Chapter 4

A Strident Nervousness: The Rhetoric of Reform

The wild fictions of the Hindus seem rather the playsome whimsies of monkeys in human shapes than the serious observations of a being who dignifies himself with the name of "rational".

-James Mill

Utilitarian philosophy with its 'unsentimental' "discourse of improvement" (Niranjana 1992:26) has been traditionally regarded as the chief oppositional philosophy to the tenets advocated by Conservatism and Indological study with regard to the administration of British India. Indeed, with James Mill's blanket denunciation of all that either ancient or contemporary India had to offer (in his History of British India), we are very far away from any notion of a Golden age in India, when Britain was "yet in the woods, suggested by both Jones and Burke. In his Imagining India Ronald Inden describes Mill's History as "the oldest hegemonic account of India." (1990:45). Mill's account was intended not only to disprove the Indological claims for Indian culture, but also to establish a foundation for the employment of Utilitarian principles in India. It can be shown that this double motivation was precisely the rock on which the History foundered, the reason why despite the powerful rhetoric it constructed through a "discourse of repetition" (Niranjana 1992:22) it could not finally emerge as "a confident body of doctrine." (Majeed 1990: 212).

However, at this initial stage of analysis, emphasis is laid not on Utilitarian principles or their effects, but on the way in which India was represented to gain acceptance for those principles. Mill's History stands as his contribution to nothing less
than an entire world view regarding India. It may be a matter of opinion whether or not to agree with Max Muller's opinion in "India, What Can It Teach Us?" that "Mill's History was responsible for some of the greatest misfortunes that had happened to India." (quoted in J.P. Guha's "Introduction" to Mill's History 1978: xii). However when we consider the immense contemporary significance bestowed on Mill's work—to the extent that the History was by 1830, required reading for students at Haileybury, the East India Company's training college—the importance to be attached to his description of India becomes evident.

Mill can be credited with steadiness of purpose at least as far as his representation of India in degrading terms is concerned. His confidence here is immense; far from any diffidence on account of his entire lack of personal knowledge of India, he argues that the severity and firmness of his judgements was all the more assured due to that reason. Indeed, Mill puts forward one of the most strident defences possible of "armchair Orientalism" (Mill 1978: 15-11.)

A large part of the early volumes of the History is devoted to examining the state of India under Hindu rule, before the Mohammedan conquest. Mill had planned his strategy very carefully indeed. Most of the Indologist claims were based on ancient Hindu culture and it is therefore, for this period that Mill reserves most of his vituperation. The Mohammedan culture is by contrast presented as comparatively preferable, a step upward on the ladder of progress. The next comparison is between Mohammedan rule and the benefits which could be conferred by Britain, which in turn are presented as infinitely preferable to the status quo. The composition of British rule is thereby presented with an air of inevitability as the next required and natural stage of evolution/progress for India. The whole structure is based on the "teleological view of world history" (Niranjana 1992: 23) with progress as inevitable and Britain as its historical agent.

The section on Hindu India is meticulously divided into chapters on Chronology and Ancient History, classification of the people, the form of government, the laws, the taxes, religion, manners, arts and literature. The Mohammedan culture is analysed in just three chapters altogether; Mill concludes this account with a comparison between the two
systems. The rest of the copious work is devoted to the account of Indian affairs since the arrival of Britain on the scene.

William Jones and other Indologists had themselves encountered difficulties with Hindu chronology and its incompatibility with Old Testament accounts—one of the "solutions" they adopted was to look for "inner" meanings in Hindu concepts. Mill refuses any truck with such tactics and bluntly condemns such attempts as fruitless.

The wildness and inconsistency of the Hindu statements evidently place them beyond the sober limits of truth and History. Yet, it has been imagined ... that they at least contain a poetical or figurative delineation of real events ... The laborious ingenuity bestowed upon this enquiry has not been attended with an adequate reward. The Hindu legends still present a maze of unnatural fictions in which a series of real events can by no artifice be traced.

(Mill 1978: 128)

The attempts of the Indologists are stigmatised and dismissed as "artifice" and unsuccessful artifice to boot. The antiquity claimed for Indian records, is accounted for, as a result of the propensity of "rude nations to derive a peculiar gratification from pretensions to a remote antiquity. As a boastful and turgid vanity distinguishes remarkably the Oriental nations, they have in most instances carried their claims extravagantly high" (Mill 1978: I 24). Even among these rude nations, the Indians were the worst: "The Brahmans are the most audacious and perhaps the most unskilful fabricators of whom the annals of fable have yet made us aware" (I 28).

Every single circumstance is used by Mill to indicate that the Hindu state of civilisation was primitive and rude. The fact that the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas were high in the social hierarchy, is attributed to the reason, that the ruder a society is, the higher the regard for the priesthood and the warriors. The Brahmins especially are described as "a people in whom the love of repose exerts the greatest sway and in whose character, aversion to danger forms a principal ingredient" (I 75). It has to be kept in mind that no proofs are adduced to any of these remarks, as if the author had intended them to carry conviction through sheer force of assertion.

