God Trusts the British in the Dark
Visual Diplomacy of the British Raj

by

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Preface

My family is composed of two very different types of Indian. Both of these types figure in especially important ways over the course of the following narrative.

The first type of Indian can be summarily described as anglophile, while the second type embodies the kind of Hindustani lifestyle that conscientiously rejects the pull of British influence. Anglophiles of my family are represented par excellence by my paternal grandfather Rattan Chand Lai who, in his prime, donned suits fabricated by tailors of London’s famed Savile Row, was called to the Bar at Lincoln’s Inn in 1937, and eventually returned to India bearing a DPhil from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. Having outfitted and educated himself in the image of an archetypal English gentleman, Grandpa Rattan bore a glossy sheen of intellectual and sartorial distinction throughout his life. As he underwent this thoroughly transformative process of anglicization, Grandpa Rattan expunged himself of all that which, to him, bespoke the tendencies of his Indian heritage. As such, he articulated himself in English and French rather than in Hindi, wore double-breasted suits rather than a traditional kurta pajama, ate basmati rice and maa ki daal with silver cutlery
rather than with his fingers, and did not pay serious heed to the superstitions of Hinduism. Rather than celebrating the social traditions of Hindustan, Grandpa Rattan exalted a pantheon of British idols, with special respect paid to the figure of Sir Winston Churchill, and looked up to the most distinguished Britons with a mix of admiration and determination. Ever the fiercely competitive spirit, Grandpa Rattan strove to incarnate a more comprehensive and unadulterated image of British elegance throughout his life than highfalutin Britons managed to embody. The most vivid visions of Grandpa Rattan, striding through Mayfair with his brown skin and British ideals, have persistently come to my mind as I write of anglophiles at the time of the Raj. 

On the other hand, the Lai family counts among its members Indians who retained their pride in uniquely Hindustani cultural traditions and eschewed British social norms. These thoroughly Hindustani Lais, at the time of the Raj, made a concerted effort to wear *saris* and *kurta pajama*, favored Hindi and Punjabi over English, ate basmati rice and *maa ki daal* with their fingers and prayed to one of many Hindu deities on a weekly (if not daily) basis. These family members, the prototype of whom was my maternal great-grandmother Sarasti Dovedy, come
vividly to mind whenever I write in this project of those Indians who fended off British cultural influence while holding tightly to their Hindustani ideals.

As it so happens, the cultural tension between anglophile and Hindustani embodiments within my own family can be seen reflected in India’s social composition as a whole, both at the time of the Raj and today. In 2015, nearly seven decades after Independence, the nation still contains Indian anglophiles who live as incarnate vestiges of the hybridized Anglo-Indian culture of the Raj. At the same time, modern India contains Hindu nationalists, including a massive, coordinated cadre of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) members, who steer Indians towards belief in notions of social progress that contain very little tolerance for colonial sympathy (or pro-Muslim opinion, for that matter). In this sense, when Indians go to the polls to choose leaders that reflects the nation’s ideals, millions are faced with a choice between two types of Indian: the anglophile of Grandpa Rattan’s ilk or the Hindustani idealist of Sarasti Dovedy’s. In the most recent election, the nation favored ex-RSS standout Narendra Modi over Rahul Gandhi, heir apparent of a political dynasty that came to power in league with the Lords and Ladies of the Raj. Following this landmark election, it
seems as though the nation is trundling forth towards superpower status while sinking the legacies of anglophiles past.

In the interest of utmost candor, I must admit that, had I been alive at the time of the British Raj, I would have been brazenly anglophile just like my Grandpa Rattan so exemplarily was. I would have then (and perhaps to some degree have now) eschewed Indian traditions in favor of modeling my self-image on that of those grandiloquent Britons, like Lord Curzon, who ruled India with posh glamour and sprezzatura.¹

Having admitted to this persuasion, I dare say that the most personally intriguing aspect of this project has been my study of the British Empire’s symbolic allure in connection to the Indian anglophile ethos. As I’ve delved into images displaying contact between British authority and Indian identity over the course of the narrative, I feel as though I’ve unselfconsciously resuscitated certain historical figures, including Grandpa Rattan, Empress Victoria, and Viceroy Curzon. I have seen, through my imagination of their quintessential

¹ According to Baldassare Castiglione’s The Book of the Courtier, sprezzatura is defined as “a certain nonchalance, so as to conceal all art and make whatever one does or says appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it” (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 32.
British perspectives, how colonial control in India was both wrought and perceived.

Ultimately, the grip of historical vicariousness that I've sensed over the course of my visual and postcolonial analytical endeavors has been captivating. As I write about, read about and look at the iconography of the British Raj, I have been able to see, in my mind's eye, what it felt like to be Viceroy George Curzon living in Calcutta at the turn of the century, what it felt like for Queen Victoria to endure her latter years in the constant company of a loyal Indian manservant, and what my Grandpa Rattan would have thought of how I've portrayed the Raj's Indian anglophile elite. I can only wish that all three of these figures, Victoria, Curzon and Rattan, would be able to detect at least a glimmer of truth to the claims that I make over the course of the following narrative.

And now, having articulated a sort of literary pushpanjali² to that trinity of idols from a time gone by, I begin.

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² Pushpanjali is an offering of flowers made to Hindu Gods, usually used as a salutation to the musicians and audience in a classical Indian dance performance
Introduction: “How is the Empire?”

Images of India range from depicting the grotesque to dramatizing the gorgeous, from etching the uncouth to sketching the unbelievable, from portraying the patrician to painting the paternalistic, and from visualizing truth to rendering falsity. Admittedly, the inherent dynamism of India’s centuries-old visual history is nothing short of extraordinary.

Inextricably entwined with the rich diversity of India’s enduring visual culture is the multifaceted course of India’s social history, stretching from the Gangetic tradition of the Indus Valley Civilization in 3300 BCE to the BJP-led, relentlessly progressive iteration of modern India in 2015. Over this series of millennia, Indian people and their images have been dominant and dominated, victorious and victimized. Tracking this constantly active narrative, images of India recount the nation’s history with vivid color and a vast aesthetic vocabulary, depicting all that India is and was with visible self-awareness.

One abundantly significant moment in modern Indian history is the epoch of the British Raj, a period emerging in the aftermath of the Uprising of 1858 and lasting until Partition in 1947. Over the course of this period, India was uncritically subject to the socioeconomic and political paramountcy of the British Empire
and then, as the influence of the Raj waned in vigor, India began to liberate itself from the controlling yoke of extrinsic dominion. A period of seismic social transition, the British Raj era saw India go from embracing the patrician reverence of anglophile Indian opinion under the thumb of the Raj regime to harnessing the burgeoning legitimacy of the 
\textit{vox populi} that rose in intensity as India surged toward self-rule. The iconography of the era, richly diverse in its portrayal of the colonized and colonizing realities that characterized the Raj’s ebb and flow, garners meaningful symbolic value to this day. By studying key examples of British Raj iconography that manifestly show the formative and reflective aspects of British rule in India from the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century to the incipience of the 20\textsuperscript{th}, this thesis hopes to create original analytical value at the intersection of postcolonial theory and visual culture.

The study of visual imagery is as much focused on the semiotics of image creation as it is occupied with theories of visual response. This bidirectional analysis of visual culture is invigorated by the fact that imagery is powerfully evocative material that has moved people throughout history to tears, laughter, and elicited nearly every dramatic trope in between. From pre-history to
modernity, people of all stripes have placed ardent faith in symbols, “give[n] thanks by means of” pictures and sculptures and, at times, “expect[ed] to be elevated by [images]… to the highest levels of empathy and fear.” This evocative quality of imagery is timeless, as people “have always responded in these ways; they still do.” Images are, on essential and personal levels, integral to who and what we are.

At its core, given its fundamental relevance to the human condition, the visual is inherently social. Some visions, like Thomas Rowlandson’s depiction of orthodox Hinduism’s funereal tradition of sati in “The Burning System Illustrated” (Figure 1, see “Illustrations,” p. 122), have the connoted potential of giving humanity a unique awareness “of our kinship with the unlettered, the coarse, the primitive, the undeveloped… because they have psychological roots that we prefer not to acknowledge.” In this sense, certain images have the power to evince precisely that which we ideally prefer to sublimate and inter, but which nevertheless rears its gruesome head in raw, unaltered form from time to time. In contrast, other images, like that of a young schoolgirl dressed as Mother India

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
waving the Indian flag in celebration of Republic Day (Figure 2, p. 122), have the ability to act as symbols of hope that cast “a brilliant light… on a potential that for many of us remains to be activated.”\(^6\) Depending on both the viewer and the visual material itself, images can either be glorious renderings that inspire the activation of untapped greatness, or they can garishly give form to ideas of destruction and poverty that might be better off left invisible. Composed of psychologically and aesthetically evocative colors and shapes, images possess the potential to affect culture insofar as they vividly invigorate that which, for better or for worse, would otherwise remain an unrepresented figment of the imagination. To harness both the formative and reflective power of images, then, is to exert both defining and confining influence over such “complex assemblages of virtual, material, and symbolic elements.”\(^7\)

On both symbolic and literal levels, images, particularly when elevated to iconic social status, can be used to inform and foment cultural change. Nevertheless, the task of creating an iconic image requires the harnessing of immense sociocultural and artistic capital. In addition, the socio-artistic process

\(^6\) Ibid., 161.

that leads to the creation of iconic imagery begs an acute understanding of the way in which the intended viewer responds to visual representations of power and submission, for example, or other stylized themes of iconography. In this sense, the proficient creation of iconic imagery requires the image creator to have intimate knowledge of the target viewer’s biases and beliefs regarding the iconized subject at hand. As private and particular as the viewer’s proclivities might be, the image creator need know the inner mechanisms by which the target audience can be expected to respond to certain representations of a given idol. On a basic level, both artist and viewer must understand and feel the evocative power with which favorite images abound in order to craft an image of iconic value.

This interrelationship between the image creator and image viewer’s attempt at mutually sensing the iconic value of iconography serves as a critical analytical link between visual studies and postcolonial theory. For example, the kind of image analysis that investigates both the inner and outer workings of a certain iconographic aesthetic substantially mirrors the investigative project of a materially focused postcolonial theory that analyzes how legacies of colonialism and colonial heroes are memorialized. In this sense, postcolonial theoretical
analysis of the way in which both colonizers and colonists imaginatively render the influence that famous authority figures have on fabricated, hybridized cultures is tightly interwoven with a study of the evocative and socio-visual significances with which iconography teems.

At their analytical essences, some of the most preeminent postcolonial theories formalize the link between colonist and colonizer as “a relationship of power, of domination, [and] of varying degrees of a complex hegemony.” In a similar way, visual study of iconography often concentrates on the perceived hegemony of the canonical juxtaposed against the powerlessness of the noncanonical. Given this thematic similitude, when postcolonial and visual theories are taken in combination, the reflective and formative role that visual history plays in materially mediating the representation of dynamics of colonial power can be mined for significant conceptual value.

Going forward, I seek to localize my study of the impact that “power relations of colonialism have on the interpretation of objects” within the context of Indian history at the time of the British Raj, a period during which the British Empire initially consolidated its Indian holdings through effective bureaucracy.

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and then underwent a watershed reformation of its relationship with India as the subcontinent strove toward self-rule.\(^9\) At its heart, this study attempts to exemplify the way in which a thorough visual analysis of images that explicitly capture Anglo-Indian contact can elucidate a nuanced postcolonial understanding of the cultural hybridity that characterized the epoch of the Raj.

Some key aspects of British Raj culture to which I will pay particularly focused attention include the Raj’s response to Hindu dogma’s social power, the idolizing of patently British heroes and the special relationship that flourished between British leadership and India’s anglophile elite.

Delving a bit deeper into these aforementioned aspects leads one to sift through the annals of British Raj iconography for intrinsic analytical value, a process that makes increasingly clear the fact that “divine beings of the Hindu pantheon… appear repeatedly in different forms and mediums” across India with an extremely high rate of frequency.\(^{10}\) As I go on to demonstrate, British leadership at the time of the Raj interacted with this deep-seated Hindu spirituality in a remarkable way. The Raj’s leaders, including Empress Victoria


and Viceroy Curzon, often harnessed the potential of Hinduism’s oldest traditions, such as those of idolatry, caste, prayer (puja) and auspicious sight (darshan), to instill in Indian masses a degree of Hindu-like fervor and reverence for British authority. Applying focalized analytical lenses shaped by both visual and postcolonial theories to images that explicitly capture the British Empire’s interaction with India’s age-old Hindu traditions, I hope to offer the reader a clear understanding of how legendary British superpower in India took material form around the religious nucleus of Hindustani society.

In addition to analyzing the British Empire’s excavation of India’s rich spiritual resources, my project studies the Raj’s material culture with emphasis on examples of visual rhetoric that reflect the way in which British leadership capitalized on the sycophantism of India’s anglophile, class-conscious elite. It bears mention that India’s native aristocracy at the time, including regional princes who held sway in an array of fiefdoms and Western-educated civil servants who ran the Raj’s bureaucracy, famously emulated Great Britain’s civilizational values, a process which led these anglophiles to expunge themselves of any thing that smacked of “otherness.” This anglophile elite, in league with the British to perpetuate the Raj’s dominion, went as far as to
denigrate those Indians who allowed their Indian heritage to go about uncovered.

In detailing this culturally complex concept, I focus on analyzing those aspects of the Raj’s iconography that display the bonhomie and integral connection between British officials in India and the nation’s anglophile aristocrats.

