8). In his sympathy for the princes and their *darbars*, in his attraction towards the orientalist discourse (which does not lose its charm for the author, though he himself hints at the way it was instrumentalised by the princes, p. 27 and 276), in the weight he attaches to persons and personalities, Copland evidently feels at home in the atmosphere of the Political Department in the 1930s and 1940s. Like the officers of the Political Department, he tends to underestimate the growing power of the nationalist movement and, specially, the Congress. It does not require the advantage of hindsight to claim that the chances for the states to preserve their political culture intact when surrounded by an independent Republic of India, pledged on democratisation and even socialism, were not very high. Copland, however, affirms that the military force and economic power of the States would in themselves have enabled them to hold their own, if they had but stood together. It certainly would be very interesting to have some more elucidation on this thesis, as up to now, historians have tended to maintain the contrary and the only occasion when the army of a State was put to the test, the so-called Police-Action against Hyderabad in 1948, ended in quick disaster.

The main emphasis of Copland's study lies on the detailed rendering of the discussions of the Chamber of Princes, of the Round Table Conferences and of those held by the Princes, ministers and British among each other. Every phase of these debates is drawn so painstakingly that the reader is sometimes in danger of losing the thread. However, he can derive consolation from the fact that, at times at least, he seems to share this fate with the protagonists themselves. Without suggesting an undue simplification of intricate matters, the study might perhaps have gained in clarity by regular summaries - a form of hindsight which should certainly be permitted to the historian.

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THOMAS R. METCALF: *Ideologies of the Raj*. (The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. III.4). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. XII, 244 pages, 13 illustrations, £ 30.00 / US\$ 49.95. ISBN 0-521-39547-X

The decision of the editors of the New Cambridge History of India to divide the 18th and 19th century into Christopher Bayly's volume on *Indian Society*

and the Making of the British Empire and the present one on the *Ideologies of the Raj* might have tempted some scholars to deal with the British way of legitimising their Indian empire as part of a traditional history of ideas. Thomas Metcalf, however, succeeds brilliantly in integrating the British worldview, their changing perceptions of Indian history and society with the conditions imposed by their desire to stabilise their rule over the sub-continent. Like Bert Brecht's literary figure Keuner, who, when falling in love, created a picture of the beloved person and then tried to make him correspond to this picture, the British worked hard at getting a consistent picture of India. As this picture - marked by innumerable villages, a caste-bound society, the overall importance of religion - informed the central political decisions of the British, perception began to change reality.

Right from the beginning British ideology was marked by two apparently incompatible, different lines of thought. The first was based on liberal universalism which assumed that all human beings were endowed with a fundamentally similar nature. Even if presently dissimilar - and for the colonial power this could but mean inferior - to the British way of thinking, their Indian subjects could always hope for change and progress in the future.

The conservatives on the other hand, and their thoughts were shared by many of the authoritarian liberals at the end of the 19th century, perceived the differences to be enduring: no amount of education and evolution would ever be able to bridge the cleavages created by climate, history and race. With dexterity Metcalf shows the background of both the assumptions and relates them to the contemporary British discourse. At the same time he demonstrates in how many ways these apparently so distinct discourses were interwoven with each other in historical reality, how much the efficacy of the British ideology depended on contradictory arguments being used in different situations and their contradiction never being explicitly stated.

In a fascinating chapter on gender history, Metcalf shows how the construction of the British male character, valiant, strong and honest, needed the counterpart of female characteristics in the 'conquered races'. Between these two poles stood the British Memsahib - repository of the female virtues when creating a domestic haven for her husband, "she had also in practice to enact within the bungalow a role similar to the one her husband played outside - that of a masculine assertion of ordering rationality in the face of an India where disease and disorder raged unchecked" (p. 110). The Indian national movement for its part reinterpreted the division between masculinity and femininity, laying the emphasis on the virtues which so far had remained a preserve of British ladies. Thus perceived, the female East was no longer cowardly, weak, sensual and deceitful, but - and the propagators of these ideas were, of course, the Theosophical Society and, later

on, Gandhi - the repository of moral force, the guardian of spirituality and the ultimate redeeming power.

The value of a research work lies not only in the insights it provides, but perhaps even more in opening new vistas and provoking new questions. Metcalf does both to an amazing extent. Right at the beginning he states his intention to limit the scope of his work to the British ideology and excludes the "Indian response" (p. XI). But can these two be separated? Did the ideology really develop independently of an Indian response? In two or three places Metcalf himself drops hints on the role of the Brahmin informants in the British perception of the Indian past and their understanding of the system of law (p.11f.; p.137). Might it be possible one day to elaborate these hints into an "eccentric idea of imperialism" (Ronald Robinson) in the field of ideology, which takes into account the local factors in the formation of ideas in like manner as in the establishment of empire?

Legitimation of government always points in two directions: on the one hand, the ruling group needs to convince itself that it is not just exercising power but is entitled to do so. On the other hand, no government can hold sway permanently by power alone, but must evoke some belief in its legitimacy among its subjects. This second aspect of the ideology of empire can certainly not be treated without taking into account the facts of colonial power. But even taking in to account the asymmetry of relations between ruler and ruled, isn't it possible to describe the development of this aspect of ideology as a dialogue?

This leads to the second set of questions: Metcalf's book is about perceptions and the way they influence policy. However, the relation between British perceptions and Indian reality - of which their informants and dialogue-partners would form an important aspect - sometimes tends to elude one. Metcalf penetratingly explains how the perception of India as a land of heat and diseases and the British response of constructing hill-stations fits into the creating of a difference and the marking of distance. But perhaps factual temperatures and death-rates can inform actions just as validly as ideology? Of course experiences have to be interpreted by the actors to lead to meaning, but nevertheless the actual experiences limit the range of the possible.

Notwithstanding these remarks, Metcalf's book will remain a landmark in the history of ideology for many years to come.

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