The Hindu legal system is condemned as "rude and defective" in a chapter which confesses that it cannot undertake the "detail or even analysis of the Hindu code" (Mill
1978: 60-61). The reader is obviously expected to take Mill on trust, a favour which he is simultaneously interdicted from extending to the Indological scholars. The Manu Smriti is described as "all vagueness and darkness, incoherence, inconsistency and confusion" (I 163), favourite words of Mill, as they are later repeated almost verbatim to describe Hindu religion. Mill postulates "completeness and exactness" as the two essential qualifications of a satisfactory digest of law. He regards the deviation of the Indian code from these principles to be so self evident that no explanations or elaborations are necessary:

To show in what degree the Hindu law recedes from the standard of completeness would require a more extensive survey of the field of law than can consist with the plan of this work. That it departs from exactness in every one of the particulars in which exactness consists is abundantly clear.

(Mill 1978: 109-110)

It is necessary to emphasise yet again that Mill seems to consider proof as a total waste of time. He had adopted a point of view so totally and firmly centered in nineteenth century rational Utilitarianism that other value systems are not permitted to even exist on the periphery. He expects his audience to accept his comments as self evident truths, precisely because the scale of excellence—which Mill and his readers were supposed to share in common-was held to be inherently the only valid one.1 This assumption naturally gave Mill an edge over the Indologists, who first had to convince themselves of the validity and authenticity of their observations and only then circulate a new perspective among the public.

Mills comments on the section of punishments for adultery in the Manu Smriti are extremely revealing:

In the Hindu language, adultery includes every unlawful species of sexual indulgence, from the least to the most injurious or offensive. If their laws are any proof of the manners of a people, this article affords indication of one of the most depraved states of the sexual appetite. Almost all

1 "As Mill painstakingly interrogated the history, the laws, the manners and the arts of India, to tell his three volume story of the civilisation, he drew quite unselfconsciously and in great detail on the assumptions and logic of his times. Mill invoked commonsense (which we must remember also grounded liberal utilitarian notions of human nature and civilised behaviour) in a tone that indicated that he regarded its soundness as obvious and its authority as rational and indisputable" (Tharu and Lalitha 1990: 48).
of the abuses and all the crimes it is possible to commit are there depicted with curious exactness, and penalties are devised and assigned for every minute diversity as for acts the most frequent and familiar. There are even titles of sections in the code which cannot be transcribed with decency and which depict crimes unknown to European laws.

(Mill 1978: I 102)

The same concept is articulated with regard to what Mill calls the "obscene symbols of Hindu religion" the grossness and depravity of the people being deduced in the first instance from the law and then from religion. The Indologists had presented a concept of the fecundity of India, which was extremely threatening to Mill's ordered rationalism. The very imagination in which Jones had awarded primacy to the Asiatics, appears for Mill as a "threatening Eros", (Majeed 1990: 221) a Dionysian eruption into the Appolonian perfection Utilitarianism sought to maintain. These aspects of India—her fecundity, apparent lack of restraint and depravity—are therefore singled out for repeated condemnation.

Indologists had remarked that the mild taxation found in Ancient India was an instance of good government. For Mill, "this only proves that agriculture was in its earliest stage. Though it paid little, it would afford to pay no more. We may assume it as a principle, in which there is no room for mistake that a government constituted and circumstanced as that of the Hindus had only one limit to its exactions, that of the non-existence of anything further to take" (my emphasis; Mill 1978: I 44).

This is by no means the only instance where Mill takes away with one hand what he barely concedes with the other. His cautious, grudging acceptance of the fact that Hindus excelled in the art of weaving and a reluctant admission that their irrigation

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2 It may be a matter of controversy to what extent the indecent objects employed in the Hindu worship imply depravity of manners; but a religion which subjects to the eyes of its votaries the grossest images of sensual pleasure, and renders even the emblems of generation objects of worship; which ascribes to the Supreme God an immense train of obscene acts, which has these engraved on the sacred cars, portrayed in the temples and presented to the people as objects of adoration, which pays worship to the Yoni and the Lingam cannot be regarded as favourable to chastity. Nor can it be supposed that when to all these circumstances is added the institution of a number of girls, attached to the temples, whose sole business is dancing and prostitution that this is a virtue encouraged by the religion of the Hindus" (Mill 1978: I 205-206).
systems were well advanced are immediately followed by dismissive comments which take away all semblance of merit or achievement.\(^3\)

A statement that Indians accomplish skilful work with scanty equipment provides Mill with yet another opportunity to employ his favourite adjective "rude": "a dexterity in the use of its own imperfect tools is a common attribute of a rude society" (1978: I 335). The very praise meted out to wise judges or kings who improved public systems is deployed as an indication to the effect that such phenomena were very rare indeed! The "gentleness" of the Hindu character is mentioned, but is immediately followed by a declaration of the impossibility of this being a positive attribute:

> Much attention has been attracted to the gentleness of manners in this people ... One of the circumstances which distinguish the state of a commencing civilisation is that it is compatible with great violence as well as with great gentleness of manners. Nothing is more common than examples of both. Mildness of address is not always separated from even the rudest condition of human life.  
> (Mill 1978: 1288)

There is practically nothing therefore, no sphere in which Mill is willing to concede that the early Indians had progressed to any great extent. Even their actual achievements appear as conclusive proof of their lack of civilisation.