As the following visual and postcolonial analyses strive to show, British rule over the Indian subcontinent featured a combination of Indians absorbing and assimilating into what they saw of British culture and Britons appropriating the most exotically alluring aspects of Indian civilization. In the fabrication of this cultural hybridity, “the nature of British dominion was shaped by Indian as much as by British people, and as much by their cooperation as by their resistance.”

Over the course of this project, I mine for analytical value this fusion of Orient and Occident.

As part and parcel of living in this hybridized culture, scores of non-elite, traditionally Hindustani Indians had to figure out how to deal with the class of colonial sympathizers who, by and large, were perched atop Indian society, seen gamely sporting the very acme of British fashion while savoring a pink gin. Were such English-speaking, Western-educated Indians, who likely warmed seats in

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11 Ibid., 11.
the Raj’s bureaucracy, perpetrators of cultural treason? Or, were these Anglophiles to be thanked for working in concert with British leadership to eliminate repugnant yet entrenched Hindustani social practices like widow burning and child marriage? In proffering answers to such charged questions, the very heart and core of Indian identity is cast in vivid relief.

Finally, one crucial and dramatic product of the Anglo-Indian enmeshing that created the culturally hybridized society mentioned above was a remarkable plethora of images, each revealing a unique aspect of Britain and India’s intricately connected relationship. These images of the Raj stake their claims to significance at “a place of hybridity, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other… changes… the very forms of our recognition of the moment of politics.”¹² In this sense, the way in which the British Empire and Indian colony portrayed the other strongly influenced the visual diplomacy of the time. To posterity, this process has left in its wake a diverse collection of statues, monumental portraits, satirical sketches, and coins that I examine over the course of the following study.

¹² Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37.
Before launching into an extensive analysis of the iconography of the Raj in the second chapter, I study the emblems and idols of Indian independence in the first. In this sense, the first chapter constructs a conceptual and socio-historical frame that then undergirds the second chapter’s insight. Taken in combination, both chapters innovate at the intersection of material culture and postcolonial theory, a crucible where the visual, the social, Empire and Art integrate in imaginative ways.
I. The Visual is Inherently Social

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world” - Mahatma Gandhi

“The art of a people is a true mirror to their minds” - Jawaharlal Nehru

What do you see? How do you see it?

You may see the Indian national flag and a faint image of India Gate in the background. Perhaps you focus on the wheel-like emblem at the center of the flag. Others see parallelism between the aesthetic of the Gate and that of the
Parisian Arc de Triomphe or the Roman Arch of Constantine. Given its evocations of Western triumph, some may question whether India Gate really looks “Indian” at all.

*Prima facie*, it seems that the above image objectively captures and stagnates a moment in time of Indian nationalist fervor by depicting a generic Indian flag in mid-wave, back-grounded by an image of Delhi’s iconic India Gate. However, there is more to the image that can be accessed via a socio-visual analysis of the picture’s contents. Such a critical analysis has the potential to reveal the hidden subtexts, coded symbolism and visual rhetoric that speak, in the above image, to evocations of a materially mediated independent Indian identity.

One meaningful aspect of the above image that is not apparently captured upon first impression is the fact that the flag shown is made of khadi (Hindi for homespun cotton cloth), and that the wheel in the flag’s middle is laden with centuries of religious and cultural significance. Without probing behind the image’s façade to study these sub-visual and supra-visual manifestations of
Indian identity that exist beyond the image's face value, one forsakes crucial aspects of the image's material and historical dimensions.

By way of developing these dimensions, it bears mention that the use of khadi to fabricate Indian flags, similar to the use of the wheel at the flag's heart and center, is of great strategic import to the cultivated and consolidated independent Indian persona. In fact, khadi is so integral to the identity of Indian independence that Indian flag manufacturers are mandated by law to produce flags made exclusively from cotton, silk, or woolen khadi.13

The origins of khadi's popular cultural significance are attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, who used the material to promote and exemplify the kind of modest self-reliance that bespoke the indigenous texture of Indian independence. The instrumentality of khadi to Gandhi's Swadeshi movement (a movement that was the soul of swaraj) became apparent in 1918 when Gandhi promoted the use of raw khadi to weave garments, rather than any imported fabrics, as part of an initiative to wean India off of its dependence on the British Empire's economy. In doing so, Gandhi encouraged villagers across the nation to weave self-reliance and self-determination into the simplest of clothes by

working with khadi, a material Gandhi referred to as “the sun of the village solar system.”\textsuperscript{14}

As the symbolism of khadi grew in popular significance, the material itself began to transcend its materiality and gain the value of spiritual purchase. For example, Gandhi came to define the “khadi-spirit” as that which connoted “fellow-feeling with every human being on earth.”\textsuperscript{15} In this metaphysical way, a substance as seemingly mundane and uninspiring as homespun cloth became a token of common humanity and, at its essence, an instrument of Indian independence. The history of khadi’s symbolism no doubt adds an additional layer of meaning to representations of the Indian flag. When looking at the Indian standard with the added knowledge of khadi’s social significance, one sees not only the iconic \textit{tiranga} (tricolor) of deep saffron, white and India green but also the integral importance of Mahatma Gandhi and khadi to the material and social connotations borne by the flag’s presence.

In addition, the history of khadi’s symbolism is inextricably tethered to the spinning wheel’s iconic value. Once again making magic of the mundane,

\textsuperscript{14} M.K. Gandhi, \textit{Harijan}, November 16, 1934, 357.
\textsuperscript{15} Mohit Chakrabarti, \textit{Gandhian Aesthetics} (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1991), 118.
Mahatma Gandhi invested the spinning wheel with symbolic charge during his imprisonment in Pune’s Yerwada jail in the early 1930s. As an example of non-violent civil disobedience, Gandhi dutifully spun khadi for an hour a day on his charkha (an age-old type of spinning wheel) to typify the kind of self-sufficiency and humble modesty that he saw as touchstones of Indian independence from British rule. In the transformative hands of the Mahatma, the simple act of spinning became an expression of liberty. As Gandhi said himself, the “charkha is the symbol of the nation’s prosperity and therefore freedom.”16

Preceding India’s total breakaway from the British Empire, the Indian National Congress resolved in 1931 to adopt a khadi-made, tricolor flag featuring Gandhi’s iconic charkha at its center (Fig. 4, p. 123). Gandhi’s charkha was later replaced by the Ashoka Chakra on the national flag, an ancient Buddhist symbol representing the righteous way of life that bears striking stylistic resemblance to Gandhi’s spinning wheel. The modern flag, in this sense, contains but a minor variation on the iconography of Gandhi’s charkha that, to this day, sits in altered yet symbolically powerful form at the heart and center of India’s national flag.

Having delved a bit deeper into the historical symbolism and physical significance of the flag, let’s refocus our attention on the initial photograph that depicts the flag waving in front of India Gate. Superimposing a socio-visual understanding of khadi and charkhas gained from the aforementioned analysis on to the image above, does the photograph seem to be saying anything differently when viewed yet again? For instance, do you now read the symbolic value of khadi and Gandhi’s spinning wheel into the visual rhetoric of the flag?

If so, what once appeared as an Indian flag like any other is, rather, an aesthetic standard of Indian independence, made of khadi evoking the Gandhian humility that characterized India’s drive towards self-determination and containing, at its heart and center, an immortalized version of Gandhi’s iconic charkha.

It is the dynamism of this critical analysis, meant to show the way in which visual images conceptualize and contextualize social mores, that gives logical form to an underpinning idea of this thesis: the visual is inherently social.
Though the above photograph, in and of itself, may not be iconic, the historical moment captured by the supposed mechanical objectivity of the image most certainly was.

As the clock in Delhi’s Sansad Bhavan neared the momentous strike of midnight, Jawaharlal Nehru rose to address the Indian Constituent Assembly in commemoration of the nation’s imminent independence from British colonial rule. Nehru spoke extemporaneously about the potential of a prosperous future, canonically mentioning the “tryst with destiny” that India made many years ago that now impelled the nation to redeem its pledge and “awake to life and
freedom.”¹⁷ This aspiration to glory that Nehru’s eloquent celebration of Indian sovereignty so vividly phrased has become an ideological touchstone of Indian ideals and one of history’s great rhetorical performances. It seems entirely adequate to claim that the above image captures but one particular moment of no intrinsic specialty from Nehru’s iconic “Tryst with Destiny” speech. Such a claim, however, does not do full justice to the image at hand. Applying a socio-visual analysis to the picture impels one to look a bit closer at the individual components that make up the image’s aesthetic. Doing so, one notices that the image shows Nehru sporting a plain white cap as he articulates his vision of Indian history’s exceptional arc.

The khadi-made, deceptively innocuous cap that Nehru wears in the picture is laden with decades of sociocultural and symbolic potential. The khadi cap was worn initially by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 as a way of materially reclaiming cultural pride in the unadorned humility of traditional Hindustani attire. Gandhi fashioned the cap on the model of a traditional Kashmiri cap, as it is “light as well as elegant; it is easy to make; [and] it can be folded, which makes it easily

portable." Following a fate of burgeoning popularity similar to that of khadi itself, the cap grew in significance when Gandhi termed it “a garment of truth,” thereby investing the cap with tremendous metaphysical gravity. In this sense, Gandhi’s “mastery in exploiting the ambiguity of symbolic phenomena” allowed him to transform the cap from something inherently commonplace and inoffensive into a garment that reached unprecedented heights of iconic stature across India.

The source of the cap’s link to ideals of Indian independence can be traced back to 1920, when authorities of the British Empire resolved to ban Indian government servants from wearing the cap in British India’s Central Provinces. Indeed, the case of the cap became so contentious that Gandhi was impelled to advocate in favor of the cap before the Chief Justice of the high court at Ratnagiri. In defense of this symbol that emblemized resistance to British regulation of Indian customs, Gandhi noted, “pleaders who adopt the national cap… do it out of respect for themselves and the nation to which they

19 Ibid., 84.
20 Ibid.
21 Lisa N. Trivedi, Clothing Gandhi’s Nation: Homespun and Modern India (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 129.
British regulation of the cap failed, and the life story of the cap’s fame was endowed with even greater renown.

Ultimately, the cap truly surged in iconic value when Jawaharlal Nehru began wearing the cap regularly as a way of paying homage to and following the lead of Gandhi’s symbolically vanguard ways. In fact, the simple white headgear that Nehru wore throughout his tenure as India’s first Prime Minister became so inextricably linked to his public image that rupee coins minted in 1964 to honor Nehru’s death were widely criticized for depicting the Prime Minister bereft of his ever-present headgear. This issue was remedied when, in 1989, coins minted to commemorate Nehru’s birth centenary vividly depicted the leader donning the cap that Gandhi popularized decades before (Fig. 6, p. 123).

In a seamless bit of sartorial continuity, the symbolic value of the Gandhi cap stretches through to the present day. India’s Aam Aadmi Party, famous for its strident revulsion to any form of sociopolitical corruption, dishes out “tens of thousands of these cheaply made caps emblazoned with party slogans at rallies

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across India," thereby harnessing the iconic value with which Gandhi and Nehru invested the cap when it rested on their famous, balding heads.\textsuperscript{23}

Returning to the details of the above photograph, one sees Jawaharlal Nehru, a man who was once known for sporting the very height of British fashion, wearing this plain white cap and a plain white \textit{achkan} (knee length jacket) while articulating one of the most famous speeches in world history. By wearing his Gandhi cap at such a particularly watershed moment in India’s narrative of independence and by paying homage to the Mahatma as “the architect of this freedom” and “the father of our nation” in his speech, Nehru revitalized the inspirational energy of Gandhi’s remarkably resilient legacy.

Moreover, it bears mention that reading the cap’s symbolic significance into the visual rhetoric of the above image alters the image’s representational focus, drawing the viewer’s attention away from Nehru’s aquiline features and encouraging attention instead on the cap itself, a piece of seemingly unforgettable headgear, that rested on the crown of independent India’s first head of state. Similar to the illustrative value of Gandhi’s khadi and charkha, the

symbolic worth of the Gandhi cap that Nehru wore at such a watershed moment in Indian history and continued to wear thereafter exemplifies the uniquely meaningful way in which the visual and social are inherently and inexorably intertwined.

Both Gandhi and Nehru harnessed the visible power of symbolic images and used them as cultural totems that bespoke those ideals of Indian independence on which these men founded their sociopolitical ethics. As Gandhi and Nehru grew in personal fame throughout India, the symbols they were known by transcended mere materiality and obtained a degree of imagined authority that thrives to this day on the legacy of whom it evokes. In this sense, both political leaders capitalized on the cultural actions that these images performed to "particularize, familiarize, and make vivid" the symbolic righteousness of Indian independence, thereby imputing to these seemingly innocuous objects audacious notions of liberty and prosperity.24

Rather than acting as those native Indian aristocrats who supped full of the British Empire’s social and political mores, Gandhi and Nehru harnessed the

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iconographic potential of their respective material symbols to reinforce the glory and humility of Hindustani identity and home-rule in a way that made them both “genial avatars” of democracy and freedom in a uniquely Indian (namely, a non-British) manner.²⁵

Having studied the semiotics of iconography that visually bespoke and informed mores of Indian society at the time of the nation's surge towards independence, one gets a sense of how visual analysis reveals the vivid aesthetic forms by which uniquely meaningful historical moments and historical figures are both created and portrayed. The study of how and why something or someone appears, in this sense, is essentially a process of recreating the apparent reality that characterized the time and place in which a given image of history took shape. Analyzing iconic images in particular, furthermore, sheds light on the ways in which singularly powerful historical luminaries like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru harnessed the potentials of symbolic and material significances to forever influence the development and resolution of Indian history. Having delved into the iconography of those who guided India towards

²⁵ Mitchell, What do Pictures Want?, 150.
the dawn of independence, I now turn to the iconography of those who consolidated India's dependence on colonial rule.
II. Empire follows Art

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image” - Exodus 20:4-6 (KJV)

“This pose of ‘seeing India’... was only a form of ruling India” - E.M. Forster, A Passage to India

The stereotypical tendency of Indian people, in particular Hindus, to uncritically worship Gods and Goddesses is one of Indian culture's most oft-caricatured features. Countless films, soap operas and books have been crafted, some self-serious and others satirical, in which the worship of Hindu idols is rightly characterized as one of Indian identity's strongest representational qualities. It is this penchant, shared by rich and poor, Brahmin and Dalit, for superstitious religiosity and categorical worship of authority that was sharply relieved in contrast to the British Empire's monotheistic and idealistically pragmatic traditions of colonialism. Revealing the way in which such religiosity interacted with British notions of control by analyzing the iconography of the British Raj is one of this section's primary analytical burdens.