Another area where praise had been bestowed on Ancient India by the Indologists was that of philosophical and theological speculation. Mill summarily dismisses Indian cosmography in harsh terms:

> No people however rude and ignorant whatsoever have ... ever drawn a more gross and disgusting picture of the universe than what is presented in the writings of the Hindus. In the conception of it, no coherence, wisdom or beauty ever appears, all is disorder, caprice, passion contest, portents, prodigies, violence and deformity.  
> (Mill 1978: I 187)

\(^3\) "Weaving is a sedentary occupation and thus in harmony with his [Hindu's] predominant inclination. It requires patience, of which he has an inexhaustible fund; it requires little bodily exertion of which he is exceedingly sparing. and the finer the production the more slender the force which he is called upon to apply" (Mill 1978: I329).
The Hindus are granted "lofty expression" in theology and subtlety in metaphysical speculation. However, Mill manages to reconcile these attributes with their primitive and "rude" condition. As far as lofty expressions conveying an elevated apprehension of Deity are concerned, Mill has this to say:

To form a true estimate of the religion of these people, it is necessary by reflection to ascertain what those lofty expressions really mean in the mouth of a Brahmin.... It is well ascertained that nations who have the lowest and meanest ideas of the divine Being yet may apply to him the most sounding epithets by which perfection can be expressed.

(Mill 1978: I 165-66)

The case of metaphysical speculation is treated even more drastically, to the extent that abstract speculation *as such* is condemned as barbarous:

It is an error to suppose, that for the origin of unprofitable speculations respecting the nature and properties of thought, great progress in civilisation is required-The highest abstractions are not the last results of mental culture and intellectual strength... The propensity to abstract speculation is the *natural result*--of the state of the human mind in a *rude and ignorant state*.

(my emphasis; Mill 1978: I 376-78)

An excellent example of Mill's abrupt condemnation of speculative philosophy is his contemptuous dismissal of the doctrine of "Maya" on which the Indologists had expended considerable explicatory energy. All Mill has to say about "Maya" which he *simplistically* terms "denial" is that it is "lunacy". (1978: I 378). In Mill's dismissal of philosophy and later of poetry, one can see as a "unifying thread, his distrust of the imagination." (Majeed 1990:214). The general Utilitarian attitude towards the imagination can be seen in Jeremy Bentham's phrase "the pestilential breath of fiction." (quoted in Majeed 1990:215). And this was the period when the Romantic cult of the Imagination was gaining ground! The Coleridgean Imagination, which if sufficiently employed could assist the Indologists in defining cultural and natural identities, and could overturn his assimilationist tendencies was one of Mill's worst theoretical adversaries. It
was on the basis of the products of the Imagination and speculation that the best cases for India were framed and therefore Mill had to deny these, not merely by showing India's inferiority, but by discrediting the criteria themselves.

Poetry, therefore is stigmatised as the rudest form of literature and Indian literature explicitly denigrated precisely because it consists mainly of poetry:

The first literature is poetry. Poetry is the language of the passions and men feel before they speculate. The earliest poetry is the expression of feelings, by which the minds of rude men are the most powerfully actuated... At this first stage, the literature of the Hindu’s has always remained.

(Mill 1978:1365)

As if it was not bad enough that literature was in this primitive stage, it is further argued that even among this type, Hindu literature exhibits the worst specimens. Of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Mill has this to say:

They are excessively prolix and insipid. They are often, through long passages, trifling and childish...inflations, metaphors perpetual and these the most violent and strained; obscurity, tautology, repetition, verbosity, confusion, incoherence distinguish the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

(Mill 1978:1367)

Mill's utter ignorance of any Indian language has to be kept in mind at this juncture. Even when he condescends to grant that there are a few tolerable passages in the Indian epics, these are mainly dismissed as a matter of mere chance.4

Mill demonstrates a great faculty for teasing out those exact parts of the Indian system; criticism of which would carry most weight with his audience. He also has the capacity to casually dismiss any record which may prove detrimental to his argument. One of his greatest charges against the Hindu religion was that it stressed only ceremonial observance and ignored moral duties. Since he certainly had access to Jones' translation

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4 "That amidst numberless effusions, which a wild imagination throws forth, there should now and then be something of taste is so far from surprising, that it would be truly surprising if there were not. A happy description, or here and there, the vivid conception of a striking circumstance are not sufficient; the exact observation of nature and the symmetry of the whole are necessary to designate the poetry of a cultivated people." (Mill 1978: 1367).
of the *Manu Smriti* Mill is forced to at least acknowledge the existence of a passage which states the exact opposite of what he claims:

A wise man shall constantly perform all the moral duties though he perform not completely the ceremonies of religion, since he falls low, if while he performs ceremonial acts only, he discharge not his moral duties.

(quoted in Mill 1978: I 204-205)

This passage is no sooner quoted than Mill dismisses it as of "little value since it was an insignificant and isolated exception" (1978: I 205).

Tejaswini Niranjana has pointed out the selective use Mill makes of Indian accounts: "Mill trashes the Puranas (mythological tales) as false history, but is willing to accept evidence from the play *Shakuntala* regarding the political arrangements and laws of the age. History is dismissed as fiction, but fiction—translated—is admissible as History" (1992: 24-25).