In sorting out and analyzing mechanisms of the British Empire's control over the Indian subcontinent, making bold use of iconography's symbolic value stands out as being one of the most vividly portrayed instruments of imperial
dominion. The iconography of the British Raj, including that depicted in and by monumental portraiture, satire, sculpture, coins and photographs, can be viewed as culturally active insofar as it impressed upon the Indian people, in its sundry media, the significance and aesthetic gravity of British authority. What’s more, the most culturally active and socially dynamic of these images acquired, in and of themselves, imperial energy and colonial impetus.

From the time of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 to the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and resignation of Lord Curzon as Viceroy in 1905, the British Empire possessed virtually unyielding control over the Indian subcontinent. The Empire was able to do so in no small part due to the use of images that both forced and reinforced the creation of a vibrant hybrid culture in India, composed of uniquely British cultural mores that took hold within uniquely Indian cultural contexts and vice versa. The consolidation of British authority in India over this time period, in this sense, can be characterized as a controlled fusion, rather than acrimonious division, of patent aspects of British and Indian identities. Examples of iconic images that explicitly capture this hybridization of British and Indian cultures include: a satirical cartoon taken from India’s Hindi Punch called “Propitiating Shri Ganesha,” a cartoon printed in Britain’s Punch magazine entitled “The Shield and
the Shadow,” Queen Victoria’s coronation portrait displayed in her physical stead at the 1877 Delhi Durbar, a half rupee coin from 1899 featuring Empress Victoria, a photograph from The Graphic of Victoria and her Indian manservant, Abdul Karim, at Balmoral in 1894, and two statues of the Empress acting as powerful stalwarts of British sovereignty both within and without the Victoria Memorial Hall in Calcutta. What sets the aforementioned images apart from others of their kind is that these images make vividly explicit, rather than merely tacit, the way in which the hybridized culture of the Raj was both wrought and perceived.

Some overarching questions that an analysis of these iconic images provokes include the following: what does the visual rhetoric of these images say about the way in which the British Empire saw the Indian people that they governed? How can one study the visual subtexts and cultural activity of these images to more accurately understand how Great Britain’s dominance on the Indian subcontinent was both made and imagined? Can a visual study of the following images clarify and distill an encompassing postcolonial narrative of British influence in India? Finally, what facets of these images can be used as cultural variables to (if not explain) at least explicate an understanding of what
led to the endurance of Britain’s colonial project under Queen Victoria’s leadership?

In an overarching sense, this chapter seeks to reveal the puissant manner in which, by understanding the British Raj’s Indian involvement over the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th through a focalized study of its iconography, Empire follows Art.
i. His Lordship's Puja

*Fig. 7: Lord Curzon in Indian Caricature, Bombay, 1902, ed. H.A. Talcherkar, 16. Illustration.*
The above image shows Lord Curzon, masquerading as Lord Ganesh, presiding over his own self-aggrandizing celebration. This vividly metaphorical depiction of the imperial dominance of Curzon, Viceroy of India during the reigns of both Empress Victoria and Emperor Edward VII, was featured in the 1899 edition of India’s satirical journal, *Hindi Punch*. The image, entitled “Propitiating Lord Ganesha”, is replete with orthodox trappings of Hindu worship except, of course, for the fact that the face of Lord Curzon is grafted onto the space where the stoically trunked face of Lord Ganesh is traditionally seen.

This sketch is acerbically witty because it so vividly portrays the manner in which some Indian people, here represented by two traditional Hindu priests, idolized British colonial authority figures and submitted themselves, with self-effacing willingness, to the government of the British Empire. Of these obedient colonial subjects, some were Indians who chose to hold fast to integral Hindustani traditions while coexisting in a thoroughly anglicized Indian society. Others broke from Hindustani traditions, choosing instead to don the trappings of a British culture that they took to be qualitatively preferable to India’s sacred order. Those Indians who saw British traditions as superior to Indian ones often exalted the West for its association with modern values while denigrating the
legitimacy of age-old traditions, like India’s rigid caste system, that had sustained Indian civilization on contentious normative ground for centuries.\textsuperscript{26}

This depreciation of Indian traditions and embrace of British lifestyle that some Indian colonists undertook at the time of the Raj was essentially a response to the inadequacy that these anglophiles felt when seeing that “the contrast between their own static systems and the West, with its superior technology and confident social development, was painfully evident.”\textsuperscript{27}

In a way, the alluring brand of British culture that the Empire’s leadership, including such figures as Empress Victoria and Viceroy Curzon, embodied in India can be credited for triggering this bifurcation of Indian society between an anglophile elite (elite by virtue of their anglophile tendencies) and the mass of Indians who chose not to transform themselves into imitative Britons. This branding of British culture that proved so successful in dividing and conquering India and her people was made possible by Britain’s robust “Orientalist imagination that led to... constructing an India that could be better packaged,

\textsuperscript{26} Partha Mitter, \textit{Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental orientations} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
subsumed, and ruled."\(^{28}\) In this sense, the exotic allure of India that gripped the British imagination was both counterpoised and complemented by the idolized Indian imagination of British culture.

Another fascinating aspect of colonialism in India provoked by the *Hindi Punch* cartoon is its ability to portray pure strains of Hindu mythology through the jocund and witty design of satire. By way of background, it bears mention that *Hindi Punch*, an Indian derivate of Britain's heralded *Punch* magazine, was much maligned by British satirists for its supposed amateurishness, its provision of unnecessary detail, and its utter inability to evoke likeness.\(^{29}\) What *Hindi Punch* did manage to evoke, nevertheless, was a rough sketch of the socio-historical context that characterized contact and immersion between British and Indian cultures. Typifying the socio-artistic value of *Hindi Punch*, then, “Propitiating Shri Ganesha” strove not for polished historical verisimilitude but rather crude and sardonic truth.

Furthermore, the witty satire that *Hindi Punch* produced catered to the amusement of an educated Indian elite who, while often disdaining the kind of


superstitions that more orthodox Indians harbored, idolized their British rulers. In appealing to this anglophile Indian elite, *Hindi Punch* can be seen to have tacitly aided the Empire’s initiative to “secure the British Raj on the consent of the western-educated.”\(^{30}\) It bears mention that *Hindi Punch* was produced not only for Indian anglophiles, but also for Britons who, along with “the avant-garde of… [India’s] contemporary intelligentsia,” took great pleasure in poking “gentle fun at British social life.”\(^{31,32}\) The popular significance of *Hindi Punch*, in this sense, was based on a shared sense of humor that caricatured both mores of Victorian England and anglophile values espoused by the upper echelon of a thoroughly westernized Indian intelligentsia. In fact, *Hindi Punch*’s own marketing supports this cross-cultural appeal of the magazine, noting that the satire’s “sobriety, moderation of tone and sound judgment are appreciated by Indians and Europeans alike.”\(^{33}\)

Giving ideological form to Great Britain’s resilient colonial effort were the notions of progress and success shared by Victorian England and India’s

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\(^{30}\) Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*, 139.  
\(^{32}\) Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India*, 140.  
anglophile elite. Once the British were able to decorate the top of Indian society with a patina of colonial authority, issuing these Indians a plethora of medals and titles like Rai Bahadur or Rai Sahib, for example, the anglophile Indians were incentivized to conform to notions of British dignity and leadership and the task of governing such an ethnically diverse and multilingual place became considerably more straightforward. With medals and titles serving as material proof of express trust that their British colonizers placed in them, this cadre of Indian anglophiles, including Indian Civil Service officers, Generals of the British Indian Army, and Indian jurors who faithfully upheld the letter of British common law, in concert with British colonial authorities themselves, came to dominate India with enduring alacrity and efficacy.

Returning to the image above, it bears mention that the stark imperfections of “Propitiating Shri Ganesha” throw its iconoclasm and sacriligeosity into bold relief. For a start, the amalgamated monstrosity of Lord Ganesh/Curzon sits regally on a dais and is evidently shown as superior to the social standing (social squatting, in this instance) of the Hindu priests who fold their hands in prayer. There are many connoted benefits to Lord Curzon’s assumption of Ganesh’s divine form, chief among them the opportunity for the
Viceroy to metaphorically stake personal claim to the exalted vision of purity and authority that Ganesh commands. In this sense, the cartoon’s depiction of Curzon adopting Ganesh’s symbolic value fits seamlessly into the mythmaking project of British leadership in India, for if Curzon could manage to have Indian subjects see him as a figure possessing authority akin to that which Ganesh wielded, the Viceroy would be able to govern relatively unimpeachably. In this sense, British colonial authority in India maximized its potential by branding British leadership, as the above cartoon shows, in a way that smacked of supreme power and blessedness to Indian anglophiles and orthodox Indians alike.

Naturally, the above image works in different ways according to the persuasions of its viewer. To a Briton familiar with the stereotypes of his nation’s imperial leaders, for example, the image might be a visual pun on Lord Curzon’s oft-caricatured tendency to self-aggrandize. To an Indian anglophile reader of Hindi Punch, the image might be an explicit depiction of how those Indians who delved superstitiously in to the mystical world of Hindu orthodoxy literally idolized Lord Curzon as they would Ganesh. The image is not of singular significance,
then, but rather inspires a sort of “double consciousness” that at once depicts the doubts and faith of magical beliefs.  

Furthermore, by having Their Lordships merge, the irreverent cartoonist offers to the viewer “visual proof of the authoritarianism that appeals to purity.”

In this sense, as the image shows the judicial power of British viceroyalty grafted on to the religious power of a radiantly mythological Hindu deity, one sees a material conflation of British and Indian mores and, thereby, a depiction of the cultural hybridity that formed between Great Britain and Hindustan. As such, the image offers to its viewer a novel way of conceptualizing the authority of viceroyalty by depicting Queen Victoria’s esteemed emissary as nothing more than a British face on an Indian body. In other words, the power of the British Empire recognizably existed, according to the image, in having British leaders look like Indian gods. Both for those Indians who thought it desirable to be British and for the unlettered crowds who were controlled en masse by British will and might, it was in those quasi-deified British figures, like the Queen and her most exalted representatives on the subcontinent, that lifelong faith was placed.

Furthermore, the depiction of Lord Curzon as Ganesh is seen, in the above cartoon, commanding the faith of Hindu priests, as if it is to him, rather than to Him, that the priests kneel in supplication. In this way, the cartoon sees Curzon established and given credence as a “heroic form of human existence in this world.”\(^{36}\) Imputing divinity to the figure of Curzon is a means of dignifying the Viceroy to such a degree that the most pious of Hindus, given readily to idolatry, would consider Curzon's image nothing short of sacred. The function of this “grandiloquence is indeed the same as that of ancient theatre,” in which the meaning of dramatic art was made “exaggeratedly visible.”\(^{37}\) The exaggerated visibility of Curzon's pomp and circumstance, indeed the powerfully literal depiction of the Viceroy's own phenomenal greatness to the Indian people (anglophile and orthodox alike), serves to visualize the facilitation of British Empire's control over India and her sundry denizens.

Interestingly, this discussion of the Indian readiness to idolize has direct relevance to a recent development in present-day Gujarat, wherein a group of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's followers erected a temple at the center of


which lay a statue of the Prime Minister. The temple in Rajkot, built to commemorate the symbolic figure of Mother India, installed a bust of the Prime Minister in the temple’s sanctum sanctorum to which Hindus prayed and offered sweets (Fig. 8, p. 124). Much to the chagrin of the supplicating temple-goers, the Prime Minister denounced the temple’s apparently sacrilegious form, calling it “shocking” and “against India’s great traditions.” Rather tellingly, the temple priest posed the following rhetorical question in lamenting Modi’s distaste for the structure: “Modi is god for me and us here and if the god himself is angry, then what good is a temple?”

The example of this temple, though not necessarily meant to serve as a microcosm for all kinds of idolatry integral to Hindu worship, evinces the currency and purchase that idol worship commands to this day as a resilient linchpin of spiritual capital in India. This tendency for Indians to deify authority figures that has pervaded Indian culture for millennia, and which gained jocund

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39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
representation in *Hindi Punch*'s witty cartoon, retains at present the immensely hardy staying power that it had during the epoch of the Raj.

Returning to the *Hindi Punch* image, one sees another fascinating aspect of the caricature in its sketch of Hindu puja that the priests are seen performing to the deity of Curzon/Ganesh. Puja, a seminally Hindu act of worship and propitiation, is based fundamentally on the inherent sanctity of ritualistic practice and the supernatural benefit of idol worship. Accenting the cartoon's particularly cheeky depiction of puja, one notices the traditional trappings of ritualistic idol worship, including the little coconuts offered to the Curzon/Ganesh deity and the water-filled brass pot sitting next to the priests into which Hindu priests occasionally dip their fingers to sprinkle water on an already cleanly idol before them.

The significance of coconuts, offered here to his serene Lordship, are used in puja as metaphysical symbols of divine consciousness. Delving a bit into the metaphysics of coconuts, some theories purport that the coconut itself resembles a human head. Indeed, the "coir represents human hair, the hard nut
represents the skull,” and the water inside the shell represents blood. As is often done with dramatic gusto, breaking the coconut at the conclusion of puja represents the destruction of the human mind and ego (with the head being the house of ego). Without either the physical or metaphysical encumbrances of the human ego, merging with the divine becomes all the more seamless.

Another theory suggests that the three dimples seen on one side of every coconut represent the three eyes of Lord Shiva. If one validates such a belief, it follows that to have a coconut present at the puja is to invoke and incarnate the powerfully watchful eye of Shiva, thereby inviting the Lord to preside over the puja’s litany of rituals. Indeed, it is in the stark contrast between these venerated superstitions of traditional Hindu puja and the unsmilingly rational visage of Lord Curzon, a representative of strong Anglicanism, that one sees a remarkably powerful point of contact and contrast between British and Indian sociocultural norms.

One clue that the image gives to its historical context can be seen in the words inscribed on the grim reaper lurking in a shadowy cranny of the puja room.

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The figure’s black gown displays the phrase “Regulation XXV of 1827” and the torch that the figure holds contains the word “turbulence.” By way of background, the Regulation XXV of 1827, which formed part of the Bombay Code, dealt with the necessity to “place under personal restraint individuals, against whom there may not be sufficient ground to institute any judicial proceedings.” In other words, Regulation XXV functioned to muzzle the sedition of those Indians who, while not explicitly breaching the law, nevertheless posed a real and present threat to the stability of the British Raj. Designed to deter Indian insurrection, Regulation XXV was invoked, perhaps most infamously, to warrant the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi in 1930 as Gandhi began to garner support for his proposed upturn of the Raj’s entire political and economic order. As a result of his detention according to Regulation XXV, Gandhi was sent for imprisonment in Yerwada jail where, as you might recall, he took up the tradition of spinning khadi on a charkha that became so singularly iconic and ultimately informed the design of the Indian flag.

In any case, the domineering and authoritarian spirit of Regulation XXV, seeking to circumscribe the scope of political dissidence, is highlighted in

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“Propitiating Shri Ganesha” by having a grim reaper-like figure incarnate the dark perniciousness of the Regulation. Strikingly, as Regulation XXV lurks ghoulishly in the dark corner of the image, attempting to restrict the political liberty of Indians by detaining freedom fighters with doubtfully probably cause, Curzon serenely basks in the divinity that he commands. The visual rhetoric of the image seems to say that if Indians do not subject themselves to Curzon’s authority (as the Hindu priests do in caricature) they ought to expect personal devastation at the hands of the menace that is Regulation XXV.

Overall, “Propitiating Shri Ganesha” is an image of remarkable dynamism and nuance. The image vividly speaks to the way in which Indian people, both traditional Indians and the subcontinent’s anglophile elite, made idols out of British Raj leadership. This kind of idolatry, a tradition that is arguably as deep seated in Hindu dogma as the ritual reception of Holy Communion is to Catholicism, is put on witty display in the Hindi Punch cartoon. This process of mythmaking, through which both anglophile Indians and orthodox subjects saw the British Empire’s leaders not as fellow beings but as something much better and much more than Hindustani alternatives of government, is just one of many
explanatory variables that serve to conceptualize the British Empire's unprecedented sway over the Indian subcontinent.
ii. Her Majesty's Darshan

Fig. 9: Queen Victoria (1819-1901), Sir George Hayter, 1863 (after his portrait of 1838), oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, London
On June 28, 1838, 19-year-old Alexandrina Victoria was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. On that day, throngs of fervent British subjects cheered Victoria’s carriage along as it proceeded down St. James Street toward Westminster Abbey. As a young and impressionable queen, “Her Majesty was visibly affected with these marks of devotion and attachment on the part of the people so warmly and affectionately expressed.” Arriving in the brilliant Gold State Coach to the Abbey on a glimmering summer day, Victoria was swathed in “heavy red and golden coronation robes clasped across her chest by a band of gold,” thereby donning the sumptuous trappings of aesthetic majesty.

In artistic commemoration of Victoria’s crowning moment, British painter Sir George Hayter was charged with crafting the Queen’s official coronation portrait. In Hayter’s iconic rendering (shown above), the Queen is seen as the visual hallmark of the United Kingdom’s apotheosis incarnate. The portrait shows the Queen sporting both the Imperial State Crown and a resolutely

expressed sense of power. The crosses on top of the scepter and crown symbolize “the Sovereign's temporal power under the Cross,” and Victoria can be seen gazing unperturbedly into the light that shines from her right.\textsuperscript{45} Signifying the ultimate validation of Hayter's work, Queen Victoria was personally drawn to Hayter's rendering of her appearance, calling the portrait of her “excessively like and beautifully painted.”\textsuperscript{46} Unbeknownst to anyone at the time, a vivid replica of Victoria's full-length portrait would feature in another coronation nearly 40 years later, this one held in the heat of New Delhi on a bright winter afternoon.

Beginning on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of January, the Delhi Durbar of 1877, otherwise known as the Proclamation Durbar, was held to declare Queen Victoria Empress of India. The 1877 Durbar, just like the two that would follow in 1903 and 1911, was set in Delhi's Coronation Park, a space once used as a recreational area for Mughal royalty and nobility.\textsuperscript{47} Setting the 1877 Durbar in Delhi, rather than the British Raj's capital of Calcutta, was a decision designed to signify “the transition of power from the East India Company to the crown” that occurred following the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{45}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{46}] Ibid.
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Uprising (Sepoy Mutiny) of 1858. In this sense, the 1877 Durbar occurred at a moment in which the British Raj had consolidated imperial authority under the auspices of the Crown and had firmly implanted the sociopolitical, in addition to the socioeconomic, standard of British monarchy on Indian terrain.

The 1877 Durbar was a spectacular affair, attended mainly by representatives of India’s royal families and the highest-ranking British dignitaries. In a grandiose display accented by Oriental hues of pomp and circumstance, the Durbar featured “a parade on a decorated elephant, in the presence of about 70,000 people, by Lord and Lady Lytton.” At the heart of 1877’s Delhi Durbar, Queen Victoria’s coronation portrait commanded center stage on a dais shaded by a finely woven shamiana (ceremonial awning). The Queen figuratively sat on her gilded throne, rested her left arm on a gilded armrest carved in the form of a large lion’s head, and looked resolutely out on to the Delhi scene. In front of the Queen, Viceroy Lytton accepted the gifts that India’s myriad maharajas had come to offer the Empress. At its heart, though the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Queen in flesh and blood were conspicuously

49 “Coronation Park and Mughal Gardens in North Delhi.”
absent from this rather unconventional coronation affair, the event still exuded connotations of the British Empire’s colossal colonial might and aesthetic majesty.

The image of Queen Victoria used at the crux of this awesome display, an 1863 replica of Hayter’s original coronation portrait, is iconic. Gracing the Durbar with the Queen’s figurative presence, the coronation portrait was meant to aesthetically inspire Victoria’s Indian subjects to feel the sense of awe and ardor regarding Great Britain that Victoria felt upon her coronation as Queen. In summing up her British loyalty on the day of her coronation in 1838, Victoria confided to her journal: “I really cannot say how proud I feel to be the Queen of such a Nation.”

Endowing Indian subjects present at the Durbar with such effusive pride in Britain was one of the portrait’s more significant cultural actions, for it was this exclusive sense of fidelity to Queen and country that inspired Indian anglophiles to acculturate in the British tradition and join forces with their adopted British brethren to govern the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, whereas the image functioned singularly as an expression of British pride during Victoria’s coronation in London, the portrait’s replica took on an enhanced, inter-

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cultural meaning in the context of the 1877 Durbar. The Queen presented herself, vis-à-vis Hayter’s monumental portrait, not only as sovereign of her homeland but also as the highest terrestrial authority on a land with cultural norms that differed vastly from those of the U.K.

Related to this analysis of Victoria’s iconography in monumental portraiture is the discussion regarding idolatry in India that was developed in the previous section on the hybridized image of Lords Curzon and Ganesha. As mentioned, the systemic quality of idolatry, a practice deep-seated in the annals of Hinduism’s ritualistic traditions, was linked to the way in which Hindus saw British figures of authority. In the case of the 1877 Durbar, at which Queen Victoria’s portrait was worshipped by India’s rajas as if she were standing before them in person, one sees another resounding example of the way in which India’s tradition of idol worship functioned to deify and support the legitimacy of British authority. Indeed, in the way that Indian princes at the Durbar gave credence to the symbolic power of Victoria as their supreme leader, one saw achieved “imperial idolatry in its classic, Roman form.”

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In general, the effect of an idol is twofold: on the one hand, an idol “is a territorial marker” and, on the other, “it is the figurehead… that ‘goes before’ the conquering colonizers” (and the conquered colonized, in the case at hand).\(^{52}\) At the 1877 Durbar, the Queen embodied both idolizing effects, as she was stoically represented before an august assemblage of maharajas and nawabs, each of whom pledged to subordinate their claims to sovereignty in favor of recognizing the Empress’ absolute and overall imperial authority. Summing up the stance of the British Empire towards India’s Princely States, Viceroy Lord Reading wrote that the “sovereignty of the British crown is supreme in India and therefore no ruler of an Indian state can justifiably claim to negotiate with the British government on an equal footing.”\(^{53}\) By bowing to the image of Victoria and, in a way, deifying the Empress’ image, leaders of India’s myriad princely states made a formal show of subjecting themselves to the British Empire’s encompassing legitimacy on the subcontinent.

The Queen, for her part, laid both territorial and symbolic claim to Delhi as her image was placed, replete with the aesthetic pageantry of Hayter’s

\(^{52}\) Ibid.

monumental portrait, on India’s reddish soil. In addition to this territorial conquest, Victoria’s visual presence at the Durbar constituted the incipience of a celestial conquest, in which her ultimate power as supreme figurehead of the British Empire established her role as a goddess of “earthly [and] of spiritual dignity” in the eyes of the readily idolatrous Indian public to whom she appealed. In her rendered serenity, there was no higher political power to which the maharajas could subject themselves than the official image of the Empress herself.

Nevertheless, it bears mention that at the heart of Queen Victoria’s idolization lies an existential clash between the Western world’s monotheistic traditions and Hinduism’s polytheistic notions of divinity. This clash is predicated on the notion that “the consolidation of idolatry into an imperial imaginary” is necessarily accompanied by a “rise of monotheism.” In the context of the 1877 Durbar, Hayter’s replica of the Queen’s coronation portrait undoubtedly portrayed Victoria as a singularly powerful idol. Sitting in powerful solitude under a “huge canopy of vermilion red curtains heavily decorated with golf fringes and tassels,” the Queen’s image provokes aesthetic comparisons to images of Hindu

goddesses, like the Goddess Lakshmi, for example, who vividly reside swathed in regal adornment in countless temples across India.\textsuperscript{56}

One crucial difference in effect between an idol of Goddess Lakshmi, perse, and the portrayed idol of Victoria at the Durbar is the need for reconciliation that Victoria’s idolization creates between the Hindu tradition of polytheism and the Queen’s monotheistic sovereignty. As British notions of God-like power held fast to the quality of monotheism, not only “the image-making capacity of the Hindu imagination” but also “the bold Hindu polytheistic consciousness” of India was at odds with the belief system of India’s colonizers.\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, this fundamental difference in religious normativity provokes a question seminal to analyzing Victoria’s idol form at the Durbar: could a given Hindu subject of the British Empire, for example a maharaja in attendance at the 1877 proclamation, reconcile his belief in the religious significance of many Hindu gods and goddesses with his belief in the singular divinity of Queen Victoria’s idol? If not, would Queen Victoria be no more than one of the many idols in India, along with

\textsuperscript{56} “The Victorians.”

Goddesses Parvati, Lakshmi and Durga, in whom the vast majority of the Queen’s Hindustani subjects place unyielding faith?

In proffering answers to such questions, it behooves one to delve, with greater depth, into a study of the power relations governing the Queen’s relationship to her subjects. Quite convincingly, the image of Victoria, displayed upon the ornately festooned dais, was meant to evoke the unchallenged superiority and authority of the Queen. In this sense, the image’s “call for material splendor and sumptuousness” decorated what was otherwise a bold political statement of British pride and sovereignty. The notion of maharaja upon maharaja kneeling down and paying respects to Hayter’s image of the Empress in Coronation Park leads one to consider the symbolic influence that Queen Victoria wielded, represented so vividly in her vicarious presence at the 1877 Durbar, as power that functions to “compensate for” native weakness.

The intangible technique of domination that Queen Victoria’s monumental portrait used during the 1877 Durbar can generally be seen as founded on a notion of hegemony that “implies a politics of identification of the imaginary.”

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60 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 32.
In this sense, the connection between Victoria’s image and the idea of her supreme legitimacy was one of the most integral building blocks necessary to consolidate any kind of sociocultural latitude in the subcontinent. The power of Victoria’s coronation portrait, as displayed with such pomp during the 1877 Durbar, essentially existed in the image’s ability to trigger the mythmaking, idolatrous, hero-worshipping behavior that was (and still is) so characteristic of a vast majority of Indians.