Judged as literature, Mills' verdict is that there are a few beautiful passages, but "beyond these few passages, there is nothing in the *Shakuntala* which either accords with the understanding or can gratify the fancy of any instructed people" (1978: I 370). (Goethe's enthusiastic praise of *Shakuntala*, quoted earlier indicates the strong Oriental edifice Mill was trying to demolish.) Mill accepts the work as a good specimen of the pastoral, but stipulates that the pastoral itself is the production of a "simple and unpolished age" (1978: I 372).

This, however, does not prevent him from making liberal use of the text as social History when it suits his purposes to do so. The rate of land revenue is deduced from the fact that in *Kalidasa's* poem, the "King is described", at a much earlier period, "as that man whose revenue arises from a sixth part of his people's income" (1978: I 133). This is by no means an isolated example: the moral laxity of the Indians, the territorial divisions of the country, corruption of the officials and the seclusion of women are all declared

5 The marriage between Dushyanta and Shakuntala is described as "so precipitate a conclusion, irreconcilable as it is with the notions of a refined people, which is one of the numerous marriages legal among the Hindus" (Mill 1978: I 367).

6 "In the dramatic poem *Shakuntala* the daughter of the hermit asks the royal stranger who had visited their consecrated grove *what* imperial family is embellished by our noble guest?" The question undoubtedly
and supposedly proved by passages in *Shakuntala*. This is a proceeding which certainly
seems self serving in view of Mill's known low opinion of literature and his outright
dismissal of those sources which the *Indologists* had regarded as historical records.

According to Mill, the condition of women can be regarded as an indication of the
civilisation of a people, since rude people degrade women and civilised people exalt
them. The Hindus fail the test of civilisation by this standard also. "A state of
dependence, more strict and humiliating than that which is ordained for the weaker sex
among the Hindus cannot easily be conceived. Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt
which the Hindus entertain for their women" (1978: I 280-81).

As "proof of this statement, Mill quotes the verse from the *Manusmriti* which
holds that women should be dependent on male relations. It may not be out of place here
to quote Mill on female suffrage in his "Essay on Government": "one thing is pretty
clear, that all those individuals, whose interests are indisputably included in those of
other individuals may be struck off (the voters' list) without inconvenience. In this light
women also may be regarded, the interests of almost all of whom is involved either in
that of their fathers or in that of their husbands" (Mill 1978a: 79). We have an ideal
instance here of how conceptual contradictions are accommodated on the basis of
geographic settings.

The language of the Hindus, (which Jones had singled out for special praise) is
also condemned by Mill. The main reason is that it has many names for the same objects,
and "redundancy is a defect in language, not less than a deficiency" (Mill 1978: I 384).

Military tactics and medicinal systems are described as "scarcely having been
even known to the Hindus" (1978: I 481). Colebrooke had published an entire volume on
the art of war and medicine among the Hindus, which, if Mill had read, he did not feel

7 The fisherman who finds the King's ring in *Shakuntala* is obliged to give half his reward to the
policemen 'to escape' it is said 'the effects of their displeasure'." (Mill 1978: I 473-74).

8 "The monarch who forms the hero in the drama entitled Shakuntala had many wives and they are
represented as residing in the secret apartments of the palace." (Mill 1978: I 285).
inclined to acknowledge. In short, anything in the accounts that had reached Britain, which was in favour of early Indian civilisation is dismissed by Mill as pure fantasy and speculation. He roundly asserts that "everything we know of the ancient state of Hindustan conspires to prove that it was rude" (1978: I 461).

An effective summing up of Mills' condemnation can be found in an essentialised description where he includes the Chinese also (and by implication, the whole of rude, uncivilised Asia):

Both nations, are to nearly an equal degree tainted with the vices of insincerity, dissembling, treacherous, mendacious to an excess which surpasses even the usual measure of uncivilised society. Both are disposed to extreme exaggeration with regard to everything relating to themselves. Both are cowardly and unfeeling. Both are in the highest degree conceited of themselves and full of affected contempt for others. Both are, in the physical sense, disgustingly unclean in their persons and houses.

(Mill 1978: I 486)

The comparatively shorter analysis of India after the Mohammedan conquest is more "factual" in the sense that Mill is more willing to accept the available records as historical. The main concern here is with a comparison between Muslim and Hindu cultures, "for the purpose of ascertaining whether the civilisation of the Hindus received advancement or depression from the ascendancy over them which the Mohammedan's acquired" (1978: I 697). In every single field, the Mohammedan civilisation is stated to be superior, with hardly any proof or even discussion, only subjective opinion and arbitrary statements being adduced.

With respect to religion, Mill remarks: "under this head, very few words are necessary, because the superiority of the Mohammedans in respect of religion is beyond all dispute" (1978: I 720). The statement with regard to literature is even more arbitrary: "In this important article, it will be impossible to show that the Hindus had the superiority in one single particular" (1978: I 723). Of course, Mill wastes no time in trying to prove what he has already declared to be "impossible". The conclusion of his comparative analysis is that "it will not admit of any long dispute that human nature in India gained
and gained very considerably by passing from a Hindu to a Mohammedan government” (1978: 1700).

However, Mill was no admirer of India even after the Mohammedan conquest. The motives behind his Hindu/Muslim comparisons are clearly spelt out:

The question is whether...the Hindu population lost or gained. For the aversion to a government, because in the hands of foreigners, that is, of men who are called by one rather than some other name, without regard to the qualities of government whether better or worse, is a prejudice which reason disclaims.

(my emphasis; 1978: 1700)

Mill obviously did not share in the liberal opinion of his day that good government was no substitute for self government. Once he had established that "foreign" governments were not in themselves to be resented, and that to so resent them, was in fact irrational, he could easily proceed to show that British rule was the next logical step in India’s progress. Eric Stokes points out, that in his evidence before the Commons Committee of 1831, Mill argued that "the great concern of the people of India was that the business of government should be well and cheaply conducted, but it was of little or no consequence who were the people who performed it” (Stokes 1959: 64).

It appears that there was an ongoing conflict between Mill and the Indologists. Indeed, Mill considers Jones as a prime adversary. He refers to Jones as "prepossessed and credulous" (1978: I 379). His comment on Jones’ codification of Indian law is quite uncompromisingly dismissive. The work is harshly described as:

A disorderly compilation of loose, vague, stupid or unintelligible quotations and maxims, selected arbitrarily from books of law, books of devotion and books of poetry, attended with a commentary which only adds to the mass of absurdity and darkness; a barrage, by which nothing is defined and nothing established. (1978: III 398)

The intention is clear enough, Mill is positioning himself against the Indologists and the revitalised Conservatism they encouraged. As Javed Majeed points out, Mill sees in the Indological practice the features of the "Ancient Regime" which he hated- "respect for the uniqueness of cultures, their distinct ways of evolving, degrees of rank,
ways of life, respect for the past and its importance for the present" (Majeed 1990:211) In attacking the *Indological* framework Mill situates himself as an adversary to the past itself, which is the edifice he had to pull down before he could erect his new rational Utilitarian structure.

But, was Mill really so different from the Indologists or the Conservatives he sought to denigrate? Did he have no common ground, share no assumptions with them? In the first place, though Mill's technique of quoting the Orientalists against themselves was rhetorically successful, it does not follow that he was "catching them out" in self contradiction. In other words, except for one occasion, where he twists Halhed's words out of context to get the required effect, Mill is only reflecting the actual ambiguity which his supposed adversaries themselves had towards India. He does not seem to realize that their attitude was not one of unqualified praise, to an extent which could question Britain's presence in India. On many issues, the Indologists themselves cherished no very complimentary views of India, though their language may be more restrained and subtle than Mill's. When Mill quotes Jones to the effect that "the cruel mutilations practiced by the native powers are shocking to humanity," (1998: I 95) or that the punishments in the *Manusmruti* are "partial and fanciful, for some crimes dreadfully cruel and for others reprehensibly slight" (1978: I 100) he is not as he fancies trapping Jones. As has been seen, the Indologists and the Conservatives had their own problems with India, and if their articulation of these problems was somewhat subdued, it was in the name of "honouring" tradition as a general principle rather than out of admiration for India. Where Mill errs is in sharing the general assumption that Indologists' works consisted, with only some unguarded slips—solely of paeans to India.

It can also be seen that certain presuppositions in Mill were shared by his adversaries in full measure. For instance, Mill firmly adheres to the thesis that the Hindus were an "unchanging" people; with the effect that his criticism of ancient India can apply equally well to contemporary society, thereby justifying a discourse of improvement. Some slight changes, he admits, may have been made after the Mohammedan conquest,

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9 Halhed's argument that laws should be studied from a perspective which does acknowledge cultural differences is used by Mill to deduce that "Hindu morals are certainly as gross as the Hindu laws, that the latter grossness is in fact the result of the former" (Mill 1978: I 124-25).
but the majority of Indians were still in their depraved ancient situation and even the Mohammedan setup by no means precluded an immense scope for improvement.

Mill insists that "The conclusion has been drawn, that the Hindus at the time of Alexander's invasion, were in a state of society, manners and knowledge, exactly the same with that in which they were discovered by the nations of modern Europe, nor is there any reason for differing widely from this opinion."(I 28) To preclude any discussion he adds: "their annals from that era till the period of the Mohammedan conquest one a blank" (1978: 1 29). As a primary proof for this unchanging nature (stagnating, in Utilitarian terms) Mill puts forward the concept of "Oriental Despotism." The government among the Hindus is described as "absolute monarchy, according to the Asiatic model" (1978:1 66) and is stigmatised as being responsible for all society's ills, including "the absence of motives for labour among the Hindus" which lead to their languid and slothful habits." (1978:1 294)

We have already seen that these concepts figured prominently in the discourses of both Burke and Jones. Mill, and his adversaries function within the category Edward Said has called "vision" as opposed to "narrative". The "vision" represents the Orient as an "unconditional and ontological category, synonymous with stability and unchanging eternality: "Whole" History and the narrative by which History is represented argue---that this does not do justice to the potential of reality for change"(Said 1978:240). Mill has no monopoly over the triumph of vision over narrative in his depiction of India; the Indologists and the Conservatives are equally implicated.