Along these lines, the image of Victoria’s ability to command and attract the respect of those Indians who saw the Queen as something akin to a goddess made “possible all the techniques of domination and exploitation on which the new form of empire depends… providing the ideological fantasies that make this process seem natural and inevitable.”\textsuperscript{61} The “process” referred to in the aforementioned quote can be interpreted as the way in which Victoria’s unopposed sovereignty was translated from the British context in which it was born to the Indian context in which it grew. Integral to the facilitation of this process was the kind of intercultural resonance that Victoria’s coronation portrait had in India, allowing expressions of power from one institution to be

\textsuperscript{61} Mitchell, \textit{What do Pictures Want?}, 168.
“transcribed in the discourse of another.”62 As a strikingly vivid example of this intercultural transcription, the ability of Queen Victoria’s coronation portrait at the 1877 Durbar to vicariously symbolize a new world order, a new set of fealties, and, in a politico-spiritual sense, a new Goddess for an old civilization are all examples of the monumental portrait’s grand cultural action and inherently artistic yet thoroughly imperial logic.

Furthermore, just as the Hindu concept of a traditional puja lent itself to an intercultural take on idol worship in “Propitiating Shri Ganesha,” the traditional Hindu concept of darshan warrants consideration when analyzing the visual diplomacy of Queen Victoria’s image at the 1877 Durbar. The ritual of darshan is primarily based on the notion of sight, insofar as darshan refers to something being auspiciously beheld. Darshan plays a seminal role in the Hindu tradition that dominates Hindustan, given how “India is a visual and visionary culture, one in which eyes have a prominent role in the apprehension of the sacred.”63 In complement to this idea of sight, darshan usually refers specifically to mutual viewership, in which the thing being seen also beholds the viewer. In the context of Victoria’s image at the Durbar, the Queen’s gave darshan to the retinue of

62 Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 33.
63 Eck, Darsan, 10.
rajas by "looking" out at each regal supplicant as they approached the dais to bow before their anointed sovereign.

In essence, the concept of darshan is located at the core of India's Hindu-dominated society with as much power today as it had at the 1877 Durbar. Indeed, “whatever Hindus affirm of the meaning of life, death, and suffering, they affirm with their eyes wide open.” This emphasis on the strength and importance of India’s visual culture can be seen in the assertion that “the day to day life and ritual of Hindus is based… upon… particular appearances of the divine in the substance of the material world.” Indeed, both in ancient India as in the nation's modern imagination, seeing is believing and, in this way, darshan is connected to notions of acceptance and respect. At the 1877 Durbar, maharajas representing this incredibly rich and religiously laden visual culture were on hand to welcome the monumental image of Victoria and receive the Queen's darshan, thereby placing their faith in that which the Queen's image symbolized.

The mutual benefit of darshan is crucial to understanding the concept's religious significance, as Hindu doctrine purports that a truly felt experience of

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64 Ibid., 11.
65 Ibid.
darshan allows a devotee to develop affection for God and, in turn, gives God the opportunity to develop affection for a devotee. From the kind of “philosophical and spiritual unity” achieved by having two people see and engage with each other on a visual basis, an opportunity for mutual recognition, if not something akin to requited affection, is born.\textsuperscript{66}

Such an experience of mutual viewship is only heightened by the particular tendency of the Hindu people to convert the visual into the tactile as, according to Vedic notions of sight, “casting one’s eyes upon a person and touching him were related activities.”\textsuperscript{67} Furthermore, according to ancient brahmanical texts, “the eye is the truth.”\textsuperscript{68} Such a notion reveals the way in which the Hindu tradition places a preponderantly strong emphasis on the importance of sight and darshan in communing both with the divine and the mundane.

Imagining the way in which maharajas beheld the image of Victoria in the 1877 Delhi Durbar as the prototypical Hindu would behold an idol of Goddess Parvati in an adorned temple allows one to see how the British Empire’s control over India was, at least partially, founded on the uniquely visual foundation of

\textsuperscript{67} Eck, \textit{Darsan}, 9.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
Indian culture. Moreover, seeing the portrait of Victoria at the Durbar as a manmade representation of holiness transforms the “previously lifeless image into a powerful receptacle of divinity.”⁶⁹ Just as virtually no God-fearing Hindu would disobey an authority figure of mythic proportions like Vishnu, the status quo of British dominance in India was sustained by Indian people recognizing the sanctity of British leaders “as present in the visible world.”⁷⁰ In a broader thematic sense, this example of proficient visual diplomacy in the Victorian Raj bespeaks the credibility of the claim that “empire requires and produces… objecthood, and along with it a discourse of objectivity… all these it then mobilizes around an ideal object.”⁷¹ In the case of the 1877 Durbar, the “ideal object” that was Empress Victoria sat adorned on the dais at Coronation Park as Goddess Saraswati sits in the sanctum sanctorum of temples across India to this day.

Another particularly interesting aspect of darshan is the concept’s built-in hierarchy of viewership that is made possible both through and by its visualization of power. Darshan implies not only seeing a person or thing of great

⁷⁰ Eck, *Darsan*, 10.
social import but, in fact, seeing such a figure with particular reverence and
devotion. Indeed, the act of celebrating graven images representing the
pantheon of Hindu gods is a way of dignifying the “multiplicity and the oneness of
the divine.”72 Darshan is based, then, on the imagined union between divine and
non-divine entities.

In this sense, the experience of darshan can be perceived, in and of itself,
as a construction of privilege whereby the auspicious thing being looked at is
granted a higher social value, based simply on the rarity of this thing's
auspiciousness. Darshan is usually an experience in which the giver of darshan,
Queen Victoria in the case of the 1877 Delhi Durbar, has a hand outstretched in
blessing. For Victoria, this outstretched hand can be analogized to the Empress
“lifting the stem of the ceremonial scepter” in Hayter’s monumental image.73

In aesthetic interlocution with the giver of darshan, the receptor of
darshan often stands or kneels with hands clasped in earnest supplication,
similar to the way in which the Rajas at the 1877 Durbar bowed before the

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72 Eck, Darsan, 28.
73 “The Victorians.”
portrait of the Queen in paying “ritual homage to the Crown.”74 The physical placement of hands during the experience of darshan acts on the underlying assumption that the giver of darshan has power to give while the receptor of darshan specializes in the power to receive. To see and bow before the coronation portrait of Victoria at the Delhi Durbar, then, was to be spiritually nourished by the blessings that the lifelike portrait of the Queen had on offer.

Extrapolating from this narrative of darshan and the materiality of Victoria's sovereignty, one sees British rule of India not so much as a process of cultural estrangement, in which British culture strove to remain superior to the fray of a radically different Indian culture, but rather as a process of cultural reconfiguration and hybridity. In vivid depiction, this process of cultural hybridization can be seen in the way that the portrait of Queen Victoria, displayed in the 1877 Delhi Durbar, offered the Queen's darshan to those most privileged Indians who were given a chance to “see” the Queen as she became their Empress. This highly unique situation, in which a thoroughly British Queen imaginatively and tacitly availed herself of a thoroughly Hindu form of divine

worship, is exemplary in its vivid representation of how the crossbred culture of
the Raj was wrought, perceived and actualized.
iii. Britannia’s Enlightenment

*Fig. 10. The Shield and the Shadow, 1890, Illustration, Punch, or the London Charivari, Vol. 99*
In distinction to the Indian satire of British authority seen in *Hindi Punch*, England’s *Punch* magazine offered its readership a remarkably more flattering caricature of British rule. As a uniquely globalizing source of British imperial history, *Punch* had a powerful influence on British imperial customs around the world. Not only did *Punch* serve to transcend the imagined divine between metropolis and colony, but the magazine also “resolved and questioned social mores, politics, sexuality and... modes of conduct for the middle class” throughout the British diaspora.\(^\text{75}\)

Nevertheless, it bears mention that *Punch* itself did not garner widespread fame, but rather grew in precedential value by serving as a template for *Punch* offshoots, like *Hindi Punch*, that surfaced in British colonies around the world. In this sense, the *Punch* satirical form became a “branded and thus authoritative form for imagining asymmetries in local (as well as global) power politics.”\(^\text{76}\)

Serving as a sort of touchstone for British wit at the time of Empire, the impact of *Punch* in Britain catalyzed a thriving cottage industry of colonial *Punch* derivatives.


\(^\text{76}\) Harder and Mittler, *Asian Punches*, 439.
Given how *Punch* can be used as an “illustrative resource for thinking about Victorian politics, manners and public events,” mining the magazine for representations of the hybridity that characterized the culture of the Raj reveals much about the British Empire’s visual diplomacy in India. One particularly striking cartoon taken from *Punch*’s October 1890 edition, entitled “The Shield and the Shadow,” depicts a caricatured representation of the way in which the British Empire dealt with the dark and pernicious spectre of India’s legendarily ossified caste system. This particular cartoon, sketched by an anonymous *Punch* satirist, depicts the figure of Britannia, the feminine personification of a martial and august United Kingdom, stoically sheltering a young, destitute Indian woman from the clutch of India’s encroaching caste system. The image is a strikingly melodramatic capture of the Victorian perspective on India’s age-old mores as it portrays, in a vivid way, the spirit of maternal nurture with which the British Empire attempted to save Indian people from their own social history.

One of the caricature’s most evocative images is its least detailed: that of an orthodox Hindu priest, with his head ceremonially shaved (save a symbolic tuft of hair known as a *shikha*), encroaching balefully on a simply clad young woman.

77 Ibid., 15.
The *Punch* cartoonist labels the Hindu priest as “caste” in jagged, dark lettering, thereby making explicitly clear the critique of Indian society that the cartoon sets out to aesthetically articulate.

The caste system, in addition to being the subject of this particular *Punch* cartoon, has had an abiding and entrenched influence on the overall development of Indian society for centuries. At its heart, caste is that which “comes by birth and can't be cast off by dying.” As an identifying and unavoidably clear denomination of worth, caste operates as a system of “graded inequality in which castes are arranged according to an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt.” As such, the caste system, outlined initially in the brahmanical texts and retaining its validity till today, calcifies a hierarchical order that seeks to give structure and security to the apparatus of Indian society.

At the time of the British Raj, mores of the United Kingdom intercepted the development of India’s rigid caste structures, and cleverly used the validity of the caste system to British colonial advantage. As mentioned earlier in the chapter...

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79 Ibid., 7.
on Hindi Punch’s “Propitiating Shri Ganesha,” the survival and flourishing of the
Raj was made possible in large part by the British “convincing influential Indians
that [the Raj’s] interests were their own.”

In this sense, British leadership’s
ability to have India’s elite actively subordinate the masses and muffle the vox
populi in order to protect the interests of British leaders in India and Indian
anglophiles alike was crucial to the maintenance of order of the subcontinent.

This bit of British Raj social history bears heavily on the analysis of the
above Punch cartoon, which depicts Britannia protecting a downtrodden young
woman from the spectre of caste. Evidently, the cartoon highlights the illumined
rationality of Britannia given the figure’s compulsion to expel the shadow of
caste from the young woman’s midst, thereby showing a clear hierarchy of value
between British and Indian structures of authority. Britannia incarnates the young
woman’s best interests in a way that leads one to suppose that the young Indian
woman would rather pledge unwavering fidelity to Britannia than to anything
impacted by the horror of caste.

This visual analysis is consistent with British leadership’s ability to win
over “an army of collaborators” for its colonizing enterprise due to what the allure

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80 Lawrence James, Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India (New York: St.
Martin’s Press, 1997), 431.
of Britain (and what the cartoon version of Britannia) stood for. Rather than stooping to greet the austere figure of caste, Britannia resolutely sends caste away from the life of the young woman, thereby exemplifying the notion of the British Empire as savior and redeemer of a morally contorted India. In this sense, those Indian anglophiles who supported and facilitated the British colonial endeavor, including “the princes… the Indian army, the native police force and a cadre of… junior officials” figuratively looked up to the glow of the British Empire for redemption and shelter, just as the young woman shown in the *Punch* cartoon tightly grips Britannia’s chiton for safety.

Moreover, there is something particularly stark in the depiction of caste in India as an unsmiling, aquiline-featured, Hindu man, especially when the darkness of this symbolic figure is contrasted with the relative luminescence and upright majesty of Britannia’s safeguarding presence. The *Punch* cartoonist, in this instance, makes it seem as though the masculine representation of caste desires to clutch this particularly solitary Indian woman. Indeed, this depiction of caste’s desire is consistent with traditional representations of human lust that

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81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
revel in the underworld of “dark passions, appetites and the ‘lower nature’ of brutes.”