To further elucidate the interconnections between Mill's attitudes and the ones he sought to attack, it is useful to look briefly at some other contemporary Histories of India. Though none of them attained the monumental status of Mill's work, Robert Orme's *A History of the British Military Transactions in India* (1763) and *Historical Fragments* (1782), Alexander Dow's *History of Hindustan* and William Robertson's *A Historical Disquisition Concerning Ancient India*. (1818) were immensely influential works of their time. Both Orme and Robertson were regarded as Conservative historians and even
Dow, despite Burke's dismissal of his work,\(^{10}\) did not display an overtly antagonistic attitude to Hindu religion or traditions. It is interesting to observe certain judgements and comments of these historians in the light of Mill's already analysed positions.

All three historians firmly believe that British imperialism was generally beneficial to the Indians themselves. The same pens, which lose themselves for pages in discussing "the wonder that was India," end up offering justifications for Empire in Appendixes, Notes and Prefaces. We can trace the existence of two conflicting pictures of India emerging through the fine mesh of supposedly "objective" narratology adopted in these Histories.

**Orme** affixes to his *Fragments* a separate essay blatantly titled "The Effeminacy of the Inhabitants of Indostan." The "fact" that Indians are effeminate is here presented as almost a scientific inevitability." The contours of the masculine imperialist and the effeminate Indian are already spelt out in this work:

> The European sailor no sooner lands on the coast, than nature dictates to him the full result of a physical comparison with the natives; he brandishes his stick and puts fifty Indians to flight in a moment. Confirmed in his contempt of a pusillanimity and an incapacity of resistance suggested to him by their form and physiognomy, it is well if he reflects that the poor Indian is still a man.
> (Orme 1982:299)

The idea of "Oriental Despotism" is also emphasized by Orme in *Fragments:* "If the subjects of a despotic power are everywhere miserable, the miseries of the people of Indostan are multiplied by the incapacity of the power to control the vast extent of its dominions" (Orme 1982: 25). Orme also uses Mill's practice of converting even accepted virtues into vices, when he asserts that Muslim "decorum" in India is the result of "subordination-joined to the deepest disguise and dissimulation" and that the charity of the Hindus is the "influence of superstition" (Orme 1982:278).

\(^{10}\) Burke refers to "the slander of Dow's History, a book of no authority, a book that no man values in any respect or degree" and also remarks that the "Dows and Hastings... trample with pride and indignity upon the first names and characters in India". (Burke 1987: I 107-108).
Dow's *History of Hindustan* is mainly a translated compilation of Persian writers. So, it is in the long Preface that we should search for the author's own assumptions. Dow accuses contemporary travellers of "prejudicing Europe—and by a very unfair account, throwing disgrace upon a system of religion and philosophy which they have by no means investigated." (Dow 1973: xx) However, it is very doubtful if his own practice lived up to the standards indicated here. His comment on Indian literature sounds like a direct quote from Mill: "Their poetry, it must be confessed is too turgid and full of conceits to please and the diction of their histories is too diffuse, verbose and redundant." (1973: ii)

Oriental despotism is of course emphasized and is also linked to a portrayal of the lethargy of the Indians:

> The history, now given to the public presents us with a striking picture of the deplorable condition of a people subjected to arbitrary sway. The people permit themselves to be transferred from one tyrant to another without murmuring and individuals look with unconcern on the miseries of others, if they are able to secure themselves from the general misfortune.

(Dow 1973:xii)

The main body of Robertson's work is confined to describing trade relations between India and the West, from Roman days till the advent of the East India Company. This does not deter him from commenting on other aspects of life in India in an Appendix which occupies a full quarter part of the book. Unlike Mill, Robertson admits that his lack of personal knowledge of India was a considerable disadvantage (1981: xi) and stresses the image of India as the lost Eden (1981:1). At the same time, the permanency of Indian institutions is emphasized as follows: "the manners, customs and even the dress of the people are as permanent and as invariable as the face of Nature itself"(15). Robertson asserts that "whatever is now in India always was there and is still likely to continue."(114)

"Breathing in the softest of climates, having few real wants and receiving even the luxuries of other nations from the fertility of their own soil, the Indian must become the most effeminate inhabitant of the globe and this is the very point at which we now see them" *(Orme 1982: 306).*
While discussing the *Shakuntala* Robertson cautions his readers that they should not apply to it rules of criticism drawn from Greek theatre or British propriety, which were unknown to the Indians. He insists that allowance should be made for modes of life and composition quite different from those of Europe. (123). But when analysing the *Bhagavat Geetha* Robertson forgets his own strictures and applies a standard of the integrated work, connected to eighteenth century British taste:

Two powerful armies are drawn up in battle array, eager for the fight, a young hero and his instructor are described as standing in a chariot of war between them. That surely was not the moment for teaching him the principles of philosophy and delivering eighteen lectures on theology and metaphysics. (Robertson 1981:124)

Comparative cultural analysis does not figure here and no alternative set of standards are acknowledged. In keeping with Mill's own style, Robertson accuses the work of a "total lack of art and taste." (124)

When we attempt to reconstruct the impressions given by these three historians to the public consciousness we may conclude that the generalisations and essentialisations included in the narrative structures were the elements most likely to penetrate into general public awareness, precisely because those sections did not deal in 'dry' facts or statistics. The concepts of Oriental Despotism, effeminacy, fecundity and also the inevitability of imperial rule could be easily bolstered by fragments taken from these works. Ironically, the avowed intention of these writers was to bridge the chasm between the rulers and the ruled, but their works contained material capable of producing exactly the opposite effect.