On the other hand, the attributed desire of Britannia to save the Indian woman from caste’s harm is seen as “the aspiration to perfection, unity, and enlightenment.” These two bipolar motivations, one that saves the girl from caste’s danger and the other that pulls the girl into caste’s fold, show, in caricatured microcosm, the British and Indian forces at play in determining the fate of Indian people with regard to their considerations of the caste system. Often, British social commentators metaphorically stigmatized and disparaged the nature of caste, describing the system as one in which Brahmins upheld “the existing unequal system against those who were oppressed culturally and materially.” It bears mention that the impulse to ultimately eliminate a system of rank injustice from Indian society was shared by the anglophile elite, led by figures such as freedom fighter B.R. Ambedkar. One particularly telling quote from a 13-year old mang girl (of low caste) which recommends, “that religion, where only one person is privileged and the rest deprived, perish from the earth,”

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84 Ibid.
85 Chakravarti, Gendering Caste, 121.
rather sums up the feelings of the cartooned Britannia, British leaders of the British Raj, and India's anglophile elite who all worked in concert to align Indian society with Western valuations of moral rectitude and justice.⁸⁶

As mentioned above, the British Raj saw its function in society, in relation to the expulsion of caste, as analogous to Britannia's caricatured role. In an overarching sense, leadership of the British Raj sought to colonize and modernize a society that was, from the British perspective, notorious for its "lax hold of facts, its indifference to action, its absorption in dreams, its exaggerated reverence for tradition, [and] its passion for endless division."⁸⁷ In a way, the uncouth superstition, religious zealotry and rigidly hierarchal caste distinctions that characterized the ethical backwardness of India (to some Britons) is all personified in the two Indian figures of the Punch cartoon. One, the grotesque shadow of caste, incarnates the obscure mysticism and destructive deference to religious authority that the British Empire saw as an inhibiting yet ingrained characteristic of Indian identity. The other figure, namely the young Indian woman cowering in distress on the floor, incarnates a person trying to evade the

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⁸⁶ Ibid., 122.
⁸⁷ Sir Herbert Risley, The People of India (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1908), 265.
aforementioned “exaggerated reverence for tradition” that resisted reform to traditions, like female genital mutilation and sati (widow burning), whose malevolence destroyed the lives and deaths of women in Indian society both at the time of the Raj and still today. In this sense, the Punch cartoon caricatures not just the British compulsion to dispel the repugnant darkness of cast from India but also the stark social inequality that existed between Indian patriarchy (represented by the austere Hindu shadow) and inoffensive young women across the subcontinent at the time.

The cartoonist’s use of a traditional Hindu priest here harkens back to the depiction of Hindu priests in “Propitiating Shri Ganesha.” It bears mention that these depictions of orthodox Hindu priests who sport symbolic tufts of hair (shikha) is connected to the material representation of caste within the Indian social system, as the use of the shikha was (and still is) a material privilege reserved for Brahmin priests. Given the “pervasive and all-powerful influence of
the Brahmans,\textsuperscript{88} the cartoon depicts a real struggle for dominance between the supremacy of Brahman rule and Britannia’s adorned authority.\textsuperscript{89}

The connection between social hierarchy and religious order is put on full display in “The Shield and the Shadow”, given the depiction of the caste system, saturated at the top by Brahmins, encroaching on what appears to be a young woman in need. The notion of Brahmins as socially supreme, a notion that is substantiated by the fact that under Hindu law Brahmins “are not subject to the death penalty for capital crimes”, are given the right of way on the street and “are seen as purer than the rest of population” is enduring to this day, where caste is certainly not past.\textsuperscript{90} In a social context where religious order is of the utmost importance, being a Brahmin, and therefore a member of the priestly class, is a form of unimpeachable aristocracy. The above Punch cartoon, then, can be seen to represent two socio-religious emblems. One, the figure of Britannia, appears in graphic satire as an embodiment of her nation’s “sufferings, faith,

\textsuperscript{88}A power of such curiosity even Max Weber took note in \textit{The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism}
\textsuperscript{90}Ibid.
triumphs, hopes, and boasts. The other figure, that of the Brahmanical priest who creeps about as a token of caste, battles with the symbolic might of Britannia for control over the young Indian woman's fate.

What “The Shield and the Shadow” manages so vividly to do is portray the plight of the historically nondescript Indian, in this case a raggedly and simply clad young woman, caught between the two dominant forces of his or her era: 1) the occult and seemingly pernicious mixture of religious authority that dominated India’s prejudicial caste system and 2) the staid dominance of Western rationality and salvation that Britain so thoroughly represented. The young woman in question seems to be clinging to the physically enlightened Western emblem, visually representing the way in which Indians looked to the authority of the British Raj to be saved from the injustices and malignancies that assailed Indian nature.

Furthermore, such a vivid depiction of how Britain's *Punch* caricaturists viewed and depicted the spectre of caste in Indian society evokes the sharp perspectival delineation between Western and Eastern conceptions of right and might. That is to say, “The Shield and the Shadow” contains a material (if not

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slightly exaggerated) representation of a prototypical Western figure, Britannia, whose symbolism is “strongly linked to ideas of Liberty,” casting out a symbol of oppression, represented by the orthodox Hindu priest who darkly preys upon the unprotected young woman.\(^92\) This caricatured demonstration of the kind of power dynamic that existed between the Raj and Indian traditions is telling, as it vividly portrays the power struggle that ensued to gain control and win the trust of Indian masses.

When one situates the *Punch* cartoon within the decidedly Western context in which it was created, one can see how the idea of Orientalism, as a philosophical and moral strategy, depends “on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.”\(^93\) In this sense, the British *Punch* cartoonist depicts the pernicious obscurity of the caste system, a hallmark of India’s stereotypical superstitious and uncivilized benightedness, “with very little resistance on the Orient's part.”\(^94\) Crafting the visualization of caste in the cartoon is, in this sense, a type of colonization in and of itself.

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\(^92\) Ibid.


\(^94\) Ibid.
Indeed, the way in which the British satirist stereotypes the undefended village girl and the malice of caste, while clearly not pretending to be a reliable ethnographic depiction, dramatizes and exaggerates the darkness of the young woman, the promiscuity and raggedness of her sari, and the austerity of caste’s figure. In this sense, the British Punch cartoonist heightens the distinction between the light of Britain and darkness of India, the classical adornment of British might and poor simplicity of Indian weakness, to drive home the symbolism of Great Britain as a saving grace to the Indian people.

Developing this theoretical discourse of post-colonialism a bit further, one can apply the common notion of knowledge as power to the idea that “to have such knowledge over a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it.”\(^95\) In the case of “The Shield and the Shadow”, one sees a material representation of the kind of domination and authoritarian status that derives from knowledge, in this case Britain’s knowledge of and therefore control over India’s ethnically charged caste distinctions.

British authority’s domination of India’s caste system can be seen in Britannia’s perceived expulsion of caste’s scourge, banishing the creepy shadow

\(^95\) Ibid., 32.
of caste in order to preserve the light of day. In this sense, the cartoonist’s knowledge of the caste system’s inextricable connection to the Hindu hierarchy, shown by the representation of caste as an orthodox Brahmin priest, can metaphorically stand for Britannia’s knowledge and domination of India’s caste system as a whole. In a microcosmic way, Britain’s knowledge of India is put on full and vivid display in “The Shield and the Shadow”, and it is this knowledge of Indian culture that armed British artists and politicians alike with the aesthetic and social resources necessary to exert British control over the impressionable people of India. In this sense, British knowledge of India, for the overwhelming majority of Britons who never stepped foot on India soil, was India.
1857 was a cataclysmic year for British occupation of India. The year began with a series of technological innovations, among them the introduction of the Enfield rifle to the native regiments of the East India Company army. Unforeseen by India’s British leadership, the Enfield's debut in the Company's regiments catalyzed an upturn of the Company’s entire socioeconomic order, known in India as the Sepoy Mutiny, that precipitated the disestablishment of the Company in 1858.
It should come as no surprise, given how authoritative a grip Hinduism has on India for millennia, that the 1857 Mutiny was galvanized by an issue of religious contention. As the Company army rehearsed military drills, they tore a greased cartridge open with their teeth and loaded their brand new Enfield rifles. When a group of sepoys (Indian soldiers) stationed at Meerut noticed that these cartridges had been greased with a lubricant containing cow tallow and pig lard, the consumption of which are strictly banned by Hindu tradition, paranoia-driven hatred of British leadership took reign. This mortally offended bunch of sepoys set off a destructive wave of popular rebellion by murdering “their officers and all the British and Christian civilians that they came upon.”

Drawing inspiration from the sensational actions of these indignant mutineers, Indians around the nation took up the revolutionary cause and the indignation kindled by the Meerut soldiers spread like wildfire across the subcontinent, leaving a grisly trail of destruction in its wake. The rebellion eventually found its foothold in Delhi where the leaders of the uprising coalesced around the enfeebled Mughal Bahadur Shah who they proclaimed Shahenshah-

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e-Hindustan (Emperor of India), thereby designating the city “the symbolic centre of the uprising.”

In spite of burgeoning popular support for the rebellion, many Indian rulers who “expected their future to be safer with the British” liberally provided the Company with men and materials. In this way, the events of the uprising unearthed a fundamental division among the Indian polity between those Indians who sought to eradicate British influence from Indian territory and those Indians who trusted in British leadership more than they did in the potential of home rule. The centrality of this bifurcation between the opinions of anti-British Indians and anglophile Indians was consistently apparent throughout the tenure of England's control over India, and has also been a fundamental axis on which this overall study has been poised.

For more than a year, the rebels raggedly sustained a milocracy in Delhi where, instead of Parliament, Bahadur Shah “had a council of solidiers, in whom power rested, and of whom he was in no degree a military commander.” The rebellion raged on until the fall of Gwalior in June of 1858, supported until that

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97 Ibid.
98 Bipan Chandra et. al, India’s Struggle for Independence (New York: Penguin, 1989), 38.
99 Ibid.
time against heavy odds by a group of rebels with “no quick system of communication at their command and, hence, no coordination was possible.” 100

Ultimately, the British garnered critical support from the thousands of Indian militants who remained loyal to the Crown in addition to “merchants, intelligentsia and Indian rulers… [who] actively supported the British.” 101 This consortium of anglophile Indians sowed the seeds of failure for their rebellious ethnic brothers and sisters by supporting the British cause while actively opposing the mutineers. In sum, the uprising proved an “unsuccessful but heroic effort to eliminate foreign rule,” ultimately sapped both by British might and by the anglophile will of Indians who sympathized with the British cause and who considered British rule superior to the potential of swaraj. 102

Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the political landscape of British governance in India radically changed, as control of the East India Company territories was ceded directly to the authority of the British Crown. As a necessary yet seemingly insignificant side effect of this power transfer from Company to Crown, rupee coinage issued after 1857 was minted under the

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100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., 31.
direct authority of the British monarchy, no longer bearing symbolism of the East India Company but rather that of the British monarch. Following 1857, all new coins minted, like the one pictured above, bore the legend: “Victoria Empress.”

For years, the only physical contact that Indians had with their British sovereign was materially mediated through coinage. As millions of Indian subjects trucked and bartered goods in the British Raj marketplace, the profile of an Empress who never stepped foot on Indian soil, embossed vividly on rupee coins, stared resolutely back at them. In this way, Empress Victoria, the most exalted personification of British authority, was vicariously present at even the most mundane moments of everyday life in the Raj, figuratively supervising the purchase of fresh vegetables, for instance, vis-a-vis the side-on view of her unsmiling visage portrayed in sharp relief on post-1857 rupee coins.

Focusing in on the specific half rupee coin pictured above, one will notice that the coin was minted in 1899, a year during which India was wracked by famine and strife. Beginning with a conspicuous lack of summer monsoons over Western and Central India in 1899, the turn of the century was punishing for the Indian peasant, who witnessed widespread crop failures, a mortality rate of 37.9 deaths per 1000 people in the Bombay Presidency, and approximately 1 million
deaths across the country from starvation.\textsuperscript{103} Given the dire socioeconomic reality of 1899, the above-pictured half rupee coin was circulated at a time when the Raj economy was splintering under distress triggered by bone-dry fields. One can only imagine a weatherworn Indian peasant with creviced, leathery skin looking from the image of Empress Victoria on his half rupee coin up earnestly to the moon hanging in an obsidian night sky, praying to one of many Hindu gods that tomorrow bring with it the boon of rain.

One of the most striking cultural actions of the 1899 half rupee coin is its ability to bring a popular image of Empress Victoria, decked in culturally nuanced garb, into widespread currency among masses spread across the subcontinent. Wrought in vivid relief on broadly and rapidly disseminated pieces of metal, Empress Victoria’s image grew in commonplace significance to millions of British Indians. Given the sheer ubiquity of Victoria’s image on the coinage of the Raj, the Queen was figuratively used by both maharaja and beggar alike, by Brahmin priests along with untouchable domestic servants, and by British colonizers together with their anglophile Indian counterparts. The Queen’s image imprinted

on the half rupee coin, in this way, can be seen as a symbolic common
denominator, in both figurative and pecuniary senses of the term, which
uncritically formed an integral part of everyday life in British India at the turn of
the 20th century.

The image of Empress Victoria on rupee coinage is particularly fixating
insofar as it simultaneously draws on notions of both sovereignty and subjection.
Though Victoria’s image represents the visage of a woman whose authority, for
some Indians and Britons alike, made her akin to a “godlike ruler of the world,”
the sheer ubiquity of rupee coinage vastly increased nonexclusive access to the
Empress’ image, in a way demystifying Victoria’s mystique.104 As a pop culture
icon with a social sway sustained by other people’s fantasies about what she
represented, the Empress was nonetheless taken for granted when seen day in
and day out by people of all stripes who used rupee coinage. In this way, the
commonplace quality of the Empress’ image on the rupee coin can be
contrasted to the symbolic value and singular authority that her image had, say,
in Hayter’s coronation portrait presented at the 1877 Delhi Durbar. The image of
Victoria on the 1899 half rupee coin, in this sense, can be seen as a kind of anti-

104 Mitchell, What do Pictures Want?, 152.
monumental rendering of the Empress insofar as her image on the coin was taken as a mass-produced logo of the British Empire.

In these ways, the Empress' image was commercialized and made commonplace when shown on rupee coins that circulated daily across the Indian subcontinent. This everyday reminder of how the truest personification of British sovereignty looked was impressed upon every Indian person, no matter how seemingly "simple, unsophisticated, or provincial," who used rupee coins during the rule of the Raj.⁹⁵ In this sense, the commonplace value of Victoria’s image on the rupee coin is based on the idea that when iconic images, like the face of Empress Victoria, are brought into everyday use, lively matter becomes inert and the magical becomes mundane. Whereas singularly famous renderings of Victoria, like Hayter’s coronation portrait, dramatize the Empress’ significance, the image of Victoria on the coin converts the Empress’ image into a kind of signage, like a bright red stop sign for example, that one sees as a necessary and unglamorous accent of everyday life.

Delving with greater depth into the detail of the coin itself, one can see scrollwork of Indian flora, including the Indian emblem of the lotus, on the reverse

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side of the coin. The lotus, a patently Indian symbol with significance stretching deep into the collection of India’s ancient Hindu and Buddhist traditions, has been coated with the gleam of divinity in Indian aesthetics as the flower itself is said to express the idea that “we are all virtually Buddhas, emanations or reflexes of the transcendent imperishable sphere.”¹⁰⁶ Given its metaphysical significance in the pantheon of India’s mystical spiritual traditions, the lotus’ place on the 1899 half rupee coin is a clear representation of Indian tradition. This combination of Indian lotus on the coin’s reverse and British Empress on the obverse offers yet another example of the cultural fusion and hybridity that characterized the status quo of the British Raj, a period during which symbols of both British and Indian cultures were metaphorically and literally two sides of the very same piece.

Every transaction that was conducted using a half rupee coin during the epoch of the British Raj, in this sense, was done so with the hybridized significance of the Anglo-Indian culture that characterized everyday life at the time.

Turning from Empress Victoria’s commonplace significance in India to her commonplace significance in Great Britain, one gets the impression that the Queen lived her famous life in coddling seclusion, keeping only a select few, highly loyal confidants by her side as she went about her daily routine. One Indian who enjoyed a particularly intimate personal relationship with the Queen in
the denouement of her life was Abdul Karim, shown above with Victoria in the Garden Cottage at Balmoral in 1894. Known as the Munshi (an Urdu word meaning secretary), Karim worked as Victoria’s personal secretary from the time he kissed her feet at Windsor in the summer of 1887 until the Queen’s demise in January of 1901. Fulfilling the Queen’s strategic needs as she went about her everyday routine, Karim brought his take on Indian culture in to the Queen’s private quarters.

Karim arrived in England as a gift from India to celebrate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee, showing up to the Queen’s court at Windsor “strikingly dressed in a scarlet tunic and white turban.”\(^{107}\) Rising swiftly through the ranks of Victoria’s household staff, Karim became the Queen’s highest decorated secretary and closest confidant, “cooking the Queen curries,” teaching her Urdu, and becoming the physical manifestation of India through whom Victoria touched the Jewel in the Crown.\(^ {108}\)

To this day, a monumental portrait of Abdul Karim (Fig. 13, p. 124) hangs next to renderings of iconic maharajas in the Indian corridor at Victoria’s beloved

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\(^{108}\) Ibid.
Osborne House. The portrait, painted by Austrian artist Rudolph Swaboda in 1888, depicts a reflective Karim, swathed in sumptuous trappings of cream, red and gold, looking decidedly more “like a nawab than a servant.” Victoria loved this representation of her Munshi so much so that she later copied it for herself.

Furthermore, the Empress had the portrait hung near Osborne House’s Durbar Room, a space that evoked the exotic romance of the Orient with “Indian-style jali work” on its balconies and intricately wrought marble ceilings. In this sense, although the Queen never visited India, she nevertheless brought India in to the private chambers of Osborne both in the form of Abdul Karim, a man who Victoria showered with adoration extending from “her love for India and the Empire” and through the collection of Indian antiquities in Osborne that surrounded the Queen when she passed away there in 1901. 

The story of Abdul Karim’s intimacy with Victoria is a surreal but telling tale of how Victoria interacted with and personalized British India and its people.

In addition, the narrative of the Queen’s relationship with Karim reveals the maternal affection that characterized Victoria’s treatment of those on whom the Queen depended daily. Victoria expressed her care for and sensitivity to the

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109 Ibid., 3.
110 Ibid., 4.
Munshi’s wellbeing in letters\textsuperscript{111} that the Queen wrote Karim every single day, often signing off to the Munshi as “your dearest friend,” “your true friend,” or “your dearest mother.”\textsuperscript{112} As depicted in the above photograph, Victoria and the Munshi’s particular point of contact was not touched by issues of caste, dogma or idol worship, like other contact points between Britain and India in this study have been, but rather occurred on a deeply personal, virtually apolitical and relatively mundane level. In this sense, Victoria came to know and see Indian culture through the humanity of Karim, establishing an endearing relationship that is a unique example of how imperial power relations “were challenged and remade by colonial subjects… in the social spaces of ‘domestic’ Victorian imperial culture itself.”\textsuperscript{113} In the halls of Osborne House, Empress Victoria materially reified her vision of Indian identity based significantly on notions of Indian culture that Abdul Karim shared with his Queen.

\textsuperscript{111} Karim was ultimately ordered by King Edward VII to burn all of these letters upon the Queen’s death. Obeying Edward’s commands, Karim then left Britain and returned to Agra with his family, where he lived on an estate Victoria had arranged for him until his death in 1909.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 2.

\textsuperscript{113} Antoinette Burton, \textit{At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain} (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 1.
Though obvious, it bears mention that the above image of the Queen and Karim at Balmoral is a photograph, and as such (debatably) represents the Queen and her personal secretary with mechanical objectivity. Indeed, the story of Queen Victoria is deeply entwined with the birth of photography as an artistic and historical medium. Victoria, the first British monarch to be photographed, was nearly twenty years old when the invention of photography was announced and her embrace of photography, along with her husband’s, made the monarchs “instrumental in [photography’s] evolution and rising popularity.”

Like many other photographic depictions of the monarch’s life, the above image of Karim and Victoria can be seen as a “visual aid to Britons’ imagination” of the Queen’s relationship to the Munshi. In this sense, the advent of photography afforded the Queen’s subjects a clear and candid look at Victoria’s daily life. This particular capture of a moment Victoria shared with the Munshi speaks to the effect of photography’s “vitality and potency” in preserving a moment of time that, in the case at hand, allowed laypeople to observe Victoria’s

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115 Ibid., 40.
interaction with her faithful Indian friend.\textsuperscript{116} Published in the October 1897 edition of \textit{The Graphic}, a weekly British illustrated newspaper of immense influence in the art world, this photograph circulated amongst the masses in a way that brought a revealing glance at Victoria’s private moments into public circulation.

Furthermore, rather than considering the quasi-divine and monumental aspects of Victoria’s image, the above photograph lacks artful varnish and realistically shows the Queen as a heavyset, elderly woman who nurtured a curious dependency on the faithful Karim. This image of a woman, at once gently maternal and steadfastly authoritative, who surprisingly gave of herself and her vested privilege for the betterment of the Munshi, sheds bright light on a deeply personal and confidential facet of the Queen’s life that, without the newfangled technique of photography or the encompassing latitude of Britain’s mass media, would otherwise have remained cloaked in rumor and beyond the rude gaze of public scrutiny. Overall, the photograph bespeaks the curiousness of Victoria’s relationship to India as seen through the capture of the Queen’s relationship to the Munshi, in this sense portraying a personal connection in which

\textsuperscript{116} Pinney, \textit{Camera Indica}, 15.
Victoria at once exploited and revered both Karim and the nation from which he so proudly hailed.

In sum, both the half rupee coin and the photograph of Victoria and Karim speak to the everyday, mundane significance of the Empress in a way that monumental portraiture never could. On one hand, the sheer ubiquity of half rupee coins featuring Victoria converts the Queen's image, once symbolically stylized and augistically rendered by George Hayter, into something entirely ordinary and predictable. On the other, the history of Victoria’s relationship with the Munshi offers revealing details regarding both the nature of Victoria’s private life at Osborne House and the kind of affection that she was able to garner for an Indian man with whom she interacted with on an ordinary and routine basis. Both of these images evince the pedestrian humanity and personal affect that Victoria and her image were capable of demonstrating. The two images exemplify uniquely ubiquitous and commonplace points of contact between Victoria and India, evincing on a day-to-day level how the Empress’ relationship to India and her people was crafted both with uncritical publicity and intimate privacy.
v. Timeless Empire

Fig. 14: Jubilee Monument for Queen Victoria in front of Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta, by Sir George Frampton, Bronze, 1901; modern photography by Karthik Nanda

Fig. 15: Queen Victoria inside Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta, by Sir Thomas Brock, Marble, 1921; modern photography by Michael Janich
One of Queen Victoria’s most distinguished emissaries, George Nathaniel Curzon exerted one of the single strongest British imperial influences on India from 1899, when he was appointed Viceroy of India, until his resignation from the post in August of 1905. During his relatively brief tenure as Victoria’s chief representative in India, Curzon inaugurated the North West Frontier Province (an area riven by tribal warfare today), undertook the restoration of the Taj Mahal and presided over the 1905 Partition of Bengal (a bitterly opposed measure which was eventually revoked in 1911). Operating during these turbulent years of Anglo-Indian history from his base in Calcutta, the capital of the Raj from 1858 until 1912, George Curzon grew familiar with and formed an integral part of Bengali society.

While publically praising “the intrepidity and enterprise” of Calcutta’s progressive elite, Curzon was known to privately disdain the native Bengali aristocracy. In particular, Curzon saw the archetypal Bengali elite as having an “incurable vice,” namely the “faculty of rolling out yards and yards of frothy declamation about subjects he has imperfectly considered, or which he does not

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The “chattering class” of sycophantic Bengali babus whom Curzon came to know left the Viceroy thoroughly unimpressed with Bengali elites as a whole. Curzon’s negative perception of Bengali aristocracy led him to conclude, “A tiny minority of educated Bengalis should not be permitted to exert power over the millions of ‘real’ Indians, mainly peasants.” In fact, Curzon’s intense dislike of educated Bengalis even led him to question, as chancellor of Oxford University in 1912, Rabindranath Tagore’s literary merit when the Bengali writer was being considered for an honorary Oxford doctorate. Curzon expressed his reservations regarding Tagore’s prowess, noting, “I question whether he is up to the standard.” Seeing as Tagore’s patriotic songs roused Bengali nationalistic fervor in opposition to Curzon’s 1905 Partition of Bengal, it perhaps should come as no surprise that seeing Tagore succeed was for Curzon a wholly unsavory prospect.

Although Curzon had a contentious relationship with Calcutta’s intelligentsia, it bears mention that the Viceroy very much relished the city itself.

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119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 128.
Expressing ebullience regarding the imperial project in Calcutta at the fiftieth anniversary banquet of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in 1903, Curzon noted, “Calcutta is in reality a European city set down upon Asiatic soil, and… it is a monument- in my opinion one of the most striking extant monuments, for it is the second city to London in the entire British Empire- to the energy and achievements of our race.”

One of the most indelible impressions left by Curzon on the Calcutta cityscape came in the form of Victoria Memorial Hall. The idea to erect a commemorative hall was born when, upon the Empress’ death in January 1901, Curzon witnessed a spontaneous outpouring of deep grief by masses of Bengalis. For days after the Empress’ passing, her Indian subjects sat mournfully “on the Maidan grieving all day without food.” Sympathizing with such poignant pathos, Curzon thought it only fit to erect a building worthy of “both [Victoria’s] memory and the munificence of British rule” on Calcutta turf. Such an enduring monument, as Curzon saw it, “shall hand down to later ages a visible

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123 Dutta, *Calcutta*, 130.
124 Ibid.
memorial of our veneration and of her wonderful and glorious reign.”\textsuperscript{125} With great alacrity, Curzon gathered up the financial support of both British and Indian elites to build an edifice of empire “more eloquent than any spoken address,” and, in January 1906, the Victoria Memorial was inaugurated in the heart of the city to commemorate a monarch who purportedly “loved India, as no other monarch… has done.”\textsuperscript{126} \textsuperscript{127}

By the time the Memorial opened to the public in December 1921, the Hall contained two statues of the Empress. One statue, fabricated by Sir George Frampton in 1902, depicts a wizened Victoria and resides outside the Hall in the verdant front garden of the Memorial. The other statue, located inside the Memorial’s gallery, depicts a young Victoria garbed in her coronation robes. Taken in aesthetic combination, these two statues physically represent the temporal stretch of Victoria’s reign, architecturally articulating a nostalgic vision of timeless empire.

The exterior statue, featured amidst the property’s lavish landscape, shows the Empress peering in perpetuity, with a kind of noble and fatigued

\textsuperscript{125} Curzon, \textit{Lord Curzon in India}, 517.
\textsuperscript{126} Dutta, \textit{Calcutta}, 131.
\textsuperscript{127} Curzon, \textit{Lord Curzon in India}, 518.
staidness, out onto the imperial project of Calcutta that George Curzon so intensely cherished and flaunted. In devotion to the Empress, coachloads of pilgrims came to Calcutta to pay their respects to this statue of Toria Mai (Bengali for Victoria the Mother) and “appeal for her blessings with the same religious fervor as they do to Kali.”\(^{128}\) It bears mention that this notion of Hindus beseeching an image of British authority for divine grace is a trope that this study has mined for significant analytical value. By examining orthodox Hindu priests propitiating Shri Ganesha in Hindi Punch, an entourage of Indian princes bowing before Victoria’s coronation portrait at the 1877 Delhi Durbar, and the image of a shoddily clad young Indian woman clinging to Britannia for salvation in Punch magazine, this study has focused time and time again on the representation of hybridity between Indian culture and British authority. In the image of Hindu pilgrims spreading marigold and hibiscus flowers at the foot of Frampton’s statue of Victoria in Calcutta, one yet again sees the way in which Hindu idolatry, mixed with deifying visions of British authority figures, created a potent mixture that infused the very motivating essence of Britain’s colonial power and control.