It is evident that Mill shared many of his basic assumptions with the Indologists and the Conservatives and with other Historians of his time. Does Mill fit in neatly then into the category of spokesman for Empire? We have seen that the Indological discourse through its fragmentations upheld the notion of continued imperialism. It remains to be

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12 Robertson expresses the hope that his work "would contribute in some small degree to rendering the character of Indians more respectable and their condition more happy" in which case he "would not have lived or written in vain" (Robertson 1981: 138).
seen whether Mill's stand was simply a variation on that position; if his Utilitarian discourse was functioning as an unconditional foundation for Empire.

Whatever Mill's position was on Empire as such, we can see that he certainly did not hold that the East India Company was doing a good job of it. He is quite scathing in his condemnation of the Company's policies and principles, including even their "attempted" reforms." The Company's monopoly of trade itself was severely criticized (Mill 1978: II 137). Even with regard to the notorious Black Hole tragedy, Mill remarks that "the English had only themselves and their own practice to blame" (II 227). The Company is also accused of misleading the nation by their "absurd estimates of the pecuniary value of the Indian dominion" (II 279). They are also condemned for making unjust war, their doctrine sarcastically summed up as:

Do you wish a good reason for effecting anybody's destruction? First, do him an injury sufficiently great, and then, if you destroy him you have in the law of self defence an ample justification.

(II 645)

The Company had, according to Mill, sufficient military strength to "exterminate all the inhabitants with the utmost ease" but its civil weakness was so great that "the villain was more powerful to intimidate than the Government to protect" (Mill 1978: III 385). The argument of the Governor-General that rendering Indian princes dependent on British support was actually beneficial to them is dismissed as "neither more nor less than another of the pretexts under which the weak are always exposed to become the prey of the strong" (III 711).

It is interesting at this point to note that in his evidence before the 1832 Parliamentary Committee, Mill had adopted a most aggressive attitude towards the Indian states. He argues that the most obvious policy was "to make war on those states and subdue them" and that the period when they were allowed to survive independently "ought to be as short as you can conveniently make it" (quoted in Stokes 1959:250).

We will see that these conflicting positions in Mill's attitude to aggression were mainly a result of his ambivalent view of Empire, produced by his Utilitarian doctrines.
Even while arguing for a doctrine of reform, Mill was not at all clear as to whether Anglicisation was the solution to India’s problems. Of education itself, which was the grand liberal panacea to all Oriental ills, Mill was considerably sceptical:

Most of the Indian judges point to education as the only process from the operation of which a favourable change can be expected in the moral character of the people. These views are superficial. Ignorance is the natural concomitant of poverty... and poverty is the effect of bad laws and bad government. Before education can operate to any great result the poverty of the people should be redressed, their laws and government should operate beneficially.

(Mill 1978: III 418)

Apart from this general distrust of formal education, in his Parliamentary Evidence, Mill specifically rejects English education as a means of progress, claiming that he failed to see how a knowledge of English would in anyway benefit the natives.13

The attempts of the British at legal reform are also stigmatised. Lord Cornwallis’ attempt at codifying the laws are criticised for relying on the "Shastras and the Khoran which were just about as well calculated for defining the rights of the people of India, as the Bible would be for defining those of the people of England" (Mill 1978: III 339). Nor are we to assume that Mill advocated the implementation of a Universal code based on the British system in India. His contempt for the English legal system in its existing form is immense. Indeed, the procedural format of justice is the one area where he proclaims that the Mohammedan system and even the system of the benighted Hindus had a definite advantage over the British system (1978: I 112, 710). The establishment, in India of a Supreme Court in 1773, supposed to act on British principles is condemned unequivocally; its proceedings described as "a black and portentous cloud, from which every terrific and destructive form might at each moment be expected to descend on the

13 I(Mill) do not see, for example, how, for the administration of justice to his countrymen as a moonsiff, a native would be better qualified by knowing the English language. The other great branch of the local administration is collecting the revenue, acting under the English collector in dealing with the natives, fixing their assessments and realizing the demand. In this, also, it does not appear to me that there would be any peculiar advantage to the native in knowing the English language, provided only the Englishman knows the language of the native" (quoted In Viswanathan 1989: 91).
neither the English legal system, nor English education, the usual accompaniments to the rhetoric of Empire, were advocated by Mill.

As Nigel Leask suggests, Mill's "paranoic prose and exaggerated denunciations" suggest his cultural anxieties related to Empire (Leask 1993: 90). Mill expresses this fear when he condemns the union between "Indian influence and parliamentary influence" and the corruption which was sure to ensure "the moment a proper channel of communication was opened between them" (1978: III 18). Unlike Burke, Mill does not fear that the Indian influences will inject corruption into an uncorrupted British system, for him the status quo is already corrupt. Nevertheless, the anxiety is precisely because it would bolster up the ancient regime which the Conservatives eulogised and which Mill wanted to dismantle. As Javed Majeed has pointed out, Mill employed his criticism partly because he saw that Empire propped up traditionally powerful groups in England; "colonies sustained the power of the aristocracy, who encouraged the myth of economic riches of India to justify Britain's role as an imperial nation" (Majeed 1990: 213).