\(^{128}\) Dutta, *Calcutta*, 133.
In terms of magisterial trappings, the exterior statue of the Empress at Victoria Memorial Hall depicts the Queen wearing robes pertaining to the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India, a chivalric order created by Victoria in 1861. This order was composed of Knights Grand Commanders from both India and England (almost exclusively Indian Rajas and British nobility), each made to pledge categorical fidelity to the British crown in order to receive the physical insignia of the Star that they then affixed to the Order’s mantle. This mantle (official robe) of the Order that Victoria is seen wearing in the exterior statue was made of light blue satin and white silk, thereby emphasizing the celestial quality of colonial power. In addition, the gilded collar (an ornate chain worn about the neck as a symbol of membership) was composed of alternating figures of lotuses, red and white roses and palm branches tied together in saltire, with an imperial crown in the center (Fig. 16, p. 125).\footnote{129} Just as the collar of the Order strung together a uniquely Indian symbol, the lotus (India’s national flower), with a uniquely British symbol, the red rose (England’s national flower), the entirety of Empress Victoria’s exterior statue in Calcutta can be seen as a physical

\footnote{129} Peter Duckers, \textit{British Orders and Decorations} (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2004), 27.
manifestation of the aesthetic and cultural hybridity that has so vividly characterized preceding images in this study.

By clothing herself as Sovereign of the Order, Victoria evokes a long history of chivalric honors and class-consciousness that dominated the social apparatus of the Raj. The silk mantle and gilded collar that Victoria sports in the sculpture are material manifestations of privilege and sociopolitical legitimacy, given to Indian princes as a form of compensation for their unyielding loyalty, and worn by Victoria in Calcutta as objective proof of her tremendous sway.

Dramatizing the role of both Indian goddess and British sovereign, Victoria is rendered in Frampton’s statue as a figure possessing cross-cultural latitude and legitimately divine stature.

In her bronze left hand, the statue of Victoria holds an imperial orb crafted "of blue lapis lazuli, surmounted by a golden figure of St. George." The figure of St. George, a venerated Christian martyr who held fast to Christ when fighting against Rome, stands balanced like a sentry and physical tenet of Christian faith on the orb that the Empress holds. The Saint looks out at Bengali onlookers and

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130 The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art 14 (1898): 120.
foreigners alike with the kind of gracious resoluteness that the Empress’ entire statue radiates (*Fig. 17*, p. 125).

Just as Indian and British symbols combine to form the collar of the Order of the Star of India, many accents on Frampton’s bronze statue have explicitly Anglo-Indian significances, including a lion and tiger side by side on the back of the statue that “typify respectively the British Kingdom and the Indian Empire.”

These two animals, each regal in their own culturally particular ways, are portrayed not facing one another, but rather looking together in the same forward direction (*Fig. 18*, p. 126). This depiction of colonial cooperation, in and of itself filtered through Frampton’s idealistic view of Britain’s colonial endeavor, portrays the equally dominant virility of Britain and India prowling the invisible future in concert. This notion of two culturally unique power structures, the British and the Indian, standing side by side like the lion and tiger on Frampton’s statue has been substantiated in this study by analysis of British authority working with Indian anglophiles to order to govern the nation at large. The lion and tiger featured next to each other on Victoria’s statue, in this sense, can be taken to symbolize two unique groups of elites. The lion, representing the dominance of British

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dignitaries like Lord Curzon who wrote the history of the Raj and the tiger, representing Indian anglophiles like the cadre of ICS officers who administered British rule, are portrayed in vivid relief on the exterior statue of Victoria to this day.

Perhaps the most symbolically meaningful portion of the statue is its stone pedestal, “lined with a bronze panel and friezes on the sides.” When one looks closely at the two figures that flank the enamel representation of the Royal arms, one sees “bronze figures of two Indians” supporting the statue’s ponderous weight. The heavy-handed symbolism of having two little bronze Indian men supporting the magnificently rendered British queen is both tacky and arresting. In this sense, the sheer physical dominance of Empress Victoria is made plainly evident in the way that she sits on top of and is supported by two upright and steadfastly loyal Indians.

In addition to this exterior representation of the Empress, Victoria also stands inside the Memorial, depicted in the coronation robes she wore when she ascended the throne of the United Kingdom. The sculpture, which stands “at the

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133 *Studio*, 122.
center of the memorial amidst marble inscriptions of her imperial proclamations of 1858 and 1877," was fabricated by Sir Thomas Brock, a sculptor known for crafting many iconic memorials to Victoria in London.\textsuperscript{134} Brock was commissioned to sculpt the statue in 1914 and, in facilitating the construction of an authentic and likely statue, King George V gave Brock permission to execute his figure based on a marble bust of the young queen crafted by Sir Francis Chantrey, a sculpture known for its emphasis on the Queen's youthful sensuality. Picking up on Chantrey's aesthetic cues, the marble figure in Calcutta sculpted by Brock, in his "unashamedly naturalistic and tradition, even at time historicist" style, exposes the Queen's neck and a portion of her shoulders.\textsuperscript{135} In contrast, the exterior statue of Victoria at the Memorial is far more covered-up and unmistakably demure than the interior rendering. Visitors to the Memorial are, in this sense, given the opportunity to visually absorb the Queen's more private femininity and sensual power as portrayed vis-à-vis the interior sculpture in addition to the Queen's hallowed public persona as seen in the exterior statue, thereby observing the physical transformation of the Queen's image over time.

\textsuperscript{134} Dutta, \textit{Calcutta}, 133.

Moreover, the interior figure of Victoria, standing in solitary beauty under the dome of the Memorial, harkens back to George Hayter’s coronation portrait of Victoria that was displayed at the 1877 Imperial Durbar in Delhi, as Brock’s sculpture depicts Victoria garbed in her coronation robes. In a curiously symmetrical way, the Victoria seen by Indian eyes when the Prince of Wales opened Victoria Memorial Hall to the public on December 2, 1921 was the selfsame Queen seen by Indians on January 1, 1877 during the first of three Delhi durbars. At both moments in time, Victoria was portrayed as a newly crowned queen of a rapidly growing empire. This historical connection lends Victoria a sense of aesthetic timelessness as, for all intensive purposes, the Queen never aged from 1877 to 1921 to the Indian perspective. In this sense, Victoria’s significance as a symbol of absolute British authority to the Indian people is necessarily superhuman and abstracted from the historical record.

It bears mention that Victoria’s fabricated immortality at the Calcutta memorial is at practical odds with the image of an aging Victoria living out her final years at Osborne with the Munshi Karim. In general, the layperson who hears of Victoria recalls immortalized, iconic representations of the Queen, like the two statues at Victoria Memorial for instance, with greater clarity than he or
she does noncanonical and relatively unknown histories of the Queen, like that of Victoria and the Munshi. Such a characteristic trait of human memory leads one to the conclusion that it is how Victoria looked, rather than minute details of what she actually did, that withstands the test of time. Given how very few people personally knew Victoria yet how very many people knew of her, it is the fame of who Victoria was imagined to have been, rather than the unvarnished reality of her everyday life, that gives form to the metaphysical life she continues to lead long after her death.

Furthermore, this notion of a timelessly significant Queen can be seen as well in the physical design of Victoria Memorial Hall, where an aging Queen sits outside the “Taj of the Raj” and a youthful Queen stands inside, beneath the perennial shelter of the Hall’s dome.\(^{136}\) In this physical sense, the Queen’s double presence in Victoria Memorial Hall evokes a doubly strong dose of nostalgia, for in Victoria’s physical transformation from one statue to the next, one can trace the development over time of India during the span of the British Raj from an elegant and determined adulthood to a matronly and worn old age. As lived Victoria, so lived the colony of India. As the Queen grew frail, so too did

\(^{136}\) Dutta, *Calcutta*, 132.
Britain's colonial apparatus. Ultimately, from the decadence of the Raj came the Indian independence movement that, as it grew in force and popular significance, manifested new symbols of authority, like the iconic tiranga and Gandhi cap, that survive in representing Hindustani sovereignty to this very day.
Conclusion: Seeing is Believing

Over the latest mid-semester recess, I traveled with friends to London. On an overcast Monday afternoon, we walked towards Westminster Abbey and, upon approach, noticed that an official ceremony was to take place at the Abbey imminently. We waited outside the Abbey as various dignitaries, mostly ambassadors representing Commonwealth nations and later British Prime Minister David Cameron, exited their polished obsidian Jaguar limousines and entered the vaunted chamber.

Then, as if announcing an icon’s Second Coming with heraldic pomp, the Abbey’s bells began to chime frenetically and British schoolchildren positioned along Storey’s Gate waved little polyester Union Jacks with alacrity. In a matter of minutes, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge glided by, followed by the Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall and finally, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh arrived at the Abbey in their claret-colored Bentley limousine.

As I waved energetically at the royal family, I could not help but think of all the images in this thesis that portray uniquely significant points of British and Indian contact. Here I was, a descendant of Indian anglophiles and orthodox
Hindustanis alike, witness to the symbolic power of Queen Elizabeth, great-great granddaughter of Empress Victoria. For the fleeting moments in which I saw the Queen, I felt firsthand what it means to believe in the enchantment of what you see. Just as Bengali mourners offered marigolds to Victoria’s statue at her Memorial in Calcutta, just as peasants and princes touched Victoria’s image daily on the half rupee coin, just as the ragged Indian woman clung to Britannia’s chiton in Punch's “Shield and Shadow”, just as a retinue of maharajas bowed before Sir Hayter’s rendering of a newly crowned Queen at the 1877 Delhi Durbar, and just as caricatured Hindu priests in Hindi Punch propitiated the hybridized Lord Curzon/Ganesh, I offered an energetic wave and genuine grin to the Queen of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth Realms as she passed me by.

During my memorable point of contact with the United Kingdom's most exalted terrestrial authority, I was overwhelmed by the vivid iconography and visual persuasion of the Queen's sovereignty and thought that this elderly woman, for no other reason than the fact that her image spontaneously commanded such an outpouring of unbridled adulation in me and the hundreds of Britons around me, was clearly the closest thing to British supremacy on Earth.
that I'd ever seen. Thinking about my Grandpa Rattan exalting an image of Sir Winston Churchill, villagers praying to a bust of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a Gujarati temple, Indians around the world seeing the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi's freedom fighting woven into the semiotic texture of the Indian national flag and me waving to Queen Elizabeth for a mere moment, the power that images have to evoke incredibly potent doses of nostalgia, woe, jubilation and deference hit squarely home.

Ultimately, this study has been based on close readings of both postcolonial narratives and the visual rhetoric of iconographic representations. I hope that I've been able to show how images, in addition to serving evocative and illustrative purposes, abound with multiple layers of historical meaning in and of themselves. In analyzing images both as visual proof of a realistic past and as cultural actors, this study has attempted to show that “we ourselves are in” the images that we recognize and view.\textsuperscript{137} This study’s analysis of various images, in this sense, can be seen as a process of seeing how I see the images here considered.

\textsuperscript{137} Mitchell, \textit{What do Pictures Want?}, xvii
In addition, this project has entailed a personally significant and careful look at the cultural particularities of the British Empire’s relationship to its Indian colony. My analysis of the responses of India’s anglophile elite along with India’s orthodox Hindustani factions to the Westernization of public style and of representation that the British Empire brought along with it has shown, I hope, the significance of symbolic battles fought between icons and styles of self-representation that go right to the heart of defining the hybridized culture of the Raj. In this sense, my historical method has been influenced in equal part by that which occurred and by how that which occurred was portrayed. Writing against the idea that East is East and West is West, this study has focused on material renditions of two sharply distinct cultures that came together, like the lotuses and red roses vividly displayed on the Order of the Star of India’s ceremonial collar, to create a crossbred identity that persists among Britons and Indian anglophiles to this day.

Finally, this study has allowed me to engage with visions of British India in the most vicarious of ways. I have felt, over the course of the study, the complexity and nuance of Lord Curzon’s relationship to the Bengali people, the great faith that the Munshi placed in the uncritical benevolence of Victoria, and
the canonical significance of Jawaharlal Nehru’s words uttered on the eve of
Indian independence. I have, in this sense, become as much a living, breathing
part of my own history as I have acted as historian. This immersion into the past
has allowed me to experience the architectural grandiloquence of Victoria
Memorial as Curzon would have seen it, feel the symbolic effect of Victoria’s
coronation portrait at the 1877 Durbar as nawabs and rajas would have done,
and experience Victoria’s death at Osborne, surrounded by precious Indian
antiques and the caring brown face of the Munshi, as it happened in real time.

I can only hope that these historical figures of the past, understandable
today by aesthetic fragments that evoke their stories, would judge this work to be
a culturally integrative study of what it means to see and be seen in British India.

And with that, I say ram ram.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ *Ram ram*, in colloquial Hindi, means “farewell.” Ram also happens to be the
name of one of Hinduism’s most oft-idolized deities. Is it coincidental that the
last thing an Indian says to another before departure takes the form of incanted
benediction? I think not.
Bibliography


Illustrations

Fig. 1: The Burning System Illustrated, Thomas Rowlandson, 1816, hand-colored aquatint with etching on paper, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 2: Indian schoolgirl dressed as Mother India, Anupam Seth, 2014, Photograph, AP Images
Fig. 4: Indian National Congress flag, Dylan Crawfoot, 1999, Digital image, www.crwflags.com

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Fig. 13: The Munshi Abdul Karim (1863-1909), Rudolf Swaboda, 1888, Oil on canvas, Royal Collection Trust, London
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Fig. 17: A view from below of St. George standing on the imperial orb
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