Was Mill then a true spokesman for the Empire? The answer to a certain extent at least will have to be in the negative. In his "Essay on Colonies" Mill indicts colonies as merely sources of power and patronage for the ruling elite to perpetuate their position. And in his pamphlet on Elements of Political Economy (1807) Mill argues that as increased production would create domestic markets, foreign commerce was not useful in any strict sense (quoted in Majeed 1990: 213). In the History itself Mill argues that Empire should be judged from a purely economic perspective:

As regards the British nation, it is in these (financial) results that the good or evil of its operations in India is to be found. If India affords a surplus revenue which can be sent to England, thus far is India beneficial to England. If the revenue of India is not equal to the expense of governing India, then is India a burthen and a drain to England. (1978: III 843)

Judged by these criteria, Mill finds Empire in India to be an unprofitable and therefore unadvisable procedure. He regards the arguments for the prosperity to be gained from India as mere fabrications. He bluntly states that "though nobody should believe it, India, like other countries in which the industrious arts are in their infancy and in which
law is too imperfect to render property secure has always been poor" (1978: II 420). He accuses his countrymen of downright hypocrisy or incredible naivete in crediting stories of Indian opulence:

> The cupidity natural to mankind and the credulity with which they believe what flatters their desires made the English embrace without deduction the exaggerations of Oriental rhetoric on the riches of India and believe that a country which they saw was one of the poorest, was nevertheless, the most opulent upon the surface of the globe. (1978: III 323)

Poverty stricken India could not meet her own needs, let alone contribute to the profit of Britain. Mill's final word on the economic folly of Empire is backed up with impeccable statistics: "During that interval (1797-98) England sent to India and China, value more than it received from them to the amount of 5,691,689 pounds" (1978: III 849). Judged by Mill's own criteria then, Empire as an institution has failed in this context. But, at this point, Mill shies away from such an assertion. In Majeed's phrase, Mill suffers from a "loss of nerve in assessing the role of the British in India" (Majeed 1990: 213). The "Conclusion" of the History is symptomatic of this, it is no conclusion at all. Mill merely states that:

> With regard to subsequent events, the official papers and other sources of information are not sufficiently at command. Here, therefore, it is necessary for the present that this History should close. (1978: III 849)

This is the very next sentence after Mill's statistical expose of the financial failure of Empire. That argument is not carried on to any logical conclusion, there is no analysis, no interpretation, merely an abrupt "conclusion." Obviously, Mill could not explicitly pronounce that Britain would be well advised to withdraw from India.

Leask and Majeed have both indicated that this was due to the confusion inherent in Utilitarianism itself between a negative view of Empire as such and a positive view where empire could help Utilitarianism to create a better society in the colonies more easily and quickly than in Britain itself, (Majeed 1990:213; Leask 1993:88) The paternal streak in Utilitarianism triumphed over the liberal streak when it came to India. As Eric
Stokes points out, Mill, though an ardent advocate of representative institutions had to claim that they were quite out of the question in India. (Stokes 1959:178) The past had to be wiped out so that a Tabula Rasa would remain for Utilitarian proceedings. This could be obtained with the help of Empire in India, and could be obtained with less domestic opposition than if the experiment was to be tried in Britain itself. Obviously, representative institutions in India would foil this purpose.

The unstated assumption therefore was that Empire was a necessary evil, which was to serve as a forerunner to clear the ground for a grand Utilitarian experiment. The problem was that by Utilitarian standards themselves, of free trade and economic calculation, Empire was indefensible. This contradiction was not unnoticed by contemporaries, as Eric Stokes points out. The Utilitarians were accused of being “Demagogues at home and despots abroad, of judging Indian questions by rules and standards the very opposite of those they employ to decide all other questions whatever” (Stokes 1959:60).

The issue is further complicated by the fact that such distinctions made on the basis of local and cultural differences went against the entire universalist and assimilationist foundations of Utilitarianism. The rational principles, which were to ensure "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" had to function across cultures and locales if they were to be valid. As Javed Majeed has stressed, "It is very difficult to make a distinction between colonial and domestic when questions of ideology in this period are being considered. Indeed, it was crucial to the emergence of Utilitarianism as a rhetoric of reform to ignore any such distinctions"(Majeed 1990: 222-23).

However, the distinctions had to be made, if the space was to be cleared for the experiment. Utilitarianism could not justify Empire and yet could not abandon its only practical ally in enforcing its reforms. This ambiguity pervades Mill's conclusions, indeed, leads him to be inconclusive in an attempt not to contradict himself too blatantly. The stridency of Utilitarianism does not imply complete self confidence and logical coherence. The fragmentations are there, clearly to be seen if only the discourse is surveyed as a whole and in relation to the other discourses it defined itself against.
Conservatism and Indological scholarship, despite their many "positive" pronouncements on India, contribute to pro-imperialist rhetoric. Utilitarianism with its incessant condemnations cannot reconcile its inherent contradictions with regard to Empire. The point is not whether the "pros" outweigh the "cons" in any particular discourse, but that the contradictions exist, preventing discourses of domination, theoretically speaking, from being absolute. These rhetorical stances did support Empire, both by what they said as by what they left unsaid. They were indeed forceful, but their forcefulness does not reduce their fragility as coherent rhetorical positions.